

# North Bucks Beekeepers' Association

Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA

Newsletter: August 2010

**July** In contrast to last July's heavy rains, we have had a very dry month and this has affected the nectar flow.

I am glad to report that Waitrose has contacted us to say that they will be awarding us £440.00 as a result of NBBKA being selected for their Charity of the Month Scheme in June. NBBKA will have a presence on the Waitrose Stand at the County Show.

There was an interesting piece on Radio 4's *Home Planet* on 20<sup>th</sup> July about hedgehogs being observed around hives eating dead and dying bees. One person reported a hedgehog being stung and squealing very loudly. A scientist had seen a hedgehog with over 50 stings. Hedgehogs often eat bumble bees and their nests and cocoons have been found in their stomach contents.

Clive Hill of High Wycombe BKA, very kindly sent us a kettle plug so we can now use the Pratley Tray. Thank you, Clive.

NBBKA had a presence at the City Discovery Centre on 25<sup>th</sup>. The Virtual Hive is proving to be very useful when explaining things to non-beekeepers.

**August** Twenty people responded to the appeal for help at shows, but several were to say they are unable to help at the moment. It is heartening to get replies though as committee members work very hard and we are volunteering our hours too. We have enough volunteers for the **Open Day** at the City Discovery Centre on **1<sup>st</sup> August** but we could do with some more volunteers for the **Bucks County Show** at Aylesbury on **Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>**.

Beginners' meetings continue. Beginners will be able to assist in the application of Apiguard and with feeding sugar syrup to the bees.

Also in August Lorna McLindon, Food Technologist for Marks & Spencer, with responsibility for honey, will be visiting our apiary. She would like to learn and understand more about bees, how they produce honey and how we deal with it. With the view that M&S will be able to help beekeepers in their drive to maintain honey bee stocks.

**The NBBKA Annual Honey Show** takes place at Wyevale Garden Centre, Woburn Sands on **26<sup>th</sup> September**. Here is the Schedule so that you can begin your preparations in good time:

## HONEY

- 1 Two matching 1lb jars of light honey
- 2 Two matching 1lb jars of medium honey
- 3 Two matching 1lb jars of dark honey
- 4 Two matching 1lb jars crystallised honey
- 5 Two matching jars of honey not as in classes 1 to 4 (eg chunk, ling, jar variations etc)
- 6 One piece cut comb, gross weight 220-250g, in container with transparent lid
- 7 One standard comb of honey showing the work of the bees. In bee-proof show case
- 8 Gift, one 1lb jar of honey of any type. Donated after the show to Willen Hospice
- 9 Six matching 1lb jars of honey presented labelled as for legal sale under current rules
- 10 One section of honey, round or square
- 11 One 1lb jar honey, the jar painted black

## WAX

- 12 One cake beeswax, 200g to 255g
- 13 not used this year
- 14 Six matching cakes of beeswax, total weight within 160g to 180 g
- 15 Three matching beeswax candles made by any method, display erect, ready to burn

## CAKE

- 16 One honey fruit cake as per recipe provided. **I will put these recipes in next month's Newsletter**
- 17 One plain honey cake (*Cakes on paper plates, in bags provided by the Show Secretary on the day*)

## FUDGE

18 Honey fudge as per recipe provided

## MEAD

19 One bottle dry mead

20 One bottle sweet mead

21 One bottle honey wine, label stating main ingredients apart from honey

*Classes 19-21 in clear punted bottles with white plastic/cork stoppers*

## CRAFTS

22 One item made or produced by the exhibitor, relevant to beekeeping either by its uses or subject, or being made using beehive produce. Excludes items covered by classes 1-21

22a A skep made by the exhibitor

## NOVICE CLASSES

23 Two 1lb jars of clear honey, of any colour but matching

24 Two 1lb jars of crystallised honey, of any type but matching

25 One cake beeswax, between 110g and 170g

**YOU MUST CHECK THE DETAILS for entries** on our Website or with Show Secretary, Nicola Smith. The above is just a skeleton to get you revved up!! The show judge will be Martin Buckle, who will be judging openly i.e. you can hear his comments and learn how to improve your products. This is the most valuable aspect of the Honey Show and if you are a Beginner, please come along and listen. More Show information and recipes will be in the next month's Newsletter. Please note the new class this year 22a – a skep made by you!

