

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



The issue dedicated to Hints on Showing Honey!

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Essex Beekeeper's Association

The Essex Beekeepers' Association is a registered charity whose object is to further the craft of beekeeping in Essex.

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March and April 2010

- 4 Mar. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. A talk by Ian Grant on the subject of 'Spring Preparation'.
- 5 Mar. *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. A talk by Clive de Bruyn, internationally renowned beekeeper, on the subject of 'Swarm Control'.
- 6 Mar. *Saturday 2.00pm* **EBKA** 130th Annual General Meeting. Room E06, Write College, Lordship Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3RR. (see advert).
- 15 Mar *Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Rainsford Rd. CM1 2XB. Join us to hear some of our members tell a tale or two about their successes and failures in beekeeping. Some of these will make you laugh and some you may find helpful in your future beekeeping.
- 18 Mar. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Colchester** Langham Community Centre. A talk by Stuart Baldwin on 'Bees and their products in fine art'. Stuart gave a talk after the AGM of the EBKA in 2009. This should be a very entertaining talk.
- 18 Mar. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Epping Forest** at The Chingford Horticultural Society Hall, Larkshall Road, Chingford, E4 6NH. Orlando Clarke is coming to talk about Urban Beekeeping. He has considerable experience in this area and appeared in Martha Carney's BBC film 'Vanishing Bees'. More details can be found at www.purelondonhoney.co.uk. This promises to be an interesting evening.
- 20 Mar *Saturday TBA* **Saffron Walden** BBKA Intermediate Assessment.
- 20 Mar. *Saturday 2.00pm* **Maldon and DH** at Blue Boar Hotel, Silver Street, Maldon. How to make Mead and perhaps with tasting!
- 20 Mar. *Saturday 11.00am* **Colchester**, Wax Day at Rowan Cottage, Tendring. £4 per person includes homemade soup for lunch and all teas and coffees. Beeswax and wick available to make candles by dipping or using moulds. Pay for materials at cost price. Beginners welcome. Phone Penny Barker to book on 01255 830713. **Please note the new date.**
- 24 Mar. *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** Peter Harvey from the Essex Field Club will give a talk on Brownfield Sites.
- 1 April *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. A talk by Danny Nichol on 'Swarm Control'

Continued on page 4

- 9 April *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. A talk Jim McNeill and John O'Connell on 'Marketing your Honey'.
- 13 April *Tuesday 7.45pm* **Saffron Walden** Dunmow Day Centre, Gt. Dunmow CM6 1AE. A 'Mead Masterclass by Richard Ridler
- 15 Apr *Thursday 7.30pm* **Epping Forest** at The Chingford Horticultural Society Hall, Larkshall Road, Chingford, E4 6NH. Roy Cropley is going to give us a talk on Beeswax. More details about this talk will be given in the next issue of the Essex Beekeeper.
- 21 April *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Rainsford Rd. CM1 2XB Mead Making: if you have ever thought of making mead but never got around to it, this is a meeting for you. Richard Alabone will be talking about the historical background to making mead and Eric Fenner will describe what equipment is needed and how to produce your first bottle of mead.
- 22 April *Thursday 7.30pm* **Colchester** Langham Community Centre. A talk by Barry Kaufmann-Wright on the 'Role of a Police Wildlife Crime Officer. The talk covers Barry's period with Essex Police in this role. The slides illustrate numerous cases and problems regularly encountered and includes current legislation and its associated issues.
- 24 April *Saturday 2.00pm* **Maldon and DH** at Blue Boar Hotel, Silver Street, Maldon. Dealing with swarms: the signs and prevention.
- 28 April *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** A talk by Terry Clare on how to organise a breeding programme for the average beekeeper.

Letter to the Editor

I'm hoping you might be able to help me publicise a new Facebook group which I have set up. It is called Beesness (Bees North Essex South Suffolk) and its purpose is to help beekeepers in the area to stay intouch in an informal way, perhaps to share their expertise with those of us who don't have any yet, and inform people about where to buy bee related products locally. Having attended Derek Webber's excellent practical course for new beekeepers, I was aware that many of us did not know where to buy the necessary equipment and between us we had far too many questions to ask him. Over the weeks we also formed friendships and would discuss whether we had any bees yet and how they were progressing. Then suddenly the course was over. Some of us exchanged contact details but with such a large group, it was inevitable that we only shared a Hello and Goodbye with some of the participants.

