

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter March/April 2016

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Calendar at-a-glance

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| 11 th April | Shoulder of Mutton |
| 21 st May | Pests & Diseases course |
| 25 September | Honey show |

Editorial

The Shoulder of Mutton pub and its lovely staff are an integral part of NBBKA. Apart from any particular meetings arranged there we meet each month at 'the Shoulder' on the second Monday of the month 8pm onwards and we hope to see at these gatherings the entirety of our membership all beginners and all happy to talk bees for a noggin and a natter.

I must start with an apology. Events conspired against getting the March Newsletter to you so this one covers two months.

A New Chair at Buckingham

One of the joys of being involved with NBBKA is our relationship with Buckingham. The two associations work very happily side-by-side as was so well demonstrated at our joint Honey Show at Buckingham Nurseries last September. One bit of news about Buckingham I will pass on. After five very successful years running it, Roger and Jane Woodbridge - also members of NBBKA - have stood down from their Chairman and Secretary roles respectively, and Sara Churchyard now becomes the Buckingham Chairman. We thank Roger and Jane for what they have done and look forward to working with Sara.

Event Reports

Bucks Spring Convention, Saturday 20th February at Wendover Memorial Hall.

The main speakers were Margaret Thomas and Marin Anastassov. Their talks concentrated on how, why and when bees do things and reflected the latest research into these fascinating topics of which much is still not fully understood. Incidentally, spouses, if you wish to give your beekeeping guru a really incredible book, look no further than "Honeybee Democracy" by Tom Seeley, available from Northern Bee Books. Tom's insights into bee behaviour are staggering. I was a bit sad that our N Bucks attendances were rather small. I know you all run busy lives, but there is so much to learn from these meetings and there were some marvellous bargains to be had. So do make a note to come to the 2017 Convention (I suspect on Saturday 18th February). I guarantee you will be delighted that you came along!

Tuesday, 8th March - **Dr Fred Ayres** "Unusual ways of keeping bees" at The Shoulder of Mutton, Calverton.

When varroa hit our shores in 1992, beekeepers took to (or at least their bees were put on) drugs to achieve some element of control as advised by the authorities. The early treatment was Apistan but that became less effective and now there is a plethora of treatments on the market making all sorts of claims none of which are fully understood, I suspect, by us beeks. A few beekeepers took different courses, the main feature of all these being that they did not involve chemicals. Fred and his colleagues at Lancaster BKA are some of those beekeepers. Fred came all the way down to the Shoulder of Mutton, Calverton to tell us all about the progress they have made. It was a fascinating presentation and gave much food for thought to all who attended. Fred's talk was followed by a far from light Shoulder of Mutton buffet, so adequate that one of our members was able to feed the leftovers to his staff the following day. Using 'SOM' for the talk was a great success: something I am sure we should repeat.

Wednesday, 16th March. Talk arranged by Mid -Bucks BKA about a likely threat to our bees: '**Asian Hornets- a Beekeeping Armageddon?**' Julian Parker, Southern Regional Bee Inspector, spoke about the history and spread of this dangerous hornet in France and the contingency plans National Bee Unit has in place should it reach our shores.

A summary of Julian's talk:-

- This hornet is a major threat to honeybees
- Its arrival in France was by accident in 2004 and it is now to be found in all parts of that country and it has footholds in Germany, Spain and Portugal
- Initially it attacks workers returning to hives with the following consequences:- bees become stressed and do not leave their hives, colonies weaken and need feeding even in full summer and when a colony is no longer capable of defending itself, these marauders move in and wipe it out
- The life pattern of this hornet is similar to that of native wasp. Only queens survive winter but spring build-up is fast and nests will be at full strength by June

- Queens start reproduction in primary nests, later moving to secondary ones located near potential food sources such as honeybee colonies! Nests are to be found on the tops of trees and resemble Chinese lanterns
- The hornet is well capable of travelling a distance over 20 miles, so crossing the English Channel at its narrowest point is no obstacle, although perhaps it is more likely that it will arrive in UK by accident as it did in France (for example in a vehicle in which a mated queen is hibernating)
- If this insect arrives in the UK, experience shows that we have just two years to eradicate it and failing that containment as far as may be possible will be the only course
- Its stings may be fatal to humans and conventional bee suits will not provide sufficient protection
- Any sightings must be reported to NBU. In what appears to be a government oversight NBU will not have similar statutory powers as for eg AFB so any action by it will inevitably require public/ beekeeper co-operation to some extent
- If you have not done so already, learn more about it on Google or the like and familiarise yourself with its appearance (see BBKA NEWS March 2016)

Forthcoming Events

Queen Rearing Course: This will be led by Andrew and Fiona Eelbeck. It will probably be most suitable for 2 year beekeepers with number limited to about 12 but anyone may apply and we will try to fit you all in. Further details from Andrew and Fiona Eelbeck on 01908551886 or fiona@eelbeck.fsnet.co.uk

Pests and Diseases Recognition Day: On 21 May we hope to hold two sessions - one in the North of the district in the morning, and one in the South later in the day. In more detail, a morning session will be at one of Andrew and Fiona's apiaries in or near Stoke Goldington. An afternoon session will be at one of my apiaries in or near Stewkley. Again, if you would like to attend one of the sessions, just contact Andrew and Fiona (as above) or me, Andrew Beer, on 01525 240235 or ae@thebeers.org

It is no secret I think, that the role of National Bee Unit in terms of its day to day support to beekeepers because of financial constraints is going to decline. This in turn will make it increasingly important for beekeepers to have a far greater understanding of bee woes. Please may I encourage you to attend one of the sessions. If we get fully booked up more sessions can easily be arranged.