## **Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer**

In the absence of a late flow, our bees are now making plans for winter and so must we. Never has this task been more vital with winter losses running overall at 25% to 30% (about 10% in pre-varroa days), the uncertainties (many) of swarms (numerous new prospective beekeepers are still without bees), and the cost of even a 5-frame nucleus setting you back, say, £120 to £200 (and may be not producing honey in its first year). Your best bet if it is honey you want from your current bees in 2011 is to get them into best possible order now.

In a sense, the beekeeping year falls into two parts: one from August to March the other from April to July. Beekeeping in the August to March period requires all of us to take a few mechanical and measured steps in a pre-determined way and if we faithfully pursue them then we will have done all we can to tend to our bees. So, what should we be doing now? In absence of a late flow, supers should have now been removed, extracted and returned to the bees for licking clean and put into storage. A few tips here:

**VERY IMPORTANT** When you removed the supers for extraction did you heft the hive for stores? If you didn't, do so at once and feed if necessary, otherwise your colony may starve to death.

- + Don't put supers back on to a weak stock – it could be robbed out.
- + Return/remove supers late evening to reduce risk of robbing.
- + Reduce colonies to 1 inch entrances however strong. Nuclei to one bee- space (but big enough for queens and drones to use).
- + Seal up every crevice and conceivable crevice in your hive through which a bee or wasp could enter. Remember that if the head goes through, the body follows! Use tape or packaging foam. Don't rely on grass, it dries out. Whatever you use, make your stocks secure.
- + A tip from Ken Gorman: leave an eke (i.e. an empty super) below supers to be cleared, it encourages bees to take leftover food below rather than collect it within those supers.
- + Choked-up oil-seed rape combs? A tip from Andy Johnson [Beds BKA]. Put into spare super(s) all clogged-up crystallised combs. De-cap combs to save bees work later. Take to a hive with strong colony from which honey crop has been taken. Move all parts of hive (apart from floor/entrance block) sideways, close old entrance, place super(s) with combs to be cleared above floor, place queen excluder above super(s), place eke with 1 inch entrance above that, finally put remaining hive above

eke. N.B. Make certain queen remains in original brood box. N.B. Bees dislike having food below their brood so will usually move it from supers into brood chamber. Don't be too ambitious. Bees don't winter well on oil-seed rape honey. Do ring me if you want more detail.

- + Store cleared supers carefully in a dry cool and clean place. Protect against the usual robbers including bees, wasps, rats and mice again sealing up every conceivable crevice and place queen excluder (or solid material) top and bottom of the piles to exclude four-legged mammals.
- + Store supers in a shed or area where bees and wasps have no access. This is very important until late Autumn when bees hibernate and wasps die out.
- + Wax moths a problem? You can buy in proprietary products but a cheaper course may be to stand out supers in extreme cold weather or place for a week or so in the family chest freezer.

Your bees. About 15 August in the middle of a good warm flying day go and check your bees. These are the questions I ask myself. Others may do things differently.