I don't think any of us in the class would consider ourselves very knowledgeable. For that reason it would be great to attract those with more experience.

Please would it be possible to give the group a mention in the next copy of The Essex Beekeeper?

Yours sincerely Graham Orme

Ed.—There are now six members!

How to Prepare Honey For Shows—Clear Honey **Jim McNeill (Romford Division)**

Showing honey is all about setting a better standard for your honey sales. Winning a few classes regularly means you are doing it right. If you then do it every time for selling, you know you are producing a first class product to be proud of.

This is the way that I get honey ready to sell and show, It may not be the standard way but I have never had any problems. If you have the equipment to strain your honey as it comes out of the extractor do so because this is the best method. However, I don't do this (!) but the honey is filtered as i bottle it. I don't think it matters much if the honey is bottled but if you sell honey in buckets it must be strained.

When extracting I make a note the colour of the honey on each bucket: light - medium - dark. I never use dark honey for set, I don't get much anyway, light is best. I don't have much choice most years. I think medium has a better flavour anyway.

Bees in the same area will all have honey that is almost the same, it's what you do or don't do that makes the difference.

- Store honey in bulk, it keeps better than in jars.
- Try to keep it in a fairly stable temperature.

In this article I will deal with clear honey and will follow what Ted Hooper says in his book *A Guide to Bees and Honey*, you can't go wrong with his method. I put a bucket of honey in my warming cabinet for about 3 days at 50c. To produce good honey you need to have a thermostatic control, over heating honey is not good. At this temperature all the sugar crystals will melt.

When it is ready, I filter it through 4 layers of nylon net curtain while it's still warm straight from the cabinet, I then leave it to settle over night and so most of the bubbles come to the top.

Using a good paper towel, I polish the inside of every jar just before I fill them up and put the lid on tight. The last 5 or 6 jars will have a scum of bubbles on top, so I fill these up a bit more to allow me to skim the top with a tea spoon; all the rest will be perfect. Next the jars need to go in a water bath for 1 hour at 60c; put a cooking thermometer in the pot with the jars. You will need a nice big pot I have eventually got one that holds 29 jars, it's a very large catering tray I bought at a boot sale. I put a grid in the bottom to spread the heat and the water must come up to the neck of the jar. Leave the lids on tight they won't explode; this procedure gives the jars a longer shelf life before they start to crystallize. Time starts when the water is at 60c; it's not that hot but keep an eye on the thermometer. When the time is up turn off the heat and take them out one at a time and polish with a tea towel especially around the neck of the jar where the water came up to trying to keep them upright all the time. If this is done just before a show it makes the honey sparkle.

Now for the bits that make a difference between your honey for showing:

- Read the show schedule very carefully. It's a shame to get a jar put to one side for being in the wrong class.
- Enter early, helps to prevent mistakes.
- Use new jars, from the same batch, judges generally don't worry about the

batch nos. but it can help if it is a tie.

- The jars going in a show need to be filled up more than for sale, I keep a few old lids that I use for the show batch so I can write on them the class nos. for when they are in the water bath.

- Aim to have honey ready the week before the show you don't want the jars to be opened for a least 3 days before the judge does. This way all the aroma is sealed in which the judge will smell when he opens your jar.

- I have a teaspoon which I have filed at the bottom and I skim every jar the day after they have been in the hot bath and have cooled. This is where filling them extra works out, you put what you skim of into another jar so you don't lose any. Then use a small piece of kitchen roll to clean the top of the jars and the threads then put on the new lids which will only be opened by the judge. They will open nice and clean.

- Polish the outside of the jar to get any finger prints off and put on the labels from the Show Secretary. These should usually be 10-15 mm up from the bottom of the jar (but Read the Show Schedule). Put the label in the centre of a panel not on a seam, get used to doing this for your sale labels as it make them look much better. Then pack the jars in a box that won't let them move or slide about.

- Do not tip jars on there side you will get honey on the lids and spoil the finish you put on top.

