

THE SCOTTISH Beekeeper

Monthly Magazine of The Scottish Beekeepers' Association

SEPTEMBER 2011 Vol 88 No 9

***Battling with
Bears, Boars,
Badgers & Hornets
Ah! c'est la vie!***

p 231



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THE SCOTTISH Beekeeper

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Events Calendar

SEPTEMBER

- 2/3/4 **DUNDEE:** Dundee Flower and Food Festival at Camperdown Park, Dundee.
- 3 **SUTHERLAND:** Visit to Irene Joyce's apiary, Talmine, 2pm.
- 6 **NAIRN:** Ann Chilcott, Cawdor Community Centre, 7.30pm.
- 8 **SOUTH of SCOTLAND:** 'Wine and Cheese Social', Georgetown Community Centre, Georgetown Road, Dumfries DG1 4DF, 7.30pm.
- 10 **SBA Convention,** Dewars Centre, Perth.
- 13 **INVERNESS-SHIRE:** 'My Beekeeping Year', Graeme Sharpe, Scottish School of Forestry, Balloch, 7.30pm.
- 17 **AYR & DISTRICT:** 'Feeding Bees', Association Apiary.
- 17 **FIFE/DUNFERMLINE & WEST FIFE:** 'Combined Open Honey Show', Fife Flower Show, Dobbies Garden World, Duloch Park, Dunfermline, 11am-6pm.
- 18 **FIFE/DUNFERMLINE & WEST FIFE:** Combined Open Honey Show at Fife Flower Show, Dobbies Garden World, Duloch Park, Dunfermline, 9am-5pm.
- 22 **HELENSBURGH & DISTRICT:** 'Review of the Past Season', Rhu Church Hall, 7.15pm.
- 26 **LOCHABER:** 'Re-queening, Choice or Chance'. Alexandra Hotel, SBA Lecture Tour, Fort William, 7.30pm.
- 27 **DINGWALL & DISTRICT:** 'Husbandry and Hygiene', Ian and Ruth Homer, SBA Lecture Tour, Strathpeffer Community Centre, 7.30pm.
- 29 **ABERDEEN & DISTRICT:** 'The Beehive', Dr Stephen Palmer, Lecture Theatre, Aberdeen Grammar School, Skene Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1HT, 7.30pm.
- 29 **FIFE/DUNFERMLINE & WEST FIFE:** 'No Bees, No Honey - No Honey, No Money', Ian and Ruth Homer, SBA Lecture Tour, Portmoak Hall, Scotlandwell, 7.30pm.

OCTOBER

- 3 **EAST of SCOTLAND:** 'Making the Most of Your Honey and Wax', David and Bron Wight, SBA Vice-President, Dundee Methodist Church, 20 West Marketgait, Dundee, 7.30pm.
- 3 **DUNBLANE & STIRLING:** 'Integrated Pest Management', SBA Lecture Tour, Ian and Ruth Homer, Dunblane Cathedral Halls, 7.30pm.
- 4 **COMBINED CLYDE AREA (CABA):** 'What Causes Colony Collapse', Ian and Ruth Homer, SBA Lecture Tour, Partick Burgh Halls, 7.30pm.
- 4 **DUNBLANE & STIRLING:** 'Talk by Dr Alan Bowman', Aberdeen University, Dunblane Cathedral Hall, 7.30pm.
- 4 **NAIRN:** 'A Nairn Colony', Cawdor Community Centre, 7.30pm.
- 5 **CADDONFOOT:** SBA Lecture Tour 'Re-Queening Choice or Chance', Ian and Ruth Homer, Galashiels Academy, 7.30pm.
- 6 **ABERDEEN & DISTRICT:** 'The biology of the Bee', Dr Stephen Palmer, Lecture Theatre, Aberdeen Grammar School, Skene Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1HT, 7.30pm.
- 13 **SOUTH of SCOTLAND:** 'Preparing for Winter, What's New?', Pam Hunter, Georgetown Community Centre, Georgetown Road, Dumfries DG1 4DF, 7.30pm.
- 14 **KELVIN VALLEY:** 'Problems and success over last summer', Lenzie, Public Hall, 7.30pm.
- 25 **INVERNESS-SHIRE:** 'AGM and Cheese and Wine', Scottish School of Forestry, Balloch, 7.30pm.
- 27 **ABERDEEN & DISTRICT:** 'What Do I Need to Keep Bees?', Dr Stephen Palmer, Lecture Theatre, Aberdeen Grammar School, Skene Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1HT, 7.30pm.
- 27 **HELENSBURGH & DISTRICT:** 'Beekeeping and Bee Products', John Taylor, Rhu Church Hall, 7.15pm.
- 31 **WESTERN GALLOWAY:** 'Communication Among Bees', Gavin Ramsay, followed by AGM, Bowling Club, Glenluce, 7.30pm.

SBA Centenary September 2012 (Reminder)

- 1 **Setting up of an SBA archive and inventory of old beekeeping equipment.**
- 2 **Request for material relating to beekeeping history.**
- 3 **Organisation of exhibition and presentations at Kittochside.**

The SBA celebrates its centenary in 2012 and would like, in three ways, to take advantage of the interest in beekeeping history that is likely to result.

Firstly, it is planned to start a collection of archival material. This would include material relating to local beekeeping associations, as well as to the SBA. The SBA library committee would be very interested in hearing from individuals or local associations, (LAs), who have archival material. Such material includes association minutes, letters, honey show programmes or results and photographs, films or videos of beekeeping, beekeepers, association meetings, outings or shows. The intention would be to keep a record of the existence and location of the material, with the original material being kept by the individual or LA. Where possible, electronic copies would be made for the SBA archive.

Secondly, the SBA library committee would be interested to hear from individuals or LAs who have items of beekeeping equipment

of historical interest, so that an inventory could be compiled, which could include photographs and other details. The National Museum of Rural Life at Kittochside has expressed interest in providing a home for selected items of such equipment, if the owners wished it to be gifted or lent to the Museum.

Thirdly, it is planned to hold an exhibition at Kittochside of selected material, (equipment, photographs and other archival material), during the centenary year and there could also be presentations at LA meetings.

Any individual or LA who has archival material, (whether old or more recent), or historic equipment, or is interested in being involved in any way with these activities or who might wish a presentation on archives, or who wants more information, is encouraged to make contact with us, by telephone or email to:

David Wright SBA Library Committee

Email bdwright20lr@btinternet.com

Tel 0131 552 3439



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September Comment

AS our wonderful summer fades away (or washes away) into sweet memory, beekeepers can look forward to renewing friendships at their local association meetings.

You'll note the calendar listings reflect that this month and apologies for any meetings I have overlooked – check your LA website.

The SBA Convention, which takes place at Dewars in Perth on the 10th of this month is an excellent opportunity to renew acquaintances, buy equipment, books and clothing, but also to learn.

The SBA has arranged for three excellent speakers to take part this year, and they are no strangers north of the border. The speakers are Willie Robson of Chain Bridge Honey Farm, Bee breeder Terry Clare and Dr Giles Budge, who will discuss bee diseases.

