



# Bee Brief



## Plymouth Branch Newsletter – October 2016

### PLYMOUTH BEEKEEPERS' Apiary Programme 2016

OCTOBER		
Tuesday 4th	Committee Meeting ~ Blindman's Scout Centre	starting 7pm
Thursday 13th	Winter Meeting ~ Elburton Village Hall More details to follow on speaker	7.30 pm
NOVEMBER		
Thursday 17th	Branch AGM ~ Elburton Village Hall	7.30 pm
DECEMBER		
Sunday 11th	Branch Christmas Lunch ~ Boringdon Golf Club <b>£5 deposit</b>	12.30
2017		
JANUARY		
Thursday 12th	Branch Honey Show ~ Elburton Village Hall	7.30pm
Date TBC	Winter Study Group ~ Kathy Lovegrove	
FEBRUARY		
Thursday 9th	Branch Meeting ~ Elburton Village Hall	7.30pm
Date TBC	Winter Study Group ~ Kathy Lovegrove	
MARCH		
Sunday 5th	Improvers Meeting	10am
Thursday 9th	Branch Meeting ~ Elburton Village Hall	7.30pm
Sunday 12th	Novice Meeting	10am
Sunday 19th	General Meeting	10am
Sunday 26th	Novice Meeting	10am
(Saturday 11th	DBKA AGM at Isca Centre, Exeter)	

**NB. Meetings will be held at the Branch Apiary Site unless advised otherwise.**

***Directions to Branch Apiary at Lee Mill, Ivybridge:***

- Turn left off the A38 at Lee Mill and follow the signs for Tesco
- Drive past the Tesco entrance & take next right for Central Avenue on the industrial estate
- Drive down the hill of Central Avenue, looking for East Way on your right
- Drive along East Way, looking for Cadleigh Close on your left
- Drive into Cadleigh Close and the apiary site is behind the big iron gates of the tyre factory
- Park inside the gates, walk up the concrete path & you will see the portacabin on your right

## ACTING CHAIRMAN'S BLOG

Hello again beekeepers of Plymouth and district. As the diminishing hours of daylight and the chillier mornings and evenings tell us, autumn is now well under way. Our bees should all have been fed by now and for those of us who use them, mouse guards fitted over the hive entrance.

Mice can dislocate their skeletons to the extent that they can enter a hive through  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch gap, so a standard entrance block is no defence against them. They tend to try to get in during the winter because they seek the hive's warmth and a plentiful supply of food. As it's usually cold in winter, the bees will be in a cluster and therefore in no position to defend the colony against the intruder(s). Once inside the hive, the mice will feast on honey, wax and they'll even chew the wooden frames. They also dribble their urine all over the hive and as anyone who has ever dealt with mice before will tell you, mouse urine smells disgusting. Beekeepers that suffers such an invasion are unlikely to discover it until they open the hive in spring and find it full of dead bees. This is because the colony will have died of starvation as the mice have eaten all the stores. Now as I intimated above, not all beekeepers use mouse guards; some say they have never used them, but I prefer not to take a chance and would recommend that they be used. Mice can do a terrific amount of damage and I don't think it's worth the risk for the sake of a few minutes work. For those in their first year of beekeeping, do make sure that you remove the entrance block completely before pinning the mouse guard in place. If you fail to do this, the resulting entrance hole will be far too small to allow the bees to pass in and out.

It seems that pests are a recurring theme in the blog recently, and this month is no exception. The attention of beekeepers has been grabbed by the news that several Asian hornets have been spotted by beekeepers near Tetbury in Gloucestershire. I think most of us expected the first sighting to be somewhere near the south coast as that is closest to France (where they are endemic), so it's something of a surprise that the first UK mainland sighting was in the southwest midlands. However they got here, they are an unwelcome addition to the list of pests and diseases that our poor bees have to cope with. Their MO is to hover (or hawk) at the hive entrance and then use their powerful mandibles to decapitate the bees individually as they fly in and out. Weaker colonies often do not survive this kind of attack.

As ever when an interesting beekeeping story crops up, the media seizes the opportunity to confuse us. Various newspapers have reported the Gloucestershire sightings; and in some, the invaders have been described as 'giant Asian hornets.' For those who are unaware, the giant Asian hornet (*vespa mandarinia*) is the one whose acidic stings make its human victims look like victims of a hail of bullets. So I must emphasise that the Gloucestershire invaders are not *vespa mandarinia*; they are the 'common' Asian hornets (*vespa velutina*). As a matter of interest, it is also known as the Asian predatory wasp and the yellow-legged hornet. We are told by NBU that the risk they pose to humans is little more than the risk posed by bees. However, Asian hornets are ferocious defenders of their nests and nest destruction really must be left to the professionals. (At the date of writing this [26 September] the NBU had still not found the Gloucestershire nest).

