

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter May 2016

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Calendar at-a-glance

21 st May	Pests & Diseases course
25 September	Honey show

Editorial

Writing on 23rd April, it would seem that most colonies are backward in their spring developments. This is primarily due to a cold April, but for those in oil seed rape areas even a few days of really good foraging weather could see colonies sprinting ahead – and with it a rush of swarms.

Transparent Hives

I have been to a lecture about the gardens in the various universities and parks in Oxford, *writes Libby Culshaw.*

An astonishing piece of information cropped up whilst scrutinising Christopher Wren. Apparently, he devised a transparent beehive so that he, his fellow scientists and friends could observe the inner workings of a beehive. This was situated at Wadham College. I know no more than that. I have tried to discover what materials he used and with what success and so on. So far with no luck. How interesting. I wonder if this was a precursor to our modern day observation hives.

Seasonal Notes

Lack of stores

There is a continuing risk of colonies running short of stores. Even though some may not be short, queens will only “up” the egg output against a steady income of food. The best artificial feed is now syrup not fondant because liquid is needed for larval development. If you feed liquid now, you have a real chance of having the greatest force of foragers when a good flow sets in – and a good crop. A stock struggling when the flow starts will not make best use of it.

Nucs

Following Celia Davis’ very instructive talk “Nuc it”, several members from the 2015 Beginners Class have asked for a short resumé. As Celia explained, Nucs can serve a number of purposes (more of those later) but I will start by looking at the preparation of Nucs for swarm control. As Celia explained, anyone can create a nuc – it is easy enough to remove just a few frames of brood, bees (with or without queen) and stores throw all into a separate box (nuc box or separate hive) and call it a nuc – but it is problematic as to whether or not it will be able to stand on its own “two feet”. On the other hand, if you follow the steps outlined by Celia and set out below you have every chance of creating a nuc which will thrive from the word “go”.

There are two standard methods of swarm control. The first is the artificial swarm-covered extensively in the standard books and not covered here. The other standard method of control is the ‘Nuc Method’. The following part of this Newsletter concentrates on that method.

Nuc method of swarm control - The Steps

Only set up nucs from strong disease free colonies with the characteristics that you want e.g. good temperament, tidy comb builder, good crop getters even in poor` years, etc. The choice is yours.

Delay setting up a nuc until the parent colony demonstrates a determined intention to swarm e.g. queen cups with eggs and/or larval jelly.

Follow this plan:

- Go to the colony at say, 11:30am on a warm sunny flying day. Quietly open up the colony down to brood chamber level
- Find the queen and put her and the frame she is on safely out of the way in your nuc box and cover up the box
- Have a quick look through the remaining frames to check that there are some good open queen cells with lots of larval jelly. One of these will become your new queen.
- Now take out a frame of largely sealed soon to emerge brood but not a frame if it is the only one with good open queen cells. Give the frame a light shake to throw off the flying bees into the original hive which will leave mostly nurse bees on it. As the nurse bees will never have been outside their hive, they will stay put in a new home

- and not return to the original hive or return later to the nuc with mates to rob it out. Put this frame into the nuc box where you put the frame with the queen.
- Now go back to the original hive and take two frames of stores again shaking off the flying bees (as above) and put these two frames with the remaining nurse bees into the nuc box.
 - Now back again to the original hive and take two frames of brood again without open queen cells, shake off flying bees into the original hive as above and then shake the remaining nurse bees into the nuc box. Then return these two frames without bees to their places in the original colony
 - Now go through the original colony again and mark the positions of, say, the best six open queen cells by marker pen or drawing pins on the top bar of the relevant frames. Destroy all other queen cells – sealed or open. Why destroy the sealed ones? They could be duds! NB. When a queen cell is sealed it may be empty!
 - Add frames of foundation or drawn comb to fill up any places in the original hive. Add similar frames to nuc box. If you are using a standard hive as a nuc box, only give the bees enough room for immediate expansion, using a dummy board to close down any spare space. NB. Nucs only need enough space for their occupation and immediate expansion. A nuc may have difficulty in maintaining heat in too large an area.
 - I should have stated two things earlier. All swarm queen cells, open or sealed, in the nuc you are creating should be destroyed to avoid the risk of the queen leaving the nuc with a swarm. Continue 7 day inspections for swarm queen cells in the nuc. As regards the original hive, resist any temptation to check as to whether a new queen is laying for at least 21 days after you reduced it to one queen cell and then only take a cursory look for eggs. You may have to wait as long as 35 - 40 days for the new queen to come into lay.

