

## North Bucks Beekeepers' Association

Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA

NEWSLETTER: March 2009

**February** was quite an eventful month in terms of meetings and prolonged snow and cold. I peeped under the roofs of my three hives to see what the candy situation was. No 1 hive had just about consumed all their candy in a month! I rushed down to the house and made another block. Luckily I noticed in time. This was the very hive that Margaret Holland and I did the shook swarm on last June. Hives 2 and 3 still had a sizeable block each. As Ian Homer said, this is the time when colonies can die of starvation, so do make sure the bees have something to sustain them.



On 12<sup>th</sup> February several of our members attended the screening of the Cooperative's new advertising campaign. We also saw a preview of a film about the demise of the honey bee which will be released in the autumn. A representative from the NFU was present and there was plenty of information from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. After the films, Libby Culshaw gave a short talk about what people can do to help save the bee. Sue Bird and Mike Bensley had a sales stand and also answered questions.

We had another great talk from Regional Bee Inspector **Ian Homer**. Following a heart attack last year, Ian is retiring from being a full time inspector but he may become involved with setting up training programmes. I can safely say that all from NBBKA wish him well for the future.

**HOT OFF THE PRESS!** You can't be more up to date than this – today, 28<sup>th</sup> Feb, NBBKA held a microscopy session under the guidance of **Martin Buckle** at Hazeley School. It was an absolutely fascinating experience. Martin, with his vast knowledge of scientific matters, explained to us how to get the very best from a microscope. He showed us various types of microscope from the past up to the present day. He demonstrated how to make slides for viewing. Then we were let loose in the laboratory to make our own slides from the great variety of items Martin had brought – hive debris, bees, honey samples, pollen. Honey bees are so amazing when viewed under the microscope. One can see stubby little hairs on the wings, fluffy hair on their backs which appear to be similar to feathers or the feathery water plants, which waft in the current. To see the scales of the abdomen, the eyes, antennae, tongue and legs in close up, glorious technicolour is awesome. You missed a treat if you didn't come. It was heartening to have two prospective beekeepers with us of twelve and thirteen years. They were as entranced as the adults.



**Words of Wisdom** from **Ian Homer**. Ian came to Rectory Cottages on the 18<sup>th</sup> and gave us a most informative and practical talk on **Eureka Moments in Beekeeping**.

- Every time you open a colony you should be making a contribution to varroa control, even if it is only using an insert. Count the mites and monitor the levels.
- Any food producing animals come under the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. Keep a note of the product and batch number. If residues are found in your honey you could be liable to prosecution. Keep notes, not least for your own convenience
- Keep honeys separate e.g. spring/summer. Regulations apply whether you give away the honey or sell it. Trading Standards Officers can sample honey and remove a whole batch from sale. Therefore it is better have small batches.
- In their natural state, honey bees nest high up. So stand your hives at a better height, bearing in mind it must be comfortable for you. Setting your hives a little higher will relieve bending and lifting from too low down. The more comfortable you feel, the more confident you will be and you will handle the bees better.
- Knock a large hive staple into the top edge of your dummy boards. It is then easily hooked out with the hive tool.
- When you take a swarm use a queen excluder **under** the brood box in which there is undrawn foundation. Put the swarm in. After three days the bees will have drawn the comb and the queen will be laying. Then you may remove the queen excluder.
- You don't have to wait for disease before you change combs. Old comb is a potential disease spreader so destroy it. Ian recommends changing the combs in one go as this removes the majority exposure to disease.
- Every year Ian and his wife Ruth try a new idea. If it is good they adopt it. Last year they came to the conclusion that open mesh floors improve ventilation/circulation and resulted in stronger bees.
- It is possible to buy small galvanised dustbins with lids about 18"- 2' high. These are ideal for containing a smoker. The car can be smoke free, the risk of fire is minimised. Ian also bungs the end of the smoker with a cork with a plastic top (think Harveys Bristol Cream) this stops the fuel burning away when in transit.
- Whilst on the subject of smokers, in the past Ian has used card egg boxes for smoker fuel. He has discovered **grass nuts**. These are animal feed pellets and can be purchased from agricultural suppliers. Be sure you buy **additive free pellets**. A 25 kg bag costs £7.00. Ian finds a half filled, large smoker will last for 6 hours. Must be a good deal, no more running out of smoke at a crucial time!
- Rub Vaseline (it must be a petroleum based jelly) along the runners and on the undersides of frames –the bees will not make brace comb or stick everything up with propolis. The frames will float along!
- Ian suggests that associations twin with each other in order to improve genetic stock. For example NBBKA twin with North Devon or similar. If you have any thoughts on this, please contact a committee member.
- Keeping records cannot be stressed enough. Ian gave us all a handout with an excellent hive record sheet. The handout also showed us exactly the right size for a bee space. Too small and the bees will propolise the gap, too big and they will build brace comb
- If you have frames at the end of the season with honey in then put these in a super **under** the brood box. The bees will use this for stores.
- By moving the brood nest up: mice don't feel the heat and get in; you increase the area for ventilation so you will not get mouldy comb; if the spring inspection is late the bees will have room to lay and so swarming is reduced.
- If you've had the super under the brood box all winter and it is clean, simply put it on top of the brood box when the new season starts. It will smell right to the bees and they will go up without further ado.
- **THANK YOU, IAN, FOR THESE VERY USEFUL TIPS.**

## Apiary Notes From Ken

This winter has tested colonies severely. There have been two or more long periods where temperatures stayed below freezing. The clusters of bees in the hives will have drawn ever tighter together to conserve heat and would have been unable to move to a new location within the hive. It is possible for the stores in contact with the cluster to be consumed and further nourishment then to be out of reach. I found one such colony, now dead, with many bees' heads tucked into empty cells. It was a large double brood colony, fit and well, with a good comb of sealed brood. Ample stores were just out of reach.

