

The National Honey Show

Brenda Davies looks at what will be happening at the last big bee event in the calendar

WHAT are you planning to do this October half-term? Meet friends? Go shopping? Learn something new? If you are a beekeeper you could be doing all these things and more.

Here are a few suggestions:- visit a honey show, find out more about bees and beekeeping, listen to talks by experts from around the world, learn how to use your spare beeswax, discover how to take better bee pictures, learn how to make a straw skep, buy some beekeeping equipment or maybe even start your Christmas shopping.

What's more you could be doing all these things in one place if you go along to the National Honey Show, which is being held from October 28 to October 30 at St George's College in Weybridge in Surrey.

The National Honey Show is the last big event in the beekeeper's annual calendar and beekeepers from all over the country will be meeting up to compete against each other, to stock up on bee supplies, to learn more about bees or to simply just enjoy being beekeepers.

If you are a new beekeeper and you have joined a beekeeping association between August last year and July this year, you should have received a free annual membership of the National Honey Show.

As well as free entry for the three-day duration of the show you will be entitled to attend the lectures and workshops (free but pre-bookable) and to enter your exhibits in the competitive classes free of charge. If you have not entered a honey show before, check out the 'Show tips for first timers' box at the end.

Free entry to the show? So what's the catch? I'm pleased to say that there isn't one. This is a genuine offer to encourage new beekeepers who know nothing about the show to go along and see what it is all about. Hopefully having experienced what is on offer, many will then become regular visitors, supporters, future competitors or maybe even all three.

The National Honey Show is not just a display of honey. In fact there are four separate parts and each part compliments the others. There are:

- Competitive classes
- Lectures about bees and beekeeping
- Trade, educational and charitable stands
- Workshops

As beekeepers soon discover, keeping bees opens the door to lots of other hobbies and interests. Many of these have a competitive side and there are classes for some of these hobbies at the show alongside the classes for



■ Honey can be many different colours

honey. Honey dominates of course; there will be classes for honey in the jar, honey in the comb, honey in the frame, runny honey, set honey and lots more.

If you produce honey you will produce beeswax as well and there are classes for different uses of wax: big blocks, small blocks, beeswax candles, beeswax models, beeswax flowers as well as cosmetics, lotions and potions containing beeswax.

Most beekeepers use honey in the kitchen so there are classes for honey cakes, honey biscuits and, of course, honey wines. Many beekeepers like to take photographs of their bees and beekeeping activities and these are catered for in the eight photographic classes which range from black and white prints to DVD productions.

As well as the international and open classes, some counties have their own competitions, with their own classes, within the main show so that there are over 200 classes altogether.

The show secretary Reverend Francis Capener told me that in 2009 there were 1,180 entries. These exhibitors came from all over the UK and Ireland and from as far away as Rodrigues (a small island in the Indian Ocean) and from the Ukraine.

He is delighted that The Brotherhood of Ukrainian Beekeepers has formed close links with the show and that they have endowed

one of the classes and presented the show with a special medal.

In all there are over 70 trophies and awards to be won. The most difficult being the Smallholder County Challenge Shield which is awarded to the county beekeeping organisation gaining the highest points in the open classes nine to 88. Yorkshire beekeepers are the present holders.

As well as the competitive classes there will be a full programme of lectures given by top speakers from around the world. Speakers this year include Kim Flottum from Ohio USA, Dr Mark Goodwin from New Zealand, Hans Ulrich Thomas from Switzerland, Jim Ryan from Ireland and Dr Nigel Raine currently at the University of London.

With such a lot to see and do it is not surprising that the show is going from strength to strength and attracting more and more people each time. A few changes are planned this year so that there will be more space for everyone.

The lectures will be held in the theatre which has tiered seating for about 200 people and the show will be expanding into the college sports hall in order to accommodate the increased number of trade, charitable and educational stands, which are expected to attend.

The National Honey Show is constantly