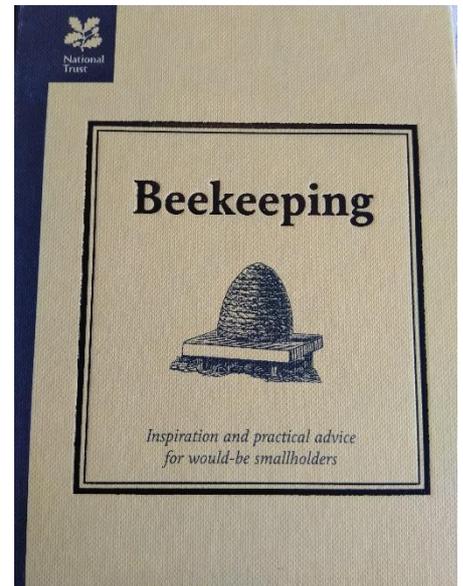


Lockdown Thoughts....

So, this past year in lockdown has really made me think but let's start at the beginning.

10 years ago, whilst on a family holiday in Northumberland, I bought a little book about beekeeping by the National Trust, nothing really heavy going but the more I read it the more I was drawn into this incredible world. More in depth books brought even more wide eyed fascination in to the life of the bee and well, the videos of people getting 120lbs of honey from one hive..wow! idea sold to the man who still had absolutely no idea what he was getting himself into.

At this point, I think my wife was still very sceptical but as soon as had done an Introduction to beekeeping course, I joined our local association which was very daunting at the time. It seemed a very secret club back then but a very nice couple, Paul and Gill, showed me around their hives and let me get some hands on with their bees and that was me hook, line and sinker. I am not sure if it was my constant spouting of random bee facts that ground them down but soon my wife, and also her father, were drawn into this journey and we were all in and still are.



But then reality hits...Beekeeping in East Lancashire and my surrounding area's micro climate is completely alien to keeping bees in the much sunnier south. Daydreams of harvesting hundreds of jars of honey disappeared years ago, so why do I still keep bees?

"Can I get a couple of jars of honey from you?" a regular question I get asked.

"I don't get enough honey here to sell, I have to leave enough for the bees to get through winter" we reply

"What's the point of keeping bees then?" is the also the regular reply I get.



So, why **DO** I keep bees then? We all obviously have our personal reasons but even with all the videos of beekeepers seemingly having honey on tap, I don't think it was ever about the honey for us. We have never had enough surplus honey in 10 years to sell and I think at most, we managed about 13lbs surplus one year which we jarred for personal use or for our apiary landlord rent. I hate to think with time and money spent, how much one jar of our honey would actually cost..hundreds of pounds I reckon!

There are the obvious environmental benefits but we should feel that importance about all our pollinators.

It is the complete fascination of their lives, how the colony exists. The more you know, the more you are drawn into their world and the more you want to learn. That is the reason...the bees themselves

If you have ever volunteered for one of the club open days, take an Introduction course, spoken at schools and events we sometimes get invited to (I know difficult at the moment but hopefully we can get back on with them) you may start off quite apprehensive but you soon find yourself talking non-stop to the public and I come away happy, genuinely thinking that people, from their looking at their faces, are amazed by the life of the bee and can see why we do it.

But, this past lockdown year has really made me think. I actually think it has been in the back of my mind for a few years now but this last year has brought it to the front. Not why am I keeping bees but, why I am my keeping bees in my village?

Forage for the bees has always been tough here but we used to have great fields of dandelions to help the bees get started early in the year but they disappeared a good 4 or 5 years ago, got rid of by the farmers, so now there really isn't enough forage here to support honeybee colonies all year round. There aren't enough trees or hedgerows, weeds are banished by tidy gardeners who buy summer bedding plants by the truckload. We have short periods with decent forage but not enough to sustain the bees through their season. I am pretty positive that I am the only beekeeper around here so getting queens mated successfully or well enough to carry the colony on is more than a challenge too



I remember when we were ready to start beekeeping...you just want bees..you want them there and then. When you get them, you just want to keep them come hell or high water and it is easy to forget to look at the bigger picture why things happen and what we can do to change it, such as looking at your forage or lack of, having to raise queens in other locations to get mated.

So, I guess it is stubbornness, selfishness of wanting to keep bees in the village, them being on my doorstep but to what cost? And this has what has made me think of the bees and what is important to them



Poorly mated queens, queens not mating full stop, having to supplement their meagre stores with substitute syrup constantly. This is no way forward for colonies of bees, so this year we have decided to stop keeping bees in the village. This may seem quite a minor decision to some but to us it seems quite a hard decision. Being able to just pop out and sit and watch our bees in and out of the hive was such a

great thing to do.

This may all sound very pessimistic but I think ultimately it is positive. I think we do tend to focus on our own beekeeping worries throughout the year but honey bees are not in danger, it is the other bees and pollinators that need our help. Honey bees have us beekeepers looking out for them. So, hopefully by not flooding the local area with colonies of honeybees that struggle in this area anyway there will be more than enough forage to help our Bumbles and solitary bees, which is what I will be trying to encourage this year whilst I look for another apiary location for these village bees.