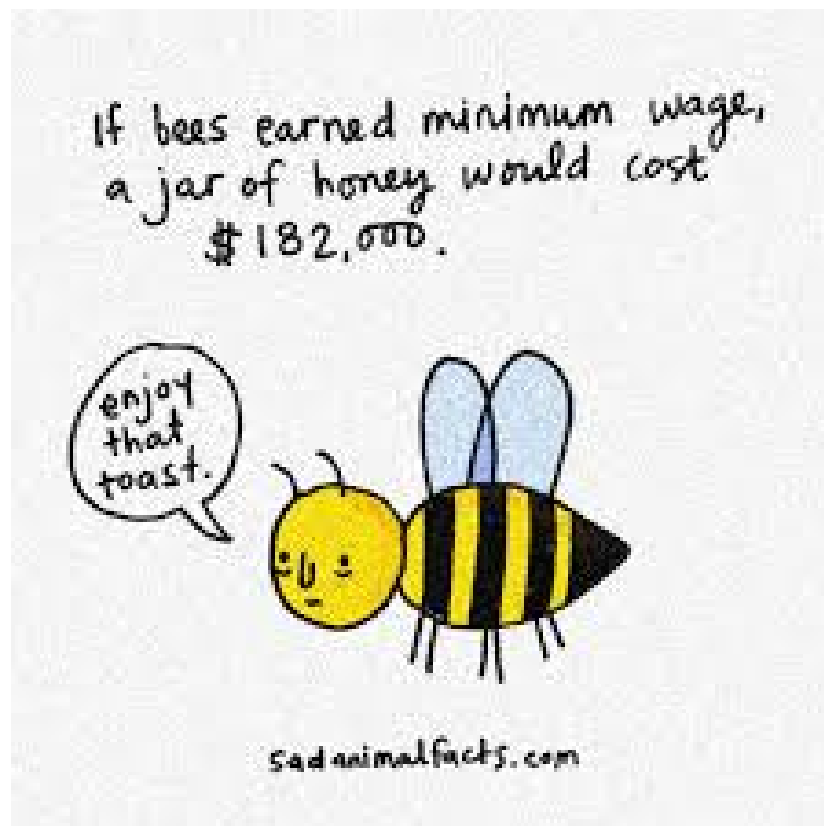


Combing

The newsletter of the York and District
Beekeepers Association.

Issue No. 56

Winter 2015.



York and District Beekeepers 2014/15

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"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 editor.

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

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

Combings Editor: Kate Wallace

Combings is published quarterly.

Please note that the last date for copy for the next edition is:

18th February 2016.

Two Eds.

Another season over; not a particularly good one for most of us, poor weather meant the bees were confined indoors for long spells so no huge honey harvests were reported locally. The weather also affected queen rearing, with an unsuccessful time for most of us and then there were the wasps... Oh well, maybe next year will be marvellous!

A well-attended AGM in October saw the election of this year's committee and the appointment of John Fuller as vice-

president. John is a good friend to many of us but in case you yet have to meet him, he has written his own introduction on pages six and seven.

The AGM benefitted from a talk ("A year in the life") by Ged Marshall, who as well as being well known as a queer rearer of excellent reputé is also a bee farmer. The talk was most interesting. Thank you to Janet Cole who organises our first-rate programme.

Alan's stint on the committee is now over and he is back as assistant editor of "Combings"; we are Two Eds once more.

Don't neglect your bees in the winter months, check the hives regularly for damage and feed fondant when necessary. If in doubt, feed!

Have a very Happy Christmas and all the best for 2016.

New Apiary Manager

I am pleased to report that a new Apiary Manager has been appointed; Martin Ainsley, one of our long-standing members, will take over in March next year. The current incumbent, Alan Johnston will give the usual oxalic acid demonstration in December or early January as his swansong. The date of the demonstration is weather-dependent and therefore will be notified via email.

Thanks to Paul Taylor for his report on this year's Show.

Honey Show 2015

Congratulations to Ann Parnaby, who swept the board!

This year's winner of the Honey Show Cup with a total of 23 points was Ann Parnaby.

2nd place with 11 points was Martin Ainsley.

3rd place with 10 points was Peter Allanson.

The winner of the John Fuller Trophy for a block of wax weighing over 1lb in weight - Ann Parnaby.

The Best Exhibit in the show - Ann Parnaby.

The David Gray Trophy awarded for the Best Jar of Honey - awarded to Ann Parnaby.

Honey Show judge, Ivor Flatman spoke in his closing remarks about the need to have less than 20% water in honey; he saw some instances of very runny honey. However he was pleased with the number and quality of entries in Class 1: Clear light honey, but the entries for all Novice Classes was disappointingly low.

