

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter August 2012

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Calendar at-a-glance

25 th September	Committee Meeting
13 th October	County and NBBKA honey shows and County AGM

News Articles

Event Report – Going for Gold

Members were treated to a lecture entitled *Going for Gold* given by expert beekeeper Mike Bensley at the end of July. Mike explained to beginners and seasoned pros alike the best ways to succeed at honey shows, first regarding the preparation of honey and then his secrets for the best wax. Since Mike regularly cleans up at the NBBKA honey show, the hall was busy and the questions were fired frequently and fielded ably. Thank you, Mike, for a very informative evening.

BDI Reminder

Members are reminded to ensure that their Bee Disease Insurance cover is sufficient for all their colonies, including those splits and swarms that have appeared over the season. You probably already know that having a single colony over the insured number will invalidate the cover for all your hives, but you may not know that any uninsured colony at a communal apiary will invalidate the insurance on all hives. See the back of your certificate for details. While you may be covered, if your bee buddy splits his colony and blows his own cover, yours will also therefore be blown. Members can increase their cover by paying an additional premium at any time of the year, but after the end of March cover will not commence until 40 days have elapsed. Please contact treasurer@nbbka.org to increase your cover.

Constitution Update

The draft new NBBKA constitution will shortly be shared among the members, and comments will be invited for a limited time. The new constitution will be presented at the AGM for voting and approval by members. Please note that it is not expected that we will enter into discussion of the proposed constitution at the AGM; the time for that is beforehand. Watch this space.

Education Office and Beginners' Course

With the departure of NBBKA's previous Education Officer, members are invited to consider whether they can help with this role. Although it may not necessarily involve teaching at the beginners' course in the spring, it is likely that the role will involve acting as a liaison between the association, the teachers and the students. If you would like to help, please contact chairman@nbbka.org.

Regular Columns

August 2012 apiary notes from Andrew Beer

This is one of those years 'beewise' when it is very difficult to predict what will happen next. Our bees have been confused and stressed, confined to their hives often with a dearth of stores. Flowers, and particularly veg., have not developed at normal speed whilst weeds have literally had a 'field day' luxuriating in the 'winter' wet. Will you therefore get any more sense from me – I fear not!

I tried to enthuse you last month by suggesting that we could still get a late flow, and weather permitting that could still happen. Have a look at the brambles – they are only just bursting into flower. Clover is still lush, and farmers (because of the wet) have not been able to 'hay make'. Deep down much ground is still saturated. 'Townies' with numerous gardens etc. always seem to get 'a longer flow' in any event.

Only time will tell, but these are my tactics for this month:-

- Remove surplus supers, leaving enough supers in place for the bees to occupy (remember, if a super is about 80% full of bees, then add another regardless of honey present).
- Go through broodchambers. Startlingly, this year many broodchambers have been devoid of stores. In summer all strong colonies must have a minimum of 20 lb of stores (e.g. 3 full National Deep Frames). If they haven't, my approach is to put an eke above the queen-excluder and put a feeder directly over the queen-excluder (to help the bees obtain access, put a suitable stick between the queen-excluder and feeder, so that they can reach it 'from the side' too). What you are trying to achieve (apart from keeping the bees alive)

is to ensure that the colony has enough stores until winter feed.

- Look through the broodchamber and make an assessment. In early August a 'good' colony should have at least, say, 4 combs of solid brood, and the bees should look happy/good, which is exceedingly difficult for beginners to judge. Have a look at the 'books' (my suggestion to all beginners is that they get a copy of "Get started in Beekeeping" by Adrian and Claire Waring, keep it at their bedsides and read and re-read it (if you do, I can assure you that you will keep bees perfectly adequately).
- This year especially, you are going to find unmated queens (evidenced by slabs of drone brood) or laying workers (irregular drone brood about the combs) or no brood at all. As mentioned previously in the latter case there could still be queens about to come into lay, so patience may pay dividends! (You can always put a 'tester' comb of day-old brood into an apparently queenless hive, and if normal brood develops almost certainly a queen will be present, who hopefully will soon be laying!) The real point is this. Weak colonies have got to be sorted sooner or later, whether you are looking for a late crop or to have any hope of taking them through the winter. (David Warren and I are currently sorting out a colony in a large (hawk) box which fell out of a tree on to a walkway in Dunstable and is now being induced into a Commercial Hive!)
- If you have a weak stock, say a colony queenless, broodless and clearly en route to a quick death, go to a strong hive on a good flying day, chuck the bees in front of the hive, remove the old hive and leave the bees to sort themselves out. If it is a strong colony and you are really certain it is queenless, it will be best to unite with newspaper over another strong but queenright stock to avoid any hiatus. If the problem colony has laying workers, don't do any uniting until you have dealt with the laying workers as follows. Move the problem hive away on a good flying day, say 30 ft. and point its entrance 90 degrees away from the direction in which it was originally facing. Put a super with some frames of drawn comb on the original site, and come back in the evening and unite the super (and bees present) with newspaper over a strong stock. If you do this, you stop the non-flying laying workers reaching the strong hive and perhaps killing their queen. The riff-raff in the problem hive can then be left to 'cool off' for a day or two before being chucked in front of a strong hive on a good flying day – a day or two later or when convenient. Be very careful however, if the robbing season is under way, because a problem hive left with a few bees and even a whiff of stores will soon offer 'free lunches' to its stronger brethren. Never unite if disease or affliction is suspected.
WARNING – Be very careful not to chuck bees about if there is any risk of neighbours being disturbed or stung. If there is any risk at all, unite through newspaper.

