

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter November 2012

Table of Contents

Calendar at-a-glance.....1
 News Articles.....1
 AGM & Constitution Update.....1
 Event Report – County Extravaganza.....2
 Honey Statistics request.....2
 National Diploma in Beekeeping extended short courses.....3
 Regular Columns.....3
 November and December 2012 apiary notes from Andrew Beer.....3

Calendar at-a-glance

20 th November	Committee meeting
2 nd March 2013	County spring seminar, Wendover

News Articles

AGM & Constitution Update



On the 30th October a near-capacity Rectory Cottage hosted a friendly and fast AGM. Reports were received from chairman and membership secretary Ken Neil, treasurer Rod Pakes, apiary managers Karen Dale and Phil Gabel, and webmaster Daniel Clarke.

The membership voted-in the proposed draft constitution, which now replaces the 1996 version and better reflects the current workings of the association. The final version will be published on our website soon.

The Committee stepped down and all officer positions were expressly voted in, with Ken and Rod refilling their posts. Ruth Hewitt takes over from Karen Glasse as General Secretary. The non-officer positions were refilled by their previous holders, with the exception of Honey Show Secretary, now held by Cynthia Smith instead of Nicola Smith. Ed Reney re-joined as an ordinary member of the committee. Libby Culshaw was made an honorary member.

After engraving, the NBBKA honey show trophies were awarded to the winners.

The minutes will be made available on our website soon.

Event Report – County Extravaganza

On the 13th October the whole county thoroughly enjoyed the combined event in Stewkley. The county and NBBKA honey shows were a great success with many entries. While the show was being judged the members enjoyed a variety of seminars and lectures, including wax production, bee disease and equipment hygiene, skep making, honey hygiene, bees and stress, the future of beekeeping, and beekeeping in New Zealand.



The results of the honey show will be on our website... suffice to say very well done to Fiona Eelbeck and Mike Jackson (pictured above).

At the end of the event was the county AGM. One of the points of discussion was a proposal, ultimately rejected, that the autumn seminar be held in Stewkley every year; very flattering to NBBKA.

Very well done and many thanks for Andrew Beer and his team for the organisation.



Honey Statistics request

Regional Bee Inspector Nigel Semmence requests that members complete the NBU survey regarding honey harvest and pricing. Kindly complete the survey (on our site) and return it to him.

National Diploma in Beekeeping extended short courses

Starting this month and running through to Spring 2013, the NDB team are running an extended set of short courses. The two-day courses cover a range of topics likely to be of interest to improver beekeepers. The courses are just £75 each thanks to a subsidy from FERA and at this price are likely to fill up quickly. Further information can be found on the NDB website.

Link: http://www.national-diploma-bees.org.uk/short_courses.htm

Regular Columns

November and December 2012 apiary notes from Andrew Beer

Last month I promised some reflections following a highly disappointing year. Talking to others, I am disturbed to learn of so many beekeepers who either have had no honey, or worst of all have lost their bees. It seems to me that within the Association we must have a system, a warning system which alerts us all to a beekeeper in – or better still before he or she gets into – trouble. In my experience help is always at hand: let us broadcast it and blaze the bad news in future so we actually offer help before it is too late.

For a starter may I suggest that if you either anticipate trouble or are in trouble in any respect with your bees, or simply want bees (or more bees) you put a suitable note in the newsletter (that is one of its purposes) or simply contact one of the Association's more experienced beekeepers, or if you have to scrape the barrel, then me! Luckily in the Association, North Bucks area, we have highly experienced commercial beekeepers selling colonies, nuclei and /or queens: do take advantage of their services, too.

No two seasons are alike. Good, bad and indifferent seasons do not come in patterns: advice which may serve well in one year may be totally inappropriate in the next, so what general advice can I offer?

EARLY SPRING FEEDING for early honey crops, e.g. rape. In the past, I have emergency-fed only to keep the bees going until there is sufficient available forage, but I now believe that to have been a mistake, certainly in my area which is dependent on spring rape. In future I intend to feed heavily (say a gallon of feed) after the beginning of March (or as soon as bees are flying freely) as a stimulative feed to fill up brood chambers with food, brood and young bees, so that as soon as the rape is in flower, colonies are forced to put much of the rape crop into supers. Points to note: To maintain a programme allowing ALL brood frames to be changed

within a time frame of two years, as now recommended, as far as possible and whenever possible, place misshapen, blackened combs etc. in the outer brood area and remove before spring feeding (as above). If these "bad" frames in spring still contain food, de-cap and put in separate brood chambers at top of hives with queen excluders underneath, before finally removing them when clear. If you don't do this you run the risk of re-filling the bad combs which you need to remove with the spring feed. Further, the queen must always have enough room to lay. If necessary, remove one or two combs of food/pollen and put in top brood chamber as above. In each case put clean frames of foundation in the space you have created in the brood chamber. Finally, this "stimulative feeding" may hasten your bees' preparations to swarm. For those wanting bees, surely that is no bad thing, but you must adopt a swarm control system as suits you best, or as an experienced beekeeper advises (- and more about swarm control next spring).

