

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter January 2016

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Calendar at-a-glance

11 th January	Fortnightly social evening at the Shoulder of Mutton pub
22 nd January	<i>Mid-Bucks lecture: "Bee-ing in Ghana", Stewkley Methodist Hall</i>
2 nd February	Lecture: "Raising Nucs", Stewkley Methodist Hall
19 th February	Bucks County Spring Convention
8 th March	Lecture: "Unusual Ways of Keeping Bees", Shoulder of Mutton pub

Editorial from chairman Andrew Beer

A very happy New Year to you all. I trust you had wonderful Christmases. It always seems to me that the Christmas festivities make the New Year feel far away, but here we are now, a few days in 2016 - and lots of bee things to think about and DO!

It has been a very unusual winter so far- all over the world it would seem. I read that temperatures in the Arctic are some 10c higher than usual, and monsoon rains in South East Asia are light. My colonies are filling whole brood chambers, which clearly means that brood-rearing has continued without a break. For those who normally apply an oxalic acid treatment around this time these strong states of colonies raise an important issue - when to treat - because oxalic acid will clearly kill all open brood. If we now get a couple of weeks in January of really cold weather it will probably be safe to treat in the following warmer spell, but if necessary I shall consider an alternative spring application. Do discuss this problem with me if you wish.

Beginners' classes

These will start on 25 February. More details in next newsletter. Anyone who is interested in helping on the course, please let me know. Beginners should bring hive parts for assembly to the woodworking session.

Forthcoming Talks

May I please remind you that we have a couple of outstanding talks arranged for you, and the details again are:-

Tuesday 2 February at 7.30 pm. - Celia Davis, nationally known beekeeper and writer of several books about bees is coming to talk to us at the Stewkley Methodist Church Hall. The subject is "Nuc It". This talk is a must, whether you are an experienced or inexperienced beekeeper. I guarantee that if you follow just some of Celia's tips you will never, ever, be short of bees. The reverse in fact - more bees, and more importantly, better quality bees. I know Celia has turned down several other invitations to be with us - so please can we have a full audience! The talk is NOT at Rectory Cottages, but at Stewkley Methodist Church Hall, 103 High Street South, Stewkley LU7 0HU. Date/time again: Tuesday 2 February at 7.30 pm. Park along the road outside the Church, or in the yard behind the Church which you enter by a fairly narrow driveway on the south side of the building.

Tuesday 9 March. Our next speaker will be Dr. Fred Ayres of Lancaster Beekeepers. Lancaster Beekeepers for many years have challenged current UK beekeeping methods and thinking, advocating that bees should do more to fend for themselves and be kept naturally, meaning no varroa treatments, no artificial feeding, and removal only of the surplus crop, taken off in April when the winter needs of the colony have been met. You may not agree with all Fred's views, which will be provocative, but a very interesting evening is in store for us.

For this talk we are trying a new format. We will set up the Shoulder of Mutton in "lecture room layout". The talk will be followed by a light buffet: essentially provided out of Association funds but you will be invited to toss in a contribution of a pound (or two) if you wish! We do hope you will come to this talk too. N.B.: To make sure there will be enough food, please let me know if you will be with us by Tuesday 2 March.

County matters

Quite a lot has been happening on the County front. For those who may not know it, our North Bucks Association, with Chalfonts Beekeeping Society, High Wycombe and Mid-Bucks BKA's is affiliated to Bucks County BKA. The affiliation offers tremendous advantages to the local associations, particularly in terms of Education. For example, the County organises the examinations to which each local association's members can enter. This will be ever more important in future years, as the County intends to lead the drive for higher beekeeping standards and play a more active part in maintaining bee health, as services hitherto available through the National Bee Unit and their inspectors have been, and will continue to be, scaled down. Some of our members are already taking advantage of the County services now available. To keep this note short, may I simply send you web links from Derek Atkinson's (Derek is Chairman of Bucks County BKA). The addresses are:

<http://www.buckscountybeekeepers.co.uk/whats-on/microscope-study-group-2016/>

<http://www.buckscountybeekeepers.co.uk/whats-on/20th-annual-spring-seminar/>

<http://www.buckscountybeekeepers.co.uk/whats-on/practical-skills-training-2016/>

Do follow up the details - it is all there for you to enjoy and learn.

Spring Convention

This was not well supported by North Bucks members in 2015 which, given the marvellous programme arranged was a great shame in my view. The Spring Convention is in effect a national event on our doorstep! Again for 2016 a marvellous programme has been arranged for us, as you will see from the accompanying poster. I really do hope you will make a special effort to attend.

This year it is the turn of North Bucks to run the tea and coffee bar during the day, for which we need eight volunteers please. If you are coming, can you please let me know that you can take a turn!

