

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter February 2013

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Calendar at-a-glance

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|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 25 th February | Social evening (see below) |
| 2 nd March | County spring seminar, Wendover |
| March | Improvers group (TBA) |

News Articles

Social Evening

Following the success of our social evening and by popular request we are organising another for February and intend to hold more throughout the year.

This is your Social evening so please nominate a venue in your area worthy of our patronage or tell us what you want from a venue.

The Proposed date is Monday the 25th of February, and proposed time 7:30pm onwards.

All suggestions and comments to our chairman, Ken, at chairman@nbbka.org.

Library

NBBKA thanks Libby Culshaw for keeping the association's books at her house for so long. The library has now moved to my (Daniel Clarke's) house in MK13, just off the V6 & H2. I will try to bring requested books to social events, committee meetings,

etc, while I fix some defects in the electronic library inventory page on our website at www.NBBKA.org/library

Beginners' Course

It looks likely that the annual beginners' course will be run at its regular home of the Hazeley Academy (school) on H5 on its usual Thursday night slot. The cost should be the same as last year and the facilities will remain the same. It will probably commence in mid-March. If you would like to help at the course, either by giving a lecture or just by being present on the evenings, please contact your committee at committee@nbbka.org.

European Food Safety Authority report

The BBKA have issued a document in response to the European Food Standards Authority's report on the risk to bees from neonicotinoid insecticides. The BBKA urges us, its members, to read the report and the response. The response is not yet on the BBKA website so we will put it on ours:

<http://www.nbbka.org/members/Documents.aspx>

The original report is available on the EFSA website:

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/130116.htm>

Improvers Group – event report

Last November and on Wednesday January 30th an Improvers Group was hosted by Andrew and Fiona Eelbeck at their home in Stoke Goldington. It was attended by 18 NBBKA members and ran from 7:30pm to 10:00pm, *writes Ken Neil*.

What is an improvers group?



An improvers group is an informal forum of bee keepers of all levels of experience to discuss aspects of bee keeping. It is a chance for bee keepers to interact with others of all levels of experience and expand their knowledge of the craft. Experienced bee keepers have a chance to be challenged by the questions of those less experienced and from the ensuing debate may gain a valuable insight or a different perspective

on the topic in question. Less-experienced bee keepers have a chance to hear several methods of dealing with a problem or aspect of bee keeping which allows them to further research, experiment, and find what works best for them. Members who have already gained BBKA qualifications can pass on their knowledge and experience to those currently working towards them, encourage those who are considering doing so, and those who might be nervous at the thought of doing so. It is a chance for the association to ensure that the methods described follow best practice and to emphasise the importance of improving skills and keeping up to date. Above all it brings members together in a friendly social environment, allows friendships and working partnerships to grow, and is immense fun!

The evening started with teas, coffee, and cakes being dispensed to those arriving by Andrew and Fiona. Once we had found a seat and settled down Fiona opened the session and asked us to introduce ourselves to the group by giving our name and where we lived. Since there were so many of us we were then split up into groups 1, 2, and 3 and Fiona announced that our topics for the evening were Swarm Control, Methods of Finding the Queen, and Identifying the Level of Varroa Infestation. Group 1 took up residence in the living room, Group 2 around the dining room table, and Group 3 in the kitchen within arm's length of the cakes. The discussion was lively, extremely good natured, and at times very funny. Different methods of swarm control were debated with some digression into reasons for splitting colonies and for creating a nucleus for future use. This was followed by discussion on methods of finding the queen and before we knew it the allotted time had flown by and our group had to rush through methods for identifying the level of varroa infestation. The three groups were then brought back together and Fiona asked for one representative from each group to summarise what had been discussed. Using an extremely useful **virtual system**, which I think deserves full description in an article all of its own, Fiona took us through the methods for swarm control that each representative described, then methods for finding the queen, and briefly through identifying the level of varroa infestation - though it was agreed that we take this subject up again at the next improvers group.

The meeting was concluded and the group gave thanks to Fiona and Andrew for hosting the group and their excellent hospitality. The two and a half hours had flown by, was thoroughly enjoyed by all, and was very rewarding.

It has been suggested that we form more improvers groups in different parts of the North Bucks area. This is sensible as it is evident that this is a popular format. Rather than have one extremely large group we would be better served with more, smaller, groups. It has also been suggested that to ensure that the burden is not always on



one person that the group could be held at a different home or venue each time, and that periodically we could have one meeting of all the groups.

So, If you would be prepared to host an improvers group in your locale, or, you have suggestions on how the improvers group could be improved, or, you have suggestions for topics, or, anything else comes to mind, then please email Ken Neil at chairman@nbbka.org.

The next improvers group will be held in March at a date and time to be announced.

