

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter 2011

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Calendar at-a-glance

DATE	EVENT
22 nd May	Village Green Fair, Aylesbury
7-8 th May	Stoke Goldington Steam Rally
4-5 th June	Lillingstone Lovell Open Gardens Weekend
2 nd July	Social Evening at the Betsy Wynne, Swanbourne
1 st September	Bucks County Show
24 th September	Bucks County Honey Show
25 th September	NBBKA Honey Show
5 th October	NBBKA Annual General Meeting
16 th November	Lecture: Disease and Pest Update from Nigel Semmence
17 th January 2012	Lecture: Speaker and topic to be advised

...and some **Committee Meeting** details:

The Committee will meet in 2011 on 10th May, 12th July, 13th September, 8th November and, in 2012, the first meeting will be on 10th January. All members are welcome at these meetings which are invariably enjoyable and productive, but please don't all turn up at once as the meeting room is pokey.

Articles

Some Thoughts

It used to be said "Don't make a detailed inspection of your bees before you can walk around your garden comfortably in shirtsleeves, until the flowering currant was, well, flowering, or before 12th April" That at least was the general drift of the advice. How timings have moved forward – at least they did this Spring. Many of my colonies, and I am sure yours, needed supering in the 3rd week of March and some, when this newsletter reaches you, will be on and possibly have a couple of full supers. That means two things. All those Spring jobs like clearing out mouldy misshapen combs should have been done – however, as the season goes on, do keep an eye open and deal with any combs which are not up to scratch – move them to the side of the broodchamber or better still if you can put them in a temporary broodchamber upstairs above the supers separated by a coverboard with a wee opening just sufficient for a bee to pass, slash open any sealed stores and the colony will come up to remove the honey (because of the narrow entrance in the coverboard the bees think they are stealing!) and will hatch any brood. But don't put brood upstairs if colony not sufficiently strong to keep it warm. Later remove the offending comb, sterilise, re-wax and re-use.

Practical point: If a frame has become "joggy" at the shoulders, before re-waxing ease out with Stanley knife retaining pins, apply exterior glue and reassemble. It will never jog again.

Teaching Apiaries

There has been a whirl of activity, too, at the Association's Bradwell Abbey and Cosgrove Apiaries. The bees are in good health, all colonies came through the winter safely, one with a drone breeder queen which has been dealt with by uniting to its neighbour. We are taking the opportunity to repair/rebuild hives and, as necessary, to get colonies onto common frame patterns, Hoffman deep frames for brood, SNI shallow frames with castellation spacings for supers. Castellations allow us to use, in addition to SNI, our existing stock of Hoffman shallow



Experts teaching the 2011 class, Cosgrove



Manley frames

(www.beekeeping.co.uk)

frames intermixed with SNIs as necessary. For supers, too, we shall continue to use also our stock of Manley self-spacing frames for the time being. As with all things beekeeping, this is a compromise. Currently I have 16 boxes with frames for repair and sterilisation and once completed if any member could take some boxes with frames and re-wax as necessary (all materials provided)

that would be great. In anticipation of your call, my telephone number is 01525 240235!

We need to get this job finished by the end of the month so time is very short! This "up grade" exercise is being led by your never-say-die chairman, Bob Sibley, with sterling work by Daniel Clarke and Richard Carder. Incidentally, if you have any suitable equipment (especially extractor equipment) you would care to donate to the Association and it will serve our needs, it will very gratefully be received.

Swarm Collection

The early season also meant early swarms. My first call-out this year was on 8th April to Mursley School. "It's in that tall fir tree, can't you see it?" ("No". I responded) "Oops, it's gone and we have had all the children over lunch locked up in the school! (My exclamation) When Geoffrey Ginn was headmaster of our Stewkley School and his bees gave even a hint of swarming, he and the class, all without protection, were out with the bees to do whatever needed to be done! Geoff cunningly had his school class desk placed so that with binoculars he could detect every bee intent before anything else materialised. The kids, of course, loved getting out amongst the bees, extracting honey, too. How sad that such simple pleasures were denied to the kids of Mursley School, "Health & Safety" fears, no doubt. I even had difficulty persuading a member of the staff that with all the bees gone – there were a few stragglers around, high up in the tree – it was safe for the kids to be out in an area some way from the tree.

The season's rush is now on! My wife knows that only too well as social niceties get ruled out of the diary. Enjoy the season (it will be over in July) whilst it lasts!