Subscriptions

If you are not yet paid-up can I please urge you to become so, and before 31 January please. Unless you do that I cannot guarantee that you will be included in the Association's return for 2016, which will mean that your membership will cease as will your entitlement to BBKA insurances, BBKA news and other BBKA benefits. It may be helpful if I explain that passing on the BBKA capitation-fee part of the North Bucks subscription is labour intensive and needs to be kept as straightforward as possible, if mistakes are not to creep in at either County or BBKA levels, as happened in 2015 involving a lot of extra work. Once the capitation fee payment for paid-up members has been made in late March to BBKA we will not process any subscriptions subsequently paid during the season. The reason for this is that during the season committee members' time is largely taken up dealing with swarms and the like, and of course their own bees. I hope you will agree this matter of payment of your subscription rests in your own hands. Please sort your subscriptions out in JANUARY, and if you are in any doubt what to do please contact Nick Hinson - membership@nbbka.org

Module Two Exam

Andrew & Fiona Eelbeck write: We are thinking of preparing beekeepers for the following, and the dates. Please advise your interest in doing this exam.

Module 2 seems a good module, exam is the 19 March. Syllabus on BBKA website.

Dates : Candidates closing date to entry of exam 10 February.

26 January 7h30-9h30

9 February 7h30-9h30

23 February 7h30-9h30

8 March 7h30-9h30

Exam 19 March 09h00

Please contact Andrew & Fiona for more information: a.eelbeck@btinternet.com

Equipment

Sometimes in the height of the season it can be difficult for us to keep track of who has borrowed items that belong to the club. In an ideal world we'd have a formal process for signing-out equipment and possessions, but sometimes the bees' needs mean we need to hurry. It's now time to recall borrowed items. Please advise Charles Vaton (charles.vaton@yahoo.co.uk) if you are in possession of any NBBKA equipment.

Seasonal Notes: 2015/2016 interim report by Ken Gorman

I am currently wintering forty colonies in seven apiaries. They were weighed at the end of October and have been check-weighed in the last two days. Feeding had been completed by the middle of September. The colonies are weighed using a spring balance on both sides, adding the two figures together; an accurate measure of total weight.

Most of the colonies are housed in National hives using double brood boxes, with eight frames in each. Wide, hollow dummy frames, one on each side, complete the arrangement. A few colonies were supplied with an empty super of drawn comb, below the single brood box, prior to the commencement of feeding. These colonies were later developers resulting from artificial swarming. Five colonies are housed in WBC hives, using the same eight frame double brood system.

THE STORES

The approximate weight of the equipment—the hive parts, including the frames and bees is known; the stores of honey and pollen, together with feeding of inverted syrup makes up the additional weight. VITA GOLD is added as a supplement, to provide a total winter food store of at least 45 pounds. A final inspection in September confirms the level of stores, with the combs in the top brood box solid with stores, fully capped.

During November and December, there has been an average loss in weight of 4 lbs. 6 ounces. This figure is slightly higher than the recent several years. There are variations: The largest loss in weight for a single colony was 13 lbs.

Six colonies have gained weight during that period. Five of these are in the same apiary at the MK Museum in Wolverton. All colonies are heavy; I hear the same report from several beekeeper friends.

BROOD PRODUCTION

I use home-built varroa floors, with bee proof sampling boards made from bright, white, 2 mm. thick plastic. There is a depth of nearly two inches between the screen and the sampling board. These boards show up varroa mites very clearly, as well as the dark brown seams of the “nibblings” from hatching brood and the lighter colours of uncapped stores. The distribution of the various “nibblings” give an indication of the size and position of the cluster.

INCIDENCE OF VARROA MITES

Prior to a test period, of, say, one week, the boards are withdrawn, washed, dried and re-inserted. There is far less evidence this winter of brood production. Most colonies are dropping no mites over a period of a week. A few, mainly in one apiary, are dropping more than a dozen, with several approaching one hundred. This last group have been treated

using the VARROX VAPORISER and the newly available oxalic acid treatment-API-BIOXAL. In the ensuing week these colonies shed mites in the range fifteen to one hundred. Such colonies will continue to be monitored weekly, in the hope of seeing a rapid tail-off of mites. Another six colonies will receive the same treatment in the next week and a few may receive the trickle (wet) oxalic acid treatment.

THE WEATHER

The first half of winter has been very warm; Daisies, Dandelion and even Blackthorn blossom has been seen. I saw bees working very strongly on Viburnum at the end of December, carrying large pollen loads. It is likely that at no stage have the bees been in tight cluster. A colder spell of weather is due shortly. Maybe all brood production will cease then, making the wet or dry oxalic treatments fully effective, with none of the mites sheltering in cells of capped brood. Although I suspect that brood production is also promoted by the extended length of daylight. Short of taking the colonies apart, it is not always easy to know exactly what is happening within .

During the recent lecture given at Mid-Bucks by a representative from the research team at Sussex University, they do exactly this, killing any brood that is left and then applying an oxalic acid treatment, apparently with no damage to the colonies and killing very close to 100% of mites.

Oxalic acid treatments, but especially the sublimation, (vapour) method, require strict safety precautions to be taken, both when preparing the treatments and when administering-also applying exact amounts of the chemical.

- Ken Gorman