I have heard Terry speak at the convention before and he was excellent, and Willie Robson, owner of the Chain Bridge Honey farm needs no introduction. Earlier this year he wrote an excellent article for the magazine recalling the life and work of that legendary Scottish beekeeper Willie Smith. He has written a book **'Reflections on Beekeeping'** which has just been published by Northern Bee Books. Jeremy at Northern Bee Books says: *"This small book - of only 64 pages - is not at all like other bee books. It is the distillation of the knowledge gained by Willie and his father Selby over very many years and that also that gleaned from W W Smith - Scotland's first commercial beekeeper and the inventor of the hive of this name, who was a close family friend. As such its value is not in sections, as in other books, of what to do in Spring, Summer or Winter, but it ranges over all the major problems as seen by a commercial man and suggests many answers based on experience. I see this book as falling into the first rank of importance in beekeeping literature with Bro Adam, Manley and Sims."* Fine praise indeed.

Dr Budge will deliver two talks: **'Random**

Apiary Survey – What a Wopper!' and **'Recent Adventures in the Understanding of Foul Brood'**.

All these talks work out at £6.25 each, which is wonderful value with trade stands, coffee, lunch and tea thrown in.

Another talk which is bound to arouse interest takes place on October 4 when Dunblane & Stirling Beekeepers welcome Dr Alan Bowman of the University of Aberdeen to Dunblane Cathedral Hall to talk about his ground breaking research on Varroa. Dr Bowman, you might recall, has found a way of making the mite self-destruct. It's like something out of Arthur C Clarke and well beyond my ken, but riveting nonetheless.

Allow me to digress for a moment. Some of you will have heard me babbling somewhat during a radio interview on Good Morning Scotland recently in which I was asked to talk about the attempts by Scottish beekeepers to battle Varroa and other problems affecting bees.

I didn't dare listen back to the interview, and I only hope it went ok. It was tricky since I was sat in the studio in Edinburgh and my interviewer was in Glasgow, with no visual link between us, so I couldn't see the poor woman's reaction to my answers or whether she wanted to me to stop talking so she could ask another question. It also took place at 6.15am, a bit early for weighty discussions in my view. I hope it went ok, but a colleague of mine said he had cut himself shaving when he heard me *"droning on about bees in Lancastrian tones"*. Thanks Bill!

Cover Image:

Beekeepers gather round a hive at SASA's Bee Health Day held recently near Edinburgh.

Picture courtesy of Stuart Greig, SASA.

Views expressed in this magazine may differ from those of the SBA.

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Beekeeping in France



Kevin Cowle is a former member of Eastwood BA. He has kept bees for forty years and now lives in the Ariège Department of the Midi Pyrenees, roughly two thirds towards the Mediterranean from the Atlantic. He owns an ancient former gîte d'étap (a kind of French mountain walking hostel) about 2,000 feet up in the Bethmale Valley, south of St Girons and about four miles from the Spanish border. He says: *"It sounds high but at this latitude its the equivalent of sea level in Scotland."*

This is an update to his occasional diary for the magazine.

TWO significant events have occurred since my last account of beekeeping in the south of France. One, we have moved house and two, I lost my bees. These were not unconnected.

After an eventful first summer's beekeeping over here marked in particular by a huge snowstorm in May, I bedded my bees down for the winter in September with plenty of food and, so I thought, plenty of bees. However, in early November we moved house and the following few months were filled with the comings and goings of a succession of builders, plumbers, joiners and electricians.

Inevitably the bees took second stage and to my dismay in March I discovered that both colonies were dead. Although it was a relatively mild winter there simply weren't enough bees in each hive to keep warm and survive. They had never properly recovered from that freak snowstorm. Time to start again!

Keeping an eye on the weekly free newspaper, which unlike Britain has a standard 'Apiculture' column, I tracked down a professional beekeeper/bee breeder about

30 miles away who could sell me a couple of nuclei for about £80 each.

A very good price, especially as I could choose which of the strains of this year's artificially inseminated queens I would like.

But there was a catch. He sold the bees on five frames and I had to provide the boxes, which I didn't have. To complicate things further, I now run Dadant hives and the nuclei were on Langstroth frames. For those of you in the know, Dadant frames are much deeper and shorter than Langstroths. As with Smith and National hives in Scotland, the frames simply aren't interchangeable.

So after making not a few mistakes I built a couple of bee-proof, ventilated travelling nuke boxes and in the process came to appreciate the accuracy with which people like Thornes construct their hives. I learnt that when building any parts to do with a hive there is only about 3mm tolerance on any measurement.

I duly collected the bees from an immensely impressive breeding station with about a hundred nucleus hives, close to the owner's equally impressive warehouse-cum-extracting and bottling plant. It was literally the size of a small B&Q. He runs 600 hives and in summer and autumn has eight full time staff.

The bees home, the next job was to devise a way of getting the bees off the Langstroth frames and into my Dadant hives. I could have simply shaken the bees with the queens into the new brood chamber, but this would have sacrificed all the brood, of which there was a lot. Instead I set about building two full sized Langstroth brood boxes with floors adapted to the dimensions of the Dadant brood box beneath them.

By stacking one above the other with a queen excluder between the two it was then

possible for the workers to occupy both parts of the hive.

After a week I found and marked two queens and moved them into the Dadant brood box below. Three weeks later, after all the brood in the top box had hatched, I removed it and the colonies were successfully transferred into their final home. This method works well as I know from experience, having had to transfer from Smiths to Standards when I kept bees in Lanarkshire.

I am delighted with my new bees. They are very docile, fly at low temperatures, don't build too much brace comb or glue propolis everywhere and as I write, in early August, the queens are still in full lay. One is Carniolan, the other Caucasian, though apart from colour (the latter is lighter with a hint of Italian) I cannot detect much difference so far.

Fortunately for the queens there is an immense flow of pollen at the moment, from the Himalayan Balsam which in France has invaded thousands of acres and is treated as an environmental threat like Japanese Knotweed. Luckily here in the lower valleys of the Pyrenees the authorities are doing little to curb this superb provider of pollen

and delicious nectar (though it will not be allowed a foothold in my garden).

At the new house we have several acres of woodland and meadow, so the bees are discretely tucked away on a little knoll that catches the early morning sun and is well protected from marauding badgers and wild boar. The local newspapers regularly carry stories of the damage done to beehives by the boars and also the brown bears coming into the valleys in winter. So my hives stand behind sheep netting and an electric fence!

It now remains to be seen how these bees will fare over the winter. There will certainly be plenty of young bees in the hives and I will not be taking any honey off.

This despite the fact that I am told a great crop can be taken from the ivy in October.

There is no sign all of varroa in either colony, though I am a bit concerned about the ants who are nesting on the varroa tray. But the big difference will be that this winter I can check my bees every day if necessary and learn from last winter's mistake. I don't need reminding that even after 40 year's keeping bees, you never stop learning more about them.

Return of the Asian Hornet

AS if coping with the threat of bears, badgers and ants wasn't enough . . . they're back!

