

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter

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Calendar at-a-glance

Wednesday 19 th January 2011	D.I.Y. Questions and Answers Evening
Wednesday 23 rd February 2011	Bee Law: What you need to know. Speaker: Andrew Beer
End February/beg. March 2011	Beginners classes start. Details will be sent to those already booked in.
Saturday 5 th March 2011 10.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m. Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Road, Wendover HP22 6HF	Bucks County Beekeepers Association: 15 th Annual Seminar – “Not Just Beekeeping”.

Meetings unless otherwise stated take place at Rectory Cottages, Church Green Road, Bletchley MK3 6BJ at 7.30 p.m.. There is ample car parking in the car park at the rear – entrance lower down the road or on surrounding streets.

Articles

Beekeeping Doesn't Have to be Stereotyped

Welcome to another year of beekeeping, albeit that the year for our bees started after the taking of last year's honey crop in September. On Ninety Mile Beach on New Zealand's North Island's West coastline (it is actually only 90 kilometres but it was measured by a Frenchman, I believe!) you can take a bus and it safely avoids the many quicksands. Less experienced drivers concerned for their safety like to follow the coaches, so the coach drivers drive in figures of eight or similar manoeuvres to amuse their passengers as cars follow faithfully but needlessly in pursuit. So I think it is with beekeeping. Traditionalist beekeepers argue that unless you do this or do not do that, then you won't be keeping your bees well (or worse) but the real question in my mind is this: "Are you keeping your bees properly according to their location, and yours, and your bees' needs?" I mention all this because on my recent trip to Chile I noted that beekeeping practices there are very different from those in the UK, just as beekeeping in the central areas of Chile is very different again from that in southern Chile. For example, in Central Chile, queen excluders are treated as positive nuisances, no swarm seven-day inspections or winter feeding are carried out and honey is extracted from frames within the brood chamber, courses that would be condemned in the UK but they clearly suit the Chilean bees and beekeepers (and Chilean honey is of the highest standard). Putting all this in the context of North Bucks – if what you are doing works for you and your bees, please don't be bullied by an expert up the road who does something different. But do listen to what other beekeepers say because they may well have tips from which we can all learn. Talking about learning and perhaps for the benefit of those who were unable to attend, can I just pass on some of the little gems Ged Marshall shared with us in his recent talk at Rectory Cottages.

Ged Marshall's Talk

Ged's talk was as usual highly informative and entertaining and a fine reminder that if you come along to these talks at Rectory Cottages you will learn much.



Here are some of his gems.

Emergency winter feeding before supers added:

Use cover boards with feed holes located off-centre. These can be turned so that a feed hole is located immediately above clustering bees. Feed fondant, available from cake shops, and place over the hole directly above the cluster "Isolation Starvation", (meaning food in hive but bees unable to reach it), appears to have been a big problem in winter 2009/2010. This suggestion should help avoid this.

Emergency Spring Feeding after Supers Added:

An explanation, first, may help. A conundrum for all beekeepers is: what is the best way of feeding bees once supers have been added. It is claimed that if you feed syrup above the supers you will contaminate the honey crop. So what some beekeepers do is to remove a couple of empty drawn brood combs and pour syrup into them. Sounds messy doesn't it? The underlying problem is the risk that spring may be delayed and bees starve. This is a particular problem for Ged who moves his colonies to Kent and the orchards. Here is Ged's clever solution. Ged strips out foundation or drawn comb from a couple of super frames and replaces with fondant cut to size and placed within the super frames. Bees will eat fondant whether or not required and when the season gets underway replace fondant with comb and honey. Place the "fondant combs" between drawn out combs to discourage brace/wild comb etc.

Super Frames

Ged never fits full sheets of super foundation into super frames. Instead, he fits foundation starter strips – say 1 inch deep nailed into the frame in the normal way and leaves bees to build comb. Subsequently, when comb becomes "tired", it is cut out to leave a wedge of comb at the top of the frame for the bees to repeat the process. Ged said this technique is suitable both for jarred honey and cut comb. Again, it would be sensible to place these frames between drawn out combs. N.B. Chilean beekeepers follow a similar practice primarily to lessen the prospect of pesticide residue in foundation being passed on to the consumer.

Bait hives.