These are my thoughts on 23rd July with the sun shining and my colonies working like crazy. Can I stress that I would not be writing wholly on these lines if the flow was clearly over (which for me at least it is not).

After taking the above steps, as appropriate, what in this difficult year of 2012 do I plan to do next (and by 20th August at the latest) in readiness for winter? My plans will depend largely on the weather and continuing availability of forage. I shall watch the position daily, and the time will come when the bees are no long working their socks off – indicated by bees lounging about and generally somnolent: what then?

- Remove and extract crop (ensure it has ripened) and return supers for the bees to lick clean.
- Simultaneously reduce all weak stocks to one bee space entrances, strong to 2-inch opening.
- Seal all (I mean all) cracks on hives to avoid robbing (once started, it may be impossible to stop.)
- As far as possible do final brood inspections (as quick as you properly can to avoid robbing and stop immediately if it starts.)
- Start getting entries ready for that spectacular show The North Bucks Honey Show, incorporating the Bucks County Honey Show to be held here in Stewkley on Saturday 13th October, organised by your very own North Bucks Committee. Make another note of the date now, and ensure not even MIL (alias mother-in-law) gets in the way! **See below for further details and an update.**

I will finish by mentioning disease and bee problems, especially varroa. You need to do a 'problems' check at the end of the season, and if you have any doubts get an experienced beekeeper to help you. Don't hesitate to approach your local seasonal NBU bee inspector – details on the web. Invariably, until the experts advise us otherwise you will need to treat your bees for varroa and I am not in a position to say which is best or which is worst treatment. My standard question to NBU each year is "What should I be doing about varroa?" but to date I have never received an explicit reply. The reason for that (I have no criticism of NBU, indeed only praise because their team are incredibly helpful and real beekeeper's friends), is because, I suspect, the "jury is still out and will be for a long time to come!"

This is my varroa treatment plan for 2012.

a) Apply Hive Clean as soon as supers are removed. It is relatively cheap and the great thing, unlike Apiguard, is that Hive Clean works at once. That is particularly convenient in this late season because it means I can keep my supers on hives, if appropriate until 20th August, and then do a quick Hive Clean treatment, starting winter feeding as soon as supers are removed.

b) Treat with Oxalic Acid in December. In the past I have used (and may in future years use) Apiguard. It is expensive, very smelly and likely to put queens off lay at a time when they should be laying 'winter bees'. Also it only works in warm weather, so treatment needs to be finished normally by about 20th September, which means it needs to be started by about 8th August, which in this very late season could deny you a good part of your honey crop..

Once supers are removed and by at least 25th August, you need to start winter feeding (in my mix this is 1 pint of water to 1 kg of sugar). This is not 'in the book'

but it works for me. This year I am going to be particularly careful not to put "clean" syrup into "mouldy" containers left from the previous feed, a cause of winter dysentery, but we shall see.

This is a busy month. For us beekeepers 2013 starts here. Good winter preparations pay dividends! I hope you are going to have plenty to do with your extractors.....

Final thoughts: Either buy, or better still make, an Ashforth "All Over" Feeder. Takes at least a gallon of syrup and it will NEVER spill like those dreaded bucket feeders.

Have you noticed? No – or few – wasps, or am I in cloud cuckoo land?

Cheers – Andrew Beer

Future Events

NBBKA & Bucks Co. Honey Shows and AGM - 13th October, Stewkley

Below is a link to the members' document area of our website, in which you will find four new files. These are the very latest from Andrew Beer, sterling organiser of the combined event. Please take a moment to read them, as it is important to register your attendance at the event, select a course or lecture, and to register your entries into the honey show.

The documents are found at:

<http://www.nbbka.org/members/Documents.aspx>

Documents	Size	Type
2012-08 Stewkley County and NBBKA show details	44 KB	WE PDF
2012-08 Honey Show Schedule 2012	39 KB	WE PDF
2012-08 Honey Show Recipes 2012	24 KB	WE PDF
2012-08 Honey Show 2012 registration form	24 KB	WE PDF