The **Asian Hornet**, first seen in south west France in 2004 has been sighted in various areas around the Aquitaine region this season and is more than likely in the Midi-Pyrenees as well. They are now present in almost a third of France and feed on bees, much to the despair of beekeepers.

As their numbers grow, so does the risk to the bee population. These hornets are no more dangerous to humans than regular

hornets and are known to attack only if they feel threatened, however, worrying reports of hornets attacking cyclists and other people have increased in recent years (six cyclists were attacked in Saint-Vixe, Aquitaine and had to be taken to hospital). It is thought that they came to Bordeaux, France in a container of pottery originating from China and spread throughout the Gironde, then on to the Dordogne and Landes and further afield.

Courtesy of www.guide2midipyrenees.com

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

As has previously been announced I am administering Dave Cushman's website www.dave-cushman.net. I am working in conjunction with someone who is doing the technical side and I intend to keep largely the same format, but there will inevitably be some changes as time goes on. There is much to do and repairing broken links and updating information will be addressed as soon as possible.

I would like to provide links to BKA and relevant beekeeping websites. Can I ask all webmasters who are interested to email me at dave.cushman@lineone.net giving your permission for a link please?

As Dave Cushman's website is a tremendous resource that is accessed by all beekeepers whatever their ability, I give permission for it to be linked to all other beekeeping websites and encourage you to do so. If there is no link to Dave Cushman's website on your BKA website please contact your own webmaster and ask for it.

I also intend adding a list of beekeeping lecturers to help event organisers with selecting and booking speakers and demonstrators. If you would like to appear on the list please contact me.

Roger Patterson

roger-patterson@btconnect.com

Sir,

I am very sorry that you saw fit to close the interesting correspondence that had arisen regarding the study into the synergistic impact of certain pesticides on bee colonies; perhaps you could merely have blacked out comment which was purely vituperative and which did not add to the substance of the

argument. It struck me that the aggressive looking bee on the front cover of the July issue was rather appropriate – but that is a highly anthropomorphic observation!

I am quite sure that the opinions of the protagonists are reinforced rather than deterred by opposition, and equally certain that the rest of us lowly beekeepers would have benefited from a continuing debate.

What was emerging was a most interesting spat between some highly knowledgeable and interesting beekeepers. It is true that there is a pro and an anti-pesticide lobby; but these lobbies are certainly not peculiar to beekeeping. The root of the opposition is not 'scientific' as scientific study can really only provide facts; facts which are often enough pre-determined by the study topic or brief or interests of the funder. Belief systems inevitably guide the selection, interpretation and use of the facts. Just consider the row that Darwin's theory of evolution provoked among 'scientists'. Now we seem to have a fine row between people of high academic qualification, scientific credentials and observational powers regarding the possibility that chemicals designed to kill insects might be harmful to insects.

I really should have liked to have seen a more thorough debate on the reasons for Mr Ramsay's opposition to the project and a response from Dr Connolly (or one of his team).

Silencing argument is not really instructive.

Regards,

Clare Darlston, Glasgow

Silencing constructive argument and opinion has never been attempted or suggested, quite the reverse applies. All that has been acted upon is inappropriate and unseemly exchanges. All other debate is both necessary and welcome. Ed.

Sir,

I am engaged in research into the fate of toxins from rhododendron in the environment including the analysis of plants and soil. I would like to extend this work to examine some honey samples for rhododendron toxins. The results may help show whether the toxin is transferred into honey, what form it takes and how long it remains viable.

I would be very pleased if you could ask if any of your members would be willing to donate or sell small samples of honey, pollen, propolis or deceased bees that they believe have been in contact with rhododendron.

There is no requirement or intention that any supplier be identifiable in any report unless they so request it, or, samples could be sent anonymously through the SBA.

Colin Crews

*The Food & Environment Research Agency
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Web: www.defra.gov.uk/fera
Tel: 01904 462549*

Dear Editor,

With August we get the 'berry-bug' or 'harvest mite' and I get out the bottle of Benzyl Benzoate to apply to affected areas. The trade name is Ascabriol. Yes, it treats Scabies, Scabies is a mite, as is the berry-bug.

Has anyone tried to find a way of using it on Varroa?

What about an impregnated cloth somewhere in the hive, or, have those good at chemistry some way of getting B Benzoate at our bees?

The bees might throw out the cloth I suppose, but they might find Varroa departing as they do it!

R Murray, Girvan

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The SBA Lecture Tour

Profile of the Lecturers

THIS month sees the beginning of the SBA Lecture tour with speakers Ruth and Ian Homer providing six lectures across the country. The tour begins at Lochaber on the 26th September, followed by dates at Dingwall (Sept 27), Combined Fife (Sept 29), Dunblane & Stirling (Oct 3), Combined Clyde (Oct 4) and Caddonfoot (Oct 5).

See last month's edition for a full itinerary and this month's calendar page (p225).

RUTH HOMER

Ruth started keeping bees at the age of nine through her school beekeeping club. This was soon followed (within months) by a neighbour inheriting some bees and not knowing what to do with them – Ruth took them on.

She has tutored beekeeping beginner's classes for around 20 years and has served as Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of Local and County beekeeping associations both in Northumberland and in Dorset. Ruth has been librarian and education officer of West Dorset beekeepers and is currently workshop convener for the British Beekeepers Association Spring Convention – the largest annual beekeeping convention in Europe.

IAN HOMER

Ian has also served as Secretary and Treasurer of both local and County Associations and as an elected Executive Member of the British Beekeepers Association when he served as Chairman of its Education and Husbandry Committee.

He has worked for the National Bee Unit since 1999, initially as a Seasonal Bee Inspector and from 2003 until 2009 as Regional Bee Inspector for the Southern Region of England. In addition to inspecting colonies for disease both posts involved helping beekeepers improve their beekeeping

knowledge and techniques. Since July 2009 his role of Extension and Learning Officer with The National Bee Unit involves him in seeking to develop and promote best practices and to deliver training material to compliment these practices.

Ian's major interests are encouraging beekeepers to practice good bee husbandry and attempting to present beekeeping issues in a practical and straightforward way.

Ian and Ruth have kept bees together for over 30 years, in Dorset and Northumberland - two very different environments. In Northumberland they practised migratory beekeeping (or 'tranhumance' as the EU call it!). They are both passionate about helping beekeepers to understand the craft of beekeeping rather than just keeping bees; they feel strongly that if beekeepers can develop a greater understanding of their bees, they will derive more pleasure from keeping them.

Besides talks to Beekeepers groups they have given numerous talks to WI's, Probus and Rotary Groups, University of the Third Age, etc.

Ruth & Ian both hold the BBKA Intermediate Theory Certificate and both have one module to complete for the Advanced Theory Certificate. They have attended the National Diploma in Beekeeping Summer School in recent years and are aiming to sit the NDB exams when they feel they are ready.



Spotlight on a Beekeeper

To nominate someone for the Spotlight email editorscottishbeekeeper@gmail.com

RUTH and IAN HOMER

RUTH and Ian are SBA Tour Lecturers for 2012 and a profile of this busy and talented duo can be found on page 235 of this issue.

When and where did you start beekeeping?

