

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter June 2014

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Calendar at-a-glance

11 th October	Bucks county autumn gathering, Aylesbury
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Queens for sale - member advert

Introductory offer - queen bees. British Black reared locally. First come, first served.

- Mature queen bee cells - £5 per queen cell
- Virgin marked queen bees - £10 per virgin queen bee
- Mated and marked queens - £23 per mated queen bee
- Clipping £2 per queen bee

Pick up from postal address below or for mated queens postal delivery by Royal Mail 1st Class for £4.50. Cheque, cash, bank transfer accepted. Please get in touch, should you have any questions. Place your order via email. Contact Details: Bertalan Lorincz, 07589714764, lorinczbertalan@gmail.com, 173 Windsor Street, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, MK12 5DP

Drones – let's hear it for the boys – by Jeff Martins

I think, somewhat, that the Drones in my hives have a bad deal.

Okay, we all know that they generally laze about in the hive, being fed and sometime around noon they may venture out (if it's warm enough) to meet up with their chums at the local assembly and wait around a few hours to see if some princess comes flying by. And stopping there, I can see why some would question why I think they have a bit of a bad deal.

But, as I'm sure all you beekeepers out there are very much aware, life as a drone isn't all fun.

Let's think about this a little...

- Starting off as a non fertilised egg and therefore not having a dad, but a deceased granddad – no male role model;

- Hatching out as a larva, in most hives, either in brace comb (therefore subject to being ripped apart from the beekeeper as they come into inspect) or in a cramped worker cell, which accidentally got widened or the queen has started to run out of sperm;
- Staying in that cramped cell for at least three days longer than any other bee;
- Varroa destructor mites being extra attracted to them to lunch on after the cell is capped;
- Being confined to the hive for the first 12 days after emergence, for cleaning jobs & little orientation flights if the weather is good;
- Being very much the minority sex in the hive (15% seems to be the upper estimate).

Then, when they become sexual mature they pop off on hot days to the drone assemblies, to “hopefully” meet a virgin queen.

But, before he even gets to that drone assembly he has to watch out! His a bit chunky is our drone, makes a very distinctive noise as he flies and add to that the disadvantage of not having a sting he becomes easy lunch for some sharp eyed bird.

If he manages to get to the drone assembly without being someone’s snack he then hangs around with loads of other drones with the wistful hope that the virgin queen comes his way and that their eyes meet across the crowded sky. Wishing that she likes chunky boys with eyes that meet in the middle of their head. The reality being if he can catch up with her he can mate with her. But, probably, he has to remove the private parts of one of the other twelve to twenty drones, whom she has also been generous with her virtue with, before he can.

If he does mate with her, then he dies. Not even a chance of a post-coital smoke as he tumbles to the ground, with his “bits” remaining with the queen in the sudden and explosive divorce settlement.

So, the sensible ones decided to stay in the hive and not do much. Mooch about, get fed a little, tidy up a little and then bam! He’s either chased around the frames by the new beekeeper, thinking he’s the queen or worse still is captured by the new beekeeper who has been told to “practice” marking (or worse still clipping) the queen by using drones. The poor little guy hasn’t got a chance, as he has no self-defence.

And it isn’t just new beekeepers he has to watch out for. We have all heard the stories of how that seasoned beekeeper, when putting together the observation hive for some public event or other couldn’t find the queen. So, as time was running short, the beekeeper selects a drone and marks his thorax with a colour marker and pops him in the observation hive. Imagine the humiliation of being the drone forced to look like a queen, and then be put on public display, with everyone pointing him out and saying “Oh isn’t she big”, “Look at her eyes!”.

Swarm season comes and goes, our little drone hasn’t had any luck with the virgin queens. He hangs about a little longer to see if he has any luck on those late in the

season supersedure princesses. Nope, not a sausage. He sits back and wonders what to do now as the evenings draw in and the workers are busy getting the final stores in and ready for winter.

Then, just as he makes plans that that next year is going to be his year, the workers show him the door, chuck him out! The guard bees don't let him back in and if he tries too much they show him what a stinger is for. So he perishes with all his fellow members of the drones club who are still virgins.

But, as a bee keeper what can I do to help the chaps? I don't think there is anything I can do for the individual drone (apart from not using him for practice or dressing him up as a queen). But I suppose I could try to appreciate what the little guy and his brothers can do for my hives and me and maybe support the need of genetic diversity within the bee population.

What I plan to do this year is encourage my hives to produce more drones. There are two main reasons for this.

- 1) For all my hives, use drone brood as a sacrificial weapon against the Varroa destructor mite and hopefully reducing the need for chemicals in an Integrated Pest Management plan;
- 2) There are reports that queens are failing at an earlier stage, maybe due to not enough matings or maybe something to do with the quality of the sperm due to environmental factors. For my hives that have queens whose workers are of a more gentle disposition I'll not sacrifice all of the drone brood in the IPM in an attempt to get that gene pool out there in the wider world to add to the diversity.

As I said, not much help for the individual drone, but may help with the overall health of the hive in both combating Varroa destructor and increasing the volume of the genetic pool. So one of my brood frames in each of the hives will have a sheet of wired drone base foundation put in it for them to draw out and for the hive to raise drone brood, which will either be sacrificed (the birds love it) or allowed to emerge as the wasteful freeloaders nature intended them to be.

