

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter April 2015

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Calendar at-a-glance

13 th April	Social event at Shoulder of Mutton Public House
17 th -19 th April	BBKA Spring Convention
28 th April	Richard Smith talk on "Extracting the Crop"
7 th July	Honey show preparation, Rectory Cottage
9 th August	Stewkley Bee Safari
27 th September	Honey show
6 th October	NBBKA AGM
20 th October	Lecture
17 th November	Lecture
19 th January	Lecture
16 th February	Lecture

News in brief

Anaphlaxis and apiary medical problems

The course attended by some 17 beekeepers on 30 March was a great success. We now know what to do in an emergency, it may be very little but even the smallest action may make the difference between life and death. If there is sufficient demand the course will be re-run on Saturday, 20 June, venue to be found but likely to be in the middle of the county. I need a minimum booking of 10 for the course and I need a commitment, please, by 21 April. Please ring me on 01525240235 to book your place. So important is the course that NBBKA members may join for £25 instead of £38.

Chairman's and Seasonal Notes

In the apiary

March to date (24th March) has been generally mild with little rain, and unless a long cold spell sets in, it is reasonable to think that the first of the swarms, at least for the unprepared, will be out at any time after 10th April. I hope to have made my first inspection (only an initial assessment of each colony) before the end of March, with a full inspection to follow in the first week of April. The point to emphasise is that the swarming season can be expected by 10th April onwards. The signs (queen cells with eggs/larval jelly) will be plain to see in the first week of April, and, if necessary, I will have an opportunity to direct colonies away from swarming.

The mild weather conditions suggest that 7 day inspections of all stocks for queen cells must start 1st April onwards; but if bad weather occurs, then the start date may be deferred for a bit. In the appalling spring of 2013 day inspections were held back until about the beginning of May.

Certainly, by way of repetition, may I mention the following:

Stocks must at all times have a minimum of 5kg of good sound stores. Heavy inflow of pollens indicates almost certainly that the colony's queen is both well and laying, but it does not indicate sufficient and available stores, i.e. where the colony can reach them. The point is that a colony with no available stores may copiously be collecting pollen (i.e. protein) but 2 days later, without stores, may be dead. At this time of the year there may be little or no nectar to collect whilst with heavy breeding a colony may be making the fastest inroads on its stores.

These early inspections may reveal troubles, which as beekeepers, we must fix.

Trouble: **Queenlessness**

No brood and no queen

Cure: Make sure there is no brood of any sort, no queen and no evident diseases. Unite troubled colony by newspaper method to a strong nearby hive. Forget about the '3 ft '3 mile rule.' Queenless bees stay put where they are put.

Trouble: **Laying Workers**

Identified by domed brood irregularly spread over brood combs.

Cure: The problem here is that if you simply do a 'newspaper unite' (and no more) pheromones of laying workers may induce bees to kill the queen of united colony. Early on a fine sunny day move affected colony to minimum of 15 ft to one side from its present site entrance, 90 degrees facing away from its original direction and location. Take say 3 brood frames, less bees from colony and place in fresh brood box adding a floor and coverboard. These are placed on colony's original site, entrance facing in same direction as the colony's original entrance. Now shake all bees out of original chamber, at the place you have put it onto the ground. Result: the non-layers fly to the brood chamber now at the original site and the layers not having flown, and therefore lost, stay put. The bees in

the brood chamber on the original site can then be united by newspaper to a nearby colony. Don't attempt this if only a handful of bees in the troubled colony or disease is suspected.

Trouble: Drone breeder queen

Large patches of domed brood, little or no sealed worker brood.

Cure: Left to its own devices, the colony will die out and when weakened will become a target for robbers. Find and kill the queen and unite by newspaper, as above.

Trouble: Manky combs, combs due for replacement.

Cure: It is recommended that a brood comb should be used for no longer than 2 years. You can replace combs in one operation by a Bailey Frame Change (see books) but as far as I am concerned, that is problematic in our area because of our high dependence on oilseed rape as a crop, in flower often by mid-April. Personally I attempt to replace any comb, whatever its age if it has become manky and as far as possible within 2 years, so long as it isn't disruptive to the colony. April is a good time to replace combs because brood chambers are unlikely to be fully occupied. Frames for replacement containing brood are best placed next to an outer wall of the chamber before later removal, or they can be placed in a secure chamber above queen excluder/super for the brood to hatch. ALWAYS BE CAREFUL ABOUT AVOIDING CHILLING OF BROOD IN THESE OPERATIONS.

Queen Marking

April is a good time to mark the queen as with a partially filled brood chamber she is easier to find. I use a 'crown of thorns' marking cage. Colour for queens born in 2014 is green, blue is the colour for 2015 queens. But really the choice of colours is yours, white, for example, is easy to see, blue may be difficult for some.

Time to Super

A good rule is that whenever bees occupy all but two frames in a box it is time to add a super. Bees are reluctant to travel 'upwards' in early spring and the first super should, if possible, contain some or all drawn comb. At this time of the year bees may regard queen excluders as an impenetrable barrier, and in recent years I have 'placed the first super directly over the brood chamber without a queen excluder for a week or do to encourage bees to move 'up'. But be careful – you may end up with a full super of brood. Incidentally, beekeepers in Chile, for example, do not understand our British use of queen excluders, and leave colonies to produce brood where they wish.