Ruth: At primary school in 1959. It was part of the curriculum and it took my interest straight away.

Ian: In 1979 when we moved out of London to live in Dorset.

Why did you start beekeeping?

Ruth: Because it was on the curriculum.

Ian: I had had an academic interest for 15 years or so but had never had the opportunity. The interest was further fuelled by Ruth having kept them previously. It all fitted!

How many colonies do you normally keep?

Both: Together we usually keep between 18 and 24 colonies in Langstroths and Nationals. To date we have managed to avoid having 'his and hers' colonies!

How have you adapted your practice to your surroundings and climate?

Both: Having kept bees in both Northumberland and Dorset, we can appreciate the difference. We had to re-

queen all of our colonies after moving north as the strain of bee we had in the south didn't suit – and again when we moved back to Dorset. The cropping practices were different in the north and we practised migratory beekeeping. Sadly, in Dorset we don't have the wonderful heather moors that we, and our bees, enjoyed so much in Northumberland.

What have been your best memories?

Ruth: Seeing students from my classes making progress in managing bees – some have become excellent beekeepers.

Ian: Apart from the heather moors, the best times are when you try something for the first time and it works out perfectly. Last year we did a couple of autumn shook swarms in August and this spring they were strong, healthy, varroa free and raring to go.

Any disasters?

Ruth: Two come to mind. Losing all of our bees in 1985 (along with most other beekeepers) after a series of bad winters and summers. I was so devastated that I vowed it would never happen again. The other was getting the trailer stuck when trying to move bees away from a migratory site. Both were positive learning experiences.

Ian: Yes. Apart from the obvious early ones (such as knocking all of the queen cells down and then finding the colony had swarmed), the most recent has been trying to get our bees to happily occupy a top bar hive. After seven years of trying, I am on the point of giving up.

What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

Ruth: To change combs regularly.

Ian: Keep on learning – there is always so much more to know.

If you could start all over again, would you change anything?

Ruth: Langstroths are quite heavy but I like top bee space. If I was starting over again, I would probably go for Smith hives. The Rowe approach also has some attractions.

Ian: No because all of the things we have subsequently changed in our beekeeping have been good learning experiences. If, for example, we had started out with Langstroth hives, we would never have had the comparison to show us how much better top bee space is.

Which beekeeping book would you most recommend?

Ruth: “Guide to Bees and Honey” by Ted Hooper has to be the all time No.1 but Celia Davis’s book “The Honey Bee Inside Out” is straightforward and excellent when studying for the modules.

Ian: Here I am torn. Hooper is still the one I refer to most often but two books by Tom Seeley, “The Wisdom of the Hive” and “Honeybee Democracy”, Mark Winston’s “The Biology of the Honey Bee”, and Storch’s “At the Hive Entrance” are all personal favourites.

What are the biggest problems facing today’s beekeepers?

Ruth: Managing varroa.

Ian: For most beekeepers, the biggest problem is learning how to manage varroa (as opposed to merely treating for it). It requires such a different approach that many beekeepers find it difficult to give the time and commitment which is necessary.

What are the challenges facing the SBA and/or local associations?

Both: It’s difficult for us, in the South West of England, to comment on Scotland but in England there are two key problems. The first is the large number of people who have come into our craft in recent years. It has overwhelmed most associations abilities to cope – not with the initial teaching but with the support and mentoring in the next and subsequent stages. The second is a perennial one. There are always people who want to belong but too few who want to be active in running their association.



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Wildlife and Nature



ON a cool autumn evening, an eerie sound drifts lazily across the glen, making the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. The deep-throated roaring sound and the clash of antlers can mean only one thing – the **Red Deer** rut is under way.

From mid-September until the start of November, male red deer gather to fight over the breeding rights for hareems of females who are in season and ready to create the next generation of Scotland's largest land mammal. They may be relatively docile during the rest of the year and happy to wander about with groups of other males but, when it comes to the autumn, red deer stags are fearsome fighting machines, chasing each other across flat areas moorland or other upland spots and fighting with their antlers, which are grown especially for the rut.

There is a perception that red deer are rare, but in fact figures from Scottish Natural Heritage (which was merged with the Deer Commission for Scotland in 2010 to become the Scottish Government's advisor on deer) show there are about 300,000 in Scotland.

In the summer, they can be found all over the highest points of the upland areas, coming down on to flatter ground in the autumn to rut.

In the winter, the deer come even lower down the hills in search of food – a drive along the A9 between Perth and Inverness can often yield magnificent sights of herds of red deer grazing among the snow.

Yet, unless you have the right equipment, winter often isn't the easiest time to get out and see deer. A trip out into the hills can be

very rewarding in the autumn though and, as long as you don't get so close that you disturb the deer or put yourself within reach of their antlers, then watching a red deer rut can be a magical experience. If you want to go out with an experienced guide to increase your chances of seeing red deer then look for businesses that are members of Wild Scotland, the nature tourism trade body. Its members agree to abide by a code of conduct so that they don't threaten or disturb wildlife. I've been out with David Newland from Glenlivet Wildlife specifically to watch deer and he was great, as was the team at Highland Offroad, Dunkeld.

Red deer aren't the only fine land mammals that Scotland has to offer though – the smaller and more flighty **Roe Deer** is a common sight around the country. Often spotted slinking between trees in a forest or bounding over open fields, roe deer have much smaller antlers and much narrower bodies but are still beautiful creatures.

Although deer numbers are heavily controlled in Scotland, through shooting on country estates and culling by Deer Management Groups, one of the biggest threats to Scottish deer comes



The majestic Red Deer with impressively large antlers

from inter-breeding with species that have been introduced to the UK.

While red and roe deer were present in the UK before the last ice age, **fallow deer** were introduced by the Normans, with the Romans having previously had a go at bringing the animals over, while **sika deer** were introduced to deer parks in the 1860s from the Far East, with those now living wild in the UK believed to be specifically descendents of Japanese deer.

While all four of these species can be spotted in Scotland, there are a further two breeds of deer found south of the Border. **Chinese Water Deer** – as the name suggests – also come from Asia but escaped from Whipsnade zoo in 1929 and now account for about 10 per cent of the world's population.



Small Muntjac (Barking) Deer

The much smaller **Muntjac Deer** – known as the ‘barking deer’ because of the strange noises it makes – was also introduced to England from Asia and has escaped, or been deliberately released, from deer parks.

One of my favourite sites for spotting muntjac deer is the amazing RSPB nature reserve at Minsmere, in Suffolk. The funny-looking wee animals skulk about the undergrowth around the reserve and offer another exciting spectacle alongside the wading birds – including the rare **Bittern** – that can be seen from the hides.

Minsmere and the area surrounding is also home to red deer – spotting one of these giants, which to my mind is a very Scottish animal, munching its way through the grass of East Anglia is a bizarre but enjoyable sight.

Curiouser and Curiouser

. . . the weird and wonderful world of insects

THE HONEY ANT

HONEYPOT ants have an unusual food storage system. Some members of each colony act as living receptacles known as ‘repletes’, these ants become engorged with food from the workers and hang from the ceilings of chambers deep underground to the point that their abdomens swell enormously, a condition called plerergate. Other ants then extract nourishment from them. They function essentially as living larders.

