

# CBKA Newsletter March 2007

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A very large queen bumblebee came into the garage/workshop yesterday and though I told her it was too early to be out I don't think she understood me. But that's not all, there's a lot of aphids/greenfly on the rose shoots and lots of seven spot ladybirds too. Shrubs and fruit trees seem to be breaking buds very early, while the crocus's and daffodils are a perfect picture. Just where the ladybirds have come from so early in the year is a puzzle, but they are clearly enjoying a meal of greenfly. The roses will be pruned in a few days time and the prunings burned, though the ladybirds will be shaken off first. What will they eat then I wonder. The birds have

paired up and are building nests, though the blackbirds seem to be feeding young - they are almost always the first to breed. The temperature at lunchtime today (12th March) was 12°C, it should be about 8°C, and this sort of thing has been going on for several days/weeks. The bees are flying most days, all that seems to stop them is the high winds. I fed them candy earlier in the year and by last week it had all gone and they are now on to the second lot.

That's all very well until we realise that it's all happening too early to be safe from the cold weather that may still come our way. Ladybirds, and young birds will have no chance if food becomes difficult to find, and the fruit blossom will be finished.

We have little choice but to believe that it's the much heralded 'global warming' that has something to do with it all and there's nothing we can do about that. It is true to say that 'man' has caused it and man is the only animal that can reverse it but that's many years away now. Bees and beekeepers will have to come to terms with the change, though I fancy it may take a few years for the bees to settle down to such changes.

My bees went into winter with their brood boxes full of heather honey topped up with sugar. But there's hardly been a week in the last 4/5 months that we haven't seen bees flying at some time. If bees cluster during a cold winter they use very little food for several months. It's in the late winter and early spring that they normally begin to consume an ever increasing amount of food to service an ever increasing brood population. But these aren't 'normal' times, and beekeepers with an eye on future honey crops will have to recognise this. We may never know just how many colonies are lost during any winter, and beekeepers are

often loathe to admit to losses, but every colony lost is one lost to the national pollinating force and one lost for gathering your honey. So get out there and heft those hives and if in any doubt about the food content, feed them.



Nucleus hive with a candy feeder in place

If they don't need it, they won't use it but it's a cheap insurance

against possible losses later. Candy is readily available from our local beekeeping suppliers, though of course you can also make your own.

I have been sent an interesting but disturbing article taken from the Independent Newspaper of the 1st of March. It's headed "Honey, Who Shrank the Bee Population". It goes on to say that thousands of colonies of honeybees have died out across America, and that beekeepers are facing ruin leaving the US Agriculture industry under threat. With a touch of the usual newspaper histrionics it talks of "echoes of a murder mystery in polite society". 'The world of beekeeping has suddenly encountered an affliction, calamity and death on a massive scale, and we haven't a clue what's happening'.

There is little doubt that the story sounds very disturbing with one beekeeper claiming to have gone from a 1,000 colonies to just eight during last autumn. What is more no one seems to know exactly what the problem is, except that bees are simply 'abandoning their hives by the million'. It is said to be a virus, but which virus has yet to be determined.

Varroa is said to have some part in it all and it's a well known fact that seriously varroa infested bees do simply abandon their hives. We know that varroa is the vector by which many viruses are spread and that viruses are thought to do more damage to the bees than was originally thought. But it is difficult to believe that American beekeepers have let varroa increase to such proportions as to allow a problem of this magnitude. Checking with the WebSite, researchers at Pennsylvania State University are investigating the interactions of a parasitic mite, viruses and other microbes. They have found "evidence that the parasitic mites are immunosuppressing the bees and causing activation of the viruses". But on this scale!! We shall simply have to wait to see what the explanation for it all turns out to be, but in the mean time we should do all we can to prevent the build up of varroa in our own colonies. It must be stressed that varroa has not been firmly implicated in the American problem, but we do not yet know what the long term effect of the mites in our colonies really is. You all have copies of the DEFRA booklet on varroa, read it, digest it and act accordingly. Yet another 'man made' problem; varroa was no problem to the world at large so long as it stayed on the island of Jarva, it was the interference of well intended scientists that brought it to Europe and hence the rest of the world. And once the genie is out of the bottle ---Ah well.

The February meeting was, for me at least, a most enjoyable revelation. To see one of our very own members taking the floor is a grand site, and to see it done so well for the first time of speaking was wonderful. Tom Rettig, with the help of his daughter Emma, talked about 'bee diseases', a difficult subject for anyone to deal with but they managed very well. They had clearly put a lot of time and effort into it. Thank you Tom and Emma, I look forward to your next talk. And I have received this from our Secretary Ian Brown:-

"Once again we had a good turn out for our last

meeting. Why don't more people make the effort to come? We will not run out of chairs and I am sure that Kevin will be able to cope with the tea and coffee.

Tom Rettig, with the help of his daughter, gave an excellent talk about bee diseases and their treatment. Throughout the talk questions were thrown at him and he came through with flying colours. Aren't we lucky to have such talented members?"

There is just time to enrol for this week-ends Northern Beekeepers Association Convention to be held next Saturday (24th) at Grey College, Durham. The University of Durham Botanic Garden is situated near Grey College and as guests of the College, you are free to wander there as you please.

The talks are essentially practical in nature and aimed at beekeepers of all levels. There is also a couple of spare places for the Sunday Microscopy Session to be held at Close House, near Heddon-on-the-Wall.

Please see me for copies of the programme.

The Yorkshire BKA Convention is to be held on Saturday the 14th of April at Bishop Burton College, Beverley.

Ian Brown has copies of that programme.

A considerable amount of time and effort is expended by a willing band of volunteers in the organising of the regular association meetings and the annual area conferences. It is all done on your behalf, and the only thanks the organisers want is to see 'bums on seats'. Please do all you can to attend all the association meetings, and please also give some thought to attending the annual 'get-togethers'. It is all done for you and it is to you that we look for help and ideas for future meetings.

Finally, do not be tempted by all the early mild weather into examining bees yet, one good blast of cold air over the brood frames will set them back many weeks. It's still chilly out there.

A mild day in mid April is soon enough.

Kindest regards to you all,



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By Any Other Name...  
Chronologically gifted: Old.  
C. Brancato

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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;  
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**John R. Allen**  
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STOCKTON-ON-TEES. TS21 1BN Mobile: 07814 576785  
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Alphabetical Beekeeping

Copied from the Honey Association's WebSite

G is for.. Greek - the deliciously, dark rich honey with a taste of liquorice and aniseed

T is for.. Texture - honey can be clear (runny) or set