

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter June 2011

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Calendar at-a-glance

4 th -5 th June 2011	Lillingstone Lovell Open Gardens Weekend
2 nd July	Social Evening at the Betsy Wynne, Swanbourne
1 st September	Bucks County Show
24 th September	Bucks County Honey Show
25 th September	NBBKA Honey Show
5 th October	NBBKA Annual General Meeting
27 th -29 th October	National Honey Show
12 th November	Ron Hoskins "Breeding Varroa-free Bees"
16 th November	Lecture: Disease & Pest Update from Nigel Semmence
17 th January 2012	Lecture: Speaker and topic t.b.a.

...and some **Committee Meeting** details:

The Committee will meet on 12th July, 13th September, 8th November and, in 2012 the first meeting will be on 10th January 2012. All members are welcome at these meetings, which are invariably enjoyable and productive, but please don't all turn up at once as the meeting room is pokey!

Articles

Further hive thefts

There have been further hive thefts reported in Wing. Please continue to be vigilant with your own and others' hives. Perhaps now is a good time to add an identifying mark to your hives, either by branding them or marking them with your initials or your BBKA membership number.

Editorial

The weather pundits will no doubt tell us later that we have had the warmest and driest Spring on record and writing on May 21st it is clear that Spring has not only sprung but just about passed. Certainly lives in hives reflect that. Supers on in last week of March, first swarm call on April 8th, first honey removed on 8th May and, believe it or not, a first wasp strayed into our kitchen yesterday and delivered a sting (on me!) and was on its way. Nothing unusual about that – just so early. As the saying goes, we will pay for it later and perhaps even now, judging by the honey being extracted, heavy as lard and (how can one be so ungracious?) a trial to harvest. If the dry weather continues we can certainly expect nectar flows to slow down or even stop – so will it continue? According to Ged Marshall, who produces those marvellous queens, June is going to be very, very wet.

The Association's Apiaries

I should like to offer a number of **Thank Yous**. First to Sue Bird, Ken Gorman, Michael Alexander, Bob Sibley, Chris Jay, Ed Reyney, Daniel Clarke, Richard Carder, Phil Gabel and Jill Franks for helping in so many ways to keep the apiaries going and for their help in running the Beginners' Classes. There are others to thank – forgive me for not mentioning them all by names.

Secondly, of course, thanks to our Beginners for really getting stuck in and sharing with us what is already a very interesting year in bee terms. Situations which have arisen so far on apiary visits include:

- The queen that unfortunately got squashed by a falling brace comb,
- Two artificial swarms (queen in new brood box placed on original site),
- One artificial swarm (queen in nucleus box placed on new site)
- Springing of queens (original queen gone, one opened but re-sealed queen cell and virgin queen gone, three ripe queen cells and opened and their inmates released and, would you believe it, the first-opened and re-sealed queen cell had been re-sealed by the workers leaving a helpless worker bee trapped inside!).
- A lot of "seven day inspections" and reading of the combs (it is not all as excitedly scripted as East Enders!)
- And, of course, taking of honey along the lines "if the comb does not emit honey when violently shaken it goes into the extractor", (a technique never to be practised if robbing is a risk).
- And a lot more. Our plan is to demonstrate all aspects of day-to-day beekeeping, including harvesting and processing of honey. My hope is that all beginners will have their own hives come first 1st September (if not earlier!). If you have (nice) bees to pass on, please, please do so. I am happy to act as an intermediary to any transaction you may wish to implement.

Now to a reality check. I do think we need to review our apiaries' activities. Perhaps I may acquaint you with our present set-up. We run two apiaries, one at Bradwell Abbey, the other at Cosgrove. Apiary meetings take place each week, on a Wednesday, at alternating sites, at 7.00 p.m. and are so well attended by our enthusiastic beginners. May I urge more help from experienced beekeepers, please? Each apiary has six hives – and increasing! Some observations may be useful:

- Running 12 hives takes a lot of time. A rule of thumb, say 1 hour, per hive, per week.
- To keep colonies operating properly each has to be inspected once every seven days.
- The present arrangement of having a meeting at one of the apiaries each week is inadequate (in terms of time) to enable all colonies at that apiary to be inspected on that visit.

- As a result, each apiary has to be separately inspected each week (i.e. outside the beginners' meeting).
- Security remains a serious and continuing concern and whilst no site can be 100% secure, that aspect must continuously be kept under review.
- Taking into account honey processing, cleaning and general maintenance (including the current equipment repair programme), operating the apiaries, as we do, needs, say 20 man/woman hours per week, each week, during the season
- And here is the frank bit, much as we would like it otherwise, we do not have the capacity of doing it as it ought to be done.

So we need to have a deep think. Your committee is LOOKING at all options and NEEDS your INPUT. Speaking as a new boy I know that the options are limited particularly given the dire shortage of suitable sites and especially important, secure ones.