- Never, Never, Never change lids at a show.

- YOUR PRESENTATION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT BIT OF SHOWING NO FINGERPRINTS - MATCHED JARS - NO DIGS OR SCRATCHES ON LIDS - LABELS STRAIGHT AND CENTRED WITH SEAMS ON SIDES.

There is not really that much difference between selling and showing honey once you do it the same way each time.

Give honey time to cool before bottling and skimming I always leave over night,.

I hope this will help people to enter shows I find it much easier to do than to write it all down but you can always give me a ring to help out.

How to Prepare Honey For Shows—Set Honey Jim McNeill (Romford Division)

I will try to show you how I get honey to set with a very fine crystal so it spreads nice on toast and hopefully wins shows. I don't get that much honey so providing it is not dark I use the first bucket I come to, as I mentioned last month I take a note of the colour as it is extracted. Light honey makes the best looking set, but a medium has more flavour and still looks good.

First you need to get some honey to call your seed. The seed is a honey that spreads easy and feels smooth on the tongue, If you are lucky some of your own set honey may be just right. It varies from year to year, mine usually sets quite hard with large crystals so I never produce natural set honey. If yours is the same, buy a jar from another beekeeper

The books tell you 1lb of seed will set 10 lb of honey but that takes a while to set. When I start to make my seed from scratch I mix 1lb with 3 to 4lb of clear honey and let it set. I then have 4 to 5 lb of seed which I mix with 10lb of clear honey and let this

set again. Put this aside for now, tagged as your seed honey. This sounds complicated but I don't find it easy to write down what I do automatically.

Now to start to make set honey. Take a 30lb bucket of light or medium honey. warm it and filter it exactly the same as if you want clear honey, as I explained last month, but don't bottle it. While that is cooling down, I usually leave it overnight, warm up your seed in the warming cabinet but keep the temperature at 30oc for about 6 hours. You must be able to stir it like a stiff porridge; I use a spiral screw on an electric drill—there are different types on sale from the bee appliance suppliers, or just use a large wooden spoon. If you use a drill, by a cheap one and only use it for honey, not the drill you used to put up shelves last week, as brick dust does not go well in set honey.

Try not to introduce air into the honey; stir the seed and pour it into the cool clear honey in the bottling tank and stir until it all takes on uniform colour. Some books say stir every hour or so for a day but I don't—once is enough. (Your seed honey, mentioned above, should be made up in the same way, warming and stirring and leaving to set. This is of course on a smaller scale so this task is accomplished more quickly). Don't worry about any scum on top—each time it's only air bubbles, but the less air stirred in the better.

Leave this alone until the next day have a look at it and scrape a spoon or knife through it to see if it is setting, it needs to be moveable enough to flow out the honey gate but not too runny, it takes time to get to know when it is just right. Leave it too long and it sets too hard to bottle and so will need slight warming to flow; too runny and it will take too long to set properly in the jar. The quicker it sets in the jar the less air rises to the top. You should be able to tip a jar on it's side and the honey not move in about 3 to 4 days.

When you bottle set honey don't tip the jar on it's side as if bottling clear honey but let the honey hit the bottom of the jar and move up the sides evenly, if you tip the jar and it starts to frost you get a line down the side of the jar but seeded honey does not frost quite so readily as it is set as it goes in the jar.

Once you have bottled all the set honey you want put the rest back in the bucket used to make the seed honey—this will have quite a scum on top but don't worry, it's only bubbles, it won't be in your jars. Seal this up and your seed is ready for next time.

TO RECAP

Make sure the clear honey is cool enough about 15-20c this is where a lot goes wrong—if the honey is too warm it melts the crystals in the seed.

Pour into the bottom of the jar.

If getting ready to enter a show, bottle the honey about 1- 2 weeks before hand. If it sets fast you will have a good top on the honey if it is slow you may be able to skim the top after a few days to take off the bubbles and it will set without showing any marks.

Don't warm the seed up too quickly and keep the temperature at 30c.

Making set honey this way will mean that all the honey has been filtered so there is no chance of black specks in the bottom of the jars. It is not really any harder to do set honey, and it nearly always comes out the same each time. You just have to start a few days earlier, So start practising on your honey sales ready for the honey shows to start.

