Hagley & Stourbridge, with Kidderminster & North East Worcestershire Beekeepers' Associations' Newsletter.
Autumn 2006

ALAN JAMES BISHOP
1940 to 2006

Alan first took a serious interest in bees when he was fourteen years old, although I believe he did the usual boys' trick of stirring up a nest of wasps at a younger age, much to his cost! Alan's Uncle Eric, who was much like Alan in many ways gave him two hives and suggested that he should collect them early one morning. Naturally they gave him such a stinging that he never had any fear again. Of course it could have gone the other way and where would we all have been then?

Eager to learn as much as possible about his new hobby and also I suspect to swell his pocket money, Alan found Mr Brad, as he always called him, in Blakedown and worked for him during the summer holidays, cycling from Colley Gate in order to arrive on time. This was excellent grounding and Alan, who was always a workaholic, took to it with vigour. They travelled all over the area and Wales with Ralph May, Mr Bradford's regular helper. So that was his grounding. He must have been very contented with his lot as his school reports improved dramatically at this time and of course he had met me too by then! Alan told me of the vast quantities of honey which they extracted at that time and his great respect that he had for Mr Brad's knowledge and handling of the bees. He always put his enthusiasm down to the happy times that he spent there, even though it was such hard work.

We jump now to after university and to when we were first married in 1963. The bees were kept at his parent's house until we went to live in the middle of a housing estate in Derby. All went well until a particularly warm spell when the inevitable happened. I became aware of windows being slammed and a few wails from children. We were not popular at all and so Alan decided to curtail his beekeeping activities temporarily until we had somewhere to keep the bees safely. In 1970 we moved back to Stourbridge to start the practice and so Alan looked for sites where he could keep his hives.

Having started with two hives he gradually became the proud owner of 26 hives (far too many for a weekend beekeeper of course, six would be nearer the mark) and he started to do examinations in Apiculture. Never one to do things by halves he took the Preliminary and Intermediate exams in one year. In 1975 we moved to Worcester, the hives stayed in the Midlands and Alan joined the Worcester BBKA. Alan's mother passed away in 1980 and he was very upset for a long time but I believe that the bees helped him through this time. Also he was working for the Senior Exam in Apiculture, which he took and passed in 1981, gaining the best mark in the whole country. He was awarded the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers' prize for that year and had to go to a lunch at the Wax Chandlers' Hall, Gresham Street where he was presented with a certificate and £50.

Alan was still rather down in 1981 and after talking to a friend about Retreats, I wrote to the Abbott at Buckfast Abbey. I told him about Alan and how he was not particularly religious but that he was a good kind person who was grieving for his mother and feeling very down. Also, I told the Abbott that a normal holiday would not be any good to Alan, as he was not one to sit about doing nothing. Because of his love of bees it would be ideal if sometime if he could spend a couple of days with Brother Adam as that would be a wonderful pick-me-up. The Abbott telephoned me to ask when Alan had his next holiday. As luck had it he was just about to have a week off and the Abbott told me to send him down. Alan was thunderstruck at my news and we all went down the Buckfastleigh on the Sunday. The Retreat was to

last a week and fortunately the weather was absolutely perfect. Brother Adam took to Alan and showed him all the intricacies of queen raising and all that that entails. They, Peter Donovan (Br Adam's helper), Brother Adam and Alan, were up with the sun and out on the moors all day only returning at dusk for a meal and bed. Alan said it was wonderful and certainly he returned to his normal self when he came home again. No, he did not decide to be a monk as they ate too many eggs! There were to be two more visits to Buckfast but neither surpassed that first week.

A story that came from Buckfast was that they arrived at one of the apiaries and Bro Adam went forward to help open the gate. He came hurrying back and said with his German accent, "Mr Donovan we cannot go in because zere are people in the field and zey are mating!" Maybe it was the right place for such activities as it was a mating apiary. Anyway, Peter and Alan had to arrange their faces very quickly.

