

North Bucks Beekeepers' Association
Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA
Newsletter: December 2009

November's meeting was excellent. **Dr Beulah Cullen**, assisted by her husband John Gamble, gave a most fascinating and informative talk, enhanced by stunning electron microscope images. I hadn't realised that honey bees mix propolis with wax when making honeycomb in order to give it strength. Beulah explained in detail the many ways in which bees communicate beyond the usual waggle dance. For example, the dancer will open the Nazonov gland and fly around the source described in the dances to be sure that the foragers get the right target! The sense of smell is paramount. Dancing bees leave a scent on the floor, if this is cut out and moved the bees find it and dance on it! We saw the sensilla, the glossa and the flabella larger than life. We saw the proventriculus, usually hidden in the digestive system, as clear as can be. The hamuli were shown large, what a wonderful zipping system. This amazing talk allowed us to peek into honey bees in a way that we could never imagine.

Many, many thanks to Beulah and John for allowing us to share this insight. Everyone who attended agreed that it was a wonderful session. I noticed seven people taking notes, every drop of information was so valuable!

Beulah recommended : ***The Buzz About Bees – J. Tautz Pub: Springer ISBN 978 3 540 78727 3***
I will see about purchasing this for our library.

Other news : **Jessica May** is a third year student at the Royal Veterinary College in Hertfordshire and is currently undertaking a short study on bee husbandry. She is increasingly aware of the need for more research in the field of apiculture and for vets to have a sound working knowledge of bees. With this project she is hoping to collect important information regarding factors determining the behaviour and health of bees and their colonies in the UK.

Jessica wonders if we would be able to assist with the study by completing a short questionnaire which I will email to members. This will help to gather key information for the study. The information that you provide will be strictly confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this project.

In response to Andrew Beer's apiary notes last month, **Phil Wiggins**, of High Wycombe BKA, wrote to say that he has used *ApiLife Var* for two years and the results have been excellent. Best of all it does not need an eke as it comes in the form of a thin impregnated 'biscuit'. It is broken into 4 and placed directly on top of the brood combs under the cover board.

Sarah Coe was on the Beginners' course earlier the year. She really enjoyed the course and hopes to put her knowledge into practise. Sarah belongs to a small group hoping to have bee hives at the Urban Farm in Wolverton. The farm is part of *Growing People at Foundation* House in Wolverton - click the link for information about the work they do on the farm. They are really excited at the prospect of having bees there. In the future they may be able to run some lessons for the young people who work on the farm and other community groups involved in the farm - so it could be a really good way to raise awareness of bees. Early days at the moment but if any members have any ideas, advice or equipment for Sarah and her group, do get in touch.

<http://www.mkchristianfoundation.co.uk/#/growing-people/4530499753>

BBKA Calendar. If you haven't sent off for this, I suggest you do so without delay. The photographs are stunning, there is one main one and two small ones per page. They are all of bee plants and there is an informative commentary about the plants and monthly bee behaviour to accompany each one. Well worth £10.00 including p&p. The calendar is sold in aid of the BBKA's Research and Education Fund.

Buglife aka *The Invertebrate Conservation Trust* has presented a report on over 20 studies relating to the neonicotinoid pesticide imidacloprid. The studies found that bees exposed to non-lethal doses of the pesticide through contaminated nectar and pollen 'forage less and produce fewer offspring'. Some bees were affected by 'apathy, laboured breathing, a lack of coordination and convulsion'. So DEFRA and Mr Benn can't say they "haven't seen any evidence".

EQUIPMENT

Pictured here is the equipment which has been purchased for members' use over the years.



We have a steam wax extractor. Some people find it easy to use, others find it messy and time-consuming to clean. They prefer to go back to their saucepan and rainwater method. Remember, it is always advisable to use rainwater when dealing with beeswax as calcium deposits can spoil good wax.

There are two plastic, nine frame, radial extractors. This one is on a fixed base with castors.



