**North Bucks Beekeepers' Association**
Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA
Newsletter: February 2010

Hoorah hoorah and jubilations! We actually had a fine sunny day on the 17th January. I was much relieved to see my bees flying and knew that they had survived the minus 13 degree temperatures of the past week. Bees at hive number 2 were dragging out dead bees so from that I deduce that the queen may be starting to lay. I was always taught never touch your hives during the winter months. In 26 years of beekeeping I have followed this advice and have not even hefted the hives, probably because I am not tall enough or strong enough. The only time I do go near though is to very gently slip a block of candy over the hole in each crown board. This I was able to do that very afternoon.

January Yet again Martin the Magician (aka **Martin Buckle**) got our beekeeping year off to a cracking start. As I introduced him, I said that Martin never fails to surprise and enlighten us. This proved to be very true and those who were present can testify that Martin not only gave us a fascinating talk on skeps, their construction and materials (how lovely to use bramble and purple moor grass in a skep) but in true magician style, he conjured something out of a heavily propolised skep, not dissimilar to a rabbit out of a top hat. I jumped on a chair and everyone moved quite quickly, with Bob offering up a Marks & Spencer chocolate chip cookie. By all accounts Martin continued his magic on the way home with three more surprises. Another bit of sorcery occurred with the very same skep at the Beds BKA talk the following night! See what fun you miss by not coming to meetings!
For more thrills and spills don't forget Martin's **Skep Making Course** on **15-16 May** at Rectory Cottages. The fee is £20.00 which covers the cost of the materials and your own fid. Contact Libby Culshaw to put your name on the list. Only a couple of places left.

## The Bee Shed 2009 from Andrew and Fiona Eelbeck

Early April and the gate to a possible apiary site was open when Fiona was going by. She popped in to ask about the possibility of siting bee hives there. The reply was that he already had bees and pointed to where the bees were. They were coming out of the side of an old shed on the site.

When Fiona returned and told me of this we both went up and had a look. There were dark bees coming out of a circular hole about 8 feet off the ground. To the left in the next panel was another hole and yellowish bees were emerging. There were two colonies in the shed. We had permission to remove them and also to put our own bee hives in a corner on the site.

The first weekend we returned to try and remove the first colony. The bees were located in the gap between wood on the outside and plasterboard on the inside. The inside of the shed was piled full of all sorts of things that were not going to be moved so it had to be from the outside. The wooden panels were removed to expose large amounts of wax, bees and brood and a small amount of stores. By this time bees were flying around all over the place. The brood area was removed and transferred to a hive but the bees did not want to go in. As the wooden panels had been removed the hole in the next panel looked like their home so the bees drifted towards the other colony. They did not handle anything like a swarm and most of the bees ended up in the other colony. We had seen no sign of the queen which would have made things easier.

The next weekend we had another go on the, by now, increased colony. The panels were removed to reveal wax, brood, yellow and black bees and stores. The wax this time was arranged more like viewing a super in regular rows inside the panel. The brood area was cut out and transferred into the hive and after a great deal of coaxing the bees transferred into the hive. A few days later we transferred them to another apiary.

Both panels of the bee shed were nailed up and everything made tidy. However, in May bees were once again flying from one of the holes. A swarm had arrived and taken up residence. The swarm was not from our bees. We have left the bees in their residence and maybe next spring we will have another go and try and improve on the removal technique. Removing all the wooden panels in one go did seem to confuse the bees as to which entrance was which.

It was also interesting to see the two colonies had survived over the winter without any human imposed "treatment". Neither of the colonies had a great deal of stores though recent nectar had been gathered. Some of the wax was black and they had obviously been in residence for some time. Now I know where the queen I bought had swarmed to one year... the direction they headed off in did match this location.

Fiona ended up using this apiary as a successful queen rearing colony. Eight queens produced from 9 is a good achievement for the first time. One of the new queens ended up being so prolific it grew into a full colony and was successfully moved to borage and brought in a good crop.

Photos of the Bee Shed at the end of the Newsletter.

## Queen Rearing Course at Stoneleigh 2009

Again in April Fiona, Pam Koniesky and I attended the Queen Rearing course at the Stoneleigh convention. The course ran over one and a half days and was led by Clive de Bruyn. We attended various lectures on the Friday and after the shopping scrummage on Saturday morning headed over for the course. Clive is a very entertaining and knowledgeable speaker about all thing bees (and other things as well) and we had a really good time. The weather turned out well for both days and the course was a mixture of theory and practical. We were put into groups of 8 and could have a go at the various aspects of queen rearing. We all had a go at grafting new emerged lava into wax queen cells. We created a queen raising colony - a special larger nuc box into which were transferred two frames of honey and two frames of pollen. About 7 frames of bees were shaken in and then closed up and put in a cool dark place. This colony was left for 4 hours, ideally 8 -12 hours, by which time they will certainly have discovered they are very queenless. The newly grafted wax queen cups were then transferred into the middle of the queen raising box and left to draw out queen cells. We returned on Sunday to see some success in starting queen cells. We also made up about half a dozen mating hives.

Our queen raising started off well. Queen raising wax cups were produced and all ready to take grafts on the specially adapted frame bar. A six frame nucleus had been modified to become a queen rearing colony by adding extra ventilation. Now we were into preventing colonies swarming and we had an abundance of queen cells. Some of these were transferred into a queen rearing nucleus and produced new queens successfully.

Doing the course is very worthwhile and also having a go after the course on our colonies has been very fruitful and an enjoyable learning experience. Note it is a queen rearing course and not a queen breeding course. Once you can rear queens successfully then you can look at breeding queens as said by Clive. Should there be another queen rearing course, do try and make time but book early Jan/Feb time as it does fill up very quickly.

As an aside, the Bee Craft magazine had a write up on the queen rearing course with a group photograph. We are there somewhere in the group. There is also a photograph of Bob Brown past president of the Scottish Beekeepers' Association. Bob Brown was my grandfather's neighbour and introduced to bee keeping by my grandfather. I was introduced to bees at a young age and used to enjoy watching bees landing and taking off from the hive.

Chief Scribe – Andrew Eelbeck  Chief Queen Rearer – Fiona Eelbeck