

North Bucks Beekeepers' Association
Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA
Newsletter: February 2010

Hoorah hoorah and jubilations! We actually had a fine sunny day on the 17th January. I was much relieved to see my bees flying and knew that they had survived the minus 13 degree temperatures of the past week. Bees at hive number 2 were dragging out dead bees so from that I deduce that the queen may be starting to lay. I was always taught never touch your hives during the winter months. In 26 years of beekeeping I have followed this advice and have not even hefted the hives, probably because I am not tall enough or strong enough. The only time I do go near though is to very gently slip a block of candy over the hole in each crown board. This I was able to do that very afternoon.

January Yet again Martin the Magician (aka **Martin Buckle**) got our beekeeping year off to a cracking start. As I introduced him, I said that Martin never fails to surprise and enlighten us. This proved to be very true and those who were present can testify that Martin not only gave us a fascinating talk on skeps, their construction and materials (how lovely to use bramble and purple moor grass in a skep) but in true magician style, he conjured something out of a heavily propolised skep, not dissimilar to a rabbit out of a top hat. I jumped on a chair and everyone moved quite quickly, with Bob offering up a Marks & Spencer chocolate chip cookie. By all accounts Martin continued his magic on the way home with three more surprises. Another bit of sorcery occurred with the very same skep at the Beds BKA talk the following night! See what fun you miss by not coming to meetings!

For more thrills and spills don't forget Martin's **Skep Making Course** on **15-16 May** at Rectory Cottages. The fee is £20.00 which covers the cost of the materials and your own fid. Contact Libby Culshaw to put your name on the list. Only a couple of places left.

The Bee Shed 2009 from Andrew and Fiona Eelbeck

Early April and the gate to a possible apiary site was open when Fiona was going by. She popped in to ask about the possibility of siting bee hives there. The reply was that he already had bees and pointed to where the bees were. They were coming out of the side of an old shed on the site.

When Fiona returned and told me of this we both went up and had a look. There were dark bees coming out of a circular hole about 8 feet off the ground. To the left in the next panel was another hole and yellowish bees were emerging. There were two colonies in the shed. We had permission to remove them and also to put our own bee hives in a corner on the site.

The first weekend we returned to try and remove the first colony. The bees were located in the gap between wood on the outside and plasterboard on the inside. The inside of the shed was piled full of all sorts of things that were not going to be moved so it had to be from the outside. The wooden panels were removed to expose large amounts of wax, bees and brood and a small amount of stores. By this time bees were flying around all over the place. The brood area was removed and transferred to a hive but the bees did not want to go in. As the wooden panels had been removed the hole in the next panel looked like their home so the bees drifted towards the other colony. They did not handle anything like a swarm and most of the bees ended up in the other colony. We had seen no sign of the queen which would have made things easier.

The next weekend we had another go on the, by now, increased colony. The panels were removed to reveal wax, brood, yellow and black bees and stores. The wax this time was arranged more like viewing a super in regular rows inside the panel. The brood area was cut out and transferred into the hive and after a great deal of coaxing the bees transferred into the hive. A few days later we transferred them to another apiary.

Both panels of the bee shed were nailed up and everything made tidy. However, in May bees were once again flying from one of the holes. A swarm had arrived and taken up residence. The swarm was not from our bees. We have left the bees in their residence and maybe next spring we will have another go and try and improve on the removal technique. Removing all the wooden panels in one go did seem to confuse the bees as to which entrance was which.

It was also interesting to see the two colonies had survived over the winter without any human imposed "treatment". Neither of the colonies had a great deal of stores though recent nectar had been gathered. Some of the wax was black and they had obviously been in residence for some time. Now I know where the queen I bought had swarmed to one year... the direction they headed off in did match this location.

Fiona ended up using this apiary as a successful queen rearing colony. Eight queens produced from 9 is a good achievement for the first time. One of the new queens ended up being so prolific it grew into a full colony and was successfully moved to borage and brought in a good crop.

