

Editorial: I hope your honey harvest has been good and it is safely stored away—the bees should have had a good chance to collect some stores ready for the winter. And how was your mite drop? There have been reports of high numbers this autumn. Also, Adrian Wells writes of very late swarms and extremely late Queen cells.

Members have been very busy with the apiary and manning the Branch stands at various shows. There are some photos included in this issue. We are fortunate to have willing helpers but if you are not able to help at these events please do support the Branch by attending the AGM on 22nd November at Churchill Memorial Hall, 2pm. Prof. Daniel Robert from Bristol University will talk on Bees and electrostatic fields of flowers. See you there

Some reflections on judging at the local shows this year.

David Capon

Those of you who have been around the club for a while will know that Tom Salter was for many years the fount of all knowledge when it came to judging honey. When Tom announced he was moving away from the area he asked me if I would consider taking over the judging at our local shows. Quite why he asked me I'm not altogether sure, although I do have one theory that I may reveal at our branch show in February, or possibly it was the word 'mug' imprinted on my forehead. To cut a long story short I agreed and after stewarding for Tom at a couple of shows last year took over from him this year.

What, you may ask yourselves, did I know about judging. Well not a lot, but I do remember as a young boy watching my mother meticulously checking and polishing jars and blocks of wax for showing. Back then I never really understood why my parents got so excited about winning, but now I've had a go at showing myself I can; and they set a high standard, winning several firsts at the National Honey Show.

Anyway, I picked Tom's brains and read all the articles and guidance leaflets I could find. I assembled all the equipment a judge is supposed to carry; believe me there are quite a lot of things, and got myself ready for my first show, which was Portishead.

Having prepared myself as best I could I turned up on the first morning of the show feeling a little apprehensive at the task ahead of me. It was a huge disappointment to me to find that I seemed to have wasted my time completely; the honey section of the show was largely a bare table. Some classes had no entries, some had only one and none had more than two. Well I did my judging which took me less than half an hour and walked away ready to chuck the whole thing in.

Instead I asked Steve to put a piece on the website urging more people to enter the next show which was Tickenham. Much to my relief several members responded to the plea and there was a respectable number of entries in this show. I realised I actually had some judging to do, but at least I had the chance to put into practice what I had been reading. The final show of the season at Winscombe was even better, a large number of entries in all classes. I really had my work cut out here and had to be quite ruthless in discarding entries in the wrong type of jar, the wrong size of cake tin etc. Even then I was left with quite a number of high quality entries. Making the final awards was not easy, hopefully I got it right. I must have done, the judge's decision is final!

I would urge you, especially those of you fairly new to beekeeping to consider entering your products into the shows. It does take a little time preparing entries, but entry fees are usually only a few pence, and the satisfaction of being awarded a prize is immense. In February I will be doing an open judging at our branch show, and going through the factors a judge considers when judging.

There are three reasons I can see for entering shows:

Firstly, when I go to a show I like to see a lot of entries. Shows struggle to survive, and rely on entries to draw the public in and keep going. If no one enters the shows then they will die. I also like to be able to cast a critical eye over the judging 'I wouldn't have given that first prize'.

Secondly, it is far more satisfying to win in a big field than by being the only entry. You may produce the perfect entry, but winning where there is no opposition is a hollow victory. A new beekeeper won a 'Highly Commended' award at Winscombe this year, (obviously at the time I did not know it was a new beekeeper) She was not at the show and said to me later 'Oh I expect there were only four entries'. 'No' I replied '15 actually'. The expression on her face told me how much more of an achievement she realised it was. Also if you are selling your honey at the show you can promote it as 'Prize winning honey'!

Thirdly, it makes it worth the judges' time and effort.

I'm sure I haven't got everything right this year, and there will be people who disagree with my judgement, but I have tried to do my best without fear or favour, and hopefully as I get more experienced I will get better at judging, just as you can get better at preparing your entries.

Skep making day



National Honey Show

Thursday 30th October to Saturday 1st November 2014 at St Georges College, Weybridge, Surrey.
nationalhoneyshownews@gmail.com

Michaelmas

Adrian Wells

It seemed a lot of effort for a half day event, but as always was well worth it, with lots of interest in the stand, especially Ian and his lost queen! I was very ably helped by a handful of helpers with a special mention going out to Paddy for her long hours before the show and to David Capon for his dedication to the judging and for setting up the observation hive. It was good to see so many entries and a spread of prize winners. Well Done! Helping at shows is a great way to give a little back to the club, the work-load is light, everything is explained and you get to be on the cool side of the bench and chat with people. What could be a better way to spend a few hours?



Chair's Letter

By now I expect you will have taken off any surplus honey and have been feeding your bees for the last few weeks. This is my third year keeping bees and the first where I've got honey, about 30lbs in all. An extra bonus was it winning third place at the Winscombe show. It was great to see so many entries in the honey classes and I did a turn on the stand answering questions. The club supports a number of shows throughout the year and we are always looking for helpers, if you can help let someone on the committee know. Following up a warning about late swarms I did a quick check of my hives at the weekend, the bees were grumpy, but I can report all seemed well.

The beginners course that starts in January is already fully booked, which is great news for the club. Next up is the visit to Ottery St Mary to see the bee farm owned by our member Ken Basterfield and then we have the branch AGM in November, I hope to see you there.

Garry

Members' Corner

Congratulations to **David Capon** won four first prizes; in classes for soft set honey, frame for extraction, blocks of beeswax and honey fudge, and third prize for his honey cake at the Bristol Honey Festival, held at The University of Bristol Botanic Garden and his frame was adjudged the best entry in the whole show, for which he was presented with an inscribed Bristol Blue Glass goblet. This frame has also qualified him for free entry into The National Honey Show held later this month.

