

Dean Forest Beekeepers

Newsletter

June 2010



Welcome to our first newsletter since we launched our new website, which I know members are enjoying.

It has been a very exciting year since our AGM in November where I was asked to give a talk on wax and wax products. I decided to run a course at home for a few members. This then became two courses and the small fee paid most of the cost for a members' trip to the BBKA Convention at Stoneleigh in April.

In March a 'Beginning of Season Sunday Lunch' was held at Bells Hotel in Coleford. Thanks to Jim Lancaster who organised this event.

This year's Basic Beekeeping Course, which was fully booked in August 2009 with 32 students, has now been completed and 11 members are qualified to take the Basic Assessment later this year. We were so oversubscribed for the Basic Course we decided to run an 'Introduction to Beekeeping' course in April. This too proved very popular and we held a second one in May.

At the branch apiary we now have a clubhouse, a converted 34 foot caravan, and this has transformed our weekly apiary evenings. A sit down and a chat after all the work in the apiary is very welcome and it is somewhere to go if the weather is inclement. A great deal better than having to stand shoulder to shoulder in the shed!! We also have two rooms set aside for the library and microscopes. Members worked very hard to refurbish the caravan in March but more work is need on the land in front of the clubhouse and I am sure Allan Wells will be looking for volunteers to help very soon.

Jim and I have given several talks to local clubs and societies and taken the observation hive into schools where the children have been studying Bugs and are very enthusiastic about the bees, especially the queen. We take the display stand, observation hive and hive products to show the public, and we have been invited to the 'Have a go at Rural Skills' day at the Dean Heritage Centre on August 30th (Bank Holiday Monday). We would like some help on the day so if you are free please get in touch with me. Do come along, it is so satisfying to pass on the wonder of bees to others.

At the apiary, working in groups with one group responsible for several hives has proved very successful and has spread the workload. Members are also gaining experience and improving their individual development. Our social members, who now number 35, are very well represented at apiary meetings and are able to gain expertise in beekeeping without having to cope on their own with a hive. We have started a queen raising programme, and if you have experience of queen raising your input would be welcome.



The Bee Safari at Andrew Phillips' apiary

Our annual Bee Safari was held on 15th May and was led by the Regional Bee Inspector, Dave Sutton. It was glorious weather and we visited four members and learned a lot about our bees and their problems. I know members thoroughly enjoyed the day and our thanks go to Dave for spending time with us.

The committee work very hard to produce a varied and interesting programme but we need your support. I hope to see many more of you at apiary meetings and planned events.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and I know the editors Dave Kennedy and Graham Carter will be very pleased to receive any contributions you care to submit.

Wishing you all a very successful beekeeping season and a good harvest of both honey and bees.

Val Vivian-Griffiths, Chairman

From the apiary

Adam Parker, our Apiary Manager, explains what has been happening at the Lydney apiary.

We took 15 hives and 1 nuc into last winter, and it now seems a distant memory that very cold February day when I did the count of varroa mites after the oxalic acid treatment. Well the cold weather seemed to do the bees no harm, with 14 hives surviving the winter and just two losses.

Early in the season we thought we might have to merge several of the hives as the cold weather was very slow to clear. We did a lot of spring stimulating feeding, and in the end only had to merge two hives. The queen was saved and put into a nuc made up using bees and frames from 3 different hives, not a technique for the beginner.

We had much work planned for early May, but almost a month of cold weather delayed things greatly. During April we were at the bees twice a week, and I think they did not appreciate it, but needs must and all the people who took this year's beginners course certainly learned a lot.

We have attempted Queen rearing using the Jenter method, and had lots of fun setting up hive 8 into a suitable state to be able to raise our queens. Our first attempt has failed but we will learn and try again.

Want to check on the latest activity at the apiary before you go along? Then read Adam's Apiary Blog at www.deanforestbees.blogspot.com. Adam updates it regularly with reports, explanations and photos, and it is an ongoing record of what we are doing at the apiary and why.

Recipe corner

HONEYBUN'S HONEY MUSTARD MARINADE/DRESSING

This can be used to dress salads or marinade meat or fish

- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar (don't use your precious best but get a cheapie from Lidl, it tastes just as good in a marinade and leaves more money for Chardonnay!)
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 shallot or small red onion (but shallot tastes better)
- 1 piece of fresh ginger, about the size of your middle finger, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon wholegrain mustard
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Place all ingredients in an empty honey jar or similar and shake vigorously to mix.
Leave in fridge until needed. You can store this for a few days.



Queen rearing

This year we wanted to try something other than National hives, so we have used the shook swarm method to shake a colony into a ROSE hive and another into a LANGSTROTH hive. (In the Rose design the brood chamber and supers are the same size, and the Langstroth is the original frame-based hive and has larger frames than the National hive.)