Technical Topics—Bottling Honey

Richard Alabone (Mr Beesy)

The extraction process gives us tubs of filtered honey but some honey will granulate too quickly, rape for example, while others granulate slowly and may go rather sugary. It's best, if you can, to seed the late crop with about 10% of fine granulated honey, stirred well in, which produces the best compromise, although lime honey is not amenable to seeding and may be kept as clear for years. Course granulated honey, in bulk, may also be dealt with by heating it to clear, then bottling it as clear, or by seeding it to produce a soft set.

Some beekeepers will bottle honey that has been cleared and seeded, straight away, but this often shrinks in the jar and pulls away from the glass, producing unsightly frosting. Also, bottling from the extractor encourages frosting or gritty granulation. Many people believe that by heating the jars first, or by avoiding trapped air in the honey, frosting can be avoided. But authors have repeatedly copied this misinformation since about 1943 when it was put in a Government leaflet about beekeeping. If cleared honey is seeded it's best to leave it to granulate, before warming and bottling, but I find it best to do the seeding, if necessary, straight after extracting.

So now you have your stock of honey in honey buckets, holding 15 or 30 lbs, which needs to be softened in order to bottle it. Use a special warming cabinet, if you have one, but I've always used the airing cupboard with a 500W electric heater on the floor and leave it for about a day till the honey is softening at about blood heat. Then stir up the honey. I use a potato masher fixed to a wooden handle but you could buy a special expensive one. If it needs more warming in order to pour it easily, it's best to warm the bucket in hot water. I have a Burco boiler, bought from a boot sale, which is also used for the final heating of clear bottled honey - 10 at a time.

At this stage, set things up in the kitchen for bottling. With only a little honey it's possible to pour or jug it into the jars, filling to the guideline on the jar, but this way can be very messy. A honey tap in a white plastic bucket is the best. I use my extractor tap, fitted on a large tub holding about 70 lbs, but you can use a 30lb bucket with a hole near the bottom to take the tap. This way I can do 60lbs at a time, blending if necessary, and I also use a good sidelight to observe the honey level in the jar. Place the tub on something about 6 inches high to allow plenty of room under the tap. A bit of bottling stupidity is the settling tank, which avoids air in the honey—don't bother, as it isn't that which causes frosting. As far as filtering is concerned a double plastic filter after extracting is generally OK for soft set, but a few bits of wax etc do get through. The jars may be used straight from the supplier without washing—but some do wash them first. In any case invert them to make sure there are no chips of glass there before putting in the honey.

To control the set of honey is not easy. Ideally it should not move at all, when the jar is tipped, but it can vary enormously from a knife-bending set, to runny. All this depends on the original type of nectar, or honey dew, the water content and also on the temperature to which it was heated before bottling. If too hot it creates a large proportion of cleared honey that subsequently granulates and produces a hard set.

When honey is cleared for bottling it is easily put through a fine mesh filter bag suspended on two pieces of wood over the bottling tub, but you do have to squeeze the

last of the honey out, by hand, before washing it. To clear honey it needs heating to 52C for 2 days, which is not always easy to do. A special warming cabinet may be used but I have always used the Burko boiler to hold a 30 lb bucket. After cleared honey is bottled it should be heated for 1 hour at 62C, which will prevent granulation for about six months. This can be done in a large water tray or Burco boiler. It is possible to buy an electric thermostatic control for warming cabinets or water boilers. One thing that you are tempted to do is to put the lids on tight for the final heating and then give a final tighten while still warm. This causes a vacuum above the honey making the lids very difficult to remove subsequently. I always release the vacuum when cool.

The use of a hydrometer will determine the water content, which should be below 20%, but, if over this, it may be blended with a low water content honey to prevent fermentation. Sterilisation by heating is practiced by large producers, but the hobbyist might have a problem if honey with too much water is stored in the warm. Fermentation in the jar makes a dreadful mess and taints the honey. For home use honey may be sterilised by adding sodium benzoate, which is sold as a wine 'stabiliser'. This can be mixed with a little water and added to the honey at the rate of ½ tsp. to 15lbs; but it must not be sold! A bucket of fermented honey may be usefully used for mead provided it is mixed with water, then heated to about 70° C to kill the wild yeasts.

