

North Bucks Beekeepers' Association

Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA

Newsletter: July 2010

This is going to be an appealing Newsletter – you will see why later.

June - good to have some hot sun at last. Beginners' apiary sessions which include practicalities such as how to light a smoker, approach a hive, manipulate bees, look for and recognise all sorts of signs, continue apace. Many beginners were lucky enough to be present at our apiaries when Seasonal Bee Inspector, Margaret Holland came to inspect the colonies. Margaret is always very informative and clear. Those present learnt a lot. Margaret gave our colonies a clean bill of health.

NBBKA was chosen as one of Waitrose's charities for the month of June. When I shopped there last week we had a healthy number of green tokens in our container. Waitrose are promoting honeybees as being central to food production, "As an essential agent of pollination for a vast array of plants, without them much of agriculture would be impossible." They are to donate £67,500 to the University of Sussex to support research into the health of the honeybee, headed by Professor Francis Ratnieks.

My bees, hives and equipment sold out in under a fortnight so I am now retired from physical beekeeping. I have to admit that I wept as I wheelbarrowed the first two supers down the garden to an awaiting car. The rest of the stock wasn't easy either. However, Ken Gorman also has items for sale: a quantity of WBC kit -not cedar - available at one third catalogue price, sound and clean; a range of bee colonies, ready now, hived swarms, nuclei and full colonies; prices- £50 for a hived swarm (no provenance); £80 for a 5 frame nucleus with 2010 home reared queen, to £100 for a full colony, (11 combs, ready for supering), again, with a home reared, marked queen.

Contact: kennethgorman@tiscali.co.uk Tel: 07779801774

Annie Kirby would like to buy a smoker, hive tool and gloves. Tel: 01296 712197

Now for the appeals! North Bucks Beekeepers are going to be present at the following events:

Sunday 25th July in the afternoon at the City Discovery Centre, Bradwell Abbey

Sunday 1st August open day at the City Discovery Centre, Bradwell Abbey

Thursday 26th August all day at the Bucks County Show, Aylesbury

Saturday 11th – Sunday 12th September the Heritage Open Weekend at both Rectory Cottages, Bletchley and the City Discovery Centre, Bradwell Abbey

If you can offer to be present for an hour or two at any of these events, we stalwarts will be most impressed and **very** grateful. Phone Libby Culshaw for details and to volunteer! 01908 375968

The second appeal is: the flex and plug for the Pratley Tray has gone awol. I have trawled round various electrical retailers and they all assure me that this is now obsolete. It is basically a kettle flex as it fits into an element in order to heat the water. Would any of you have such a thing in the dark recesses of your cupboards, garages or sheds which is surplus to your requirements but would be helpful to us?



July looks set to be another busy month, especially if the good weather keeps up. Beginners' practical sessions continue. On **Sunday 25th** NBBKA will be at the **City Discovery Centre** at Bradwell Abbey in the afternoon. So come and talk to the public about bees and beekeeping. Beginners also welcome, because your views will be useful to people toying with the idea of taking up beekeeping. You will also discover that you know more than you think you do once you start explaining things!

Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

June has produced mostly sunny days, interrupted by two short spells of really wet weather. How well I know that; “Just down the farm lane, you will get down there easy”, the man said, “and there is a lovely swarm at head height in the next-but-one field.” Several hours later, I and the bees were being rescued by a local farmer in *his* 4X4 – mine having blown up! In this perhaps bewitching year, weatherwise, some seem to have done rather well and others rather badly (with their bees, I mean). One encouraging fact, I think, is that there is now a lot of moisture in the ground which should help later flows if we get the good weather.

1. Supers

Keep supering and removing supers including individual frames when they are “ripe”. Removal of individual frames creates more work and can only be justified if you have a few hives. However if you live in an “oil-seed rape area” as most of us do, the extra work involved will help prevent the inevitable residue of oil-seed honey in frames “contaminating” and crystallising later honeys. Once oil seed rape has been harvested, the need to extract “at once” generally no longer applies. From now on use clearing boards, as the robbing season has almost arrived and bees will be getting more testy.

