

# THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Waiting for Ophelia ...

Monthly Magazine of the E.B.K.A

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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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## August 2009

- 6 August *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. 'Prepare for Feeding' with Mr J Huckle.
- 7 August *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford**. Testing for nosema with Eileen Marrable.
- 8 August *Saturday All day* **Maldon** Bradwell Flower Show. Help needed from Divisional members to man the marquee.
- 8 August *Saturday 2.30pm* **Epping Forest**. Jim McNeill is coming to talk on "Preparation for the Honey Show". Jim has much successful experience in this field and following his excellent talk earlier in the year we have invited him back to let us in on some of his secrets for winning! The venue is now confirmed as Ted Grad's apiary, Chapel Barn, Waltham Road, Nazeing, Essex EN9 2EB. Please e-mail Ted & Jackie: treasurer@eppingforestbeekeepers.co.uk to confirm attendance.
- 15 August *Saturday 3.00pm* **Colchester**. Garden meeting with apiary interlude at the home of Martin and Gill Frostick, Grove House, Great Bromley, Colchester, CO7 7JL. Please telephone to confirm attendance, 01206 250263
- 22 August *Saturday 2.30pm* **Saffron Walden**. Apiary meeting at Sally Freeman's, Well Court, Laundry Lane, Little Easton, CM6 2JW.
- 22 August *Saturday 2.30pm* **Epping Forest** We are holding an extra meeting to cover 'Preparation of the hives for winter'. This will primarily be of use to beginners who are in their first season keeping bees but anyone who is interested may attend. The meeting will be held at the Wanstead apiary, 24 Lanley Drive, Wanstead.
- 22 August *Saturday 2.00pm* **Chelmsford** Garden Meeting This years garden meeting will be hosted by Eric Fenner at his home in Writtle. Eric will be sharing his years of experience with us to provide a practical demonstration of queen introduction. Please bring your suits. As this will be a popular event, RSVP is essential ! Please contact Jean for details and to reserve your place Tel: 07731856361.
- 23 August *Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree**. Apiary meeting, The Apiary, Coney Green, Gt. Bardfield. Tel. Pat Rowland for details 01376 326036
- 26 August *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend**. Winter preparations: a talk by Marlene Harris.

## September 2009

- 3 Sep *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. A talk by Mr D. Tyler on 'Disease Control and Integrated Pest Management' (IPM).
- 4 Sep *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Rd. Speaker and topic to be confirmed.
- 5 Sep *Saturday 5.30pm* **Maldon** BBQ at Willowgrove, Burnham Road, Mundon Courtesy of Bob & Vera Finch. A very popular social evening set in Bob and Vera's lovely garden. Bring your own food to cook, but please telephone 01621 741445 if you are coming.
- 6 Sep *Sunday TBA* **Epping Forest** The Forest Festival is being held on Chingford Plain and following the success of last year the Epping Forest Division will once again have a stand at this event. We will be taking the observation hive and exhibits to show the role of bees in pollination and suitable forage that people can grow in their gardens to encourage bees. Honey will also be for sale.
- 12 Sep & 13 Sep *Saturday and Sunday All day* **Essex Beekeeper's 122nd Annual Show** at Barleylands Farm Centre & Craft Village, Barleylands Road, Billericay Essex CM11 2UD. See Show Schedule.
- 12 Sep *Saturday All day* **Epping Forest** Is our annual Honey Show which is held in conjunction with the Buckhurst Hill Horticultural Society Show at St John's Church Hall, High Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex. There are a wide variety of classes and we are hoping for a large number of exhibits this year.
- 19 Sep *Saturday 2.00pm* **Colchester** at Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve.
- 23 Sep *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** A talk by Pam Hunter, 'Bee Navigation and Foraging'..
- 27 Sep *Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** Apiary meeting, details to follow.

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## Behind the Veil with Jim McNeill (Romford Division)

### How was your interest in beekeeping kindled?

I have always been fascinated by bees, I remember when I was younger if I had nothing to do in the school holidays I would take a jam jar and a piece of card for a lid and go into the park at the end of my road, to see how many bees I could get in there before I got stung I never did; .they would have been poor old bumble bees anyway.