One last point about honey bottling is that of hygiene. A hobbyist will probably use normal kitchen hygiene throughout, but the standards required by health/ food inspectors is quite frightening when it comes to large scale production and bears little relationship to common sense hygiene as used in the kitchen, or seen inside our hives. Bees generally clean out dead insects and coat all surfaces with propolis to eliminate bacteria, but they have dirty feet, and sometimes defecate in the hive. I know some of my frames are 50 years old and have never been scrubbed. The health inspection system only allows white plastic or stainless steel to come in contact with food, and so frames should all be white plastic and hives should be lined with stainless steel which can be scrubbed! We need sanity; as well as sanitation!

This article was part-written in the Mall of Asia, Manila, "the largest mall in the world". A lot warmer than in Essex! 23-12-2009

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JUDGING HONEY--IN THE JAR
or How the Judge looks at Honey in the Jar By CECIL C. TONSLEY,
B.E.M.,F.R.E.S. (revised 2003 by Margaret Davies)

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There are now several books and booklets available on exhibiting and judging bee produce but the most comprehensive book available is "Producing, Preparing and Judging Bee Produce" by the late Wm. Herrod-Hempsall, but only a small proportion of those who keep bees exhibit the produce of the hives at the relatively small number of honey shows that take place up and down the country. More might do so if they were aware of what the judge looks for in his examination of the various exhibits on the show bench. In this article an attempt will be made to show what takes place.

Within the scope of this article it will only be possible to deal with two types of exhibit - bottled honey, liquid extracted and crystallised or granulated. (Heather honey will also be dealt with.)

The classes covered by extracted honey are light, medium and dark in the liquid form and natural crystallised and soft set in the crystallised or granulated form.

Liquid Honey Classes

When the judge commences judging he or she will pick out the lightest liquid honey class on his or her list, i.e., if there is a light, a medium and a dark class to judge they should start with the light because the exhibits will be of a more delicate aroma and taste, thus their palate will "deteriorate" more slowly and the taste buds' reaction remain alert throughout judging.

Every judge should be accompanied by a steward whose job it is to assist the judge in every way bar judging. They must see that the judge has the normal requirements for judging. For example, water for washing the tasting rods --glass rods for removing samples of honey from each jar. The steward will fetch and carry, advise the judge on details in the schedule, especially on the rules governing the honey show and the classes, although the judge will already have familiarised himself or herself with the regulations. Further they must await the instructions of the judge as to the loosening of lids on the jars, etc.

The judge will begin by looking along the showbench for those first rejections among the exhibits, having first selected the equipment needed to make the examinations, several honey tasters in a small container of water, a torch, and a set of grading glasses to check that the honey is in the right class.

Normally the Show Secretary will advise exhibitors, particularly beginners, if they are uncertain as to the class they should be showing in. However it is not uncommon for the judge to reject an odd exhibit or two for being in the wrong class. Next the judge will begin the close examination of each exhibit.

If the schedule requires that each jar should be labelled 1.5 cms (1/2 in) from the base of the jar this should be approximately as stated but not absolutely crucial. The containers themselves must match in each exhibit and the contents must also match. It is no use having one jar of honey one colour and tasting of one thing and the other, or more if requested for the class, somewhat different. Nor is it permissible to exhibit in odd types of jar. If the schedule is for squat type jars, then they must be squat jars of the same

design and shape.

For the next operation the judge will most likely have to use the torch, especially if the hall or marquee is unlit. Each jar is removed from the bench in turn and closely scrutinised. The judge is looking for what is generally called "extraneous" matter, that is, anything in the honey that should not normally be there.

It often happens that very small pieces of material detach themselves from the straining or filter cloth and, if so, these will be suspended in the honey. Likewise a hair, minute pieces of wax that have become broken up during extraction, and the filtering process has failed to remove during bottling. If any of these things are present a strong light will reveal them and in doing so the judge will in all probability reject the exhibit because the first tenet of showing is cleanliness and hygiene. During this part of the examination the judge will also be looking for the first indication of crystallisation in the honey should it be there. This is revealed in a very fine cloudy, or smokey appearance and will be described by the judge to any who may ask as incipient granulation.