Regular Columns

February Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

With a couple of inches of snow on the ground, it seems best to think of a lovely summer ahead. For once, instead of boring you with a list of *dos* and *don'ts* (well, we will revert to that later!), I thought beginners and perhaps others might like a run-through of some of the options for securing **increase**, whether for themselves, or for others of our North Bucks beekeepers in need. Some are obvious, some look difficult (but I assure you they are not) and under the principle that bees do nothing invariably (they don't read books) some work in one year but not another. You do not need to be told that bee-wise, 2012 was a rotten year; nevertheless it offered a great opportunity to me for raising new, more friendly stocks in the hope of a better 2013. Friendly? Only time will tell! Here are some of the options:-

1 - Advertise. Beginners especially please don't stand back hoping bees will come in your direction. We do not want you, during the pressure of the season, being overlooked inadvertently. Advertise in this Newsletter – that is what it's for. And elsewhere. Please ask other beekeepers now, because the earlier you can get the bees the better. As an example, a colony acquired in May often will produce a surplus crop in July. Only acquire from a reliable source and if in doubt, ask one of the Association's experienced beekeepers to advise, to lessen the risk of disease or other problems later.

2 - Purchase. Various beekeepers in the area sell bees. This has proved a very satisfactory way of getting started. For details, just speak to a member of the committee.

3 - Swarms. Again this has proved a satisfactory route into beekeeping. An advantage of a swarm (also a nucleus) as distinct from a full colony is that it will be easier to handle in its first year whilst confidence is gained. A strong swarm in May could provide a crop for the beekeeper in July. Catching, hiving and later, first disease examination of a swarm should not be undertaken by a new beekeeper without the

help of an experienced one on hand. This is very important.

4 - Increase in swarming season. Even if you only have one strong stock (but better if you have two or more) you can secure increase by taking advantage of bees' intentions to swarm, whether this is a decision your bees have taken of their own volition (a natural swarm condition) or one you have forced them to take (an unnatural swarm condition).

Natural swam condition: You will be familiar with, or at least aware when, a colony is making swarm plans. You open up a hive and find queen cells. Assuming there are no sealed queen cells, the stock almost certainly will not have already swarmed, in which case you should operate a swarm prevention plan (about which I ask you to refer to the books). Whatever plan you use, you will be directed at some stage under it to reduce the number of queen cells to one. If the stock is a strong one I suggest once the queen has been REMOVED from the original brood box, i.e. the one with the queen cells, you leave in it all cells until the oldest cell is about 13 days old (indicated by the darker brown colouring of the tip of the cell), at which point you take away one or two brood frames, each with a queen cell and for each brood frame, two of food (supers for this purpose will if necessary, do) with attendant bees, and set up one or two nucs: one nuc for each frame of brood. You then leave one good queen cell in the original box and destroy the rest. Under this system you could go into winter with up to four stocks, namely the stock in the original brood box, the artificial swarm and two nucs all ready for the winter struggle ahead.

Unnatural swarm condition: By this I mean a strong stock, which you have induced into taking first steps towards swarming. How can you do that? In late April/May you deliberately fail to give a colony enough space. Alternatively, in late June/early July you remove supers early, leaving the bees congested and wanting to swarm. In either case, you are looking to the bees to raise queens in anticipation of swarming because swarm queen cells tend to make the best queens. The steps to be taken, however, will vary depending on the time of year.

Forced swarm conditions (late April/May). Proceed exactly as if the bees had made on their own, i.e. without your intervention, a decision to swarm. Just follow the plan mentioned earlier.

Forced swarm conditions (late June/July). At this time of the year, with the crop largely gathered in, the principal concern will not be lost crop: rather that all stocks will be strong enough for winter. Proceed as follows. After queen cells appear and before any are sealed, find queen and put her with the comb she is on, in new brood box on original site with queen excluder, supers and flying bees. Put original brood box elsewhere in the apiary, turning entrance through 90 degrees to face, as far as possible, away from flight paths of all other colonies, stuff entrance with grass for three days, feed and ensure sufficient ventilation in the meantime. Open original brood box when oldest queen cell is about 13 days (see test above) and divide into two equal parts of brood, pollen

and stores, part to go into new box. Put this new box elsewhere in the apiary, with entrance facing in a different direction from both original box and that with mother, stuff the entrance with grass for three days. All stocks should be kept on narrow 1-inch entrances at least until spring, and all must be fed as necessary to ensure they have enough stores for winter. This plan has worked very well for me. Remember nucs must always be fed, particularly those set up late in the year. Similarly, they will require narrowest entrances to defend themselves against wasps and fellow bees on the scrounge, whatever the time of year.

