

Bee Talk

Newsletter of The Blackburn and East Lancashire Branch of
The Lancashire & North West Beekeepers Association

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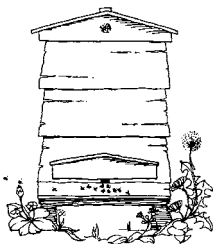
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Editorial

September 2001

A REPLY TO COLIN HARDACRE

Colin complained to me that I have got the timing wrong in *Scrapings* in the last issue on page 11.

If you are in an area within foraging distance of the heather, he reckons all flower honey supers should be off by the second week in August not the third week in September as I recommended.

Lets look at it! By the second week in August the heather will be in bloom (anyone going to the heather should be there by this date) but there will still be lots of nectar available around the home apiary, Rosebay Willowherb, Balsam etc.

When the time comes that the heather at a distance becomes more attractive to the bees than the flowers around the home apiary, that is the time to remove the supers that are to be extracted for the flower honey.

Just when this occurs will be dependent on the attractiveness of the heather as against the local flowers and the distance to be travel to both.

The bees will have this worked out to a nicety, we however must make a guess. So some where between the second week in August and the second week in September is about right. Your guess is as good as mine. The one sum I can most certainly do is:- "Heather on top of flower equals a disaster when extracting".

PICTURES

We always struggle to find suitable illustrations for BeeTalk. Our method of printing rules out glossy colour pictures although good quality, photographs often reproduce well.

If you have good quality line drawings i.e. clear, sharp black and white illustrations. Or interesting, clear photographs, either black and white or colour, please give us a ring or drop us a line.

CANDLE MAKING

I was very sorry to have missed the demonstration of candle making by John Zamorski at Michael and Saipin Birt's place in Mellor.

These meetings are always most enjoyable and informative as was the talk on varroa by Ian McLain at Ken Gaiger's home.

The next meeting is on 23rd September at John Wilson's, Back o' Bowley. The talk will be about preparation for the Honey Show.

OPEN MESH FLOORS

As you will see in this edition of BeeTalk, there is a lengthy article about Open Mesh Floors. I have been going on about this subject for many months. It is undoubtedly vital if we are to counteract varroa.

I would encourage you to read the article and put Open Mesh Floors into use as soon as you can. If you will give it a try I promise to TRY to keep quiet about it from now on BUT as a last fling, I have in my possession a large amount of plastic mesh, Ideally suitable for the job.

If you require some, ring me on 01282 614015 to let me know what you need. I can then cut them to size an make arrangements for you to pick them up.

The mesh is free of charge - all I need is a thank you and the knowledge that you are a convert to open mesh floors.

SUGGESTIONS

Arthur an I go on our merry way, putting into BeeTalk what we THINK will interest you. Please let us know if you have suggestion for articles, topics or discussion which you would like to see included.

We may not always be able to fit them in but we promise to look carefully at all suggestions.

HONEY BEE COMMUNICATION

EAST GERMANY

To the Northeast of Berlin, not far from the Polish border is the small town of Besondersheim. On a large-scale map of Germany it will be seen just to the south of Eberswalde. In Besondersheim there is still a research institute, Institut für allgemeine Forschung (Institution for General Research). Today there is nothing to remind the visitor of the gruesome studies, which took place during the regime of the East German Republic. There was then a special department, Abteilung für Menschkontrolwissenschaft, (Department for Research into Control of People). Although what I am going to tell of its work on bees seems perfectly innocuous, because of the purpose of that work it has remained a closely guarded secret.

Learning of the work of Professor Pickard on the bee brain and the relationship of its functions to those of humans it occurred to the communists that this might provide information useful to them in controlling their subject peoples. Accordingly they recruited a woman who in her young days had worked with von Frisch, Dr Ima Betrug. Like many scientists she was quite out of sympathy with the object of the work she was asked to do.

AFTER THE WALL

She did manage to smuggle out letters, which gave some account of her findings but begged the recipients not to give any publicity to it because it would endanger her life. After the fall of the Berlin Wall she still asked for confidentiality because she did not want her reputation ruined for having worked in the department. Because of my connections in Germany one of her letters, in the almost indecipherable Gothic script, has fallen into my hands. I learned that, sadly, she died just before last Christmas and I now feel at liberty to reveal what she found.

ULTRA SOUND

While working at the Institute she became pregnant and underwent an ultra sound scan. It was then that by chance something happened, as in some other scientific discoveries, which led to a significant extension of knowledge of bees. The scan took place within the confines of the institute where she had an apiary. A few bees had found their way into the room where she was having it. When the ultra sound was switched on she observed an immediate change in the behaviour of the bees.