Basic Assessment training

Last year the Eelbecks had a group of 7 taking the basic assessment and all passed. This year again we would like to run again some training sessions for those interested in taking the basic assessment. The Eelbecks are kindly offering to train members at no cost. Fiona is a master beekeeper, to this opportunity is not to be missed. Please contact Andrew & Fiona Eelbeck, details above.

Visits to **Ken Gorman's Apiary.** Ken is by any standard the most experienced beekeeper in our N. Bucks area. He is also very generous with his time. Ken is not one to leave

unquestioned current beekeeping practices which he considers to be wrong. There can be few in N. Bucks who have not learned something whenever Ken speaks his mind about bees (which we hope will continue for a long time to come). Well, Ken has indicated that we might make two trips to his apiaries - one for beginners or near-beginners, and one for more experienced beekeepers. I will give you the dates.

2016 Honey Show

Buckingham and District, our sister association in the north of the county, has again invited us to join it in running a honey show at Buckingham Nurseries or Buckingham Garden Centre as it is now more widely known, hopefully a repeat of the successful show held in 2015. It so happens 2016 is NBBKA's turn to run a county honey show so we thought bring all and sundry up to the 'Nurseries' and let us have a jolly good time there. The Chairman of Bucks County BKA has expressed enthusiasm for the idea, subject to agreement of detail and agreement of the other County Districts, and of course if we do NOT get the nod then we can happily do our thing with 'B and D' as before. A win/win situation but I do hope County and co join the fun so we have a honey show to remember. The Nurseries are pulling out all the stops for us - you would not expect anything less, and we are assured of being the star attraction at their action packed Apple Weekend. Note - the SHOW will be on Sunday, 25 September .Watch this space!!!

Bayer

People-power organisation *SumOfUs* and the *Bee Defender Alliance in Europe* are asking for assistance to bring beekeepers to the annual general meeting of Bayer, one of the manufacturers of neonicotinoid pesticides, for our voices to be heard.

For more information see here: <https://actions.sumofus.org/a/help-beekeepers-have-their-voices-heard-at-bayer-s-annual-meeting>

Seasonal Notes

I am writing these seasonal notes in two parts. First, I will allude to some of the jobs relevant to March which still may need doing and then I will drop in to April.

Early spring Jobs

A key to these is just to make a sufficient inspection to establish what is going on, perhaps no more than lifting the cover board to have a wee peek. If a colony is going well, e.g. masses of bees, then the last thing you want to do is to disturb them further because you are likely to do more damage than good, for example if the cluster breaks up it may not reform properly and bees which have been confined to their hives for any period are far

more likely to ball their queens (meaning a ball of bees surrounds its queen and crushes her to death). Retention of heat is absolutely vital at this time of the year and is needlessly lost if the beekeeper's curiosity gets the better of him/her just for the sake of having a look. The critical job in March (just as at any other time of the year but in March especially, the Starvation Month) is to ensure all colonies/nucs have enough stores: say a minimum of 10 Kilos within their easy reach at least until the next inspection. Until bees are flying freely, feed should be fondant; thereafter you can give them syrup (I apply at the rate of 1 pint of water to 2lbs of sugar but some halve the sugar). Now what about those colonies/nucs clearly flustered: perhaps stains on frames/ hive body parts or not happy like those larger colonies earlier described? It depends. On a warm flying day, remove an unoccupied frame and work your way to the centre of the cluster. What happens next depends on what you find!

- No sign of a queen so the stock is queenless. Just chuck all the bees off the frames in front of a strong flying stock and remove old hive/its bits to base. Job done!
- There is brood but it is all drone brood in compact patches. You have a drone-laying queen. Kill her and unite by newspaper method to a strong flying stock. Remove surplus combs on first full inspection of the year. It is possible in the situation first described that there could be a failed queen and therefore no brood. If so kill the unfortunate lady and then unite by newspaper rather than chucking at hive entrance to avoid the risk of fighting.
- As above but the brood is scattered over the combs. This means you have laying workers and no queen. You cannot amalgamate 'by newspaper' as above as those laying workers could kill the queen of the good stock! In this situation early in the morning shift the whole troubled hive, say, 20 feet away, entrance turned 90 degrees away from its original direction. Now put a super or larger box with some drawn frames on the original site entrance facing in the same direction of the hive before it was first moved. Come back late afternoon when flying has finished and unite the hive now on the original site with a strong stock by newspaper. Incidentally a drop of syrup spread lightly over the newspaper sweetens up /speeds up the marriage! On the next good flying day go to the original hive in trouble and chuck any bees on to the ground and return hive and bits to base. Some say these laying workers then revert to being good citizen bees and find new homes but they will certainly not be a nuisance.
- For all other situations, take advice from an expert - that is why we are here!

