

## NHBKA November 2013 Newsletter

It was a packed house for our November meeting at Howgill's for the showing of the film 'More Than Honey', ([www.morethanhoneyfilm.com](http://www.morethanhoneyfilm.com)). We were offered a chance to view the film, directed by Oscar-nominated director Markus Imhoof, in conjunction with the Friends of the Earth. The film looked at honeybee colonies in California, Switzerland, China and Australia, and touched on some of the issues affecting bee populations globally.

The film showed some disturbing footage and put me in mind of some of the worst excesses of the meat production industry. It posed a lot of questions but didn't provide too many answers. Perhaps the beekeeping community, and the film showed us how expansive and diverse that community is, doesn't need Hercule Poirot for a denouement. As beekeepers and beneficiaries of the bees' toil, we all have a seat in the carriage of the Beekeeping Orient Express, and find ourselves tainted with the guilt of the bees' demise, even though to a lesser extent than some of the film's participants who would share the carriage with us.

A Lewis Carroll quote provided a handy hook for some of the story.

"Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!" .

Surely our commercial American beekeeper, Mr. Miller, was running to stand still. Trapped by a desire to maximize the profits from his bees, he allowed them to be subjected to insecticide spray among the fragrant miles of the almond groves of California, only to counteract the effects by giving them antibiotics. Even if he knew the future was as bleak as the current situation in China where the use of insecticides has decimated the bee population and pollination is now done by hand, it is unlikely he could or want to do much about it. He said himself that if his father could see how he managed his bees, he would walk away in disgust. His beekeeping may have lost its soul but whichever way you look at it, more than half a billion bees is a big chunk of responsibility.

"If you drink much from a bottle marked 'poison,' it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later."

As beekeepers we need to have an opinion about bee welfare, and perhaps the current discussion about neonicotinoids is part of that debate ([www.foe.co.uk/beespetition](http://www.foe.co.uk/beespetition)).

So many questions!

"Did the pursuit of his pure race of bees by the third generation Swiss beekeeper in the Alps inevitably lead to the foulbrood outbreak?"

"Why did the commercial American beekeeper only lose 20% of his colonies when he treats his bees in such a cavalier fashion?"

"Why does the genetic diversity adopted in Australia seem to be as successful as the option of the American on the Mexican border who was keen to exploit the African black bee in preference to the less aggressive European bee?"

"How did the American find his swarm of bees in a rocky outcrop in the wide open spaces of the American frontier?"

"Why did the majority of the beekeepers, both male and female, smoke big cigars?"

Though we know something of the goings-on in the beehive, it was fascinating to see some of the truly exceptional footage in the film; the emergence of a queen bee, the construction of a queen cell, cells being filled with nectar, and the mating of a queen among others. I have my own ideas how the photographer managed to follow the path of a bee in flight.

A big thank you to Gary Hammond who organised the showing of the film, and to Helen who provided the refreshments and, together with Sharon, prepared all the teas and coffees.

A reminder that our next indoor meeting is in February next year and is a talk on Queen Rearing by Andy Johnston. It is on Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> February at Howgills and starts at 19:30.

At the end of the meeting we managed to delay Chris Mercer's exit long enough to present his BBKA certificate, along with certificates for Vincent, Deborah, Lynn, Gary, Dave and Helen. Congratulations to all.

Graham Beesley will be running a stall at the Christmas Market in St. Francis' College in Letchworth on Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November from 16:00 to 19:00. There will be a huge variety of stalls. I'm sure Graham would be delighted to see you.

Don't forget your bees over the winter months, make sure the hives are not getting too light and be prepared to feed the bees with some fondant if they are.

And finally, although it seems a little early for a Christmas message, best wishes for the forthcoming season and don't forget to add a few bee items to your Santa list.