PROJECT ICON

Instead of buzzing round and some frantically trying to find a way out through the window, they all stopped flying and settled peacefully on a wall, curiously forming the shape of a fish. That gave her the idea that bees, hitherto thought to have no organ of hearing, might in fact be able to hear high frequency sounds. She embarked on an investigation code named Project ICON. She discovered that her bees did in fact respond to a wide range of high frequency sound. She found amongst other things that subjecting a colony in an advanced stage of swarming to a certain frequency would lead them to abandon the swarm.

BEE LANGUAGE

Another frequency would calm an aggressive colony although it would be too late if the bees were already attacking an intruder. One of the more fascinating findings was that in a swarm the scout bees themselves emitted high frequency sounds, each scout having its own pitch or rather pitches, amounting almost to a genuine language as we know it. She was convinced that it is by this means that rival scouts come to a consensus as to the best cavity in which to establish the swarm but she was not able to interpret the signals to the extent that she could guide the swarm to a destination of her own choice, unlike Professor Michelsen's success with his artificial dancing bee.

I am not aware of any published work on the reaction of bees to ultra sound so I am sending Dr Betrug's letter to IBRA in the hope that it will be published and encourage further investigation of this fascinating discovery. (I should add that Dr Betrug managed to leave the Institute before the fall of the Wall and that she destroyed all records there of her work.)

Peter Rosenfeld of 'Devon's "Beekeeping.

IT'S A LONG TIME SINCE WE HAD
A BEEKEEPER'S JOKE - THIS ONE IS
FROM BRIDGET.

A swarm of bees was flying to its new home when a little voice piped up from the back "Mum, Mum, are we there yet?". "No, dear, it's still a little way off". "But Mum, I really need to go" "Can you hold on for a minute or two, dear, there's a BP station up ahead".

HANDLING SWARMS

Somebody rings you and says there is a swarm for the taking so would you take it? Do you know how to go about it? If not learn quickly or get an experienced beekeeper to come along with you.

First of all ask the person where it is. Is it hanging nicely on a branch of a tree within reach or is it forty feet high on the tree. Make sure you keep all your equipment handy and in the one place (if children are around; keep it under lock and key) as you must be able to collect it quickly for swarms have a nasty habit of absconding very quickly and you might arrive to find them gone.

If you have to leave the collected swarm near to where you found it (to gather bees that didn't go into the box) put an old white sheet over it to shade from strong sun. If there are lots of bees still on the branch, it is a good idea to scoop them off with your gloved hands and drop them down at the entrance of the box as the queen might still be on the branch and all the bees would leave your box and go back up to her.

Don't try to hive them until late evening. They will go into an empty hive themselves anytime of the day but you try to make them go in - at any time - you just won't win.

Don't bait the hive with anything; confusion would reign and could start robbing from other hives, especially if the new colony is in the same apiary as parent colony.

Starve them for two nights on foundation, as they will then use up all the honey they brought with them in making wax and feeding themselves.

Remember spores of A.F.B. are carried in honey so don't give them honey you are not sure is 'Clean' or they will store the honey and then feed it to young brood and so spread A.F.B., but never forget to feed them a gallon of 2 to 1 syrup after the second night (at dusk), more especially if weather turns bad.

VARROA AGAIN

Another season draws to a close and varroa is still surprising people. For different reasons, members have found heavy mite infestations when they considered everything was under control.

Varroa is now wide spread in our part of Lancashire and varroa control measures must be based on this fact. Let alone beekeeping is no longer a option. If you consider yourself varroa free, you are probably mistaken and the situation could change overnight.

I have received several reports from members of mite free colonies becoming heavily infested within weeks. This indicates heavily infested wild stocks or stocks of less diligent bee-keepers are decamping before total collapse and invading a colony nearby. Unfortunately there is little one can do to stop this, except be prepared.

To continue beekeeping successfully, some or all the following recommendations should be adopted.

- 1) It is essential to fit varroa floor screens to all hives to monitor mite fall (either mesh or tube floors)
- 2) Control mite build-up between spring and August by all or any of the following:
 - a) Thymol crystals in either sachets or purpose built frames
 - b) Sealed drone brood removal
 - c) Ensure minimum 2" clearance beneath varroa screen
- 3) Treat with Bayarvol or Apristan in August to give the bees the best possible chance to be healthy and fit to withstand the rigours of winter.

Finally whatever you decide, GOOD LUCK.
Ken Gaiger August 2001



WE HAD ONE OF THOSE ...!

but we threw ours away

It has worm holes and some of the metal parts have nearly rusted away. It is about eight inches long, very crude construction. Probably from about 1900 but what on earth is it?