As the class calls for clear or liquid honey, and the smoke haze of minute crystals or worse will very soon bring about crystallisation in the exhibit, the honey judge will have to reject it. Honey with a high imbalance of dextrose to laevulose is therefore not a good one for the liquid honey classes. An example of this, of course, is Rape Honey.

The external examination of the exhibits is now almost complete and rejections or otherwise made on an examination of each item in the exhibit i.e., if two jars compose the exhibit, then both jars are examined. The judge will also take into account lids and should there be any rust the whole exhibit will be rejected.

Once more we return to the need for cleanliness which is the keynote of all food preparation.

All exhibits in the class that have stood up to the first tests are now about to have their final examination, the judge having already briefed the steward to loosen the lids of those still remaining in the contest.

It is important, of course, that lids shall only be loosened **not** removed. The judge then carefully lifts each lid in turn and sniffs closely the surface of the honey for any aroma, which in the case of light honey should be very delicate. It is at this juncture too that a little of the honey is removed on the end of one of the tasting rods after it has first been wiped free of any water. The sample of honey is transferred from the rod to the forefinger of the left hand (to the right hand if a left-handed person) and thence to the mouth for tasting.

As already explained the taste should match the aroma, light and delicate for light honey, more perceptible for medium honey and more distinct in dark honey, but at no time should there be any unpleasant taste which can come about from a variety of things such as contact with products of pronounced odour, the use of strongly tainted products for cleaning the jars, or it sometimes occurs that the bees themselves introduce unpleasantly tasting honey into the hive from some floral sources an example of which is ragwort. Nor should the honey, on being swallowed following the tasting, cause a tickling or burning sensation at the back of the throat.

Liquid honey, whether light, medium, or dark, should be bright and clear. If it is dull looking and is not in the incipient granulation stage then it could very well contain an admixture of honeydew. Such honey has no place on the showbench.

Having made a number of rejections of exhibits for one reason or another the judge will begin the task of placing the remaining exhibits in a rough order of merit from left to right

always having at the back of his or her mind the various criteria which have already been mentioned, but with the addition of finally paying attention to the density of the honey.

Honey should not be so thin that it falls rapidly from the tasting rod when sampled or so dense that it forms a "ball" on the tongue when tasted. The first is usually a sign that the moisture content of the honey is too high and it is likely to be "unripe" and therefore liable to ferment in storage, and in the other instance the exhibitor may have over-processed the exhibit to obtain brightness and reduce the water content.

Lightly touching the surface of each exhibit in turn the judge carefully watches the small "pyramid" of honey raised as the rod is withdrawn return to its normal level. From this exercise an experienced judge can usually tell a good honey from a poor quality one. Comparing one jar against another and also doing further taste sampling, and also taking into account such details as general get-up, clean jars with clean screw threads, new bright lids with clean inner surfaces and threads (a little fresh honey on the lid due to travelling will not detract from the exhibit), honey surface free of dust and wax particles, and finally the presence or not of air scum or froth which usually forms a fine ring around the surface and on the outer edge of the honey, the prize winning exhibits take shape.

Granulated or Crystallised Honey

Nowadays shows usually carry two classes for granulated or crystallised honey -natural set and soft set, the latter has come about as a result of public demand for the latter over the former.

Because cleanliness plays its part in the preparation of all honey the judge starts by carefully examining the bottom of each exhibit, for dust and other extraneous matter will usually be present in this area if the exhibitor has failed to check his glass or honey before filling the jars.

Frosting caused by the presence of air trapped between the side of the jar beneath the shoulder and the honey, if unsightly, will reduce the exhibit's chances of a prize although the honey may be excellent in other respects. Frosting is more likely to occur in natural granulated honey than soft set depending, of course, on its preparation.

Next the judge will be looking for a honey with a relatively fine grain. A rough, coarse grained honey is not to be recommended.

The honey in the exhibit must be uniform in colour. A pale straw colour is preferred to dark, brownish or greenish shades.

Within the jar the judge tests for fermentation by smell and the tell-tale moist bubbly appearance on the surface of the honey. The surface should be absolutely dry and firm with perhaps the hint of whiteness.