Another colony was found, which had contracted dysentery, caused probably by a virus. Both of the sets of combs are already being fumigated with 80% acetic acid for about ten days; about a quarter to a half pint poured onto a large pad of cotton wool, and sealed up with a floor, crown board and roof. This is only worth doing if the combs are in good condition and there is no sign of brood disease. Otherwise cut out and burn the combs, scrape the frames and sterilize them by boiling in a solution of washing soda if you have a large enough container.

The important action is to close up any hive where bees have died as soon as you make the discovery. Bees from other colonies quickly find an undefended hive and will investigate and rob out any stores, picking up disease, should there be any, in the process. If you have doubts as to why a colony has died, try to contact one of the experienced members to give an opinion.

More colonies die out in the next two months from starvation than ever die from other reasons. The rate of consumption of food accelerates rapidly as the queen increases her rate of egg laying. If you are in doubt about the stores level and you have baker's fondant, then put a slice of that directly above the cluster. Choose a warmer day to remove the crown board; if a colony feels very light, then get on some feed immediately whatever the temperature. Thick syrup can also be fed from a contact feeder; any jar with a metal lid can have a few holes punched in the lid with a thin nail, filled with syrup, (one pound of sugar to half a pint of water), inverted over the feedhole, directly above the bees. Some overwintered nuclei have been taking liquid feed this spring very quickly. Shake a few drops down to encourage them up. Once you commence feeding, in whatever form, it must be kept up. It is likely that the cluster will move up to take feed; to suddenly terminate the supply would be to abandon the bees, particularly if temperatures fall again, as they are quite likely to do at this time of the year. If, upon lifting the crown board you see several combs with seams of sealed stores, then the colony is still well found.

The colonies were flying very well in the middle of the day, today, Friday 27<sup>th</sup>. February. A light yellow pollen was being carried in-always a good sign. Most of the colonies were covering much of the width of the brood chambers, many on double brood chambers. This year I am feeding pollen substitute, a protein food. This is made up with a thin sugar syrup and is eagerly taken by the bees.

**Forage** The aconites are nearly over, they are a good early source of pollen. There are still a few flowers on the mahonia which the bees have been working. It is a most valuable autumn/winter bee plant and has been flowering since October. Hellebores are beginning to open. The bees are working on catkins and crocus. Try to provide a water source if you can. A shallow plant saucer is better than nothing. Put some stones or twigs in so that the bees can pull themselves out of the water if they get blown



in.



**Message from Andrew Beer** Andrew is looking for a beekeeping partner to work with occasionally. He has a possible site in Great Brickhill where some hives can be placed. For more information contact Andrew on: 01525 240235

**Message from Beulah Cullen** Beulah is planning to run a **Practical General Husbandry Course** at the Mid Bucks BKA apiary at Stoke Mandeville, beginning Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May at 18.00hrs, to allow for maximum daylight. Stoke Mandeville being midway for all Bucks Beekeepers. The course will last for 8 weeks but will be partly weather dependent. Beulah's preference is that participants should already hold the Basic Certificate so that more beekeepers will take the BBKA General Husbandry Exam so that we can then have more Assessors for the Basic Assessment. There will be no pressure put on participants to take the exam if they don't wish to.

The course will cover:

- Hygiene
- Comb change
- Disease recognition
- Swarm control
- Queen rearing

If you are interested and have the Basic Certificate, please contact Beulah as soon as possible on: 01895 234704

### **This Month**

Bucks County Beekeepers' Association **13<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL SEMINAR**

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 10.00 a.m. – 4.15 p.m. at Wendover Memorial Hall, Wendover HP22 6HF

- 10:00 **Meet** for coffee & registration
- 10:30 **Welcome** by the County Chairman - John Catton
- 10:40 **Bee Venom** – Professor David Warrell
- 11:40 **Insect Flight Systems** – Dr. Robin Wooton
- 12:40 **Awards presentation**
- 13:00 **Ploughman's lunch** - Time also to spend visiting the various exhibits & sales stands
- 14:00 **The State of Beekeeping in Britain Today** – Richard Ball
- 15:00 **CCD – Colony Compromise Disorder** – Peter Tomkins
- 16:00 **Closing remarks** by the County President, Bob Hunter

£12 per person, to include refreshments & Ploughman's lunch. Pay at the door, but **please book beforehand** with **John Catton tel: 01494 726616** e-mail: [richard.catton1@ntlworld.com](mailto:richard.catton1@ntlworld.com)

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March the Beginners' Beekeeping Course starts at Hazeley School. Twenty people have signed up. If you require information contact Chris Jay: 01908 373465

**Please note** there will be **no** Newsletter for April because I will be making a Circumnavigation of Papua New Guinea. Ken has kindly offered to send his Apiary Notes and any other important notices to you.

### **Buzz Word**

Did you know that cars nowadays have pollen filters? I found this out when I collected my car from a recent service and noticed a £12.95 addition to my bill for the renewal of my pollen filters, which I didn't know I had. Aren't I lucky?

If you would like to comment on or contribute to our Newsletter contact Libby Culshaw 01908 375968  
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