The answer is on page 12

PORTRAIT OF A BEEKEEPER

HAY FEVER

The other evening on arriving home, I found a message on the answer phone. It was Bill Ainsworth to say "It is your turn to write an article for Bee Talk". Well here goes.

Many years ago, about 1976, I must have been others, having sneezing bouts of runny nose, smarting eyes - yes I discovered I had hay fever.



After trying all the useless remedies I happened to visit Moorys, the herbalist in Blackburn. I requested a quick cure. Mr Moory looked at me and said "Lad, it's local honey you require". To which I replied "And where do I get such a thing?" He told me to contact a local beekeeper.

I didn't think there were beekeepers in Blackburn but how wrong I was. He must have read my thoughts because he explained that I would find the address of the secretary at the Public Library. Their data was out of date and, after a few phone calls, I eventually found the Secretary.

Mrs. Hacking informed me an exhibition of Beekeeping was to be held at Samlesbury Hall. When I arrived, who should be 'On Duty' but Jack Armistead who gave me a good talking to on the benefits of having bees of my own. "Never mind buying honey, produce your own. There's nothing to it" Said Jack "There's a meeting at Bolton near Belmont next Saturday You are welcome to attend". I found a beekeeper there who wasn't able to carry on beekeeping and there was equipment for sale. Jack Armistead, being Chairman, suggested that new beekeepers be given the opportunity to purchase bees and hives etc.

MY FIRST SITE

My first site was on the tops at Tockholes. One of the locals became very friendly and very helpful.

One day as I was inspecting a stock, he appeared and said "I have been putting the bees back into the hive". This was very good of him, the only trouble was, they were drones that the workers had excluded at the seasons end - talk about push and shove!

I have used W.B.C hives, Nationals, Bee houses and the only success has been with Nationals on broodbox and a half. The next move was to Wilshire where I had many happy years with some success at our honey show and the county show, I even had delusions of grandeur and attempted the National at London. No luck there but the experience was useful.

ENGINE DRIVER

As an engine driver for British Rail, I found I was receiving comments and nick names. I was asked by the local manager to attend to a swarm that had taken over the signal post at Wilshire. The lamp man was refusing to service the oil lamps.

The post was a hollow steel contraption with plenty of openings' and a straw skep on top of the signal post was quite a sight.

At Preston Station a swarm had invaded an overhead electrical stanchion 25,000 volts. I requested the power be shut off which would have isolated the whole of Preston Station. Fortunately it moved to another location with no need to isolate the power (I didn't even get a thank you) but it was a prime swarm.

TREASURER

I was elected treasurer for the Branch which I did for a number of years and spent many an hour burning the midnight oil learning a great many things, again under Jacks guidance

I have enjoyed my craft it has given me and my family loads of satisfaction. My hayfever has lessened my grandson also a sufferer has seen a great improvement.

Yours in Beekeeping
John Holland

THE ITALIAN CONNECTION

LATE AUGUST

Saluti Tutti to you all from a very hot Geminiano.

After all our rain through Winter and spring we are now in the middle of a drought. Temperatures in the mid 30°C for almost three months with only two flash thunderstorms and what rain these brought, either ran straight off or was quickly evaporated with the hot ground. Both the villages above and below ours are now with out drinking water and the Fire Department is having to 'tender' it in for them, so far our sorgento is still running.

Geminiano is now full to bursting point. Only six of us for eleven months of the year to over fifty in August, comes as a shock as all the second homes fill with Italians from around the World for what is known as Feragusto.

HONEY SALES

At one time or another over the month most of them visit us, it is difficult to get on with our work but very good for honey sales! The hot weather has also made hard work of everything. In June we managed to get our fifteen meadows cut, baked and into the barns very quickly. With the heat, some of the grass which was cut one morning and baled the next day, 'crisped' very quickly.

All the early crops did very well and only the corn for animal use and sweetcorn for our use has been a failure with the lack of rain.

POTATO HARVEST

Now we are in the middle of the potato harvest. Our nineteen varieties on the whole have done very well even though we were late ploughing and planting and we should have plenty for sale as well as our own stock for Winter and Spring.

Next will be the various types of beans. Most of these we leave on the plants to dry as they are much better to store this way and also ready to re-sow next year.

As predicted we quickly ran out of supers by mid June so in early July we extracted over 300lbs, as even the swarms from April started to fill frames very quickly and we have been extracting on and off since then. Our main extraction will be at the

end of the month and now with 56 hives will be a longer job than normal.

HOSING DOWN THE BEES

With the heat we have had to keep a watch on the hives without shade as we remember our first year with bees in Italy when combs started to melt and the mayhem that caused as honey ran out of the entrances and robbing ensued. We had to get the hose pipe out to quieten the bees down and cool the hives off and get things back to normal.