Flavour of course will be taken into account by the judge who will secure a small sample of honey from the very edge of the exhibit and not by carving a relatively large hole in the very centre so that the exhibitor cannot offer it to another show.

Finally, the judge will set out the prize winning exhibits in order as with liquid honey checking off the list with the steward.

Soft Set.

The procedure as for natural set honey is followed out precisely except that the judge will expect each exhibit to be quite firm but have the consistency of butter when first removed from a refrigerator. It should also be free of air bubbles and scum often produced in exhibits of this kind through the exhibitor following instructions to beat honey to

produce a soft condition. This is neither right or good for soft set granulated honey as the excess air introduced into the honey by such a process leads to an unsightly exhibit and later on to fermentation.

Heather Honey (*Calluna vulgaris* -Ling)

Pure Ling honey carries a slightly bitter-sweet taste, is a reddish dark amber colour, has a very distinct aroma of heather flowers, should be free of any granulation and be gelatinous (usually referred to as thixotropy). The purer the sample of heather honey the more thixotropic it will be, often tested by the judge turning the exhibit on its side whereupon the honey will stay firmly in place for some minutes or fall more quickly away when the sample is less pure. The judge will also test the thixotropic nature of the exhibit by drawing the tasting rod through the surface when it will become quite liquidly runny but reform firmly shortly afterwards. Whilst exhibiting a bright appearance, heather honey, unless it has been heated, will not be clear and should have an even distribution of air bubbles trapped in it from pressing. These should be of a reasonable size, not too large otherwise they detract from and not enhance the appearance of the exhibit as they should. Heather honey tends to darken with age.

A lot of heather honey that appears in honey shows these days is centrifuged from the comb and also heated. It lacks much that pressed heather retains.

Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*)

Is not gelatinous, has a less stronger flavour than true heather, is the nearest to port wine in colour, varies in its brightness and often is a little on the thin side in density.

In judging it the judge follows a similar comparative test to that given to liquid honey.

Commercial Classes

In classes that incorporate honey labelled 'as for sale' the judge will check the labels to ensure that they comply with the current regulations, including lot numbering.

Finally, with every class of honey the judge, having made his awards, checks each complete winning exhibit for any possible faults overlooked in the preliminary stages and very occasionally has to reappraise the outcome -but very rarely.

Secondly, every exhibitor who enters a show will have all their exhibits examined by the judge and will usually get an explanation from the judge why any particular exhibit failed to do well if they so require it.

Thirdly, any show staged under National Honey Show or B.B.K.A. rules makes provision for only one prize per exhibitor in each class. This is achieved by the judge prejudging any group of exhibits put in the one class by an exhibitor. It is considered a fairer way of dealing with exhibitors who could sweep the board in a class with exactly the same honey put up in a number of exhibits.

And very finally please understand that the outcome of any class is the judge's preference for a particular honey and not necessarily the unanimous verdict of a group of judges, although it will be found that prize-winning exhibits travelling around the shows attract similar prizes from a variety of judges.

Behind the 'Honey for Sale' Sign Ian Milligan (Colchester Division)

Behind the 'Honey for Sale' sign at the local beekeepers cottage should be a really diligent operation. The honey must be clean both physically and chemically, and if any ends up in the local shop, it must comply with Trading Standards labelling requirements. It may be sent for analysis to ensure it can meet moisture, HMF and enzyme levels and MRL's. Starting at the hive, honey must be free of contamination, paints, preservatives, vermin, smoker ash and especially bee disease treatments. Unapproved chemicals must not be used as they will probably not meet minimum residue level tests. When transporting supers home for extraction, the honey must not pick up anything from the vehicle such as dog hairs, carpet fibres or dust etc. Extracting equipment should be of food grade plastic or stainless steel, and extraction should take place in clean premises. An insectocutor is handy, and hygiene to a high standard should be maintained. Honey filters should be of correct size and grade to ensure that the honey is not peppered with tiny black specks which are not acceptable, and cannot be separated even if honey stands for 24 – 36 hours. Storage containers, usually 30lb buckets, must be food grade, and honey should be stored in a cool dark place. Melting honey out of buckets I do with a 100 watt light bulb set up in an old refrigerator laid down on its back.

