

# North Bucks Beekeepers' Association

Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA

Newsletter: May 2010

**April** turned out fine after all. The Spring Convention at Stoneleigh was as popular as ever. The sales halls were crowded all day and there were long queues at the wax exchange stands. The Icelandic volcano created havoc with the lecturers, many of whom were unable to attend. Other people stepped into the breach and gave splendid lectures and thus saved the day!

Thanks to information from the people at the City Discovery Centre, we have won an award from the MK Community Foundation, Grassroots Grant of £750.00. This money will mostly be spent on buying bee suits for the Beginners to wear at the apiary. We will also purchase the book "The Buzz About Bees" and a Beehaus Bee Hive. This means we will have a whole variety of bee hives so that members and Beginners can make a more informed choice about what type of hive to use.

**May** The Beginners' Theory classes have ended and now the practical sessions will start at the apiary. If you feel you could help at any of these sessions or take a turn at mowing and tidying the site, please contact Bob Sibley 01908 647597

**National Honey Week** runs from 3-9. Three Counties Radio have contacted us for input. So radios on! **Sue Bird** will be having a stand at the **Stoke Goldington Steam Rally** and Country Fayre, 8-9. If you can assist, call Sue on 01908 591191.

**Martin Buckle** will be teaching us how to make **Skeps** on 15-16 at Rectory Cottages, Bletchley. If you would like to join, call Libby Culshaw 01908 375968. The course will start at 10.00 a.m. on the Saturday morning and end at around 4.00 p.m. on the Sunday afternoon. The cost is a very reasonable £20.00.

**Rothamsted Research** is holding their open weekend 22-23.

As the practical season has arrived here is a very good tip from our **Seasonal Bee Inspector, Margaret Holland**: keep an old enamel bread bin in the back of your car so that you can safely transport your hot smoker. If you have a cork you can put that in the spout so that your car does not fill with smoke. Tip from me: Harveys Bristol Cream corks are best! Notice that Margaret's bread bin stands inside another container.

**Margaret Holland** is the SBI and point of contact for those with apiaries in and around Milton Keynes. She is very approachable and very knowledgeable so do call her if you have any problems or would like her to visit your apiary. Tel: 01327 857328.



## **Buckinghamshire Beekeepers' Survey**

Beekeepers in the south of the county have been recording their winter colony losses over the past few years and we were invited to join in. There was an amazing response to my second plea for information. 19 people answered, which is almost half the membership. Many thanks.

Of 259 colonies which went into winter 42 were lost, 207 came through and 10 came through but were queenless.

Reasons for the losses were quite varied: one was due to isolation starvation; some were failed queens-drone layers. Two were as the result of woodpecker damage and consequent entry of mice. Two or three had dysentery, probably the result of Nosema Apis. Seven New Zealand bee colonies had dwindled to nothing well before Christmas, despite being very strong, with new comb and plenty of stores at the end of September; probably the result of viruses, a combination of which they are not meeting in New Zealand.

Ken's German Carnica (Bantin line) have wintered very successfully. Some queens have come through for a third year of laying.

## **SWARMING OF BEES: USEFUL GUIDANCE-KEEP FOR REFERENCE. 2010 from Ken Gorman**

### **Make your preparations for each season:**

1. Mark the queen, preferably with the colour of the year: blue this year.
2. Give the hive a thorough spring clean-up: scrape brood boxes carefully and flame lightly with a blowlamp. Preferably, transfer colonies to freshly prepared equipment.
3. Change all combs every other year, or half of the combs yearly. Clean up frames.
4. Have spare equipment to cope with swarms or swarm control procedures.

### **Routine management of colonies.**

1. Inspect colonies every seven days from about mid-April
2. Give colonies ample room: a). for the queen to lay, b). for storage of nectar and c). standing room for the bees. Never let the accommodation get to the "full" state.
3. Queen cups are a first sign of the intention to swarm. **The appearance of even one grub in an enlarging queen cell is the signal for you to take immediate action.**

### **DO NOT CUT OUT ALL OF THE QUEEN CELLS; THIS ONLY DELAYS THE INEVITABLE. EITHER:**

1. Remove the queen and the frame that she is on, plus another of brood and one of stores into a nucleus box: **no queen cells though!** Shake in one or two frames of extra bees. Add empty frames of foundation to fill up the box. Move the nucleus two metres aside. Reduce the cells in the main colony to **one good sized uncapped cell.**
2. Check the main colony again in 5 to seven days, **removing any extra cells that may have been built in the meantime**, leaving the chosen cell to hatch, producing a virgin queen, which will, hopefully, mate. If successful, you can sell the nucleus, which may need room as it develops, or let it build into an additional colony.