PESTICIDES

Last week we had a visit from an Italian beekeeper who lives in Switzerland for most of the year but who comes 'home' a few times to sort his hives out. He was after advice on his Varroa problem. We sat back in shock as he told us about all the insecticides he uses, almost every chemical on the market for Varroa and as a precaution against E.F.B. and A.F.B. a mountain of antibiotics.

He takes his honey back to Switzerland as he can sell it for a higher price and we feel sorry for his customers who are eating it. I had to have a 'good talk' with him and he left clutching a bag each of thymol and oxalic acid with instructions to forget the antibiotics. Once again an insight into what can happen to unsuspecting people who think they are eating a natural uncontaminated product!! As I have said over and over to the point of being boring, it is possible to keep Varroa under control biologically. Enough said.

SENDING BEETALK FAR AND WIDE

And to finish. After reading the last Bee Talk and the Electronic Beekeeping? snippet we have to admire Bill, Arthur, Michael etc.. for all the work that goes into such a smashing little newsletter. We always look forwards to it arriving and read it over and over. We even get it photo copied and send it to family and friends. it gets about further than you think! Even though it is now down to just four a year, keep it up and thanks for all your hard work.

Arrivederci until December.

The last line of a personal note I received from from Jake & Jeni

"Give our love and regards to all who remember us and keep some for your self."

I certainly will Ed.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

What size are they compared to your little finger nail? Do they have long slim or roundish bodies? what colour are they? Are they black with yellow stripes? or brownish with lighter brown stripes and how many are there flying about? Are they situated in a wall, in a bush, in the garden soil and how long have they been there?.



All these questions and sometimes many others need to be asked of someone who has phoned for help when bees or wasps have taken up residence and are considered a threat by someone knowing little about them.

UNUSUAL LOCATIONS

As a beekeeper, who was for many years on call to remove bees and wasps or if this was not possible, to give reassuring advice, I did a questions and answers quiz to eliminate time-wasting journeys. However, I did remove many swarms, bumblebee and wasp nests over a period of some sixty years. Some of the more unusual occasions I remember for various reasons. Like the bumblebees which had built a nest inside the metal water 'stop cock' box at a farm in Nelson and when the water-board man arrived to read the meter, he was chased all over the farm by scores of irate stinging bees and he refused to try to read the meter until they were removed.

Then there was the farmer who wanted to remove some bales of hay from a barn and discovered that there was a large nest of bumblebees in one of them. Over the phone, I suggested that he wrap the bale in a big enough sheet of polythene after dark and take the bale to his furthest field, put it under a hedge and then swiftly remove the polythene to allow the bees to fly freely on the day after, when daylight arrived.

UP THE CHIMNEY

Many years ago, I removed a large feral colony of bees from a disused chimney in Barnoldswick Working Men's Club. I could tell they had been there for some years because after driving them out and into a travelling box, I filled three of the big, old type cube-shaped cream-cracker tins with honey combs.

DOUBLE REWARD

Much of the honeycomb, I gave away to one or two of the nearby shopkeepers who had provided the tins also club members who did a whip round for me, raising a tidy sum which was a double reward for me on top of the enjoyment I had when removing the bees.

I really did enjoy driving them out of the chimney but had to be very careful because, although the building was a single storey, half of the double-span roof above the entrance to the club was only about twelve feet above ground level, below the other span of the roof, there was a drop of some fifty feet into a shallow, stony river.

THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO

When at the end of WW2, having served for six years in the RAF, the last four which were in Burma and India, I was demobbed, I went to Cornwall on a long holiday and found the place a paradise for a beekeeper looking for swarms and feral colonies. More about this in a future edition.

P.S. Here's one for you Arthur. I liked the story you related of the way matches were split into four during WW2 when economies had to be made to help scarce commodities go round and it was to this end, that we devised a similar method for splitting cigars and cigarettes into four but never found a way of smoking them after we had done this

Regards to All. Albert.

SHELF LIFE OF HONEY

Honey has an endless shelf life when stored at room temperature in a sealed container. Most raw, natural honey will crystallise. This is normal and is preferred by many. If you prefer runny honey, heat may be used to liquify it. Placing an unsealed container in warm water or for a few seconds at a time in a microwave oven. Be very careful as excessive heat will ruin honey's delicate flavour. Enjoy!

BRIDGET'S AFRICAN SOJOURN

I met my husband, John, in 1967 in Uganda, East Africa, when he was a career surveyor and I was a V.S.O. volunteer, teaching chemistry in Mbarara in the southwest of the country. We left in 1972 after 18 months of Idi Amin's regime of terror and for many years harboured mixed feelings about this beautiful country as it went through many changes of often violent government. John's career there of 16 years had been ended abruptly - we thought we were in Uganda for ever - and the experiences during our last few months in Entebbe would fill a book of horror stories.

