



January 2008

A note from the Editor

Helen, who has been editor of Foragings for a few years, has stepped down and I have picked up the pen (or is it keyboard!) to keep this newsletter going.

So that you don't have to read the life story of Andy Willis all the time, I (as well as Andy) would welcome any articles or letters that you wish to write, I may censor them if they're a bit risqué, but it will provide more variety for you to read.

Happy New Year, and may the coming year be healthy and prosperous for you and your bees.

Winter Losses

By Andy Willis

This winter I'm sure is going to prove more difficult than usual for us beekeepers. I now know of 3 strong colonies that have died before Christmas. The cause of these unusual events is not certain as yet but my suspicions are that high levels of Varroa (combined with pyrethroid resistance) and the viruses that they carry have played a big part in this.

The first signs

My concerns were first raised in October '07 when I noticed a change in behaviour of one of the association hives. I had seen something similar only once before, and that had resulted in the colony crashing and death within 4 weeks of first noticing something wrong.

Unusual behaviour

My attention was drawn to a number of bees sitting on the front of the hive, near to and around the entrance of the hive. On closer inspection these bees seemed to be jostling or bullying one another with biting and wing pulling. A few bees were flying in with pollen but had difficulty getting into the hive with the crowds of bees present. Robbing was not taking place and this was the only hive to show this unusual behaviour.

Discussions with ...

I discussed my concerns with the boys from the National Bee Unit (NBU) on their stand at the National Honey Show in London that same week. They requested some samples of bees to be taken and sent to them for testing and would supply me

with the tubes and ethanol free of the normal charge of £26.45 per sample.

Colony crashes

These sample tubes, containing 75% ethanol, took a while to arrive and on 25th November, Ian Homer found the colony had crashed, with large numbers of dead bees within the hive and only about 2 large handfuls of live bees left, the colony was deemed to be no longer viable.

Samples

With the permission of the various members concerned, at the end of November I took 10 samples of approximately 100 individual bees. 9 hives were on the Broadlands Apiary and a related hive to the crashed Association hive, located in the New Forest. The samples were relatively easy to take once I had been told the trick on how to get 100 lively bees into a small tube (method will be in a later issue).

The results

The results will probably take some time to come through as the NBU has a large back log of over 400 samples of bees sent in this autumn. The samples will be given the full spectrum of adult bee disease tests including Acarine, Nosema, dysentery as well as viral analysis and dissection.

I know that my bees have never been given such a thorough microscopic m.o.t. and it will be interesting to see what is found and what conclusions and actions (if any) we can take to keep our bees going.

'Twas the season to be jolly

By Andy Willis

The crisp, and for the first time this year, seasonal weather was the backdrop to the start of a truly enjoyable evening at La Parissienne. 14 members and guests assembled from 6.30pm in the bar area, and once we were all gathered and ready, we were then guided to our table.

Décor

The table layout was long and thin, with 6 people on either side and 1 at each end. The table was most festive and well decorated with Christmas crackers, party poppers and candles (but not beeswax though!)

Surprise Gifts

Santa's little helper, who had assisted in co-ordinating the event, supplied each person with a place setting, listing his or her menu choice as a reminder. This was attached to a small gift (a beeswax moulded Christmas tree ornament, the beeswax donated by Tony Mabey) wrapped in red tissue paper and gold twine.

Food

The food was excellent, starters comprised of a choice of 5 items including soups, salads and

Chicken Pate. The service was superb (aided by the place setting cards, much appreciated by staff and guests alike) allowing conversation and merriment to continue unabated. The main course was a choice of duck, sea bass, turkey, mushroom risotto or steak; all washed down with wine and drinks from the bar.

Desert was to follow with a choice of superb sorbets, Christmas pudding or cheese.

Party Games!

Once Bill Dartnell had mastered the art of party poppers there was no stopping him, with streamers going in all directions, what fun! This proved to be a great night out for all who attended and at a reasonable cost too with a three-course meal and coffee totalling £26.50 per head plus the bar.

Repeats!

I heard it said by more than one of the ensemble that it was the best 'official' Christmas party that they had ever attended, and we are all looking forward to the next social event. It is hoped that this high standard will be maintained throughout the years to come.

Good beekeeping and a happy new year to you all.

Dates for the Diary

Saturday, 12th January 2008, 2.00pm

Waterloo Arms PH, Waterloo Road, Freemantle

Ian Homer – No Bees, no honey; no honey, no money

“A talk about swarming and other reasons for colony depletion with a good measure of swarm control procedures thrown in.”

This should prove to be a very interesting talk by Ian utilising his experience of bee keeping and his work as the regional bee inspector. He has a sharp sense of humour, which enables him to bring any subject to life, making you stop and think. This will be good winter prep work for the coming season.

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CHANGE TO PROGRAMME Saturday, 9th February 2008, All day ***CHANGE TO PROGRAMME***

Lyndhurst, New Forest

Integrated Pest Management Day

The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Day being run by the New Forest BKA on Saturday 9th February 2008 costs £8 with a ploughman's lunch. The numbers for this event are limited and priority will be given to New Forest BKA members, with the remainder from a list being compiled by Stanley Gibbons on a 'first come first served' basis. This course comes highly recommended by some of our own members who have already attended previous days. So I recommend giving Stanley a ring (023 8081 3254) to get your name on the list as soon as you can. The talk booked by our association that clashes with this event has now been cancelled and is being looked into for possible re-scheduling.