Not a new suggestion. Ged places bait hives at some distance, at least 20 feet, from other hives, on some suitable support "as high as you can reach". If no suitable support can be found, Ged places the bait hive on the highest hive. He uses a full size brood box but he inserts only two used brood combs. These are placed in a brood box over a wooden floor (wide entrance), and covered with a board/roof. Why insert only two combs? Answer. If the swarm does not move in, wax moths certainly will and you will be left with just two damaged combs rather than a dozen or so. N.B. Add swarm lure and "bee sex the box up" if you wish by rubbing old brood comb over the inner surfaces. Don't follow this plan unless you are certain no comb is diseased or infected.

Unripe combs in late summer.

Ged collects together and puts over strong colony who will take unripened honey down to brood chamber. N.B. The job is done even more effectively if coverboard with one bee space opening is placed between the boxes. Colony then "steals" the honey from the upper box, thinking Christmas has come early!

Bad queen – a quick fix.

Kill the queen and make the bees raise a new one. N.B. Perhaps a controversial suggestion.

Fondant

Probably because I have a perverse hatred of shopping, never venturing further than a timber yard or a garden centre, I have never walked in to a cake shop asking for fondant. Now, thanks to this recipe from Mr Computer Expert (alias Daniel Clarke) I and you will have no need; in Daniel's words:

After searching the local sugar craft shops for additive-free fondant icing, but without success, I decided to make my own. The following recipe is nothing original, of course, but the method was new to me and so I thought I would share my experience with other beekeepers. I didn't make quite enough to fill my vessel at first so I have included volumes and quantities to help others.

1.5 kg plain white sugar

250 ml water

3 teaspoons of liquid glucose (You can find this in the baking aisle of the supermarket).

This will make 1200cc in volume, 1700g in weight of fondant. Adjust the ingredients accordingly to ensure you make the right volume for your chosen tub. You can work out the volume of your tub by filling it with water and weighing it. 1g of water equals 1cc.

The ratios are 500g sugar: 80ml water: 1 teaspoon glucose.

Make sure your ratio of sugar to water is accurate, but don't fret too much about the exact amount of glucose. It's so sticky you'd never be able to measure it accurately anyway.

Mix them up and heat at a reasonable pace (not too fast or it'll burn), all the way to 116C (240F), soft ball point. Stir continuously. My tip is to wear rubber gloves because if your stirring causes a splash of boiling sugar to hit your hand, its high temperature and latent heat will hurt more than a bee sting. At the target temperature, remove from the heat and slowly dunk the pan into a sink of cool water, taking care not to damage your pan. Stir vigorously until it turns white. Keep stirring for a few minutes, then turn it out onto a damp worktop and knead like bread. This last step is important because otherwise the result can be too crumbly and will not pack easily into tubs. After a few minutes kneading you can place it into an ice-cream tub.

Our woodpecker friends

Are you troubled by woodpeckers and need a free source for wire netting – a suggestion in the latest BBKA newsletter: contact a master thatcher and get his wire netting off-cuts. Alternatively, wire removed from the old thatch will probably keep those pesky friends at bay.

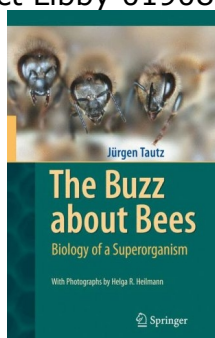


A Good Read

Thanks to the Community Association Foundation/Grass Roots grants The Association has been able to purchase for its library "The Buzz about Bees" by Jurgen Tautz. In BBKA December news Dr Stephen Palmer writes:

Dr Stephen Palmer reviewed ***The Buzz About Bees*** by Jurgen Tautz. He says: "This is quite an extraordinary book in so many ways. It is one of the best produced books I have read for a long time and the quality of the accompanying photographs is exceptional.....The central theme of the book is that a honey bee colony should be regarded as a super organism."

Dr Palmer concludes, "It is an outstanding book that all should make the effort to read." It is available for loan. Contact Libby 01908 375968. Thanks, Libby.



A New Apiary Site for the Association

The facilities at Bradwell Abbey and Cosgrove are serving the Association well but the Committee has been discussing locating the Association's main apiary in the Bletchley/Simpson area, central to the Association membership. We are looking for a

site for about a dozen hives offering security, car parking and provision for storage. Please tell Bob Sibley if you are aware of a site suitable for the Association's purpose. Stop Press: Bob Sibley has just called me to say that the owners of Bradwell Abbey are willing for the Association to keep more hives on their site. We shall be investigating further early in the new year.

