

Bee Matters - Bees Matter!

FBA and DWFBA Newsletter September 2011

GENERAL NOTICES

WINTER TALKS start early this year - FBA and DWFBA have been chosen for the SBA autumn tour speaker, Ian Homer, on **Thursday 29 September, 7.30pm at Portmoak Hall**. His talk is titled '*No Bees, no Honey; no Honey, no Money*'. Then talks will be as usual:

DWFBA on the first Thursday of the month, 7.30pm in Portmoak Hall, and

FBA on the second Thursday of the month, in the VONEF rooms above the main post office in Crossgate, Cupar, also 7.30pm.

FBA's first speaker, on **13th October**, will be Margaret Thomas on '*Getting a Maximum Crop of Honey*'. Remember dates can always be checked on the website: www.fifebeekeepers.co.uk

BEE BASE:

Have you registered on Beebase yet? All beekeepers should. It's very easy to do, you need only a post code for your apiary, and then you will be notified immediately of any disease in your area and also receive seasonal beekeeping hints.

NEEDING A GOOD APIARY SITE?

Cupar/Ceres area landowner wants bees and beekeeper on his land: Edward Baxter, Farming, Forestry and Wildlife Adviser, approached me at the RHS, wanting a beekeeper to set up an apiary on his land. He is Chairman of Sabre Safety Ltd, Sabre House, Cupar Trading Estate, tel: 01334 656 645, or mobile 07970 449 886.

SBA AUTUMN CONVENTION 10 Sep:

Have you registered yet for this? A full day's lectures, coffee, lunch and tea included, with sales stands, for £25 – what could be better?! It is always a most enjoyable and interesting day. One of the three speakers is Willie Robson of Chainbridge Honey Farm – those of you who came on our joint DWF/FBA trip to Chainbridge on 21 August (see later article) will know what a fascinating speaker he is. The other two are Terry Clare and Giles Budge, both excellent speakers with a wealth of knowledge and experience. Do come!

Phone Iain Steven on 01738 621 100 or email lomand@btinternet.com to reserve your place.

CHANGE OF DATE:

The SBA Annual Council and Local Association Secretaries meetings have been changed to **26th November**. The LA Secretaries meeting is restricted to just 1 or 2 representatives from each association but the Annual Council meeting is for ALL SBA MEMBERS.

UPCOMING HONEY SHOWS:

Fri 2nd, Sat 3rd and Sun 4th September: SCOTTISH NATIONAL HONEY SHOW and also **East of Scotland Open Honey Show** at Camperdown Park, Dundee, part of the Dundee Flower and Food Festival. Entries Thursday afternoon / early evening. Email www.dundeeflowerandfoodfestival.com for a schedule.

COMBINED FIFE OPEN HONEY SHOW:

Sat 17th Sep (11am-6pm) and Sun 18th Sep (9am-5pm), Entries Friday afternoon/early evening. This takes place in Dobbies Garden World, Duloch Park, Dunfermline. Email www.fifeflowershow.org.uk for a schedule.

LEUCHARS AND DISTRICT FLOWER SHOW:

Sat 29th October 1.30-5pm, Burnside Hall, Balmullo. This has a honey section. Entries by 9am. Anyone needing a schedule, just ask! Janice.

PREPARING FOR WINTER

After a most disappointing summer we need to prepare very carefully to ensure our bees make it through the winter. I did manage to take off a little honey in late May, and even less in late June, but any hopes of a later 'main' crop have long disappeared.

The first thing to do has been to insert entrance blocks wherever wasps were making a nuisance of themselves. Any starter colony was automatically given a restricted entrance, but recently full size hives have needed it too. This at least makes their home easier for them to defend against these robbers. At one apiary where I'd noticed wasps I also placed old lemonade bottles behind hives, half full of water and jam, and it was a delight to empty out the corpses of hundreds of wasps at each inspection. Bees are not tempted by jam, and tend to avoid the back of the hive, so it is a

cheap and effective way to trap these pests. Jim Ferguson gave me a clever French wasp trap last year, which has really come into its own these last two weeks, hanging from a tree outside my kitchen window with the same watery jam bait, and needing emptying every couple of days, there have been so many dead wasps in it.