A special plea to newer beekeepers

Do watch the brood chambers for queen cells and queen larvae. There can be nothing more depressing than to find that by mid-April your bees have swarmed and with that perhaps your whole crop lost for the year. If they do swarm, assuming there are 'open' queen cells, do remember to reduce the colony to one best open queen cell with an abundance of larval food, and destroy the rest to prevent castes emerging. If there are no

unsealed queen cells, reduce to one queen cell. The selected cell should be close to worker brood and away from drone brood. Mark the position of the queen cell retained by drawing pin or marker pen. If you do that, an early swarmed stock may, when you have a choice of sealed and unsealed cells, build up sufficiently to take in a crop later in the year. Why, you may ask, destroy cells already sealed? Answer: A sealed cell may be a dud.

Chairman's notes

Bucks County BKA and British Beekeepers Association (BBKA)

It may help members to explain NBBKA's relationship with these two bodies. The most tangible benefits North Bucks receives from the BBKA are Public Liability and Product Liability insurance, each in the sum of £10 million, education programmes and the monthly BBKA News. BBKA also operates in other fields including research, representation on government bodies and acts as a focal point on issues of concern to beekeepers. Bucks County BKA is a body to which Chalfonts, High Wycombe, Mid- Bucks BKAs as well as NBBKA are affiliated. The main benefits North Bucks obtain from this affiliation is the ability for its members to enter BBKA examinations invigilated by County, and such events as County arranges during a year. For 2015, County is organising or has organised its annual excellent Spring Convention with national and internally well-known speakers. Its autumn gathering is on 10th October (this year being run by Chalfonts) and subject to its entry being accepted, a stand at the Bucks County Show on 27th August (to promote beekeeping across the County-NBBKA will be very much involved.)

North Bucks Summer Events

First of all a plea and an explanation. As you will be aware, North Bucks assiduously promotes beginners. They are the bedrock of beekeeping in North Bucks in the future, and the higher standard we can teach benefits all. I have asked some members if they will kindly support the beginners at their Saturday sessions (see Beekeepers' Apiary Visit programme below) but if you can give beginners a couple of hours of your time, on say, a couple of Saturdays, it would be tremendously appreciated. Can you please let me know what Saturdays you can do if I have not yet spoken to you already. As you will note below, the visits will be to the Cosgrove Apiary which means there will be the allure of the Barley Mow pub in Cosgrove invitingly close.

Safari Visits

A safari visit means you go to a beekeeper's apiary, you join in whatever activity is going on (but anything can happen) and end up with tea. We haven't done any for some time in North Bucks as far as I am aware, so let's do one this year.

On Saturday 9th August, I invite you to Stewkley, we can then break up into groups, and each group can go to one of my seven apiaries, returning for tea here. Interested?? Give me a buzz on 01525 240235

Would you like to arrange a safari visit to your apiary? Please let me know, and I will fix a date.

Forward Planning

We try very hard not to fixture clash with our beekeeping friends from Chalfonts, High Wycombe, Mid-Bucks, Buckingham and District and Bedfordshire BKAs; so the list of events involving North Bucks includes Evening Meeting dates for Autumn 2015/Spring 2016. Topics and speakers will be chosen later. If you want a particular topic covered – just let me know. We have included Beds and Bucks County Events up to the Spring Convention 2015 – please note these additional dates now! But better still, make a note to come!

Beginners

We have a tremendous group of 29 very keen beginners, and it is a real privilege to introduce them to beekeeping. We are determined to guide them every bit of the way to becoming competent beekeepers, fit to take and pass the BBKA Basic Exam, after which they will be ready to take beekeeping to whatever level they choose. It is, of course, one thing to do the theory and attend apiary sessions, but the critical thing is to be able to press the personal 'Confidence Button' to 'Go' and suddenly beekeeping becomes the most rewarding hobby in the world, or indeed, as you will have heard from Simon Croson (he once fixed planes and wings in the RAF; now is heavily involved with bees and wings of the fluttering kind,) in his superb talk on Bees and Beekeeping in Nepal, it will take over your life. As far as I am concerned, any beginner, indeed, any member who wants to come and see my bees on any of my apiary visits is welcome, I hope experienced beekeepers will not mind too much if I ask them to show less experienced members their bees. I assure you 'it will really make a difference.'

An initiative to be commended

Fiona and Andrew Eelbeck run improvers groups from their lovely home in Stoke Goldington. Meeting informally, every bee topic is discussed, analysed and deliberated. If you are one of last year's beginners, there could not be a better way of improving, indeed toning-up your beekeeping skills. Wholly recommended... A call to them on 01908551886 will set you up.

Beginners Apiary Visit Programme

Place : Cosgrove Apiary (off A508 north of A5 Milton Keynes bypass)

N.B contact me or a committee member for directions

Days: The following Saturdays at 2pm:

- April 25th,
- May 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th
- June 13th, 27th
- July 11th, 25th
- August 15th
- September 5th, 26th
- October 10th

- December 5th

Timing and duration of visits are naturally dependent upon the weather and special needs of the bees.

Please come to the apiary in clean clothing to minimise the risk of spreading diseases.

Regards

Andrew