



Cumbria Bee Times

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(Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the editor and do not necessarily represent those of the CBKA)

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The cover picture for this issue of the Cumbria Bee Times is of a Honeybee collecting nectar from Purple Wood Sage or Salvia. It has distinctive dark purple spikes clothed in vibrant violet-purple flowers which soar above grey-green foliage. It is in flower from early summer and with regular dead heading it will continue to flower through to late summer. It not only attracts honey bees but also Bumblebees so is an interesting plant to add to your garden.

The weather seems to be following a pattern of long cold winters, with periods of heavy rain, followed by a long cold spring and then a hot dry early summer. I don't know if this sort of weather is affecting the bees but they seem, to me, to be swarming earlier. Just before the end of April the beginning of May my bees were preparing to swarm and talking to other beekeepers this seems to have been quite common this year. The resulting Queens have mated successfully and have built up very rapidly.

Now we are into June after a long dry spell of weather and without some rain the June Gap may be compounded as the flowers may not have sufficient moisture to secrete nectar. It always rains in Cumbria though! Doesn't it?

The following article was written by Walter McPhee of Carlisle Beekeepers Association.

Beekeeping gloves.

When first starting out in beekeeping the extra protection offered by leather beekeeping gloves reaching up to the elbows may seem like a good option, especially when dealing with particularly vicious colonies. However, they do not allow for much

tactile feedback and that gets worse with use as they get stiff with propolis. If you cannot feel the movement of bees under your fingers they will get crushed and crushed bees give off a smell which will excite surrounding bees to become more defensive and aggressive leading to stinging of the beekeeper. The stings also give off a pear drop smell which recruits more bees to defend the colony against the beekeeper. Long use of any beekeeping garment without regular cleaning will have the same effect the smell of stings starting off with a downside on every inspection.

What are the alternatives?

Household marigolds, washing up gloves, easily cleaned, are bit more tactile and come with long cuffs. Unfortunately they are not always bee proof as gaps at the wrist allow bees to crawl up and get squashed and squashed bees will sting.

Another alternative are nitrile gloves which are washable and disposable, very thin and tactile but in such a huge array of types.

Nitrile gloves come in various sizes s,m,l and xl, and as with all gloves they need to fit well. If your fingers don't reach the end of the gloves the finger ends of the gloves can become trapped under the frames causing aggravation to the bees and the beekeeper. The most common of the nitrile gloves are the examination gloves, very thin, tear easily and usually short cuffs, not really suitable for beekeepers, I always look for long cuffs even then stings on my wrists are the most common sting, I should get/make a pair of elasticated cotton wrist protectors. For a long time "ultrasafe" violet, large, long cuff were my go to gloves but got expensive and more difficult to source. During the covid pandemic I found a supplier on ebay selling PH bodyguard nitrile long cuff "bee gloves" which were thicker than examination gloves, thinner than ultrasafe

but were adequate and as I use them for painting, gardening, etc; 100 in a box rather than 50 is economical.

So lots of alternatives depending on your and your bees temperament, the weather and your frame handling technique. Going without gloves in the right situation looks impressive but always have gloves in your back pocket in case things get rough.

Some interesting facts about Honeycomb.

Honeycomb is one of nature's best engineered structures.

Honeycomb is a structure that has both fascinated and inspired humans for millennia, including serving as inspiration for many engineering structures. It is a multifunctional structure that acts as a store for food, a nursery for developing honey bee brood, and a physical structure upon which honey bees live. It is constructed of wax produced by bees in specialised glands in their abdomen. Wax is an expensive commodity and so comb construction can be quite costly for a honey bee colony. Honeycomb is constructed in such a way to minimise wax consumption.

Honeycomb construction is optimised to serve multiple purposes for the bee colony, subject to the constraint of material and labor costs. Sounds like the bees are a responsible engineering firm.

Are there too many Honeybees?

A controversial question for beekeepers! However, a recent news article raised the question and apparently the City of London is Europe's most densely populated city for honeybees and possibly in the world. The UN hive data for honeybees globally shows that they are at an all time high. Scientists are concerned about the impact of the proliferation of honeybees are having on other pollinators, especially in places like London. It has been suggested that about seven hives per square kilometres is the correct density for London. In some areas of London there are more than 50 hives per square kilometre and in one location there are 400 hives in a square kilometre, and they all need feeding. There are hundreds of other pollinating bee species, wasps, flies, beetles, butterflies and moths which all need pollen and nectar. A healthy ecosystem needs an abundance and variety of

pollinator species. Honeybees don't drop much pollen whereas solitary bees, such as the red mason bee, are such messy collectors of pollen they end up covered in it which falls off on to other plants visited by the bee so increasing the chance of pollination. Whereas the honeybee is constantly cleaning her self and packing the pollen into her pollen baskets. However, it is generally agreed that much more needs to be done regarding the landscape to reduce the use of pesticides and provide habitat and increase the floral resources for the many pollinating insects.

Dates for your Diary.

9th September 2023 The Cumbria Beekeepers Autumn Conference to be held at the Embleton Village Hall. This event is organised and run by the Cockermouth Branch on behalf of the Cumbria Beekeepers Association and always provides an interesting variety of speakers on beekeeping subjects for beginners and the more experienced.

4th November 2023 The Cumbria Honey Show. The venue and details of speakers will be circulated when known.