The second is to tackle the supers. Brush the bees off, or put an escape board under them, leave 24 hours then take them away. If not sealed you can either extract the honey for your own immediate use (it will not keep indefinitely) or give it back to the bees, slightly diluted, in a feeder. If you wish you can give the super with frames of unsealed honey back to the bees, either over or under the brood box, but in either case without a queen excluder. However, any varroa treatment is then likely to contaminate the wax in the super and make it unsuitable for future use for saleable honey.

The third thing is to make sure the bees are kept as warm and dry as possible. Enid this year is putting most of her colonies onto double brood boxes, with 7 frames in each and thick dummy boards (each the width of 2 frames) either side. She has made these herself, filling them with 2" thick polystyrene. These, plus the same thickness of polystyrene between the crown board and roof, should keep her bees very well insulated through the cold weather, and the bees will be less at risk of isolation starvation as they prefer anyway to move upwards rather than from side to side of the hive. My strongest hives will be on 8+8, but smaller colonies will remain in a single brood box with 10-11 frames and dummy boards. In Enid's heather apiary up north the hives are on single brood boxes and these she will put onto doubles with 5 & 6 frames and thick dummies.

The fourth thing to do is feed them thick syrup, or, even better, Ambrosia or Apisuc, a syrup with additives, which the bees absolutely adore. (nb DWFBA are putting in a bulk order for Apisuc – contact secretary Tom Scott if you'd like some of it! It will be cheaper than Thorne's Ambrosia). The colony must have enough food stores for the winter, and this means the equivalent of 7-8 deep frames full of honey (each frame weighing approximately 5lbs, making 35-40lbs of stores). Keep filling that feeder until the bees stop taking it, or until mid-October, to give them time to ripen it. You don't want unripened stores in the hive, these being a common cause of dysentery. If in the spring you find there are too many frames of stores for the queen to have room to lay, you can remove some and add empty drawn comb or foundation, but far better to err on the side of over-feeding rather than letting them starve. Remember starvation is the most common reason for colonies to die out.

The fifth thing on your list is to treat for varroa. There are various treatments, and a policy of Integrated Pest Management, ie combining or alternating between two or more types, is the best way to keep mite numbers down. Some people are still using Apistan or Bayvarol strips, but most seem to think they are losing their effectiveness. Apiguard needs higher temperatures than we usually get here to be effective. Till this year I have used Apistan at start of September, then oxalic trickle in late December, but this year I'm going to try Apivar Life (a very strong thymol based strip) in one apiary, and formic acid in the others, in September, then oxalic trickle in late December. Jim Bell treated some of his colonies with formic and when uncapping drone brood recently it was still completely free of mites! Apivar Life may be a good choice for those of you with a single hive as you can buy just the two packs needed for the

treatment, which would be easier and cheaper than the acids. But whichever treatment you decide on, the important thing is that you treat!!!!

Point number 6 is to remember to insert mouse guards by late September/early October. A warm, cosy brood box full of wax and honey is paradise for a wintering mouse who will wreak havoc on your comb, eating huge holes through it and often so demoralising the clustering bees that they die out.

Last on my list is to strap the hives, or weigh them down with heavy stones, so that they are protected against winds, and to check after gales that they have not blown over (as two of mine did in those awful late May gales) or the roof blown off.

DID YOU KNOW...? by Isabel Brown

The season of Honey Shows is well underway so, if you should be one of the lucky ones who has some honey, have you considered entering?

The Judging of Honey Shows is not only about the wonderful product the bees produce, however, but also about how you present it.

Did you know that you must have the correct jar and lid, pristine clean with no flaws, scratches or dents, and that lids must be matching where more than one jar is entered in a class? Any imperfections will be noted and lessen your chances of success.