- + Is the colony queenright and are there good quantities of solid slabs of brood? Take a NBU disease pamphlet with you and compare the brood you see with what is in the pamphlet. If you are in the slightest bit worried, ask an experienced beekeeper to look.
- + Is there enough food? A strong colony should never have less than 20 lbs of stores, a four-frame nucleus never less than 10 lbs... Feed if necessary to bring up to the appropriate level - winter feeding is done in September – more later. If you feed excessively in August you will probably end up with unneeded excessive brood.
- + Bees also need a good supply of pollen. I have no experience of feeding pollen substitute for the very simple reason that my bees in/on north Bucks/Beds borders collect too much with the result that combs with stale pollen have to be rendered down periodically.
- + Do bees look and feel right? How can you possibly judge that without more experience? Here are a few pointers:
  - + Are they a cohesive unit and do they keep at their tasks when you open up? Busy bees normally mean healthy bees.
  - + Providing you have found eggs or healthy brood then there is no need to look for the queen. Too much excitement and out come the robbers! Finding, marking, and, if you wish, clipping the queen is so much easier in the Spring so this is not a vital task in August.
  - + Don't be too concerned if there is no brood. Queens in their second or third years often take a summer break from egg-laying. Similarly, during a heavy honey flow, it is quite normal for the queen to go off lay. Make a note of the disorder and check again two weeks later.
  - + Excessive numbers of drones, large slabs or haphazard drone brood suggest either a drone laying queen or laying workers. You may wish to leave for a week or two to see if the situation improves (in all probability it will only get worse) and if so you will need to sort before winter. Some form of unification is usually the best in these situations. Unfortunately you can't just unite the stock in trouble with a good one because in all probability the queen of the good stock will be killed. I suggest instead you proceed as follows:
    - + Drone laying queen? Find and kill her. If you can't find her you can place queen excluder below brood chamber and shake all combs and hive parts clear of bees on to large sheet you have placed in front of the hive. The sheet should be laid to provide a platform to the hive entrance. The queen should be found below queen excluder.
    - + Laying workers? Move the stock in trouble to a fresh site at least 20 feet away, entrance facing another direction. Remove several brood combs minus bees and place in new hive on original site. The flying bees will return to original site but the laying workers, the trouble makers, will stay put. Later unite flying bees in new hive to a good strong stock by newspaper method. Bees remaining in original hive will soon lose heart and can be shaken off a few days later at the entrance of a strong hive. Never unite if disease is suspected.

Varroa treatment The other vital task in August is your varroa treatment. Unless you are in the very fortunate and very unlikely position of having no varroa, you have got to treat. It is generally accepted that the Apistan and Bayvarol, treatments applied when varroa struck these parts in the mid-nineties are at present no longer effective and we are advised to use Apiguard N.B. You can buy in Apiguard from the bee equipment suppliers and you should follow the manufacturers' instructions to the letter.

Two points cannot be over emphasised. Apiguard works best in the warmer days of August rather than the cooler days of September. That is why the treatment needs to be started by 15<sup>th</sup> August at the latest. Secondly, if you have open-mesh floors you must seal up all gaps below to limit Apiguard vapours being lost. I am now working my bees on open-mesh floors without trays so whilst I am treating with Apiguard I place a temporary blank board below floor to seal gap.

Finally, it is time to start preparing for the honey Show! It is a real fun day and experts will be on hand, I am sure, to answer any worries or concerns - so make a note of the date **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September** and come with your entries! Mind you, you will probably get five different views from any three beekeepers you consult – sorry, that's beekeeping! Incidentally, I think it is time I mention once again these notes represent my own views rather than those of the Association but do contact me on any issue.

IT IS YOU WE WANT TO HELP!

**Forage** Bee plants in my vicinity don't seem to be as luxuriant as in previous years, this means thin pickings for our bees. However, they are still working thyme and marjoram in my garden and also the pale and dark purple buddleias. The Himalayan balsam is providing sustenance near the river. Teasles are coming out and provide a good source of nectar. Hebes are also popular but as with the white clover, don't seem to be as nectiferous due to the dry conditions.



**Queenie's Kitchen** Hot, dry summer – we've just got to have ice cream This **Honey and Cognac Ice-cream** is very indulgent but absolutely delicious and easy to make.

- Separate 6 eggs into different bowls. Whisk the whites until stiff. Add ½ lb icing sugar and whisk until very white and stiff.
- In another bowl combine the beaten egg yolks, ½ lb jar of honey and the same ½ lb jar full of brandy.
- Add this to the stiff egg whites and blend well together.
- Freeze for at least three hours then remix and set to freeze again. This won't set hard due to the brandy.

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

- Apparently over wintered corn cobs give a gentle smoke? Mixing these together with old wood from fallen trees give a low ash, low tar fuel and they cause the smoker to burn on for hours. So save those husks!
- Jo Colesworthy a sculptor has made a sculpture based on pollen grains. She says the marvels of the botanical world are invisible to the naked eye but now with electron microscopes we can enter that world. See her work on the Web.

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