

The Extractor



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The honey harvest is over and the bees have been treated for varroa and fed with syrup. It is a delightful time of year, seeing the shelves lined with jars of honey and clean yellow bars of wax waiting to be made into candles and polish during the winter.



The ivy flower

I have found the honey yield a little less than usual, but the flavour wonderfully intense. I can only imagine that the dry heat of the summer resulted in a reduced nectar secretion.

I went to the bees today and was enchanted by the distinct smell of ivy emanating from the hives. It is very clear what they have been up to!

Editor

Rothamsted research axed

After seven years of research into a cure for varroa, Defra has withdrawn its funding. Only £600,000 was needed to achieve a useful conclusion, but Brenda Ball has been forced to close down the bee unit, which she heads, leaving a potentially successful programme incomplete.

Scientists had selected 40 isolates. The best eight were chosen, involving three or four different species and four commercial products already on sale for other purposes (Bio Blast, Botaniguard, Naturalis and Mycotal). Should an existing product have proved the solution, it would have been easier to register a "change of use" than to create a new product.

The fungal solution

Certain moulds or fungi kill varroa mites without harming honeybees. They work by penetrating the cuticle and proliferating inside the body of the mite. Whereas varroicides act on a target site (eg the nervous system) and the mite can mutate to sidestep the poison, the

The US is also researching a fungal cure for varroa. However their approach has been to select only one fungal isolate and test that

to the limit. So the method at Rothamsted could not now mesh with what is being done in the US.

Lord Rooker, the Minister for Sustainable Farming and Food, has turned a deaf ear to BBKA's pleas for more money for research. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* he says "The bee and honey sector must and does take responsibility for its own swarms' health" and any further research should be co-sponsored by industry. The BBKA executive met with DEFRA this month, hoping for a change of heart.

Based on Caroline Birchell's talk to MBBKA in the spring. She was one of the scientists made redundant from the Rothamsted project.



The *International Herald Tribune* reports on the problems varroa is causing in New Zealand. Varroa hit the north island of NZ a couple of years ago and there were plans to eradicate all bees, hoping to get rid of the mite. This strategy was not followed through, but as lots of colonies have died out, a farmer who grows Kiwi fruit now has to pay beekeepers \$145 per hive for pollination as opposed to \$100 five years ago.

There is a similar situation in California which grows the world's largest almond crop. It is said that 1.3m hives are required for pollination and, as in NZ, the price per hive here has gone up from \$40 a few years back to a figure around \$135. (Google 'Bees and almonds').

The Editor of *Bee Culture*, one of the two main US bee magazines, will be at this year's National Honey Show in London. He's worth listening to if you're up there. One of his talks will be about a beekeeper with 100,000 (Yes, one hundred thousand) hives. I bet Mr Thorne would be pleased to see him coming through the door.

Peter Smith

Foreign Editor

Parslow Apiaries Ltd. - the life of a commercial beekeeper

By Netia Lascelles

The Parslows of Bledlow are a full-time, family beekeeping business, consisting of John and Joan, and their son Barry (not to be confused with John and Penny Parslow at Little Kingshill). The Parslows made a limited company of their business 23 years ago. They run several hundred hives and every one has to be fitted out with hand-made frames (John's winter work). I had hoped that beekeeping on a big scale could be streamlined. Not much, according to Barry, when I asked him about it. Though they use a huge metal unit with extractors which hold up to 24 frames, it is hot and sticky work – while the wonderful heated uncapping tray makes it even

hotter. Handling so many supers, it is impossible to get rid of all the bees, so Barry admits he gets stung quite a lot!

In the past the Parslows sold their 30lb buckets of unstrained honey to co-operatives who heat-treated it for the supermarkets. But Barry says they do better to trade top-quality natural honey from their front door, plus making value-added wax products which they sell through the farm shops and fairs. Pollination used to be part of the job too, which involved carting hives all over the country. But that was hard work – as well as “knocking the bees back” said Barry.

Parslow Apiaries are the Thornes agents in our area. They operate out of Bailiff's Cottage, Bledlow, just below Lord Carrington's house. Beekeepers can order everything that appears in the Thornes Catalogue by telephone. Basic things are held in stock and can be collected on the same day, while larger orders need advance warning.

For anyone who hasn't bought the odd porter escape from Bailiffs Cottage, it is worth it, because you can ask John and Barry all your beekeeping questions when you are there! (ring 01844 344948 first).

Gritty honey wanted

A beautician I know in London uses gritty honey for exfoliating the skin of her clients. The scratchy bits remove dead skin and she says that the honey itself has all sorts of beautifying effects, moisturising and “plumping”. (I wish!) The honey must not have fermented because she is very fussy about the smell.

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Microscope for sale.

Plus various bits and pieces to go with it.

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