

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter March 2012

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Calendar at-a-glance

3 rd March	Bucks County Seminar
6 th March	Extraordinary General Meeting 7:30pm
20 th March	Committee Meeting
21 st March	Nick Grey lecture on preparing products for sale
22 nd May	Committee Meeting

News Articles

Committee matters

As reported by email, the committee of NBBKA saw several resignations in February, leaving the positions of chairman, treasurer/membership secretary and general

secretary vacant. There have been volunteers for the two positions that would be created by splitting the membership secretary and treasurer roles, but the vital jobs of chairman and general secretary have had no takers.

At the extraordinary general meeting that will be held on the 6th, members will hopefully be elected to these positions. If you would like to help run your club, please nominate yourself. It is a great way to shape the association and if you have ever felt that you would like to see things run differently, now is a great opportunity to do so. Please raise your hand to the incumbent committee via website@nbbka.org in advance of the EGM.

John Rainey

Sorry to report the death of John Rainey. His funeral will be held at St Botolph's Church, Aspley Guise at 2.00 p.m. on Thursday 1st March. In the 1980s and 1990s John was a stalwart of NBBKA. He was Treasurer and along with Bill Jones ran the Beginners' Classes, apiary meetings and general meetings. In the 1990s, he embarked upon a programme of Study Meetings so that members could sit the BBKA exams. His input to our Association was invaluable. In his day, he was the glue that held NBBKA together.

Apiary update

Hive repairs. Grateful thanks to another gluer! Andrew Beer, who has spent the winter months repairing the Association's hives. It is due to people like Andrew, rolling up their sleeves that keep our Association thriving. Please, do offer to help out there are hundreds of chores to do!

Feeding. Bob Sibley reports that all association hives were well fed and have made it successfully through the winter so far.



Photo: volunteers tend to the bees at the association's teaching apiary at Calverton.

Skep loan request

Beds BKA member Katharine Sorensen of MK Gallery, is seeking the loan of a straw skep on behalf of British artist Olivia Plender. The skep is needed by the artist for inclusion in an installation in her exhibition at the gallery from April to June this year, and its subsequent tour to Bristol and Glasgow (ends December 2012). Anyone able to help or suggest some leads, please contact Katharine at: ksorensen@mkgallery.org or call 01908 558318.

Groundwork

NBBKA had a column in "Groundwork" the annual newsletter of the Windmill Hill Garden and Allotment Association. If you are a gardener you may like to join WHGAA. Membership costs £2.00 per annum. All gardening items are sold at extremely favourable rates. For more information check WHGAA online or call Libby Culshaw.



For Sale

5 Frame **nuclei** for sale, homebred 2012 queen, ready April/ May £140. £40 deposit required, travelling nuc available £10. Please contact Sue Bird on mobile 07811 192467 or email suebirdsbees@aol.com.

Event report – allotment gardening lecture

In January Bob Sibley delivered his much-awaited lecture on allotment gardening. Bob has green fingers and, we learnt, green genes, so it was fascinating to hear his tried and tested tips for growing one's own fruit and vegetables.

At the end of the lecture was a quiz on general knowledge, gardening and beekeeping, with prizes of seeds. Around half the attendees went home with a prize. We thank Kings Seeds and Wyvale Garden Centre for their generous sponsorship.



<http://www.thegardencentregroup.co.uk/garden-centres/wyevale/Wyevale-Woburn-Sands-Garden-Centre/26>

Event Report – honey potions lecture

A full Rectory Cottage thoroughly enjoyed a lecture entitled "Honey Potions" from Dr Sara Robb, which focussed on the making of soap. Members were taught the chemistry and process of making honey soap, and learned through careful explanations and a practical demonstration how to make a silky smooth hand soap with nothing taken away.

At the end of the demonstration Dr Robb kindly gave a sample of the soap that she made in the lecture to all attendees.