Now people can have a good look and decide for themselves what type of hive they may like.

At the time of writing we have 18 or 19 colonies at Lydney, and will be selling some of the nucs for Club funds as soon as we know the parent hive has a happily laying Queen.

Well there is much more to come at the apiary so I look forward to seeing you on Thursday evenings between 6 and 9 for however long you can make it.

Readers might like to note that recipes from HoneyBun are being published on our web site, www.deanforestbeekeepers.co.uk. Follow the link on the site's home page to see more.

A seasonal view

by Jim Vivian-Griffiths

This year's beekeeping season got off to a very slow start, following a long, very cold winter. Swarming activity has been delayed, but now appears to be in full swing. Swarming is a natural means of colony reproduction, but if you want to try to prevent your bees from swarming you have to exercise a form of swarm control.

Each colony is made up of three parts:

- Queen
- Brood/Nurse Bees
- Flying bees

Swarm control involves separating one of the three parts from the other two:

- Queen from Brood & Flying bees
- Brood from Queen & Flying bees
- Flying bees from Queen & Brood

In the branch apiary, when we see any open queen cells during weekly inspections, we remove the queen and two frames of brood and one of stores, plus the adhering bees, to a nucleus hive, leaving one open queen cell in the hive. Check the main hive after seven days to remove any other queen cells the bees might have made. Leave that hive alone for three weeks, to allow the virgin queen to mate and begin laying.

If you don't want to increase the number of your hives you can kill the old queen in the nucleus and merge with the main hive when you are sure your new queen is laying. If you want to make an increase you can transfer the nucleus into a new hive after 7 to 10 days making up the frames with foundation or drawn comb. Feeding the new hive at this stage will help the bees to draw the foundation.

If you have oil seed rape (OSR) near to your bees you will need to remove the supers from the hives when the flowers of the OSR drop off and the field turns green. Don't wait until all the super frames are fully capped, otherwise the honey will set hard in the frames, and will be difficult to extract. Take the honey off when 50% of the frames are capped, and extract immediately. Any delay will hasten the crystallisation.

After removing any OSR honey make sure your bees have sufficient stores, because there is often a shortage of forage in June. Feed the bees if necessary. Add your supers and hope it doesn't rain too much in July to prevent the bees getting in the main crop of honey.

Make sure you give the bees plenty of space to store the incoming nectar. Nectar has a very high water

Follow Jim's advice to reduce the risk of swarming



content, and until the bees have evaporated the water to below 20%, they need space to store the nectar. You should always super early, but not be too tempted to add another super during the latter part of the flow. You want the bees to pack the supers that are on the hive, to make extraction easier.

By July the swarming season should be over, and if you find a single queen cell during your weekly examination, do not cut it out. This is most likely a supersession, and the bees are planning to replace their older queen, and do not intend to swarm. Once you have found a supersession queen leave the colony alone for three weeks.

During this time be very vigilant for wasps trying to enter your hives. Get your mouse guards over the entrances, using tape to leave only 3 holes for a hive and one hole for a nucleus. Remove these guards when the ivy pollen is being collected, otherwise some of the pollen will be knocked off by the mouse guards.

At the beginning of August plan to remove the honey when it has been ripened by the bees. Capped honey is ready to be taken off, and if you have partially capped frames you can test whether the honey is ripe by holding the frame over the hive on its side and gently tapping it. If no drops of honey drip out, your honey is ready for extraction. Replace your supers on the same hives they came from, over the crown board, with feed holes open, so the bees can clear out your super frames. Remove supers after 2 to 3 days. Store your frames over winter so they are secure from moths and mice.

As soon as the supers are off the hive treat your bees for varroa using either Apiguard or Apilife Var, a vermiculite tablet, consisting of mainly thymol (76%) eucalyptol, camphor & menthol. You should now begin to feed your bees, to replace the honey you have just removed and to give them sufficient stores to get through the winter. They will need about 20 kg.

It's very important to feed your bees before they start gathering ivy nectar. This honey sets incredibly hard in the combs and the bees require a lot of water to break it down. In a cold winter they will not be able to get out to collect water, and can die of starvation if their stores mainly consist of ivy. Do not believe any advice you might read that you don't need to feed your bees if they can collect ivy nectar.

A Nuclear Disaster

by Graham Carter

One Saturday last May I set out, feeling slightly nervous, to Andrew Till's breeding apiary near Maisemore. I had ordered my first nucleus colony some weeks earlier, and it was time to collect. There were two other customers also waiting when I arrived at a barn containing various travelling boxes, next to a pasture adorned with ranks of hives. I waited for Andrew and his father to load a complete hived colony, plus bee suit, feeder and sundry bits into a young couple's car; it was destined for an allotment site (wonder how it's doing). Then my little white travelling nuc was placed on the front seat, frames aligned front/back to minimise movement in the box, secured with the seat belt.