When some of us attended Professor Steve Martin's lecture on the Asian hornet in Buckfastleigh last April, he described its sting as 'a bit more painful than a bee sting.' Well I'm happy to take his word for it! Steve, a renowned expert in insects, also said that if

they turn up while we are in our apiaries, the best way to deal with them is to hit them very hard with a tennis racquet. There are also hornet traps on the market, some of which can be fitted to hives and some that are free-standing, but I have no idea how effective they are; beekeepers will probably need to use a combination of weapons. Our bees, *apis mellifera*, have not developed any effective self-defence.

Beekeepers in France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy and Portugal are learning to live with this pest and the authorities in those countries are finding various ingenious ways to destroy the nests such as using mechanical drones to deliver a dose of insecticide (Asian hornets prefer to make their nests high up in tall trees). And importantly, beekeeping is continuing in these countries without the widespread destruction of colonies that many of us fear. Well, let's all hope that *Vespa velutina* will take a long time to spread to Devon.

Returning to the fact that winter is just around the corner I wonder how many of us use the 'brood and a half' system throughout the winter months. We always do. For the benefit of new beekeepers I will explain. Brood and a half gives the bees better access to their stores over winter as they prefer to move vertically. To go to brood and a half, you simply remove the queen excluder from the top of the brood box and give the colony, including the queen, free access to the super. The queen excluder is unnecessary. Colonies have been known to die of starvation over winter in single brood boxes with plenty of stores either side of the cluster. Sadly, the bees were unwilling to leave the cluster to make lateral movements towards the stores, and starvation was the result. The brood and a half system reduces the risk of this happening.

This brings me neatly to this month's issue that divides beekeepers. That is 'when going to brood and a half, should the super be above or underneath the brood box?' Well let's start with a bit of pedantry! I am reliably informed that if a box is placed underneath the brood box it shouldn't be called a 'super.' The correct term for a box in this position is a 'nadir.' This is because 'super' is Latin for 'above,' so it's completely illogical to describe a box that goes underneath the brood box with a Latin word that means 'above.' Latin scholars out there will know that 'nadir' means 'the lowest point,' which if you don't count the floor, is probably near enough to a fair description of the box underneath the brood box. I don't have room in this blog to list all the advantages and disadvantages of box above versus box below, but I have found that beekeepers who prefer one or the other methods will argue their position with passion. I remember as a new improver, attending an excellent joint presentation by two of our own members who, with the aid of diagrams, gave thoroughly convincing demonstrations of why their preference was best. One favoured 'above' and the other 'below.' The lesson I took away from that talk is that both ways have their strengths and weaknesses so it's up to individual beekeepers to find which way works for them. We always put the super above the brood box for a number of reasons but now I've got one more; I really don't think I could ever get used to calling it a nadir! (Anyway, wasn't she last year's winner of the Great British Bake-off?)

#### **P.S. Update on Asian hornet.**

Some good news at last. Today [30 September] the NBU announced that the main nest has been found and destroyed. The nest is being examined and we must all hope that they got it before the queens and drones emerged for their mating flight.

All the best

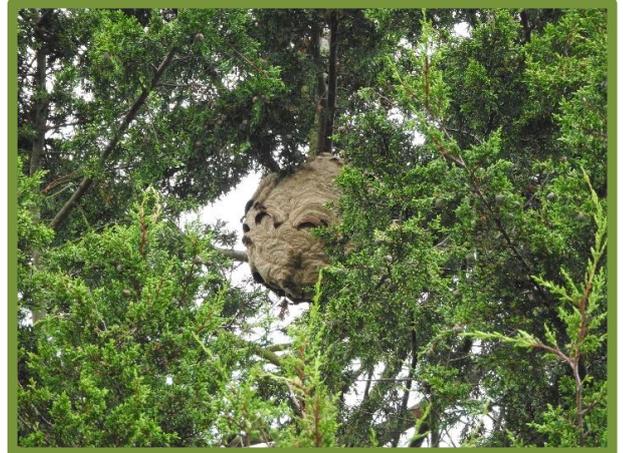
*Terry*

**Asian hornet  
(vespa velutina)**



©J. Haxaire

**Photos from the NBU website  
of the Asian hornet nest  
in Gloucestershire**



# I have seen my first Asian hornet - LIVE!!

**By David Milford**

The good news is that it was not in England. The first day of our holiday in France at the beginning of September involved travelling from Roscoff to Surgeres (near La Rochelle) and we had all day in which to do it. We went to an old haunt called La Faute sur Mer and had a bite to eat, before going to the beach. The weather was sunny and very warm and a walk by the sea was decided upon by she who must be obeyed.

