Combings

The newsletter of the York and District Beekeepers Association.

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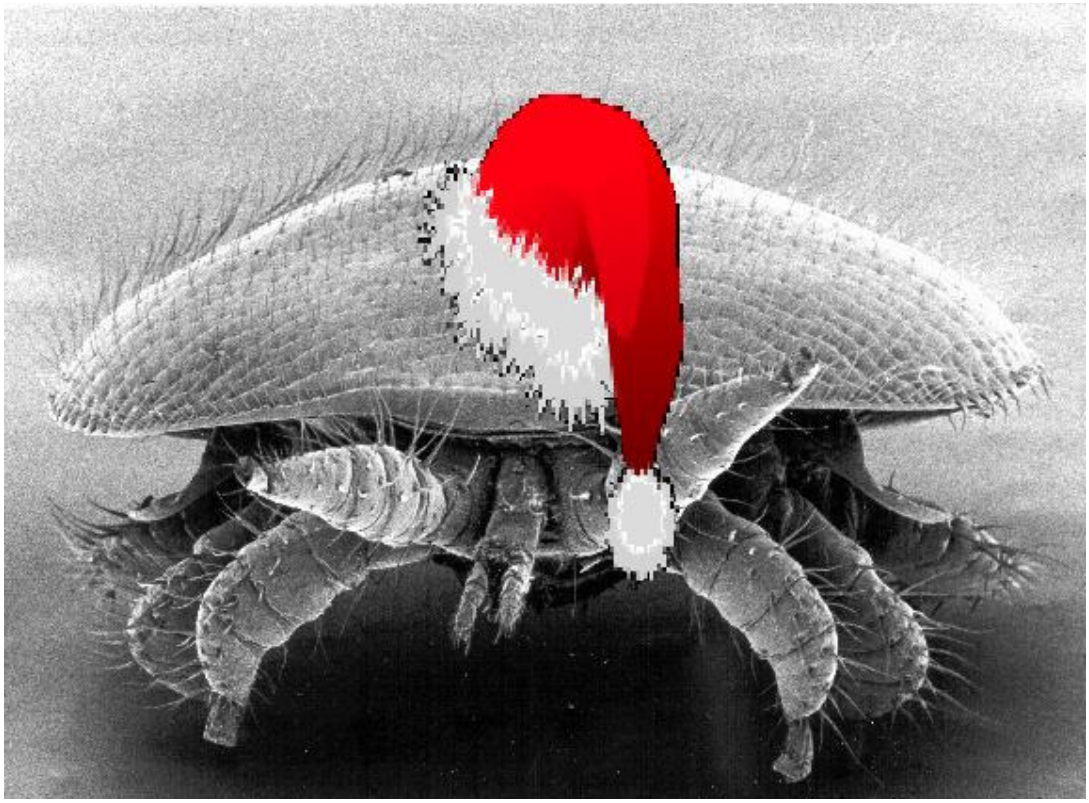
Winter 2013.



www.yorkbeekeepers.com

The password for the members area of the YDBKA website is:

beesatyork

"Combings" is the newsletter of the York & District Beekeepers Association. Views expressed in the newsletter are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Association as a whole or of the editors.

Contributions to, and comments on "Combings" are always welcome. We would particularly appreciate your pictures for "Reader's Hives".

Please send any copy or comments to: Combings@gmail.com

Assistant Editor is Alan Johnston.

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The last date for copy for the next edition is:

18th February 2014.

Two Eds.

The long slide into autumn and winter 2013 may well have already had an impact on the stores our colonies hold, as being active results in the bees using more honey than when in a winter cluster.

I met our new Seasonal Bee Inspector, Adrian Wilford a couple of weeks ago and he told me that he had seen colonies on the brink of starvation in September and he urges us to check on colony reserves and feed fondant if necessary.

Don’t leave months between your colony checks, every couple of weeks a quick check is all that is needed - and be prepared with the fondant!

Now is the time to be planning your oxalic acid treatment; if you are unsure about how (or if) to do this, there will be a practical demonstration at the Murton apiary in early January, when the Association bees will be treated. As there is little or no brood at this time, the Varroa are living on the adult bees and so are easier to access with the acid, which dissolves their biting mouth-parts; it’s not pretty but neither are Varroa-damaged bees.

The date of the demonstration will be notified via email as it is weather-dependent.

A few “Thank-You’s”

In the absence of a report about the AGM, Two Eds would like to take the opportunity to say a few words of thanks to those Committee members who stood down at the last meeting.