So it was with some doubts that we accepted a last-minute invitation to an old friend's celebration of 50 years of continuous living in Fort Portal, beneath the ethereal Mountains of the Moon (Rwenzoris). It was wonderful, but the relevant part of our 3 week visit in July for this contribution to BeeTalk is the beekeeping which we kept finding.

NOSTALGIA

After leaving Mbarara, filled with nostalgia, we were driving south to the mountainous region of Kabale when we noticed a log hanging from a tree



and determined to stop and investigate it on the way back. It was, indeed, a beehive in the traditional African style, with an entrance for the bees at one end and access to honey from the other. We got out the camera whereupon a small girl pointed to another tree close by where there

was a second hive and another - and another - we were looking at an apiary! Using our rusty Swahili we obtained permission to photograph it, and were duly elated with our find as this is the main region in the southwest where log hives are still used.

On our way to the celebrations in Fort Portal, as we came to the edge of the Eastern Rift Valley and looked down over the vast plains of the Queen Elizabeth National Park, we reminisced over the times when elephant were everywhere and huge herds of game roamed unmolested. We had kept abreast of developments during the hard times and knew that the invading soldiers and rebels alike had used their machine guns indiscriminately in the park, both for food - the soldiers were not paid for many months - and for sport.

THE SAVANNAH

We did not expect to see much game. However, it is still as beautiful and the wilderness always stirs something in the soul. The elusive Rwenzoris beyond the savannah were shrouded in mist as usual, a habit which fooled the early explorers who were searching for these mystical mountains but didn't manage to find them for a long time!

KICHWAMBA BEEKEEPERS

A sign at Kichwamba caught our eyes as we drove past the many new developments along the roadside. Kichwamba Beekeepers! We turned into the track and found a thriving project in which a co-operative was making Kenya Topbar (KTB) hives, with a workshop and honey house, as well as a shop where we were able to buy their honey.



A helpful and knowledgeable lady showed us round, introduced us to the workers, and took us into the apiary. As well as the KTB hives, there was a log hive, and she showed me how it works. The queen remains at one end of the log and the workers put honey at the far end, so the beekeeper opens the "door" at that end to harvest, without disturbing the nest. She told me that there is no Varroa there, and I was impressed that although these were the African strain of *Apis mellifera*, we were not even buzzed while standing in among the hives. (Continued on Page 8)

QUEEN REARING

Queen rearing is left to the colony. She told us that the members of the co-operative bring in their honey in the comb where it is uncapped and just left to drain. Filtered and bottled, its sale makes a very big difference to the lives of the beekeepers in Uganda, where the spirit of the people everywhere remains unbroken and their optimism and self-help are a model for humanity. We have vowed to keep in touch. I must send her copies of the photographs!

MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

The road to Fort Portal goes right through the park - and we were amazed and greatly heartened to see Colobus monkeys in a tree beside the road, and on the plains many graceful Uganda Kob, warthog, buffalo and - yes, there in the distance - elephant! Later we were to see for ourselves the recovery of the animal population over the 16 years of stable government under President Museveni, but right now we were on our way to the Mountains of the Moon.

BANANA SPIRIT

We saw more signs for beekeeping projects in the region of Tooro, and in the town of Fort Portal itself, we came across a shop proclaiming "Honey candles - propolis". I had hoped to find the beekeepers where our correspondent has his hives, and maybe we would find him here as his address is in Tooro. This was another large co-operative that was selling various types of honey, such as wild flower and acacia as well as creamed, liquid and set. They harvest a lot of wax because the KTB hives do not have extractable frames, so there was an extensive candle selection but the beekeeper on duty told us that it's only the few tourists who buy them. Propolis is another matter - dissolved in the local banana spirit "Waragi", it is a valuable treatment for many ailments in a society where most cannot afford to visit a doctor except for really serious conditions, and even then only as a last resort. Unfortunately our correspondent was not in the Association.

HOME AGAIN

So we came home with lots of samples of honey, awaiting investigation under the microscope for pollen identification. That will make a change from oilseed rape! We also came home feeling very optimistic about this beautiful country and its warm, welcoming inhabitants. It won't be another 29 years before we go back.

Happy Beekeeping, Bridget

OPEN MESH FLOORS

WINTER LOSSES

Have you ever suffered winter losses, maybe observed signs of faecal staining on the front of the hive, or the combs themselves? How about mouldy combs, generally the outer or flank ones, or mouldy pollen? Alternatively, problems with wax moth, both the Lesser Wax Moth (*Achroia grisella*) and Greater Wax Moth (*Galleria mellonella*).