The jar is held up to the light and the judge looks for colour, clarity, bubbles, debris and the amount of honey in the jar. The colour of the honey has to match the category into which it has been entered. If it is too light in a Medium category or too dark in a Light category it won't be judged. A torch may be shone from behind the jar to show up any clouding, bubbles or specks of debris. Again, if any of these things are spotted it is unlikely that the honey will progress any farther. Last in this

section is the quantity of honey in the jar. If there is too little it will be picked up visually, before the jar is even opened, by the tell-tale light beneath the bottom edge of the lid and the top of the honey. If there is too much it will stick to the lid.

Did you know that when the jar is at last opened it is moved around to test the viscosity, the surface is examined and the honey smelt? If it appears too runny it may be necessary to test the water content by a special gauge which gives the percentage of water in the honey. If the reading shows higher than the permitted level then the jar will be put to the side. The surface should be clear and smooth with no bubbles or surface covering. Did you know that some people enter the same jar into several shows and sometimes over a number of years? This does not break any rules. Lastly the smell can tell a lot about the honey. If it is overheated it may smell (and taste) burnt and this will put it out of the running. However, a pleasing smell may help the judge make the final decision.

The judge uses a small glass rod to dip into the honey in order to taste it. (The rod is washed by

the judge's steward after each use). The judge will have a glass of water to clear the palate between tastings and one judge is known to bring a bunch of green grapes for the same reason. Tasting is subjective, meaning that a honey that wins with one judge will not necessarily win with another and not all judges will award a First Prize if the standard does not seem sufficiently high.

You may think that I have entered a lot of Honey Shows to have all these snippets of

information -but you would be wrong. The reason I have come across them is that when Enid asked for Honey Show Judging Stewards- I volunteered. It is a great way of learning what a judge is looking for and needs absolutely no experience.

One day, when my bees give me enough honey - I may even enter..

A VISIT TO CHAIN BRIDGE HONEY FARM by Alison Milne and Finlay Taylor



Picture Peter Mackintosh

Our recent visit, by coach, to the honey farm went really well and everyone enjoyed a lovely day. As a beginner, having attended last winter's classes, this was my first trip and I was unsure what was expected, eg were we going to inspect hives, would I need my suit, would we get lunch? However, deciding it would be a good day out for me and my 11 year old son, Finlay, off we went to join all the 'experts'.

I know many beginners feel as apprehensive as me but as I started talking to the 30 or so strong group I realised that there were a lot of people, family and friends of beekeepers, also just having a day out and I knew more about bees than them!

After our pick up points in Kinross and Inverkeithing, off we went all the way to England, just over the border near Berwick upon Tweed. Our host, Willie Robson was

very welcoming and gave us lots of information about how he keeps his 1600 hives! Finlay and I couldn't believe that number of hives when it takes us about an hour to check our one hive at the bottom of the garden. However, he let us into some of his secrets like tipping up the brood box to look from underneath to find queen cells. I also enjoyed his approach to keeping bees, reminding us that bees have been around a long time and can look after themselves as long as they have the right environment, location, crops etc.

A bit from Finlay:

*What I liked about the visit was that he showed us the factory where he makes all of his honey, and all the vintage cars and motorbikes. Also I liked the **BIG** honey extractors and the place where they keep all the honey jars. But best of all was the green bus that had a cafe in it, and I*

*got the best hot chocolate in the world from it. (I have a hot chocolate list you know!).
Finlay aged 11*

We all of course enjoyed a visit to the shop and gallery with plenty of information and things to see including an observation hive and I came away with quite a few goodies, lip balm, honey, candles and soap etc. It really is a lovely place to visit for people on holiday with lots to see and learn. And I can't thank Willie Robson, his family and staff enough. They were all so friendly and welcoming and gave us one of the best soup, sandwich and tea and cake treats that rounded off the day beautifully.

Mmm I might be back next year!