Queen Excluder Recall

Thornes have run into trouble with their latest plastic queen excluder – not the white or cream but the orange one sold over the last six months or so. Trouble is that the excluder, made in China, has too narrow gaps – no bees can pass through (perhaps it was for use with Apis Cerana, the smaller Asian honey bee!) Anyway, please contact Thornes and they will replace F.O.C.



(www.thorne.co.uk)

Cuprinol

Cuprinol have warned that their latest product is NOT bee friendly and should not be used on or in the hive. This probably means that there is no product on the market suitable for preserving deal and similar perishable woods. One of the advantages of using western red cedar is that it lasts for years without any treatment. A possible alternative where treatment is needed is to apply one coat of emulsion paint (external parts only) which in the short term will provide some protection but first check the

label to ensure there are no harmful bee ingredients or contact manufacturers. To lessen any risk of theft use a subdued coloured paint however marvellous a multi-coloured hive may look. Don't use gloss paint as it stops the hive breathing and encourages damp inside it in winter. N.B. I have just learned from Bee Mail that Ronseal claim that their Five Year Woodstain/Ronseal Fencilife are bee-friendly. I suggest you get specific clearance before use from Ronseal. Incidentally I have no hesitation in "gloss" painting hive roofs once wood, although still strong, starts cracking and lets in water through the cracks.



(www.cuprinol.co.uk)

New BBKA Insurance Policy: Public and Product Liability

The British Beekeepers Association has revised terms of the Public Liability and Product Liability insurances. Details are on their web site but the following points should be noted.



The policies cover all UK resident individual members and that includes you as long as you remain a UK resident and a paid up member of this Association (what better incentive to pay your subscription on time!)

There is a limit for each and every claim of £10 million (previously £5 million).

Cover includes swarm collection but not work at height (meaning above 3 metres) so presumably without insurers' prior consent there is no longer cover for those "high" swarms unless as part of the swarm collection process and before climbing that ladder you get insurers to give consent to your ascent! Another reason to be wary indeed about collecting these high swarms – but see below.

Cover only extends to primary hive products e.g. honey, propolis, wax not to e.g. cosmetics.

Anyone who is concerned about any insurance aspect should look at and rely upon the policy rather than these notes. Alternatively members are invited to speak to Wendy La Vay, telephone 01732 228 716 at Townergate Risk Solutions. I have spoken to one of Wendy's colleagues. He said the height point was being reviewed. It was apparently a term of the previous insurance and the point has never been taken before. Insurers clearly did not consult the bees! Watch this space!

Hive Thefts

Unfortunately further thefts of hives have occurred. Please be vigilant. It may be worthwhile to check whether your household insurance policy covers or can be extended to cover thefts of hives and other equipment. Alternatively, speak to John A Pearce, insurance broker to BBKA at Linden House, St Arilds Road, Didmarton, Glos, GL9 1DP, telephone 01454 238 744. Email john.a.pearce@gmx.net

Ken Gorman on swarm prevention and control

Ken Gorman has kindly sent me a copy of his guide which I am delighted to include. As usual from Ken, stacked with sound solid good advice.



SWARMING OF BEES: USEFUL GUIDANCE-KEEP FOR REFERENCE. 2010

Make your preparations for each season:

1. Mark the queen, preferably with the colour of the year: blue this year.
2. Give the hive a thorough spring clean-up: scrape brood boxes carefully and flame lightly with a blowlamp. Preferably, transfer colonies to freshly prepared equipment.
3. Change all combs every other year, or half of the combs yearly. Clean up frames.
4. Have spare equipment to cope with swarms or swarm control procedures.

Routine management of colonies.

1. Inspect colonies every seven days from about mid-April
2. Give colonies ample room: a). for the queen to lay, b). for storage of nectar and c). standing room for the bees. Never let the accommodation get to the "full" state.
3. Queen cups are a first sign of the intention to swarm. The appearance of even one grub in an enlarging queen cell is the signal for you to take immediate action.

DO NOT CUT OUT ALL OF THE QUEEN CELLS; THIS ONLY DELAYS THE INEVITABLE.

EITHER:

1. Remove the queen and the frame that she is on, plus another of brood and one of stores into a nucleus box: no queen cells though! Shake in one or two frames of extra bees. Add empty frames of frames of foundation to fill up the box. Move the nucleus two metres aside. Reduce the cells in the main colony to one good sized uncapped cell.
2. Check the main colony again in 5 to seven days, removing any extra cells that may have been built in the meantime, leaving the chosen cell to hatch, producing a virgin queen, which will, hopefully, mate. If successful, you can sell the nucleus, which may need room as it develops, or let it build into an additional colony.

