

The Tivvy Buzzette



The newsletter of the Tiverton Beekeepers ~ May 2016

Tiverton Beekeepers are a branch of The Devon Beekeepers Association. Registered Charity No 270675.

Branch Meetings.

Meetings at Uplowman Village Hall have finished until September.

Branch Apiary meetings continue every Sunday 10am at Knightshayes.

Please support the branch at our meetings. We look forward to seeing you.

Beginners Meetings with Keith Owers at Roliphants Farm, Crazelowman. EX16 7DF 2:30pm

Next Meeting:-

Sat May 7th. Queen finding & marking.

Sat June 4th. Making increase.

Sat July 9th. Uniting.

Sat August 6th Extracting in the kitchen.
(More details nearer the time).

Sept TBC. Preparing for winter.

Notes from the Branch Apiary -The native black bee is well adapted to the local climate.

On Tuesday 12 April we collected two colonies of black (probably native or near native) bees from a property near Knightshayes, and brought them back to the apiary around 8pm. We just had time to briefly check them before nightfall, to get an idea of what we had bargained for. One was strong and placid, with several frames full of brood. The other, with nearly as many bees but no brood, was much less friendly, repeatedly stinging any foolish human who neglected to put on a pair of gloves. With no brood in the middle of April it seemed almost certain that the queen had failed. In the coming apiary session on Sunday, we thought, we would check them again just in case, and then unite them with another hive.

On Sunday then, with most of us 'Sunday regulars' present, we prepared one of the other hives in the apiary to receive this failed colony by uniting the two. We placed a

punctured newspaper over the recipient hive and an empty brood box over it to contain the bees, which were going to be shaken in. We then inspected the new hive again, just in case we had missed something the previous Tuesday. The bees were quieter, but frame after frame looked empty of both brood and food. But the seventh or eighth frame looked interesting, and after shaking off the bees and with the sun shining into the black comb we found a number of tiny larvae in their first or second day, and a whole patch neatly laid with eggs. Although we couldn't see the queen, there was no doubt she was there and viable. The plan to unite this hive to another was aborted, and we gave this new hive more space and fed it with syrup.

It may seem inauspicious that this queen was so late in starting the season, but on reflection I think this is related to the fact that the hive had no stores left. An Italian bee,

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for example, would have been laying eggs from February onward regardless, in the expectation that nectar would be coming in, as it does all year round around the Mediterranean. The bees would then be unable to feed the larvae and keep them warm, and this would result in damage to the brood, making the colony more susceptible to disease and more likely to collapse altogether. Such foreign bees may be prolific and may yield more honey under favourable conditions, but in our climate of long winters and unpredictable summers they are more

dependent on a beekeeper feeding them at critical times. The local bee by contrast bides its time and waits for the right conditions. This particular colony seems to have survived the winter on the bare minimum of stores, but the new location at Knightshayes now offered many more sources of nectar, and in the four days between Tuesday night and Sunday morning, with occasional good weather, some nectar started coming in and the queen got down to business.

Baruch Livneh.

First Inspection Report Of The Season From The Branch Apiary 3rd April.

There were nine of us out this morning and we inspected all our hives briefly in the sunny but cool air. The three original colonies have all come through the winter and are in splendid condition. No. 1 has had a second brood box of foundation added just a week ago and there is already sealed brood in it! It is good tempered and the strongest colony we have.

No. 2 is not far behind showing a nice and extensive brood pattern on several combs; it is due for a second brood box shortly. No. 4 which I had some doubts about earlier on is healthy and bringing in tons of pollen and expanding rapidly. All three have plenty of supplies including fresh honey. There is no sign of disease, and the varroa drop is minimal.

The only colony that is in less than optimal condition, I am sorry to say, is the one we have just acquired at great cost, where old comb needs replacing, which we have started doing, and the hive generally wants rejuvenating. There is brood on three frames, and the black queen, unmarked and unremarkable, is laying fairly well, and the bees seem reasonably tempered and free of disease. Let us hope this colony picks up and later justifies the investment.

This new hive (No. 5) seems to be 'honey bound', with old stores from last year, leaving the queen little room to lay, and the combs look old. We replaced two combs with frames of foundation either side of the brood nest. Next Sunday, we'll use those two frames of honey to set up a couple of bait hives in the area to see if we can entice a swarm or two to settle in them. We should also prepare two or three new brood boxes for No. 2 as well as for the new colony.

Baruch Livneh.
Apiary coordinator.

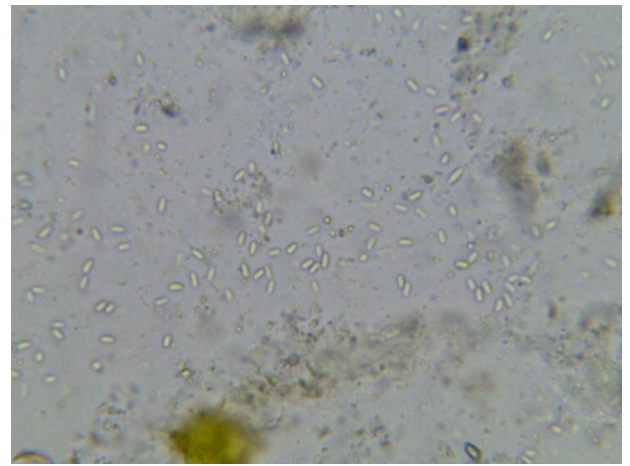
Bees under the Microscope - Wednesday 20th April

Our final event of the winter programme of talks etc is what we now call 'Bees under the Microscope' but it also includes testing members' honey bee colonies for levels of Nosema. It was another successful evening with 32 samples being examined leading to plenty of bee discussion and conversation taking place. Again it was good to see many of our newer members in attendance.

