

## North Bucks Beekeepers' Association

Affiliated to BBKA and Buckinghamshire BKA

NEWSLETTER: March 2010

**February** The snow and cold weather persists but there was enough sun on Sunday afternoon to peep under the roofs of my three hives to see what the candy situation was. The bees have eaten a little but this time last year I was putting on a second batch. The good news is Ken weighed all of his colonies in early October and again in early February. They averaged a loss of only 5 pounds.

We met our new Regional Bee Inspector, **Nigel Semmence**.

Nigel told up about his scientific background and his work with solitary bees at the Oxford Bee Company. He went to work in California where the almond growers are experimenting with solitary bees as pollinators. Nigel's pictures of some of the 700,000 acres of almond trees in blossom were stunning. The work of the **National Bee Unit** was explained and then Nigel talked to us about the importance of apiary hygiene and the pests and diseases we should be looking out for and how to deal with them. If in doubt, of course, contact the RBI. Although Nigel is based in Andover, he is only too pleased to be contacted and will give advice and arrange a visit.  
Tel: 01264 338694



Nigel recommends all members to join **BeeBase**. This is the NBU's web based data base for beekeepers in England and Wales. It provides information on the activities of the NBU, legislation, pest and disease recognition and control, interactive maps, current research areas and key contacts. You can register online at [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com) or phone: 01904 462510

**This month** Bucks County Beekeepers' Association **14<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL SEMINAR**  
Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> March 10.00 a.m. – 4.15 p.m. at Wendover Memorial Hall, Wendover HP22 6HF

- 10:00 **Meet** for coffee & registration
- 10:30 **Welcome** by the County Chairman - John Catton
- 10:40 **Honey for Healing** – Dr Rowena Jenkins
- 11:50 **Pollination Mechanics** – Robin Dean – Red Beehive Company
- 13:00 **Ploughman's lunch** - Time also to spend visiting the various exhibits & sales stands
- 14:30 **The Raffle** – supporting "Honey Bee Health & Well Being" Research
- 14:40 **Bees and plants** – Andy Willis
- 15:50 **Closing remarks** by the County President, Bob Hunter

£12 per person, to include refreshments & Ploughman's lunch. Pay at the door, but **please book beforehand** with **John Catton tel: 01494 726616** e-mail: [richard.catton1@ntlworld.com](mailto:richard.catton1@ntlworld.com)  
If you would like a lift, contact Libby.

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March** the **Beginners' Beekeeping Course** starts at Hazeley School, MK8 0PT  
Twenty five people have signed up. If you require information contact Bob Sibley 01908 647597

Meetings are underway with the Parks' Trust to make apiary sites available to Association beekeepers. There are currently four venues of interest and another possible training apiary at Elfield Park. It is hoped that beginners will be able to place hives at Cosgrove. For information contact Bob Sibley.

Bob has negotiated a discount for Association purchases with Thorne's Agent, Jenny Ellison, at **L.E. Services**, Rookery Road, Wybotson, Beds, MK44 3AX. Tel: 01480 217887. Bob is currently trying to secure the same discount for all NBBKA members.

## **Apiary Notes From Andrew Beer**

Following January's snows, temperatures have remained generally at or a few degrees above freezing but bees have taken advantage of warm breaks.

### **Main Jobs for March**

**1. Change Floors** On a cold, not frosty, day proceed as follows:

- take off and upend roof.
- straddle remainder of hive over roof so that sides of roof support hive floor.
- put clean floor and entrance block where hive originally stood.
- break propolis seal between dirty floor and brood body with hive tool.
- lift hive less dirty floor onto clean floor.
- replace roof.
- scrape, clean/blow-torch dirty floor for re-use elsewhere.

Three points:

Light the smoker just in case..!

Some of the latest floors with varroa under-trays will not withstand blowtorching especially those with some plastic parts. The easiest alternative is to prepare hot water/soda crystal mix and scrub down. I am now using wire floors without under-trays. If I find them clean and clear of debris, I shall leave in place; only dirty ones will get the water/soda treatment.