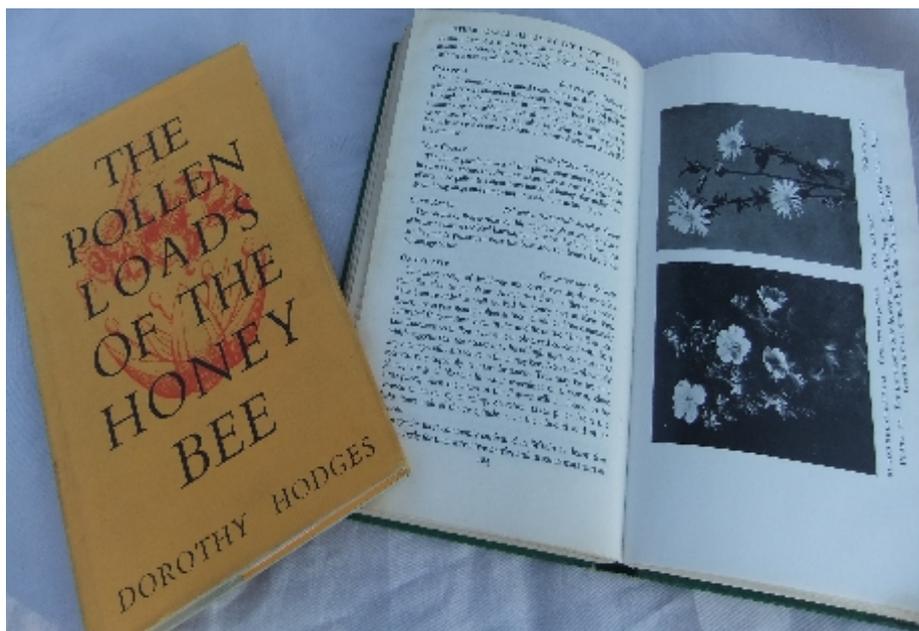
Judging by the number of people taking notes one might expect a drop in business for the major soap retailers as much of North Buckinghamshire makes its own.

Regular Columns

Library and equipment

Two of *Libby Culshaw's* favourite beekeeping books are: *The Pollen Loads of the Honey Bee* by *Hodges* and *Plants and Beekeeping* by *Howes*. They are in our Library and I recommend them to you.

The Pollen Loads of the Honey Bee by **Dorothy Hodges** cost a staggering £30.00 when we bought it in 1984. The main reason for this was the charts at the back which identified pollen colours. These were invaluable for identifying the various pollens which came into the hive. Also in this book are line drawings of pollen grains. It is fascinating to see how diverse the



shapes, sizes and appendages are from species to species. Dorothy Hodges explains in detail the pollen packing process and this is accompanied with her lovely illustrations. Nowadays comprehensive pollen charts are quite cheap to buy but nonetheless this book is well worth a read.

Plants and Beekeeping by **F.N. Howes** has got to be one of the books I have used most over 28 years of beekeeping. It is in three sections, the first relates to plants and their nectar secretion, honey in relation to the nectar source, notes on unpalatable and poisonous honey, pollens and the value of pollination. The first section also advises on bee gardens, apiary hedges and windbreaks, honey dew and propolis. Sections two and three are a reference to the major honey plants which honey bees visit. Black and white photographs are included in the early editions of this book but not in the later paperback ones. If I could only have one book on beekeeping this would be it. It is interesting, informative and a pleasure to read.

Gardening Column by Bob Sibley

March can be a busy time on your plot you only have to look in the hedgerow and some bloom is taking place. Only this morning I got my first sight of pussy willow. Now on your plot I would normally have my parsnips in by the end of February but the late snow flurry has put me off. However they will be in by the second week of March. Parsnips take an age to germinate and you will not be harvesting until the winter. You need to get it right because of the length of the germination time, you may not get a second chance. I will take out a line and using my dibber to make holes as deep as possible some 14 - 18" & 9" apart. Make up a compost medium: 4 parts multi purpose 2 parts horticulture sand 1 part grit, mix well & drizzle into each hole water in and back fill

once the medium is settled. Plant 2 seeds to each station 1/2" deep and prick out weaker seedling once germination has taken place. Most importantly, mark your rows for once the foliage has died back as if we have a snow fall you will not know were to harvest come next winter.

I set a nice wide row of meteor peas under glass clutches in January and they are now breaking surface and looking very bright; I will leave the glass on until they have establish only to continue with fleece. A second sowing of Feltham 1st has gone in again under glass and hopefully I can look forward to some sweet-tasting peas in the next 12 weeks. I will continue to sow with a 2nd early Hurst Greenshaft and Onward are reliable. For a later main crop neither Kelvedon Wonder or Pioneer will let you down, they will crop well into September to October. Shallots and Onion sets can be planted Mid March protect from birds as they love to pull them out.

Your seed potatoes should be chitting in a cool light place. I always pop a few 1st earlies in on St. Patrick's day , but you will need to straw up to protect from frost once the rose starts to break surface.

Also worth sowing this month are broad beans, spring onions, summer cabbage, peppers, tomatoes and beetroot.

Next month more allotment advice, hanging baskets and bee-friendly plants.

Happy Gardening
Bob

Seasonal recipe – honey crepes

If you are still in pancake mode try these Honey Crepes



Beat together 4 fl oz water, 4 fl oz milk, 3 ½ oz flour, 2 tbsp oil, ½ tsp salt, 2 eggs, 1 tbsp honey to make a smooth batter. Leave to rest for at least one hour. Beat again briefly before using.