There were a good number of entries of Honey for Sale, with some delightful labels. Ivor pointed out, for those who made their own labels, that the weight of honey must be shown in 4mm font, also that the best before by date or the lot number, must be visible on the front label of the jar.

For candle making, Ivor recommended dipping the wick into molten wax and letting it set before adding it in the candle. Several of the candles exhibited did not light or stay alight because of the lack of wax in the wick.

I spoke to this year's Cup winner, Ann Parnaby, after the show and she told me she will be glad to get her kitchen floor cleaned of wax splashes!

Did you know?

Experiments with queen bees indicate that they use their forelegs to differentiate between drone and worker-sized cells (she needs to be able to tell the difference in order to lay fertilized eggs in worker cells and unfertilized eggs in the drone cells). If the tips of the forelegs are amputated, she continues to lay eggs, but produces a mixture of fertilized and unfertilized eggs which are not laid in the correct sized cell.

My thanks to our new vice-president, John Fuller, for writing his own introduction! You may be interested to know that John has been an assessor for the BBKA Basic Assessment for many years and is willing and able to advise those wishing to undertake the assessment.

FULL CIRCLE

At the AGM in October I was appointed to the prestigious position of Vice President, to replace John Acheson who died recently. Such honours are not handed out lightly.

To the majority of you I will be just a name. Here is a resume of my time with York Beekeepers.

I started keeping bees in 1976 and soon after joined York Beekeepers. Meetings then, were held in Purey Cust Chambers. I did not know a soul at these meetings, like a lot of you in such circumstances. It was there that John Acheson took me under his wing. He talked me into joining the Committee in 1980 and I stayed on for a number of years.

I was involved with fitting out our pavilion at Murton and ran the shop for a period. I have also been a member of the Honey Show Sub Committee and the Auction Sub Committee.

My main claim to fame was being the originator of "Combings" magazine in March 2002. I edited "Combings" for ten years.

To this day, I am involved with newcomers to the craft and helping those wishing to do the BBKA Basic Assessment.

As for John Acheson, he was a Committee Member, Chairman and Vice Chairman at various times before being made one of our Vice Presidents. I feel privileged to have stepped into his shoes.

John Fuller

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS 2015/2016

Please remember to renew your membership subscription by 31st December 2015, otherwise it will lapse (see paragraph 4 of our Constitution on our web site).

If you choose to pay directly to our Bank, please send me a hard copy of your membership form, (my address is on the form) and also put your name on the remittance advice to the Bank. Otherwise I will have difficulty matching your payment on the statement.

John C Thompson, Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Coming up at Murton

There is a busy and interesting winter programme of events coming up, thanks to our events organiser, Janet Cole. See your programme card or the website for details.

Association Equipment available for hire

If you have old frames to render down for wax recovery the association has two wax extractors available for use at a nominal rental of £2.00. One is a steam extractor designed to be used in conjunction with a brood box (provided by the

user), the other looks rather like a tea urn and is used when the comb etc. has been removed from the frames. You will need to provide your own 'filter' bag, an old pillow case will do.

We also have a Calor gas powered automatic blow torch available for the scorching out of hive parts to sterilise them.

To book any of the above, contact the equipment officer, Peter Crosby.

Email: equipment@yorkbeekeepers.co

Top tip

Stack over-wintering supers with layers of newspaper in between the boxes; this should prevent any wax moth infestation from spreading through the stack. Storing queen excluders between the boxes will stop the progress of any mouse which may have chosen the stack as its winter quarters. Don't forget to check your stored comb regularly over the winter months so if there is a problem you can spot it before it is too late to remedy.

Fondant and syrup for sale:

David Bough has plenty of syrup and fondant in stock as usual: syrup is £18 per jerry can and fondant is £19 per box.

David is in Holtby, contact him via email at david.bough@wardstheflorist.co.uk

Alan Johnston also has syrup and fondant for sale at the same prices. Alan is near Selby. For the one-hive beekeeper, Alan will sell a single 2.5 kg pack of fondant at £4.

The origins of YDBKA

Many thanks to John Thompson, who sent me some pieces about the history of our association. This one was written by former Secretary and Treasurer, Alf Race. John believes it was written in the 1980's.

Many organisations of beekeepers ended with the start of the First World War in 1914 and the outbreak of the "Isle of Wight" disease, until beekeeping recovered about 10 years later. The New Earswick Association probably started during the latter part of these 10 years (1914 – 1924). York District Association started in 1921. By 1924/5 we had a membership of 21, and by 1946 York had 70 members, New Earswick had 76 and Ousedale (later part of York) had 120 members. With the end of sugar rationing seeing in a decline in beekeeping after the Second World War, the New Earswick Association was invited to our functions and joined with York shortly afterwards.