Mid Spring jobs

There was little frost in March, but a few fine warm days allowing bees freely to fly from their hives. My guess is that, as a result, this is not going to be an early swarming year and, sticking my neck out, not starting before 20th April, but a week of good flying weather and good forage can quickly turn bees' thoughts to swarm preparations. What do we need to do? - Wait until we have had a few days of good flying weather and then on another good flying day, open up the hives for their first full inspections of the year. If the main object of your beekeeping is to obtain honey, your two main concerns should be (1)

is each colony building up satisfactorily, and (2) if so, is there any risk of their swarming before your next inspection in 7 days? Each issue will now be taken separately:-

Is each colony building up satisfactorily?

Tell-tale signs include:-

- Profusion of pollen being taken into the hive;
- Queen laying outside sealed main brood area, or even better, brood from centre of nest has emerged and is being replaced by further brood in the form of eggs or larvae;
- The emergence of drones (which indicates that a colony is in position to swarm if it wants to, but will not necessarily do so). The presence of drones brings merriment to the hive apart from their ability to procreate if needed!

An advantage of having several hives is that it is then dead easy to see which colonies are advancing well - and which are not.

It may well be that one or more of your hives is not building up satisfactorily and you must try to identify the cause, which may be revealed by one of the standard checks you must carry out on this your first full inspection and on subsequent 7-day inspections.

1. Has the colony sufficient room? A quick route to swarming if it has not.
2. Is the queen present and laying the expected quantity of eggs?
3. Is the colony building up in size as fast as other colonies in the apiary?
4. From April until end July, are queen cells present?
5. Are there signs of disease or abnormality?
6. Has the colony sufficient stores until the next inspection?

Particular points to watch:-

- When the colony occupies all but two brood frames, it is time to super. To encourage bees into supers you may wish to follow the slightly dodgy practice of adding a super without a queen-excluder underneath until bees start occupying the super, but be careful the queen does not get trapped upstairs.
- Recommended practice is to replace all brood frames with a two-year time frame. This can be achieved by employing the Bailey comb change system (please refer to books), but I work towards replacing half of brood frames each year. For me this is essential because I am so dependent on the oilseed rape crop, and I don't want my bees spending all their energy "pulling out" foundation which in my view may happen if you replace all the brood frames at one time. What do you do with the frames due for removal full of brood and/or stores? I clear these of bees by shaking frames right into the brood chamber, to save harming queen remove three frames from middle of brood chamber first and deposit bees in the gap you have created. Next, de-cap the removed food frames now clear of bees, place them and all other removed frames clear of bees in spare brood chamber and then place it either above a queen-excluder, or if supered above super queen-excluder and top cover board reducing its openings to one single bee space and place the spare brood chamber with its frames over cover board, adding a second cover board over that second brood chamber. What happens next? The bees from down below come up to look after the brood and to rob out the food, after which the second

brood chamber with its frames once clear can be removed for re-cycling. Going back to the brood box from which you removed frames replace with frames of foundation or better still drawn comb putting on the outside of the nest and be ready to feed if necessary.. One final point-put a half inch thick piece of wood above the second cover board and the second brood chamber to allow emerging drones which would become trapped by the queen excluder to escape.

- It can happen that after a fine early spring bad weather sets in and colonies come close to starving. They need feeding with syrup, but how can you do that if bees already occupy supers? Proceed as follows. Place a cover board with feed holes over a queen-excluder. Add an eke, into which you can place a rapid feeder with syrup. Place any supers with bees on top. Make sure bees in supers can get back to brood chamber below. Because of the supers' position, bees will not fill them with syrup but take it to where it is needed: in the brood chamber.
- Make the first full inspection the time when you do a full inspection for disease. If in doubt ask an expert.

Is there any risk of it swarming before your next 7-day inspection?

You may be certain (although nothing is certain in beekeeping) that if there are no drones and no signs of queen cups or play cells, or if there are play cells but there is no laval juice in them, that your bees in that hive are not going to swarm in the next seven days before you must make your next inspection. What can we do to encourage a colony to expand without making swarming plans?

- a) Super in time.
- b) Give them plenty of room.
- c) Remove a frame of brood (- less bees!) and give it to a colony in need which can support brood within the same apiary and which needs strengthening. Don't do this "inter apiaries" because of the risk of spreading disease to another apiary.
- d) Comb renewal as described above.

In May's Newsletter I shall discuss Swarm Prevention and Control.

I could go on but will not. If you have a question please just ask.
Telephone 01525240235

Andrew