When we moved to Collier Row in 1976 we had a very long garden and after a few years we seemed to have a lot of spare time, don't know what that is now, we must be getting older. I said to Liz it would be nice to have a hive of bees down the garden, you never see any one doing anything with them, and she agreed. It took a while to find out about beekeeping. I found the phone number of the Romford secretary who said their next meeting was the AGM but I was welcome to come along. The AGM seemed to go on for age's with members queering the accounts for what I thought was not very much—I would not want to be a treasurer in those days. On the way home Liz said well we won't be going there again but I said we would try next month's meeting which was much better.



I was told to join Clive de Bruyn's classes when they start and that it is much easier to manage two hives than one. Before I had finished the beginners course two hives came on the market with a lot of extras for £150.00; the beekeeper's husband had become allergic and his wife could not lift the super's on her own so they were giving up altogether. What a bargain, it is only the last season that I have stopped using those wbc hives.

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### What were the formative influences on your beekeeping?

Having someone like Dick Marrable who was so enthusiastic in our club to help with problems and just to watch when he was demonstrating to the club—he made it seem so easy

### How did things develop from your first hive?

The bees I bought were very gentle but, boy, were they swarmy. I did not clip my queens then. My first swarm went into our next door but one neighbour's garden in a small tree. Liz phoned me at work and when I got home the neighbours had their deckchairs out to watch me get them back, good job it went well.

It seemed every time the sun came out so did my bees. One lesson I learned quickly was to change the queens, after watching Dick clip queens things started to improve.

**What keeps you beekeeping?**

Hoping that one day I will be able to say " I am a beekeeper". I do enjoy the showing side of beekeeping. One day I will try to do the display class but it takes a lot of forward planning, not one of my strong points.

**What have been the high points of your beekeeping career?**

Getting the Blue Ribbon at the County Show the first time was great. I like to enter the shows just to make up the numbers as the show secretary to the club works hard to put on these shows. It can be very disappointing when you hear how much honey members have got but still need their arms twisting to enter. I am passionate about showing, but I don't worry about being disqualified; it is only done for fun. It has made my presentation of honey much better and I have to try harder each year.

**Has anything gone wrong with your beekeeping?**

Mistakes ... where do I begin? Some you learn from—here are three examples. In my second year of keeping bees in the garden the weather was not too good and a lot of children were playing next door in their garden. When they went in I rushed out to inspect my bees but in my haste I forgot to put on my wellies—I have never forgotten them since! I have squashed a lovely queen on the side of a nuc box—I nearly cried as she was a big queen and I was about to clip and mark her. And finally, I recently clipped a virgin queen. So even when you think you know a bit you still make mistakes—beginners don't be put off, there's always next year to improve.

**What do you consider to be your beekeeping legacy?**

Being enthusiastic at shows and talks so as to plant the seed of beekeeping. This seed was planted in me many years ago at the Orset show where I saw an open hive demonstration. I would like to think people will enjoy showing hive produce as much as I do.

**What about the future of beekeeping?**

Hopefully with all this green movement things can only get better with more people involved. With more money going into research it may help us hardworking beekeepers to understand bees better.

Jim McNeill, June 2009

**Honey Buckets 30lb****Mr Beesy has buckets @ £1.30 each****For collection from Chelmsford CM1 2JG  
11 St James Park. Call Richard Alabone 01245 259288**

### So what is so special about Manuka Honey? Part 3 Howard Gilbert

Have there been any tests done on UK honey? In the Journal of Apicultural Research December 2008 an article, 'An investigation into the wound healing potential of Welsh Honeys', tested 139 local Welsh honeys against a sample of manuka honey. These honeys were compared against a test sample of manuka honey. Manuka honey had total and non-peroxide activity equivalent to 18.5% (w/v) phenol; only 71 of the Welsh honeys possessed total activity, with 6.9% (w/v) the highest phenol equivalent, and none possessed non-peroxide activity. The research found that although Welsh honey had weak antibacterial activity (no Welsh honey would even qualify under the UMF<sup>®</sup> standard) it did find that Welsh honey might have particular wound healing potential. It suggested that more research should be conducted in this area.

In another article Peter Molan tested 179 unifloral New Zealand honeys and found that none of the floral sources had detectable non-peroxide antimicrobial activities and that only manuka honey showed antimicrobial activity due to phytochemical components.

