

Only A Beekeeper

I have always thought that being a beekeeper meant I was “special”. I have a close relationship with some wild creatures, colonies of which I had persuaded to live in homes I had made for them. Not only that, but they collected nectar from flowers that were not mine or growing on my land and made it into honey I could harvest to eat or sell. Food for free from the fields, gardens and hedgerows around us. Being special is comforting, what I had not reckoned on was being seen as odd at best and stark raving bonkers at worst!

Blood Sweat and Honey

The first time that I can recall thinking that being a beekeeper was not completely for the sane was in mid summer, a year or two back, at the edge of a cut Borage field, at night, trying to get 10 hives closed up and onto the trailer for their next job on the moors. It was a warm evening and very humid, thunder threatened. When I arrived just before dusk each hive had a beard of bees hanging out the front, trying to relieve congestion and ventilate.

I sprayed water on the beards to convince them to go indoors and waited. Sprayed and waited, sprayed and waited. It was nearly dark before they started to go in. I closed them up one by one and started to struggle with hives onto the trailer. I switched the car headlights on so I could see what I was doing. As time went on, and the sweat ran down my face, I realised that each one had a good supply of Borage honey in the brood box beneath the two empty supers I had put on the day before. After I had lifted three my arms were aching. After five my back was saying 'enough' and number six and seven were half dragged and half lifted the 15 feet to the trailer.

Train Spotting?

It was at this point, doubled up after lugging hundreds of pounds of bees, hives and honey and with sweat prickling every bit of my body, bee stings peppering my arms, legs and even up my jeans and I began to think “ Why am I doing this? All this effort and pain for a few jars of honey, I must be barmy “. I sat on the edge of the trailer and felt like crying. It was dark and I was in a big field miles from anywhere. At this point I was ready to pack it all in and take up basket weaving or train spotting. Then a voice out of the dark said, “What are you doing?” It was Paul, my son, out shooting pigeons with his mate and he had seen the car lights. Salvation! I had a spare veil in the car (there were bees everywhere over all the hives still) and Paul helped me lift the last 3 hives onto the trailer. I was saved and train spotting would have to wait.

Only a beekeeper.....

Since that hot night I have thought a lot about ways in which beekeepers are not like the rest of the human race and I will list just a few of them here to show you. Each one could start with, “ Only a beekeeper...”

- ...would look at mass display of daffodils in the spring and say, "well they may be very pretty but bees don't visit them you know" (for daffs also read Hybrid Tea Roses, Hydrangeas, May blossom and many other "pretty" flowers).
- would look at a beautiful garden in a quiet village with clipped lawn, cottage borders and honeysuckle rambling over the porch and say, "you know a nice white WBC would look good just there".
- ... heads straight for the jams and preserves at Tesco's whilst his spouse sorts out the weekly shop, 'two for the price of ones' etc, etc, and after finding the right aisle would say to no one in particular, hmm, "honey from more than one country, utter rubbish, no comparison with REAL honey you know".
- ...would say in answer to a questioner at a bee display, "Yes I get stung all the time but it's nothing to worry about and it only hurts for a minute", when he knows that after being stung 10 times in his face through a faulty veil his face swelled up like the Elephant Man and he didn't leave the house for a week.
- ...says, "Have you been stung? It must have been a wasp". You can add here the other charmer, said in response to neighbour with a swarm in his garden, "I'm certain it's not one of mine but I'll get rid of it for you if you like"
- ...picks the warmest days of the year to wear wellies.
- ...sits down with his wife one summer's afternoon after she has brought him a cool drink to quench a thirst brought on by heavy gardening and then leaps to his feet dropping the drink and runs off shouting "Look up there it's a queen mating and I want to see which hive it goes back into". "A queen"? She hadn't even seen a bee and thanks the lord that we didn't have guests round.

After all that I still do try to kid myself that I am "special" being a beekeeper but sometimes, I begin to wonder if I am just odd.

Lester Quayle