

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter January 2015

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Calendar at-a-glance

12 th January	Social event at Shoulder of Mutton Public House
27 th January	Paul Walton talk on "Breeding Better Bees"
9 th February	Social event at Shoulder of Mutton Public House
24 th March	Simon Crosan talk on "Bees and Beekeeping in Nepal"
28 th March	BCBKA practical training session, Wendover
13 th April	Social event at Shoulder of Mutton Public House
28 th April	Richard Smith talk on "Extracting the Crop"

Bucks County seminar and training days

19th Annual Seminar

Saturday 28th February 2015 - 10:00am to 4:00pm, Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Rd, Wendover, HP22 6HF.

Speakers:

- Michael Palmer – The sustainable apiary
- Bob Smith – Botany for beekeepers: about some flowers useful to bees
- Michael Palmer – Queen rearing in the sustainable apiary

Stands:

- National Bee Unit
- National Trust
- Bucks, Berks & Oxon Wildlife Trust
- National Honey Show

Tickets:

£12 per person in advance for Bucks members. £15 for non-members and on the day. Includes Ploughman's lunch. All tickets must be pre booked by 21st February to secure a lunch. Contact Fiona Matheson 01923 285637 fiona.matheson.fm@gmail.com

Training Days

Saturday, 28th March 9.30-16.00, Wendover.

Bucks County Beekeepers Association is co-ordinating Practical Skills training across the County, covering aspects of beekeeping in line with the practicals in the BBKA General Husbandry Assessment.

The training in 2015 is split into two parts and is designed for delegates to have time to learn and practice their practical skills throughout the coming season.

The second part will be on 27-28th June, all day. It will be a mixture of classroom and apiary sessions over the weekend at an apiary in Wendover.

Attendees must have attained their Basic Assessment Certificate to qualify to attend. The course fee of £20 is payable to Bucks County Beekeepers Association.

For more information and an application form please contact::

Sean Stephenson chairman@mbbka.org.uk 01296 623318

Deadline for receipt of application forms and payment is Feb 28th 2015

Sydney Bee Club lecture

I gave a talk to the Sydney Bee Club late last year while a guest at one of their meetings. Visiting my head office for business, I made the most of my time there and joined the young and enthusiastic club at their regular venue in the heart of the city.

My talk was about beekeeping in the UK, focussing on our lives with varroa. Australia is one of the only countries to have kept the pest at bay, even their biosecurity-conscious neighbours in New Zealand now suffer it. Thus the members were not very aware of it and certainly had no experience of dealing with it.

The members present on the night seemed to be mainly beginners, brimming with enthusiasm and questions but occasionally those questions betrayed their young beekeeping years.

These two aspects of inexperience, combined with the obvious doom and gloom of such a talk, meant that I rather think I terrified most of them! They did seem to gain a lot from it though.

The club's chairman had obviously done a lot of research and was able to take the helm when members asked questions about how Australian bees and beekeepers might be affected if or when the mite is found in their country. His view is that it would devastate their bees and there much of their industries very quickly, before those surviving colonies would bounce back. The devastation would be, he thought, mainly due to there not being a winter broodless period where numbers of mites dwindle.

After the talk we sampled the beekeepers' honeys and had nibbles and beers to celebrate Christmas. I tried every honey and although they were all nice and all different, none of them tasted quite like home. To my palette, many tasted blandly of syrup and lacked the distinctive spring floral flavour that I so love about my own honey.

Article by Daniel Clarke.

Editorial and Seasonal Notes

Sorry these notes are a bit late. Christmas intervened! May I start by wishing you and your bees a very happy and successful year? We will be fortunate if it turns out as good as 2014, but as beekeepers we always look forward and plan for the best....

It may seem strange that I'm writing about raising nucs in mid-winter, but hopefully you'll see why when you have read this newsletter. I am constantly surprised when I hear that a beekeeper, once he or she has got started, is short of bees or even has later got wiped out. I am not forgetting the disabling impact of varroa and various maladies, some not understood, and the adverse impact of a really bad winter; and I am not suggesting that for some mysterious reason, whilst others are losing bees I never lose any. Of course I do – in a bad year up to 20% and never less than 10%. So what is the point I'm trying to make?

In my view, so as to ensure you have a viable apiary year in year out, able to withstand set-backs, you need a minimum of five good colonies at September count. In a worst-case scenario, over winter you will lose three of those colonies and come out with two at the end. To get yourself back to five, traditionally you would have waited for swarms both from your own and other bees: a course haphazard in the good old pre-varroa days (for example, swarms did and still do get away(!), the state of health and behaviour of a stray colony were unknown etc. etc.), and today swarms from the wild are few and far between, and of course in a “bad” year, when bees generally are in short supply, your fellow beekeepers will need to keep their own swarms and have none to pass on.

So how do you go about having a viable apiary? The solution is simple, and it is in your own hands (and with your bees). Make nuc-raising a specific part of your beekeeping each year. Can't do it? If I can, as one of the most ham-fisted beekeepers the world has ever seen, you certainly can. How? I'm not going to go through each of the various operations as they are described in “the books” and many were set out in my article “The Joys and Rewards of Raising Nucs” (Beecraft, March 2014). I will, though, mention some specific situations in which nucs can be raised:-

1. You “forget” to give a colony enough space in spring, so it is forced to raise queen cells. Alternatively, in June you leave a colony with, or reduce a colony to, insufficient space with the same results.