On our return to the car park about an hour later, we opened all the car doors and changed out of our beach wear – not a pretty sight – into something more comfortable. At this point I should point out that my wife hates bees and most flying insects of a similar disposition, i.e. those that sting, and she does not like honey either. She had changed much more quickly than me and got in the car. She then asked me quite calmly what the flying insect was that was sitting on the roof lining above her head. I managed to not say “what now”, but went to the driver’s side of the car and looked up at the mysterious insect. I recognised it immediately as an Asian Hornet.

For once the good lady followed my instructions: Get out of the car calmly, walk to the rear of it and then stand still. Meanwhile, I had to get this thing out of the car and I didn’t have a tennis racket of anything like it! I picked up a box of Waitrose man sized tissues and held it up near the beast. Obviously it had not heard of the aforementioned supermarket, more used to Le Clerc or SuperU, I suppose. Anyway, it disliked the box, stung the roof lining and flew out of the front passenger door, landing on the ground about 3 feet from the boss. Amazingly, she remained perfectly still! After about 30 seconds it took off and for some reason was attracted to me, landing on the ground about a foot away. I stayed still, hoping that it could not understand the English language following my verbal concern. Anyway, I could not get in the car, nor did I submit to stamping on it in case it moved more quickly than me. After all, even Usain Bolt would have had to have run even faster than he does normally and at my age..... no chance!

After what seemed like an eternity, but was probably about a minute watching this creature, I stamped my foot on the ground. It moved and took off. Oh bother I said – or something similar – but luckily it flew vertically in a spiral motion for about 20 feet or so and buzzed off towards the trees. Relief all round. I wiped the sting off the headlining and it did not stain. So there we are, if you see one here, don’t panic and stay still and, better still, always carry a tennis or badminton racket with you just in case! Then contact [alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk)

The rest of our holiday was great, but one of the problems with the French, as a Frenchman told me, is that they don’t bother to report sightings, as it’s only the beekeepers that care. Nothing new there then!

## FROM DBKA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

### By Terry McAuliffe

The meeting took place at Meldon near Okehampton on Saturday 17 September.

Apart from routine matters such as approval of minutes etc. the following issues were discussed:

- The DBKA Governing Document received its annual review.
- The calling notice for the 2017 DBKA AGM was approved.
- BBKA Award Certificates were discussed. Delegates were asked to check with their branches whether any members were approaching 50 or 60 years as a beekeeper. **Therefore, if any member of Plymouth Branch knows of another member who is approaching their 50<sup>th</sup> or 60<sup>th</sup> year as a beekeeper please get in touch with me or any other committee member.**
- Proposed changes to the DBKA Financial Reserves Policy were approved. The principal change is a limit on the amount of money we are permitted to have in reserve. As many of you will be aware, DBKA (and therefore our branch) is a charity, and as such is subject to scrutiny by the Charity Commissioners. They set requirements about the amount of money charities can have in reserve funds and it is these requirements that have driven the need for DBKA to change its policy. The initial proposal was that branch reserves should be set at a maximum of 7 months running costs. An alternative proposal was to set a band of between 5 and 9 months running costs. It was agreed that a sub-committee of DBKA EC would meet to consider the details.
- Proposed changes to the DBKA Financial Policy and Procedures were discussed and approved. These cover bank accounts, the annual budget, financial reports, accounting and financial records, authorisation and payment, insurance, assets, depreciation, expenses and Gift Aid. If any member would like further details about this you can contact me (but please do form an orderly queue).
- Deformed Wing Virus Research. This is a project being undertaken by an academic from the Plymouth Marine Biology and Ecology Research Centre, Declan Schroeder. Declan explained his research to the EC members and said that his aim was to sign up beekeepers throughout



Join us on October 12th at 8.00pm for our next hangout/webinar. No doubt there will be some discussion on the Asian Hornet! Just watch live or email your questions through this [link](#).

We hope to have Michael Badger MBE joining the above webinar to talk about his new book "Heather Honey - A Comprehensive Guide" which is being launched at the National Honey Show at the end of this month, a copy of which can be ordered [here](#) for despatch after 30th October. It's 384 pages full of photographs, information, and history; how to prepare hives and successful honey production.