What should you look for if you see honey being sold as 'active'? If the honey has the trademark UMF<sup>®</sup> then you will see a factor of at least 10 (but this might be changed—see last month's issue). Bearing in mind the margin of error, the actual UMF factor of that particular honey might not be what you see on the jar (it might be higher or lower—but it would have a UMF factor). If you see a display of Manuka honey being sold without the trademark then it probably has not been tested in a laboratory prescribed by AMHA. For such honey, it doesn't necessarily mean that it does not have any non-peroxide antibacterial qualities; it just means that a sample of this honey has not been sample tested under the AMHA guidelines.

You might see an English honey sold as 'Active Honey'—what unique characteristic does this honey have? Well the short answer is that the claim might only be asserting that honey has a an antibacterial element; something which we now know can be due to its osmotic effect, its acidity or the presence of hydrogen peroxide—common in nearly all honey. It might be claimed that this honey has undergone a 'pharmaceutical challenge test' which shows that the honey is active. But until it is specified what method is used to test the honey for antibacterial activity no conclusions can be reached as to whether this is a non-peroxide antibacterial quality or not.

Recently, there has been developed another method for evaluating the non-peroxide antibacterial quality in honey, by measuring the methylglyoxal (MGO) content. This compound is found in high concentrations in manuka honey, up to 100 times greater than ordinary honey, according to German researchers, and is thought to give it its antiseptic edge. A testing regime is planned by the 'Manuka Health' honey in New Zealand. This will certify the level of Methylglyoxal in products for consumer guidance. Manuka Health has a trade mark for Methylglyoxal

in manuka honey - MGO™ Manuka Honey. The number beside it would represent the level of Methylglyoxal in the honey.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, (i) manuka honey does have a non-peroxide antibacterial activity; other honeys *that have been tested* generally lack this unique element. (ii) The testing for this activity cannot be guaranteed to produce consistent results—also the magnitude of the margin of error is subject to disagreement. (iii) Inconsistencies can arise from the sampling methodology (e.g. where the sample of honey is drawn from may produce different results). (iv) The AMHA UMF® standard is not the only standard being used to market such honey—unfortunately the alternatives are not always clearly distinguishable for the AMHA standard. (v) There are three published methods for quantifying this non-peroxide antibacterial quality in honey: a) the current method used by the AMHA, b) the soon to be announced revised method advocated by Professor Molan, and c) measuring the methylglyoxal (MGO) content - MGO™ Manuka Honey. In a report commissioned by the AMHA, manuka honey sold bearing the trademark enjoyed a premium value of almost \$13million in 2007. (vi) What does appear to be important regarding the direction of research is that other floral sources do show antibacterial activity. 'The presence of antibacterial factors in honey other than hydrogen peroxide is a possibility, with research indicating that antioxidants may contribute to the antibacterial activity of honey. More understanding of the mechanisms involved in different floral sources would be beneficial, enabling information to be generated regarding the heat and light stability of non-manuka factors .... Still, honeys with high levels of antibacterial activity (particularly those with non-peroxide factors) are promising, and markets other than those of medical usage may still be exploited'.

[http://bio.waikato.ac.nz/honey/honey\\_intro.shtml](http://bio.waikato.ac.nz/honey/honey_intro.shtml)

<http://bio.waikato.ac.nz/honey/special.shtml>

-The Antibacterial Activity of Honey 1, Peter Molan *Bee World* 73(1) 5-28 1992

-The Antibacterial Activity of Honey 1, Peter Molan *Bee World* 73(2) 59-76 1992

-A survey of non-manuka New Zealand honeys for antibacterial and antifungal activities, N. Brady, P. Molan and L. Bang *Journal of Apicultural Research* 43(2) 47-52, 2004

-New Zealand Beekeeper, August 2008

-*Watson and Son v. Active Manuka Honey Association Incorporated*, New Zealand High Court (CIV 2008-419-001495).

-*Watson and Son v. Active Manuka Honey Association Incorporated*, New Zealand Court of Appeal (CA762/2008 [2008] NZCA 566).

-'An investigation into the wound healing potential of Welsh Honeys' Rose A Cooper, Emma-Jane Wheat, Neil F Burton. *Journal of Apicultural Research* 47(4) 251-55 2008.