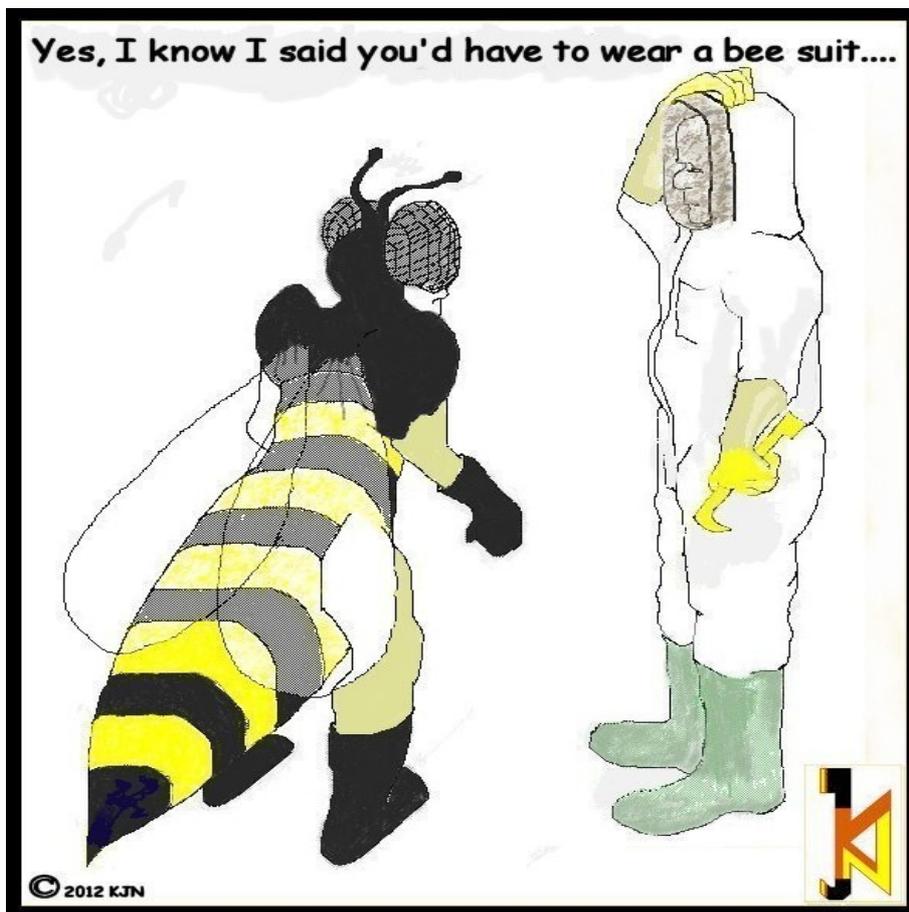
Brush a heavy based frying pan with a little oil and heat. Pour in enough batter to just coat the bottom of the pan; there should be a sizzle as it goes in and any excess immediately tipped back in the batter bowl.

Cook until the underside is golden then turn or flip to cook the other side.

You should get about 16 crepes which are light, golden and have a delicate honey flavour. Stack them up as they are ready.

Stock picture from <http://fashionedbylove.blogspot.com>

Bee Cartoon by KJN



Apiary Notes from Ken Gorman



Colony checks: late February

There's always a sense of euphoria as the days lengthen and one finds that colonies of bees are still alive. They've made it!

Any colony which was suffering some severe weakness upon entering the winter period will have succumbed by now, or be in the last stage of dying off.

The current warm period does offer an opportunity to check colonies: a peep through a feed hole may be enough; a sharp rap of the knuckles against the side of the hive, with your ear pressed against the wood, listening for the answering short buzz can give further reassurance. If there is no answering buzz, then it is necessary to lift the crownboard and peer down between the combs. Wear face protection, at least, when doing this.

The beekeeper with many years of experience uses more finely honed senses: the smell emanating from the colony

at the feed hole; the actual appearance of the bees, the way they move, their numbers, the way the fliers behave at the hive entrance.

Dead Outs

This is the name used in the USA to describe colonies lost during the winter period. The use that beekeepers make with the resulting combs can have implications for the general health of both their other, or future colonies and those of their beekeeper neighbours.

It is possible to be grossly misled by the activity at the hive entrance at this time. One colony may be flying very strongly, but on closer attention the bees entering the hive are nervous and jerky in flight. They could be entering the hive of a colony that has died, that has left unattended stores, with the consequence that the hive is being robbed out. Should this have been a colony with health problems, particularly diseases of the brood, then the troubles are going to be spread far and wide. Should you discover a colony that has died, the entrance must be closed and whole hive made bee tight. Once the reason for the colony's death has been determined, a decision needs to be made about the future use of the hive contents-frames, comb and boxes.

