

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter March 2014

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Calendar at-a-glance

4 th -6 th April	BBKA Spring Convention, Harper Adams College
11 th October	Bucks county autumn gathering, Aylesbury

Forthcoming events

BBKA Spring Convention, Friday 4th April – Sunday 6th April at Harper Adams College near Wellington, Shropshire. NB: It is understood that although the Bee Trade will be a Stoneleigh on 1st March, there will be limited trade representation at Harper Adams, too.

Bucks Authum Gathering. Venue will be the Church of the Good Shepherd, Aylesbury, on 11th October. Hosted by Mid-Bucks. This will be another first-class day out and is again unmissable!

Regular Columns

March Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

So far the 2013/2014 winter has been very easy for our bees: no snow and virtually no frost. I write this on the first day of March, the first day of spring but you do not need me to tell you that winter may still arrive/come back with a sting! My experience out in my apiaries is that stocks are running through stores pretty quickly, so we need to keep a careful eye on that. I shall continue with fondant at least until the last week in March, and then turn to stimulative feeding with syrup for the oilseed rape crop. As usual these timings are weather-dependent, so we need to be flexible.



I am waiting for about three warm flying days, after which I shall make my first inspection. The purpose of this first visit is to check that all seems well rather than to make a 'comb by comb' analysis – too detailed an inspection and the ladies may take fright and harm their queen. What does 'all seems well' mean? A contented cluster of bees, no sign of faecal deposits on hives inside or out or on combs, normal brood pattern for March, nice compact patches of sealed worker brood and sufficient stores within reach of the cluster. At this time of the year it is no good having stores in an outside frame: they must be in contact with the bees because if the weather freezes up, bees stay put in the cluster and won't reach them. To remedy the position, decap a frame with stores positioned outside the cluster and with no bees on it, and place it next to the cluster, moving unoccupied frames to make space for it. Your action will be an immediate boost to the colony. Don't worry too much if the cluster is small but tight, providing the bees otherwise seem happy. The smallest stock at this time of the year may later prove your best. Incidentally, one of the reasons why we are getting small stocks in spring is the impact of varroa shortening bee lives, resulting in colony numbers being much lower in spring, say not a normal of about 7000 but say 3000 or less. Apart from ongoing varroa treatments, one thing we can do is to help a colony short of numbers. Wait until the weather is warm and spring is well under way (say when apple blossom is out), take a frame of soon-to-emerge worker brood from a healthy colony, which can spare it and give it to the weaker one.

And what if things do not look good? I am going to cop out here slightly by asking you to refer to my article in the March 2014 BeeCraft article, where detailed advice is given with lots of lovely (or perhaps not so lovely) photos. But do speak to one of our experienced beekeepers if you have any worries or concerns. Remember – any loss by you of any of YOUR bees is a loss to US all. We, you and the bees are all part of the North Bucks family.

Other things to think about and do:

HIVE BRANDING. This is a very good moment to get hives branded. Remember, hive thefts appear to be on the increase.

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE SEASON. This really is the 'last call' to get equipment repaired and cleaned, frames made and fitted-out. The first swarm in our part of the county has been known to emerge in the first week of April, a strong possibility after this very mild winter. You have been warned.

QUEEN RAISING. As I have indicated to some of you, I am very happy to run a queen-raising course this year: a technical session at Rectory Cottages in April and practical sessions at my apiaries in mid-June onwards. Hopefully this should produce some nucs for beginners to take over later in the year. NB I use commercial frames so those using, say, BS frames, will need to do a transfer, probably in spring 2015. For that I invite donations to Bees Abroad (every £20 - £30 gets a new beekeeper established somewhere in Africa and a child educated year in, year out. The rewards are as great as that!)

Any worries: ring me on 01525 240 235.

Best regards,
Andrew Beer