Honey-pot ants belong to any of five genera, including *Myrmecocystus*.

Honey ants are unique in using their own bodies as storage, but they have a greater function than just storing food. Some store liquids, body fat, and water from insect prey brought to them by worker ants. They can later serve as a food source for their fellow ants when food is scarce. In certain places, they are eaten by humans as sweets and are considered a delicacy.

These ants can live anywhere in the nest, but in the wild, they are found deep underground, literally imprisoned by their huge abdomens, swollen to the size of grapes. They are so valued in times of little food and water that occasionally raiders from other colonies, knowing of these living storehouses, will attempt to steal these ants because of their high nutritional value and water content.

They are known to change colours, commonly green, red, orange, yellow, and blue.

Like all formicine ants, honey ants lack stingers so they spray fine droplets of formic acid from their abdominal tip.

Unlike here, Honey Ants mainly hang from the ceiling of their chamber dwellings



The June Gap

WHAT is the June gap?

How do you know it exists in your area?

The June gap is a foible of Mother Nature whereby the spring flowers (early hardwood trees like sycamore and horse chestnut, fruit trees, hawthorn, oil seed rape) cease flowering before the summer and late summer flowers start.

The spring flowers tend to finish in the first half of June and the summer flowers (clovers, brambles, lime trees) will not be flowering freely until July. Some of the shrubs are more helpful in this respect and keep going into summer. These include the Cotoneasters (*C. horizontalis* is a great favourite of bees) and the Pyracanthas. In this respect town and city beekeeping is rather safer than country beekeeping as there tends to be a larger spread of these shrubs in towns.

In an idle moment I once strolled the residential roads and avenues of Bathgate noting down the patches of Cotoneaster and their approximate size and in nine streets came up with a composite count of almost a tenth of an acre of flowering Cotoneaster – a worthwhile bee feed, (our own garden surprised me with 14 square yards).

If you've got some spare space fill it with *horizontalis* – it'll also keep the weeds down or at least hide them. My count included 51 lime trees and 52 sycamores which had mostly been planted for street shading – a quantity boding well for spring and summer foraging.

Areas in the east of Scotland where oil seed rape is a common farm crop, sometimes have flowers into summer, if the farmers have been caught out by the weather in autumn and have failed to get their winter rape sown. Spring rape is then sown and of course flowers later.

You can usually determine whether or not there is a June gap by watching the beehive entrance – if there is little activity, no pollen

being taken home, then it is likely that there is a dearth of flowers. In this case and especially if the weather is inclement, the bees may run short of food – a full sized colony should always have sufficient stores for 10 days about 5kg (11lb).

A very full BS deep frame holds about 2¼ kg (5lb) of food, so at least two full frames of food (usually the two end frames). Normally there would also be some food in the super.

However if the June gap is severe and the weather is inclement, check your bees for food and if in doubt e.g. the super is empty and hardly any food in the brood chamber, remove the super and put on a rapid two litre feeder of sugar syrup (0.8 litre water to 1 kg sugar – equal volumes water and sugar).

Beware the June gap and never be reluctant to feed your bees in summer if necessary.

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Whitmuir - The Organic Place

Scottish Bee Education Project in the Scottish Borders

A FEW years ago Peter and Joyce Jack set up a project to raise awareness of the falling numbers of honey bees (and beekeepers). Following consultation with a variety of people at government level, as well as other beekeepers and educators, the following aims were agreed in order to seek funding:

- To facilitate practical hands-on training for novice beekeepers by setting up a training apiary where each student fosters a hive for a year under the tutelage of an experienced beekeeper.
- To encourage novice beekeepers to attend evening classes and engage in formal Scottish Beekeepers' Association (SBKA) examinations.
- To provide novice beekeepers with educational materials as well as a nucleus at the end of the training.
- To set up an observation hive for the public to visit.
- To inform young people about the life of honey bees and their important role as pollinators by providing information materials for schools and arranging for presentations by a beekeeper.

Whitmuir, The Organic Place at Lamancha offered a site to locate the project which was gratefully received. Whitmuir Initiative helped with all the paperwork. In May 2010 a £10,000 grant from 'Awards for All' enabled the purchase of all the equipment and suits as well as eight nuclei specially reared by local beekeepers. A Scottish Borders Community Council grant for £4,610 financed the purchase of IT and presentational equipment, information leaflets, DVDs and books.

During the set-up period, assistance from two of our most experienced beekeepers, Jim Bogle and Walter Brodie of Peebles, was invaluable. They volunteered to be mentors for a year. Jim Bogle designed the observation hive and taught us how to rear the nuclei and to introduce the bees into such a hive. He was always happy to advise on any problem

we encountered. Sadly, Jim died in February 2011; a great loss to beekeeping in Scotland. He is greatly missed by all connected with the project. We are very proud to have secured several of his bee colonies to work with.

The first four novice beekeepers, Joyce Jack, Catharine Lyall, Peter Stevenson and Myriam Baete, have now finished their first year of training and passed their bee master exam with distinction. Seven more trainees and mentors are involved this year. The future of the project looks very secure and it is hoped that other beekeeping groups may follow this type of approach.

'Awards for All' are very keen to support this kind of initiative.

The success of the project would not have been possible without the hard work, tenacity and sheer drive by Peter and Joyce Jack to overcome the numerous obstacles encountered along the way. They are to be congratulated for their foresight and unwavering belief in the project.

Topical Tip

by Ramsay Graham

If you can't find the queen and you think the colony may be queenless a tip I have is to watch to see if the bees are bringing in pollen. The point being that they won't bring in pollen (*that's the theory*) unless the queen is present and laying.

Also, clear out all last year's pollen - it probably won't get used; bees are only really interested in fresh stuff.

If you want to re-queen an aggressive colony, try moving the hive to a different spot, inserting your new queen in a new hive on the original site on one of the frames with brood and a few nurse bees. The field bees from the first hive will return to the new hive and the old queen should be easier to find a day or two later amongst the less aggressive younger bees in the old hive. You can reunite the hives or increase with another queen.

Hive Robbing by Wasps and Means of Prevention

WASPS will smell the honey and home into a hive where they will try to gain entry. A strong colony will prevent their entry and kill any persistent ones, but at a price!

Worker bees will sacrifice their lives for the colonies survival but a strong colony should be able to fend off an attack.

However, if it continues then the defenders weaken due to the loss of guard bees and there becomes a point where the colony gives up and the wasps get 'free' entry. Once this happens the colony is doomed and the brood, honey and bees will be carted off!

So what can we do?

- Keep strong and healthy colonies.
- Do not spill honey or syrup and keep hive inspections and so exposure of combs to the minimum.
- Reduce the hive entrance to make it easier for the bees to defend the colony. With severe problems reduce the entrance to a single bee-way. A small tube entrance can be easier for bees to defend. Having a floor to your hive with a devious entrance route is said to help. Some dispense with the normal entrance and have an 'up and over' one under the floor. Others place a piece of glass in front of the hive entrance which the bees are able to circumvent but the wasps try to go through!

