

# Bee Matters – Bees Matter!

## *FBA and DWFBA's joint newsletter December 2012*

### **BEGINNERS CLASSES 2012**

These start **Thurs 19 January** 7.30pm in Portmoak Hall. All details – dates, topics and application forms now on website 'News' page: [www.fifebeekeepers.co.uk](http://www.fifebeekeepers.co.uk)

### **2012 SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE**

A reminder that your subscriptions for the coming year are due on **1 January**. Members should send their £10 (plus £5 for each family member at same address) to John Tout (DWFBA) or Isabel Brown (FBA) Both associations have a standing order scheme – DWFBA have had one for some years and FBA are now starting one too. See Isabel's article below:

Well it is that time of year again of Christmas trees, fairy lights, pantomimes, a wee dram with friends and family and paying annual subscriptions due on the 1st January. Whoops, did I really add that in? The trouble is that because there are so many other things going on we tend to forget about them - until about March.

Many members have asked to pay by Standing Order and this year, after much consideration, the FBA has decided to set up this facility. The form can be downloaded from our website. The one slight problem we have is, that as we do not issue Membership numbers, we need you to supply your own Reference number that will show up on our Bank Statement as proof of your payment. The way that has been chosen is for you to fill in your initial(s) and surname in the place provided on the

form, e.g. my reference number for Isabel M Brown would be:

Your Ref: FBA/ I M BROWN

For my husband Brian A Brown and myself it would be:

Your Ref: FBA/ I M & B A BROWN

I hope that makes sense. If you have any queries please contact me. Once you have filled in the form, **take or send it to your bank** and your subscription will be paid, annually, until you instruct your bank to cancel it. Alternatively, as you finish writing your Christmas cards, why not find a spare envelope (there is always one) and pop in a cheque for £10, with your name and address, and send to your local Association's Treasurer. Job done!

Whilst on the subject, **SBA SUBSCRIPTIONS** are due also on the 1st January 2012. In difficult times for Beekeepers this is probably the most important **£30** that you will pay out, with the amount of support, information and insurance that it offers.

**Note** – If you pay by Standing Order please remember to amend the amount to reflect the revised (**£30**) amount.

Cheques or Standing Order Applications to be sent to:

Phil McAnespie, 12 Monument Road, Ayr, KA7 2RL

## **Book recommendations from Bill Macrae - Ideas for Father Christmas ?**

As the annual beekeeping season draws to a close, the prospect of sitting by the fire with a good book makes us realise that winter has its compensations. In the past year or two I've been fortunate to find some excellent, stimulating books about bees, which I can recommend, to while away the dark nights. Without question the most interesting has been Jürgen Tautz's *The Buzz about Bees. Biology of a Superorganism*. Professor Tautz follows in a long line of distinguished German academics who have made an enormous contribution to our understanding of the biology of bees, such as Karl von Frisch and Martin Lindauer. He works at the Institute of Behavioural Physiology and Sociobiology at the University of Würzburg. His book pulls together strands of research into many aspects of the behaviour of honeybees and weaves a compelling argument that we should regard honeybee colonies as superorganisms, with many of the attributes that we normally associate with mammals. Like mammals honeybee colonies have a low rate of reproduction, provide nourishment for their young, nurture their developing offspring in a protected environment, maintain a constant temperature in the brood chamber and have advanced learning and cognitive abilities. He elaborates on these themes and gives insight into the science that has enabled us to understand so much honeybee behaviour. His description of some of the experiments makes fascinating reading. Another of the delights of this book is the wonderful photographs, taken by Helga Heilman.

Bees and flowers have co-evolved over 30 million years. Professor Tautz explains how flowers have evolved to attract bees, the colour and scent of flowers being the prime examples. Bees have evolved into experts at recognising flowers, manipulating them in order to obtain the nectar and pollen and in the process of visiting many flowers of the same species, distributing the pollen. There are many examples of how detailed the behavioural match is between flowers and bees. Honeybees don't graze a meadow gathering pollen or nectar from any available flowers, they prefer to gather from one species at a time; this of course suits the flowers as it means that their pollen is taken to plants of the same species where they can pollinate them, not be wasted on plants of another species. From the bee's point of view it is advantageous because it leads to efficiency, as the bee has learnt how to manipulate that particular flower in order to obtain the nectar or pollen and doesn't waste time having to learn how to 'work' a different flower. Honeybees have evolved sophisticated communication skills to pass on to nest mates information about sources of nectar and pollen and navigation skills to enable them to find the flowers in a landscape. After reading this book one begins to wonder if in fact honeybees have evolved further than humans, especially in the light of what Tautz calls their 'propagated immortality'. When they swarm, the old queen and many of the bees leave the old colony, but the colony lives on and on in subsequent generations.

Another book that makes one wonder if bees have a thing or two to teach us is *Honeybee Democracy*, by Thomas D. Seeley, who is Professor of Biology at Cornell University in the USA.