Of the three fates, being sacrificed, sudden death or evicted & left to perish I'm not sure which one I would opt for, so lets hear it for the drone boys who are much maligned.

Raising Nucs Naturally – review by Jeff Martins

On the 9th of April I attended what is my first "meeting" of the NBBKA (as only just joining the association this season) - a talk presented by Andrew Beer on Raising Nucs Naturally.

My appetite had been whetted by Andrew's March Apiary Notes footnote re Queen Raising and what with me currently having three hives and wanting to end this season with at least five to help with any 2014/15 winter losses this seemed to be a "must" to get along to.

Well, obviously I wasn't the only one who thought it was a "must" as when Andrew started at 7.30, we were at near full capacity to listen to his talk at the Rectory Cottages.

Andrew was able to adjust his talk to deal with so many of us there who are either in our first season or just starting out with the NBBKA training course, stepping us through firstly a couple of swarm control measures (when you find the queen and when you don't find the queen) to help us all to be at the same pace, he then went through the main talk.

As this was Raising Nucs Naturally, Andrew made it clear that although "grafting" etc etc has its place, this talk was not about that, but something for us small-scale bee keepers to know and understand how we can work with our bees to boost our colonies' numbers.

Andrew stepped us through three ways of starting nucs off:

- 1) Through our 7 day swarm control checks;
- 2) Using the Miller frame method;
- 3) Encouraging our colony to want to swarm.

I'll not do Andrew a disservice by trying to summarise his talk here, but I will say that it was made clear how all three could be used and why you would want to use one option over another at a particular time.

I'd like to thank Andrew for a straightforward, insightful and interesting talk, which has helped infuse me with the confidence that raising nucs is something I can do this season (nature allowing) and what's more am willing to offer one of my first nucs to one of the new beginners of the association who are bee less at the point my nucs are ready.

In return, I'd ask two things...

- 1) I'm using National boxes, so I'd ask for my nuc box to be returned with the same number of fresh frames and foundation that the beginner had received from me, once the colony had been homed in their hive;
- 2) Like Andrew asks, £30 which I will pass onto Bees Abroad.

Bait hives by Jeff Martins

It started early this year, when I mentioned to friends that I was on a beekeeping course. Their ears pricked up. They were interested in beekeeping, but for various reasons couldn't commit to a course at present, didn't want to get all the equipment without first being sure of how they would react to bees and the handling etc. So we came up with an idea. If I was successful in rearing a nuc or two this year, then we can move a hive to their home and install the nuc there. They can then help me as I go about the beekeeping stuff with them and if my friends decided it was all too much then I would move the hive to my apiary.

So that was the deal, but my friends didn't want a national hive, they wanted the iconic WBC. Mmmm, I wasn't keen on the idea of having two hive types so what we did was

buy the WBC lifts, floor and roof and installed inside it one of my National brood boxes. I also brought over a crown board, frames, foundation and 3 supers to be kept in storage at their until they were needed. If they liked keeping bees that could keep it all and if not, then they keep the WBC bits and use it as a storage box in their garden and I move all the national stuff and the bees out.

As we set it up and I put ten frames of foundation in it, the eleventh frame I had was an old brood comb from one of my hives after I carried out the Bailey comb change earlier this year. "What you doing with that old one?" my friends asked. "Well", I replied, "I've read and been told that if you leave an old brood frame in an empty hive, you may bait a swarm in there. Chances are small as it's too close to the floor, up the side of the house, smells of new paint people leave bait hives out for years and nothing happens and anyway, we will raise you a nuc to go in there sometime in June I should think."

This was back in Early April.

When my friends text me on Saturday 17th May at 5pm, telling me that they thought they may have bees in their hive, I was a bit surprised and said I'd pop over - not now was the reply as we are just going out, how about Sunday morning?

So that Sunday morning at 10.30 I popped over and started to have a look-see. Wow, there were a lot of bees (circa 30) flying in and around the hive and looked as if they were orientating. First thought:- "Mmmm. I think they are lots of scout bees sizing it up." Then we saw some that looked as if they were fighting at the front. "If not scout bees, is this the sign that others have moved in already and another colony has found it and trying to rob it?". I watched the traffic at the front of the hive. No pollen going in, but definitely looked if some bees were on guard duty as others tried to gain access at any point they thought possible. Back to my first guess - yes scout bees and they are calling dibs on this hive.

At 12ish, we go inside to have a cup of tea. "So, I think it's one of two things. A colony has moved in and are currently trying to stop other bees from robbing it. We could do something to help them, I'll build something to go on the entrance to confuse the robbers. Or, it is scout bees and there is a swarm about to move in". I slurp my tea as the sky outside goes dark and a great roar of buzzing is all around us.

"Ah, here they are..."

I put my tea down and we go outside to watch the swirling black mass fly around the garden and down to the side of the house where the hive is, closely followed by lots of birds, looking as if their picnic has just got away.

In awe of it all, we watch them, pull out iPhones and film them too. Fantastic. We watch them land at the side of the hive, all over one of the legs and side and then move in. Twenty minutes later, you wouldn't know they were there all bar less than a dozen still circling the hive.

We did manage to get a lot of it videoed and have uploaded it onto Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xAUrMUnBJg>

Bait Hives - Now that is the way to collect a swarm.