BeeBase suggests closing open mesh floors with the floor insert. I assume that this is to reduce the 'area of honey odour' which attracts the wasps. However, several beekeepers testify to the fact that the wasps get 'confused' and try to enter through the direct route - the mesh.

- If colonies are weak/under strength but healthy then unite them so they can fight off the attackers.
- Control wasp nests around your apiaries by destroying nests in the spring and summer. This is clearly a good method

of reducing the overall wasp population and reducing robbing problems in the autumn. Wasps do have a place in nature and destruction of wasp colonies on a wide scale will be disadvantageous to the environment, especially if you are a gardener as it has been suggested that a single wasp nest will catch five metric tons of insects through the course of the summer!

- Trapping wasps in the apiary. Placing wasp traps such as jars/bottles containing a wasp attracting mixture will help. Wasps will tend to go to these traps as an easier option and drown. There are commercial traps available in garden centres and also one called WaspBane and waspinator (maybe a new acting part for Arnold now the Governorship is over!), which may be more effective and easier to use.

A Simple Wasp Trap

Take a plastic pop bottle and cut off the top third. Then invert the cut-off piece and placed into the lower portion, which is baited with a mixture irresistible to wasps. This works because the wasps are attracted by the bait odour and enter/fall into the trap but will find it difficult, but not impossible to find the small entrance. Just like a lobster pot!

Mixtures

Bait mixture are like many things in beekeeping – every person you talk to has their favourite brew. However, the following pointers might help you decide on your brew:

- Never use honey unless you want to catch bees.
- Add a watery mixture of vinegar, sugar and salt. The wasps are attracted to the sweet and sour scent yet bees don't seem to be attracted by this sour mixture.
- Over ripe fruit seems to attract wasps – they like my apples.

- Mix two level tablespoons of Sardine and Tuna cat food into 200ml of warm water and pour into the wasp trap.
- You can replace the solution of water with mashed grapes, sugar and lemon juice, sugar and water, soda, vodka and orange, wine, maple syrup and water, etc.
- I found a use for lager – add a dash to stimulate fermentation.
- Add a dash of washing liquid as this causes the wasps to sink and drown by reducing the surface tension.

Tips

- Keep the wasp trap out of the rain as it will quickly fill with rainwater.
- Hang the wasp trap in a tree or shrub with base of trap well clear of vegetation.
- Locate traps well away from hives or you will attract more wasps to them.
- Place one trap upwind and one downwind of your hives at least five metres away.
- Empty them regularly as they fill up surprisingly quickly. Take care that the wasps are all dead!



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The downside of wasp traps is they also attract and trap beneficial insects such as lacewing and hoverflies which are a natural pest control of aphids.

The late Dave Cushman's site has some excellent information on other wasp trap design and can be found at www.dave-cushman.net/bee/wasptrap.html

CULLINGS by H. M. Stitch

(First published SBA magazine, Feb 1925)

OBSERVATIONS made by balloonists have shown that the average maximum height of insect flight is about 1,500 feet. Monsieur Lejeune, a French aeronaut, while drifting in a balloon at a height of 3,000ft on a hot day in August 1911, noticed two bees licking some chocolate lying on the edge of the basket.

No mention is made of the topography of the country over which he was flying, and, as bees are kept at much higher altitudes in parts of Switzerland, Italy and Austria, it is not surprising that bees should have been seen at 3,000ft (above sea level presumably).

SBA COUNCIL MEETING

26 November 2011

Dewars Conference Centre, Perth.
commencing at 2.15 pm

preceded by the LOCAL ASSOCIATION SECRETARIES' MEETING

10.30am to 1.15pm

Members and local Associations are invited to submit items for discussion at the above meetings. These should be in the hands of the General Secretary by 24 September 2011.

The SBA Awards 2012

THE following SBA Awards are presented annually.

Nominations, for the **Local Association Award** and the **Dr John Anderson Memorial Award**, together with supportive reasons, must be made through Local Association Secretaries.

All nominations must be sent to Bron Wright, SBA General Secretary, by 31 December 2011 for consideration at the January Executive meeting.

Awards will be made at the discretion of the SBA Executive Committee and presented at the SBA Annual General Meeting, to be held on Saturday 10 March 2012 at Dewars Conference Centre, Perth.

■ The Local Association Award

Awarded to beekeepers in recognition of the quality of their contribution within their Local Association and their active promotion of the art of beekeeping in the environment of that Association.

Recipients must have been SBA members for at least ten years.

■ Dr John Anderson Memorial Award

The object of the award is to stimulate education in beekeeping throughout Scotland, to further the work of research in practical beekeeping and to perpetuate the memory of the late Dr John Anderson. It is awarded to members of the SBA *'In recognition of special work or service for the furtherance of beekeeping in Scotland and beyond'*.

■ Harry Brown Memorial Award

Aim is to stimulate interest in *The Scottish Beekeeper Magazine*. Awarded for contributions to it. The Executive Committee makes the award on the advice of the Editor.

■ The Moir Library Prize

Seeks to stimulate interest in the Moir Library. Awarded to the author of the best article, on the Moir Library appearing in the Scottish Beekeeper. Articles will be considered by the SBA Library Committee and a recommendation made to the Executive.

■ SBA Special Certificate

To be awarded to a beekeeper by the Executive Committee for a notable contribution to beekeeping in Scotland, over a long period.

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September

WHAT should the diligent beekeeper be doing or thinking about this month (September). Feeding the bees perhaps?

No need to think about harvesting any honey surplus this thought is 'knee jerk' to most of us – check out the word 'surplus'.

The beginner needs to be able to differentiate between what the bees need, to get them through the winter after perhaps three-four supers full of honey have been removed in early September, and, what is surplus to the bees' wintering need.

Experience will demonstrate that the more honey there is in the honey supers – above the queen excluder, the less stored honey there will be in the brood box .

It is quite revealing to heft such a colony by tipping it up slightly, by hand from the rear, before removing the surplus and then repeating the procedure after the supers have been taken off.

I have never been an advocate of working bees on 'one and a half'; that is a deep box and a shallow crate. However it is a good ploy to leave a super on the colony filled out with partially finished shallow frames culled from the other supers. Such a procedure of course requires that the beekeeper REMOVE the queen excluder from the hive!

The ideal overwintering procedure is to use a double deep system – so long as the frames in the top deep box are chock full of stores. If the comb in the top box is not filled to the bottom bars of the frames in the top box that gap, empty of stores, could be an unbridgeable barrier to the bees rising into their heat as the winter progresses. Whichever ploy used feeding at least 1 : 1 sugar syrup should be commenced not later than the end of the first week in September – the sooner the better! Where a number of colonies are being fed 1 : 1 syrup made from unheated water will make the beekeeper's management more economical.

The cost of electricity and gas is now worthy of consideration – it always was as far as I am concerned.