OR:

Artificially swarm the colony - a more time consuming procedure.

1. Find the marked queen. Move the comb that she is on, first removing any queen cells on it, placing it into the centre of a fresh brood chamber containing empty combs or foundation. Add one or two combs of stores.
2. Stand this newly made up box on a floor and place it on the original hive stand, moving the rest of the colony two metres to one side.
3. Transfer the excluder and any supers back onto the brood chamber containing

the old queen.

4. Inspect the rest of the colony thoroughly, removing all but one, good sized, uncapped queen cell. Mark the top of the frame to show where it is located.

5. Close down both colonies. The flying bees from the main colony, now in the new position, will rejoin the old queen on the original site.

6. In five to seven days time, move the newly sited colony, which has the uncapped queen cell, two metres to the other side of the colony containing the old queen. Inspect it thoroughly to check that the chosen queen cell (now capped) is still in place, removing any other queen cells that have been built in the meantime. More bees, which have learnt to fly since the first move, will now join the old queen on the original site.

The colony containing the old queen behaves as though it has swarmed. It continues as a strong colony, gathering nectar.

When the new queen is mated, the old queen can be removed and the two colonies united, on the original site, using a sheet of newspaper having a few pinprick holes in it. Or the old queen can be sold as a nucleus, or retained as a colony, when she is likely to be superseded.

Ken Gorman

Those swarms in hard-to-get places

A helpful firm recommended by Ken. The Buckingham Mole Catcher, Roger Jaworski, telephone 01908 504 405 or mobile 07771 966 377. Roger lives in Whaddon.

Here in Stewkley we have Nigel Bliss of Bug-a-Off who has been a great help to me, telephone 01525 240 619, mobile 07767 86 46 98. These gentlemen sometimes have bees to pass on.

Apiary Notes

Here in Stewkley the honey flow is over by about July 15th and I imagine the picture is similar for you unless you are fortunate enough to have a late crop such as borage. Sobering thought, the season is so short! If it is your plan to secure a reasonable crop from your bees (lawyers love the term "reasonable" because it can mean so many things!)

I trust that you will find these notes especially helpful. As usual, I am really writing for beginners. From now on timings and your action plans no longer depend upon the calendar but upon what is happening in your hives, their locations and, of course, the weather. When you have more experience, your plans can be developed but until then I hope these simple rules will serve you well. Let us start with regular inspections.

1. Regular Inspections

The short point is that once queen cells appear (not those funny little 'play' or 'acorn' cells) and you see an egg in a bed of jelly or larva in it your bees have 'decided' to swarm and unless some unexpected event occurs, your bees will. I do believe if you can keep this point in mind your beekeeping will become immeasurably easier. Assuming we either don't want our bees to swarm or to swarm in a way which we, as beekeepers, can control, your action plan should be as follows.

From now until mid-July: make regular 7-day inspections. Miss an inspection and away could go a swarm and 60% of your honey crop or even more if castes are allowed to emerge. It really does help if you can team up with another beekeeper to cover holiday M.I.L (mother-in-law) visits and the like! May I just add that in certain situations the 7-day inspection programme can and must be suspended – see the Waring book (below).

On your inspections look out for and keep asking yourself the following questions:

- Does the colony have enough space?

For example, if the brood or top box is 75% occupied then it is time to add a super. If your super frames contain plain foundation and the super is the first or only one to be placed above the brood chamber, give the bees a run of it for a week or so or until they rise into it without a queen excluder before putting it in place (but first check that the queen is in the brood box below!) A colony not only must have enough space but for the queen to lay too. In a typical situation you may find honey nectar or pollen on, say, four out of 12 combs in the brood chamber and the remainder stocked with brood in various stages and no space for the queen to lay. Alleviate the situation by adding 1 or 2 fresh brood frames of foundation in place of those you remove which if healthy can be given to another colony or put upstairs for the same colony to hatch in a temporary brood box above the queen excluder and any supers. Be wary of transferring comb from one colony or nucleus to another because of the risk of spreading disease or other trouble. Best to discuss with experienced beekeeper first.

- Is the colony developing and looking healthy?