Plenty of insulation and a well sealed door will suffice, depending on the type of honey and its ambient temperature and timings. A porridge state after mixing does for set honey and I give clear honey another two hours at 55 degrees centigrade. This needs experience to judge as all honeys are different and will try to re-crystallise whenever possible. Again, watch for contamination from floating fluff or fine animal hairs etc. After bottling and inspection I fit a temper proof label. As the jars go out for orders to the shop outlet, the final label goes on with a note made giving the lot number.

This is a brief account and does not include us of baffle tanks, Pratley trays, electric uncapping knives, draining cappings, and all the things that keep occurring to me, but would take ages to explain. And besides, my tea is nearly ready.



Essex Beekeepers' Association
130th Annual General Meeting, Saturday 6th March 2010
Room E06, Writtle College, Lordship Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3RR

General Treasurers Report for 2009

This is my third and last report as treasurer because as with other CEC posts someone else must take over after three years. I've enjoyed my time as treasurer and I'm delighted to say that there is a volunteer to take over. I must again thank the divisional treasurers for all their time and effort during the year; their diligence has made my job easier.

Last year's finances were shaped by the large numbers of beginners who needed to be trained. The CEC helped the divisions by making grants to divisions for protective clothing for use on courses. It also refunded half the subscription of beginners to divisions to help fund the costs of training courses. Income and expenditure on beginners' courses became major items in divisional accounts and are separately identified for the first time in our consolidated accounts.

Payments of £500/a to part fund a PhD research project started during the year; the researcher will be talking at our annual conference about her work. An enclosed trailer to house and transport the equipment used for the annual honey show was bought for a little over £1000 along with a PA system for use at the show. The honey show made a surplus despite a small reduction in the amount of honey sold. The CEC continued to refund the full entrance fees of those successful in BBKA assessments and exams.

Overall EBKA broke even in 2009 but the subsidies to divisions for beginners were perhaps a little generous resulting in a deficit to the CEC of around £4,000 and an equivalent surplus across the divisions. The subsidies should no longer be necessary because the divisions now have the equipment required to run future courses.

Our membership has increased from about 300 to about 500 during my term as treasurer. This has put some strains on the organisation but leaves us stronger in the longer term.

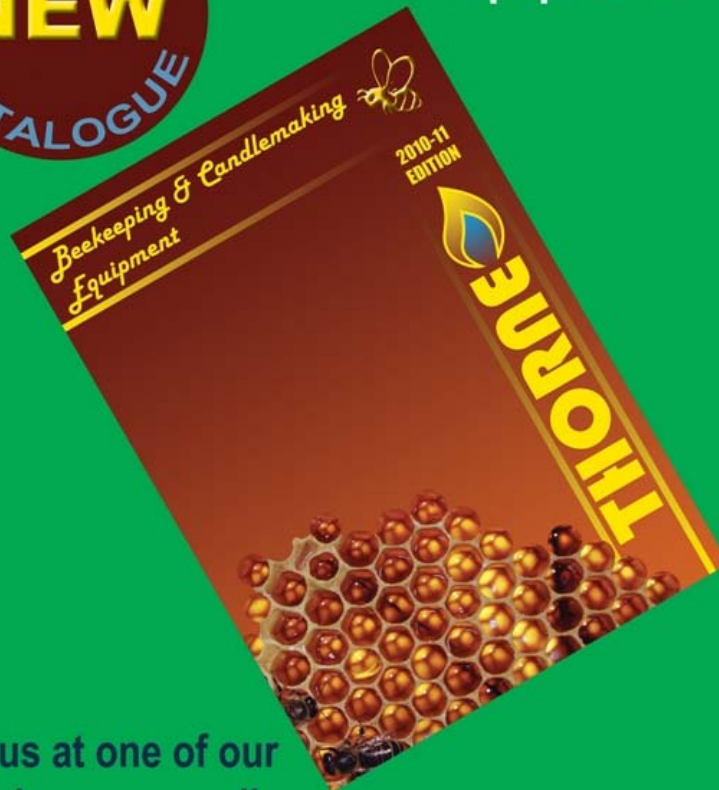
Richard Ridler

February 2010

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