

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter June 2013

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Calendar at-a-glance

22 nd September	Honey show
12 th October	County honey show

Beginners' Practical Classes

In order to ensure that organisers are kept abreast of potential numbers of attendees, beginners are kindly requested to call or text their instructor if they are unable to attend one of the outdoor sessions. It should also be remembered that beekeeping is seasonal and dependent on weather, so expect that sessions will be cancelled in inclement weather.

Choosing an apiary site - solar calculator

This simple application for Google Maps will help you determine how much sunshine a potential apiary site will receive. This can help you determine whether the location will get a satisfactory amount of sun in the mornings. The editor recently rejected a site offered by a local business due to it being too shady.

The website is www.SunCalc.net. Search for any location and drag to pinpoint your hives. Select a time of year and a time of day. The yellow line (roughly parallel with Midsummer Blvd in the below) is the position of sunrise on midsummer's morning, the red line sunset, the dark orange line shows the position of the sun at the selected time of day, and the shaded arc shows the maximal and minimal declination of the sun at different times of the year.



NBBKA Honey Show

The NBBKA honey show will be held on Sunday 22nd September 2013 at the same village hall in Stewkley as last year's event. There will also be talks and seminars. Watch this space for more details.

Regular Columns

June Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

By the time you receive this newsletter, strong, healthy colonies will be up to “swarming strength”, indeed, you may already have had to implement swarm control measures. It is well to remember that a strong colony, likely to be led by a 2012 queen, may make no attempt to swarm. I think one of the advantages for beginners of buying-in a good queen from a local and health-assured source (or a colony with such a queen) is that with luck the colony she heads will make no attempt to swarm in the following season, enabling the beginner to get a really good “feel” for beekeeping, without too many problems (and a good prospect of securing some honey!).

If you are in the fortunate position of having such a colony or colonies (indicated by large slabs of brood not just in May but continuing into the later summer), here is a list of things you can think of doing:

(a) as a swarm control measure, or otherwise, periodically remove frames of soon-to-emerge brood WITHOUT BEES and add to a colony that needs building up. I would never remove more than two frames from a strong colony and never give to a weaker one more brood than it can cover, to avoid chilled brood.

(b) when the honey flow is coming to an end (in Stewkley this is normally about 15 July, but in this “late” year, perhaps 22 July), turn the colony into a breeder colony. You won’t be losing much crop (because the flow is coming to an end) and you have the perfect opportunity to produce some first-class nucs from a first-class stock to take into 2014. If you think this is a good idea, proceed as follows:

1. Remove supers, cleared of bees. If honey not ripened, get another colony in the same apiary to ripen (to reduce risk of spreading disease). But do just make certain that there is enough food in the brood chamber of the strong colony, say a minimum of two frames of food. The aim is to leave the bees short of space and force them into raising queen cells.

2. Go back seven days later and you should find queen cells with eggs. If the weather has been cold or wet that process may not have started, in which case go back at seven-day intervals until a start is made. It is possible of course that bees will not accept the bait (and not produce queen cells) in which case you have neither gained nor lost anything and DO NOTHING.

3. Assume you have queen cells which are nicely full of larva fluid and close to being sealed (about Day 7), divide the colony into three parts; the queen stays in the original hive on the original site with one third of the brood/food combs. The other combs in the original brood box are removed, divided into two and placed in brood or nuc boxes. All queen cells in the box with the queen are destroyed, the two boxes without the queen are left with one queen cell each, with a good fat larva (sometimes a sealed cell will be found to be a dud) within it, and the rest are destroyed (unless you wish to use these for, say, a queenless colony). It is best if (to prevent drifters) the two queenless stock can be taken at least three miles from the original hive (as I have said before, this can be where the

mother-in-law comes in handy) but failing that, shut up the entrances of the queenless bees for 72 hours or so, first making sure that they have good ventilation (a good reason for having mesh floors), a supply of sugar syrup and are left in a shady spot. Gaps in boxes are filled with frames of foundation and you should keep feeding until all combs are drawn out. N.B. This is in addition to usual Autumn feeding.