By preparing the syrup well in advance of being required the beekeeper will find that 1:1 by weight, cold syrup is possible by dissolving the correct amount of sugar in the correct amount of water and over a period of perhaps two days breaking up the sugar sediment in the bucket and stirring regularly – every time you pass the bucket. I use a nominal 30 litre size bucket and mix 15 kilos of sugar with 15 litres of water – this will result in circa 24 litres of syrup.

The economy achieved is well worth the effort since a colony being prepared for overwintering can take down a lot of syrup – Athole Kirkwood reckoned that a strong, needy colony could shift a gallon (4.5 litres) of syrup overnight every night for around ten days and then some, especially if two broods are worked!

Fast is not always beautiful!

Ponder mechanised agriculture: A tractor ploughing a field can get the job done in quick time relative to a pair of horse and a ploughman but a simple (or not so simple relative energy comparison) will demonstrate unequivocally, which system is more efficient.

However, I don't think horses are much good at mixing sugar syrup!

Feeding should be done with by mid October.

By the way, do not believe the dogmatist who will tell you that feeding sugar syrup wears the bees out and is detrimental to colony survival. Nonsense! The most detrimental factor to an overwintering colony of bees is starvation.

Around the World

ITALIAN beekeepers Marisa Valente and Renato Bologna have gone on public hunger strike outside the Ministry of Agriculture in Turin, demanding the Italian government ban the use of neonicotinoid pesticides which they say have killed 80 per cent of their bees and ruined their business.

The couple are living in their camper van and making a public protest under the banner 'Basta Veleni' (Enough Poisons).

Renato Bologna said:

"For our small company, the financial consequences have been huge. We produce Apitherapy products, royal jelly, queen embryos, bee-bread, pollen, comb honey. Chemical analysis conducted by ASL and a private laboratory confirmed that the collapse of our bee colonies and the loss of self defence capabilities of the remaining bees, was caused by the neonicotinoids. In addition we discovered that the pollen, bee-bread and Royal Jelly of our hives were contaminated with these insecticides.

This is totally unacceptable for us; we cannot simply ignore the problem and remain silent in the face of such overwhelming evidence. It is very simple: neonicotinoid pesticides are killing our bees and killing our business."

The couple have been bee farmers for 20 years, based on the edge of the National Park di Rocchetta Tanaro in the Province of Asti in the Italian region Piedmont, located about 40 miles south east of Turin.

It is a base for grape farmers and Bologna claims: *"The bee deaths are triggered by the toxic pesticide treatments which are 'required' for golden vines, among other treatments that have not yet solved the grape farmers' problems. If neonicotinoid pesticides are sprayed on the vines, even once, this is deadly for our bees."*

Meanwhile, across the 'pond' in the United States, the documentary film **'Queen of the Sun: What the bees are telling us'**, is making quite a stir. Directed by Taggart Siegel

who made **'The real dirt on Farmer John'**, it pupports to *"Take us on a journey through the catastrophic disappearance of bees and the mysterious world of the beehive, this engaging and ultimately uplifting film weaves an unusual and dramatic story of the heartfelt struggles of beekeepers, scientists and philosophers from around the world including Michael Pollan, Gunther Hawk and Vandana Shiva. Together they reveal both the problems and the solutions in renewing a culture in balance with nature."*

It has gained five-star reviews and a clutch of industry awards including winning the Planet in Focus Film Festival, plus some gushing praise. *"A remarkable documentary that's also one of the most beautiful nature films I've seen,"* says Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times.

However, not everyone is convinced. *"A film that has an opening featuring a woman dancing in slow motion, clothed mainly in bees, is aiming at a certain kind of audience – one that, frankly, is likely to believe its premise: the bee preaching to the bee choir. And this just does the subject a disservice,"* says Dan Friedman of the Jewish Daily Forward.

Elsewhere, 50 queen bees from the West Australian bee breeding programme are being used in a research trial in the US seeking to test honeybees' tolerance to the Varroa mite.

Senior Apiculturist with the Department of Agriculture and Food, Bill Trend, said: *"It's hoped current research efforts will find ways to breed bees with stronger resistance to the Varroa mite. If we can achieve this through cooperative research, Australia can develop stronger protection against the mite if it comes to our shores."*

The mite has already spread to our neighbours, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. In New Zealand, Varroa mites have had a major economic impact with losses of bees, hives, honey production, crop yields and export revenue."

Education Update

CONGRATULATIONS to the following candidates who have been successful in the SBA Examinations during the summer of 2011:

SCOTTISH BASIC BEEMASTER CERTIFICATE

Ruth Anderson	<i>West Kilbride</i>
Kate Archley	<i>Acharacle</i>
Myriam Baete	<i>Peebles</i>
John Baillie	<i>Garmouth</i>
Mark Barnett	<i>Gordon</i>
Fiona Bashford	<i>Cairndow</i>
James Baxter	<i>Biggar</i>
Reginald Brammer	<i>Kilcreggan</i>
David Brown	<i>Inverness</i>
Kate Byrne	<i>Kiltarlity</i>
Moira Carstairs	<i>Forres</i>
Stella Chisholm	<i>Beauly</i>
Donna Clark	<i>Lhanbryde</i>
Torquil Clyde	<i>Kirkwall</i>
John Coyle	<i>Kippen</i>
Nicholas Davies	<i>Kilcreggan</i>
Joyce Duncan	<i>Mauchline</i>
Emma Evans	<i>Kilbarchan</i>
Doris Fischler	<i>Stromness</i>
Faye Gibbins	<i>Edinburgh</i>
Jeannine Hazelhurst	<i>Dounby, Orkney</i>
Graham Hill	<i>Elgin</i>
Joyce Jack	<i>Peebles</i>
Wendy Jamieson	<i>Elgin</i>
Catherine Lyall	<i>Blyth Bridge</i>
Cynthia May	<i>Nairn</i>
Joan Maynard	<i>South Ronaldsay</i>
Andy Mitchell	<i>South Ronaldsay</i>
Edward Monaghan	<i>Helensburgh</i>
Nicola Monaghan	<i>Helensburgh</i>
Scott McLean	<i>Drymen</i>
Pamela Nairn	<i>Fochabers</i>
Howard Nicholson	<i>Renton</i>

Kitta Potgieter	<i>Turriff</i>
Sandy Reid	<i>Helensburgh</i>
Susan Reid	<i>Helensburgh</i>
Matthew Richardson	<i>Penicuik</i>
Anne Ritchie	<i>Helensburgh</i>
Neil Robertson	<i>Edinburgh</i>
Elizabeth Shiach	<i>Inverness</i>
Gordon Smith	<i>Rhu</i>
Sue Spence	<i>Kirkwall</i>
Lindsay Stephen	<i>Kirkwall</i>
Peter Stevenson	<i>Peebles</i>
Kirsti Sweeten	<i>Kilmarnock</i>
Sibyl Tchaikovsky	<i>Eday, Orkney</i>
Gerry Thompson	<i>Aberlour</i>
Andrew Watson	<i>Huntly</i>

SCOTTISH APIARIAN CERTIFICATE

Maureen Cameron	<i>Edinburgh</i>
Tony Harris	<i>Fochabers</i>
Willow Lohr	<i>Crathie</i>

SCOTTISH EXPERT BEEMASTER CERTIFICATE

Maureen Cameron	<i>Edinburgh</i>
Tony Harris	<i>Fochabers</i>
Willow Lohr	<i>Crathie</i>

continued

The BEEMASTER talking Beekeeping . . .