Photos of the Bee Shed at the end of the Newsletter.

Queen Rearing Course at Stoneleigh 2009

Again in April Fiona, Pam Koniesky and I attended the Queen Rearing course at the Stoneleigh convention. The course ran over one and a half days and was led by Clive de Bruyn. We attended various lectures on the Friday and after the shopping scrummage on Saturday morning headed over for the course. Clive is a very entertaining and knowledgeable speaker about all things bees (and other things as well) and we had a really good time. The weather turned out well for both days and the course was a mixture of theory and practical. We were put into groups of 8 and could have a go at the various aspects of queen rearing. We all had a go at grafting new emerged lava into wax queen cells. We created a queen raising colony - a special larger nuc box into which were transferred two frames of honey and two frames of pollen. About 7 frames of bees were shaken in and then closed up and put in a cool dark place. This colony was left for 4 hours, ideally 8-12 hours, by which time they will certainly have discovered they are very queenless. The newly grafted wax queen cups were then transferred into the middle of the queen raising box and left to draw out queen cells. We returned on Sunday to see some success in starting queen cells. We also made up about half a dozen mating hives.

Our queen raising started off well. Queen raising wax cups were produced and all ready to take grafts on the specially adapted frame bar. A six frame nucleus had been modified to become a queen rearing colony by adding extra ventilation. Now we were into preventing colonies swarming and we had an abundance of queen cells. Some of these were transferred into a queen rearing nucleus and produced new queens successfully.

Doing the course is very worthwhile and also having a go after the course on our colonies has been very fruitful and an enjoyable learning experience. Note it is a queen rearing course and not a queen breeding course. Once you can rear queens successfully then you can look at breeding queens as said by Clive. Should there be another queen rearing course, do try and make time but book early Jan/Feb time as it does fill up very quickly.

As an aside, the Bee Craft magazine had a write up on the queen rearing course with a group photograph. We are there somewhere in the group. There is also a photograph of Bob Brown past president of the Scottish Beekeepers' Association. Bob Brown was my grandfather's neighbour and introduced to bee keeping by my grandfather. I was introduced to bees at a young age and used to enjoy watching bees landing and taking off from the hive.

Chief Scribe – Andrew Eelbeck Chief Queen Rearer – Fiona Eelbeck

Apiary notes from Andrew Beer

The great wait for the 2010 "Honey Season" is almost over, perhaps difficult to realise when we are told we are experiencing the coldest winter for 30 years. Give us a few warm days and bees from healthy colonies will be bustling at hive entrances on cleansing flights, perhaps bringing in water and early pollen. Pollen, of course, indicates that the queen is laying, and that the colony is in good heart. Try and make an external inspection on a warm sunny day in late January or early February, about noon. Check also for stores using the "Grunt Test", as suggested last month. If necessary, or if in any doubt, you need to feed – see January's notes about timing and for type of feed and method. Some hives may show activity, some may appear dead to the world. Very gently, lift the clearing boards of the latter. You will often find a nice clustered colony still "asleep"; if so, you probably have nothing to worry about. It will almost always catch up. If a colony is dead, close down and preferably take the hive away immediately for further examination and sterilisation.

Keep an eye open for robbing; much activity and general excitement around a hive may indicate that its incumbents are dead and visiting bees are there for the pickings. Chewed up wax and rubbish below the hive entrance are strong clues of robbing by bees. To be certain, raise the coverboard and if the colony is dead or in the last throes of life, remove the hive, as above. A family of mice may have taken residence in the hive, leaving a trail of dead vegetation, gnashed comb and other rubbish at the entrance; if so, gently lift the brood chamber off the floor and let the intruders scurry away. Any further damage to the hive or hive parts can be sorted later. Finally, patch over any holes made by woodpeckers with whatever you have to hand – as a temporary expedient, agricultural sacks draped over the sides of the hive are a good deterrent to discourage future attacks.

