

Diary Dates

Sunday 6th November 2005 - Apiary Meeting. Starts 11:45am. Includes refreshments.

Tuesday 15th November 2005 at 6.30pm - The Bee Improvement Group meeting before the main AGM.

Tuesday 15th November 2005 at 7.30pm - The Bromley branch AGM and honey show cup presentation in the branch club house. Full reports from all officers. Includes refreshments. All Bromley members should attend.

Saturday 26 November 3pm - Kent Education Group Guest Lecture Celia Davis: Mr Bee. To be held at Langton Lecture Theatre, West Kent College, Brook Street, Tonbridge. More details from <http://www.beedata.com/news.htm>

Sunday 4th December 2005 - Apiary Meeting. Starts 11:45am. Includes refreshments.

Please keep a close watch on the Bromley branch website for details of our winter series of lectures. Better still subscribe to our mailing list and we will post information and reminders.

For more information

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Visit our website: <http://www.kentbee.com/bromley>

Join our mailing list by sending an email to:

mailserver@zbee.com with the command in the subject or message body "subscribe bbk" (no quotes) and wait for a confirmation message to complete the subscription.

Bromley Bee News Monthly Update

Published by the Bromley Beekeepers Association

Welcome to the **November 2005** issue of Bromley News.

Render unto Caesar

Sometimes when you try to translate a phrase into another language it doesn't quite have the same impact, does it? For example, the French version of the English tongue twister "She sells sea-shells on the sea shore." comes out as: "Elle vend des coquilles de mer sur le rivage de mer." By the same token when you tell your friends you have spent £101 on buying six pure bred Queen bees, they look at you with a puzzled expression and then someone says, "Do you mean you just spent £101 on perishing insects?" because they don't speak your language. "No, no," I reply, "you don't understand, these are *pure-bred* queens!" They still look at you as if you came from Mars but when you say, "It is an *investment*. It will increase my honey-yield per hive *and* increase my income by 20%." the light goes on. "Ah, I see; *more money!*"

I do not consider myself an evangelist for beekeeping but like many of us my enthusiasm sometimes provokes interest in the subject. A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to preach the word to a friend who had bought a Red Mason Bee nest and was intrigued by the subject. I took him to see some of my bees and he thoroughly enjoyed the day out but seemed sceptical when I tried to explain some of the simple economics of beekeeping. There are two ways of approaching the subject of bees and money.

System A – Keep bees and spend money.

System B – Keep bees and make money.

In case any of you have got religion and believe it is sinful to make money out of bees (by this principle, I doubt there are many Vegan beekeepers) read no further, all you need is System A.

Some of us, not having won the Lottery or being blessed by a highly successful career in the similar pursuits of stock-broking, managing loose women, being chartered accountants, estate agents, drug dealers or professional footballers, see beekeeping as a way of boosting our finances whilst enjoying the more esoteric aspects of the Craft. According to System B, there are Ten Commandments of Beekeeping which apply (I found them on the top of a mountain carved on some old slabs of stone which I was going to use as hive-stands).

Law 1. Thou shalt not treat your bees like the children of thy loins, clothe them in fine raiment and talk to them with tongues (the technical expression is anthropomorphism but the spell-checker and I can't agree how to spell it.)

Law 2. On the other hand Thou shalt take good care of your bees and your beehives and preserve them from all evil.

Law 3. Thou shalt Market thine honey and all manner of things that shall flow from ye hives with great fervour and joy.

Law 4. Thou must not seek advice from Antient beekeepers for they speaketh with no concord - liken until the builders of the Tower of Babel.

Law 5. Thou shalt spend thy shekels wisely and render ye a full accounting unto thine computer.

Law 6. Thine enjoyment shall be leavened with the need to add to thy store of shekels.

Law 7. Thou **shalt** covet thy neighbour's queens as well as their spouse (used to be "wife" but this should also apply to lady-beekeepers.)

Law 8. Thou shalt keep thine ear pressed firmly unto the earth and await the glad tidings of Thorne's Sales, that thou may make frugal increase of thine equipment with all dispatch.

Law 9. Thou must never turn aside from an offer of pasturage for thine hives. For the time shall surely come, and the wisest of us know not when, that the Grand Sanhedrin (called the Allotments Committee) look upon ye with disfavour and instruct thee to quit thy plot.

