

HELENSBURGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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NEXT MEETING ON THURSDAY 28 OCTOBER AT 7.15 pm

Nigel Hurst will be talking about "**The Scottish Beekeeper**", **my beekeeping and gadgets and gizmos** at our usual venue **in the Hall at Rhu Church**. Nigel is standing down from editing the "**The Scottish Beekeeper**" after 5 years and 60 editions. He is working with the new editor, who is a journalist and who will be taking over in the New Year. It is a particularly appropriate time for Nigel to come and speak to us, with consideration being given by the Scottish Beekeepers Association on how it communicates with the membership through the website, forum and, particularly, the magazine. It is proposed, after Nigel's presentation, to hold an open session in order to find out what you think about the "**Scottish Beekeeper**", its contents, presentation and style. Please come along and let us know your views that will be fed back to the SBA executive committee.

OXALIC ACID TRICKLE TREATMENT: ORDERS.

Jim McCulloch has again kindly offered to arrange for oxalic acid to be made up in a sugar syrup mix for application by trickle treatment by members. It is important that the mix is used soon after it has been made up and with mid to late December as the best time for application the mix will be available to members at our meeting on 25 November. In order to achieve this orders must be placed with the Secretary ideally at the October meeting. If you are not able to attend please give your apologies and your order, stating the number of colonies you wish to treat. Please note that treatment is entirely at your own risk.

SBA AUTUMN CONVENTION.

When the alarm went off at 4.45 am I doubted the wisdom of going to this year's

SBA Autumn Convention in Blackburn, a few miles west of Aberdeen, but this turned out to be really worthwhile day. The centenary of the Aberdeenshire Beekeepers Association had been celebrated the night before in the excellent community hall venue and the catering through out the day was magnificent, from the early morning butterfly to the last afternoon cake.

The highlight of 4 good talks was the opening presentation by Graham Royle on "Apis through the looking glass", the results of a 1000 hours of studying, dissecting, and recording honeybees under the microscope. The photographed and drawn images were beautifully presented and were a revelation. Did you know that a honey bee has a semicircular comb arrangement on her front legs to clean her antennae when working in a dusty, pollen laden environment, or that a bee has 3 apertures on top of her head, in addition to the compound eyes, that it is thought act as off/on switches when moving from the dark hive environment out into the open air? And so it went on: from the pivoting action of the wing mechanism to the ability of the gut and rectum to expand and contract into shared space depending on need for the bee to carry nectar or hold her waste. This talk fired an interest in microscopy and can be obtained in book form by going to www.blurb.com and typing in "Bees through the looking glass".

Graham's afternoon contribution was "If Heath Robinson was a beekeeper" and showcased devices such a vacuum arrangement with expanding plastic pipes that could reach swarms 20 to 40 feet above the ground. Perhaps most revealing was a graph from measuring the weight of a hive every week that showed that all the honey surplus for the year is obtained from only a couple of week long spells and is heavily temperature dependant.

Celia Davie is a well known author and reminded the convention, in the morning, of "The challenges of beekeeping", the greatest of which was "Keeping on top of Varroa", her afternoon paper. Perhaps she said nothing new but she spelt out the problems clearly. Particularly relevant to us in the west of the country is the need to understand the weather and how it impacts on how our bees develop. She reminded us of the need to monitor for Varroa, to be aware of mite levels at all times and to treat regularly and consistently. She also stressed the need for strong colonies. Too many weak colonies are allowed stutter on and decline when they should have been amalgamated. Like many exponents she put cleanliness of equipment and clothing high on her priorities and the need to replace combs regularly, using the Bailey comb change system if necessary.

On top of this were interesting equipment, book and organisation stands, friendly delegates and the good company of Petra and Reg with a special thanks to the latter who drove us there and back. Next year the Autumn Convention is on Saturday 10 September in the Dewars Centre in Perth, If you have not attended an Autumn Convention, go.

MEAD BLOG

Following Ben's mead making demonstration, with conjuring tricks thrown in, we dug out our old beer making equipment (ah those heady days in the 1970s) and discovered that we nearly had all the kit to make mead. So we cleaned out the spinner and honey tank carefully and put this washing up water as Ben called it into plastic bottles in the freezer, as we were going away and did not want the brewing process to start in our absence. A quick visit to *Glenbrew* at the west end of *Dumbarton Road* in *Glasgow* produced the yeast, sterlising tablets and replacements for the broken gloppers and we are in business.

The only problem is how long it has to stay in the bottle before it can be sampled: far longer than in our beer making days with their head splitting results. Like beekeeping, mead making is something that should be taken up early in life as possible. I hope that Ben, who makes no concessions to old age what so ever, has inspired others younger than ourselves to follow his example and make mead. We will let you know how we get on. Thanks Ben for your talk.

Mike Thornley

Secretary