Once set on their permanent stands, the queenless stocks should be left unopened for 4 weeks at which point you will hopefully find fine laying queens. And if that doesn't happen, wait a further 21 days, destroy any virgin queen, (which will by then at best only be a drone layer) and unite to whichever stock most needs beefing up, by the newspaper method.

The above procedure depends upon your having good rich queen larvae. It is no good just dividing your colony into three parts and relying upon the bees to produce good queens. They won't, because the queens will be raised from emergency queen cells and will not have received the proper dose of larval food. An alternative way (at least for the small-time beekeeper) of producing a good queen cell is to put a frame with eggs taken from your best colony into a queenless nuc for, I suggest, 2 days, at which point the frame (with mini queen cells) is put into an empty brood chamber. The empty brood chamber is put above the brood chamber and queen excluder of your good queenright colony which you are going to use for breeding, supers placed above. In this situation, as the queen is separated from the queen cells by the excluder, the bees will develop the queen cells started by the nuc. Go back to the hive when the queen cells are about 7 days old (in any event before they are sealed) and then make up nucs as above, ensuring each nuc has just one good rich queen cell.

The above queen-raising method could be adapted for use at the beginning of the season. Just fail to give the bees enough space, wait until you see swarm queen cells and proceed from there. But you will destroy the crop usually.

Putting any disease issues on one side; **many colonies failed this Spring**, not because they were necessarily diseased but because the Spring build-up rate could not cope with the Spring death rate, and so nucs ran out of numbers. You might call it the numbers game. I think all of us have got to raise stock each year, simply to counteract the winter losses we now regularly expect. Some commercial beekeepers lost at least 50% of their stocks (for whatever reason) last winter and there must be a tipping point of no return when it becomes impossible to replace winter losses over the following summer. This very difficult summer (at 22nd May) highlights these problems! Note: Oxford would never tell Cambridge its tactics for the Boat Race. As beekeepers, it is vitally important we work together to save our bees!

As usual, I stick my neck out; all beekeepers should have a **minimum of 5 colonies** at Autumn count. I appreciate 5 hives on one site could create an annoyance, if not a nuisance problem to neighbours – if so the answer is to have a **second apiary**. Why not ask a local farmer whose fields abut a town to let you keep your bees there? No nuisance or annoyance should occur and bees away from their hive are far less likely to sting when on foraging duties (and who will know that it is your bees who are delivering the stings!)

And the **crop**. In the cold, wet, windy Spring we have had to date, it is easy to forget about it. Let us hope that, by the beginning of June, some honey will be ripened in combs. I just want to make the following points:

1. You do not need to use Porter Bee Escapes or similar **clearing** devices, and with fast crystallising honeys such as oil-seed rape it is best you don't, PROVIDING THERE IS NO RISK OF ROBBING. Always use a clearing device if robbing is a risk, or after foraging for the season starts to fall off, usually after about 10 July. To proceed without a clearing device, go to the bees at about 7 p.m. put the boxes with ripe frames to one side and put an empty eke (for example an empty super) in place of the removed boxes. Knock, shake off or brush off with grass the frames to be cleared into the eke, putting the cleared combs into an empty super for removal to home base. Re-assemble the hive as necessary. Abandon the operation at once if neighbouring bees take any interest in the operation and revert to a clearing device.

2. Try to **extract** the combs you have removed on the day you take them off. Otherwise leave overnight in a warm room and extract as soon as you can.

N.B. Some beekeepers install a low-powered electric light bulb in an eke and then put frames for extraction in supers above the eke with a cover on top.

3. Get, say, two 30lb food-quality buckets and use a quarter-inch drill-bit to make, say, 12 holes, evenly spread over the base of one bucket. Now get a bit of plywood and cut a circular hole in it of roughly the same circumference as that of the bucket you have drilled through midway up its side. If you made the hole too big, a few tacks nailed into the opening of the plywood will put things right. Then put the bucket with holes drilled in above the bucket without holes and pass it through the plywood. The plywood/bucket with holes will then sit on the bucket without holes. Put your honey cappings into this and you have a first-class **strainer** to be collected by the bucket below.