### **OR: Artificially swarm the colony-a more time consuming procedure.**

1. Find the marked queen. Move the comb that she is on, first removing any queen cells on it, placing it into the centre of a fresh brood chamber containing empty combs or foundation. Add one or two combs of stores.
2. Stand this newly made up box on a floor and **place it on the original hive stand, moving the rest of the colony two metres to one side.**
3. Transfer the excluder and any supers back onto the brood chamber containing the old queen.
4. Inspect the rest of the colony thoroughly, removing all but one, good sized, uncapped queen cell. Mark the top of the frame to show where it is located.
5. Close down both colonies. The flying bees from the main colony, now in the new position, will rejoin the old queen on the original site.
6. In five to seven days time, move the newly sited colony, which has the uncapped queen cell, two metres to the **other** side of the colony containing the old queen. Inspect it thoroughly to check that the chosen queen cell (now capped) is still in place, **removing any other queen cells that have been built in the meantime.** More bees, which have learnt to fly since the first move, will now join the old queen on the original site.

The colony containing the old queen behaves as though it has swarmed. It continues as a strong colony, gathering nectar.

When the new queen is mated, the old queen can be removed and the two colonies united, on the original site, using a sheet of newspaper having a few pinprick holes in it. Or the old queen can be sold as a nucleus, or retained as a colony, when she is likely to be superseded.

## **Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer**

Our bees should now be very busy and for the beekeeper life goes into overdrive and success for the year will largely depend on what happens this month. You can't control the weather nor, unless you move your bees about, the forage available for them to collect. Assuming you hope any colony will produce, say, 30 lbs to 40lbs of honey for family and friends then just about everything else you can fairly easily control if you go about your beekeeping in a determined way and adopt a few rules. It is true that problems such as varroa have made life more difficult but nevertheless seasonal work from May to July has not changed very much – it remains hard work, but fun. Can I write some rules based on what I do?

- Awaiting your first swarm, nucleus or colony.

Be prepared. Try to run over your preparations with an experienced beekeeper. Some sites will be unsuitable for bees or neighbours. Getting on with neighbours is vital. At worst your bees could be a legally actionable nuisance. Good relations with neighbours demand that your bees are not even an annoyance. Remember when planning your apiary that your neighbours will not be wearing bee suits. Decide how many colonies you plan eventually to keep and allow for seasonal increases. For example, say you plan to keep 4 colonies, you are likely to need room for 4 additional hives or nuclei boxes to house temporary increases as part of swarm control measures. Each hive or box can then be positioned in accordance with a lay-out plan to avoid the inconvenience of repositioning them later.

- 7-day inspections

Each colony must be inspected every 7 days. Why 7 days? Two reasons; an egg may be laid in a queen cell on Day 1, the cell sealed on Day 8 and a swarm emerge on Day 9. Strictly one could probably get by on an 8-Day inspection but since most people work to a 7-day pattern, for them 7 days is more convenient.

- What do you look for on each inspection? Repeating what I stated in my March Notes, you apply Ted Hooper's Five Tests. These are
  1. Has the colony sufficient room?
  2. Is the queen present and laying the expected quantity of eggs?
  3. a – (early in the season) Is the colony building up in size as fast as other colonies in the apiary?  
b – (mid season) Are there any queen cells present in the colony?
  4. Are there any signs of disease or abnormality?
  5. Has the colony sufficient stores to last until the next inspection?

From mid-April onwards the thing which you most need to look out for is ANY indication that bees are starting preparations to swarm. The only way you can find out is to shake sufficient bees off broodcombs (you do a "beekeeper's shake" of each comb within the brood box so that bees end up on the floor of the hive) and look meticulously for any acorn cup or queen cell (or anything conceivably resembling them) having an egg or unsealed larva within it .A. If you see an egg: Assume your bees are likely to swarm. Often an egg will appear in one inspection and be gone by the next. However, by then there may be other cells with eggs or unsealed larva.

If you see an unsealed larva: Swarming will happen unless there is a late change of plans by the bees, In either of these situations you have got to make a decision. If you see an egg, then, depending on its age, a swarm could emerge 5 to 7 days later. If you see an unsealed larva, a swarm could emerge 1 to 5 days later. N.B. These timings can be affected by environmental factors, especially temperature and weather. In either case, a swarm could emerge before your next 7 day inspection so it is no good closing up the hive and hoping for the best. If bees' swarm plans have only got to the egg stage, you could, of course, mark the relevant comb or combs containing eggs with drawing pins and come back 2/3 days later to see how matters progress before making a final decision. It is not safe cutting out all cells with eggs or unsealed larva for the simple reason that until Day 3 your bees can convert any worker egg in an ordinary worker cell into a queen cell and if so a swarm could emerge before your next 7-day inspection. All these timings assume your queen is NOT clipped, i.e. she can fly.