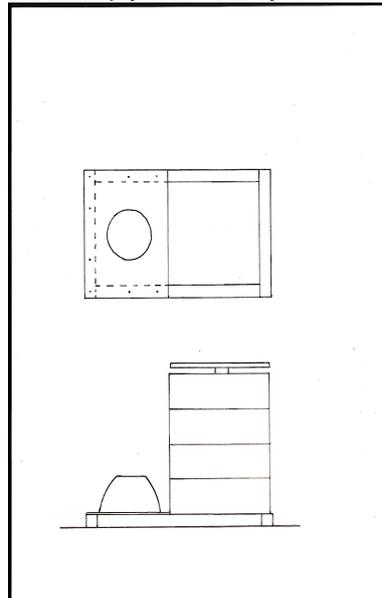
## Technical topics: Warming Combs for Extraction Richard Alabone (Mr Beesy)

It is often said that you should extract frames immediately while they're still warm from the hive. But they soon cool off if using a clearer board, or if left out for a short while. The best answer is a warming cabinet which aids uncapping, extracting and subsequent filtering. But most cannot justify a large warming cabinet, and it's really not necessary.

For many years I have used a simple, cheap, easy to store, but very efficient comb warmer which has aided the extraction of about ten tons of honey. It's just a wooden frame, of four pieces of wood about 2x2 inches, with a piece of 6mm ply nailed on to it. The heater is one of those whole-head hair dryers which can often be found at boot sales. The aim is to heat the frames and honey up to about blood heat.

The sketch shows the frame, 33 and a 1/2 inches, by twenty and 1/2 inch [outside dimensions] nailed or screwed together, and the ply sheet 15 by 20 and 1/2 inch with a 9 and 1/2 inch diameter hole in it, nailed onto the frame. In use the frame rests on the floor, with the hair dryer over the hole as shown. Pile the supers on the frame with a board on top spaced off by about 3/4in. to allow an even flow of warm air. Don't have more than six frames in each box, with the lower box empty to equalize the heat up through the frames. It takes from 1 to 3 hours to warm up, depending on the number of boxes, but take care in regulating the heat to avoid melting the lower frames. Switch off the heater and turn the cover board over when ready for uncapping and extraction. Take the top box off to uncap but replace the cover board to keep the heat in.

Next month I will discuss uncapping, extracting and filtering, detailing my own methods and equipment which is all cheap, easy to use and suitable for most beekeepers.



## **Tales from the Hive**

### **Richard Alabone (Mr Beesy)**

I have some recent 'Tales from the Hive' concerning bee,havior. I recently had a couple of strong colonies in my garden, much to my neighbour's dislike! On a warm day, one of them decided to swarm. Hearing the commotion I grabbed a water sprayer, that I keep for calming bees, and ran down the garden without any protective gear. It was a fairly powerful sprayer with a variable nozzle so I could direct a squirt of water about 7ft. at the flying bees, also at the hive entrance. It worked instantly as they all went back home. I have read of people using a hose for this job, but you can't leave the hose out all the time. The modern water sprayer works like a charm.

Then, a few days later, I was talking about the bees at our observation hive to children at Chelmsford Museum on the Children's Fun Day, with various activities going on in the park just in front of the observation hive. Suddenly there was much activity outside the entrance, which was inaccessible as it was under an upstairs window, and all the bees in the hive started rushing about excitedly. They were going to swarm; and on to hundreds of children! OH DEAR. Remembering the swarming bees fear of water I poured half a cup through the feeder gauze directly into the observation hive. Miraculously, they instantly calmed down and forgot all about swarming. What a relief!

My beekeeping has tended to be an experiment into how and why, and have always tended to ignore things I read in books until I've tried it out for myself. Something I did recently was to remove a strong 5 frame nucleus box to a new site, but I did it in the middle of a warm day when the flyers were out, just to see the reaction. I left a nuc box with three empty frames on the site for the flyers to move into. They were not amused! Those lost bees spent the next three days buzzing about, looking for a hive to move into, until I closed them up one evening and moved them all to an apiary. There was a good half frame of bees, which meant that about 10% of the colony was out foraging when I took the queen and brood away.