Alan's Christmas Book review

"Beekeeping: a practical guide" by Roger Patterson.

I don't normally get excited about new-ish beekeeping books. Most, in truth, are the product of new authors recycling the contents of other equally badly-written modern books. So three years ago when Roger Patterson's book first came out, I simply overlooked it, mistaking it for yet another re-hash job.

I finally picked up a copy in a charity shop for a pound, read it from cover to cover during the course of a morning and realised that it contained more pragmatic good sense than I'd found anywhere in a long time. Roger Patterson has been keeping bees for over fifty years: he writes as one who has long passed the stage where he feels a need to push or preach. He tells you what he does and why, but is happy to acknowledge that different options exist which work well for others in other situations

The book has seventeen small chapters covering most subjects, and averaging 10 printed pages each. It is primarily a book for those in years 0-5 of their beekeeping career although those more set in their ways could gain from reading it, taking a step back and remembering that it's just a hobby! It covers hive and bee types, colony inspections, swarm control, making increase, honey extraction and pest and diseases.

Along with David Cramp's "Practical Manual of Beekeeping", it's probably the best basic beekeeping book I've come across in years, and it's not expensive. At £7.99 from Amazon, it's a stocking-filler. If it teaches you nothing else, it will teach balance and a sense of perspective. It's about keeping your bees alive and getting a little bit of honey. All the rest is... Merry Christmas!

I am grateful to Association Education officer, Adrian Burnside for this article.

BBKA EXAMS

Some years ago your committee introduced an offer to refund the examination cost of the Basic Assessment to any fully paid-up member of YDBKA passing the exam. So far, take up on that offer has been slight, perhaps because it is not well publicised.

We have now decided to expand the offer to cover successful participation of members in any of the exams of the BBKA learning packages, in an attempt to encourage more members to further their own knowledge and to increase the experience and knowledge levels within the association. The various courses can be found on the BBKA website under 'learn', but in short they cover the seven modules of the Intermediate and Advanced Theory Certificates, Microscopy and the General Husbandry and Advanced General Husbandry exams. A pass of

the Basic Assessment is required before entry to any of these other courses.

At present the modules can be studied individually, but can also be studied within a study group of up to 4 participants on a correspondence course, with questions provided by a tutor. Each month the study group would meet and pool their study of the questions set, before collating answers for marking. A different person would send in those collated answers each month to the tutor for marking and return.

Many of you work or have other retirement hobbies besides beekeeping and working within a study group does help to lessen the individual load. Additionally this offer to pay all successful exam fees is our attempt to help address your observations that the association is well equipped to help newcomers to beekeeping, but less proactive in helping beekeepers beyond novice level. Suitable modern text books will also be acquired by the association for the use of the group members.

Once the module syllabus has been completed, exams can be sat each March and November. Up to four modules can be taken at any one time, but it is more usual to attempt no more than two at a time. They are theory only, with no practical side to the syllabi. Conversely the General Husbandry exams are entirely practical in nature, although a considerable depth of knowledge would also be required.

Would anybody interested in undertaking any of the above courses please contact me in the first instance. Other associations have recently undertaken similar group learning enterprises with great success and as one of the larger district associations within Yorkshire, it is hoped we can do the same.

Adrian Burnside education@yorkbeekeepers.com

Success in BBKA Assessment

Well done and congratulations to the following YDBKA members who all passed the BBKA Basic Assessment earlier this year:

Paul Appleton

Tim Brenchley

Adrian Burnside

Beekeeping in pre-history

Traces of beeswax found on ancient pottery from Europe, the Near East and North Africa suggest the first farmers kept bees. The research, published in the journal "Nature", shows our links with the honeybee date back to the dawn of agriculture. Prehistoric people may have "domesticated" wild bees or gathered honey and wax for medicines and food from wild colonies.

The honeybee has been part of human culture for centuries, appearing in cave paintings depicting honeycombs, swarms of bees and honey collecting. However, there has been little direct evidence of when and where ancient people began harvesting honey and wax. International scientists examined over 6,000 pottery vessels to piece together a map of the honeybee at a time when the world had just emerged from the last Ice Age about 10,000 years ago, when people were moving towards a more settled agricultural lifestyle, growing crops and keeping animals.

The oldest evidence for human links with the honeybee, dating back almost 9,000 years, have been found in Turkey; but a few thousand years later, beeswax was detected across the Balkan peninsula, including Greece, Romania, Serbia, and then at sites occupied by early farmers in Central Europe. The first evidence for the use of bees in North Africa was also found around the

same time. In the British Isles, the chemical fingerprint of bee products was found on broken pottery at Neolithic sites in southern England.