Longest-serving of those is Sue Hesp, who has acted as both Chair and Vice-Chair in her time, but should perhaps be best-remembered for her excellent work in organizing the education courses for the beginners for 10 years. Sue organized both theory and practical courses but, just as importantly has been a constant point of reference to those joining YDBKA. It can be all too easy for new members to feel isolated in a sea of new faces, in a strange craft: Sue provided continuity and a friendly face, and cups of tea, and bees, and advice for years.

Certainly the older tutors have put themselves out for Sue in ways that they might not so readily have done for anyone else; her contribution cannot be over-stated. Those who would now lead could do no better than foster the sorts of one to one relationships Sue had developed and should recognise the distinction between information transfer and real communication. Always our Queen Bee!

Generally essential to the smooth running of an association are those who fulfil the roles of Treasurer and Secretary, and we have been most fortunate to have had John Thompson and David Bough firmly anchoring those two corners of the tent. Both have been class acts and have done much unseen work that has helped the association run smoothly. John has done fine work with the Bossall apiary in addition to his Treasurer duties. David has organized excellent programmes and bulk purchasing. Thanks guys!

These three have been replaced on the Committee by Adrian Burnside (education) and Patricia Miller as Treasurer. André Scruton continues as Secretary.

From the Chair

Paul Taylor writes:

There has been much interest in the Queen Rearing Course that we are proposing to run in 2014. I understand it is over-subscribed and this must say something about what our members want. As you would expect, there are many views on the subject of queen–rearing but what all beekeepers can

agree on is that the queens need to be replaced so the course will help address this.

I have often wondered how you can tell the amount of food reserves in a hive without opening it up. Gently lifting one side or hefting is the accepted method but my hives are all different. So I have put an eye screw into each floor and I lift the hive with a 0 to 32 lb fishing balance. Whilst this does not give me the weight of the hive, over time, it does give a rough indication of how much the colony has used up its reserves. Keeping a record through the winter helps to keep track of what is going on but do remember to clear the roof of any snow first! Happy Christmas.

Paul Taylor

My thanks to Julia Coates who has shared this experience with us:

Alarming behaviour or nature protecting the future?

I'm a very keen, novice bee keeper with a question nobody seems to be able to answer. Perhaps you can help.

My father has kept bees as long as I can remember and my role with the bees up to recently has revolved around crusty bread, full-fat butter and a spoon! However this year my interest has not solely been sampling, but maintaining and nurturing my father's hives and this has involved taking the hives up the North Yorkshire Moors; a trip for many beekeepers when the heather is in full bloom.

This leads me onto my question, please bear with me as I'll need to set the scene: The heather came into bloom and the time was right for the bees to make the journey up to a secret location (usually with any farmer who liked honey or ale…) on the moors. We had roped in my friend, Mike, for muscle power and waited until the last bees were back in the hives in the late evening. Securing the hives on the trailer was a lengthy procedure but the journey would take a good hour, so no stone was left unturned. Or so we thought!

Little did I know how much hives can move on the back of a trailer, no matter how secure they seem. After having to make two stops, we reached our destination with only a stony, pot-hole ridden track to cross then we were home and dry. By the light of our head-torches, we set-up the hives and beat a hasty retreat. Being keen novices, both Mike and I couldn't resist making the journey a couple of days later to check on our precious bees and we found that outside four of the hive was a pile of still-live juvenile bees. This was a shock, what was wrong? Why were the workers throwing out what looked like healthy bees? I sought advice and as a result, we treated the bees for Varroa and put the experience down to a high parasite burden. It wasn't until my father went fishing with a friend who in his younger years had been a professional bee farmer. Their conversation turned, inevitability, to bees and the problem we had had with our bees. Dad's friend, Duggy, mentioned whenever he took hives up to the moors, if the weather was cold or the journey had been difficult, the workers would drag the drones out by their tongues, and leave them outside the entrance! Unfortunately I didn't check whether our cast-out juveniles were drones or worker bees!

Has anybody else experienced this behaviour?

DVD Review

"More than honey" Issued by "Eureka" No. EKA 40373

The approach of the festive season usually triggers a Christmas-pressie book review: this time it's a DVD review, but what a cracker (pun intended!)

