



Forest Beekeeper

The monthly newsletter of the Epping Forest Beekeepers

November 2009

www.eppingforestbeekeepers.co.uk

Spellbound

Jenny Barling reports on the amazing presentation at the first of the winter meetings.

Photos by Michael Johns

If the 30 or so Epping Forest beekeepers who gathered at the Chingford horticultural society hall for our first winter meeting on October 15th were expecting the usual beekeeping talk they were in for a great surprise.

Stuart Baldwin from Witham in Essex, who only took up beekeeping two years ago, held everyone spellbound with his enthusiasm for anything connected with bees. A palaeontologist and scientific bookseller - among many other things (see his website www.secondhandsciencebooks.com) - he began his illustrated talk with a picture of a rare fossil bee trapped in volcanic ash around 60 million years ago. Then picked up the actual fossil from a collection of artefacts and bygones with links to bees which he had brought with him to the meeting.

He is a lively and entertaining speaker and had something to interest everyone. Bees in art and architecture; bees in literature; bees in ancient Egypt (they represent the sun apparently) and honey found in ancient tombs. It was only after the archaeologists had tasted it that they found the body of the baby preserved at the bottom of the pot!

Stuart had brought several interesting objects. Wax jacks for melting sealing wax



and small hand seals - with a bee emblem, naturally - with which Tiffany made a good impression! The older beekeepers remembered having to blob melted sealing wax on the knots of registered parcels, but far more artistic were the wax municipal seals on show embellished with the industrious bee.

The silver dowter, which looked like a tiny 12" post horn was for extinguishing wax candles. It confused everyone. Apparently you get the strongest puff if you blow into the flared end! There were coins and trade tokens with bee motifs; a bee-shaped honey pot in silver and cranberry glass; an antique smoker in the shape of a little tobacco pipe and many other fascinating bygones on the table but a real draw was the selection of rare beekeeping books and the video of a queen bee mating.



We had seen pictures of the earliest drawings of bees made under magnification as well as the most modern images produced by electron microscopes.

We had held a bee fossil in our hands that was nearly as old as the dinosaurs. So Stuart brought us right up to date with images of the honeybees trained at Rothamstead to sniff out explosives, drugs, tainted food and metal objects. Welcome to the 21st century!

He told us that he sourced most of his collection from the internet and it was his latest acquisition which he unveiled as his finale that rendered everyone speechless with laughter - a fully-grown, stuffed ratel (honey badger) all four feet of her in ferocious pose. ♂

Forest Festival Report

By Jenny Johns

Following the success of last year's event we decided to have a stand at the 2009 Forest Festival which was held on Chingford Plains on 6th September. We arrived early to set up Peter Dalby's large gazebo, kindly lent to us for the event. This gave us plenty of room for our exhibits; candle rolling, always popular with the children, a display of beekeeping equipment, a vase of bee pollinated flowers to illustrate those which could be grown to encourage bees to visit gardens. Ted set up and brought the observation hive with its marked queen and of course we had plenty of honey for sale.

It quickly became clear that beekeeping was still a very popular activity, there was always a crowd around the observation hive and the beekeepers present were continually being asked quite in depth questions about bees, their life history and how to keep them. The public interest has definitely been awakened by the BBKA campaign in the media and many people now feel that they could keep bees and it would be a nice thing to do. Well over 20 people gave their names and contact details expressing a wish to find out more about it and to sign up for courses. The 2010 course is already over subscribed!

The honey was also a very important part of our event and many of us had brought some for sale, both 1lb and 1/2lb jars were available. By mid afternoon it had all gone and people were asking where they could purchase more. ♀

Topical Tip

By now the Varroa treatment with Apiguard should have been completed and most of us have also finished feeding. Remember to heft the hives by lifting one corner, now and regularly through the winter to estimate the food store.

If they appear to have become lighter they will need feeding either by using a contact feeder with sugar syrup or candy. We will be dealing with the winter Varroa treatment, using oxalic acid, at the November meeting. Ken will also be giving a talk on the small hive beetle. ♂

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