4. If you have just a few **jars** of honey to extract, it is probably best to leave the honey in the extractor overnight to allow the "frass" to get to the top, which you can remove with a spatula, and next morning strain into a jug and fill the jars. This won't get you a prize in the NBBKA Honey Show but is perfectly adequate if you like honey. For large quantities, acquire more food-quality buckets, run the crop into them, leave overnight in a warm room, scrape off the frass the following day. The crop can be jarred as required. The strained cappings can be fed back to the bees. I use seed trays, placed within supers or ekes, for final clean-out and rendering down. Sometimes in doing this, the artistic department of the colony will produce marvellous shapes. Supers can be returned to the bees for refilling or licking clean

N.B. One often finds that, despite best endeavours, combs at the end of the season get filled or partly filled with **solid honey**. If so, de-cap as necessary and put the relevant combs in supers below the brood chamber AFTER autumn feeding is completed. Bees hate having food below brood and will clear the frames. Having a super below the brood chamber is good beekeeping practice – it keeps the bees further from the ground – and damp – and the bonus in Spring is that you can whip the supers away and place above a

queen excluder. The supers will be immediately attractive to bees being “home from home”.

N.B. In the situation I have just described, you can speed up the process of clearing the combs by putting a shallow eke with, say, 4in wide entrance, immediately below the brood chamber. Put a coverboard and queen excluder between the eke and the supers with the combs to be cleared, and place a flat board below the supers, with no opening. Bees will clear faster because they think they are stealing the honey! The normal feed holes in the coverboard next to the queen excluder are reduced to one single bee-space to speed up the stealing!

And those weak colonies which have struggled through the winter and this wretched Spring?

If combs are covered in excreta and there is only a cluster of bees, best course is probably to kill the colony off and sterilise the hive for re-use. But, as I have said before, if the colony is fighting for its survival and it is just the “numbers game”, nurture it along. A nice frame of emerging brood from a strong hive will do it a power of good. Queens can only lay as fast as the colony can support brood. In some cases, it is a question of the queen, perhaps damaged, holding back the colony. This is a perfect situation for replacing her with a bought-in queen – order her immediately and she should be yours by mid-July. I once had a swarm which got into an empty pile of supers where it remained undisturbed for several years. (Pressure of work, of course!) Finally I got the old swarm out, hived it and replaced the queen in July. My best stock the following year...

What do you think about syrup?

One constantly reads that syrup in the Spring should be a 1:1 mix, pints to pounds of water and sugar. Adrian Waring says it doesn't matter as different nectars have different water contents. My complaint and experience is that a 1:1 mix invariably ferments, so I am going back to 1 pint to 2 pounds of sugar, from March, through to the end of September. Outside this period, you should give candy or fondant feed.

Not much has been said about **swarms**. Here are a few tips:

1. Try giving the swarm a wetting, where they are perched, with a household plant sprayer. No chemicals, please. This will encourage them to stay put and not fly back to the perch when thrown into your skep.
2. You can hive the swarm either the romantic way (i.e. shake onto a cloth and the bees run into the hive) or from above the brood box – in this case remove, say, 8 central frames, block the entrance and put a queen excluder below the box to stop the bees/the queen emerging and use a second brood box or eke above the first to shake them into their new home. Then gently replace the removed combs, being very careful not to squash any bee (it could be the queen). When fully installed, unblock the entrance and 24 hours later put the queen excluder above the brood box (very important, your queen may need to mate!). If you happen to have some clean old comb this will encourage the swarm to stay, but replace as soon as possible. Feed the swarm until the brood chamber is full of brood/stores.

Remember that catching a swarm often requires ingenuity. Some swarms will simply be impossible to reach and are best left to the Pest Control officers to deal with.

Finally, your public liability **insurance** from the BBKA will not cover you if you are reckless, do not have the right experience or the right equipment. Take Care !

Regards, Andrew Beer

Telephone number for queries or advice: 01525 240235

P.S. Swarm update.

On 24th May David Warren and I did our first artificial swarm.

Any colony low on food? Keep feeding when needed!