2. Assess your colonies

As the honey flow slows down, it is important to assess your colonies. Unless you are in range of borage or similar crops, the main flow is generally over by about July 20th (but in exceptional years like 1977 the main flow started in August!). Once the main flow is over (you will be able to judge that from looking at hive entrances and noting that bees are no longer flying with urgency) make an assessment. Until you have more expertise try to get an experienced beekeeper to help you because it could make a vital difference as to how your bees fare in 2011! The planning starts now! Another reason for getting on with things is because you need to have hives cleared of supers by about August 10th so that you can apply your Apiguard varroa treatment (Apiguard will not work satisfactorily in low Autumn temperatures). The needs of each apiary will be different but I hope the following points will provide some guide to the way ahead.

- Have all supers removed and extracted by August 10th unless there is a late flow.
- From July 1st reduce strong stocks to 4 inch entrances, and weak stocks to 1 inch, all to 1 inch, by 15th August, this will cause some congestion for full colonies but will help prevent robbing among the colonies and by wasps.
- As supers are removed, heft hives. If your body does not “grunt” as you lift a broodbox minus bees supers and roof, it will almost certainly need an immediate feed to bring store levels up to say, 20 lbs. N.B. The main feed is carried out in September – more of that later.
- What of the bees themselves? What can you do, what can an experienced beekeeper advise you to do to provide you with good strong stocks in Spring 2011? The following suggestions may help achieve that.
- Weak but well-disposed colonies and nuclei. Perhaps a small caste but with a good queen covering say 4 brood frames. Keep feeding, give it a chance to build up as it may be your finest stock next year. It could be helped even further if it can be given from time to time (providing it can cover it with bees) a frame of brood from a healthy colony able to spare it.
- The bad girls (and boys), the bees that run all over the place as soon as hive covers are lifted, the bees that for one reason or another make your life (and your neighbours’ lives) a misery, the inveterate swarmers (two or even three times in a season) etc. Unite them, if healthy, with healthy, better stocks. It will probably be best to unite late September/early October because a bad-tempered stock is more likely to kill the queen of the stock to which it is introduced at least until Autumn “sleepiness” sets in and drones are no longer on hand. Unite by newspaper method. If the stock is really nasty, consider killing outright. Block the hive entrance and fill hive with water N.B. experienced beekeepers to advise.
- Do you want more bees? In the past, I have always considered that every beekeeper, to meet family and friends’ needs, probably should have a minimum of three colonies so one can produce, say, 60 lbs, one, say, 20 lbs and one fail to score. This is purely a personal opinion. Given that winter colony losses are now as high as 30% (in a few cases much higher), I suggest the minimum should be four. How do you go about increasing your stocks? See below.

3. Two methods of increase.

The fundamental point is that if you try to increase your bees, during the honey flow season, from existing stocks, you are likely to reduce your total crop. If you attempt to do so later, you can't affect the crop. If you only want to increase your stocks from, say, two to four, the following suggestions may work for you. N.B. There are many methods for securing increase of stocks: most involve much work, equipment, time and timing and are not appropriate to a new beekeeper wanting a couple of extra stocks.

A. Buy in queens from a reputable breeder. Introduce by nucleus method. Follow the books and get an experienced beekeeper to help.

B - A suggestion of **Donald Sims** in his book *60 Years with Bees*. You start by removing from your best very strong stock all supers (after clearing bees from them). The frames can, if necessary, be "ripened" by another colony. In brief, you create the conditions which make the bees want to swarm, you go back to the stock every three to seven days to look out for queen cells and if and when queen cells appear, you remove queen with a frame of brood and one of stores and put into nucleus box. Place box, say, at least ten feet from the original hive, with the entrance of the box facing in another direction. Seal entrance of the box with grass for 72 hours. Remaining bees in original hive are allowed to build up queen cells and when sealed you divide remaining bees, brood and food frames into up to three equal parts and place in separate boxes. Leave the weakest box on the site of the original hive and other boxes elsewhere in the apiary with entrances set in different directions, again, sealed with grass, as above. The bees in each box are allowed to develop into colonies unless united elsewhere. Drifting of older flying bees back to the original site will weaken nuclei not on it. This risk can be wholly removed if nuclei boxes are instead temporarily moved at least three miles away at least until queens are in lay. This course does not guarantee success but may be worth a try. Good luck!