Law 10. Study thy Craft. Look with gladness on new things and finally; ***Smite the Mite!***

If you keep the Laws and make a determined effort to treat your bees with respect but focus on the concept of the Craft paying its way, you can succeed in supplementing your income considerably.

My friend asked how much profit I reckoned on making per hive. Without going into all the caveats about weather, vandalism, terrorists, swarming, disease, friends who want freebies and other horrors, I gave him the following formula – it seems to work for me but if you know better, please, please tell me.

One hive should produce between 30 and 120lb of honey, possibly less or more. The amount will depend on a lot of factors -see previous paragraph. As a cautious person, I would suggest – count on 40lb-50lb year-on-year and be pleasantly surprised by more. This allows for bad years. Set your price by what the market will stand. Locally I find that at a Farmer's Market, Craft Fair etc, £3 to £3.50 per lb is realistic. Health Food shops, Garden Centres and other places will want to pay you, say, £2.50 and sell it for £4.50. Your friends and neighbours (if you charge them) can be persuaded at £2.50 easily. So a well-managed hive should give you at least £100-120 gross profit from honey in most years.

Other hive products such as candles and beeswax polish will help to offset your costs. The market in propolis apparently nosedived some time ago along with typewriters, Andy Pandy and Political Commissars in Russia.

Costs include replacing equipment and wax, packaging (jars and labels etc) for the product, transport, bribes to neighbours who get stung etc. but if this amounts to more than 15% of your gross – take another hard look and see where you can save without compromising quality. For example buy an "Open-All-Hours" type of grocer's delivery bike for £20 or £30 from E-Bay, tart it up, have your name and advert professionally sign-written on it and ride to your apiary and the pub instead of using the gas-guzzler. (Obviously you chain it to the lamp-post outside the pub.)

It is still an offence to ride a bike under the affluence of alcohol, by the way.

Have a well-researched programme to replace queens and persistently find new markets for your product it will go a long way to producing a consistent profit. Unfortunately costs can vary but even so, in *normal* circumstances, you should be

left with at least £100 net profit per hive (I plan for £140). Twelve hives will give you a useful £100 per month – probably more. Pays for necessities like the Pinot Grigio, just about. Your set-up costs are reasonable – particularly if you avoid paying top price for equipment – but these costs need to be amortised against the profit in early years. If you make a conscious effort to maintain your equipment and colonies carefully, Professional honey farmers tend not to buy-in queens, they breed their own. Once you have established the strain you want to work with, you should consider doing the same. Joining a bee-breeding group makes a lot of sense. Honey farmers in America, Denmark, Israel and other places often routinely replace their queens once a year. This makes good commercial sense regarding fecundity and significantly reduces swarming. If you can learn by this and apply it, you may find a similar advantage even if you do not want to amass the biggest apiary in England. Finally remember, Profit is only a dirty word if you don't make it. If fact, running your hives to make a profit should encourage you to bring a degree of excellence to the way in which you keep your bees – with an obvious benefit to them too. Even, dare I say it, people who kept slaves in less enlightened times found it more profitable to ensure the well-being of their slaves. Sentiment combined with practicality is a good combination for those who know which factor to emphasise when the chips are down. ***Mike Oliver***

Apiary News

Once again the National Honey Show is in the past but what a good show it was. The new honey stands and wine racks were well received and made a terrific difference to the time taken in putting up the show. The only disappointment was that the number of entries was down yet again and the number of paying visitors was also down, not a lot but it follows a continuing trend over the past few years. The executive committee is looking very hard to reverse this trend and any ideas would be welcome.

Things are looking a little gloomy at the apiary, everything damp and fallen leaves everywhere, but it's so nice to see the bees come out at the slightest sign of sunshine.

There has been no activity from the big WBC at the far end of the apiary for several weeks and so one of Sunday's jobs will be to take that one down and see what went wrong. I am hoping to get our observation hive and one of the mini-nukes through the winter as with global warming our winters don't seem so harsh as they used to be, so a little attention in that direction will not go amiss.

If you are looking for something interesting to look at these dark nights try the National Honey Show website as I am told the pictures are really worth an inspection. www.honeyshow.co.uk

Peter Springall