Later in 1981 we returned to Stourbridge to live and Alan became an active member of the Club. He always enjoyed imparting his knowledge to others and encouraging them in their endeavours to understand bees. As you know he helped with the lectures for the Beginners Courses at the Evening Colleges and supported all the activities at the Club including making a honey cake for the show. Alan had the sort of personality that made him approachable, he would have made a good teacher and in fact he nearly became one before opting to train in dentistry at Guy's.

Having written this I am again reminded and even more amazed at the amount of things that Alan managed to cram in during his lifetime. The range of his beekeeping knowledge is well known to all Club Members. I know this from the number of phone calls I used to take for him over the years. He was always polite and infinitely patient no matter how many times he had to repeat himself. His sole aim to give to potential and actual beekeepers the same enjoyment and enthusiasm that he had had throughout his beekeeping career.

Zeldah Bishop

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 27 August Kidderminster Autumn Workshop on extracting wax and honey at the Baptist Church Hall Franche Road

Saturday 16 September at 2pm The Joint Honey Show (all 3 Branches) this year organised by Kidderminster Branch Hagley Free Church Hall

Saturday & Sunday 23 & 24 September. The County Honey Show at the National Agriculture Centre Stoneleigh

Wednesday 18 October at 8pm Celia Davis talks about Communication and Control in Colony Reproduction - Understanding Swarming at the Methodist Church Hall Ring Road Stourbridge

Tuesday 7 November at 8pm Hagley & Stourbridge AGM Methodist Church Hall Ring Road Stourbridge

Wednesday 15 November at 7.30pm Kidderminster Branch AGM at Chaddesley Corbett Village Hall

Wednesday 22 November at 8pm Phil Healey on Beekeeping in Nepal or: our own home spun Microscopy Evening Methodist Church Hall Ring Road Stourbridge

Tuesday 5 December at 8pm. A Study of Social Beekeepers - Our Annual Get Together Methodist Church Hall Ring Road Stourbridge

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TOPICAL TIPS

Summer is about to revert to "normal". But what is this "normal"? There never will be an average year I suppose, just parts of it which conform to the usual pattern, whilst the rest does as it pleases! Rather like that man on the Clapham omnibus doesn't exist, and I doubt if the Clapham omnibus does now either!

We started this season (concluded by the time you read this) with a reasonable Autumn and Winter. The Apiary bees went into the Winter in a sound state as far as we could judge; with "normal" stores most of which were their own (only about half the usual syrup had been fed). Spring found all the colonies alive and well, the weather in the early part of the year was approximately "normal" and allowed the colonies to build up steadily as mother nature intended. Then came a warm June and a very hot July. For our honey flow, we need the first three weeks of July to be hot and sunny to achieve the maximum crop of honey. This year that is just what happened. Of course we are never satisfied, and July became too dry! At the apiary the top two thirds of the willow herb flowers didn't open and are still there because of the drought. If your bees had been up to strength, they too should have given you a nice crop. As the month of July wore on with no let up in the heat, I'm sure the ground was much too dry for any nectar secretion by the flowers. A possible exception to this would be the Himalayan Balsam which only grows where its feet are in water, or at least wet. Provided that source of water doesn't dry up it should have continued to secrete. The apiary bees fly to Cookley to exploit the balsam there.

Hobbyist beekeepers always worry when they (and everybody else of course) have a good season, and panic about getting rid of their crop (and I deliberately used the phrase "getting rid of' rather than "sell"). Honey properly stored will keep for a very long time, losing little of any of its properties, and at a slow rate. Certainly the human palate would be unable to detect much if any change, and the layman (on the Clapham omnibus again I suppose) certainly couldn't. So please don't be in too great a hurry to dispose of it all. Next year may be a bad one, and what would you have to sell to your regular customers then? If they are forced to go elsewhere, they may never come back. The important point of course is in the phrase "properly stored". Poorly stored honey may deteriorate in a very short period, and that man again on the bus would most certainly detect a change for the worst!