5 - Queen introduction. You can either buy in a queen from a reputable source in the area, or you can raise one (or a few) yourself.

Buy a queen. A nucleus raised before 10th July with a new queen well fed should produce a first-class stock at the end of the summer. I suggest you collect your queen to prevent mishaps in the post. On the day before arrival of the queen, go to your strongest stock. First find the queen and put her safely in a separate box during the operation. Then take three brood frames: one with soon-to-emerge brood, two of stores. Shake each comb LIGHTLY over original brood box to dislodge flying bees, and to leave nursery bees which will cling on. Do this with, say, two additional combs, but this time having shaken the flying bees off, as before, you shake the nursery bees into the new box before returning those combs to the colony. Close the new box up and place, if at all possible, in a quiet place at least three miles from apiary. The new queen is then introduced the following day, as per queen-raiser's instructions (for further advice, please refer to the books). Why discard the flying bees? Because they are less likely to accept a strange queen.

Raise your own queen. Please don't be scared off. The principles are easy to understand. From a strong colony take three brood combs, one with some day-old worker larvae. Put in separate box and place elsewhere in the apiary. Make sure you do NOT take queen. There will be no need to shake any of the combs. 48 hours later, go back and you should find partly-formed queen cells where previously there were day-old larvae. Take relevant comb and put in an eke immediately above queen excluder of the original stock and below any supers. Queen excluder is vital to stop existing queen destroying queen cells. Four days later, return to original stock and put frame with almost complete queen cells back into nuc. Go back after seven days and reduce to one good queen cell, or to whatever is the number of nucs you wish to raise, assuming you have more available bees. Each nuc is allowed to raise its queen, who will hopefully mate to lead a strong colony in the following year.

You may think it strange that a queen-right colony with a good queen will continue to raise queen cells started by a nucleus. I doubted it until I tried. The secret is to have

the cells above the queen and queen excluder, but below the supers, to ensure rich queen jelly supply! [NB This is a suggestion of Ged Marshall (as amended!)]

6 - Saving colonies in Autumn. Traditionally, beekeepers have merged stocks in autumn to reduce numbers to take into winter. May I appeal to all beekeepers, as an alternative to this course, to pass surplus stocks to beekeepers needing them when possible? I pass on nucs in September and obtain payment in the spring, if they survive.

Naturally in this note I cannot go into minutest detail. Essentially I want beginners to know that there are many ways of increasing stocks apart from straight purchase. Please, please do tell me if you want more detail.

At the risk of repetition, all new stocks must be kept in feed. Finally you can, as the year goes on, strengthen any weak nuclei by transferring healthy frames in the same apiary with attendant bees from good strong stocks. If bees are being transferred on the combs, and a queen is present in a nuc, introduce by the "newspaper method" to prevent the introduced bees killing the queen! If no queen is present, but bees are on the combs to be introduced, inter-space the frames in the nuc with the frames being introduced sufficiently so that light can get between the combs for ten minutes or so, then slam the combs together like a book and there will be no trouble (a Manley plan).

Now back to the present. Notes for January were quite extensive, so no repetition. Just a few things to mention:-

A. Solid floors. It is time to give clean floors. Do this with a friend. First, lift the WHOLE hive, straddled on an upturned roof, and put the new floor where the dirty floor rested. Gently ease off brood chamber from original floor and place remaining hive on new floor. Do on a flying day so straggler bees can get back. Sterilise dirty floors before re-use. Some bees can be very testy on your first visit, so for your comfort do the job quietly and quickly and just in case, have smoker to hand. Wire floors normally need only brushing down.

B. Bees flying well, bringing in pollen enthusiastically, showing no signs of disorder. Best left until March, but keep up the feed because strong colonies starve to death first.

C. Bees dead, apparently dead, weak or showing distress e.g. dysentery spots at entrances. Take a peek and act as advised in January's newsletter. If bees being robbed and dysentery present (which may mean nosema), then it may be best to cut your losses by killing and burning bees and removing hive for wholesale cleaning and sterilisation. I have said before, be wary because the weakest in early spring can be the strongest hive later in the year.

D. Temperature. As I write, we have had about three weeks of cold, sub-zero weather

due to end in a few days' time (now ended!) Healthy bees should be fine, especially with the mild spell now being forecast. Again, don't forget any necessary feeding.

And finally, I was speaking to one of our members who said he didn't like troubling other beekeepers with his problems. May I please dissipate that thought. We, that is those of us who have been doing bees for "a year or two" (you know what I mean) are delighted to, want to and will endeavour to help in any way we can. The antiipation of your call is probably why we still keep bees! Here is my landline phone number for help: 01525 240 235. Please, please use it for bee business!

I hope it is not too early to wish you "full supers"!

Regards,

Andrew