Forage There is no forage in my garden at all. A dozen aconites are peeping through but will not be open for a few more days. One snowdrop is in flower, the rest are tight buds. Hellebores are also showing tight little buds just above the soil surface. The hazel catkins are hanging small and tight as are the flowers of viburnum and Christmas box. The only signs of crocus are thin leaves, so no pollen for a while. Best make sure you get candy on.

THIS MONTH we are introduced to our new **Regional Bee Inspector, Nigel Semmence**. Nigel will be giving us a talk about his past work with solitary bees, his present work at the National Bee Unit and he will also be briefing us on disease recognition and the latest methods to deal with these problems.

Wednesday 17th February at 7.30 p.m. at Rectory Cottages, Church Green Road, Bletchley MK3 6BJ

BUCKS COUNTY BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION 14th ANNUAL SEMINAR

Saturday 6th March 2010 - 10:00am to 4:00pm Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Road, Wendover HP22 6HF

- 10:00 Meet for coffee and registration
- 10:30 Welcome by the County Chairman - John Catton
- 10:40 **Honey for Healing** - Dr. Rowena Jenkins
- 11:50 **Pollination Mechanics** - Robin Dean – Red Beehive Company
- 1:00 **Ploughman's lunch**. Time, also, to spend visiting the various exhibits and sales stands
- 2:30 **The raffle** - supporting "Honey Bee Health & Well Being" research at Sussex University.
- 2:40 **Bees and Plants** - Andy Willis
- 3:50 Closing remarks by the County President - Bob Hunter
- Cost:** £12 per person, to include refreshments and Ploughman's lunch.

Please pay on the door, but **please book beforehand with John Catton tel: 01494 726616** or
e-mail: richard.catton1@ntlworld.com

John has requested that people attending bake a cake, biscuits or scones & also provide a raffle prize (neither obligatory). The seminar is very well worth attending, there is always a lot to learn and new and 'old' beekeeper friends to meet. There are some spaces in Libby's car if you would like a lift.

Beginners' Course

The classes will start on 17th March with **Local Forage, Nectar & Pollen Gathering and Equipment and Hive Design**. They will be held at Hazeley School, Emperor Drive, Hazeley, MK8 0PT

Weekly practical **Bee Handling** sessions will take place at the Association Apiaries from May until September. For further information contact Bob Sibley: 01908 647597

Queenie's Kitchen

We humans also need some comfort food in these cold conditions, why not try **steamed lemon and raisin pudding with honey and brandy sauce?**

- Sift 4 oz self-raising flour and 1 teasp baking powder in a bowl. Beat in 4 oz caster sugar, 4 oz soft margarine, 2 large eggs, rind and juice from 2 lemons. Beat until the mixture is smooth. Stir in 4 oz seedless raisins.
- Spoon the mixture into 8 greased ramekin dishes or moulds and cover the tops with greased foil. Place them in a large frying pan or saucepan with boiling water to come half way up the dishes. Bring quickly back to the boil, cover and cook for 45 minutes, keeping the water at a boil. Top up with more boiling water as needed.
- Make the sauce while the puddings are cooking. Put 4 tabs clear honey, 1 tab rum or brandy (optional), grated rind of two lemons, 4 tabs lemon juice, 2 tabs water and 3 tabs raisins into a small pan and heat them gently so that the raisins absorb the honey and lemon flavour. Serve the sauce warm.
- Run a knife all round between the puddings and the moulds and turn them out on to a warmed flat serving plate. Spoon a little of the sauce over to glaze and decorate the puddings and serve the remaining sauce separately.

Buzz Words

Did you know that...

- Lidl is selling clay pots of really healthy looking bee favourites – rosemary, sage, thyme, lavender at £2.99 each or two for a fiver? A real bargain.
- Thomson's Roof Repair is a rubber compound and available at B&Q? Once set it is totally water proof. So get your hives water tight before more precipitation descends from above!



If you would like to comment on or contribute to our Newsletter contact Libby Culshaw 01908 375968
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