Most amateurs pot their entire crop into pots directly it comes from the ripening tank for the sake of their own convenience, and probably from the lack of alternative methods of storage. If you adopt this method (and I'm sure we all started that way!) then it would be best to sell the crop as soon as you can, and certainly before the next season's arrives. Hard crystallisation and severe frosting (that odd whitish pattern inside the glass of the jars which so spoils the look of the honey) are more likely to occur with the passage of time, and if your honey was abused in the extracting (or was not filly ripened by the bees) fermentation becomes a very real possibility. Obviously all retailers of the stuff sell honey in the pot, but bottle only small batches of the honey at a time, and sell that before bottling the next batch. If you are going to do this, where then are you going to store the stuff in the meantime? The traditional way was to use 28 lb tins with push in lids like paint tins. These were tinned on the inside, but sooner or later this tinned layer was damaged, and the steel exposed which of course rusted. The honey would then be badly tainted and quite unfit for sale (It could be fed back to the bees FROM WHICH IT HAD BEEN TAKEN if only you knew which that was!). This problem of rust is easily avoided by putting a plastic bag inside the tin so that the honey doesn't touch the tin, and it works well.

Today however tins have been almost completely replaced for all except those who had a stock of them, by plastic buckets, which are fitted with Tupperware type lids to seal them. These clearly cause no problems with rusting. There is no internal lip to these buckets, so emptying is easier too. If the bucket is filled leaving as little air space as possible between the lid and the surface of the honey, then little moisture contained in that air can contaminate the honey. The plastic is less robust than the steel of the tins, so needs to be handled with some care, or they will split open and you will have a nasty mess n your hands (or, more likely, on your feet!). Once split they cannot be used to store honey (except using a plastic bag again) but they are excellent for the storage of many other things (I hate to throw otherwise useful items like this!). They are not expensive to buy, and will last many years if handled with a reasonable amount of care.

Of course the honey will granulate within the buckets, with time will harden and probably frost too, though this cannot be seen. But none of these points matter if the honey is going to be at least softened before it is bottled. The nicest samples of set honey are obtained by completely liquefying the contents of the bucket to remove the crystallisation, and then adding to that liquid honey a small

quantity of set but softened Rape honey. (Between *5* to 10% is quite enough.) Rape honey as most people know generally granulates very quickly with a very smooth set. The very fine crystals which have formed have to remain small as they are surrounded by many other rapidly forming crystals, so none can become large. Thoroughly mixed into your now liquid honey these small crystals are the “seeds” for further crystallisation, which therefore also proceeds rapidly. Not only is it a smooth set (of small crystal size), but at least in the short term, remains softish only hardening with a longer period of time. Frosting can be reduced if the honey is run into the bottom of the pot (not run down the inside of the pot) and if the pots are stored at a reasonably constant temperature which is not too low.

These tubs containing 30 lbs of honey have to be heated to soften their contents and that can be a problem, for the heating must be gentle and not exceed the lowest possible temperature to achieve the required result. These are about 85 degrees F for softened honey, and 120 degrees F to liquefy completely. Once the desired texture (softened or liquid) remove the source of heat and use the honey as soon as is practical. There is a chemical (HYDROXYMETHYL FURFURAL) which increases in concentration as the honey ages and with heat. The concentration of HMF is used as a measure of the quality of the sample of honey within the EC. Some tropical honeys can exceed the HMF levels even when taken directly from the bees compared to our normal levels just because of the local temperature. A great deal of heating will lead to a caramelisation of taste to the honey, So again try to avoid the application of such heat. Any so spoilt honey is perfectly safe to eat, and is good when used in cooking, but would fall foul of the regulations if sold as honey i.e., not only for catering purposes. If you have access to a disused fudge casing, the heat from a 100 watt bulb in that casing will gently soften your tubs of honey over two or three days, dependant upon the ambient temperatures. The bulb should be controlled by a thermostat, and one taken from an immersion heater is quite suitable for the purpose. This control will prevent overheating. If you are not lucky enough to have such a cabinet, then make one to suit your purpose. All it has to be is a wooden box inside a wooden box with insulation between them. The same system for heating will work just as well.

