

**North Bucks Beekeepers' Association**  
Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA  
**NEWSLETTER: April 2010**

**March** The Bucks County Beekeepers' Association's **14<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL SEMINAR** got March off to a flying start. One hundred and twenty people were there representing twelve different beekeeping associations. **Dr Rowena Jenkins** presented us with fascinating facts in **Honey for Healing**, where she revealed the effect of honey on the cell cycle of MRSA. Scientists have identified 600 different components in honey so more than one thing gives the overall medicinal effect. Honey has antimicrobial qualities which are active against bacteria, fungi, protozoa, and viruses. Honey kills off certain proteins in MRSA and so far 18 proteins have been identified in MRSA. Sadly, due to funding constraints most of the honey tested is foreign honey, although Welsh Honey has been found to aid rapid wound healing with less scar formation. It was suggested that British Beekeepers fund research into honey for healing as most foreign beekeepers and honey producers do.

**Robin Dean** then talked to us about **Pollination Mechanics**. We were introduced to new ideas on pollen and pollination practices world wide. Flowers have a short period of about 16 hours when the pollen is at optimum condition for fertilisation. Inadequate pollination leads to misshapen, undersized fruit, premature fruit fall and storage problems due to reduced calcium concentrations. It is therefore very important for food producers to secure the best pollinators for their crops. To illustrate this, Robin told us of the alfalfa farmers in Australia. Bee producers there have developed cylindrical card "hives" containing small colonies. These are dropped by the thousand from helicopters over the alfalfa fields. For 6-8 weeks the bees get busy pollinating the crops then...**sit down before you read on...**the combine harvesters cross the fields churning everything up including the bees and their hives! This dreadful information elicited gasps of disbelief from the audience. Why are we whittling about colony collapse disorder?

After that devastating news, a much needed hearty ploughman's lunch was served in the school dining hall next door. People caught up with old friends, made new ones and visited the stalls and stands.

**Andy Willis** gave us a lovely illustrated talk on **Bees and Plants**, taking us through a year of pollen and nectar bearing plants. **Bob Hunter** wrapped the afternoon up with votes of thanks and the raffle, all monies raised from the day to go to the "Honey Bee Health & Well Being" Research at Sussex University. Finally, thanks must go to **John Catton** for organising yet another splendid seminar and also to the fellow beekeepers who assisted him.

The **Beginners' Beekeeping Course** continues at Hazeley School, MK8 0PT. Thirty people are attending. If you require information contact Bob Sibley 01908 647597

**Grant** The Association has put in a bid for grant. Last year we were able to purchase a Dartington Hive, Snelgrove Board, 2 large smokers, 5 mesh floors, a Virtual Hive, dvds, books and posters. This year we hope to buy bee suits for our Beginners. Pictured is some of the equipment and the Dartington Hive made by **Arnold Parrot**. Arnold makes every sort of hive imagineable. If you would like to commission an unusual hive, he will be on the Dartington Stand at the Spring Convention. Arnold is a beekeeper of many years and has experience of keeping bees in all types of hive. He is always happy to share his knowledge, so do have a chat with him.



A small trailer has been donated to the Association. This is available for members to hire.

Our nearest Thorne's Agent is Jenny Ellison, at **L.E. Services**, Rookery Road, Wybotson, Beds, MK44 3AX. Tel: 01480 217887. Bob is currently trying to secure a discount for all NBBKA members, following his success at gaining a discount for Association purposes.

From **Sue Bird**: Over wintered colonies for sale, £120 each. Brood box, floor etc to be returned within 7 days. Available from early April. 07811 192467.

**Apiary Notes From Andrew Beer** Most of my colonies are kept on wire floors without under trays. Today I have changed floors and the only debris found was dead bees, the usual accumulation of wax cappings and general slime presumably having fallen through the wires. A quick shake-off of bees was all that was needed before the floors were back for re-use. All colonies had quite a lot of food but one had died out from isolation starvation i.e. no food on frames holding cluster of bees which was unable to reach in the cold weather food on adjoining combs. As a precaution all colonies have been given a 2kg bag of sugar – the bag is given a slit, it is dunked in water and the resulting mush is placed, slit down, below clearing board in eke directly over the cluster of bees – with more feed to follow if necessary. Once we have got our bees through winter and they are flying freely in Spring and pollen is abundant on any warm day, a priority for all beekeepers is to minimise or delay the risk of bees swarming and should bees demonstrate any intention to do so, to ensure that the swarm or increase is in a way which the beekeeper controls. Here are some measures to reduce the risk of swarming:

- Ensure bees have enough space, in particular the queen to lay
- Add a couple of supers above an excluder as soon as bees are occupying, say, 75% of brood chamber, placing a sheet of newspaper between the 2 supers so that bees don't go into upper super until they have used the lower one (use one super only if a further brood box is to be added (see below))
- Replace all blackened, generally grotty, combs in brood chamber with fresh frames of foundation or some good drawn combs. NBU suggests 50% replacement of combs per year. Put discarded combs in further brood box which is then placed above the one super. De-cap any honey in these combs. After 2/4 weeks all brood and honey will be hatched and cleared and box can be removed. Go back to further brood box after 7 days and destroy any queen cells. If you place a board between super and this further box with a hole just wide enough for bees to pass, the honey will be cleared more quickly as the bees think they are robbing. Don't forget to put a stick under one corner to allow drones to escape.
- Some beekeepers equalise colonies so that they are at similar strength and can be treated as one unit. For example some swap the stations of strong and weak stocks, some move frames of brood from one colony to another, some simply chuck bees about between colonies. To be successful it needs considerable experience and is not a course for beginners and anything which stresses bees or neighbours is simply not on.
- DON'T DO IT IF DISEASE IS SUSPECTED.

**Practical approach to dealing with swarming.** You have got to work with the bees not against them. That means that such holding measures as cutting out queen cells are at worst a total waste of time and at best simply delay the inevitable. Basically, the question is not "Will your bees swarm?" but "When?" The beekeeper must plan accordingly.

Swarming usually occurs between the beginning of April and the end of July so from 1<sup>st</sup> April (no joke!) to at least the end of June you must make weekly inspections of each colony (at critical times more frequently – see below) to see whether it is making preparations to swarm. Weather and forage may vary. How will you know your colony intends to swarm? Indeed, how will you know your colony does not intend to swarm? Answers will almost always be found by your inspection of the brood box as follows:

No cells resembling the base of an acorn, (called by beekeepers play cells) or queen cells.	Assume no intention to swarm until your next weekly inspection.
Empty play cells, but no queen cells and no larval jelly.	Ditto
Play cells with eggs	The beginning of swarming process, but it could be abandoned or delayed (see below).
Open play cells or queen cells, with larval jelly or larvae	Colony intent on swarming unless its plan is interrupted by beekeeper or other frustrating factors.
One or more sealed queen cells	Queen/swarm gone probably but they could still be there (see below).

**At these inspections keep at the front of your mind:**

- a new queen spends about 3 days as an egg
- a new queen spends about 5 days as an open larva after she ceases to be an egg
- the old queen will usually lead out a swarm at any time after the first queen cell is sealed, normally immediately or the day after that happens at the end 8 days. N.B. Each period can vary e.g. due to nutrition.

**Applying the foregoing if you see:**

- only eggs in play cells or queen cells - you can expect a swarm to emerge, according to ages of the eggs, between 5 and 7 days later (but swarming could be abandoned or delayed e.g. due to adverse weather)
- Unsealed larvae in queen cells – you can expect a swarm to emerge, according to the ages of the larvae between 1 – 5 days later.
- One (or more) sealed queen cells – queen and swarm probably gone – see below.

It follows that your time for preventing swarming is dictated by the ages of the earliest egg or larva. For example, if the earliest egg is 2 days old and the colony maintains its intent to swarm (see above) you have about 6 days to implement your swarm action plan; again if the earliest larva is 4 days old, you have about 1 day to take action. You need to do your best to ascertain the ages of eggs or larvae and err on the safe side!

Assume you have a swarm-intent colony, what do you do? Adapt any plan (and there are a myriad of complex, confusing, time-consuming and conflicting ones) for stopping your bees swarming and dealing with the situation. None is foolproof. I would suggest however that you adopt either the Artificial Swarm Method or the Nucleus Method set out by Adrian Waring in his book "Teach Yourself Beekeeping". Some beekeepers clip their queens. If so, the periods for swarm control will be longer. You will all know the joke "Bees don't read books" and it surely applies to swarms. There will be occasions when bees don't follow "the rules" and a swarm despite your best endeavours will get away.

**Some other points:**

Left to their own devices, an emerging swarm may be a legal nuisance and good relationships with the public demand that we, as beekeepers, control swarming.

If you go to your bees and find sealed queen cells it is just possible that your bees have not swarmed and the queen will be found in which case put into operation your swarm control plan soonest.

For swarm control, those with a few colonies have a great advantage over those with many because they hopefully have more time to give to their colonies during height of the swarm season. In particular I would suggest if you find only eggs in any colony you go onto a 3-day inspection programme so that if eggs develop into larvae indicating that the colony really intends to swarm you can operate your swarm control plan in time.