What you will have done so far

Original Hive

There is no queen so no swarm can emerge until the unsealed queen cells have been sealed and the first virgin queen emerges perhaps as early as 7 days later.

Nuc

It has a queen, soon to emerge brood – few bees and fewer flying bees, and therefore, no ability to defend itself or inclination to swarm.

What happens next

Original Colony

As it only contains open queen cells, i.e. less than 9 days old. It follows that a new queen cannot emerge from any of the queen cells until as explained earlier at least 7 days later (queen from egg to emergence say 16 or to be extra safe say 15 days). So you need to go back to the original colony before the first queen emerges to be safe say four/five days later after your earlier visit to the original colony and select your queen from one of the cells you marked earlier. Better to do that then rather than run the risk of the various queens emerging fighting and perhaps your new queen injuring herself. The other danger of leaving more than one queen cell is that the colony may take matters in to its own

hands, throwing out “endless” swarms and perhaps rendering itself useless as a honey producer for the year.

Nuc

What you need to do depends upon where you are going to put the nuc.

Within the same apiary or within three miles of the apiary

The danger is that bees in the nuc will drift back to the original hive, weakening the nuc and perhaps lead out their mates in the original hive to rob the nuc out. In these situations especially when the nuc is to be placed within the apiary or very close to it, say within 1000 yards, it will be best to close up the entrance of the nuc, give it plenty of space within the nuc, good ventilation (a mesh floor does the job) and a weak liquid feed (using a frame feeder or a rapid feeder placed above cover board feeder hole (if you use a frame feeder, do fill loosely with grass if necessary to stop the bees drowning in the mix. Now put the box in a shady, cool position for at least 72 hours (I once forgot I had sealed a hive up until 2 weeks later – it came to no harm). At the end of the 72 hour period place the nuc as far as possible from the original hive entrance facing at least 90° away from the direction of the entrance of the original colony and place a pile of loose grass, branches or whatever to help its occupants identify their new home.

Nucs 3 or more miles away

There will be no problem of drifting, of course, so the nuc can be opened up on its arrival at its new home and fed.

Future development of the Nuc

Steady feeding of small amounts of feed is essential.

- for nucs not moved at least three miles away, feeding must not start until they have been opened up and set in their new position within the apiary and even then be careful in case robbing starts. To reduce the risk of robbing wherever sited, all nucs need no more than a one-bee space entrance until they become full colonies.

I find the nuc method a convenient swarm control. It is less demanding of equipment initially and for me with 7 apiaries it is an easy matter to set up a nuc in say 10 minutes and then move it on to the next apiary at least 3 miles away, ensuring that its occupants stay “put” and with less risk of being robbed out.

I have written the foregoing principally with swarm control in mind. But nucs serve so many useful purposes including queen raising (you give it a ripe sealed queen cell from a good open one (see above) after removing any queen!), queen introduction, lost colony replacement, to strengthen a weaker stock accommodating a valuable queen before she can be passed on to another stock, bee improvement to name just a few of the purposes.

Comb replacement

Anyone who has been in beekeeping for even a short time will be aware of the need to change regularly combs to lessen the impact of diseases. No disagreement there. In recognition of the need, some practice the Bailey Comb Change System – basically you put the queen and bees into a new box with new frames with foundation then put the old box with its old frames above the queen excluder and once the brood has emerged from it you take it away. This system has always seemed very harsh to me especially in a cold