Another thing that has always interested me is this business of only moving bees 3ft. or 3miles. Once I had to move a hive 12ft. so in spring I made a series of 2ft. moves. It was a disaster! Most bees disappeared; but it might have worked in the summer. Also, having moved bees successfully from one side of an apiary to the other, I was asked one day to move a whole apiary across a field, which was about 200yds. This I did one evening in August with the help of a friend, and a wheelbarrow. I left one old frame on the original site to catch any lost bees. The next day there were only a few bees there, as I had thought. They had all realized that their hives had been moved, and reoriented to the new site. So much for the 3ft. or 3mile rule. Maybe my 2ft movements would have been OK in summer, also the whole apiary move during the day would have lost most of the foragers.

## **Chelmsford Division Inspection Tour with the Seasonal Bee Inspector by Anthony Edwards**

For Chelmsford Divisions mid-summer meeting, Divisional Disease Liaison Jean Smye organised the annual inspection of (volunteered) member's hives by the Seasonal Bee Inspector, Peter Heath.

This proved to be a great opportunity for members in their first year of beekeeping to experience a variety of apiary sites, different types of hives and strains of bees and learn how more experienced beekeepers went about their tasks to secure a good honey crop. For the longer term beekeepers there was the free service and gratifying opportunity to learn that their colonies were free of notifiable AFB and EFB diseases and other pathogens.

Eighteen hives at three apiaries were inspected and thankfully no significant problems were found. A few Varroa mites on only a few of the many drone pupae sacrificed in the control of Varroosis, a small sample of Chalkbrood in one hive and the 'Chinese Slipper' tell-tale sign of Sacbrood elsewhere, but in controllable quantities.

Of particular interest to new beekeepers was the gentle and smooth routine of Peter, working in tandem with Jean, clearing bees off the frames to enable a close inspection of the brood, essential when examining for AFB/EFB. Peter constantly advised what he was looking for whilst responding to many questions and discussing possible solutions. Peter's sharp eye spotted a couple of virgin queens - sometimes in unexpected locations, including one in the process of emerging from her cell, which was quickly removed to be put to good use in another colony.

The merits of preventative solutions ranging from mesh floors, a shook swarm to the use of chemicals such as Oxalic Acid, Fumidil B and Apiguard were discussed, as were the issues of mite resistance to Pyrethroids as used in Apistan and Bayvorol. Peter presented an insert, new to most present, for trapping *Aethina tumida* (Small Hive Beetle) an exotic pest which hopefully has not yet reached our shores.

The satisfying state of members hives might stem from the Divisional training sessions where we are told that part of the formula for avoiding potential problems lies in adopting clear hygiene principles in bee management – clean tools and bee-suits, disposable or washable gloves, as few as possible squashed bees, regular replacement of foundation and apiaries free of detritus.

Whilst the tour of apiary had a serious intent, it also proved to be a great social occasion to gossip with old friends and exchange views with new acquaintances. After four hours in bee-suits on a day with temperatures into the 80's, the 20 plus participants were happy to shed the veil and join in thanking Peter and Jean for a very enjoyable and instructive meeting.

**Birds of a Feather or Beekeeping “Types” Part 1**  
**Michael Badger MBE MA**

*First published in The Scottish Beekeeper vol.86 no.2, February 2009.*

My mother often said that a man is known by the company he keeps. If he is a beekeeper, the company is not always good, although our readers will agree that he could keep much worse. This of course will not include his beekeeping pals, for beekeepers, like birds of a feather, tend to flock together!

On my settling down in Leeds, I met by chance a beekeeping sage, “Sage by name and sage by nature”. Harold Sage was a beekeeper of many, many years’ standing and well respected by the Leeds beekeeping fraternity. He was a tailor by profession at a time when they were renowned in the rag trade for sitting crossed-legged but for Mr Sage this was especially awkward, as he had lost his left leg in the Great War. Despite the loss of a leg, this did not really interfere with his beekeeping. He was fortunate living in the Chapeltown district of the city, as his bees were kept close to hand at the nearby Newton Green Hospital. This hospital had a specialist unit for the limbless and the disabled. Due to his infirmity, he was able to coach fellow limbless people about beekeeping. Despite his determination to pass on his skills to others with similar infirmities, he let it be known that it was not successful. These fellow travellers moved back to their home environments to take up other interests that did not include practical beekeeping.