### **2. First Spring Inspection.**

Exact timing, as always, depends on the weather but often can be done in the first ten days of March. Choose a warm sunny day when bees are flying freely. Inspection should always be minimal because the risk of bees balling their queen is much greater before full Spring activity has got underway. In a case of balling, the bees surround their queen in a ball about the size of a golf ball and crush her to death.

Colonies flying freely need no more than a cursory inspection at this time. Colonies showing little activity or wholly inactive must be inspected. I suggest you proceed as follows. Open these hives so that you can see the tops of brood combs and the gaps between them. If you wish, remove unoccupied combs for closer inspection but not combs occupied by bees or within the cluster.

All colonies - feed as necessary (see February's notes) and remember that March is the killer month for starvation and expanding large colonies can starve fastest of all.

### **3. Second Spring Inspection.**

This may be as late as April. Again, much depends on the weather. Wait until bees are out of winter and into Spring mode and full Spring activity has begun. The simple fact is that bees, barring some emergency, must have got into full Spring activity as seen at hive entrances for, say, at least 7 days before hives can be opened up and combs taken apart and examined. Even then, that examination should be carried out with the minimum disturbance. At all inspections try to apply Ted Hooper's 5 tests, (Ted Hooper "Guide to Bees and Honey" (4<sup>th</sup> edition 1977), p.102) which are:

1. Has the colony sufficient room?
2. Is the queen present and laying the expected quantity of eggs?
3. **a** – (early in the season) Is the colony building up in size as fast as other colonies in the apiary?  
**b** – (mid season) Are there any queen cells present in the colony?
4. Are there any signs of disease or abnormality?
5. Has the colony sufficient stores to last until the next inspection?

and act accordingly. If you look at Ted Hooper's book or any standard bee books, guidance and answers will readily be found to each of these questions so I will limit myself to a number of comments.

- You may find no brood. If so, queen probably dead. Check if queenless and if so shake combs/hive clear of bees at the entrance of the nearest strong stock and leave bees to fend for themselves.
- You find slabs of drone brood in worker cells in regular pattern perhaps with scattered worker brood. Queen is or is becoming a drone breeder and must be destroyed. Then unite by newspaper method with strong stock or shake at entrance of another hive as above.

- You find drone brood scattered in worker cells laid haphazardly with some cells having one or more eggs in them. Indicates that queen has gone and some workers are laying. You cannot unite by newspaper method as workers likely to kill any queen. Shake hive/bees at entrance of another hive, as above.
- Some take time-consuming steps to keep non-queenright stocks going. This will be virtually impossible at least until there is a steady supply of queens later in the year and probably uneconomic as colony in trouble likely to contain elderly bees.
- NEVER UNITE IF DISEASE IS SUSPECTED.
- Take any opportunity to mark queens. At this time it should be an easy task with a marking cage and should help you find the queen when the hive has 50,000 + occupants. The 2010 colour is blue. This will also be a good opportunity to clip queens' wings. Personally, I don't.
- Some beekeepers give a stimulative feed or "spread the brood" to expand colonies for early crops, especially rape. For explanation, see "the books". Personally I find the problem is rather holding colonies back so that they do not advance too quickly and get in to swarming mode in April.

If the second inspection has to be delayed for any reason but bees need more space, immediately add queen excluder and supers and deal with inspection later. Preferably use drawn combs at this time, but if foundation only let bees have a run of 1 super without excluder until they rise into it then put the queen excluder (and queen) back to proper positions.

Next month, I shall give my views on swarm control (no need to panic – I shall be following Adrian Waring's methods) but now is the time to have all your extra hives and equipment, rather like artillery, in position in preparation for the rush which will be with us by mid-April.