A good healthy colony should in a good spring and forage area by the time plum blossom is out have say good slabs of brood in 4 to 6 brood frames and by the time

the apple blossom is over 6 to 8 brood frames. Anything less requires further investigation and discussion at least with a more experienced beekeeper and there may be a perfectly sound reason. For example, the colony is a slow starter, will build up steadily make no attempt to swarm and secure your largest crop.

- Is there enough food?

A colony must always have at least 15 lbs of stores and in a cold wet late spring can easily run short. In particular bear this in mind when supers have been removed for harvesting – your colony could have almost 100% brood in the brood chamber, a week of wet weather follows and on your next visit a sorry pile of soggy dead bees awaits...

- Is the colony going to swarm?

It is said that bees don't read books and sadly we cannot read every bee instinct (an instrument called an apidictor went on sale in the 1950s and it was claimed that it was able to detect an intention to swarm up to 15 days before the event but then nothing more was heard of it for reasons which are easy to guess!) To find out the colony's intentions we need to open up the brood chamber (try to do this between noon and 3.00 p.m. on a fine day when most of the flying bees - the ones which sting - will be elsewhere) and steadily go through the brood chamber. The use of a dummy board will save a lot of jolting of the bees as do the use of Hoffman frames but others have different views. Starting from the outer comb in the brood chamber check each comb first as to whether or not it contains eggs, larva or sealed brood or stores. The probability is that you will find brood on the second or third comb in. Once you have reached the brood, you look out for queen cells with eggs or larva. The chances are that you will not be able to see the comb without removing some of the bees and easiest way to do this is to do a "beekeepers' shake" of each comb within the hive (so bees fall into and not out of the hive!) to improve your view. But don't shake a hive with a queen cell in it because it will not do its incumbent any good. So how can you avoid shaking those combs upon which there might be a queen cell? The solution is to use a bee brush – personally, I collect birds' feathers when out with the dog and they do just as well. And then you reach that potentially "Titanic" moment when on your look out you see that "iceberg" straight ahead or in bee terms a pregnant queen cell and after your initial shock and perhaps a cup of tea you want to know what to do. Please read on.

- Egg in bed of jelly or larva within an open queen cell.

Your bees are going to swarm unless some external factor (including you) stops them in their tracks. It is as simple as that. To prevent them you have got to put in place your swarm control plan. It is my advice that until you have more experience you simply follow [as advised in the April newsletter] the artificial swarm or nucleus plans set out by Claire and Adrian Waring in their book "Get Started into Beekeeping" which is helpful to me because I don't have to waffle on except in the following respects:

- ✓ Have the equipment ready and set out in your apiary at the start of the season to receive artificial swarms (and natural swarms) and to make up nuclei. If your house was on fire you would at least be miffed if the fire engine ran out of fuel en route! And so with beekeeping! A safe rule is to have one additional hive or nucleus box for each colony at the start of the season ready for immediate action.

- ✓ Bear in mind that you can still operate a swarm control plan without ever seeing the queen (see the Waring book and April's notes) and even if there is a sealed queen cell (normally indicating that the queen has gone) she may still be around. If so, you can still operate your plan.

2. Natural swarms

A swarm could have come out of one of your hives, a fellow beekeeper's or a wild colony. Here are some "rules".

- Beginners should not have a go at collection without help from an experienced beekeeper so as not to imperil their own and others' safety, apart from reducing the risk of the swarm absconding. Please bear in mind that stragglers left behind after a swarm has been removed will understandably be angry so always try to remove a swarm after flying for the day has ceased.
- Swarms may carry disease or may have undesirable characteristics such as bad temper or be inveterate swarmers.
- Swarms can, of course, from the right source be a marvellous (and today given the price of nuclei and colonies) cheap way of securing increase. For that reason those wanting increase are advised to put out bait hives (see April Notes). If I may mention it, beginners please be nice to those collecting your swarm for you. There is never going to be a perfect way of getting bees with their own agendas and timings into the hands of those wanting them. Unfortunately, unlike a baby, one cannot select the time a swarm will depart (or perhaps I should say, arrive)

3. Harvesting

When you set out in beekeeping a principal motive I am sure is to collect honey rather than to do some of the exotic things like rolling candles or making up a potion from your supply of propolis, so I will just deal with honey harvesting. Of course this means not only removing it from the hive but ensuring that when it reaches either your or another's plate it is the perfect product it ought to be and, indeed, in law, it must be even if you are only producing a few jars for friends. It is worthwhile, perhaps, to reflect that by the time you as a beginner are taking off your first crop of honey you will have spent say £250 for each hive you own and between say £120 - £250 for each colony. The last thing you probably want is to have a large outlay on honey processing equipment and the good news in this Association is that there may be no need. Why? Because the Association has an extractor for hire (contact Bob Sibley on 01908 647597 or me, Andrew Beer on 01525 240375 and so long as you have, say, just three hives and are producing, say, up to 200 lbs of honey each season and have a well provided clean up to date kitchen there will be virtually nothing else you need.

