

## KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

### Orpington Branch Newsletter November 2009

First a reminder about subscriptions which should have been with Tony Trinick by October 1st.

At our meeting this month Alan Kime started by apologising for his bad throat but kept talking for almost two hours. He is obviously a microscopist first but also a beekeeper. He keeps his bees on an allotment and was horrified to find on his return from Apimonda that his hives had been sprayed with insecticide. Three of the four colonies were dead and the fourth in a bad way. The bee inspector thinks it is too risky to use the hives again. Bee Disease Insurance does not cover loss of bees due to this cause so he has had a big financial loss in addition to losing his honey. He notified the police without a great deal of hope and thinks he might know which other allotment holders could have done it. Unless there is a specific regulation against it at an allotment, bees are allowed. Some gardeners are much more intolerant than beekeepers.

We are all very aware these days of the problems caused by varroa, EFB and AFB. We treat against varroa and watch out for signs of the others. But what do we do about acarine and nosema which are hardly mentioned these days? The trouble with these infections is that you need microscopes to confirm that they are present in your bees. He thinks that every organisation like ours should run two microscopy clinics each year, one in the Spring and one in the Autumn, at which every colony of all members is examined for these two infections. The snag is that we would need two microscopes, one low power binocular and one high power monocular. We could probably afford these but they have to be looked after when they are not in use, but more importantly we need people who know how to use them and do the examinations and are prepared to do so. To test one colony I guess might take a quarter of an hour if you're lucky so it is quite a commitment.

You need a sample of 30 bees and Alan does not favour catching bees that are allowed to escape through a hole in the crown board since these are hive bees. He prefers catching flying bees as they leave the hive. He manages this with a plastic bag as they emerge and then transfers them into a jar with a mesh lid. I think a good supply of sting remedy is needed for this! A second jar containing ethyl acetate is placed mouth to mouth on the first to kill the bees. He described how you mount each of five bees on a cork under the low-power instrument using a double pin, remove the head then the collar and first pair of legs from the thorax to enable the breathing tubes (trachia) to be seen. If they are discoloured that is the sign of acarine. I have also done it but with more difficulty using a magnifying glass. You grind up the abdomens of the remaining bees with a little water, put a smear on to a microscope slide under the high-powered microscope and if you see something that looks like grains of rice your bees have nosema.

The best way of finding out about this is to go on a microscopy course where you will have the chance to do it.

A last reminder about the National Honey Show on October 20th-31st and don't forget the lecture at Lenham on November 15th and the AGM and Harvest Supper on Wednesday November 11th at Atomwide.

Overleaf is a contribution from Eric who describes himself as the resident eccentric.



This is a picture of the Apiary as it was just after we moved in many years ago. Thank you to Peter Burden for letting me have it.

Frank

## THE DARWINIAN SOLUTION

Nobody seems to know exactly what it is that is wrong with our bees - parasites, viruses, insecticides, climate change etc. Charles Darwin might have had an insight were he here today for, after all, it was he who discovered the relationship with the domestic cat and local flora. Some plants need to be pollinated by bumble bees with their longer tongue and bumble bees in their turn need the abandoned nests of mice in which to breed. As the domestic cat population increased there were fewer mice and thus fewer bumble bees and less fruit. Who but a genius like Darwin could work that out? So, if we want to find out what is wrong with our bees we must stop asking the same tired old conventional questions and start to find cause and effect beyond the obvious. It is time to let our minds wander and to generate what politicians call blue sky thinking outside the box.

With this in mind I sat down on my favourite garden seat with my pipe and a hot mug of tea and let my mind wander. It eventually wandered back to the Gold Coast in the days long ago when I was a very young soldier living in the bush under conditions not a lot different to that of Dr Livingstone. There were lots of strange and unexplained things there apart from black magic and ju-ju. For instance there was Ladbrooke who had a strong hold over the native mind. Every so often the camp labourers, dhobi boys, grass cutters etc, would assemble and sit cross-legged in front of his hut and listen respectfully to his lectures on mathematics. I paid no attention to the nonsense at the time save to observe the attentiveness of the "class" which would be the envy of schoolteachers today and the title of a particular lesson which was "Richter's Law of Reciprocating Proportions". Looking back I now remember that Ladbrooke had only passed his Army Certificate of Education Second Class to qualify for promotion to Corporal after three attempts. So what could be the quality of his lectures and what benefit to his "pupils" most of whom could only speak pidgin English at best. Then there was the invitation to cocktails at the Governor's residence Flagstaff House. This was my first official function and an occasion to wear formal mess kit. I looked forward to it but Ladbrooke commented that it would be like getting into bed with a Duchess - the privilege being greater than the pleasure. He was right but what a strange way of putting it. Now after fifty years I recall that he had once been a groom at the Royal Stables at Windsor. Surely . . . ?

Prior to the Gulf War Donald Rumsfeld said that there are known knowns and unknown knowns. Things we know we know and things that we do not know and things that we do not know that we do not know. And my old granny said that there are some things that are best not known and that ignorance is bliss.

Now I find that my pipe has gone out (again) and my tea has gone cold and despite all the effort I have put into this rambling over strange things I can find no relevance whatever to beekeeping in the way that Darwin did with cats and plum blossom. However, my mind continues to wander as my wife will attest, and if during the lone watches of the night something useful crosses my mind, please be assured that you will all be the first to know.

Eric Ward