Generally speaking, bees will be supplied with unclipped queens. When the queen is clipped, longer timings, not covered by this note, apply.

You have found eggs or unsealed larva as above then what do you do? The safest courses are either a) to make an artificial swarm (the queen is put into a new broodbox which is left on the site of the original hive with the original supers, and the original broodbox is put on a new site in the apiary or b) the queen is removed (queen put with 2/3 combs of advanced brood and stores in nucleus box in another part of the apiary or elsewhere and the old broodchamber with the original supers is left on the original site with one queen cell to raise new queen).

Both these methods are described in several of the well-known books but as suggested in April's notes get a copy of "Teach Yourself Beekeeping" by Adrian Waring. If all goes well you are likely to end up with 2 separate units of bees which you can either run on separately or unite later in the season.

What if you find a sealed queen cell? Quite often a swarm will not leave until a day or two after the first queen cell is sealed because of, for example, adverse weather conditions. If so, you still have time to implement your Swarm Control Plan as above. If the queen and swarm have gone then to prevent your bees sending out second or more swarms from the original colony you need to reduce cells to one good queen cell and cut out all others including any which look remotely like queen cells. Again this topic is admirably covered in Adrian's book so I write no more about it. This may be an opportunity for you if you wish to increase your number of colonies – if so you can take a comb with a good sealed queen cell on it plus a frame of stores and pollen from original colony (leaving a good queen cell for that colony!) and put in a suitable box to raise a new queen. Usually, this will have a negligible impact on the honey yield of the original colony but prove a cheap source of getting a nucleus and in due course a colony, from a known source. In good years, carried out early in the season, you may even get a few jars of honey for your troubles!

Always see your bees have enough space. This will assist the passage of the queen's pheromones through the hive. Restricted passage or space are major causes of swarming. Always give your bees a super or extra super when broodchamber or top box is 75% full of bees. Sometimes you can deter swarming completely by removing from time to time a frame or two of sealed stores or brood from a colony and giving frames with foundation in their place. If **NO DISEASE IS SUSPECTED**, you can place the removed combs into a weaker stock or that nucleus I refer to above!

By mid-May you may well be ready to take off your first honey. If your bees have been working oil-seed rape (honey crystallises rapidly) take combs off, if necessary, individually and extract immediately, even unsealed combs if you vigorously shake face down over the hive and no honey spills. Extraction may be improved if you leave combs in a warm room overnight. If you do not have an extractor yourself, please get in touch with the relevant Association holder in your area.

I write about things as they have worked for me. All beekeepers have different views and if your District Advisor or "bee buddy" advises otherwise then do please follow what he or she proposes. Finally, there can be nothing worse than trying to follow advice which you can't understand, or, in my case, is probably not clear so do please feel free to telephone me on **01525 240235** or **07968 277 247** and I shall try to assist.

**Forage** Yet again blossom and dandelions are superb. The cherry trees are resplendent. Apple blossom is just opening as is the crab apple. Horse chestnuts will be open in a few days and buddleia, quince and medlar won't be far behind. My bees are sniffing round the comfrey but that hasn't opened yet. The acers are blooming and are very attractive to bees. There is plenty of oil seed rape around. Chaenomeles (pictured) is set to produce a bumper crop of fruits which can be treated in the same way as quince.



BBKA has started an **Adopt A Beehive Scheme**, sponsored by **Saga**. To help promote this you can get an 'Adopt a Beehive' pack by going online at [www.adoptabeehive.co.uk](http://www.adoptabeehive.co.uk). Or to help minimise the workload for the small team of office staff at Stoneleigh write to the company which is distributing the packs at: Freepost RSHK-KSBE-EHKU, The British Beekeepers Association, 5a – 5b Little Mead Industrial Estate, Cranleigh, Surrey GU6 8ND

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

- one horse chestnut tree in flower is the equivalent of a field of flowers?
- **Vita** the honey bee health specialists, have hundreds of images to download? Free to anyone giving talks about bees and beekeeping. Go to [www.vita-europe.com](http://www.vita-europe.com)

My last Newsletter will be in September. I have not yet been deafened by the sound of sharpening pencils! If you would like to comment on or contribute to our Newsletter contact Libby Culshaw.