"The Executive of Avon Beekeepers Association has invited **Jan Davis** to become an Honorary Member of the Association as a way of thanking her for her many years of service to beekeeping. We do so as an acknowledgement and thanks for all the work she has undertaken to support beekeepers, branches, ABKA and the British Beekeeping Association. I am sure all members of Blagdon and Clevedon will join me in congratulating her. – Neil Redman,

Sue Carter (Bristol) with the Bronze Queen, Ann Rowberry (Bath) with the Silver Queen and David Capon (BCD) with the blue goblet at the Bristol Honey Show.



Swarms

Adrian Wells

It has been a long swarm season this year. I took the first swarm 16th April and the last was reported on 3rd of October. Checking through my notes I see that I managed twenty seven swarms between those dates; This doesn't include swarms that we couldn't attend, had absconded or swarms in roofs etc. where the 'landlord' was happy to accept new lodgers. Nor does it include the (literally) hundreds of calls about Tree Bumble Bees, or "bees in my bush" (foraging!) And the season hasn't ended! In the last few days of September beginning of October I removed queen cells from three hives and had reports of others.

Apart from a few swarms that were too small or queenless, all of the swarms were given to bee keepers that had lost their stock or to new bee keepers under supervision, so one bee keeper's loss has been another's gain.

Our motley crew of swarm catchers has done a sterling public service and deserve a well earned slap on the back. Most were swarm virgins and are now happy to get out there and confidently tackle anything that comes there way.

Most interesting/unusual swarms? One decided to gate crash an engagement party which will never be forgotten by the other guests! I took one that had emerged from a chimney pot jardinière that had been in residence for at least three years (I'm going to attempt to treat the pot for Varroa shortly). A mob-handed group took a swarm from inside a compost bin, we transferred the swarm to a hive and presented the honey laden comb to the house owner stacked on a plate. Other than that it was mundane, chimneys, trees, shrubs, fences, oh and a tiny cast from a potted plant on someone's decking!



FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2014

Sat 15 November 2pm Branch visit to

Ken Basterfield's Blackberry Honey Farm

There are 3 spare places on the 22 seater bus with 2 pickups:
Nailsea and Congresbury.

Sat 22 November 2pm BCD AGM

at Churchill Memorial Hall

Prof. Daniel Robert from Bristol University will talk on
Bees and electrostatic fields of flowers.

*Efi: please contact **John Banks 01275 855685***

Ja.banks1@btinternet.com

All information about meetings are on the website:

www.northsomersetbeekeepers.org

From Education co-ordinator, Rob Francis rob-francis@virgin.net

Recently there has been a good deal of coverage about honeybees in the media and the interest continues to grow. I am particularly pleased that many young people are taking an interest in beekeeping. There have been a number down at the branch's apiary this summer keen to find out more and quite a few talks given to schools by various members of the branch.

The highlight of my summer was to spend a week in Nailsea School working with Year 10 students (15 year olds) who had not been given work experience placements. On the first day of the project, called *Sweet and Sound*, a group of 20 students were given information and a presentation about honeybees and then challenged to prepare a lesson for a primary school class. This they did. On the final day of the project they successfully presented a lesson to a class of 10 year olds at a local primary school.

Now as the winter approaches we are considering how we might update our skills and knowledge about our bees.

THE BASIC COURSE

We are running the basic course again this year. It is designed for those who have been keeping bees for one or two seasons. Covering all the main areas in the craft you will have to opportunity of taking a practical assessment in the spring. Because all those taking the course have some experience of beekeeping it's also a good way of exchanging your experiences.

There are seven sessions which take place in Kenn Village Hall, starting on Tuesday 20th January and then every other week. The cost is only £10. It's a great way of extending your skills and building confidence.

ANYONE FOR MODULE 1?

I have been approached by a couple of people from the branch who are interested in taking this module. It is likely to be run as a self-directed learning group; ie you work together on it with some input from members who have recently taken the module. Now, at the time of writing this we have six interested participants. We're intending to have a meeting on Tuesday 11th November to plan how the group will work together (the venue still to be decided). If you are interested in participating then let me know.

THE WINTER CLUSTER

The first winter cluster takes place on Tuesday 21st October at The Star in Congresbury (BS49 5AJ). Come and join us at midday for a drink, a bite to eat and a gossip about bees, amongst other things. Everyone welcome. Further cluster meetings will take place on the third Monday or Tuesday of every month until the warm weather returns in March. Details will always be posted on the website.

If you'd like any further information about the above or if you have any further suggestions for educational activities then contact me.

In the Apiary.....

David Capon (Apiary Manager) djcapon@gmail.com 07551994848

Another season of apiary sessions has drawn to a close, winter preparations have been made, and the hives all tucked up for winter....except someone has forgotten to tell the bees. As I write this, a third of the way into October, my bees are still flying as though it's the middle of summer, and they seem to be finding plenty of pollen to bring in.

The Brockley apiary has been in full use this season, we have had over thirty new beekeepers at the practical sessions and fifteen or more experienced hands giving them guidance. We used MAQS on the club hives this year for the first time, we followed the advice given to us at the bee disease day and only put on one strip per hive. We don't appear to have lost any queens as a result of using the MAQS.

Again we were able to take a honey crop off the apiary, and we have paid our 'rent' to Solarsense in the form a small jar of honey for each employee. My own bees have produced the biggest harvest I have had in the few years I've been keeping them, and I'm sure many of you will have enjoyed a productive year.

I have not had to give much feed this year as the bees have still been bringing in stores in the late summer and early autumn, but where I have had to feed I have taken advantage of the very good price John Banks negotiated for syrup and have not had the hassle of dissolving bag after bag of sugar. So the hives are fed and strapped down, entrances reduced, mouseguards on. What to do on a Sunday morning until April?