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Well suited: John Hauxwell examines his hives

Buzz builds around honey from local hives

By Nick Young

Shoppers may have noticed that Tony's Continental in the High Road is now selling honey from East Finchley's very own bees. But who keeps them and how is it produced?

The answer to the first question is a master beeper by the name of John Hauxwell. He lives in Kentish Town, has been keeping bees since the 1970s and is a former chairman of the North London Beekeepers, affiliated to the British Beekeepers' Association.



John's honey on sale in Tony's Continental

Bee-friendly site

John has two apiaries, the main one of which consists of eight hives located somewhere in the wilds of the Islington (St Pancras) Cemetery, the third largest cemetery by area in the country, at the top end of the High Road.

The site is full of natural flora, giving rich pickings to bees in search of pollen; they also travel further afield into local gardens and parks.

"The cemetery authorities have been very helpful," explained John, who was happy to show *THE ARCHER* around his working hives. Once he had

donned his beeper's suit he set to work checking the hard-working communities inside.

"There are about 40,000 bees to a hive," said John, "although it can be as high as 60,000". Each hive is in two parts, a honey box above a (larger) brood box; each of these consists of eleven panels. The boxes are separated by a metal grid to ensure that the queen bee doesn't lay any larvae in the part that will be harvested for honey. Queens are larger than the worker bees and are usually marked so that they can be easily identified.

Bee enemies

John explained that the main problem for beekeepers since the 1990s has been the varroa mite, a parasite that transmits diseases to honey bees and is the biggest single cause of their worldwide decline. Like many beekeepers, John uses strips of formic acid to deal with the mites and our visit coincided with these strips being removed. "The treatment is for seven days," he explained.

A future threat to British bees is the Asian hornet, which preys on bees and has been spotted in France. "I understand that they cannot enter a five millimetre-high entrance," said John. "Some of my entrance blocks have cut-outs of this size in the hope that if they arrive, my bees will be safe!"

You can buy the honey from John's bees at Tony's Continental and find more information about the North London Beekeepers on their website at: www.beekeeping.org.uk.

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