Ensuring the interior of the hive is both dry and well ventilated can reduce all of these problems and the easiest way to achieve this is to use 'Open Mesh Floors' (OMF's).

OMF

What are OMF's? Simply a floorboard where the solid wooden section is replaced with a sheet of wire mesh, virtually leaving the bottom of the hive open to the elements. "But my bees will get cold maybe even die of frostbite during a hard winter" You will say. Sorry to disagree with you but generally bees do not die of cold; it is damp conditions that cause bee deaths. This can be verified by beekeeping friends from North America, Canada, and many of the colder European countries who regularly use these floors, sometimes having to dig their hives out from deep snow to discover all is well within the brood box. The next question will be that other bees and wasps could easily rob the hive. Might be true if you use the wrong size mesh but I will describe the type needed later in this article.

During the early 1990's beekeepers throughout the UK were invited to test these floors. I joined these trials and, without listing the findings of the experiment, hopefully it is sufficient to say that the majority found their colonies loved all this additional ventilation. My trials on just three hives, at that time about 10% of my stocks, supported the findings of others; my bees adored OMF's, both summer and winter.

Then in 1992 the Varroa mite arrived in the UK and I was asked by the Bee Inspector to strictly monitor for its arrival in Shropshire. This meant returning to solid floors, a paper or similar insert placed on it, and a Varroa screen above. But what is a Varroa screen, simply another name for an OMF. Using this method I did discover what I believe was one of the first findings in South Shropshire, just one mite found on the insert.

WAX MOTH

However my colonies started to attract wax moth, both types, who found a safe haven below the mesh screen where bees were unable to gain access. So I removed the screens, returned to solid floors and again suffered from damp conditions.

If you use floorboards that have been freely treated with a wood preservative you will have noticed that if the hive-level should fall towards the back (bad beekeeping) a pool of water, or damp hive detritus will collect. So I quickly returned to OMF's, and currently I am in the process of adapting them so that both ventilation and Varroa monitoring can be achieved without suffering the problems already mentioned. Another advantage of OMF's is that they can be used as part of an Integrated Pest Management regime in the control of Varroa mites.

VARROA CONTROL PROGRAMME

It is well documented that Varroa mites drop off the bees. Some will fall onto a bee lower down the comb, but some will eventually reach the floor. If this is of the solid type the mites can easily climb back onto the comb, but given a mesh, they fall through to be devoured by ants and the like - part of a Varroa control programme and all without the use of chemicals. It is essential to add that these floors cannot be the sole method of mite control, just part, of the integrated Pest Management regime previously mentioned. Also, it is documented that as many as 40 to 60% of the mites can be removed from the hive using this method. This figure is disputed but I will be perfectly satisfied with losing 10% of my mites given they have the ability to multiply themselves a thousand fold each year.

The method is also promoted in the latest Ministry leaflet entitled "Managing Varroa" where they emphasise that this is a method, which can be used throughout the year. Still sceptical? What will a bee do with an opening that it objects to, we all-know-the answer is that it will fill it with Propolis. Place a piece of mesh over the feed-hole and I guarantee it will quickly be sealed with Propolis. But I have never encountered an experience of bees fixing anything to the mesh, occasionally a small piece of Propolis will be found affixed but this has obviously just dropped from the bees located above, the heat of the hive welding it to the wire. Sealing of the mesh has been reported by another OMF user (Tim Kidman from Cheshire) but he informs me the bees moved it a before winter set in.

HIVE ENTRANCE

Never have I witnessed comb being extended from the bottom of the frame and fixed to the mesh; if you think about it this would compromise the security of any brood or food. This point alone makes colony examination so much easier.

Another of my passions is a small hive entrance knowing that a gap of nearly 18" wide needs a lot of bees to guard it. But give them a small entrance on a hot summer's day and bees will congregate outside the hive, what the Americans term as 'bearding.' No problem with OMF's, obviously plenty of ventilation is available irrespective of entrance size.

I am not suggesting that you should change all your solid floors to the open mesh type; instead I am trying to encourage you to give them a small-Scale trial. Maybe for the two hive beekeeper this will mean using 50% of their colonies, one on a solid floor, and the other on open mesh.

CONSTRUCTION

Constructing an OMF is simple; a wooden framework of hive dimensions is constructed, and to this is fixed a sheet of mesh. A small entrance is incorporated into the wooden surround.

Starting with the mesh, I have already stated the dimensions are critical, too small a mesh and the mites will not drop through, too large and the security of the hive has been compromised. Mesh of 8 wires to the inch is required. Given the thickness of the wire this gives squares of just under $\frac{1}{8}$ ", a perfect dimension. Such mesh can be obtained from E.H.Thome (Beehives) Ltd.