Your stored honey should be in the 30 lb drums, well sealed from the ingress of moisture from the air. The cooler and more stable the temperature at which it is to be kept, the better. The Americans (or some of them) go to the lengths of refrigerating their honey, but this only becomes necessary when the water content is higher than 17 to 18%. With higher percentages, fermentation is highly likely at room temperatures. A cellar is an ideal place to store honey, but few houses today are blessed with one. Likewise the traditional walk-in pantry is unheard of in modern houses (post WW2). You will have to look around for the best conditions you can find. Do label the tubs with what is in them, and with regard to the (liquid) colour and date of tubbing. Generally use the oldest honey first, but mix what you have to try to achieve a constant colour. Your customers will appreciate this stability in your product. Label OSR honey for what it is, as this becomes your seed honey to promote better granulation than that which occurs naturally with our typical Summer honeys.

With the good harvests being reported, more honey pots should be required. There has been a bulk buying scheme of pots again this year organised by Richard Murgatroyd (Kidderminster) many thanks for your work Richard. The minimum level of order to give a good price is 50 gross, so everybody’s order must be added in if we are to achieve this level at this time of year. If you need jars (minimum order is half a gross) Richard says the price is £26 a gross... Thanks in anticipation for your help in this Richard.

When your crop has been taken from the bees the beekeeping year is concluded. The first act of the next season is to prepare the bees for the coming Winter and Spring. Our speaker at the Branches’ Honey Show would have talked on this had we wished it. It was thought that by September (the date of the show) it would be rather late to suggest these ideas! There’s always another year though if you would like to hear about this preparation.

When you come to place your clearer boards beneath the supers, since you will also have removed the excluders, take the opportunity to have a quick peep in the brood box to see that all is well. There is no need to do a full-scale examination; indeed the temper of the bees would possibly exclude this if you are late in removing your honey! To

check that you have a laying queen, all you need to see is NORMAL sealed brood i.e. the cappings are slightly rounded, not greatly domed as occurs when drone eggs are laid and brood raised in worker cells. If there is such normal brood present in a reasonable amount on a central frame, that's all the evidence you need of the presence of a laying queen. If you haven't already done so, move old and tatty frames to the flanks of the brood box, so that they can be removed in the Spring. Doing this in August will not chill the brood, whereas in September this may well result if the night time temperatures drop greatly. If there isn't any brood present (and the bees' behaviour suggests they are queen-less, make arrangements to unite to a stronger colony. It's much too late for a new queen to be able to build up the colony to stand a reasonable chance of surviving the Winter. Much better to unite and to increase next year; perhaps as part of a swarm avoidance policy. If the bees are too nasty to permit even this level of examination, feed a gallon of syrup and then have a look. Weather permitting; this trick should make them more amenable to your manipulations.

It's quite a good idea to put feeders in place and to give a feed as soon as the supers come off. The colony assumes that another flow is in progress, so the queen is fed to induce her to come into lay again. These young bees when they emerge from their cells are the ones which will survive longest in the Winter and Spring as they will not have been worked so hard. If the Winter is long and hard they will be worth their weight in honey for the Spring! Do make sure though that ALL feeding is completed at the very latest by September 30th and rather earlier than this if possible. It is essential to give the best time in weather which should not be too bad, to ripen fully that syrup before it is sealed within the cells of the brood nest. This will be their only source of food for the Winter and much of the early Spring. If not of good quality, Dysentery may develop within the hive. In the wake of this will come diseases which are endemic within our colonies but usually cause little obvious troubles. Generally each colony on a British Standard brood box will need about 12 kilos of sugar for this period. (Larger colonies will need a bit more, and smaller ones only a little less as they consume more stores than their larger fellows. Thorough feeding in late Summer or early Autumn is much to be preferred to candy feeding in the Winter and syrup feeding (because of hunger) in the Spring, and is much less work for us!