Some thoughts:

- Let's start with a fundamental one. Why have an apiary? Many Associations don't. Surely the answer is that here in North Bucks, we all want beginners to learn about bees and beekeeping and to adopt the best practices and the only way of ensuring that is to teach them that the "leave-alone" approach of the past no longer works.
- Given the above, we reduce the number of hives to an autumn count of six hives, all on one site, to allow for a winter loss of two and to bring us to Spring with four. If we suffered a greater winter loss, we would need perhaps a stock or two on loan from existing members for teaching purposes only for a short period. That is preferable to having too many hives and being unable to cope. Northants BKA runs just 4 hives for the whole county.
- Travelling across the county three times per week to make three apiary visits, at a mileage in excess of 120 miles is simply a "no-no" – well, it is for me! There must be just one apiary with a limited number of hives – probably not more than a Summer count of six – capable of being inspected during each Beginners' Class.
- Four or so hives would be an ideal number to teach a class of say twelve beginners. Until now we have had up to 35 beginners but much as we would like it otherwise we do not have the teaching capacity to cope adequately with these large numbers. Sue Bird, our tutor on the theory section of the Beginners course, did brilliantly this Spring by all accounts – enormous thanks, Sue.
- It might help, Beginners especially, if we were to have smaller, more focused and hands on classes so as to ensure that every Beginner handles bees on each apiary visit. The overriding intention must be to ensure that anyone joining the Beginners Class leaves it enabled to become a highly competent beekeeper willing to take a full part in the Association's affairs. It may be that courses should only be available to those becoming members of the Association. To answer that, a Beginners' fee would include a year's membership.
- TO HELP the Committee's deliberations can you please let us have your thoughts and suggestions in time for our next Committee meeting on 12th July. In particular, can you please tell us what help you can offer - help running the classes, repairing and renewing equipment, processing honey. These are vital if we are to provide a proper service for Beginners. Are you aware of any suitable site where bees could be tucked away from the public gaze, and equipment could be safely stored? This is important. It would, in my view be a dreadful thing if we were unable to run any apiary and had to close it down.

Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

I apologise for the length of the foregoing so let's turn to the happier subject of notes for June. Basically for each colony or nucleus there will be one or two concerns.



Colonies queenright on full blast

Keep them that way! About 10% of my colonies don't swarm each year. Go on with 7-day inspections, check no swarming plans (evidenced by eggs/jelly in those queen cells – and ACT if you find any). Go on ensuring that the queen has enough room to lay and add a frame of foundation when necessary to increase laying opportunities. Old frames cleared of all bees can be placed above supers and bees will take down honey (decap any honey in frames first and place a cover board with a narrow entrance between supers and frames to speed up the process). Workers will come up from below to take care of any brood. Put a suitable twig between the boxes containing brood and the supers to allow the drone boys to exit! And go on extracting as needed. I like to get all oil-seed rape honey off and extracted within a week or so of flowering ceasing, and, remember that the crop will be ready for extraction even though not sealed if it does not run out of combs when violently shaken. If your colony is a "non-swarmers" count your blessings. Put on, clear, and remove supers as needed (perhaps as often as every 7 days) and with luck you will get a lot of honey! As a guide, bees not intent on swarming by 1st July probably won't, and the queen may be replaced by supercedure by the bees later in the year. Great if your bees are nice, gentle ones bringing in lots of honey.

The Rest

i.e. colonies which have swarmed, colonies which are in some sort of trouble, nuclei.

The question is, in each case, what are you hoping to achieve? The first thing I think which is necessary is to assure that even in the most organised apiary all does not go according to plan and in June there will be bees at various stages of transition (at Cosgrove, currently, we have hive COS1 (which has been artificially swarmed), COS2 (artificially swarmed by nucleus method) COS3 (which lost a queen), COS4 (which hitherto has shown no swarming intentions but is rather feisty), COS5 (which is a split from COS2) and COS6 (which is a split from COS1). Apart from COS4, each is in transition. June is a good month to start consolidating your bees. The possibilities are many. For example, if we want more bees we can simply allow each to build into, or remain, a full grown colony, or if we wish to reduce numbers uniting of stocks can be made and of course if a stock becomes and remains hopelessly queenless, we need to act! It is impossible here to cover every situation but please speak to our experienced beekeepers, or even me, in case of need. But I would like to cover one regular worry. Typically, the telephone rings and the conversation starts "My bees have become queenless". The plain fact is that if you lost a queen for any reason it is going to be at least a month before your new queen is in production as this example will show.

Example

20th May. Bees swarm. Original queen goes off with swarm. There are, as you will expect, queen cells in the colony, the oldest is 9 days old. You know that because that queen cell has just been sealed. With experience that will become obvious.

About 27th May. The oldest queen cell is now about 16 days old and about then out comes the

queen. She will mill around the hive for at least 5 days, or, with bad weather, she will not go on a mating flight for up to 20 days. That could be as late as 17 June (perhaps even later).

Once mated, the queen may go on milling about the hive for another 3-8 days before getting down to the business of laying her first eggs! In this example you will see that the earliest time the queen can start laying is 4th June but, if the mating flight is delayed to 17 June, she is unlikely to lay before 20th June.

If virgin queens go off with swarms, timing will be dependent on the date the first queen returns to the hive successfully mated – this could be up to 1st July if the egg producing the mated queen was actually laid on 20th May, virgin queens departed and the new queen's flight was delayed by bad weather for 20 days.

Let's be honest. Getting a colony back to bee production is a constant concern to all beekeepers after any swarm has emerged. All positions need careful monitoring. The period is always longer than you think. Then you see the polished queen cells, then eggs in turn, later larval juices, later still sealed worker brood, in a regular pattern and you are pretty certain all is well. Good luck.

Future Events

Lillingstone Lovell open Gardens Weekend

4ht – 5th June – just about when you receive this newsletter!

These gardens must be seen to be believed. Nicola Smith and an observation hive of bees are flying the NBBKA flag. Nicola would love some help. Call her on 01280 860102.

Social Evening at the Betsy Wynne



Another reminder – 7.00 p.m. July 2nd.

The pub will provide a finger-buffet at £10 per head, with a cash bar. We have to let the pub know the numbers by 25th June so please fill in the slip below and send to me, Andrew Beer.

There are other things to tell you about but as we are running late (for which many apologies!), they will be held back until life with the bees is not so hectic.

