

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter November 2011

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Calendar at-a-glance

12 th November	Ron Hoskins lecture: varroa-free bees, Northampton
16 th November	Nigel Semmence lecture: disease and pest update
22 nd November	Peter Tompkins lecture, Houghton Conquest
17 th January 2012	Bob Sibley lecture: Allotment gardening
15 th February 2012	Dr Sara Robb lecture: Honey Potions (inc soap making)
4 th March 2012	Bucks County Seminar

Articles

Editorial – a new acting editor

As you may have heard, Andrew Beer stepped down from his formal role of newsletter editor, his de facto role as apiary manager, and his informal role as general doer of good things after the last AGM. We thank Andrew for all his hard work and dedication. He made huge contributions to the association and will be missed.

This leaves the positions of newsletter editor and apiary manager open for volunteers. If you have felt that you could do a better job running the club's two teaching apiaries for our beginners, or in providing content for the newsletter, do please volunteer. In the mean time I, Daniel Clarke, will continue to compile the newsletter and will write a few articles too. Andrew has kindly allowed us to recycle his seasonal apiary notes, which I know will be invaluable to new beekeepers.

Apiary news

We are pleased to share that the owner of the site at which the association has several hives, in Calverton to the west of Milton Keynes, has agreed that we can use it as a teaching apiary. The owner had said that he would not mind if some education was conducted there, but this has recently been graciously upgraded to full teaching apiary status.

The 2012 beginners' course will likely have some outdoor sessions held there.

Get to know your committee and members

Here is the first in an experimental series of interviews helping you to get to know fellow members of the association, starting with your committee. The objective is to help put faces and knowledge to names with which you may already be familiar, and to help remind members that NBBKA is not a faceless multi-national corporation but a local association run by volunteers.

As time is against me I will indulgently start with myself.

Name: Daniel Clarke

Age: 32

Occupation: software developer in the freight, logistics and customs industry

How long have you been beekeeping? This is my second season with my own hives, but I started helping the late Betty Goseltine of Beds BKA look after her bees when I was a teenager. I can't remember what made me want to keep bees, it's something I have wanted to do since my teenage years but it's only now that I have had the opportunity to have my own.

Where do you keep your bees? My hives are on an allotment near my house. It's good in that it is secured with a 10' barbed-wire fence, but it's a little closer to a public footpath than is ideal. Apart from a few ignorant neighbours who claim my bees "bite" them, the allotmenters are delighted that my bees help with their fruit harvest.

What do you like most and least about being a beekeeper? I like learning something new each time I speak to a beek. I don't like the way my friends joke that I have a "old man's hobby", although they don't mind when honey comes their way.

Share something interesting about your beekeeping: I learnt the hard way not to be cavalier about the temper of bees. Turning up without a veil "just to to refill a feeder" on the morning of my sister's wedding I was stung on the eyelid and by the end of the day my face was twice the size. Luckily it was still OK for the photos.



Website news

You're now able to log-in to our website, www.nbbka.org, using your email address instead of your BBKA membership number if you have not yet been issued one by the national body. This will allow new members access to the members-only resources while they wait for their details.

We're also working on enrolling and managing beginners for next year's teaching sessions using the website. This is provide a single point of contact for all candidates, to simplify the enquiry process, to reduce the number of separate enquiries that the committee receives, and to assist with management.

We are also looking into allowing you to renew your subscription to the association online, but this all depends on how much we can simplify the county and national associations' renewal processes. Watch this space.

Apiary Notes

With thanks to Andrew Beer for allowing us to re-use his notes. Here is his article for November and December, taken from November 2010's newsletter.

Our bees should now be semi-clustered and semi-dormant. Queens will be going off lay, though research suggests that some lay throughout the winter, and on warm sunny days around midday bees will be making cleansing flights and perhaps bringing in some pollen but later, as darkness approaches, and temperatures fall, they will fall back into winter inertia. Clustered and semi-clustered bees at this time of the year suggest that all is well in the hive and the less bees are disturbed the better. Colonies not settling may indicate queenlessness, nosema, or that they are suffering from dysentery or other ailments. If appropriate, consider sending a sample (at least 30 bees; 200 for suspected poisoning) to the National Bee Unit. Sample bees should be killed by freezing in the deep freeze, then thawed, dried out on kitchen paper in a warm room, and posted to the NBU (but avoid plastic wrappings). In short, corpses must be fit for examination.

Our role in November and the three months ahead is to do everything in our power to help our bees through their winter struggles, and as their needs are paramount may I repeat advice offered in the last two newsletters:

- Ensure your hives are weather, mice, rat and other creature-proof. It is a good idea to have say a couple of spare roofs, because due to internal condensation the inside of a roof can become damp and mouldy and in such cases you can make an immediate swap.
- Mouse guards should be fitted if you are using them. This needs to be done after the risk of robbing is over, during the first of the cold weather, usually at the beginning of December. Personally, as I have previously explained, I keep entrance blocks in the narrow position all over winter, since I have found that if hives are positioned say 15 inches or so clear off the ground on shallow stands and the entrance is no more than a bee space or two, mice and rats cannot gain access. If you follow my plan however you will need to have either fitted wire floors (any undertrays removed) or placed quarter-inch wedges under cover boards to provide suitable ventilation. NB if you are fitting mouse guards, first drill holes in the guards to take drawing pins and use a magnet (available from some equipment suppliers) to drive these home. If so you may

discourage emerging bees from stinging you!