Have you ever wondered how a colony of honeybees makes decisions? This question has interested Professor Seeley all his life and he has devoted much time, effort and ingenuity to investigating the question. Again following in the footsteps of Martin Lindauer he has devised studies to determine what it is that makes a colony decide it is time to reproduce, i.e. swarm, how they choose the best site for their new home how they go about organising a whole colony of bees to behave in a coordinated and cooperative fashion. Using a remote island off the coast of Maine, he induced swarming and studied their behaviour, in a long series of experiments over many years. It transpires that bees have evolved a method that allows them to explore multiple options, compare and evaluate them and reach a consensual decision. Having already established what constitutes an ideal nesting site he was able to give the bees options with artificial nest boxes and study how they go about making the necessary decisions, as a group.

The book starts with a review of the early research on the subject and how he became interested in the subject. There follows a chapter which summarises the life of bees and anyone wanting a concise account of the biology of bees should look no further. The bulk of the book describes his fascinating experiments on Appledore Island and he finishes by reflecting on how we might learn from honeybees to improve our collective decision making.

Honeybees are the focus of our interest, but we shouldn't forget that bumblebees are important pollinators and in many ways more interesting than honeybees. Anyone wanting an introduction to the fascinating world of bumblebees should read ***Bumblebees***

by Oliver E. Prŷs-Jones and Sarah Corbet. This is a short handbook published by Cambridge University Press and it contains a wealth of information about the many different species of bumblebees that we have in Britain and even a section on how to rear your own colony. Bumblebees differ from honeybees in many ways, for example only new queens survive the winter, to emerge in the spring and form new colonies. They are able to fly at much lower temperatures than honeybees, and this question of how bumblebees use energy and in particular regulate their temperature is the subject of *Bumblebee Economics*, by Bernd Heinrich, Professor of Biology at the University of Vermont in north eastern USA. This may sound dry, scientific stuff, but this is a well written, fascinating story leading us through the biology of bumblebees to interesting field work and laboratory based research and showing how complex physiological mechanisms have given the bumblebees a successful niche in our world. Professor Heinrich discusses the many evolutionary threads that weave together flowers and bees, from a slightly different perspective from Jürgen Tautz, but makes an equally compelling case for bees being responsible for much of the appearance of the natural world around us. Without bees there would be no beautifully coloured and scented flowers.

***The Buzz about Bees*** - Jürgen Tautz, 2008, Springer, ISBN 978 3 540 78727 3

***Honeybee Democracy*** - Thomas D. Seeley, 2010, Princeton University Press, ISBN 978 0 691 14721 5

***Bumblebees***, Oliver E. Prŷs-Jones & Sarah A. Corbet, Naturalists'

Handbooks 6, 1987, Cambridge University Press, ISBN 0 521 25975 7

*Bumblebee Economics* Bernd Heinrich, 2004, Harvard University Press, ISBN 0 674 01639

## **Letter to beginners from Alex Jarrett, FBA beginners' rep.**

I hope that you have all managed to source bees or have had the opportunity to handle bees at visits to Association or fellow beekeepers' apiaries. I'm sure many are wondering whether beekeeping is for them or are concerned about the difficulties in acquiring bees or indeed finding a suitable site for an apiary. I delayed becoming seriously involved for a year due to work pressures as you will require a fair degree of commitment and time to manage your colonies, and some effort to get your bees through the winter. That worked for my family as it gave us time to fully consider the implications of beekeeping, buy some kit, and source a couple of decent sites for apiaries.

I also understand the frustrations of many who may not have managed to get bees from those associated with Fife Beekeeping Association this year and may consider sourcing bees on the internet. Perceived wisdom is not to source bees from outwith your locality for very sound reasons of disease control, and poor behaviour due to cross breeding. If you *are* thinking of buying bees from outwith the Association remember 'caveat emptor'. Take someone with you and check out the person you are buying the bees from – you wouldn't buy a car without some basic research.

Those with bees will have now fed them for the winter and made sure they are secure and safe from the elements. I use straps bought from Aldi/Lidl to

secure my hives which I find perfectly suitable if somewhat larger than the conventional straps. I use polystyrene cut to shape (50mm/2" thick) or polystyrene chips placed in net bags to cover the crown boards in my hives to assist the bees in regulating the temperature.

If you have some basic DIY skills and have a friendly farmer nearby I have found that the straps of wood and corner posts from reclaimed potato boxes make very acceptable stands for hives.

Remember to use mouse guards, I was a bit late in putting them on my hives and found a mouse nest in the front of my weakest colony. Luckily the mice hadn't got as far as destroying any frames or stores. I have taken some pictures on my mobile 'phone which can be found in a 'Drop Box' folder at

<https://www.dropbox.com/home/Photos/Mouse%20nest%20in%20beehive#/Photos:::>

For next year, be aware that your colony temperament may change, last year our bees were perfectly behaved during the summer months but their temperament changed as autumn approached (I believe they were getting ready to settle down for the winter) and I occasionally received one or two stings (I don't use gloves in an effort to make sure I handle the bees with care). As this season progressed they have seemed a bit more feisty and I have started to show some signs of greater localised swelling when stung on my hand which on the last occasion travelled beyond my wrist. Though I

have had no other symptoms I'll visit a doctor for advice. If you want to know more about these issues a recent discussion on allergy effects on the BKKA discussion forums <http://www.britishbee.org.uk/forum/showthread.php?t=5199> is a useful read.