It must be remembered that the mesh will not support the weight of the hive and hopefully many full supers, such weight should be borne by the wooden framework of the floor.

I have made 15" high hive stands, so much easier on the back, and the floor rests on each of the legs. When using OMF's it is recommended that the floor be at least 12" above the ground.

STANDING ON A MILK CRATE

I have one OMF standing on a milk crate, but have placed a couple of wooden bearers across the top of the crate onto which the floor then rests.

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When monitoring for Varroa's 'Natural Mite Mortality' with my original OMF's it necessitated sliding a solid floor and insert below the mesh floor, such humping that I could well do without. But by adding deeper sides it allows me to cut a groove into those sides into which I can slide a sheet of thin painted plywood or hardboard. When monitoring is needed these sheets are slid into position and removed once the simple task is accomplished. Don't leave these-boards in longer than necessary as you are defeating the objectives of OMF's.

Although the floor is used throughout the year it is advised that top insulation be given during the winter. This is achieved by adding about 3" of good insulation above the crown board and surrounding it by a wooden eke (four pieces of timber nailed together to form a square, or an empty super will act as a substitute). Such insulation will reduce the amount of condensation forming on the inside of the crown board. A further recommendation is that the crown board is not removed, and the Propolis seal broken, after the supers have been removed. However with Varroa strips to be removed towards the end of October, I find this impossible.

These floors are best added in May or June as this gives the bees a little time to acclimatise to the change before winter sets in. So early next year I urge you to give OMF's a trial.

NASTURTIIUM PLANTS AND VARROA

One Summer a swarm landed in the garden which I placed in a skep and successfully overwintered. The next year I bought a hive and the bees were put above the brood box. I eventually found that they had moved down into the box and the queen had established a good brood nest. The skep still had bees in it and it was moved to a new location. At the end of the summer I had four colonies and the first honey harvest amounted to 25kg. I applied the recommended treatment for Varroa but the bees chewed the insert and threw the dead mites out of the hive. So I made a Varroa floor so that a mite count was easily made and monitored and treatment was carried out in the spring and autumn.

BIOLOGICAL METHOD

I now treat using a biological method. I read an article in an agricultural magazine stating that it was possible to keep aphids from plum and pear trees if nasturtium plants were grown under the trees. I thought, if such a procedure is effective for aphids, could it be effective against Varroa? I sowed a 2 metre broad patch of nasturtium seeds in front of my hives in spring 1994.

The seeds did well and a green carpet of nasturtium soon developed around the hives. Many returning foragers rest on the leaves of the plants before entering the hive. That September, despite two anti-Varroa treatments with Perizin I found no mites on the floor inserts! In the following spring (1995) I sent the floor debris to be independently checked.

BAYVAROL

In 1996 I carried out the anti-Varroa treatment using Bayvarol. There were no problems with the bees in the application of these treatments. The debris was once again officially checked. The spring 1997 search also discovered no mites. I therefore deem my biological method to be proved effective.

GENTLE HANDLING

And then, the greatest care with hygiene, new comb, young queens, gentle handling of the bees these parameters are the ABC-XYZ of good beekeeping. Using the above procedures I breed gentle bees, work without protection and almost without smoke. I manage a static apiary. My garden is some 3000 sq.m. and in it are all kinds of nectar bearing plants and bushes. There are large tracts of dandelions, oil seed rape, fruit trees, willow, robinia, alder, lime and many wild flowers including thousands of heathers in the garden centre. The honey produced is a blend of these blossoms and hive yields of around 50-70kg are not unusual. The honey is sold in 500g jars, up to the present time I have never had honey left on the shelf. Colony losses due to Varroa I have never had! I have to date lost only one colony due to starvation. *Courtesy of The Scottish Beekeeper*

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in any of the articles in 'Bee Talk' represent the personal opinions of the contributors and in no way should they be regarded as the official opinions or views of the 'Lancashire & North West Beekeepers Association' nor of our local Branch of this association 'The Blackburn & East Lancashire Branch'



HONEY CARAMELS

85g (3oz) butter, 140g (5oz) golden syrup, 170g (6oz) clear honey, 115g (4oz) walnuts (finely chopped), 115g (4oz) pitted dates (finely chopped). Grease and line a 9" sandwich or Swiss roll tin. Melt butter then add syrup and honey. Bring to the boil and cook till it reaches 250°F (130°C). Use a sugar thermometer. Stir in the nuts and dates and beat well until the mixture is thick and opaque. Pour into the prepared tin and leave to cool. When almost cold, cut into 1 inch squares. Wrap in waxed paper.