- Protect your hives, where necessary, against woodpeckers. Three of my seven apiaries have recently been attacked so hives there get protection. With the others, I take a chance. NB The trouble is that many “woodpecker-free years” go past and then, when least expected, woodpeckers plunder with abundance. The best protection is small-hole wire netting but old flapping agricultural sacks secured to roofs by bricks or plastic netting may be sufficient to deter the enemy.
- Keep hefting! If a hive feels light, then you need to do something about it AT ONCE WHATEVER THE WEATHER – PROVIDED THAT WHATEVER YOU DO, YOU DO NOT DISTURB YOUR COLONY OF BEES. Some of the strains of bees e.g. Italians, get through stores faster than others so don't chide yourself if a “greedy” colony runs short. October has been very warm this year so colonies may be getting unduly lighter. What can you do? Put candy fondant packs over the feed holes closest to the cluster. But there is an even better way of ensuring that bees get their feed, without disturbance, because if you have followed my earlier advice of placing an eke immediately over the brood combs and a cover board above (not below) that, you can then simply lift the cover board (bees will not “propolise” it down because of distance from brood) and place feeder face down directly over inert bees. Scrapings of honey from extractor and honey tank, carefully stored in those otherwise recyclable plastic tray containers from supermarkets, also provide suitable feeders. Liquid sugar feed, if offered, may be ignored by bees or if taken may cause dysentery so should be avoided.
- Periodic inspections: try to get to your bees fortnightly between now and mid-March and immediately after gales or heavy snowfalls. You never know what you may find. One of my hives, was in successive years, knocked over in cattle stampedes, and only yesterday an escaped pig was found ready to tip it over!
- Second varroa treatment: the National Bee Unit recommends an oxalic treatment in December but views differ. Personally, I follow the NBU's advice to the letter. It is dangerous stuff so be very careful. The cost of treatment is cheap but it will probably be worthwhile to double up with neighbouring beekeepers as each bottle will cover many hives.
- What else? It is time for reflection and the following thoughts spring to mind:
 - Looking through other members' hives I have been surprised to find deep and super chambers containing one, two, three or even four different types of frames, which is just building up problems with combs and the like, for the future. Personally, I use Hoffman Commercial deep frames and Manley frames in supers. The choice is yours! There is no such thing as the perfect hive or indeed frame pattern. Whatever you do, be consistent. Order any necessary frames in the January sales and have them made up for use in early April before Spring build-up.
 - The application of Apiguard varroa treatment requires an eke or spacer above the wood frames. A cheap way of achieving that is to fix one-inch square sections of wood to one side of clearer boards and turn boards over and use the wider spacing whilst treating for varroa (with feed holes blocked). Varroa treatment also requires open wire mesh floors to be sealed during treatment – sheets of plywood or the like placed under the floor will do the trick.
 - In the workshop: now is the time to clean, repair and when necessary, replace, equipment. I am now cleaning floors, roofs, cover boards and other hive parts not in current use in a hot water/soda crystals mix. I am overhauling/reviewing combs. Misshapen, darkened and otherwise defective combs get the chop! I just cut out the wax (pulling the wire out first makes the job much easier). Frames are then sterilised in my Thorne Easi-steam but any water-boiling vessel will do. Some

people simply throw away all old frames and start afresh. Do that if you wish and if your pocket allows but I find that with careful maintenance frames last for years if you replace parts when necessary. If you find a frame has become loose at the shoulders, carefully prise out retaining pins (put a Stanley knife blade under the pinheads – it works!), put Evostik exterior glue in the joints and re-assemble. NB Never glue the bottom bars. Wax is then boiled down; I use a steam extractor but there are other options (please refer to “the books”).

I, like many other beekeepers, put the residue sludge onto the compost heap, but don't attempt that if you are either a beginner or unable to detect foulbrood; instead burn the lot to cinders.

Future Events

Ron Hoskins Lecture: Breeding varroa-free bees

Lecture in conjunction with Northamptonshire Beekeeping Association, Saturday 12th November, 3.00 p.m. at the Abbey Centre, Overslade Close, East Hunsbury, Northampton NN4 0RZ. This should be a very interesting talk by an acknowledged expert in the field by kind invitation of Northamptonshire BKA. Tea/refreshments will be provided. Entry £2.00 per person. Let's have a torrent of North Bucks members there! Ron's views have generated national discussion, including on the BBC.

Nigel Semmence lecture: disease and pests

Wednesday 16th November, 7.30 p.m. at Rectory Cottages, Bletchley. Tactics, especially against the varroa mite are constantly changing. Many have now given up Apiguard. Come and find out the alternatives.

Peter Tomkins lecture: 1 ½ ways of keeping bees

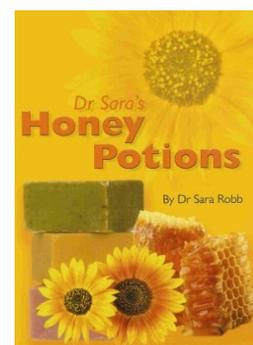
Tuesday 22nd November, 7.30 p.m. at Houghton Conquest Village Hall, by invitation of Beds BKA.

Bob Sibley lecture: Plants and bees

Wednesday 17th January 2012, at 7.30 p.m. at Rectory Cottages. Bob, who is a highly-experienced gardener, is planning a talk with bees in mind. This will be a departure from the normal bee format and perhaps we can develop it into a “start of the season” social get-together?

New Event: “Honey Potions” from Dr Sara Robb

Dr Sara Robb gives us a presentation on “honey potions”, including **soap making**. 15th February 2012, 19:00, Rectory Cottage Bletchley. Dr Robb also has a book of the same name:



Bucks County Annual Seminar

This is a splendid event with guest speakers of national acclaim. Note especially the date – Saturday 3rd March 2012. Only the Gales and I were there to represent the NBBKA in March last year so the rest of you don't know what you missed! Please come! Venue: Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Road, Wendover, HP22 6HF. I am awaiting further details but what I have heard so far is mouthwatering.

Next Month

There will be no newsletter next month. See you in January.