



CBKA Newsletter

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Autumn is always a colourful time though I feel this year has been more colourful and longer lasting than usual. Sitting here looking out of this window the Elm trees are a blaze of yellow and the Sumac (*Rhus*) is amazing. The ground is a carpet of leaves of all colours. Sadly there's not a lot of berries this year, the Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Hawthorn along the old railway line are almost bare and the numerous Whitebeams (*Sorbus aria*) we have here haven't a single berry between them. That's sad for in previous years such trees have been laden with fruit. What does it all mean? Well it could spell disaster for the many birds and animals of the area. But then the fruit trees in my garden have not done anything like as well as they have in the past either, with very few eating apples and no pears or damsons.

You all know that my bees died out early in the year and since then I have only seen two or three honeybees flying about the garden during the summer period.

All the trees mentioned above, and many more, require the services of the honeybee in order to produce fruit. They also require good weather to enable the bees to fly and do what comes quite naturally, that is to collect nectar and pollen and to pollinate the flowers automatically, that is exactly why they are here. (They are not here to provide honey for you and me, that's purely incidental).

So the shortage of bees combined with poor flying weather must be a contributory factor in the present parlous state of our hedgerows. This can only result in considerable difficulty for our wildlife, and particularly the birds, during the coming months.

And now another incidental; I have an article here that tells me that we cannot live without our birds. It says that if two house flies breeding at the start of the year were allowed to breed without any interference, then their progeny were to do the same - and so on through the summer, we would be covered

with a carpet of house flies one metre deep within the year. So the bees help to provide the food to feed the birds which keep the fly population down to manageable proportions, all part of the amazing 'food chain'.

The almost total loss of all feral bee colonies combined with the severe losses experienced by beekeepers is clearly serious. It's effect is being felt by farmers and growers over a very wide area and can only spell disaster in the long run. Clearly we beekeepers need to do all we can to maintain healthy bee stocks and encourage new beekeepers into the craft. Maybe our annual autumn display of colour will then coincide with a healthy food supply for all of us.

Winter is a particularly testing time for bees, so good and careful preparation by the beekeeper will help mitigate losses. Make sure your bees can take the test in their stride. On any flying day you will see your bees bringing home pollen loads. There are several plants that produce pollen even in the winter time. Colonies that have been properly fed should have little room for all of this to be stored but most of it is intended for immediate consumption by the worker bees. It is partly this consumption of pollen that helps these young workers to become "winter bees". They have well developed 'fat bodies' and brood food glands. In addition the life of those bees is enormously lengthened. It is these bees, produced from eggs laid in September that will still be alive to forage in the Spring, maybe even on winter rape in April. This is why it is vital to encourage Autumn brood in colonies by feeding. Apart from ensuring that colonies have enough food there are a number of other ways in which the beekeeper can help his bees to survive. The Apiary site is important. Few are perfect but a little attention to detail can improve your bees chances of survival. Make every effort to limit the cutting winter wind from impinging directly on to the hives. Hedges and shrubs offer great protection but

take time to establish. A semicircle of fencing panels fixed on the windward side of the hives will offer good protection. They do not have to be more than 1200mm (4-0ft) high, but they will serve to drive any cold wind upwards and over the top of the hives. A very necessary addition is the placing of a heavy stone on top of the roof to ensure it does not blow off in strong winds. The deeper the roof the less chance it has of blowing off too.

Do ensure that your hives are sited to take advantage of any winter sunshine. Winter bees are physiologically different from summer bees in several ways, and one of those ways is their ability to store faecal matter for very many days in their rectums. Spells of winter sunshine enable them to then take 'cleansing flights'. Faeces are voided in flight enabling bees to face confinement again in the event of a prolonged spell of cold weather. Bees that cannot take advantage of winter sunshine may well be confined to the hive for much longer periods with every possibility of them defecating inside the hive. The only 'tool' your bees have to clean the hive with is their mouth.

Bees are naturally very clean creatures, but there is every danger of them suffering from dysentery as a direct result of cleaning the inside of their soiled hive. Once dysentery breaks out within a colony it spreads quickly and will soon affect and destroy all the bees. Varroa: It is important, especially in winter, to monitor the natural mite drop from your bees. Use open mesh varroa floors fitted with a draw on to which a paper insert can be added. Do remember that varroa is unquestionably the principle cause of all the current losses of honeybees. (I am enclosing a sketch of a floor this month which can easily be made by any DIY enthusiast) Write the date on the paper when you insert it. Any mites falling off the bees drop on to the paper and cannot get back. What is more your bees cannot get to the dead mites to remove them. Check the paper insert whenever conditions allow and record the number of mites that have fallen.

The number of mites divided by the number of days since you last inspected the paper is the 'average' mite drop per day. From the results you obtain in this way it may well be obvious that a Spring treatment will be necessary to maintain colonies in a good healthy state.

Showing honey and beekeeping products is not everyone's 'cup of tea' but I feel we have to admire those who do and particularly those who make such a success of it. Once again Peter Schollick from Richmond BKA and our very own Allan Jefferson and family have again done well in the National Show held each year in the London area. We must congratulate them for such success does not come without considerable effort.

I have for some time been aware of a severe pain in my right shoulder and arm which has made beekeeping particularly difficult for me. I now have spondylitis confirmed in my spine. It's painful and my right arm has pins-and-needles sensation nearly all of the time though I am learning to live with it. Beekeeping and lifting heavy hive parts is no longer possible, so I have given up the 'sport' and handed all my equipment over to my son who lives in Cambridgeshire. He came with a large van and took everything away about three weeks ago. I was saddened to see it go though I know it's for the best, but after nearly forty years ---- Ah well what more can I say.

Last month I gave you all a map showing how to get to Finchale College, Durham, (Satnav DH1 5RX) for it's there that the Inter-Association quiz will take place this December - NOT Houghall as shown in the current Programme. It's on the 3rd, starts at 7-00pm and anyone wishing to travel with me is welcome, I should manage to fit at least three folks into my car. It will be necessary to leave here at 6-15pm. Please make every effort to be there for it is always a grand night, a lot of fun and a great opportunity to meet fellow beekeepers from other Associations. I look forward to seeing you all there.

kindest regards to you all,



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You feel happiness through what you experience, not because of what you are.

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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.

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Bee Facts/Did you know?

VARROA MITES FEED ON THE ADULT BEE by biting through the soft folded inter-segmental skin between each segment of the abdomen.