

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter July 2011

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Calendar at-a-glance

1 st September	Bucks County Show
24 th September	Bucks County Honey Show
25 th September	NBBKA Honey Show
5 th October	NBBKA Annual General Meeting
27 th - 29 th October	National Honey Show
12 th November	Ron Hoskins "Breeding Varroa-free Bees"
16 th November	Lecture: Disease and Pest Update from Nigel Semmence
17 th January 2012	Lecture: Speaker and topic t.b.a.

Committee meetings: The Committee will meet on 12th July, 13th September, 8th November, and in 2012 the first meeting will be on 10th January. All members are welcome at these meetings.

Articles

Editorial

The "flow" definitely slowed down in June, to an extent due to the so-called "June Gap", but probably as much to needed rain. It is worthwhile reminding ourselves that very dry conditions over a long period, this year from March until the end of May, put considerable stress on bees as ready, regular supplies of water dwindle and nectar yields reduce. There are arguments for and against supplying bees with an artificial **water source**, Ged Marshall of Buckfast Bee fame being one who considers that in the UK generally it is unnecessary. Robert Manley, a bee farmer with a considerable number of apiaries in the Thames Valley half a century ago, advocated the provision of a water supply where needed, pointing out that in one of his apiaries he had known fifty stocks in April to carry in five or six gallons a day. For those of us with small apiaries, and especially those close to human habitation the following factors, apart from need, may be relevant:-

- Bees like to collect water from sheltered sunny places. If these happen to be your neighbours' fish tank or worse the children's paddling pool, this is where the bees will go, without so much as a by your leave!
- Bees do not consider their safety, so unwise water landings may result in a lot of dead bees.
- The appearance of so many bees dead or alive may be the tipping point between a good relationship and a bad one with your neighbour.

Personally I have many times thought about providing a water supply, and then somehow or other have thought about something else – and done nothing. It is a matter on which my beloved felt compelled to action in the drought of April, so a large ashtray full of water appeared in our garden plot and guess what: Jim the jack russell soon lapped up the supply before even one bee visit. So what to do? There is, in my view, no conclusive case for or against a separate water supply, but if you provide one it should be along the following lines:-

- Put a dustbin-sized container in a warm, sunny, sheltered place in your garden away from neighbours.
- Fill it with peat. N.B. To reduce the amount of peat you could line the container with e.g. polystyrene and finish with a foot or so of peat.
- Water the container regularly to keep the peat damp, but not so wet that the bees drown. The idea of the peat is to provide the bees with a firm landing ground.
- Preferably start the operation in March, and to attract the bees add a little syrup feed to the first one or two waterings to draw the "customers" in. Avoid syrup feed later in the year, because of the risk of robbing.
- Bees, if given the opportunity, may collect water from undesirable sources such as cattle slurry. Your supply may divert that course.
- Most important: Once you provide a water supply you must continue it. It may be that you have a pond or something similar. If so, ensure your bees have a safe landing strip within it, such as stones in a sunny spot at one end of the pond. The strip, whatever it is, will soon attract plant and pond life and become increasingly attractive to your bees.

When I visited two of my apiaries yesterday, in both of them enormous activity was going on: the bees darting in and out of hive entrances, oblivious to my presence with a powerful aroma of nectars, mostly from lime, clover and bramble, to please the nostrils. Stocks which now are so intent on doing "the honey business" are in my view in early July now best left to get on with it, especially if you bear in mind that a colony at full strength and in a strong flow can easily bring in 25 lb of nectar per week. But sadly not for very much longer in the year. I reckon that by 15th July, at least here in Stewkley, the main flow for the year will be over and once that happens one must start removing supers, winding the bees down for winter, and yes, 2012. As one bee year ends, so another starts, and the fascination of beekeeping continues.

Our Apiaries

Since my *cri de coeur* in the June newsletter, the Committee has met and I am pleased to report has agreed some arrangements which we are confident will go some way to suiting all in future:-

- The Association will continue to run separate apiaries in Bradwell Abbey and Cosgrove. The variety offered by two separate apiaries is very much appreciated by beginners.
- Each apiary will be reduced to four or five hives at the end of summer. This means that we should have a few stocks to offer members later.
- Additional security measures will be put in place at Bradwell Abbey.
- Ed Reeney, Daniel Clarke, Richard Carder and Karen Dale will run the Bradwell Abbey Apiary, Phil Gabel and I Cosgrove. We hope Ken Gorman will continue to offer us the benefit of his enormous experience.
- Some loose ends still need to be cleared, but this is the scheme of things.

Thefts

Just to remind you: theft of hives and related equipment continues. Please be on your guard. Now is the time to brand hives if you have not already done so. The Police are apparently trying out a new marking device, details of which will follow when received.

Our North Bucks honey show, Sunday 25th September

This is once again being spearheaded by Nicola Smith, and is a highlight of the Association's year. Entries will be judged by Martin Buckle, who is one of the top judges in the UK, and not only is his knowledge of the subject breathtaking but invariably he leaves helpful notes as to how your entry could have been better, or even was rather good! The days when we could just run honey into a jar and expect a quick sale are thankfully over,, and we owe it to ourselves and to beekeepers in general to ensure that our produce is only of the highest order. Entering the Show is one rung up the ladder of achieving that. The Show offers a marvellous opportunity to North Bucks to advertise itself to the public, so please come! And beginners, please do not be daunted: you often walk away with the top prizes.

High Wycombe, Chalfonts and Mid-Bucks BKAs

It seems to me that it will be of tremendous benefit to us North Bucks members if we are kept aware of activities in the other Associations and they of ours. I am therefore asking them to circulate us with details of theirs, and we will provide ours to them. The four associations are all part of Buckinghamshire Beekeepers' Association.

