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The Healing Power of Honey

From the Daily Telegraph on March 2nd 2005

It has long been suspected that honey has a special healing power. Some of us heard Dr. Rose Cooper, a microbiologist at the University of Wales Institute in Cardiff speaking about her research to the Bucks Seminar last month. Medihoney is a specially prepared gel made of Manuka honey. It is the first pure, medical honey dressing, proven to work against MRSA, to be distributed through the NHS Logistic Authority.

A trial is currently in progress at Aintree Hospital, Liverpool, comparing conventional wound healing treatments on deep lesions, such as leg ulcers. The results are exciting. Medihoney treats malodour effectively and some patients have gone on to full healing. "I have been amazed at some of the results" says clinical nurse Val Robson.

Honeys vary in their effectiveness because of the way they release hydrogen peroxide which is an antiseptic. They also appear to gain added potency from the phytochemicals that are in the nectar of particular plants. Ordinary honey may produce disastrous results if it has not been sterilised and standardised. "Clostridia bacteria, present in some honeys, can cause gangrene" warns Dr. Cooper.



PETER SMITH, Foreign Correspondent

Bee Losses

There have been considerable losses of bee colonies in the US this winter. Figures quoted are as high as 40% or even 50% in some areas. This has meant that the usual rush of hives for pollination of almonds and citrus fruit in the South has been problematical, with hives being drawn in from all corners. Pollination fees are quoted as high as \$100 + for a strong colony.

The reason for the losses is not quite understood. Some are suggesting that it may be due to resistant varroa mites or even a build-up of anti-varroa chemicals in the wax combs. Watch this space. Roll on Integrated Pest Management!

Just a headline

Looking in one of my old beekeeping books recently, I came across this description of a swarm written in the 1920's by J G Digges in his *The Practical Bee Guide*. Digges was the Ted Hooper of his day and was writing at a time when descriptive prose was often used in scientific writing. Perhaps we have lost something of the wonder of beekeeping in

expecting our beekeeping books to be lacking in emotion. What do you think? **John Chudley**

The Swarm – An Ecstasy.....Pouring from the insufficient opening they come, in bewildering haste; a riotous throng, rapturously jubilant, in the very ecstasy of extravagant emotion; harmless, too, in their design, and in their exaltation so sweetly amiable that he who will may handle them in safety. A vast multitude it is, rushing hither and thither, with great noise of humming, until the queen has joined them from the hive and has alighted upon some neighbouring tree. Then they gather round her in very numbers assuring her timid heart, unaccustomed to rough exposure and risk of outer dangers- and form a cluster with the faithful mother, so still that the passing traveller may hardly notice them. Now let the watchful owner hive them without delay, and set them to work in anew home, or they will rise and, following their scouts sent out before to find a dwelling, will settle in some distant tree or chimney, or will invade the ruined tower upon the neighbouring hill, and so be lost to useful purpose.

Bees in a bag

Bob Hunter is President of the Mid Bucks Beekeepers, and a member of the Wycombe Association of Beekeepers Committee for 40 years. (This must be a record! Ed.) As part of an occasional series of interviews for *The Extractor*, he tells us how he became interested in beekeeping way back in the 1940s.

I spent my early childhood in a cottage near the village of Lavant in the South Downs and first tasted honey when I was about seven. I was playing with a friend at his house. In the scullery we saw a large glazed earthenware pot standing on the floor. It was full of honey, still mixed with wax. We dipped our fingers in and it tasted wonderful. But we were discovered by my friend's father, the beekeeper. He slapped us both so hard around the legs that I was quite shocked, but I was not put off. In fact I used to hide

in the hedge secretly after that and watch fascinated while he worked among his hives.

When I was 10 we moved to live at Flackwell Heath near High Wycombe. Two doors away lived another beekeeper called Bert Keene. He had a WBC in his garden. The time came when he was getting married and felt that he must move his bees for his wife's sake.

So he hooked up his car, a 1936 Austin 7 two-seater convertible, to an old Ministry of Defence steel trailer. All he needed was a helper to carry the hive. I was proud when he asked me (not knowing how many had refused). We stood the hive just as it was on a large square of sacking and gathered the edges of the hessian together, tying it up with string like a bag. This was then lifted into the trailer and we set off to a field near Hambleton.

The bees rattling about in the trailer behind had now emerged from the hive, and finding themselves trapped in the bag, they set up a tremendous roar. The angry pressure of them was making the bag move about and it was tremendously hot to the touch.

A little anxiously Bert prepared himself in his protective gear and lit the smoker while I was told I would be fine as I was! (Have you noticed how often beekeepers say this)? He opened the bag... Well - those bees came out of the sack as though shot out of a machine gun. We ran for it with Bert puffing the smoker, but got terribly stung anyway. It was quite exciting really.

Fourteen years later I got married myself and thought the time had come to have some bees of my own. Bert and I went together back to the field to see if we could find that same hive. The WBC was still there, rotting away under a mountain of brambles. Inside was a colony of bees still alive and doing fine. I hived it into a National and that was how I got started in beekeeping.