

**Editorial:** If you can spare a couple of hours to help at the Portishead & the Winscombe Shows please do. It is great fun and there is always an experienced beekeeper on the stand to help out with those difficult questions the children ask! They love to see the bees in the observation hive and looking for the Queen draws in their parents as well. Our membership is at the highest ever I think, so we should have lots of volunteers for this excellent way of meeting the public and telling them about our wonderful craft.

Let's hope the weather stays fine for the BBQ at Pat & Bob South's home. My best wishes and I look forward to seeing you soon

### Are Your Bees Behaving as Expected?

Stephen Brain

The reason for the title is that I'm seeing a lot of colonies which are not performing as expected and I believe the reason is that we have a far higher incidence of disease than most people think. You may be surprised at this, as this year should be a good year for bees since the incidence of varroa is quite low. In fact at times it is hard to find a varroa mite to show beginners! However we are seeing strange things. Many colonies keep raising queens cells even though the queen is relatively new and the colony not huge. This could be a sign of disease or it could be a function of something else. Performing a Pagden or other swarm control in these cases will just mean you end up with several weak colonies, instead of one strong colony. Indiscriminately knocking down queen cells isn't the answer either. Recently in the Langford apiary we detected a bought-in colony infected with Nosema. I suspect there may be more. I have also seen colonies elsewhere infected with bee paralysis virus. Therefore please be vigilant. Look at Beebase and BBKA News for the latest information on disease. If you suspect Nosema then there are people who can check samples—for example Ivor or myself. Keep doing the IPM. Do practice good hygiene - wash tools etc after use. Sterilise combs and hives. Be careful moving hives to other apiaries in case you infect other colonies. Finally, if you are unsure - do ask for help.



◀ This shows the Queen and her Court (photo by Ivor Davis) The other is by David Welham...have you any photos you would like to see in the Newsletter?



### Rare Sighting at Somerset Nature Reserve

The Blagdon Beekeeper (Apis Agravaticus), made a rare migratory visit to Avalon Marshes Centre (Somerset Levels). These retiring creatures, known for obsessive curiosity about other species were noticed in



a flock, their distinctive call (sounding a little like "Oh, oh, There's one" or "There's one. There's one"), resonating about the reserve. Apis Agravaticus, managed to spot Hobbies, Swifts, a Heron, and many May and Dragon Flies. Some actually heard the distant booming call of the Bittern, a call less grating than that of Apis Agravaticus

It was a pleasant afternoon and they were seen later, clucking contentedly, many taking advantage of the feeding station, before heading out on the return migration.

Many thanks to Chris Sperring, the adopted flock leader, whose guidance ensured the safe passage of the shy and rare Apis Agravaticus back to their departure point.

Peter Carter Deputy Programme Manager.

### Note from Philip Clemente..

"We have been asked to supply a total of 40 nucs this year; we still have 6 to supply, and this will be further reduced next Sunday. We have not used any swarms to produced these bees, but have bred queens from our own hives, and bought a few in, so the beginners have bees which have a this years queen and bees tested for disease. Other beekeepers have been selling their surplus bees to the beginners, something which Steve (Brain) and I are not happy with, as we are unsure of the health of these bees, thank goodness there were not too many. I have taken 10 swarms since the beginning of June, most of which have been given to experienced beekeepers."

### Visit to Botanic Gardens Bristol University

Peter Carter

On June 25<sup>th</sup> a group of us visited the Botanic Gardens in Bristol. We were shown round by Sally, a beekeeper until the death of her husband several years ago, Sally was a very knowledgeable and informative guide. The gardens are a very peaceful place with numerous interesting species of plants from all over the world. Planting was arranged in regional plots, including a Chinese Medicinal Herb Garden which is a source of herbs for practitioners of Chinese medicine throughout the UK. One rather surprising fact about many plants in the collection, is that since the discovery of DNA, plants that were often thought to be related have been found not to be so and vice versa. The University Botanic Gardens are well worth a visit, and costs £4:50 entrance, not far from Black Boy Hill /Whiteladies Road with its, restaurants and shops.

### Grant from the Co-op

The Committee applied for and has been awarded a grant of £500 by the Co-op! This will go towards buying our own projector and a Notepad. Our increased educational activities have meant an increased need for our own equipment so that we no longer have to borrow them!

The Committee would like to make other grant applications, some considerably more complicated than the Co-op form. We would welcome the help of any branch member with experience of making such applications.

### Chair's Letter

As I write, David is out collecting a swarm - possibly from one of our own hives! I know there have been a few swarms around just lately so I hope that means more of the newer members now have their own re-queened colonies to look after.

Learning about the manipulation and management of a colony is quite like getting our new website up and running. It can prove to be more difficult than one imagines, so please be patient with me (or lend me a hand!) My intention is to update the website every 2-3 weeks and I've already had a request for some specific information, namely the details of the cleaning solution that Tom Salter used during his IPM/IBHM talk. So look out for the recipe for *Salter's Soda Solution* on the website. There's also a chance to read the previous articles that were on the *News & Information* page.

Eventually everyone will be issued with a password for access to the *Members Only* page, but this will take some time.

This is when your patience will be most appreciated!

