


# BeeMail

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Send your news to: [beemail@bee-craft.com](mailto:beemail@bee-craft.com)

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## More than just the holly and the ivy

CHRISTMAS is coming and the goose is getting fat... but don't forget to check the weight of your hives regularly to ensure your bees aren't going through a lean period for stores.

The tradition of giving bees a gift of a jar of honey at Christmas is frowned upon nowadays for fear of spreading disease, so resist the temptation unless you are feeding honey from that particular colony.

**Fondant** is the recommended winter food but if you don't have the confidence to make your own you can buy commercial products such as Apifonda from beekeeping suppliers or baker's fondant. Supermarket royal icing should be avoided, as it contains additives.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, it seems Britain's gardeners are coming to the rescue of bees by being more insect-aware, for which we should thank the media generally. *Gardeners' World* offers a list of insect-friendly plants (but bear in mind the honey bee has a shorter

tongue than bumble bees so not all plants are suitable for them).

Further to the gardening hints in the last *BeeMail*, it may still be worth planting bulbs or trees for early spring pollen, but why not give your bees a treat for later in the season?

Garden centres should be able to advise you on what may be planted now and you may even be able to pick up some bargains, as shops drop their prices on perennial plants that are no longer in flower.

Golden rod and late-flowering asters are both very popular with bees at the end of the season and are quite invasive so should spread naturally around the apiary. Asters can flower from August-October, giving your bees an alternative to ivy.

If you need to provide a wind-break, how about a hedge of Hebe? Some varieties flower through to the first frosts. Or for a sturdy barrier, a mix of male and female holly will protect against wind and intruders, will buzz with bees in May and give decorative boughs to deck your halls.

Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you all!

Chris Richmond

## Fera refutes Buglife's pesticide report

The Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) has issued a stinging rebuke to invertebrate conservation trust Buglife's report on 'The impact of neonicotinoid insecticides on bumblebees, honeybees and other non-target invertebrates'.

The trust's 52-page report, published in October, pointed to the use of systemic pesticides as a major contributor to colony losses, with fears that even sub-lethal doses of neonicotinoid pesticides could weaken colonies and may account in part for Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) by poisoning and disorienting foraging bees.

But in a letter of response last month by Helen Thompson, Fera claimed much of

'No evidence' of adverse effects, but guidelines on use will be updated

Buglife's evidence was flawed or may have been misinterpreted, being based on laboratory tests rather than field trials that could give quite different results.

The Fera letter also stressed that bee losses in Germany, which resulted in the pesticide being withdrawn, were due to a poor coating of seeds with the chemical, causing dust clouds during sowing, and that longer-term studies had shown "no significant overwinter losses since monitoring began", despite the programme being started before the use of seed dressings was withdrawn.

The letter goes on to say that much of the

complaints raised by the Buglife report refer to 'first generation' neonicotinoids such as imidacloprid, rather than the more recently developed 'second generation chlorothiazolyl derivatives' such as thiamethoxam and clothianidin.

However, Helen Thompson, herself the Secretary of the bee protection group International Commission on Plant-Bee Relationships (ICPBR), admitted the current pesticide risk assessment systems for honey bees had not been set up to assess systemic compounds.

The ICPBR has proposed several amendments to the European Plant Protection Organisation guidelines, which will be passed on to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for consideration.

"These revisions have been based on detailed considerations of the available scientific evidence and the need to concentrate efforts on identifying compounds which may result in impacts in the field environment", she said.

## Medicinal honey conference

The **Second International Conference on the Medicinal Uses of Honey** takes place from January 13-15 at the Renaissance Hotel, Kota Bharu, Malaysia.

The first conference took place in the city in 2006 but plans for the sequel to be held in Pakistan in 2008 had to be abandoned.

Most of the speakers at the event are from Malaysia, but the list includes representatives from the US, New Zealand, India, Japan, Algeria and the UK's Rose Cooper, Professor in Microbiology at the Cardiff School of Health Sciences in the University of Wales Institute Cardiff. She has investigated honey's antibacterial properties since 1997, focusing on its use against methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (the MRSA 'superbug').

## 'Fake honey' to be outlawed

WISCONSIN in the US is considering a bill to prevent misleading labelling of 'honey' products that are largely composed of corn syrup or cheap imported honey from China.

"They're using honey's name as a natural health product," said Tim Fulton, president of the Wisconsin Honey Producers Association. But with some products, "it has so little honey that it's laughable."

## Going Dutch: BBKA shares the load

THE British Beekeepers' Association has gained some mechanical muscle in its campaign for bee research in the sturdy shape of tractor manufacturers New Holland.

The agricultural hardware firm has formed a **partnership** with the BBKA to raise funds and awareness among farmers.

As well as providing direct funding, New Holland says it will use its dealer network and customer base to support the BBKA.

It will have stands at agricultural shows and events, where it can raise awareness of the work of the BBKA amongst farmers, land-owners and contractors. The partnership will officially be launched at the Lincolnshire Agricultural Machinery Manufacturers' Association show at Newark in January.

New Holland's marketing manager said the move was a "logical step" for the company that already produces specialist vehicles for orchard farmers and is developing environmentally-friendly tractors powered by biomass-derived hydrogen.

BBKA President Tim Lovett said: "The BBKA welcomes the opportunity to work with a major player in the agriculture sector and to be able to raise awareness with key groups such as farmers, land-owners, fruit growers and contractors, all of whom can have a major influence on the future welfare and success of honey bees in the UK."

## Jones II at IBRA

CONGRATULATIONS to Sarah Jones, who succeeds Richard Jones as Executive Director at the International Bee Research Association.

Sarah joined **IBRA** in 2005.

## Can you help Defra study?

VOLUNTEERS are needed for a Defra study of beekeeping and education. Email: [alan.worley@peoplescienceandpolicy.com](mailto:alan.worley@peoplescienceandpolicy.com) or phone 020 3102 8137.

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