Results: of 32 samples tested, 1 sample showed a high level of nosema infestation, 7 samples revealed medium levels of infestation, 2 samples were indicating low levels of infestation and the rest appeared to be clear of Nosema infestation. *Continued on next page.*



Members inspecting the samples for Nosema spores.



Nosema spores as seen through the microscope

Thanks to William providing the technology, we were able to see the nosema and other slides of the bee on a large wall screen rather than just through the microscope.

Our thanks must also go to Barbara not only for her microscopy skills but also her enthusiasm for the subject. Finally thanks to our Chairman's wife, Susan, for providing such a delicious range of cakes, it was worth coming to the meeting just to sample them!

When is spring going to start?

No two years are ever the same but this year is proving a little more difficult than most for our bees. Whether you are a beekeeper or a gardener or both, we like to see winter out of the way then a steady improvement in the weather from late March and into April and by the end of the month day temperatures in the mid teens and not too many night frosts. This year we seem to have managed about two good days then back to cloudy cold weather again. My solar wax extractor is all set up in the garden and has made a start melting the wax out of old brood frames but I could do with a lot more sunny days to melt all of the old frames that I have. A solar wax extractor is a good indicator of what sort of weather we have been experiencing.

So far this year I have only managed one good look in the hives as the air temperature has been in single figures or the low teens. My flowering currant in the garden, normally a good indicator that when in flower it is warm enough to go looking at bees has let me down. To be true it started to flower at the beginning of April and is still in flower indicating that day temperatures are low hence longer flowering season this year. The bees have come through the winter quite well but with a difference between my three sites. During the winter months it is easy to check the stores in the hive without looking inside by hefting the hive but at this time of year it is not so straight forward. The queen increases her egg laying, according to how many bees she has to support her. The reserves of honey will be decreasing but with our cold spring there has been little nectar coming in to replenish stores, although my bees seem to be well supplied with pollen. If the air temperature is below 16c you must be very careful not to chill brood. Inspecting for stores does not mean you have to disrupt the whole colony. Most of the stores will be on the outer frames so by removing an outer frame you can quickly look at the frames starting from the outside and working towards the centre, soon as you come up with a frame with bright coloured pollen you know the next frame will have brood so stop and close up the hive. This inspection means you can check the stores and close up the hive quickly without chilling the brood.

At this time of year it is safe to feed bees with a liquid feed, although you can still use candy if you wish. I always feed with full strength syrup (1kg sugar: 630ml water). It is better to feed with 2 litres at a time unless you are trying to encourage the bees to draw new foundation in which case I would feed 5 litres at time. If your queen has been laying well and the colony building well you can still be caught out by cold weather starvation preventing the bees

from foraging, hence the need for a small feed. You may have a problem with a colony that does not seem to be building up as it should, it could indicate that there is a problem with Nosema especially if you can see signs of staining on the front of the hive or on top of the brood frames. Unfortunately somebody who should know better mentioned at one of our winter meetings that there was nothing you can do for Nosema, not true. Changing frames regularly is an essential part of maintaining healthy bees as a lot of Nosema spores can be found on the old foundation. The branch has just had its Nosema testing evening and several members' colonies were found to have a problem. At the moment beekeepers do not have a licensed medication for the disease but we do have a product that seems to reduce the problem, Vitafeed Gold. I have used the product on problem hives myself and it appeared to act as a good pick me up. The material is a vegetable extract which you mix with sugar syrup. I will be using again on one or two of my colonies that are not building up as I would like. There is another product Nozevit which I understand is a similar vegetable extract.

Should you be unfortunate and loose a small colony, do close up the hive to stop robber bees entering and possible transporting disease. Brood frames from a colony that has died should be properly sterilised in a solar wax extractor or remove the wax and scrub the frames in strong soda water, (1kg washing soda: 4.5 litres water). The inside of the hive will need to be thoroughly scraped followed by flaming with a blow torch. Nosema is a difficult but manageable problem if you practice good hygiene and regularly replace frames with new foundation.

Looking on the bright side, flowers in the hedgerows have also slowed up. Blackthorn and Wild Cherry still have plenty of flower buds to open, and the Hawthorne is yet to start. The bees favourite Dandelion is not in full flower and will be flowering for weeks. Beekeeping is always a challenge and all we can do is help our bees if we can. Work with the weather and try to think like a bee!

Keith Owers

[Can you help us at the Devon County Show?](#)

The Show is from Thursday 20th-Saturday 22nd May. Once again our branch has entered a display for the Stephenson Trophy in the Bee & Honey Marquee which is organised by the Devon Beekeepers Association.

Our theme this year is the Bee Olympics to coincide with the Olympics taking place in Brazil.

We require a total of 12 stewards to look after the display and talk to the public about bee keeping. (More enthusiasm than detailed knowledge!)

2 members are required for sessions from 8.30-13.00 and 13.00 to 18.00 each of the three days. We will supply you with a ticket for the show-parking is free.

If you would like to help please contact me.

Tony. Hon. Sec.

[Bee Swarms](#)

During the swarming period a number of our members are authorised by the Branch as Swarm Collectors. As a Branch we attempt to ensure that our new members or existing members who have lost their bees are offered the first chance to have one of the swarms. Just be aware that the disease status and temperament of any swarm is unknown.

If you would like to go on our list to have a swarm please let me know.

Tony. Hon. Sec.

If you have any interesting articles relating to Bees & Beekeeping, please do not hesitate to forward them to me by email to jon.gubb@voddens.co.uk by the 27th of the month for inclusion in the next months edition of the Buzzette.