

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter March 2017

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Calendar at-a-glance

14 th Mar	Swarm Control lecture, Monkston Park Community Centre
Wednesdays	Beginners' Course, Hazeley Academy, 19:30
25 th April	Committee meeting, Shoulder of Mutton, 19:30
Saturdays in May	Apiary sessions, Cosgrove

Editorial

Committee News

We have decided to issue these newsletters on a 6-8 week basis, usually after a committee meeting. We also may email you with extra news (such as the one we did with news of the Bucks Seminar) 2-3 times in between newsletters. We will always aim for these to be short, and contain important information that cannot wait.

We asked you for Gift Aid responses this year on your membership renewal. This is because whilst we are not a charity in our own right, we can claim charitable status via Bucks County / BBKA who we are affiliated to. The money collected will be used towards Capitation to Bucks County which we have not paid over the last few years. This is the fairest way we could 'pay our way' with the county, as well as keeping your subscription rates the same.

You may remember at the AGM no-one stood to replace Andrew as Chair. The committee has been rotating this role around. If you would like to stand as Chair, please make yourself known to the committee via secretary@nbbka.org

If you have any thoughts or comments about the newsletter, and the association's activities, please contact Sue Lang on honeyshow@nbbka.org

Bucks County News

As you know, we are affiliated to Bucks County Beekeepers, and through them the British Beekeepers Association. Their website is <http://www.buckscountybeekeepers.co.uk/> It's worth keeping an eye on their *What's On* page, as all the associations (Mid Bucks, High Wycombe, Chalfonts) advertise their talks, courses etc.

Swarm List 2017

This is available on the BBKA website:

http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/do_you_have_a_swarm.php

If you wish to be included in the 2017 directory, please update your preferences within 'Members Area/Edit your profile' on our website, www.NBBKA.org, and we will use that to feed the update to BBKA. Please note, this is only done once during the season, so you must be able to commit to collecting swarms for the whole season.

Events

Swarm Control talk

A subject that every beekeeper struggles with on occasion. Fiona is leading a talk on Tuesday 14th March, at Monkston Park Community Centre, Milton Keynes, MK10 9FJ. Starting at 7.30 pm. This is a free talk to all members, and will cover the reasons why bees swarm, and several methods of controlling it. There will be a number of empty hives there so that it will be as practical as possible. A very timely talk if the weather continues to be mild – spring is on its way!

Please note, your SatNav may not take you to the correct address, look for the Fish & Chip Shop and Co-op on your left, the community centre is just past that with parking at the rear. If there isn't enough parking, use the car park of the Primary School which is opposite.

Beginners classes

Classes have now started over at Hazebury School. Led by Fiona Eelbeck, several members will be delivering various aspects of the course. We are using the Haynes Manual of Beekeeping by Claire & Adrian Waring as the basis of the course.

Apiary Training Days

Sessions in the training apiary at Cosgrove, led by Terry Lock, will start around the end of April, weather permitting. Whilst these are intended for the students on the Beginners course to have some hands on time with the associations bees, all members are welcome to turn up and help. They are held each Saturday starting at 2pm.

Full details including a map, are on the associations website nbbka.org within the Members area. You will need your BBKA membership number to log in with.

Improvers Group

If you have been keeping bees for a couple of years now, and would like to improve your beekeeping knowledge, consider joining an Improvers Group. This is a study group, led by Fiona and Andrew Eelbeck. Whilst you may wish to study more for one of the BBKA Modules, this group is more around practical beekeeping, and learning how to care for your bees better. Contact Fiona or Andrew for more info, their details are in the Year Book section of the Membership area on our website.

Seasonal notes for March and April

Here are seasonal notes from 60-year beekeeper Andrew Beer

When I used to run the "100 yards" (yes, I could just about do that then!) the pre-start orders were "Get Ready", "Get Set" and "Go". Note no guns. Our bees are now - and so should we be - at the "Get Set" stage, and there will be straining at the leash for "Go". Go means when we have had a week or two of good flying weather enabling us and our bees to get about outside in lovely warm sunshine. More of that later. The point to emphasise is that any timings for operations are weather-dependent and not ruled by the calendar.

JOBS TO GET READY

1. Have your colonies got at least 15 lb of **stores** (a standard BS deep frame holds 5 - 6 lb) and can the inmates reach it? Once March is under way, unless we have a long spell of sub-zero temperatures it will be safe to give liquid syrup feed (- I always use 1 pint water/2 lb sugar mix) - if really cold continue with fondant, March is said to be THE Killer Month for bees - but it must be by inverted feed bucket or similar container, placed on the brood frames directly over the cluster (- bucket needs to be placed within an eke). NB. You can invert bucket over a feed hole, but will the colony find it if they are at some distance from it? This is the winter/spring problem. Hungry but cold bees stay put; they would - if they thought - prefer to be hungry rather than to freeze to death by leaving the cluster. You need to check now (however heavy the deep box is) that bees are IN CONTACT WITH FOOD. I am being really serious, so look down the faces of brood frames (a torch helps), and if there is no feed give them some. In addition, if you have a really weak colony (say a large "fist" of bees over a couple of frames), help them on their way by removing good food frames not covered in bees, decapping them and placing

them on either side of the cluster, or if none do this with two empty frames within the hive after trickling some syrup on to the combs.