Nearly fifty years ago I was given several WBC hives, which had not contained live bees for a number of years. I stood them next to my apiary, deciding that I would look sort through them later. It transpired that these hives contained combs infected with American Foul Brood spores, left by the last colonies to die on them. My bees had been nosing into these hives and the infection then appeared in two of my live colonies, which had to be destroyed. How many other colonies had been infected over the years from that source of dire trouble?

Diagnosing the cause of death

When beekeepers tell me that they have lost one or more colonies, the first question that I ask is-"What do you think happened"? The majority of answers are some form of "I don't know". Here are some possible reasons:

1. The combs are empty of stores, there are many bees with their heads tucked deep into empty combs. Many dead bees lie on the floor. They starved.

2. There are stores in some combs, but the cluster has died, on the combs, out of reach of the source of plenty. Isolation starvation.

This can happen more easily with a single brood chamber colony. They begin clustering in the centre of the set of combs, gradually moving in one direction, steadily consuming food. They are then hit by a prolonged cold spell, consume all the stores within reach, but cannot then migrate to the other side of the box to reach fresh stores.

3. The combs are covered in bee droppings: there is an unpleasant smell of decay. Dead bees may have a bloated appearance. This is dysentery, which can be caused by the bees consuming unripe stores. The colony may have been subjected to frequent disturbance; attacks by woodpeckers, entry by mice, or being lodged on an unstable stand, with frequent movement of the hive. They may be suffering from one of the forms of Nosema, a protozoan, (single cell animal), which forms spores in the bee's gut. This can only be diagnosed by microscope on high power, (x400). To test for this, a few bees are mashed up with a few drops of water; a drop of the fluid produced is then being placed on a slide, with a cover slip. Reference then needs to be made to a suitable book. Pollen grains in the gut might easily be confused for nosema spores, which are either oval, Nosema Apis, or capsule shape, Nosema Ceranea.

4. Dead, shiny, black bees might indicate a virus attack. Damaged wings also indicate this; usually the result of high varroa populations.

5. The hive is empty of bees, yet there are ample stores and the colony looked well found in the autumn. This is where the term CCD- Colony collapse Disorder has been used, the phrase originating in America. Recent research suggests that there may be many different causes, perhaps a multiplicity of disorders within the one colony. The bees have left the hive one by one by one, dying outside. They may be piled up outside the hive entrance.

6. The colony has died out; there are stores and there is brood, which is smelly, discoloured, or, if capped, has some sunken cappings. This could be much more serious-possibly American or European Foulbrood. There needs to be a formal diagnosis. Either consult an experienced beekeeper, initially, or keep the hive tightly closed and wait for a visit from the Seasonal Bee Inspector, which will not be before 1st. April. This is a legal requirement: you can't just try to sort it out yourself.

7. The colony is small and there is a queen. The brood has domed cappings: the queen has become a drone layer. The colony will continue to decline until it is robbed out by other colonies, unless the queen is removed and that colony united over newspaper to another colony. Do not try to requeen! I have found one such colony in my own apiaries.

The next two months

So far I have not found one dead colony and most are still heavy with stores. Many are very well populated, some even occupying the whole of two brood chambers. This year could produce an early swarming season.

Most colonies lost in winter/spring are lost in the next six weeks. There is a rapid increase in consumption of stores in support of brood rearing and the beekeeper is caught out. We could still be surprised by a late period, perhaps prolonged, of bad weather. The British climate is often challenging and unpredictable. Don't be tempted to start taking a live colony apart just yet; this can be done in late March if the shade temperature is above 15 degrees Celcius and there is little or no wind. This will be a brief inspection, checking to see if the queen is in lay, the brood looks healthy and to assess the weight of stores left. Room, in the form of a second brood chamber, or excluder and super may need to be provided.

Feeding with sugar syrup can be started after mid March; use fondant before then. Be clear: feeding during the winter or early spring is an emergency procedure and once commenced, must be continued until the bees are able to gather natural food. The use of pollen substitute and feed can, and is, used by experienced beekeepers to stimulate colony development. That's another story.

First colony manipulations

Floors can be changed in early March. This manipulation is best done by two people. Crack the seal between floor and brood chamber with a hive tool; lift the colony to one side and substitute a clean floor, lifting the colony back into place. This can be done in 30 seconds. Clean the floor there and then if you don't carry a spare, scraping the debris onto newspaper, which be burnt later.



