Cumbria Bee Times

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At last we are emerging from winter which until December was fairly mild. However, the New Year brought cold frosty weather with some short periods of very heavy rain leaving no opportunity for the bees to leave their hives. Fortunately February had a week of warm sunny weather allowing the bees to go on cleansing flights and collect pollen from Snowdrops and other early flowering plants.

Water is essential to support all forms of life and honey bees collect water to dilute stored honey and during the summer to help cool the hive by evaporation. It is always worthwhile providing shallow containers of water near to the apiary for the bees to easily access, especially during a hot summer and even at this time of year when it is cold preventing the bees flying too far. During a warm day, just recently, I observed lots of bees looking for water. Presumably to help with the dilution of stores. Unfortunately some were taking water from a small pond in the garden and a few were drowning which is why shallow containers, which allows the water to warm quickly, with materials such as moss, straw or stones are provided to give the bees safe access.

Early flowering plants allow bees to collect nectar and replenish their stores of pollen.

Flowers being unable to move and find a mate rely on bees and other insects to transfer pollen, the male fertilising agent of a plant, to another flower of the same species. Honey bees are effective at this as they live in large numbers and consistently visit the same plant species.

Flowers attract bees by secreting nectar which in turn the bees turn into honey. Whilst visiting a flower, the pollen produced by the anther, the male part of the flower, sticks to the bees hairy body. When the bee visits another flower some of the pollen is subsequently transferred to the stigma of that flower, the female part of the flower. That flower has then been pollinated, fertilised, and will reproduce by bearing fruit and seeds for the next generation of plants. Honey is therefore a by- product of plant pollination.

The Honey bee transfers the pollen from its hairy body to its pollen basket to transport the pollen back to the bee hive. The pollen which contains large amounts of protein is fed to the bees' larvae as it is essential for their growth. The colour of the pollen from various plant species is different and it is a wonderful site on a summers day to watch the bees at the hive entrance bring in pollen loads of many colours.

Thanks to Margaret Riches of Penrith Beekeepers for the following article

Bite makes plants flower.

Bumblebees force plants to flower by biting their leaves. A discovery that may help agriculture. When common European bumblebees and their larvae emerge in spring, pollen is all they eat. Scientist recently found that if plants aren't flowering, the bumblebees bite them and somehow those incisions speed the arrival of pollen laden blooms. When scientists tried to mimic the marks, the plants bloomed earlier, but not as early as they did for the bees. **Virginia Morell**

Cumbria Beekeepers 2021 AGM was held on Saturday 6th March 2021 via Zoom, with a slightly improved attendance than in recent years before the restrictions on social meetings were imposed because of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Two talks were presented to the meeting prior to the start of the AGM. The first talk, by Ian Gregory, was about encouraging pollinating insects into our gardens and was accompanied by slides of

Honeybees, Bumblebees, Solitary bees and Hoverflies.
The second talk by Jo Widdicombe, the President of the Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association, (BIBBA) was about the importance of breeding Queens from local bees and not importing bees from abroad and other localities. The following extract from the BIBBA website is a summary of Jo Widdicombe's talk

Locally Adapted Honey Bees

1. Locally adapted honey bees have long been known by experienced beekeepers to consistently perform better than exotic imports. This was confirmed in 2014 with the publishing of a substantial Europe-wide study aimed to identify how to optimise sustainable productivity. The Study can be found (here)
2. Imported queens are usually either pure sub-species, hybrids or man-made types. They are mainly from different evolutionary lineages that have evolved in very different ecogeographic conditions. It is well known that random mating with different types of bees creates arbitrary crosses that often result in aggressive behaviour in subsequent generations. This is known as "F2 Aggression".
3. As imported drones mate with local queens, another result is the disruption and dilution of locally adapted genetic traits that have evolved in the local population. The consequence of this dilution is weaker colonies less likely to survive the winter without substantial beekeeper intervention and support.
4. We do not need to import bees! There are circa 250,000 colonies in England and Wales. These can be rapidly increased if they were needed. In favourable areas, it has long been shown that one strong colony can produce up to ten colonies, strong enough to go into the next winter. How to do this link is (here).
5. Importing bees is largely, if not solely, a commercial activity. It is not for the benefit of the bees, for pollination, the ecology of our countryside or biodiversity as it is oftentimes portrayed. Imports have increased greatly over the last few years (here). Unfortunately, if imported bees fail to over-winter it merely sets up a vicious circle, prompting more demand for bees, and further imports.
6.

As responsible beekeepers, we should all be concerned about the welfare, health and survivability of our populations of honey bees. Established free living colonies usually show little resemblance visually or behaviourally to those of imports, suggesting that imported bees do not survive our conditions well. This is simply natural selection at work.

Despite well over a century of importation, the background population has been shown scientifically to be predominantly *Apis mellifera mellifera*, our native bee, confirming that exotics do not survive long.

Following the two talks the 2021 AGM was held. Stephen Barnes stepped down as President and Walter McPhee was voted in as his replacement.

Ian Gregory stepped down from the role of Vice President.

Stephen Barnes was voted in as Vice President.

Sara Barnes had given twelve months notice that she would not be continuing in the role of Secretary. No-one at the meeting was willing to take on the role and the position is presently vacant. If there is anyone out there interested in being Secretary to the Cumbria Executive Committee please contact Stephen Barnes.

Melanie Vincent agreed to carry on as Treasurer and presented the Annual Financial Statement to the meeting.

Dates for your Diary.

All meetings for the foreseeable future are being held over the internet using the App., Zoom. Cumbria Beekeepers have purchased a licence for Zoom and that is available for the use of all branches of the Cumbria Beekeepers Association.

Contact Stephen Barnes for further information.

The next **Cumbria Executive Meeting** is on: Wednesday evening 5th May at 7.00pm via Zoom.

The **Cumbria Beekeepers 2022 AGM** has been scheduled for 5th March 2022.

For those of you who have internet access try the following link to beekeeping events throughout the UK:

https://beekeeping.events/