After a chat about the type of bees I had, and some advice, with a promise of support should I need it off I drove, rather more steadily and sedately than usual. By early afternoon the box was on the ground next to the waiting hive, producing a rather pleasing buzz. There it stayed until the following morning, while I read again Jim's notes, and bits of Ted Hooper's book, preparing for the first real operation of my new hobby.

Suited up, I peeled off the duck tape and lifted the lid, a couple of smoke puffs, wait, then opened the box. 5 frames and bees! Gingerly lifting the first frame, I noticed that they were well-used, and appeared to have only one piece of wire supporting the comb, horizontally across the centre; the brood looked healthy though, and there were some stores visible. It went next to a frame feeder, not yet filled, and a frame of foundation. Then the next, then the third, and there was the queen; a nice size and a lovely golden colour, due to her Italian lineage.

The fourth frame was aloft for a quick inspection, wax not joined to the wood along the bottom or sides; there didn't seem to be even the one piece of wire. Turn to view the reverse; the comb sort of swung outwards, then it was gone...disbelief. I was holding a near-empty frame, the comb, brood, bees and all had landed on top of the others already in the hive, bees were flying furiously all about, and I was to all appearance standing calmly as a beekeeper should, in reality stunned into near coma.

Cogs slowly turn, OK what to do now. What would Jim do? First thought, abandon the dropped comb; second thought, don't be stupid, it's worth £20. Jim said something about this, there was no blasted wire, I need wire. So I fetched the garden wire, and a fish slice, and the secateurs, what else would I do? Two lengths of wire place across the cover board, used the fish slice to lift the comb onto the wires, replaced the frame and wrapped the wires around - beggar me it just about all held together. So it went into the hive, the last frame after it and I began to think it might be OK; wouldn't the bees be clever enough to reverse the effects of my carelessness, misfortune, whatever? And of course they were; at the next inspection I had a frame that was not geometrically perfect, but was neatly repaired all around; I could have removed my clumsy wires but they are still there now, waiting for the comb-change which will put the bees onto new wired foundation, the old frames consigned to kindling.

I had started beekeeping.....

About our membership

Dean Forest Beekeepers been very successful in attracting new members recently and we now have 116 full members, over 50% more than a year ago. Interest in bees and beekeeping has increased generally, and membership of our national association (the BBKA) has risen from 12,500 to 17,000 over the last 18 months, but we are doing even better than that!

If you are not already a member and are interested in joining us, you will find full information and an application form on our web site, or contact our Secretary, Graham Carter, on 01594 861002 or by email at gscarter@btinternet.com.

The Honey Extractor has moved!

Patrick James has now taken over from Suzy Lawn as keeper of the association's three-frame Honey Extractor.

If you would like to book it please contact Patrick (patrick.james@glosfire.gov.uk or 07786 013869).

Propolis: An Overview

by Marie Toman

As a beekeeper you continually discover new things about bees and their remarkable social behaviour and in particular, about the health benefits of their products: royal jelly, pollen, honey and propolis. Propolis has such a wide application to a variety of products that it might be useful, particularly to our new members, to outline just some of its uses, effects and applications.,

Originating from the Greek language, the term propolis stands for 'defender of the city'. From the honey bee's perspective, 'protection' is certainly gained from its use. Propolis is a mixture of beeswax and resins collected from a variety of plants and in particular, flowers and leaf buds. Trees secrete resin to protect the buds from bacteria, moulds and fungi and bees scrape the protective resins with their mandibles, transporting it on their back legs. Within the hive, resins are used to repair combs, seal holes and mummify dead animals or insects too large to remove, thus ensuring that the colony is protected.

It would appear that only the western honeybee *Apis Mellifera* is known to forage for propolis and, as some of us know only too well, some colonies are more avid collectors than others. In warm temperatures, propolis is a soft, pliable and very sticky substance and can create havoc when inspecting and or removing frames from hives. Characteristics of propolis depend on the season and sources available, varying in odour, medicinal characteristics and colour, which ranges from yellow to dark brown.

New compounds are discovered with every new analysis of propolis, almost 200 identified thus far. The major ones are flavonoids and phenolic acids or their esters, which often form up to 50%. Many scientific tests show positive control of a variety of bacteria, fungi, viruses and other micro-organisms. Bees take advantage of the antibacterial and antifungal effects of propolis in protecting their colony against



diseases and there is valid evidence to support that it is capable of killing the *Bacillus* larvae, the cause of American Foul Brood and *Ascosphaera apis*, a chalkbrood pathogen. To reduce the risk of infection in developing brood, bees mix small amounts of propolis with wax to sterilize and seal brood cells, hence the biscuit colour. So, rather than despair, perhaps we should be thankful if our bees are great producers of propolis.