Above: a slow-worm (a rare type of lizard) found by Ken during a routine floor change

Future Events

Bucks County Annual Seminar

Bucks County Seminar, Saturday **3rd March 2012** at the Memorial Hall, Wendover. Another reminder about the Seminar. A really great day out and not all about beekeeping. At last year's seminar by way of example, our lecture was about the pros and cons of intensive farming and gave advice that without it, many more people around the world would starve - something perhaps we beekeepers in Britain may forget. Again there will be talks by leaders in their fields, and much much more - the 2012 season starts here!

Cost £12 per person including ploughman's lunch. To book, contact John Catton, email richard.catton1@ntlworld.com or telephone him on 01494 726616 and pay on the door. NBBKA are running teas and coffees and afternoon tea. Sandwiches and cakes will be gratefully received. We are also running a competition on beekeeping teasers. If you are coming can you please also let Andrew Beer know - your help would be very, very welcome. Email andrewbeer@tiscali.co.uk or tel. 01525 240235.

Extraordinary General Meeting

Notice is again given that an Extraordinary General Meeting of the North Bucks Beekeepers' Association will take place at 7.30pm on Tuesday 6 March 2012.

Agenda:

1. Presentation of Audited Accounts
2. Presentation of Asset Register
3. Proposed amendments to the Constitution
4. Any Other Business

Nick Grey Lecture

Nick Grey on preparing honey and other products for sale. Rectory Cottages, **21st March**, 7pm.

Beds BKA event - BBKA General Husbandry Assessment

Not listed on our own calendar above is an event from our friends at Beds BKA. Unfortunately it clashes with the Nick Grey lecture above. Here are the details.

Date: Wednesday 21st March 2012, 7.30pm, Flitwick Village Hall, Dunstable Road, Flitwick, Beds. MK45 1HP. <http://www.flitwickvillagehall.org.uk/>

A £2 charge will be made to cover hall hire, refreshments and Beulah's travelling costs.

The BBKA General Husbandry Assessment is the next practical assessment after the BBKA Basic, and it is recommended that you have kept bees for 3 years before taking it.

Beulah Cullen (Chalfonts/Bucks BKA) is the nearest examiner to Beds BKA, and we have asked her to prepare a talk for members about the assessment, what is involved and how best to prepare yourselves for the 2012 season.

If anyone is interested in attending, can they please email Sue Lang via bedfordshirehoney@hotmail.co.uk or leave a message on 01234 764180 to confirm that they are going to attend.

NBBKA & Bucks County Honey Shows and AGM

To provide Bucks County Members with a very full and we hope interesting and rewarding day, the County Committee is arranging for both the County Honey Show and the AGM to be held together on **13th October 2012 in Stewkley**. Details are still being planned: the following is a provisional programme.

- 9 am onwards: Entries for Honey Show arrive. Tea and coffee bar open.
- 10.15 am: Honey Show judging starts.
- 10 am to 12.30 pm: Talks and Workshop sessions.
- 12.30pm onwards: Lunches.
- 2 pm: Talk by distinguished speakers: Dinah Sweet, President of BIBBA and Welsh BKA
- 3.15 pm: Honey Show: Prizegiving
- 3.40 pm: County AGM
- 4.30 pm: Afternoon Tea

For the event we are taking over Stewkley Village Hall, and during the morning session the neighbouring Swan Public House and further facilities at the also nearby Stewkley School will be available if needed. A suitable field close at hand will provide free parking for some 80 cars.

The County Spring Seminar, based in South Bucks, is now a leading event in the "Bee Calendar". The Bucks County Honey Show and AGM is planned to be a second leading event, in the north of the county, with the North Bucks Association playing its part. Please make a note of the date of Saturday 13 October now. If you would like to be part of the North Bucks organising team, please tell Andrew Beer, tel. 01525 240 235 or email. andrewbeer@atiscali.co.uk

One point to note: **North Bucks BKA Honey Show** will also take place in Stewkley as an adjunct to the County Honey Show, rather than at Wyevale, Woburn Sands. Some members, we know, will miss the successful Wyevale event, but given that it is North Bucks' "turn" to organise the County events, we hope members will appreciate the additional burden there would be for NBBKA were they to run two separate honey shows, and will welcome the increased activities offered by the shows being combined.

Editorial

Kindle

Is anyone interested in having these newsletters pushed to their Amazon Kindle? They will automatically appear in your list of books and documents. Please email website@nbbka.org to express an interest.

Thanks and next month

Thank you to all the contributors for this month, especially our regulars. Articles gratefully received by webmaster@nbbka.org by the last week of the month.