Courtesy of Lincolnshire BKA via BEES.



Here is a great recipe for the hot summer days

Peter's Excellent Punch

1 lemon 1 orange 1 cucumber 3 or 4 cloves 1 lb. Honey 2 litres lemonade 1 litre Ginger Ale 1 pint strong cold tea 1 litre of Orange or Apple juice 3 sticks of cinnamon 1 Granny Smith apple 1 Cox's Orange pippin

Slice all the fruit. Mix all the ingredients together, preferably 6-8 hours before drinking as this improves the flavours. Add ice cubes just before serving.

This goes down well at outdoor meetings/conventions.

Thanks to Margaret Lockett for this recipe



A WAX MOTH TRAP.

Cut a 1.5 inch hole near the top of a two litre plastic drinks bottle. Add one cup of granulated sugar, 1 banana (cut up to fit), one cup of vinegar and three to four cups of water. Shake well (covering the hole), and top up to 2 inches below the opening. It takes about two weeks for the mixture to pickle and become effective. Use one trap per 4 or 5 hives in the apiary. Could also be kept next to stored supers.



OVER SUPERING

Adding more supers than normal, in what could prove to be a difficult year, with regard to Foot and Mouth Disease, is a good idea. The area where your colonies are may be a restricted area for some time.

Having kept bees at some considerable distance from home for many years, two to four hours drive away, I have always practised over-supering. Bees naturally use a pile of supers like a chimney i.e. fill the middle combs only.

To prevent this I came up with the idea of interleaving each super with a heavy duty piece of plastic, approximate size 9ins x 12ins. The bees then fill the first super in the middle working outwards, at which point they find they are able to move upwards, so repeating the process. The sheet also appears to contain warmth within the brood nest area, which is so necessary for the build up of the colony, especially in the Spring.

Some suggestions of suitable materials include: Damp course membrane, new from builders' merchants or free from a builder's skip. The material I used was off-cuts from taughtliner wagon sides.

Cheshire beekeepers



HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

Did you ever wonder how it is that honey from the big packing houses stays runny no matter what.

The difference is very simple, filtration. In most really large packing operations honey is flash heated to as much as 190f., then filtered to about five microns before being cooled. Honey filtered this fine is void of the natural pollens and the microscopic seed crystals need for other crystals to form on.

If that didn't ruin it for you the heat used also destroys the natural yeasts and enzymes that help to give honey it's flavour and appeal

SWARM COLLECTORS

Beekeepers prepared to collect swarms
Blackburn, Darwen & Mellor

Robert Fulton
01254 772780

Clitheroe
Ribbles Valley

John Zamorski
01200 427661
David Bush
01200 428152

Nelson & Colne

Bill Ainsworth
01282 614015

Padiham

Ken Gaiger
01282 778887

Barnoldswick and Earby

Accrington & Burnley

Ian Dent-Willoughby
01282 814374

John Wilson

FROM THE TREASURER

Subscriptions are due on November 1st. If your subscription is outstanding, could I ask you to pay before March 1st in order to simplify administration.

The fee is unchanged at £11 per full member and £2 for each additional family member. Extra Bee Disease Insurance costs are:

Up to	5 Hives	£3.00
Up to	10 Hives	£5.40
Up to	15 Hives	£7.20
Up to	20 Hives	£8.40
Up to	25 Hives	£9.00

CHEQUES SENT TO OUR TREASURER
SHOULD BE MADE PAYABLE TO :
L & N W B K A

MEETINGS

SEP 23rd MR & MRS JOHN WILSON, BACK 'O BOWLEY FARM, GREAT HARWOOD
2.30pm "PREPARATION FOR THE HONEY SHOW"

OCT 7th 'THE HONEY SHOW'
2.30pm AT THE CASTLE CEMENT WORKS

NOV 14th THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
7.30pm WHITBREAD BREWERY, SAMLESBURY

INFORMATION ABOUT 'BEE TALK'

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If you have any information, tidbits, articles or stories about beekeeping, please contact the editor :- Bill Ainsworth, 296 Scotland Road, Nelson, 'phone 01282 614015
e-mail:- bill@scotland.free-online.co.uk or arthur@lapwing.idps.co.uk

Please don't worry about writing skills, between us we will knock it into shape.

We have no objection to any part or the whole of this publication being reproduced. All we would ask is that Blackburn & District Beekeepers Association is acknowledged

WE HAD ONE OF THOSE . . . (Answer)

There is a man in Holland who collects things like this. His e-mail address actually contains the word mousetrap. That's what this is, a six hole mousetrap. Presumably, when the mouse puts his head in the hole to eat the cheese the wire comes down and chops his block off!! Will you be first down into the pantry?



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