For Sale

I believe Ken Gorman and Sue Bird may still have bees for sale, so can I encourage you to contact them. Caroline Luxford , 0772 962 4336 of Mid-Bucks also has bees for sale. Having done my normal expansion on the bee front for this year, I am likely again to wish to dispose of some bees in September. My telephone number is 01525 240 235.

Photos from the social evening







Those hard-to-get swarms

A company called Bucks Pest Control, Bletchley, m.07834 773114 provide this service, and we have been asked to give some details. We have not worked with them in the past, as far as I am aware, so feed-back will be welcome. They also sometimes have swarms caught for sale. Because of the risk of disease or other problems, only very experienced beekeepers should accept swarms at the current time, especially following the outbreaks of American and European Foulbrood in the Buckingham area (see below).

Foul Broods

At last night's beginners' meeting at Cosgrove, I learned that American and European Foulbroods had been discovered in Buckingham. If so, this is very serious news. I shall pass on any further details as soon as I can.

On this rather sombre note I shall end this newsletter's articles, again delayed, for which many apologies. Once I can get to grips with super boxes to extract, and buckets to jar, I shall again try to speed thing up a bit.

Apiary Notes

As you may know, I started doing these notes when Ken Gorman stood down, and with much trepidation (which continues to this day.....!) I have already urged all beginners to have their own separate copies of the Waring book "Get Started in Beekeeping", but it also occurred to me that it might help them and even more experienced beekeepers, if they were to have a seasonal guide to "Beekeeping outside the Season" (1st July to the following 31st March). After all, although one can never predict what will happen during the season (1st April to 30th June) you can reasonably foresee what will happen, and need doing at other times. So, included with this Newsletter, is the "Outside the Season Guide" prepared for Beds BKA, which I am confident is relevant to land to the west, i.e. us, North Bucks! As you will see, the Guide covers July, so I will just emphasise for the month the following points:-

- Strong hives should now be reduced to 4-inch entrances, very weak, e.g. 3-frame nucleus to one bee space, others to 1 inch. This is to reduce the risk of robbing.
- For the same reason, seal up all gaps in hive bodies, avoid wash-up spills, put all equipment out of use where robbers cannot reach.
- Extract supers/super combs as soon as honey ripens and remove/clear/extract all supers at the end of the flow (here in Stewkley this should happen about 15th July).
- Start planning your apiaries and bees for 2012. If you want to raise nuclei, it is not too late if you start at once. In 2010 I reduced a very strong colony to a broodchamber in late June; this forced the bees to raise queen cells, at which point the hive was divided into three: one with the queen and flying bees and two each with one queen cell. Do call me if you wish to discuss further. My

own view is that if a beekeeper goes into winter with four hives and loses possibly two, the two remaining should enable the beekeeper to go back the following year to four.

- Finally order your supply of Apiguard for your August varroa treatment. There are other products on the market for treating varroa, of which I have no experience. The National Bee Unit recommends Apiguard, and that is why I use it.

Future Events

Bucks county honey show

Saturday 24th September 2011.

Yes, the day before our North Bucks Show. This is a great opportunity to meet members of the other Associations under the Bucks County banner, namely High Wycombe, the Chalfonts and Mid-Bucks, and to fly the North Bucks flag. Details from Frank Rickett, chairman@mbbka.org.uk, 01494 866516.

Honey Show

Sunday 25th September 2011: schedules enclosed.

This is once again being spearheaded by Nicola Smith, and is a highlight of the Association's year. Entries will be judged by Martin Buckle, who is one of the top judges in the UK, and not only is his knowledge of the subject breathtaking but invariably he leaves helpful notes as to how your entry could have been better, or even was rather good! The days when we could just run honey into a jar and expect a quick sale are thankfully over, and we owe it to ourselves and to beekeepers in general to ensure that our produce is only of the highest order. Entering the Show is one rung up the ladder of achieving that. The Show offers a marvellous opportunity to North Bucks to advertise itself to the public, so please come! And beginners, please do not be put off: you often walk away with the top prizes.

And more on the way....

Bucks county show

1st September 2011, off the A413 two miles north of Aylesbury.

Again we have been invited to join the Waitrose tent, which is a real accolade for the Association, and fun too (even in the now-famous mud of 2010!). We got terrific support from the general public, who showed tremendous concern last year for our bees. Again, we shall be taking an observation hive with us and have honey for sale. Libby Culshaw and I will be on parade. Could we have two more volunteers please.

Annual general meeting

Wednesday 5th October 2011.

Yes, our AGM. Bob will be giving a review of our year. Is this not the time for YOU TO ANSWER THE CALL and seek election to join the Committee? I do hope beginners will apply: beekeeping experience is DEFINITELY NOT REQUIRED and may NOT EVEN BE DESIRABLE, because like the best committees, we need ALL THE TALENTS PLEASE. The other draw for coming to the AGM is that you then get a lecture from a guest speaker.

Ron Hoskins

Talk on breeding varroa-free bees. 12th November 2011. We are holding this meeting in Northampton at the invitation of Northamptonshire BKA. Further details in next month's newsletter.

Nigel Semmence

Disease and pest update. 16th November 2011. Nigel, who is head of the southern section of the National Bee Unit, is giving his annual update. No beekeeper today can afford to be unaware of the latest tactics for responding to the various troubles affecting bees and I hope, as usual, we will have a very full turnout for this vital meeting.

Best wishes,
Andrew Beer