"More than honey" received a brief mention in one of the recent Sunday glossies, and a subsequent visit to HMV quickly tracked it down. Narrated by John Hurt (of "Alien" exploding-chest fame), the film focuses on the American colony collapse phenomenon (CCD) and contrasts their large-scale beekeeping methods with the smaller-scale, more sensitive approaches in the USA, Austria and Switzerland. I've watched dozens of bee-related films, but the photography – and especially the close-up work – is simply breathtaking. From the opening shot of a hatching queen, to a mini-helicopter filming bees in flight, "More than honey" is a visual treat. But the close-ups are disturbing in equal measure, when they record the casual destruction of thousands of bees in industrial uncapping methods, feeding via tankers, and spray poisoning.

It concludes with a brief glimpse at Chinese agricultural workers pollinating fruit trees by hand due to the absence of pollinating insects in a polluted landscape…the future? It is certainly a warning not to break the unwritten covenant that exists between bees and beekeepers when we puts bees in a hive and expect them to produce a few jars of honey for us.

At under £10, this DVD is an absolute bargain. It runs for 90 minutes (plus extras) and is a must-see for anyone who cares for bees "more than honey".

Top tip:

When feeding fondant, put it directly above the cluster (shine a torch between the frames if you can't see where the cluster is situated) on the top bars, using an Apiguard eke to provide the space. This makes it easy for the bees to find.

If the fondant has become wedge-shaped in the box, leave it in a warm place and flatten it with a rolling pin before use, the crown board will then sit flat above the fondant, resting on the top edge of the eke.

Thanks to John Ellwood, for this appreciation.

When I volunteered to write a summary of the experiences of the "Bossall Trainee Beekeepers" for Combings, it came as no surprise to read in the responses from my fellow-trainees, enthusiastic praise and gratitude for John, Nigel, David et al from all eight respondents (plus myself.) We were quite overwhelmed by the time and total commitment given to us on the course.

We appreciate the personal cost to the instructors of raising nine nucs from their own Apiaries. Our outcomes vary widely, largely due to some having problems in the early stages, but we have all come through the summer with live colonies and are desperately hoping they survive the winter, having learned

how easy it is for experienced beekeepers to lose colonies over the winter months.

Surely the most successful of our number must be Mike, who is forging ahead with four hives, and harvesting 40 lbs in summer, 20lbs of cut comb and 20lbs of heather honey, making candles and brewing some mead!!! Will his quality match up? We may find out at the Honey Show [see results on page 10. Ed] Others have managed to harvest smaller amounts this season and between us we have coped with such things as collecting a swarm, loss of a queen, managing a brood and a half and battling with wasps and hornets! It should also be said that we find the hobby most interesting and satisfying regardless of the honey (or lack of it) produced. It seems that, between us, we have extracted 120lbs and all confident (!) we have left our colonies with sufficient supplies for a normal winter.

Thanks again to YDBKA.

Varroa on Youtube!

As part of the USDA national survey of honey bee pests and diseases, this video was developed to train novice and experienced beekeepers to detect and identify Varroa mites

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pg3J_ufsR9A&feature=youtu.be

YDBKA Honey Show 2013.

This year's Show judge was Alan Woodward. In his first visit to YDBKA, Alan spotted some interesting basic errors – such as honey which had part-granulated in the jar, a jar which wasn't properly filled – not show standard! And there was the spider suspended in the honey…

The Honey Show cup winner 2013 was Martin Ainsley, with a total of 27 points.

Second place was taken by Mary Ellwood with 13 points

Third placed was Mike Wallis with 11 points

The best exhibit in show belonged to Martin Ainsley

Best jar of honey was produced by Martin Ainsley.

The John Fuller trophy for a block of wax weighing more than 1lb was won by Mary Ellwood.

Well done to all!

What is happening at Fera?

There are changes afoot, but as yet it is unclear as to how, or if, the Bee Inspectorate will change.

A project looking at a new business model for the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) has been announced by Environment and Science Minister Lord de Mauley. Defra is beginning a 'market sounding' exercise to discuss options for a possible new joint venture with potential partners which will enable Fera to grow while continuing to provide high quality services to government.

Varroa: the ever-present threat.

We make no apologies for making Varroa part of every issue of "Combings". There are many threats to our colonies but most beekeepers don't see AFB, a few suffer the ravages of EFB, Acarine probably goes unnoticed by many and (as yet anyway) Small Hive Beetle and Tropilaelaps are just an exotic threat; but we all have a duty of care to ensure we do all we can to keep Varroa numbers as low as possible. So, a reminder of the basics: The varroa mite, *Varroa destructor* is considered to be the most serious honey bee pest which now occurs almost worldwide. Most unprotected honey bee colonies will die from the effects of Varroa within one or two years. So, it is imperative that beekeepers become familiar with and apply the latest Varroa mite control recommendations.