The



Pratley uncapping tray is useful if you have a lot of solid honey. One of our members kindly made a stand for it.

We are fortunate enough to have two electric microscopes. These come complete with a book, a CD, various lenses and a of slides.



box

Sometimes we are lucky enough to receive donations. Colin Delaney has given us a devise for cutting comb and John Marchant kindly donated a child's beesuit. The extractors were also donations from members.



The terms of hiring are: a deposit of £25.00 will be charged. £20.00 will be refunded upon the return of clean, serviceable equipment. Thus NBBKA will retain £5.00 for funds.

The steam wax extractor, honey extractors and Pratley tray may be hired for one week maximum.

The microscopes, books, slides and cds may be hired for two weeks.

Only members of NBBKA may hire equipment.

To hire equipment contact Libby Culshaw.

Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

When temperatures fall to a few degrees above freezing our bees form a tight ball and appear comatose. This indicates all is well. On the other hand, restless, moving bees, perhaps scurrying to and fro at hive entrances, may indicate problems such as dysentery. Unless there is a very mild spell which enables bees to fly freely from hives it is probably best not to open the suspect stock but to make a note of it and inspect in the early Spring.

Jobs for December are to apply/continue to apply, where needed, varroa treatments, anti-woodpecker and mouse-guard measures and to check stores by hefting. Visit apiaries every two weeks and immediately after storms. Try to take spare roofs on your inspections and replace leaking ones.

The main activity now is to get you and your bees ready for the new season which is approaching like an express train and will inevitably catch out the unprepared, perhaps even the prepared.

PREPARATIONS Apiary equipment - go through your equipment, checking that it is serviceable.

1. Clean up - are your hives, floors, boxes, queen excluders, coverboards and roofs clean and up to the job? Scorch wood with a blowlamp.

2. Robbers and damp - are your hives robber-proof and water-tight? Wasps and robber bees will get through the tiniest gaps. Simple, basic carpentry will ensure there are no gaps. In my view - some of my equipment is now over 50 years old and is still, thanks to western red cedar, as serviceable as the day it was made - there is absolutely no need to apply preservatives to cedar hive parts but if you want to, check labels to ensure that they are "bee friendly". I do, however, paint and periodically repaint any roof when wood has split or opened up and is no longer damp-proof, applying fillers, undercoat, etc. as for any outside paint job.

3. Loose joints - over a period of time joints of boxes and other wooden parts tend to loosen. Normally, it is possible with, say, an old screwdriver to prise joints slightly apart, inject outside glue such as *Evo-stik External* and re-fix with galvanised screws or nails as necessary.

4. Frames - go through your boxes of frames / combs and work as follows:

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| Wobbly, rickety frames or those "just past it" | Discard/burn |
| Blackened combs | Cut out and replace. These are ideal for your compost heap but boil up just to kill off any diseases - otherwise discard or burn |
| Misshapen, gnawed-away combs, brood combs over 2 years old, combs pollen or crystallised-honey blocked or generally "past it", | Cut out or render down the wax and recycle it -. |
| Brood frames | Disinfect |
| Super frames | Providing not used as brood combs and disease is not suspected, I do not disinfect - some people do. |
| All frames not discarded as above | Fit new foundation. Do this in a warm room to prevent cracking. The experts tell us to wait until the weather warms up. I prefer to get on with the job! |
| Frames / combs in good condition | Scrape off brace / wild comb and propolis deposits and render down wax. |

5. Extraction and other honey equipment - hopefully, you are going to need this in a rush, and often! It is as well to think out, now, the whole process of dealing with honey from hive to honey pot (and, if appropriate, sale). Can you make things more efficient? Is the "other half" happy with your use of kitchen utensils and kitchen space? It may be useful to discuss your plans with an experienced beekeeper because what is always a chore can become downright frustrating if there is a blockage in the system such as semi-crystallised oil-seed rape honey, which won't strain, or if your honey is not perfect.