Beeswax may have been used by prehistoric people to glue together arrows and spears or to waterproof their pottery; honey may have provided a rare and valuable source of sweetness.

Some timely advice from Alan Johnston

Winter bees

“If some British beekeepers suffering from winter losses could be persuaded to try and kill their bees one winter by excessive ventilation they would be surprized at the number of colonies they could save thereby”. E.B. Wedmore. 1932

The end of a season, particularly such a difficult one as this year, is always welcome – no more extractions, sticky floors or weekly stings but it quickly changes to concerns about the best way to get colonies safely through winter.

Normally, by September/October, the bees should be bedded down with 40lbs+ of honey/sugar syrup for winter use but a relatively mild October and November meant that bees were more active, and thus still feeding, much later than is usual. That 40lbs has probably been significantly reduced already, although as temperatures drop, this food use should reduce.

Colder weather induces the bees to form a “cluster”, tightly packed barely-mobile bees on the central frames. Oxygen content at the core of the cluster drops significantly, further reducing the bees’ metabolic rate. Water, however, is still required by individuals and this is extracted from their honey/syrup stores. In round figures, a colony consuming about 1lb of stores would metabolize about 1/2lb (a cup full) of water.

Vital as water is, it does produce the potential for excessive dampness. There is an understandable desire to protect ones bees – to wrap them up against the cold, but a tightly sealed box, warmed by the bees and insulation, with water vapour produced by 10-15,000 individuals is just an invitation for frames of stores to go mouldy and condensed water droplets to drip on the cluster.

Prior to the advent of mesh floors, a small opening in, or of, the crown board was good practice to allow a gentle circulation of air. With mesh floors, however, crown boards can be kept closed. Some form of insulation above the crown board may help prevent moisture droplets forming on its underside and drips falling on the bees.

To prevent excess turbulence coming through mesh floors in particularly exposed, windy, sites, the placement of an empty super *below* the mesh floor can help to create a “dead-air” space: it permits a gentle exchange of air but reduces constant cold draughts, which can do long-term damage to an over-wintering colony.

In respect of winter feeding, I always ensure that each colony has a pack of fondant in addition to its liquid honey/syrup. (If it’s unused in spring, it can be saved in air-tight boxes for 12 months or dissolved in hot water and fed as a liquid). There’s a debate about whether the fondant should be placed above or below the crown board. I prefer to place it below, as I can be sure that it lies directly above the cluster; others prefer to place it over the fees-holes in the crown board. You pays your money...

So, having ensured that the mouse-guards are on, hives are weatherproof, roofs are secured and the bees have sufficient stores, both wet and dry, there’s little to be done apart from cleaning and repairing kit, catching up on your bee reading, ordering new queens, preparing for BBKA exams and fervently

hoping that 2016 will be a far better year for bees than 2015. Fingers crossed!

Thanks to Julie Bishop, our proof reader for this article.

Oriental (or Crested) Honey Buzzard, a widespread Asian raptor closely related to the familiar European Honey Buzzard – is likely to use a combination of sense of smell and sight to identify nutritious 'pollen dough' balls found in Taiwanese beehives, according to a recent study published in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*.

Scientists are aware that birds of prey may use their sense of smell to detect food, but so far this has only been demonstrated in Turkey Vulture, an American scavenging species. Oriental Honey Buzzards in Taiwan regularly forage in apiaries for yellow pollen dough, a tennis ball-sized mixture of pollen, soybeans and sugar which beekeepers provide as a supplementary food for their colonial bees. Since pollen dough is not similar to any naturally occurring food, the authors of the study investigated whether the buzzards identify the dough's nutritious contents using their sense of smell, perhaps in combination with vision.

The authors of the study used a series of experiments where individual birds could choose between two doughs that varied in pollen content or colour to test whether the birds use the scent of the pollen to find their food and whether the food colour influences their preference. The authors found that buzzards almost always chose dough with pollen over dough without pollen, when the dough was otherwise identical in size, shape and yellow colour. Vision also seemed to play a role in foraging, as the buzzards preferred yellow over black or green dough if both contained pollen.

In addition, the honey buzzards still preferred dough with pollen when both doughs were black, but at a lower rate than

when both were yellow. The authors suggest that the birds likely identify the dough using their sense of smell in combination with their vision. The authors conclude that olfaction is likely of far greater ecological importance to this species than previously thought, and should be considered when studying their behaviour.



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Reader's Hives



YDBKA's very own non-beekeeping roving reporter, Chris Swift has sent me some more of his holiday pics.

Chris was in Crete in September and spotted this beekeeper who had his hives on a plateau on the mountain side about 400ft above the Amari Valley, which is a very fertile area with apricot, cherry and olive trees.