On a final topic, how do you store those empty combs both brood and super? Super combs stored wet (wrapped in dustbin bags if you have to be careful of the mess) seem to be resistant to the ravages of the WAX MOTH larvae (both species of them). Combs stored dry can be destroyed by these little beggars in only a few months, particularly if the Winter is mild. PDB crystals (Para Dichloro Benzene) will repel the females and thus prevent their laying eggs, but will do nothing to kill eggs, larvae or pupae already present. If you really cannot store your combs wet, give them back to the bees to clean out, above the crown board (feed hole open), but beneath the roof. This will cause a great deal of excitement, so do it in an evening so that the greater part of the excitement will be over by morning (bearing your neighbours in mind!). All entrance blocks should by now be in position in case of attempts at robbing by bees or wasps. Some beekeepers leave their supers like this for the Winter, but beware of high winds, and the comments about wax moth above. If you remove the supers from the bees (when the weather has gone cold as they will have left the supers themselves, and clearers will not be needed), build the supers into a stack with a bees proof base and top. A couple of hands full of PDB crystals will deter wax moth adults. If you do leave the supers with the bees, make sure you have a mouse proof cover in place beneath the roof, do not use PDB and weight down the roof! And on a final, final note, readers of previous years will know how I like Top Ventilation for the Winter! So with no apologies for repetition, in October, raise the crown boards with a nail at each corner to allow free ventilation of air up and under the roof and the crown board to blow away that moist air from the bees that can do so much damage to sealed stores in the cold months ahead.

WANTS

With very few changes, the above article was written by Alan Bishop in late 1994. Have you got any old (pre 1999) branch newsletters? They will be returned to you after copying! Call Nick 01562 882145

Editor required - immediate start! Do you think you have what it takes to edit the branch news letter? Are you PC lierate, know what a pdf file is and are able to spare a few hours every quarter? Speak to a branch officer and let them

know

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL BEE UNIT

First of all, a reminder: **Pyrethroid–resistant mites** are on the way. More have been found near Ludlow, near Shrewsbury, and in the region to the North of Birmingham. There is now reason to suspect that some of the winter losses can be explained as Varroa losses, namely where people have treated with Bayvarol or Apistan, confident that these strips still work, and where there were already too many resistant individuals in the mite population. – So, if you want to be sure that your mites will still respond / not respond any more to treatment with the strips, ask your Inspector (that will be me, for most of us) for the test kit, and sacrifice 300 – 400 bees to find out. And please let us know the result.

The NBU has secured 100 k£ worth of funding for **research** looking, in greater detail than in previous years, into the effectiveness of the **shook-swarm treatment of European Foul Brood**. The principle of the project is to take samples of bees and larvae of EFB-infected colonies before the treatment, six weeks after the treatment, once more at the end of the season, and again in the following spring; to analyse all these samples for the level of the bacterium *Melissococcus plutonius* (which causes EFB), and compare the results with data obtained from samples from colonies treated with Oxytetracycline (antibiotic), and also from apparently healthy colonies within an affected apiary, and from healthy colonies in an EFB-free area; the latter two providing something like a background level of the presence of the bacteria.
The project should have got under way at the beginning of the bee season, but was kicked off only recently, as the bee season and the Government's fiscal year don't match, and the funding has been approved only half-way through the bee season. – Still, expect to be asked to support the project by donating approx. 100 bees and 100 larvae when your bees are inspected this season, and one other pair of samples next Spring (more samples, if EFB is found).

Finally, a good piece of news: at last, almost two years after Robin HALL, the **Regional Bee Inspector** for the Western Region, fell ill, the post is being filled again: **Dave SUTTON** who has been acting RBI since Autumn 2004 has been offered the job and is going to accept. – If I was asked for a comment, it would be: Jolly good! – We could not wish for anyone better so succeed

FOR HIRE

The branch extractor is available for hire. Please contact Nick on 01562 882145 to book it. Cost is £6.00 per day inclusive of knife and two stage stainless steel filter. Ripening tanks (£1.00 per week) are also available. Cheques to Hagley & Stourbridge BKA please.

Also available an electric uncapping tray at £3.00 per day