

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter July 2012

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Calendar at-a-glance

24 th July	Committee meeting
31 st July	Going For Gold
25 th September	Committee Meeting
13 th October	County and NBBKA honey shows and County AGM

News Articles

Bee Gardeners and selling your honey

BeeGardeners, the community bee keeping project that I am involved with in Milton Keynes, will be attending several events over the next five weeks to promote honey, bumble, and solitary bees. I will of course also be flying the NBBKA banner and talking to all interested parties about the association and what we have to offer. I would like to offer the opportunity to any of you who would like to sell honey through us at these events to do so. If so please call me on 01908 241 855 or 07798 841 274 to arrange dropping off the honey at my house in Woughton. The next event dates are the 15th and the 25th of July.

Ken Neil (Chairman NBBKA)

Sugar offers from Huntingdon and Beds BKAs

Our friends at Huntingdon BKA are offering sugar for sale, and one of our friends at Beds BKA is offering a very generous mileage rate for collection of the sugar from Huntingdon. The deal is: 15kg for £9.00, larger sizes available by request, collection from Huntingdon (PE29 7DT) on 7th July, please contact Mark on 07813027627 or

mark-harte@o2.co.uk.

Dave Tucker of Beds BKA has a van and is kindly offering to collect members' orders for an extra 1p a kg to cover his fuel. Please contact him on Davetucker@aol.com and mention this newsletter.

Event Report – Loughton Open Day

Rod Pakes sends in this picture of our stall on Sunday before the public started to circulate. A great deal of interest was expressed particularly regarding varroa which they had read in the news as the biggest threat to bees. We explained that the foul brood disease was much worse and that we can to some extent monitor and control varroa. The other big question was how many times do we get stung, well how long is a piece of string. Over £100 of honey were sold and all the boxes of eggs were snapped up. A lovely afternoon in an idyllic setting with a very interested audience.



Ged Marshall queen-rearing technique

Andrew beer used a Ged Marshall technique for producing queen cells at Cosgrove from a section of comb containing eggs cut out and suspended vertically in a small square box. Here is a photo:



Regular Columns

July 2012 apiary notes from Andrew Beer

We are delighted that Andrew has very generously offered to write fresh beginner notes for this season. Thank you, Andrew, for this month's notes. Fresh notes in a year whose weather doesn't compare to last's are very welcome indeed.

2012 has been to date a very difficult year for bees and beekeepers alike and I wish to highlight two particular concerns. First, in my experience, and it seems from the experience of many others, most stocks are very light on stores. At especial risk are very large colonies (because of the number of "mouths" to feed), stocks where supers have been taken and extracted, swarms and nuclei, and they MUST BE FED, preferably at a 1 pint to 1lb sugar- syrup mix, or given a proprietary feed. To stop feed reaching supers for extraction, place feed within an eke immediately above the broodchamber/ queen excluder, and either remove or probably more conveniently, place the supers above the eke. As a guide, a strong colony needs, during the summer months, at least 3 deep frames of stores (or equivalent in supers) left on the hive! The other concern is the time being taken for new queens to get into lay. Whilst always a worry to more experienced beekeepers (particularly because the arrival of varroa and associated viruses may have reduced the effectiveness of drone cover), it is clear from many remarks I have heard from newer beekeepers this year that this is a subject which also worries them greatly.

So the following reminders may help. If a colony sends out a first swarm, on say 1 June, the very earliest it can expect to have a laying queen is about 16 June (queen emerges on 7 or 8 June: 7 days after departure of the swarm; mates within 5 days on 13 June, and starts laying 3 days later on 16 June). This is the earliest time.

If a colony sends out a swarm on 1 June, but the queen 'chosen' to lead the colony is only a day-old egg on departure of the swarm, then it may not have a laying queen until 14 July (queen emerges from her cell on 16 June, mating is delayed until, say, 11 July, and laying starts 3 days later). Normally, the waiting time for the queen to mate and start laying will be somewhere between 16-44 days from the departure date of the first swarm, but for even the most experienced beekeeper it can seem a long, long time.

Some tell- tale signs that all is well in a swarmed colony:- pollen is being taken into the hive, the colony is engaged in "bee-business" and cells in the middle of the brood nest have been polished up in readiness for the new queen to lay. Finally, if you have a queen-right colony in the same apiary and are worried about a queenless one, put a test comb containing eggs or day-old larvae into it. Unless queen cells are produced, you may assume your colony is proceeding to bring its new queen into lay. If new beekeepers are in any doubt, we earnestly recommend that they take advice from experienced ones. My personal view, providing there is sufficient forage in the area, and other relevant factors permitting, is that all beekeepers should have a minimum of

five colonies to allow for winter losses and mating failures. Whilst I stand to be corrected, I believe I am right in saying that only 7 out of 10 mating flights, through no fault of the beekeeper, are successful, so please don't take failure personally.

We have had years like 2012 has been to date, and then the following July and August have been quite glorious. There is lots of damp in the ground, brambles or some crop could be a great source of honey and it may be the best is still to come. In 1977, the whole of my honey crop came in after 1 August so let's be hopeful.

Do you have all the colonies you want and have you missed out on swarms? If so, you might like to consider the following: In the first week of July, go to your best colony (good temperament is even more important than productivity in my view), take away its supers and force it into raising swarm queen cells (experts maintain swarm cells are superior to emergency cells for the best queens). Wait until the earliest queen cells are almost sealed and then divide the colony into three, the queen being left in the original hive on the original site with supers added as needed, all queen cells removed from combs. The two other divisions should each be left with one good open queen cell and preferably taken to another site over three miles away to prevent drifting. You can return them, if you wish, after queens are mated. Each division should be copiously fed as necessary in order to get it up to strength for winter. Do give me a call if you want to have a go, and I will provide more details. The process will inevitably reduce the honey crop and I must warn you it does not always work, in which case you will need to re-unite.

In a normal season, when the honey flow, at least in Stewkley, can be expected to slow down by about 15 July, I would recommend that entrances be reduced on or after 1 July, very weak stocks to 1 bee space, strong stocks to 4 inches (and 2 inches in August). Because this season has been so variable, it is probably better to play it by ear, and when you sense the robbing season is imminent, and particularly when wasps are on the wing with a vengeance, to put your security measures in place.

All the best,

Andrew Beer

Future Events

Going For Gold – an exciting new event

Expert beekeeper Mike Bensley will be presenting "Going for Gold" at the Rectory Cottages on the 31st July at 7pm. This exciting talk will assist you in producing excellent quality honey and wax for sale and show. Mike regularly cleans up at the NBBKA honey show, so this event is not to be missed.

NBBKA & Bucks County Honey Shows and AGM

A reminder for your diary, that all these events are taking place together in **Stewkley**, a few miles south of Milton Keynes, on Saturday **13th October** 2012.

We know many members have skills about which we would like to know a lot more! For example, would you like to run a honey cooking demonstration that day? If you are able to **help**, or have a **suggestion** for a feature for the day, could you very kindly tell the Organising Committee, through Andrew Beer, andrewbeer@tiscali.co.uk, tel. 01525 240 235.

For full details of proposed plan, please see April's newsletter on our website at (www.nbbka.org/newsletters)