Humans also take advantage of propolis. It is considered a very versatile substance and the list of medical conditions that it purports to help is endless. To name just a few, the digestive system, wound healing, especially burns, anaemia, respiratory infections, dental care, tissue repair, ulcers, cancer and eczema. Propolis can also be incorporated into special varnishes for string instruments and there is a growing market in cosmetics and as a preservative in food technology.

However, where studies exist, not all claims are backed by sufficiently large numbers of patients or rigorous test designs. A small percentage of people are unable to tolerate propolis under any circumstances, for example those suffering from asthma, or allergies to bee stings and pollen. There are insufficient trials on the effect on pregnant women, so avoidance of the use of propolis is recommended. Aside from intolerance, the only identified reaction to propolis appears to be contact contamination, where people have shown allergic skin reactions. Caution must therefore be exercised with preparations for human use by taking or applying small quantities at a time only, slowly increasing the recommended dose or application. Where claims are unsubstantiated or studies lack vigour, it is clear that more needs to be done to establish the additional benefits from the medicinal use of propolis and its side effects.

Carol Klein coming to Coleford in September

Beekeepers are often keen gardeners, so members might like to know that the well known gardening expert Carol Klein will be giving a talk about her Devon garden on the evening of Friday 24th September at the Forest Theatre, Five Acres, Coleford.

Carol's talk will be about 'The Gardening Year at Glebe Cottage'. Tickets are £8.50 from the Theatre box office (01594 838432), or £7.50 if bought through a local gardening society as part of a block booking before 1st July.



You don't need to teach an old dog new tricks...

by Allan Wells

I have a friend. Just the one. His name is Guinness and he is a Boxer (the dog variety) Guinness is about 70 in dog years which makes him marginally older than me. Of course he thinks he is just a pup, that is until his arthritic joints, rheumy eyes and shortness of breath catch up with him and then he flops down with an exhausted sigh and lay his head on his paws. A bit like me really.

He lives in a house with two rumbustious and exuberant boys aged two and three and although he loves their company I think they rather exhaust him and he seeks, let us say, a more mature company and trots up to my house.

I garden a lot and Guinness likes to be involved, to the point in fact, that he sits with his nose inches from my spade or if I am in the greenhouse with his head on my shoe. I like his company and we enjoy long conversations about everything under the sun although I admit they tend to be one sided. Still, he is nice to have around: as all dog owners know a dog is totally uncritical of humans especially friendly ones (and anyway I am the purveyor of biscuits).

So all goes well in this placid routine or rather it did until I got the bees.

I warned Guinness in advance of their coming, telling him that they sting and are no part of a dog's life. He nodded his understanding and they duly arrived and were installed. Now Guinness is a naturally obedient dog and does exactly as he is told (when he wants to, which is practically never). I said to him sit over there whilst I do my stuff and then we will have coffee and biscuits. He sat where I put him until I turned to walk to the bees and he promptly followed me to see what was what. I took him back to the spot and told him severely to "Stay or stop or whatever".

No, he was determined to be involved. So be it. I opened the bees and began doing my stuff completely involved in my task and forgetting totally about Guinness. Suddenly there was a howl and Guinness began to violently shake his head before rushing out the gate and dashing (hobbling) home. I downed tools and rushed (hobbled) after him. Getting to his house I threw my suit off explaining to Sarah that Guinness had an encounter of the first kind. I found the sting embedded in his left ear flap (very flappy are Boxer ears) and quickly removed it. Very sorry and sore was Guinness for a few days and I saw nothing of him.

We returned to our normal routine with one exception. As soon as I don my bee suit Guinness takes it as a sign to vacate the area. Sharpish.

Future events

Every Thursday evening from now until the end of September we hold practical sessions at our Lydney apiary from 6.00 pm to 8.00 pm with tea/coffee in the clubhouse afterwards.

On **Saturday August 21st** we will be holding our **Summer Barbeque** at Ellwood. Details will be provided later.

On **Thursday September 2nd** our 2010/2011 indoor meetings at Staunton Village Hall begin with a talk on **Hive Products** by Don Streatfield.

On **Thursday October 7th** we will be holding our **Honey Show** at Staunton.

Association contacts

Chairman: Val Vivian-Griffiths 01600 714428 valvg@jimvg.f2s.com

Secretary: Graham Carter 01594 861002 gscarter@btinternet.com

Our web site address is www.deanforestbeekeepers.co.uk

Adam Parker's Apiary Blog is at www.deanforestbees.blogspot.com

The next issue of the Newsletter will be in October 2010.

If you have any comments, suggestions, or contributions please send them to either of the editors: David Kennedy (david.kennedy@btinternet.com) or Graham Carter (gscarter@btinternet.com) or talk to us at one of the meetings.