N.B.1.- Do not be too ambitious. Remember the bees in each box, unless united with another stock, need to build up for winter.

N.B.2.- Once you have removed supers, bees may need feeding.

A final point, buy your Apiguard now for your August varroa treatment.

Forage Lime blossom is late opening as are many flowers this year. The bees are currently on sage and thyme. The borage won't be long behind. Popular with all flying insects is the buddleia which is coming into flower. Honey bees particularly enjoy the buddleia globosa, pictured here. Creeping Jenny, which as its name suggests, spreads and forms carpets of nectar bearing flowers. Brambles are proving their worth and towards the middle of the month we should see late flowering raspberries, rosebay willow herb and Himalayan balsam opening up.



President of BBKA, Martin Smith said, "Everyone can play their part by continuing to plant bee friendly plants, fruits and vegetables to provide desperately needed forage." I agree with this but every week gardeners mow their lawns and the clover with it! It has been a very good season for clover and each head contains 50-100 individual nectar bearing flowers. Can we persuade lawn buffs to mow less often?

Ray Mitchener has forwarded a news clipping for us to consider. It is regarding the risk of botulism from feeding honey to babies under twelve months. The article states that three infants (one of 15 weeks) contacted infant botulism linked to honey, in the past year. The babies required hospital treatment but are now recovering.

Botulism is caused by spores that normally live in a dormant form in soil and dust but can occasionally get into homey. If the spores enter a baby's intestines they can grow and produce a toxin that causes infant botulism.

Honey is safe for children over 1 but a younger baby's gut is not sufficiently developed to be able to fight off the bacteria. Not all babies who are given honey will develop infant botulism but it is best to be safe and not give honey under any circumstances. Ray intends to state the danger on his honey labels.

Queenie's Kitchen – with the hot weather and hopefully a glut of tomatoes coming on in your gardens, try this **Chilled Tomato, Honey, Citrus and Vodka Soup**.

- Heat 2 tabs extra-virgin olive oil in a large saucepan over a moderate heat. Add 10 medium plum tomatoes which have been seeded and finely chopped, 4 oz chopped shallots, 1 tab finely chopped fresh ginger and 1 tab chopped garlic. Simmer until the liquid evaporates and the mixture thickens – about 12 minutes.
- Add 2 tabs honey and simmer until mixture is very thick, stirring frequently – about 8 minutes.
- Add 450 ml chicken stock, 225 ml dry white wine, 125 ml freshly squeezed lime juice, lime zest, 4 tabs freshly chopped coriander, 2 tabs freshly chopped mint and simmer for about 30 minutes.
- Pass the soup through a sieve into a large bowl, pressing on the solids to releases the juices. Discard the solids.
- Stir in 2 tabs freshly squeezed lemon juice and 4 tabs vodka. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Chill for at least 8 hours.

It is recommended that this soup be accompanied with fried apple rings to give a sweet and savoury combination:

- take 2 apples, core them and slice into thin rings. Pat dry with paper towel.
- Heat 125 ml vegetable oil in a large deep sided frying pan, over a high heat. Fry the apples in small batches, stirring for 1-2 minutes or until they are crisp.
- Transfer the fried apples to paper towel to drain off the excess oil.

Buzz Words Did you know.....

- David Cameron was the Honorary President of Oxfordshire Beekeepers' Association?
- Bees don't like to work on old, brittle foundation? Soften it up by putting it in warm water with a little *Fairy Liquid*.

DON'T FORGET – dates for the rest of the year:

August – Saturday 1st - **Open Day** at the **City Discovery Centre**, Bradwell Abbey
Thursday 26th – **Bucks County Show**, Aylesbury

September Saturday 11th-Sunday 12th – **Heritage Open Weekend** at Rectory Cottages & the City Discovery Centre

Sunday 26th – **NBBKA Annual Honey Show** at Wyevale Garden Centre, Wavendon

October – Wednesday 20th- **AGM** followed by a talk and demonstration of the new **Beehaus** by **Johannes Paul** at Rectory Cottages

November Wednesday 17th – **a talk** by **Ged Marshall A Day in the Life of a Bee Farmer** at Rectory Cottages

December – we haven't had a meeting in December for the past couple of years but watch this space as some committee members were thinking of possibly organising a gathering.



Bee thereor bee square!

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