Don't forget, if you want to collect a Microbox at the National Honey Show, orders are required as soon as possible [here](#). This doesn't include the excellent complementary book "Practical Microscopy" by Master Beekeeper, Bob Maurer which can be ordered through the same link.

**We look forward to you joining us on 12th. See you then!**

**Kind regards**

**Wendy and the *Bee Craft* team**



## **BeeConnected – keeping beekeepers notified when a neighbouring farmer is applying insecticides to their crops**

While the importance of bees to UK agriculture is profound, it has not always been straightforward for farmers and beekeepers to communicate directly with each other. BeeConnected – launched on the 12th September aims to address this by digitalising the process. The project, led by the Voluntary Initiative (VI) says BeeConnected is designed to work quickly and efficiently for farmers and beekeepers alike. “BeeConnected operates on a very simple, yet efficient, two-way process whereby farmers identify their fields and, in just a few clicks, are able to inform local beekeepers when they intend to spray an insecticide in particular fields. Beekeepers plot the location of their hives, and will then receive a notification ahead of when a farmer within their locality is planning to undertake a spray event.”

### **A two-way process**

The launch follows a successful pilot which took place in Hertfordshire in the spring spraying season. Andrew Watts, a farmer with 2250 hectares of combinable crops and grassland in NE Hertfordshire, participated in the trial. “The countryside is a shared place, and beekeepers need farmers as much as farmers need beekeepers. It’s a two-way process, and anything that improves communication as BeeConnected does is a good thing.”

### **Open communication**

Improving communication is a key benefit of BeeConnected for Mat Smith, a beekeeper in Bishop’s Stortford. “The current SLO system isn’t always effective,” he says, “The BeeConnected website is an excellent tool that can improve both bee health and relations between beekeepers and farmers. Honey bees are hugely beneficial to both their keepers, farmers and the larger population as a whole, and open communication between farmers and beekeepers can only be a good thing. It was very easy to set up, and the alerts came through in time for me to take action to protect my bees, I can’t think of any reason for beekeepers not to use this service!”

During the development of the project the VI worked closely with the National Farmers Union (NFU), the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) who were responsible for the initial BeeConnected proposal, and the Crop Protection Association (CPA), who funded the development of the site.

<https://www.beeconnected.org.uk/>



## The Buzz – Beekeeping in the news



September 16, 2016

### Pesticide manufacturers' own tests reveal serious harm to honeybees

Bayer and Syngenta criticised for secrecy after unpublished research obtained under freedom of information law linked high doses of their products to damage to the health of bee colonies

Unpublished field trials by pesticide manufacturers show their products cause serious harm to honeybees at high levels, leading to calls from senior scientists for the companies to end the secrecy which cloaks much of their research.

The research, conducted by Syngenta and [Bayer](#) on their neonicotinoid insecticides, were submitted to the US Environmental Protection Agency and obtained by Greenpeace after a freedom of information request.

Read more:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/22/pesticide-manufacturers-own-tests-reveal-serious-harm-to-honeybees>



October 1, 2016

### Bees added to US endangered species list for the first time

Seven types of the yellow-faced or masked bees once found in great numbers in Hawaii are under threat. Seven types of bees once found in abundance in Hawaii have become the first bees to be added to the US federal list of endangered and threatened species.

The listing decision, published on Friday in the Federal Register, classifies seven varieties of yellow-faced or masked bees as endangered, due to such factors as habitat loss, wildfires and the invasion of non-native plants and insects.

Read more on the Guardian website:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/oct/01/bees-added-to-us-endangered-species-list-for-the-first-time>

## Contact Details – Plymouth Branch

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### **DBKA Website - Members Area Password:**

If you have forgotten the password, please contact either Terry McAuliffe or Jean French.

**Member Adverts**

2 x Beekeeping suits with fencing veils, beige, will fit medium to large:  
£40 each

Galvanised spinner: £40

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# Notice

Gary and Steve would like to inform all new and existing customers that we **no longer** trade under the name of "Cornwall Honey" and have no affiliation to the website or other social media tools related to Cornwallhoney.co.uk



Business is as usual but we are now trading under the name of "The Honey Company"

Therefore please correspond using the email:  
[thehoneycompanyuk@gmail.com](mailto:thehoneycompanyuk@gmail.com)

The website which is under development is:  
[www.thehoneycompany.co.uk](http://www.thehoneycompany.co.uk)

We look forward to seeing you all in the future.

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