As for the winter, I'll be making up more wooden hive parts and painting those that have felt the affects of the previous winter. While the plywood flat pack hives I bought have performed admirably, they will probably require more care and maintenance than more expensive models. Also, planning ahead is vitally important to recognise and be aware of the need for action to be taken in relation to feeding, swarm control and increasing your stock once winter is

## **Perth Association restarted!**

### **Update on Perth and District Beekeepers' Association**

An initial meeting was held on 1 November 2011 to establish a new Beekeepers' Association for Perth and surrounding District. Eighteen beekeepers attended and elected an \*ex officio\* committee of three (Charles Wood – Chairman; John Leggat - Treasurer; Linda Leggat - Secretary). The "Committee" have drawn up a draft constitution which has been emailed to those who attended, for comments at the next meeting. Also sent out were membership and data protection forms and minutes of the meeting.

### **Leuchars + District Gardening and Crafts Club Autumn Flower Show, Honey Section**

Around 1930 Leuchars and District Horticultural and Industrial Society

over, (though don't forget your bees over the winter). Attendance at your association meetings to network and take advice, as well as a couple of good books are a prerequisite to success.

I would appreciate your views on any of the aspects of training (classroom and outdoors) that you have received as well as any other opinions you may have on your experience as a beginner with the Association thus far. Your opinions are vitally important in order to maintain the relevancy and practical application of training to support those starting their beekeeping careers.

It goes without saying that if I can be of assistance to any one – please do not hesitate to contact me. Yours, Alex [alexander\\_jarrett@hotmail.com](mailto:alexander_jarrett@hotmail.com)

A series of winter meetings with invited speakers have been arranged.

The first of these is on **Tuesday 6th December** at 7.30pm in St John's Episcopal Church Hall, Princes Street, Perth PH2 8LJ, starting at 7.30pm. The speaker is **Margaret Thomas** and her talk is titled **Suburban Beekeeping (beekeeping with near neighbours)**. After the talk and tea break there will be a short business meeting to discuss the constitution of the Association.

The **10th January** meeting is **Spring Preparations** by **Gavin Ramsay**.

The **7<sup>th</sup> February** will be the AGM, when a permanent committee will be elected

Linda Leggat, Secretary, P&DBKA

was established to hold an annual flower show and gymkhana under canvas in fields around Leuchars and eventually in the playing field there. There would appear to have always been Honey displayed at the show, and

in 1984 the Guardbridge Sports and Social Club donated a trophy for annual competition.

This was when I first met Bob Simpson and Alastair Thake, Bob judging and Alastair exhibiting. In those days it was a simple table display with the jars exhibited on a flat bench, and I remember Alastair remarking with his usual dry sense of humour, 'it's a nice display of lids'.

In those days the show was held in August and unless honey had been kept from the previous year entries were small, but it let the public see that there was a local beekeeping presence. Eventually financial pressures forced the show indoors and a second show was set up at the end of October based on Chrysanthemums. The Honey and WRI sections were moved to this show to give a better balance to the two shows and it was thought this was a better time for showing these exhibits. With the demise of the Cupar late show the Combined Fife Associations looked for a new home and were welcomed to Leuchars Autumn Show which had been relocated to Balmullo. The Leuchars committee closed their honey section and presented their trophy to the best exhibit in the honey show still retaining ownership of it.

When it was decided to move the Combined Fife Honey Show to the Fife Flower Festival at Dobbies, Dunfermline, the Leuchars committee reinstated their honey section.

This competition is an ideal place for local beekeepers to start showing as it is a small show with a trophy for the best exhibit so you can win it with only one class entry, and surely even in these hard times everyone can manage two jars of honey. Also, the candle class is open to non-beekeepers, so family members can make candles.

This year's competition was very poor and I wonder if people look at the Fife, East of Scotland and Scottish National shows and feel they are not up to that standard. Well, Leuchars is the place to start, and gain the confidence to move up to the bigger shows, and the more experienced of us will be more than happy to give advice and help to anyone who asks.

I have put in a plea to the Leuchars committee to keep the show going, and make the same plea to local beekeepers. It's a nice, friendly wee show and lets the public see beekeeping is alive in this area, so if you have a couple of jars of honey next year or decide to make some candles, please come along and help to maintain this show.

Bill Duff

## **EQUIPMENT FOR SALE**

An elderly beekeeper at Strathtyrum, St Andrews has some equipment for sale. It all needs a bit of tidying up but appears to be serviceable and he would accept any reasonable offer. There are 5 hives of 1 deep and 3 shallows; 1 hive of 1 deep and 2 shallows.

All are Wormit Commercial and include floor, crown board and roof. Also 1 table top extractor and 2 smokers. Contact either Bill Duff 01334 870 787 or Sandy Masson 01334 478 423

Elizabeth Adam has some **Smith equipment for sale**. Phone 01383 831 221