2. **Clean floors.** NB. Best done by two people. Lift the wood body off the floor. If floor is mesh, probably all that is necessary is to brush off dead bees, debris etc., if solid replace with a clean floor.

3. **A first peek.** Can I explain that I now use coverboards with two-inch deep lips on one side. This enables the boards to be used as a conventional coverboard in summer, but for pests or disease treatments and feeding, the boards are reversed. This makes "peeking" very easy even in mid-winter! On a day when it is not so cold that escaping bees cannot safely get back to their hives, have a look. If you see a mass of contented bees, close it up. All is probably well, and interference may be counter-productive (- but do check for stores as above). If you see bees running around over combs, the absence of a cluster or badly stained frames or boxes, take an unoccupied frame and then work towards the bees quietly. Things you may find; things to do: -

a) No brood. The stock is probably queenless, but provided it is not being robbed you can leave it for a couple of weeks and then check again. NOTE: If we have had a long cold spell the queen could have stopped laying, and some colonies are notoriously slow starters. When you are satisfied that it is queenless, early on a good flying day, shake-off the bees in front of a strong flying colony. They will enter their new home.

b) All or mostly sealed drone brood, little or no worker brood in solid patches, ie. not higgledy piggledy, you have a drone-laying queen. Kill her and unite by newspaper with a strong sound colony.

c) Scattered capped drone brood. You have laying workers. The trouble is, if you simply unite to a queenright colony, the laying workers may kill any queen, so proceed instead as follows. Early on a good flying day, lift the troubled colony and place it, say, 10 ft. away, entrance at 90 degrees turned away from its original direction. Place a floor, super with frames and cover, in the place of the troubled colony. That night go back to the bees and unite them in the new box by newspaper method (as above) to a good stock. The bees now without laying workers will happily adopt their new home. The old box left with the laying workers will stay put, not having flown for some time. Go back on next good flying day and chuck the bees onto the ground and leave to their own devices.

NEVER DO ANY OF THESE MOVES IF DISEASE IS SUSPECTED, BUT TAKE ADVICE INSTEAD.

d) Consider pollen substitute feed. The natural supply in these parts is always good, so I have never bothered.

JOB'S FOR WHEN WE REACH GO (see above)

The point is that the bees need a week or so of good flying weather to forget the winter blues and go into spring mode, before a detailed inspection is made. Going into colonies earlier for that purpose runs the risk of bees balling and killing their queen. As stated already, timing is weather-dependent.

4. **Check stores** as above.

5. Quickly **inspect** the combs. You may find contorted combs, combs full of stale pollen, combs with crystallized stores. If you cannot replace them at once, place against side walls so that they can be replaced easily later. A good rule of thumb is to replace every brood frame with a two-year cycle (- a year date on the top bar of each frame makes this task very easy.)

6. Whenever you go through a colony be watchful for **disease**, but make this inspection spring disease-inspection day (- and do another in August).

7. Mark the **queen** with the appropriate year colour: queens born in 2016 should be marked white.

8. Ensure the colony has enough **space**. The general rule is that when the colony occupies all but two frames in a brood box, it is time to super. Try supering without a queen excluder for a week or two to encourage the bees to go upstairs - the risk is that the queen may go upstairs too, in which case you will have to drive her down. NB. A good dose of smoke usually does the trick!

9. "Go" marks the beginning of the 7-day **inspection regime**. It is a good idea to diarise the inspection days until at least the beginning of July, so that your bees' needs are prioritised - swarms wait for no-one if even one queen cell is missed.

SOME OTHER THOUGHTS

10. If discarded frames contain food and **THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF DISEASE**, rather than waste the food reduce the feed holes in a clearer board to one single bee space - say a diameter of three-eighths of an inch - decap the frames with food and put in a box placed over the brood box. The bees will clear it quickly as they "think" they are robbing out another colony.

11. Many now use the Bailey Frame change to organise a complete change of brood frames every two years. If varroa levels are high, an alternative is to shake the whole colony into a completely new clean hive, but do delay until a good flow is on and the weather is really warm, to avoid stress to bees.

12. As we all know, we could have, say, a lovely March and then winter returns with a vengeance, and you need to feed, but you have a honey super in place and don't want, very rightly, the feed to contaminate any honey in it. A way round this is as follows. Lift the super off and put on one side. Now put an inverted bucket of feed over the cluster (see above) and put an eke in place to house it. Put a cover board above the eke, with a restricted bee space as described earlier, and then put the super on top. The bees will then have no incentive to store feed in the super.

Like many members of the Association, I am very happy to give my views on any problems you have. Landline 01525 240 235 or mobile 0796 827 7247.

Regards,

Andrew Beer