spring like the current one. One report reached me that in a particularly harsh spring, the colony less queen all passed upstairs through a queen excluder presumably to the more comfortable quarters of the old box leaving the poor queen on her own to a shivering death in the box below. But I do fear that the experts, however right they may be in theory, just occasionally fall down in practice. Certainly if you all want a decent crop. Let us remember those brood combs you need to replace under 'Bailey' as well as containing brood may also contain hard-earned pollen and stores represented by the feed you gave, bought with your hard-earned cash the previous autumn. I hate taking old combs home with me with food or brood of any sort, especially as I have no means at home of protecting them from robber bees / wasps or any of the wax moths. It is time to stop complaining and tell you what I do. A weaker colony in each of my apiaries which is capable of defending itself is given a spare brood box the equivalent of a recycling bin of the computer world (if you follow me – most don't). It is placed above a queen excluder and any supers. As soon as I can get to my bees in the spring and progressively as spring advances I remove combs, in need of replacement or in some way unsatisfactory say two at a time, brush/shake off all bees into the hive from which they came, decap all food frames and put them in the "recycling" brood box earlier mentioned.. Frames with brood don't go into the "bin" until the "weak" colony is sufficiently populous and the weather has warmed up, so that nurse bees can move up from their brood box into "the bin" to nurse any brood placed there without risk of chilling. As frames are emptied, they are removed. What next? Every apiary ought to have a bait hive. What could be better than a brood box filled with lovely bee smelly frames recently vacated by bees from the recycling "bin". But points to note:

- only do this between colonies in the same apiary
- never do it if disease is suspected
- the old frames are left in the bait hive to attract a swarm.

Incidentally, my bait hives in each apiary are placed facing south-east on my tallest hive in the apiary. As soon as the swarm is in occupation and her queen laying, unoccupied combs can quietly be removed and those in use progressively removed by the 'bin' arrangement

Once the old combs come back to home base they can be stripped of wax and sterilized for recycling but for me the old frames are handed on to friends for their winter night fires whilst I splash out on new frames. I am doing this for the first time this year – Oh what joy, not having to sterilize the old combs. Any good wax is reclaimed.

Improvers Group

As I started writing this part of this over-long, you might say repetitive newsletter, I thought how lucky we are to have a "Queen's Counsel" in our beekeeping ranks a sort of Queen Bee if you like. I am of course referring to Fiona Eelbeck, Master Beekeeper, not forgetting her husband Andrew. The Eelbeck's, if I may so call them, run an improvers group for us – a lure to beekeepers from Northampton to Bedford and from Slough to far, far North and they produce cakes to die for! Not to be missed.

Well the next improvers course starts on Wednesday 4th May 7.30pm to 9.30pm at 1 West Side Lane, Stoke Goldington, MK16 8UA. T: 01908 551886

You know what to do – grab the phone now and book your place – and those cakes – and bring some with you!!

Disease Recognition Day

I am going to push this, if I may. With all the threats to our bees, it is essential that everyone can recognize diseases, and pests and to know where to turn for help. I shall be discussing this with Fiona and Karen Smith, our current season bee inspector and will then contact you further. So seriously think about going on this recognition day – you and your fellow beekeepers should know what to do if any of them suffer sadly from these ever widening problems.

For Sale

Both Ken Gorman as well as NBBKA have second-hand equipment for sale. Just because NBBKA also has equipment for sale please do not feel any commitment to buy from NBBKA – NBBKA wants its members to have any opportunity to get the equipment they need and if Ken can help you out, then go for it. Your need is much greater than the balance in the NBBKA Bank account!

Ken's Sale

Well maintained national equipment. Single items to complete hive. Email or phone for full list – special@kennethgorman.plus.com tel 07779801774.

NBBKA Sale

The Association has been rationalizing its equipment which has built up over the years and has been diligently maintained. Mostly in Western Red Cedar, this wood lasts for years. Some of my equipment is 70 years old plus and is as good as the day it was made despite occasionally having been sadly driven over by my car (and now repaired) and chewed by woodpeckers (and again repaired). Well we have the following equipment, previously used in the Association's apiaries to offer, priced at about one-third of Maisemore's 2016 prices. All National pattern

Solid floors £10

Mesh floors £10

Brood chambers £15

Super chambers £12

Shallow roofs £15

Plus various bits of homemade kit.

All cleaned and sterilized in bleach/water mix. We are not aware of any of the equipment having been exposed to any notifiable disease but being second-hand equipment, it is offered subject to that risk.

That is probably more than enough for now. If there is anything you would like the Association to be involved with or to feature, just let us know. In the meantime, roll on some decent weather and do check to see your bees are not starving – and feed syrup as appropriate.

Best regards
Andrew.