

CBKA Newsletter December 2007

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This is the time of the year when people look back at 'what might have been', or they are saying, (mostly to themselves), 'if only I had done so and so' how different things might be now. Looking backwards is only useful if we can seriously say 'we have gained something, positive or negative, and intend to learn from it. Only too often there's a tendency to shrug shoulders and say 'better luck next time'. But folks who depend on 'luck' are rarely lucky and never serious in their intentions. Beekeepers are eternal optimists and prefer to look forwards. Looking forwards to greater success next year means planning carefully to ensure we are not caught out by reasonably predictable events that can, to some extent, be catered for. For the amateur or small time beekeeper this is not diffi-

cult. There's bound to be periods of bad weather when your bees can't get out; OK, don't let them starve, give them back some of *their* honey. Doing so helps to keep up the momentum within the colony preventing any break down in the brood rearing pattern so building up colony strength for when the weather improves. I have a bucket full of poor quality honey taken from frames insufficiently sealed this year ready to give back to the bees next year when the time arises. It will be diluted, ever so slightly, and fed back (recycled is the modern jargon) in order to help build up the colonies for the summer and the heather.

Beekeepers are invariably interested in other forms of wildlife and I am sure they all have a particular interest in butterflies. We have many beautiful butterflies in this area and Ray Wilson, our speaker in November, had a superb collection of pictures to show us. His talk was intensely interesting as it showed the variety of butterflies we can see at different times of the spring and



Comma seen at Grindon

summer. He and his wife are clearly dedicated to their subject. What is more, CBKA had one of the largest turnouts that night that we have ever had.

I wonder how many of you heard the Farming Today Programme on the 28th November (BBC Radio 4 each day at 5-45am). In it the Farm Minister Lord Rooker said in the House of Commons (yesterday 27th) that the honeybee population could be wiped out in ten years if nothing is done to tackle the Varroa mite that attacks them. Replying to a question from Lord Talgarth he denied that Defra was cutting research funding into the disease. He said "that our bee health research has remained roughly the same at about £200,000 for several years. The funding for the Bee Health Unit has also remained almost exactly the same for the past five years. We don't deny the fact that bee health is at risk and frankly if nothing is done about it, the fact is

the honeybee population could be wiped out in ten years - there's no question about that, and in terms of being asked to acknowledge the worth to the agricultural industry our best estimate is the bee population contributes £165million extra in terms of yields."

Not only are we faced with disease, but we are also faced with paying more for honey in the shops. Stuart Bailey of The Honey Association said (in the same programme) "a world shortage is to blame". We have the drought in Australia that's been going on for about three years, only 25% of normal crop in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria along with only 50% of a normal crop in Greece and Turkey makes for a world shortage of honey. He said "In America there's Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), so that all in all there's a shortage of honey". When asked if we produce sufficient honey he said "the UK consumes 30,000 tons annually, but the British beekeeper's can only produce 2,500 tons, that being a function of the climate and the economics for beekeeping, though only 250 tons is sold through the major grocery chains, most English honey is sold at farmers markets, from the beekeeper and village shops etc". He also said "this year the British crop again was poor, this is the year when we really needed a good crop because the demand for British honey has never been better and we didn't get it". Asked 'how much is honey going to go up in the shops' he said "the world price is up by 25% compared with the beginning of this year for raw honey and as the cost of raw honey is about 70% of the total cost of producing and packaging it, so the increase expected for January is about 6% to 10%, with the possibility of another increase in March or April". It was said that "shop prices are sure to increase but is still value for money, particularly when compared with a pint of beer"

It was Einstein who said that "if honeybees

died out man has four years to live". So is Lord Rooker forecasting the end of us all. If so then I think we should all urgently prevail on him to increase the spending on Varroa research right now.

Looking at the figures for home produced honey, there is clearly a case for us to do more as there is an ever expanding market out there. I am absolutely convinced that we can do better, it simply means considerably more thought and attention to detail, or perhaps we should turn to brewing beer.

But then we find this little gem in the Independent news paper. It is of course only telling us what every beekeeper (and mother) has known for many years. I am far from convinced that it has to be 'buckwheat' honey for any honey used when our children were small worked wonders.

Honey 'is best cure for coughs'

■ Natural honey is a better remedy for children's coughs than over-the-counter medicines, say researchers. A dose of buckwheat honey before bedtime outperformed cough suppressants containing the active ingredient dextromethorphan, a US team told the journal *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*.

It's almost mid December and it's been snowing here today, not a lot, but it's a sign of things to come. There's nothing you can do for your bees from now on until the weather warms up again. If they are in a windy spot, place a large rock on top of the roof to prevent it blowing off. Make sure they are on a stable base and can't readily be blown over, for that could well be the end of them. Do not remove snow from the roof, it acts as an insulant preventing cold from penetrating downwards. When the weather is frosty do not even walk amongst your bees as the hard crunching on the ground may well disturb them, just be patient and leave them alone.

2007 has been a momentous year for CBKA with the granting of the money to enable us to set up our own teaching apiary and purchase the required equipment. The apiary will be our 'shop window', for all who visit the Newham Grange Leisure Farm will be

able to see beekeeping first hand and in relative safety. As with any shop window it should lead to enquiries regarding its display and could lead to many more people joining the 'sport'. But (there's nearly always a 'but') it will not prosper without the help of several volunteers being prepared to help those members who have worked so hard to set up the operation. In addition, what finer way is there to learn more about our splendid pastime as well as being able to pass knowledge on to others. Please ask "what can I do to help" and be prepared to put in a hour or two occasionally, your help will be appreciated.

Ten members turned up to the quiz at Houghall and they all helped CBKA to win once again and by just one point. The quiz was set by Richmond, last years winners, and it comprised a total of 6 sets of questions but only one set relating to beekeeping - it was a general knowledge test, and a good one. Thank you Richmond. Thanks must also go to Pat and Ian Copinger who, once again, prepared a splendid buffet fit for a king. We were told that this may be the last year the quiz will be held at Houghall as there are plans to close the college. At the moment no alternative venue has been found - any ideas?



Pat & Ian Copinger setting up the buffet for the night.

Clearly our bees have found a warm venue to hibernate for the winter, for a swarm turned up on the 4th of December in Sri Lanka at the Asgiriya Stadium during the cricket match, adding to the torment England were already suffering - have they no sense of National Pride?

Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year to you all.

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If we could do with what we need rather than what we want, we would be at peace.

Secretary; Ian Brown, 48, Thames Avenue, Guisborough, TS14 8AF. Tel: 01287 632851

Meetings held, from September to April, in Lingfield Farm, Countryside Centre, Middlesbrough, on the 3rd Monday of each month at 7.15pm
Newcomer's are welcome.

BEEKEEPING SUPPLIES
Allan, Tony & Richard Jefferson;
Tel. 01947 840723 or Tel/Fax 01947 893811
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Cleveland. TS13 5AN.
Suppliers of all beekeeping equipment.
Honey bought and sold.

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Alphabetical Beekeeping

Copied from the Honey Association's WebSite

K is for. Kvas - a Russian variant of mead, made from barley and rye.

P is for. Pollen - bees collect pollen when the flowers are in bloom.