INCREASE. The clamour is for more bees. Clearly you must not "over-bee" an area as appears to be happening in London, nor must you, for a similar reason, harm fellow beekeepers in your area.

Read the books about "increase" and work on a plan. As to plans, if necessary speak to an expert, but I will just mention two plans:

QUEEN REMOVAL. If a stock is making arrangements to swarm, remove the queen and put her with a frame of brood (normally the one she is on), a second brood frame and a frame of stores in a separate brood box (or nuc box), and place it some distance from the original site, facing in a different direction. Original stock is left on original site, and when queen cells are 11 – 13 days old, divide the original stock up into say, three separate nucs, each with a good queen cell, and if not needed elsewhere, destroy the rest. The nucs can be left within the apiary, the weakest on the site of the original hive. Stuff entrances of nucs placed on new sites within the apiary with grass for three days and ensure ventilation, either through wire floor or top screen. Of course if you only want one additional stock, you leave the original colony where it is and reduce to one queen cell.

Try the MILLER METHOD OF RAISING QUEENS suitable for the beekeeper with, say, 1 to 20 colonies. This takes various forms, but each involves getting one-day larvae on comb from a "good" stock, persuading the bees to raise queen cells, later putting sealed queen cells in nucs and getting the nucs to look after those cells and the emerging queens until they are mated and can be put with, and/or grow, into colonies. A tip with nucs: ensure they always have a quart of syrup and be careful about robbing. Would you like to join me in raising a few queens in 2013? It is fun, and we can make our mistakes together! Don't all rush, though!

HIVE CLEANING AND STERILIZATION. Gone are the days when we could be "leave-alone" beekeepers, i.e. leave brood chambers undisturbed, queens unseen, and just take off supers as they fill up. Nigel Semmence of NBU, at the Gathering on 13th October, spoke extensively about how we must clean and sterilize equipment, and I will just make a few points. In the absence of a "nasty", i.e. American and European Foul Brood, all equipment – hives, feeders or whatever, must be cleaned periodically

and sterilized. In the case of wooden hive parts, that means when not in use they should be scraped down and lightly singed with a blow lamp, according to Nigel. Personally, I hate the idea of singeing equipment: Nigel agreed that alternatively equipment could be soaked for thirty minutes or so in a strong bleach mix (for which I use a garden water butt). Nigel indicated that a soda-crystal wash, although useful for cleaning after apiary visits, might not be a sufficiently strong disinfective for "serious" cleaning. As to supers, Nigel recommended the use of acetic acid, of which I have no experience, which I now intend to use and will report more on later. But be warned: it is dangerous stuff and please seek and rely upon expert advice before attempting to use it. Of course if you are unfortunate enough to have either AFB or EFB, simply shut the colony up and contact Julian Parker, Seasonal Bee Inspector (sadly Margaret Holland has retired: thanks for your great work, Margaret) or the NBU and take matters from there. It is "the Law".

These notes are intended to cover December as well as November, so here are "notes about some of the things we should be doing in the next two months". Stocks should now be shut up, excluders and surplus supers removed, essentially ready for winter. Continue to check hives are weatherproof. Be on your guard for robber bees/wasps. In particular make certain that any entrance, however wide, is not more than 3/8inch in depth, otherwise mice may enter.

If you are using mouse guards (I don't), do not use before cold weather sets in, or else before 1st December because robbers may still be around. Before inserting mouse guards remove any entrance blocks. Check stocks externally every 2 – 3 weeks (and after storms, heavy rain or snow), and investigate/deal with possible problems. If you have left your stock with an empty eke above brood chamber, coverboard above (as described in an earlier newsletter), you can peek at your bees without disturbance to see all is well: a torch helps you look down into the combs.

On every visit "heft" hives as previously described, and feed candy or fondant (some use 1 kg granulated Tate & Lyle bags of sugar slit with or without drenching in water – they have not worked for me).

Apply any prescribed varroa treatment as advised (I use oxalic acid in December with no problems to date).

If woodpeckers are likely to be a problem, put in place netting, as previously advised.

Have a great Christmas and a marvellous bee year in 2013; but how could we forget – start working away at cleaning and sterilization of equipment. More about that in January's newsletter.

And finally, what a marvellous turn-out for the Autumn Gathering! At least 32 North Bucks members attended. Tremendous. But most important of all – we trust the day was educative and fun, and that you got together with many Bucks members outside our association. Talking about getting together: If you already have, or are buying, your 2013 diary, please note at once: Saturday 2nd March 2013, the date of the Bucks

County Spring Seminar in Wendover, being led by our very own Chairman, Ken Neil. Now described as a leading national bee conference in the "bee year", on our own doorstep. Unmissable! The guys from the south came to Stewkley: now we must pay them the compliment of travelling south (just 16.2 miles from Stewkley to Wendover – well short of the Antarctic.)

Cheers and all best wishes,
Andrew