

North Bucks Beekeepers' Association

Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA

Newsletter: August 2009

July has been yet another busy month, in spite of the sudden heavy rains. Members have been involved with all sorts of things. Ed Reney was showing the Beginners, at the Bradwell Abbey apiary, how to deal with brace comb when a photographer, Chris Mitchell, happened by and asked if he could take photographs. He took 39 splendid photos, two are copied here. To see the others go to: www.mitch.myzen.co.uk/Togfest09/Togfest2009/Bees/index.html



Nicola Smith reports - **“The Bee Disease and Husbandry Day** in Great Missenden on 5th July was great. It was very well attended, and it was good to meet beekeepers from other parts of Buckinghamshire and further afield. A couple of people came from as far away as Leeds! Bee Inspectors Ian Homer, Margaret Holland and Julian Parker introduced the main themes, and gave us lots of advice on how to keep our bees healthy and happy, what to look out for and what to do if we find something amiss. As you might guess, there was plenty of discussion and also new ideas! There was information about new threats. Margaret told us about the Small Hive Beetle which is causing major problems in America, and how to recognise it if it arrives here. It wasn't all doom and gloom, though – there do seem to be effective ways of coping with the problems our bees are facing, and at the end of the day I felt much more confident about managing my bees.”

The Bee Safari went very well. It was heartening to have three children with us who were enchanted to see inside the hives and hold frames with bees on. The safari started with Ed Reney's hives at the Open University. A lovely setting with well tended flower beds providing varied forage all year round. There have been bees on this site for 100 years. Margaret Holland, our Seasonal Bee Inspector, did the honours again and showed us how to look out for various problems at each different location. She explained how chalk brood forms and advised re-queening if it is very bad. You always learn something new at each apiary – Ed puts a square of carpet on top of his crown boards. This gives all year round insulation and absorbs any moisture but it has to be good quality carpet with a hessian back, not a foam one. The carpet doubles up as a manipulating cloth. Ed also says it helps to keep a lot of bugs at bay. We proceeded to Bradwell Abbey where we had a sunny picnic and Cynthia treated us all to a selection of her delicious honey cakes. Margaret showed us the latest field kit for identifying EFB. Also how to take ready mixed oxalic acid into a syringe then spread 5 mls along each seam. She showed us two Small Hive Beetles in a jar so that we can recognise them if ever they appear here. In Hive 1, Margaret pointed out the evidence of queen mating with various drones – the worker bees were different colours. We learnt that pupae which have not emerged and bees with deformed wings are signs of severe varroa infestation. Luckily the colonies were not too bad. A couple of wax moth larvae poked up when the frame was tapped.

Onto the apiary at Cosgrove where we actually looked at 4 colonies. The first one had a virgin queen – we saw her but there was no brood. However, there were stores, drones and workers. Hive 2 was strong and healthy but by contrast Hive 3 hadn't drawn out any comb which indicates an absence of a laying queen. Chris was able to mark the queen in Hive 4, she seemed to be a drone layer. Margaret showed us how to monitor the number of varroa mites by putting the hive debris into a jar of meths. The mites float to the top and are easier to count. The meths can then be filtered and used again.

A very big thank you to Margaret for making it such an informative and interesting day.



We have received a **Grassroots Grants Funding** cheque for £900.00 from the **Milton Keynes Community Foundation**. A variety of equipment has been ordered that will be of great help for educational purposes. The condition of the grant is that we use the MKCF's logos as an acknowledgement of the grant. Many thanks to the grant committee for giving us the full Grassroots grant. Apparently our application was warmly received.



Managed by the Community Development Foundation
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August Beginners' apiary meetings continue at both apiary sites in the week and at the weekend. Contact Ed or Chris for dates and times.

Saturday 1st we will be visiting **Buzz Works** in Hitchin.

The project to create a bee centre to educate the public and promote the craft of beekeeping started in 2007. There is now a bee shed and public viewing gallery overlooking eight hives, also a log cabin which is to become the Discovery Centre. The bee garden features plants that will hopefully stimulate the public interest in planting for bees in their own gardens. Robin Dartington has kindly agreed to show us round at 1.00 p.m. **We should leave Bletchley at midday** (contact Libby Culshaw 01908 375968) or meet there, if you prefer. The postcode is SG5 1XT. Aim for the village of Ickleford, opposite the church take a right turn. After one field you will see house No 178, follow the track beside this house and it will lead you to the BuzzWorks' car park. There are picnic benches if you would like to take a picnic

Sue Bird is to have a stand at the **Bucks County Show 27th August**. If you would like to help with the observation hive, contact Sue. She is also running a children's bee session for the Park's Trust next week.

Apiary Notes from Ken

Late July and the season has quietened down. Some of the bees, as forecast, have become very defensive. Care now has to be taken not to expose honey in any form in the open air, particularly wet supers resulting from honey extraction: equally, spillage of syrup and opening colonies for lengthy inspections are to be avoided. Wasps are immediately present as soon as a colony's crown board is removed. Bees poured out of the entrance of one colony because I nailed a new number onto an adjacent colony, without smoke. The guards were around my ankles straightway and then began to disturb other colonies nearby. Watch out! It always pays to have a smoker lit, no matter how small the procedure at this time of the year.