**Members' Corner** We welcome new members, **Clive Bowell, Chris Coates, Rachele Corker, Angela Flynn, Martin Reynolds, Penny Rowlands, Sandu & Ian Baker Hellings, Paul Burrowson, Eve Sims, Robert Kirkwood, Sally Stephens, Martin Ford, Andrew Robb, Sally Harden, Nigel Scholey, Kathy & Lillian Fawcett and Christina Gray.** We hope you enjoy your beekeeping with us - there are lots of experienced members who will help you. Congratulations to **David Welham** for passing BBKA Module 3 & **Jane Scrase** who passed Mod. 2. The 2012 winter study group subject will be Biology (Module 5) held at Shipham Village Hall as usual. More information will be available later in the year.

### BCD Committee Report

*David Welham, Secretary*

We attended the Bishop Sutton Funday in June with the bees and had a successful day with many visitors including the chap in the photo who was part of a medieval club.



I also took the observation hive to Wraxall Primary School

where a group of older pupils had carried out a honeybee project which they presented to the school. The previous week the school had held a fete and the girls had a bee themed stand and the money they made from this they presented to me during my visit. I will donate the £44 they collected to Bees for Development. The enthusiasm that the pupils demonstrated must give us hope for the future.

### FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2011

**Sat. 16 July 12.00-4.00 pm President's BBQ.** 01275 463117 **Quiz & Games** for all the family. As usual please bring something to cook on the BBQ, drink and a pudding to share...and a broolly!  
**Fri/Sat 29/30 July Portishead Show—see box at side**  
**Sat.13 Aug 2.00pm** Walled Garden Apiary

Winter care and preparing for next year by **David Maslen**  
**Sat 10 Sept. Winscombe Show** Help needed for the stand please and schedule to follow.

**Sat 17 Sept.** Dave Avery's home. 07831 868589

Latest Research by **Ivor Davis**

**Sat 15 Oct. at John Dixon's NOT at Graham Haverson's.**

Talk on what else to do with hive products by **Tony Richards**

*Ffi: please contact Peter Carter 01934 820079*

### Portishead Flower Show

1. Volunteers to man the stand.
2. Honey Show Entries (Entry Forms available July 16 at the BBQ) - this is the first time the George Sims Cup will be awarded.
3. Honey for sale .

*If you can help, please call David Hounsell 01275 844187*

**Help needed**

### Reading the comb

*Ivor Davis NDB*

You may hear beekeepers using this phrase and wonder what on earth they are talking about. It is an approach to beekeeping that develops over time and when you watch an experienced beekeeper inspecting a colony it can sometime seem miraculous that they can inspect a colony in such a short time and give an accurate assessment.

Reading the comb is part of an experienced beekeeper's tool kit and relates to the issue that you do not inspect a colony without a purpose. One of the most important outcomes of the inspection should be 'what do I need to do now?' and 'when should I inspect the colony next time?'. Reading the comb means looking at the brood and stores to assess the state of the colony and how it might develop in the near future. There are a number of points you need to consider:

- ◇ If there are eggs, the colony is queen right and you do not need to find the queen. If you have difficulty finding or seeing eggs then a head light may help as will a magnifying glass. Remember that a frame with eggs is lighter than one with brood or stores . It will also have lots of open cells.
- ◇ If the brood pattern is patchy then there may be a problem somewhere. If you have lots of sealed brood with few patches then the colony is probably doing well.
- ◇ Try to work out the ratio of eggs to larvae to sealed brood. If this is about 1:2:4 the colony is not building much nor is it shrinking. If the number of eggs is less than the average would suggest the queen has gone off lay and you need to find out why. If the egg ratio is a lot higher the queen is doing well and the colony wants to increase in size.
- ◇ Before you remove any brood frames look down into the hive and see where the bees are. If there are 3 or 4 frames with only a few bees on them it is not worth looking at them and you can skip to frames with a lot of bees on them.
- ◇ Make a mental note of the state of the combs and plan to remove ones that are poorly drawn or have dark cells or are misshapen. These frames will always cause a problem and can store disease pathogens.
- ◇ If you put brood foundation into a colony consider removing the supers and feeding. If the colony is very large this is unnecessary but you should ensure that the frames are drawn out quickly.
- ◇ If there are many bees on a frame so that you cannot see the comb, try giving the frame a light shake into the hive to remove the flying bees. Inspection is then much easier.

Finally ignore much of this if you need to find the queen. This is best done by lightly smoking the colony and then progressing logically and smoothly through each frame, looking on both sides.

Some words of advice;

1. When doing this do not be distracted by other things you might see in the colony, otherwise the queen might evade you
2. After a couple of passes give up and try another day unless it is essential for you to find the queen.
3. If you do not find the queen have a quick look in the supers and look for eggs and larvae; she may have escaped from the brood nest.

### Apiary Notes

*Philip Clemente, Apiary Manager 01275 879697 [nerja5@hotmail.com](mailto:nerja5@hotmail.com)*

Sundays at the Apiary are very busy, we have 25 to 30 people most weeks, and most have their own bees now.

We have only had two swarms at the apiary, one from bees supplied by another beekeeper, it had a blue spot queen, the other from a nuc I supplied, they had filled all the comb with nectar and had left no space for the queen to lay in. I will replace this queen.

The Apiary is getting rather full and one member has now taken their bees home and is being mentored by Steve Brain.

There is a good flow on at the moment, so don't get caught out, get those spare supers ready.

*Philip*