History

The Varroa mite's natural host is the Asian honey bee, *Apis ceranae*, and it seldom reaches a destructive level in this species. Varroa mites were found on specimens of Asian bees collected in 1942 and are stored in Museum Moscow. Varroa mites were first discovered in the same USSR region on European honey bees, *Apis mellifera*, in 1964. A rapid and multidirectional spread of the mite occurred within the USSR. Varroa was first detected in West Germany in 1977. The mite continued to spread and is now found throughout the world within the natural limits of honey bee distribution.

Biology

Varroa mites can be found on adult honey bees, on the brood and in the hive debris. The adult mite has eight legs and is reddish brown, oval and is flattened in shape. The flattened

body confirmation allows them to hide between the abdominal segments of the bee and go unnoticed by the beekeeper.

The adult female mite is about 1.1 mm long and 1.5 mm wide; and is visible to the naked eye, the mite being about the size of pinhead. The male Varroa mite is considerably smaller and light tan in colour.

When brood is present in the hive, an adult female mite will enter an uncapped larval cell (5-5.5 days old). After the cell is sealed, the mite will lay approximately five eggs. Egg to adult stage requires 5-6 days for male mites, and 6-7 days for females, mating takes place within the cell between the siblings. The nymph stages feed on the developing brood, often causing deformities in the developing bee. The parent, along with her newly-mated offspring, leaves the cell just as the young honey bee emerges. Adult honey bees serve as an intermediate host and a form of transportation (the phoretic stage) for the newly emerged mites. Male mites and any immature female mites are left behind in the cell to die. Life span of Varroa females is reported to be 2-3 months in summer and 6-8 months in winter. Mite populations increase rapidly during the heavy brood rearing season.

Varroa mites have piercing and sucking mouthparts and feed on the haemolymph or "blood" of honey bee adults, larvae and pupae. In heavy infestations, pupae may not develop into normal adult bees and several mites per cell (five or more per pupa) may result in death. Adult bees that emerge may have misshapen wings, deformed legs, shortened abdomens, and may weigh less than mite-free raised honey bees. These heavily infested bees may be found in front of the hive, unable to fly. Other symptoms of heavy mite infestation include spotty

brood pattern and the appearance of a weak colony with low morale.

Varroa mites can live only a few days without a blood meal from an immature or adult bee. Varroa mites are spread from colony to colony by drifting bees, especially drones. Mites can also be spread with package bees, queens, and swarms.

Beekeepers must use an effective method of mite detection and periodically survey for pest level.

Did you know?

Although the recipe for Drambuie is a closely guarded secret, another honey drink can be made at home.

This is Meg Dod's recipe (1826), found in Eva Crane's "A Book of Honey".

Atholl brose uses a pound of dipped (best quality liquid) honey, put in a basin with enough cold water to dissolve it (about a teacupful). Stir with a silver spoon. When well mixed, add gradually 11/2 pints (0.85 litres) of whisky. Stir briskly until froth begins to rise. Bottle and keep tightly corked.

With an eye on the potential threat posed by the Small Hive beetle, this may be of interest:

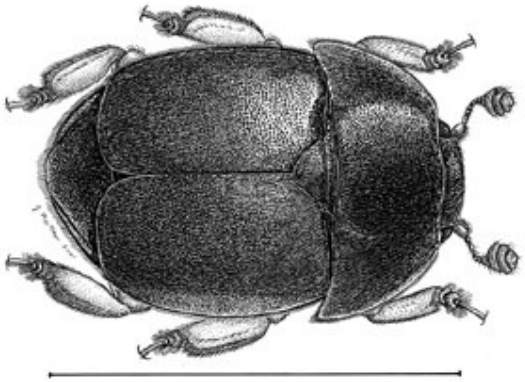
Beetle Baffle give bees a fighting chance against a major threat, the Small Hive Beetle

From the Mississippi Business Journal dated 15 November 2013 by Becky Gillette.

There is worldwide concern about the decline in populations of honeybees that not only provide honey but pollination for many crops. Insects are responsible for pollinating about a third of the world's crops, and honeybees do about 80 percent of that.

One major problem with the decline in bees is Colony Collapse Disorder, which has been linked to the pesticide neonicotinoid, leading to that class of pesticides being banned in the European Union.