### Messages

**Brian Copsey** has 163 acres of land he wishes to make available for an apiary at Edgecott. Brian is an ex bee keeper and he says it is suitable for hive access. Tel: 01296 770360

**James Monk** has been sorting out the last of the late **Bill Jones** beekeeping bits and pieces, at the request of his widow Elizabeth. The following items are available for sale:

12 x Commercial Frames	12 x Varroa Screens
3 x Section Display Cases	10x Metal Section Dividers
6 sets of model National, WBC and Skep hives (each about 3 inches high - ideal for a display stand)	
Plus foundation as follows:	
22 sheets 14 x 12 (unwired)	20 sheets 14 x 12 (wired)
80 sheets National Super (unwired)	50 sheets National Brood (unwired)
50 sheets National Super (wired - some with the older vertical wires, some with "W" wires)	
30 sheets National Brood (wired - as above, some old, some new)	
60 sheets Commercial Shallow (wired)	10 sheets Commercial Deep (wired)
A mini smoker (worked by your own puff!)	2 x model straw skeps (6" high and 5" in diameter)

Elizabeth is not looking for the Thornes' catalogue prices for these items. All proceeds from any sales will be sent directly to Bees for Development.

If you are interested in any of these things, please contact James Monk on 01908 672306.

From **Ken Gorman** - Overwintered, full brood chamber colonies, 2009 marked queens, mid/late April: £120. Five frame nuclei, available early June, 2010 home reared Carnica strain: £120. Collected from home and boxes returned within seven days. Supply subject to weather and successful wintering. Tel: 07779801774. email: [kennethgorman@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:kennethgorman@tiscali.co.uk)

If you intend to join the **skep making course**, 15-16 May, do have a look at **Martin Buckle's** web site [www.martinatnewton.com](http://www.martinatnewton.com) -therein lies all things bees; a lovely section on skeps - including Martin's reconstruction of a skep circa 1682; also sections on wasps, willow baskets and Alphorns!

**Forage** - aconites, snowdrops and crocus are just beginning to open. Hazel catkins are producing pollen. On Sunday bees were desperately sniffing around the mahonia. Alas there were only brown spikes, the flowers had been decimated by heavy rain, strong winds, snow and frost during January and February. On the *bright side*, the *clematis armandii* buds are swelling.

**Queenie's Kitchen** There is just time to prepare wine for September's Honey Show. **Bee Wine**

- Add 3 lb honey and the peel of two lemons to a gallon of cold water. Boil for 30 minutes.
- Pour into a container and when the mixture has become tepid, add ½ oz yeast creamed with a little cold water. Add ¼ oz phosphate of ammonia and ¼ oz cream of tartar.
- Cover the container with a piece of muslin and let it ferment.
- When the liquid has ceased 'working', cover the container closely.
- After 6 months, pour into bottles and cork down.

For the Honey Show, meads and honey wines must be presented in clear, punted bottles.

During the 1980s I travelled extensively around Australia and was impressed to see that hotels *sported* full frames of honey comb on their breakfast buffet tables which customers could happily hack away at. Recently introduced is a system similar to a section display case, where the comb is kept behind glass and the cappings are scratched only by a waiter. There is a conduit to convey fresh honey to a bowl from which one helps oneself. This method is more hygienic and less wasteful but lacking the audience participation element!



**Buzz Words** Did you know.....

- Bee Craft are producing very useful apiary guides in sturdy, glossy card which can be used outside in the apiary? Brilliant, especially for beginners. [www.bee-craft.com](http://www.bee-craft.com)
- Honey sales in U.K. have fallen? Apparently due to producers hiking their prices amidst rumours of predicted honey shortages.

**Fingers crossed -**

A peck of March dust and a shower in May,  
Make the corn green and the fields gay.  
As many mists in March you see  
So many frosts in May will be.  
March damp and warm  
Will do farmer much harm.  
A peck of March dust is worth a king's ransom

If you would like to comment on or contribute to our Newsletter contact Libby Culshaw 01908 375968

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