Forage for bees is now very limited as the blackberry has finished blossoming. Clover is still being worked a little. There is ivy to come, but not for a few weeks. Keep an eye on the level of stores in colonies, including pollen. I looked into three colonies resulting from making artificial swarms late in June, to check whether the new queens were in lay. All three were almost out of both honey and pollen. This leads to colony stress. I have some pollen substitute left over from the spring and will make use of this. I was also able to transfer some frames of capped stores from another very strong colony in the same apiary.

Sugar syrup alone consists of empty calories. Honey, the natural food, contains traces of mineral salts and pollen. There are two feed additives produced by VITA: VITA GREEN and VITA GOLD. These are sold in bottles for treatment, as a feed additive, in two sizes, for five or for twenty colonies. I haven't tried either, but I intend using some this late summer/autumn. VITA is a company which carries out detailed research before they place a product on the market. VITA GOLD is recommended for adding to autumn feeds and is said to reduce *Nosema* spores and increase bee population. Small amounts of pollen substitute can be obtained from Thornes.

The bees that are reared in the next two months are those which take the colony into and through the winter, continuing to survive until the following spring, even rearing next year's spring and early summer workers. They therefore need to be well fed during *their* development and during the early days after hatching: they need to "fatten up", prepared to face the tasks ahead. They can't fatten up on sugar syrup alone, as this is an energy provider only. Pollen is the protein food. Pollen shortage is less of a problem in town areas where gardens provide a variety of forage in late summer and early autumn. Apparently bees need a range of pollens to thrive and this is not always possible in country areas where monocultures of rape and beans are commonplace.

By the way, don't put any varroa treatments or feed additives into colonies until after the removal of the honey harvest.

When returning wet supers to colonies following honey extraction, I often place them over an empty super or brood chamber, on top of the colony. I find that the bees are more likely to completely clean out the super frames, carrying the honey down into the brood chamber, rather than concentrating it into a few frames in the centre of the supers. The aim is to get the supers thoroughly dried out for winter storage. Only return wet supers at dusk to avoid turmoil in the apiary.

Have you decided on a varroa treatment yet? Are you monitoring for natural mite fall? Monitoring entails some system where you collect the fall-out from a colony over a period of, say, a week, using a wire mesh or expanded metal screen. You then analyse this dross, which can include wax scales, particles of pollen, nibblings from hatching brood cappings, mites and much more. Count the number of mites and if you are seeing numbers into the tens for a single week, then you have a problem that must be tackled. Mites can be separated from other dross by putting it all into some methylated spirits, when the mites, little beetles and bees legs float, but everything else sinks.

Only commence feeding in early August if there is a shortage of stores, otherwise too much breeding can be triggered. Aim to complete feeding by mid September, using thick syrup, 5 lbs. Sugar to 2 ½ pints of water. This will give the bees time to process and seal it over. Aim to have forty pounds of

stores to keep the colony well supplied through to the following spring-the equivalent of eight full brood combs.

A final colony inspection should be carried out in the first half of September, making a note of stores and brood - there should still be brood on several combs.

Lastly, begin closing down the size of hive entrances now, especially of small or developing colonies. The smaller entrance is more easily defended.

Sadly for us these are the last of the apiary notes from Ken. **Many, many thanks, Ken for all the notes over the years. We will miss them.**

Forage Ken has covered forage. I still have thyme in flower which is being worked hard and the rosebay willow herb is going strong and providing a good source of pollen, which is a greeny-blue-grey colour.



Nobody spotted last month's *deliberate mistake!* The very popular bee plant is campanula ... of course! Apologies to Creeping Jenny which is a straggly, yellow flowering plant that creeps through my campanula.

Confirmation has come through that the **Bees Abroad** Trip to see the **Honey Hunters of Nepal** is to go ahead from 22nd November – 6th December. It is an amazing experience. Both Martin Buckle and I have made this trek. We are happy to talk to you about it if you feel you would like to go.

info@beesabroad.org.uk or www.beesabroad.org.uk

Queenie's Kitchen

With high hopes of more summer to come here is a very simple **Honey and Lemon Salad Dressing**. In a screw-topped jar put: 4 tabs lemon juice, 1 tab clear honey, 3 tabs olive oil, salt and pepper. Adjust ingredients and seasoning to taste. Shake well to blend just before serving. This makes ¼ pint.

Variations on this: add 1 tab mustard or crush 1 clove of garlic and add, or add 1 tab soy sauce, or take a ½ piece of root ginger, peel and finely chop it then add it to the jar.

I suppose if one was feeling really reckless you could try putting the lot in together! Don't forget to throw in at least one finely chopped chilli for extreme excitement. This should sort out who is paying attention to the Newsletter!

Buzz Words Did you know.....

- That pigeon fanciers feed honey and garlic to their pigeons before a race?
- If you rub honey into a bee sting, it relieves the stinging, burning sensation and prevents swelling?

Best Wishes You will be sorry to know that the very first lady chairman of NBBKA, **Elsbeth Plumb**, has been taken ill and is to start hospital treatment this week. We send you our very best wishes, Elsbeth. Get well soon.



And finally – Congratulations to Sue Bird for winning a first at the Royal Show with her dark honey. **Very well done!**

If you would like to comment upon or contribute to our Newsletter, contact Libby Culshaw 01908 375968 laviniaiculshaw@hotmail.com