Another serious problem is predation by the Small Hive Beetle (SHB). The SHB larvae eat bee eggs, larval bees, pollen and honey, said Haynes Haselmaier, who has 12 beehives and about 500,000 bees on his property in Pearl River County.



The SHB eventually despoil the hive so badly that the bee colony flees the hive to seek a new home.

"The beetles remain and continue to breed and lay eggs until there is nothing in the abandoned hive that represents a food source," Haselmaier said. "The damage frequently includes the loss of a viable bee colony as well as ruined frames and foundation on which the bees build wax comb. The comb cells are the chambers used to store pollen, honey and new bees until they complete pupation. Beetles lay their eggs in many

places inside the hive. Sometimes some beetles join the leaving bees, so there is almost no escape from the SHB pestilence."

Many beekeepers have already lost too many hives to the beetles and given up beekeeping. In only a few years after the SHB was discovered in this country in 1996, some commercial beekeepers reported losing thousands of hives and much equipment.

"Devastating perfectly describes the consequences of SHBs becoming established in a hive. They have a huge reproductive capacity and the bees cannot kill them. Even the strongest hives, without effective intervention from the beekeeper, are likely to fail eventually. Some hives have gone from highly productive to zero bee population in as little as two or three weeks. Devastating also accurately describes the financial impact of beetle infestation on the beekeeper, both small and large. Those who have not yet had misfortune due to the SHBs eventually, almost certainly, will."

After having lost several hives to beetle infestation, Haselmaier decided to observe beetle behaviour in his hives on his own and with an open mind. He recalls looking at one of his queen excluders, and wondering if a selective barrier could keep the queen out of the supers, why couldn't a different type of selective barrier allow a bee to go where it needs to, but effectively block access to a very much smaller SHB?

"The theory was simple," said Haselmaier, who has been a beekeeper for 30 years and comes from a family that has been in beekeeping for about 100 years. "Install a barrier in the hive below the area where beetles can do damage that does not represent a problem for the bees. I took a few measurements

of bees and beetles, as well as a comparison of their anatomy and made some prototypes that have performed far beyond my original expectations."

The result is his invention, the Beetle Baffle, the only selective barrier for the SHB. He said it is not a trap but functions 24/7 to thwart movement of the SHBs within a hive.

"It is important because it allows bees to move to move in and out of the hive as they please, but beetles can only cross it in a downward direction. Once below the barrier, they are unable to return to the sensitive parts of the hives where they do great damage. Simply put, the Beetle Baffle gives bees a fighting chance against the SHB. Even heavily infested hives can frequently be saved by adding our selective barrier system."

The Beetle Baffle, which was featured in the October issue of Bee Culture magazine, begins to work immediately and Haselmaier said simple field trials have established that the barrier does not harm the bee colony and that it does reduce the numbers of SHBs in the hive significantly.

NB. SHB is about the size of a ladybird – not the size if the illustration! Ed.

The Wounded Cupid

Cupid as he lay among

Roses by a bee was stung.

Whereupon in anger flying

To his mother, said thus crying;

Help! Oh help! Your Boy's a dying.

And why, my pretty lad, said she?

Then blubbering replyed he,

A winged Snake has bitten me,

Which country people call a Bee.

At which she smil'd; then with her hairs

And kisses drying up his tears;

Alas! Said she, my Wag! If this

Such a pernicious torment is:

Come tell me then, how great's the smart

Of those, thou woundest with thy dart!

Robert Herrick

1648

Honey diet – could put on £- pounds for beekeepers!

I was alerted to the following, which appeared in the Daily Mail:

What if someone told you that you could drop a dress size by Christmas simply by eating a spoonful of honey before bed each night? It sounds far too good to be true, but it's actually the keystone of a revolutionary new, scientifically backed way to slim.

The Honey Diet harnesses the proven powers of honey to trigger metabolic changes that ensure you won't succumb to diet-busting sugar cravings, and mean you even burn fat while you sleep. There's no calorie counting, no expensive diet foods, no draconian starvation plan - and you can easily lose up to 3lbs a week.

Extracted from THE HONEY DIET by Mike McInnes, published by Hodder & Stoughton on January 2 at £13.99. © Mike McInnes 2014.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year.

Reader's Hives

This edition's picture is of the YDBKA Bossall apiary site and was sent in by John Ellwood; it shows quite a few readers and their hives!