

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter October 2013

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Calendar at-a-glance

12 th October	County event and honey show
24-26 th October	National Honey Show
24 th October 7pm	AGM (Rectory Cottage, Bletchley)
TBA	Winter lectures/events programme

North Bucks honey show

The annual NBBKA honey show was a success, even though there were several classes without entries. Well done to Cynthia, with Andrew's help, for organising. All results and photos are up on our website, as well as Cynthia's vote of thanks, at this address: www.nbbka.org/honey/honeyShow/2013.aspx

Was there a reason you did not enter anything this year? If you could send your feedback to honeyshow@nbbka.org it will help us to plan better for next year.

Well done to Mike Jackson for such success:



Bucks county gathering and honey show - 12th October

The county event is THIS SATURDAY the 12th October. Do please attend – for full details please see this website:

<http://www.buckscountybeekeepers.co.uk/whats-on/autumn-gathering-2013/>

Regular Columns

October Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

Well, 'they' ought to be tucked up and ready for winter now, activity marked on warm days by our friends at hive entrances going out to gather autumn pollen from ivy and the like. Brother Adam, the great beekeeper from Buckfast Abbey, would finish apiary work at the end of September, after which his bees had to fend for themselves on Dartmoor, whatever the winter elements. His philosophy was simple: the less disturbance the better, and let colonies that are weak for any reason be sorted out by the elements. Brother Adam, of course, never had to deal with varroa. I will be the first to admit that circumstances have forced me into feeding in October, but this year I did it differently. Instead of stirring a lot of sugar (over 300 lb) I slipped away to the marvellous Ged Marshall and collected 300 litres of syrup in jerrycans, some for the Association bees at Cosgrove. Total bliss! Job done by 1 September. And the special joy is the syrup: inverted sugar syrup (so it doesn't ferment for at least a year, and it has alleged goodies added.)

Just as in the garden it's tidying-up time, so beewise here we go:-

1. **Robbing.** The wasps and other bees will take the slightest opportunity for a free meal until winter has set in (perhaps not until end December). So keep your guards up until you sense that the threat is over. If you want to use mouseguards, delay installing them until the robbing season is over. Active bees in a strong colony will see off any mice in the meantime. If you insist on using mouseguards, for heaven's sake remove entrance blocks first. If you don't, all you will do in practice is to trap your bees inside hives with perhaps calamitous results. As I have said many times, I keep entrance blocks installed throughout the year, and leave all colonies of whatever strength on 1-inch wide entrances from early August until the bees are fully active again in spring. N.B. Back to mouseguards: these should not be added until the robbing season is over, because they will not be a sufficient defence against other bees and wasps.
2. **Hives up to purpose?** Get them fit for winter and make any long-term change in spring. It's too late to make major changes now – you will upset your bees if you do.

- 3. Cleaning equipment.** Unless you have bee/wasp-proof premises, I suggest you delay sterilisation/cleaning of equipment until the robbing season is over.

Review of the year.

The combination of the bad summer in 2012, a wet autumn and cold and very much delayed spring meant most colonies even as late as May were in a very weak state. As perhaps evidence of that, the first swarm call came in on 21 May rather than in mid-April. As things turned out that was not wholly a bad thing, because many colonies, particularly the weak 2/3 frame ones in April, made no attempt to swarm and were up and running for business in early July – and what business! Personally, I had taken off about 200 lb by late June, but then the bees went into overdrive and some 1,100 lb were gathered by 15 August. It is perhaps useful to recall the almost unique forage conditions in early July. Plenty of damp from spring rain, an especially wide variety of crops due to the late season, hot humid windless weather and a very heavy flow for me, especially from lime trees. The remaining summer has continued good for bees, so there is every prospect they will emerge in spring in good shape.

May I now write to you please as an old crumbly? These are my thoughts – nobody else's.

If you possibly can, come to the Bucks Autumn Gathering this year in High Wycombe on 12 October. A marvellous mouth-watering programme has been organised for us, like Stewley in 2012 but now even better!

Now perhaps to more serious things. I believe it is an undeniable truth that, as an Association, we have not succeeded in doing all we might have expected to achieve in 2013. At a minimum, a full training course both technical and practical including examinations, a full winter programme, and there has not been as much social activity as I would have liked. Why this has come about is due to several reasons, all good and understandable and I have absolutely no complaint. Indeed I have total admiration for Phil Gabel and Karen Dale as they have borne the burden of the Association's two apiaries. It seems to me that the time has truly come when we all ought to sit down and agree just what you would like to get out of the Association. For example, you may think you would like NBBKA to be more like Buckingham BKA, which runs a healthy evening lecture and social programme (but no apiaries), or perhaps like Beds BKA which takes care of almost every beekeeping need. The choice is YOURS! What I am quite certain about is that we cannot continue as we are at present, when a few people do quite unfair, inordinate amounts of work, only too conscious that the Association is so to speak going through the motions rather than thrusting forward, focussed on its aims and vibrant. Can we think about these things: (a) decide the sort of Association you want; (b) how we are going to take matters forward, and most importantly, who will come aboard to help. More help is vital!

I hope the Committee, on which I am co-opted, will organise a suitable meeting just as soon as possible. May I stress again that the above are my views and my views alone.

Best regards, Andrew