6. Personal equipment, (including hive tool, gloves and smoker) - obviously, you need to check these over; have bee suits repaired, particularly veils and zips, and don't forget to give your smoker a thorough clean-up - again, an old screwdriver will be a useful tool here. Is your hive tool (so easy to mislay!) painted in a bright colour? If not, get a small tin of Hammerite Yellow, and apply.

PROVISIONS

1. As it is inevitable that 100% of your bees will swarm, given the chance and the conditions, you have got to provide for that. If you have five colonies in Spring you need five additional hives or nuclei boxes to cope. If you want the increase you have now simply got to buy in the necessary equipment. It is no good "waiting and seeing" because you can be certain that just at the time you need additional equipment so will other beekeepers and there will probably be a fateful delay in your delivery (and your swarm will be gone). If the cost of all that additional equipment really is prohibitive, then at least make some if not sufficient provision by buying some equipment now and acquire more in later years.
 2. Current advice is that 50% of brood combs should be replaced each year. You will need a suitable number of frames with foundation in readiness for the first full Spring inspections.
 3. Do take advantage of January and Stoneleigh sales for whatever extra equipment you may need.
 4. If you do not want a permanent increase of colonies, then you need temporary accommodation for swarms, nucs etc until they can be sorted (through unification, or otherwise) and you can reduce to the required number.
 5. It is obviously galling and expensive to have to go out and buy equipment from the suppliers for short-term increases which you are going to need at most for three months. There is an alternative! Make temporary hives or nuclei boxes. The carpentry is so elementary that even I can do it!
- Have a great Christmas and if you haven't got it already here is a Christmas present must: The Waring Specials namely "**Teach Yourself Beekeeping**" [Bookpoint Limited, tel. 01235 827 720]

Forage The mahonia Charity has been flowering so well, the bees were enjoying it but now with the high winds and heavy rains the ground underneath is a carpet of yellow flowers. So sad as this is the bees main forage till January / February.

Queenie's Kitchen Turkey Roast with Honey The Romans cooked flamingos and herons in this way. Take 1lb thick honey for a 15-20 lb bird, melt together with ½ lb butter until amalgamated. Place the turkey in a baking tray and pour the mixture over. Allow to stand for an hour or so, pouring the mixture over from time to time. Roast at 400F/Gas 6 for 30 min. By now the honey should have made a black crust all over. Baste. Reduce heat to 350F/Gas 4. After a further 30 mins baste again and cover the black turkey with foil and continue to cook for the time you have calculated. Remove foil 15 min before taking from the oven. The honey seals the bird so that the flesh is white and moist. The black skin is sweet and crisp. Potatoes put around the bird will be candied. We have tried this recipe several times, even at 16,000 feet in the Andes. Our Argentinian guests were alarmed at the sight of the blackened turkey and thought we had burnt the dinner! But everyone ate with mucho gusto! Que rico.

December

The **Bucks County AGM** is hosted by Mid Bucks BKA this year on 4th December at the Bowls Club, Wendover. There will be a speaker from **BIBBA** with a subject related to selective queen breeding. All members of Bucks BKA are invited to attend. Ken will be going and has seats available. If you would like a lift, please call 07779 801 774

January 2010 Once again **Martin Buckle** gets our *New (Beekeeping) Year* off to a cracking start with a talk on **SKEPS** on Wednesday 20th, 7.30 p.m. at Rectory Cottages. Martin will show ancient and unusual skeps to accompany his talk. Martin always amazes us with his skill and knowledge in all things. We are lucky to be offered a two day skep making course in the Spring. The cost is £15.00 per head to include materials. Max 8 people. Please contact Libby as soon as possible so that dates can be decided and the hall booked.



Bee thereor bee square!

If you would like to contribute to or comment upon our Newsletter, please contact Libby Culshaw 01908 375968 laviniaculshaw@hotmail.com