Send your questions for The Beemaster to editorscottishbeekeeper@gmail.com

WHY does a large colony seem to make so disproportionately more honey than a smaller colony?

It is well known that exceptional honey harvests are obtained by colonies with large populations. In fact the ability to gather a surplus increases non-linearly with population – doubling the population more than doubles the ability to gather nectar. This is due to there being a certain fairly fixed number of bees which are required to feed and look after the brood, all remaining bees being available for foraging, drawing comb and processing nectar into honey.

Arranging for the maximum population point to coincide with the honey flows has to be one of the main aims of the beekeeper. This sometimes happens serendipitously, as during the brief July flow(s) this year. Due to the previously very poor summer weather, few of the foragers had become worn out and died and were available (albeit as old bees) to lend a hand with the July flow.

Some thought must therefore be given to the relationship between queen laying rate, colony population and population growth.

The period from egg laying to emerging worker bee is 21 days. In this consideration we can concentrate on worker population since the quantity of drones is usually small and more or less a sideshow compared to the queen's main task of producing worker bees.

Laying rate and Brood population

Because of the 21 day brood period, the average queen laying rate can be obtained by counting the (worker) brood –all stages, eggs, open and sealed brood, and dividing the total brood population by 21 to obtain the average daily laying rate.

If the brood count is e.g. 21,000 then the queen's average daily laying rate over the past 21 days will have been 1,000 eggs per day. If the brood population was 31,500, then the daily laying rate will have been 1,500 eggs per day. Laying rate and brood population are inextricably tied together by the 21 day factor. The stabilised maximum brood population is always Queen average daily laying rate x 21.

Laying rate and Total Colony Population

Extrapolating from laying rate to total colony population is rather less fixed since it depends on the life of the worker. A worker life of 50 days is often assumed for summer bees in the foraging periods. However worker bee life is, like aircraft life, a bit dependant on air miles. In periods of lax, non foraging activity, the life is likely to be extended somewhat.

Staying with the 50 day average life then, the maximum colony population is simply queen average daily laying rate multiplied by 50 e.g. for a queen capable of sustaining a daily laying rate of 1000, the maximum colony population will be $50 \times 1000 = 50000$ workers – every day a thousand bees are born and a thousand die.

Increasing either the average life time of a worker or the average daily laying rate of the queen will increase the maximum population e.g. 55 day average life and 1200 average daily egg laying will give a maximum population of $55 \times 1200 = 66000$ workers.

Laying rate and Colony Population Build-Up Rate

Let us take a typical springtime scenario.

Assuming that the colony comes through the winter with a population of say 10000 and virtually no brood. The queen then starts laying at say 500 eggs per day and sustains

that for say two weeks. The brood population is now 7,000, the adult population may have dwindled by say 2,000 due to losses of winter bees foraging in difficult conditions.

Provided sufficient pollen and stores of honey are still available and that some fresh pollen sources have been found, the laying rate may now increase, say to 1,000 per day.

The population progress from start of serious laying will be as **Table 1** below.

For interest, if the queen's laying rate had increased in week five to say 1,500 then by the end of week eight the population would be 31,500 instead of 28,000

As long as the colony foraging economics can sustain a high laying rate (1,000 per day or higher), the build-up will continue rapidly. This is the advantage of good early spring forage availability and a great advantage of winter sown oil seed rape. At the end of week eight we may now have an adult population of almost 30,000 (winter bees have all died off) and increasing at 7,000 per week and a stabilised brood population of 21,000 capable of producing 7,000 new bees per week.

Now that your head is swimming with numbers, we can say, don't worry about the

numbers shown, they're only typical, but they illustrate the method by which a high population can be achieved quite quickly, but all depending on food availability. The Count (from Sesame Street) would have loved all these figures – I wonder if he kept bees?

Bees that were well fed the previous autumn will still have a good reservoir of food available for these quick building spring activities. Of equal importance is a good carry-over of autumn pollen – Himalayan balsam and ivy are very valuable as sources of autumn pollen and please, do always leave the bees with their stores of winter pollen.

If the main sources of nectar in your area are from early summer flowers, then trying to achieve a quick build up in spring is important. If late summer flowers are your main source then the bees will have time for a more leisurely build up.

But remember 'Bees make honey' and the more bees the better.

Table 1

<i>End of week number</i>	<i>Winter bees</i>	<i>Assumed Queen rate of lay per day</i>	<i>Brood Population</i>	<i>New adult population</i>	<i>Total Number of Adults</i>
1	9000	500	3500	0	9000
2	8000	500	7000	0	8000
3	7000	1000	14000	0	7000
4	6000	1000	17500	3500	9500
5	4000	1000	21000	7000	11000
6	1000	1000	21000	14000	15000
7	0	1000	21000	21000	21000
8	0	1000	21000	28000	28000

Book Review

**The Enigma that was
Thomas William Cowan**
R. J. Hawker

ISBN 978-1-904846-75-8

published by Northern Bee Books, 2011
£17.50.

OUR appetites were whetted by the article on Cowan that appeared in *The Scottish Beekeeper* in January 2010 for which the author was awarded the very first Moir Library Prize at the AGM in 2011.

Here we have the fruits of Robert Hawker's meticulous, in-depth research and analysis distilled into a full-length book, a copy of which he kindly gifted to the Moir Library.

The title is well-chosen. T. W. Cowan truly seems to have been an enigma: heading the English beekeeping establishment for half a century or more, despite being an abrasive, argumentative, domineering character who lived abroad for lengthy spells. Yet, it is said, British beekeeping took the shape it did through his leadership during a period of considerable change in matters pertaining to beekeeping.

Cowan (1840-1926) assumed leadership of the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA), established in 1874; he wrote innumerable articles, pamphlets and books; his **British Beekeepers Guide Book** of 1881 produced many editions and was being reprinted into the 1930s. He also owned and edited the **British Beekeepers' Journal** and latterly, the **Beekeepers Record**, thereby leaving his opponents without a means of voicing their (numerous) complaints at his high-handedness - until the Rev. Digges founded the **Irish Bee Journal** in 1901 and wrote his own Guides.

Regarding the opposition to Cowan's predominance in British beekeeping, it is interesting to note a strong link with the SBA. One vocal element came from

Cumberland BKA. After the death of their Hon. Secretary the post was filled by GW Avery who continued to query Cowan's assumptions. In 1911, Avery was appointed Senior Lecturer in Beekeeping to the Edinburgh and East of Scotland College of Agriculture. The following year he called for the formation of a Scottish Beekeeping Association, thereby becoming the founding father of the present SBA.

There can be no doubt that Cowan, whatever his merits or faults, was an important figure in beekeeping history and raised the profile of British beekeeping abroad. The author's ability to put across his subject in a concise and readable manner has given us a worthy account of the man who was at the forefront of British beekeeping for over half a century.

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