It must not be forgotten that a worker egg less than 4 days old can be "converted" by colony into a queen. For example, suppose a beekeeper inspects a colony on Day 2, the colony starts developing a worker as a queen on Day 3 the old queen and swarm could depart on or after Day 8 before the next inspection on Day 9. This can happen in any circumstances, usually if the beekeeper has been cutting down queen cells. This is another reason for more intensive inspections at critical times.

To my mind there is a particularly easy way in which the beekeeper can increase his colonies of bees as part of the swarm control process with little significance for the honey crop. Instead of cutting down to 1 the number of queen cells in the queen raising unit (i.e. the unit which is producing the new queen under either of the above swarm control plans), once sealed leave one queen cell with that unit but use further queen cells from the unit for setting up 1 perhaps 2 nuclei according to the strength of the unit, any nuclei to contain adequate amounts of bees, brood and food appropriate to it (see standard books). The nuclei should be put some 10 yards from the unit and face in a different direction to it. Any entrance is blocked (in narrow position) with grass for a couple of days and suitable feed added. In due course a fine queen may emerge and be got into lay.

The plan works even better if you can move nuclei at least 3 miles in which case entrances can remain open in narrow position. Don't move nuclei back to their original site (or elsewhere) until the queens are mated, otherwise queens may become homeless after mating flights! The nuclei will need steady

feeding and benefit from additional combs of brood from elsewhere from time to time. Try this even if you don't want the extra bees yourself – there are plenty who do and, in my view, it is vital that those wanting bees get them.

Finally, if it is not too early to think through your plans for extracting your early May crop – and getting ready. My extraction arrangements last year were fraught because of wasps gaining access to my extraction room something which I am currently taking steps to stop.

**April Spring Convention:** 16<sup>th</sup> Members' Day, 17<sup>th</sup> Public Day, 18th Education Day at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2LZ. See the BBKA Website for more details. Advance tickets are cheaper.

**West Sussex Beekeepers' Association** is organising a **Bee Market and Auction** for members and non members. The event will take place at Chichester College's Brinsbury Campus in Pulborough on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup>. Further details: [www.britishbee.org.uk/local/westsussex](http://www.britishbee.org.uk/local/westsussex)

**Paynes Southdown Bee Farms** will be in attendance. Any orders placed with them online before 24 April may be collected from their stand at Brinsbury. [www.paynesbeefarm.co.uk](http://www.paynesbeefarm.co.uk) Please ensure you indicate collection will be from Brinsbury when placing your order.

Don't forget to book your place on the **skep making course**, 15-16 May at Rectory Cottages.

**Bucks Bee Survey** – Mid Bucks, Chalfonts and High Wycombe have been recording colony losses over the years. How have we, in the North of the county fared? **How many colonies at 1st November 2009 and how many queenright colonies do you have on 15th April 2010?** Please respond to Libby Culshaw. If possible state the reason for any losses, if known. Last year Chalfonts recorded a 15.4% loss, Mid Bucks recorded losses of just 11.7%. This compared to a national loss of 20%. It will be interesting to learn how we compare with other areas.

**Forage** – viburnum, pulmonaria, muscari, bergenia and rosemary are just coming into flower. Willow nearby is coated with pollen which is being carried in by the ton! Street trees and clematis Armandii are blossoming. Apricot, cherry, ribes and fruiting currant will open any day now. Fingers crossed for warm weather, unless you suffer from hayfever – the silver birch tree pollen will soon be airborne. The photo of blue sky and blossom is to remind you what spring looks like! With the present icy temperatures we may not get one!



**Queenie's Kitchen** For Easter fun with the children try making **Honey Comb**.

- Lightly oil a shallow container and put a cup of cold water to one side
- In a saucepan heat 3 tabs runny honey, ½ oz butter, 3 tabs light raw sugar, ½ teasp cider vinegar, 4 tabs water, stirring all the time.
- When boiling, simmer gently for two minutes. Then turn up the heat a little and boil until some of the mixture, when dropped into cold water, turns into hard crystalline threads
- Remove from the heat and stir in half a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda. This will cause the mixture to froth and rise.
- Pour into the shallow container and allow to cool. When quite cold break into pieces and eat quickly as the honey comb becomes sticky with storage

**Buzz Words** Did you know.....

- Suttons have introduced a fruit bush called the **Honeyberry**? Apparently bearing sweet fruits containing vitamins and antioxidants. [www.suttons.co.uk/honeyberry](http://www.suttons.co.uk/honeyberry)
- Marathon runners are advised to eat honey on toast before they race?

**Reminder** – My two year term of writing the Newsletter will end with the September issue. Who's next?

If you would like to comment on or contribute to our Newsletter contact Libby Culshaw 01908 375968  
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