**122<sup>nd</sup> Annual Honey Show**

**Saturday & Sunday 12/13<sup>th</sup> September**

**At Barleylands near Billericay**

The annual Honey Show is our premiere public event of the year where we have the opportunity to meet many thousands of the public and interest them in bees and beekeeping. We have a large marquee at the largest show of its type in Essex. As well as the show entries we have exhibits and demonstrations for all ages.

The show schedule is now on our website and is published in this issue. Of Essex Beekeeper. There are classes for novices, and lots of classes for things other than honey e.g. cakes, biscuits, fudge, candles, mead, photos, wax....so no excuses for not entering something. Please enter at least one of the Classes of the Show. As Jim McNeill has commented, If you don’t have much honey, why not try your hand at the cookery class ... read the Show Schedule twice, enter (at least) once!’

Also, we need volunteers for selling honey, candle rolling, manning observation hives, providing information, catering etc. We hope lots of you beginners will offer to help, please contact Rachel Mahoney now at [rachel@jmahoney.co.uk](mailto:rachel@jmahoney.co.uk) if you would like to be there. It’s a great day out and entry is free to helpers.

### **An Impromptu Talk**

A few years before he died, Harold asked if I would take him to a beekeeping association's outdoor meeting at Holmfirth, well known for the television programme "Last of the Summer Wine". Mr Sage had been asked to give an impromptu talk on the craft. My newly wedded wife came too. We were told that after the talk, our host would be providing a sumptuous afternoon tea and this would introduce her to the niceties of the social side to beekeeping. As is often the way in Pennine districts, rain is never far away. Our host had set up a marquee in his palatial garden, explaining to me that if you can see the hills, it's going to rain, if you can't, it's raining. Fortunately for everyone, the sun shone in a cloudless sky, so we sat back to listen to Mr Sage's discourse on beekeepers and beekeeping "types". I retained mental notes of the talk. The remarks will I am sure remind you too of instances of beekeepers you have encountered.

No doubt you, like me over the years have found that there is always something fascinating to learn from a fellow beekeeper, especially if you can catch him handling his own bees. There will be instances to unlearn, too. I have found that there is a good deal of character revealed by the manner in which a stock of bees is handled, both good bad and indifferent.

### **The Forceful Type**

There is the forceful type of beekeeper who intends to move both heaven and earth in his attempt to do what he has set out to do, whether the bees like it or not. "Smoke the blighters and get on with it" comes to mind is his motto, making his bees bad tempered at the expense of neighbour's goodwill. In most cases he is overdressed for example with heavy leather gloves that a hedge layer would feel comfortable with, thus making a mockery of handling bees.

### **The Fussy Type**

The fussy type comes next. This one looks at the sky to see if rain or thunder is about, looks at his watch to see if there is enough time to do what he wants to do, and then looks at the beehive. The job needn't be done after all. Taking down a beehive, to him, is an event, which must only be undertaken when conditions are just right and the stars are propitious.

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### The Careless Type

Now for the careless type, "Never mind, everything will be all right" is his maxim. He never thinks forward of his needs and requirements for the job in hand, but starts cheerfully with the minimum of preparation. If the smoker goes out at a critical moment, there's plenty more fuel in the house. Queen excluder wanted? There's one in the cellar. Smoker out again – now where are those matches? The opened colony can give rise to excessive amounts of chilled brood, in addition, bees are apt to smart under manipulation of this kind – and so might the chance visitor.

### The Optimistic Type

Then there is the optimistic type. His bees are expected to work miracles. If half dozen bees are on the wing, one must go a super, with foundation instead of drawn comb, as this will give them that extra bit of encouragement. When other beekeepers are uniting or contracting their brood boxes with division boards, the optimist is all for more room and more honey. Five combs are covered with bees, and the hive is composed of two brood-boxes and two supers, foundation and all.

### The Inventor Type

Now, what about the inventor type? Of all the hobbies, bee-keeping lends itself best to the inventor type. Ideas flow like water from a spring, from special floor-boards, patent feeders, contraptions that will make swarms, stop swarms, catch swarms, gadgets that will work marvels during a honey flow, central heating systems for use during winter, twenty first century beekeeping with a vengeance! Yet deniably he finds that his honey yields do not or ever match his beekeeping inventiveness.

*To be continued next month.*



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