Can I now make a number of points:

- If you are in an oil seed rape area or an area in which honey can be expected to crystallise quickly you need to take off honey, comb by comb, as soon as it is ready. This is not an option if you have many hives. If you wait until the super is full, some crystallisation may have occurred. I go to the bees in the evening, go through the super combs removing all sealed combs and all unsealed combs from which no honey emerges when the comb is held face down over the hive and violently shaken. Don't use this technique earlier than say an hour before

sunset or after say 1st July to avoid setting up robbing or if robbing is otherwise a risk. Finally, clear up any honey spills.

- When extracting, try to slice through the air gap between the cappings and honey below and go easy with the extractor increasing speed slowly or your combs will part from their frames!
- From the extraction run the honey in to glass or cooking grade plastic containers which are scrupulously clean. Sterilise glass in the oven first.
- Allow honey to settle in containers overnight and remove debris and "honey froth" the following morning. These can be returned in receptacles for the bees to lick clean (personally I keep for winter fondant feeding).
- There is a vast amount of complex law surrounding the processing of honey (and indeed any food) and Andy Pedley wrote a series of articles on the subject in Bee Craft in 2009 which are essential reading for all. Earlier this year I produced a fairly detailed talk about "Bees and the Law" which includes processing of food. Please click here to retrieve the document from the NBBKA website:

www.NBBKA.org/newsletters/archive/files/NBBKA.org_Newsletter_2011_03_BeesAndTheLaw.doc

If the link does not work, and you don't fancy typing the whole thing, try typing this shortened version: <http://tinyurl.com/64c59np>

4. What Else?

I think it will be helpful perhaps to reassure beginners that nothing particularly so far as bees are concerned, even for the most experienced, always works according to plan. To take just a few examples, queens may not hatch, take off up to 60% of the colony with them on a mating flight, get lost on mating flights, become drone breeders, produce vicious bees – the list is endless and is not limited to queens. This is the rough and tumble of beekeeping which one just has to accept. On the other hand, even in these days of unexplained honey bees losses, there is usually a solution readily to hand and we urge you if you have the slightest bee worry or concern to have a word with an experienced beekeeper or if you really wish to scrape the barrel, then me on 01525 240 235. The health of your bees and the success of your beekeeping is our concern and all part of the North Bucks Bee Service.
Happy Bee days.

Future Events

As these were fairly comprehensively covered in April's newsletter may I just offer the following as reminders.

Stoke Goldington Steam Rally

7th-8th May. Please support. More details from Mike Bensley 01908 230261

Village Green Fair

Market Square Aylesbury 11.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m. 22nd May 2011. As you have not responded to April’s newsletter, I shall now be chasing for volunteers. I shall be there and if you will entrust me to sell your produce for you that is precisely what I shall do. I shall have my observation hive with occupants to entertain and instruct the public.

Lillingstone Lovell Open Gardens Weekend

4th-5th June 2011. These gardens must be seen to be believed. Nicola Smith and an observation hive of bees are flying the NBBKA flag. Nicola would love some help; her number is 01280 860102

Social Evening at the Betsy Wynne

Swanbourne, 7.00 p.m. 2nd July 2011. A Gala Night? Well, no. Just a chance for us all to get to know each other that little bit better. The pub will provide a finger buffet at £10 per head. There will be a cash bar. We have to let the pub have numbers so can you please be really speedy and spend a moment filling in the accompanying form and despatch it, as indicated, to me, Andrew Beer.

To:
Andrew Beer
1 Kings Street
Leighton Buzzard
Beds LU7 0YA
T: 01525 240235

Get Together at the Betsy Wynne, Swanbourne, 7.00 p.m. 2nd July 2011.

I am delighted to be coming to the Party with

I enclose a cheque for £ _____ (£10 per head)

Signed..... Date

Name (print)

Telephone number.....