2. The colony naturally starts steps towards swarming and produces queen cells. (N.B. Swarm queen cells are the crown jewels – never destroy one, especially if it comes from your best stock, without first considering if it could be used elsewhere.)

3. You take a frame with three-day-old eggs and leave it for 24-48 hours in a queenless nuc before placing the comb with the started queen cells in a QUEENRIGHT colony. Note, the comb is placed in a separate brood box above the queen excluder of the queenright colony, and here is the irony: a queenright colony given a frame of started queen cells which its queen can't reach, i.e. because of the excluder, will continue to develop those queen cells which can later be put in queenless nucs.

4. You have a colony of uncertain temperament and of unassured productivity, but in good health. In other words a colony which is a waste of space. Set up queenless nucs from this colony and pass on a queen cell from your best colonies.

5. A nuc is just about the safest way of introducing your best queen. Every year I make up three nucs in late June/early July, and have a lovely car journey motoring down to and back from Ged Marshall at Steeple Claydon to pick the ladies up and waste Ged's valuable time. Ged's bees define the temperament and productivity of my bees, and give me the material I need for my own natural queen production.

Well, you will say: why should I think about nucs now? Simply because this is the best time to start making plans for nucs. Specifically because:-

a) There is little to do in the apiary now.

b) It is no good leaving things until the first queen cell is seen. Just like making an artificial swarm: if you need to set up a nuc, you can't wait until the relevant equipment has arrived from the equipment supplier three – four weeks later. Nuc boxes must be ready at the apiary for IMMEDIATE use as required.

c) The January sales are now on, offering you the best chance of getting good deals on equipment. Personally I make up nuc boxes myself: another reason for doing it now, before the season's rush.

I try to run 20 colonies year in year out. If I slip below 20 after winter losses, I have never had difficulty in getting back to 25 to 33 colonies by midsummer. My usual problem is having too many colonies in early September, some of which I am happy to sell on against a suitable gift-aided donation to Bees Abroad.

Two other points to be made here about nucs. A nuc started early in a good year may produce a surplus of say 50-100lb of honey. If our plans for a queen-raising apiary at Magna Park come to fruition, then our own Master Beekeeper, Fiona Eelbeck, will be on hand to demonstrate all the finer points you need to learn about nucs and queen raising! But start now. The basics are easy and very rewarding.

Oxalic Acid

I have about 1 ½ bottles of oxalic acid. Yours for 5 pounds sterling for Association funds. Thanks to Terry Lock, Charles Vaton, Pat and Phil Gabel for administering treatments and giving winter checks to the Association's bees.

2015 Beginners

Beginners' classes will start late February/early March. Beginners are invited to all Association meetings – everyone please greet them with a beekeeper's welcome! I have heard it suggested that beginners should not have their own bees until they have about three years' experience. I have always thought this approach to be flawed: when I started bees you would buy a colony or be given a swarm, and you managed on your own with no courses for guidance, and I say let the beginners start as soon as they can, but let that be

with an experienced beekeeper behind them. If you can help a beginner, that would be kind indeed and very useful.

Future Events

We have a good programme coming up – see the list above. The next event is the Social at the Shoulder of Mutton, Calverton, 8pm onwards on 12th January. See you, particularly beginners, there. May I urge you to come to our member Paul Walton's talk "Breeding Better Bees" at 7.30 pm at Rectory Cottages, Church Green Road, Bletchley on 27th January? This subject has now become a serious issue, given the impact of varroa and the lack of any measure which will safely and reliably kill all mites, coupled with the need to ensure bees' survival in an increasingly competitive world. Paul has devoted himself to the topic for many years – a talk not to be missed! May I also mention the Bucks County Beekeepers' Association Seminar on Saturday, 27th February at Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Road, Wendover, HP22 6HF (please above). This is a first-class beekeepers' day – a day when a national-conference-quality event comes to our doorstep, and it's a great opportunity to mingle with our fellow Bucks and other beekeepers. Not to be missed. Book now, with Bucks BKA!

Fondant

The Association's very good friend and commercial beekeeper and a fount of knowledge, Gunter Weber, has a ready source of fondant. Even if a colony has stores, a block of fondant placed directly on the top of the brood frame bars over the cluster will ensure that the colony has immediate access to food at all times. Gunter's contact details: tel. 01908 582757, email gunterandmaggie@btopenworld.com Thank you Gunter for all the time you give to help our members.

It would be lovely for us all to get together for some social event in the glorious summer we are expecting. Offers and thoughts please? We are in beekeeping for the fun.

In the apiary now

1. Watch stores – the weather has been exceptionally mild, and stores will be consumed FAST. Maintain fondant feed.
2. The time slot for oxalic acid varroa treatment, especially with the recent warm weather encouraging breeding, is almost over.
3. Keep an eye on hives and act as necessary. After a cold spell of, say, ten or more days you can move hives where you wish with impunity without observing the '3ft at a time' rule.

At your home base

Boxes and frames to clean, cappings to put through the Pratley uncapping tray, wax to melt down for foundation, roofs, dummy boards and cover boards to make. Is it any wonder that come the season, going through a colony checking for queen cells will seem like a holiday?! Christmas inevitably brings a halt to the chores, but it is now FAST FORWARD with all the JOBS if we are to be ready for the OFF! Enjoy!

Andrew Beer