Phil Gabel joins the Committee

Our appeal for additional members has resulted in Phil Gabel agreeing to join us. Thank you, very much, Phil. Any more, please?

Apiary Notes

Things to do in January – at least how I see things!

- Are your colonies/nuclei secure? January often produces a few warm days – have a look soon after midday – some activity may be observed. Perhaps pollen being taken in, wax particles dropped by the entrance during snowy and frosty periods, wet, thawed patches on roof – all signs that all is well. Also check your hives after gales and heavy snow – brush away sufficient snow to allow bees access/egress.
- Keep hefting and use my “grunt test” (see previous notes). If you grunt, your bees should be alright but be warned! Check, too, that you can see food around the cluster (a torch helps). Cluster at top of frames may indicate food exhausted on those frames. If you can't see food, put a slab of fondant above cluster and add more as required until the cluster breaks up – usually late March or until the Spring flow starts. N.B. If you have an eke above the cluster, you will find that you can reach the bees on a coldish day without them knowing it! [Please also refer to Ged Marshall's thoughts, see above.
- Woodpeckers, mice, rats, attempting to gain entry? Add netting or whatever comes to hand to ward them off. N.B. Mice and rats entering will soon see off a colony and smash combs to bits.
- Colony/nucleus sadly dead? Remove the hive and speak to experienced beekeepers as to the advisability of a “post-mortem”. Again, ask if bees appear restless or if faeces present on combs hive body and take beekeepers' advice as to clean-up measures.
- Hives on weakened or wobbly stands? Go to the bees on a cold (but not freezing) day. Block hive entrance, gently move the hive aside, sort out the stand or replace old one, replace hive and open entrance.
- Hives need re-positioning, etc.? Go to the bees on a cold but not frosty day after, say, two weeks confinement by weather whilst weather still confines bees; move stands as desired.. Bees will re-orient once flying resumes. N.B. Never attempt when bees have been flying freely.
- Back at home base – vital tasks:
 1. Plan your beekeeping for the coming season. For example, you have three colonies and want to increase to five? Buy in the necessary equipment -

- perhaps taking advantage of suppliers' sales. Don't use second-hand equipment unless from a reliable source. For each hive you will need up to three supers.
2. Continue repairing/cleaning existing equipment; have all boxes covers roofs, etc. scraped clean of wax, propolis and other debris and washed down with a strong soda crystals/water mix. N.B. If any disease is suspected, take advice about cleaning.
 3. All misshapen, defective, blackened combs and all brood combs 2 years plus: Strip out all wax (try pulling the wire out first – it saves getting it mixed with molten wax and general debris later) and treat frames as above or better still sterilise in boiling water. Then melt down the wax for re-use. Cleaning wax is a messy job. For small quantities try a bain-marie and then drain the wax through a kitchen strainer. (N.B. There are other methods for small quantities). The job probably will need doing twice. For larger quantities you will need specialist equipment. Cleaned wax can be exchanged for foundation through an equipment supplier
- The bee season is just 90 days away. You need to make your final preparations now.
 - A plea to those who are seeking a colony, nucleus or swarm in 2011. Please, please get yourselves organised now. NOTHING IRRITATES A SUPPLIER OF A COLONY, NUCLEUS OR SWARM MORE THAN IF YOU ARE NOT READY TO, OR CANNOT, RECEIVE IT. THIS HAPPENED SEVERAL TIMES IN 2010! THE BLOCK CAPITALS ARE DELIBERATE. END OF BLAST! Seriously we just want to help you keep your bees better and for some to get started. A great sadness in 2010 was that many aspiring beekeepers went without because bees were in short supply. Experienced beekeepers, can you please help out beginners by raising more stocks than you need and passing them on.

Future Events

D.I.Y Evening: Wednesday 19th January 2011

Several of the Association's experts will be on hand to answer your questions and to share their experiences with you. Please be there with your questions. Again, this will be another of those evenings from which we all can learn.

Bee Law: Wednesday February 23rd 2011

I shall be speaking! You will be understandably thinking that any talk about the law will be an invitation to nod off. I am determined that this will not happen! Seriously, there are one or two (actually rather more) legal bee points which are worth drawing to your attention to help keep you on the right side of the law and I shall try to do that as amusingly and lightly as possible. Promise!

Buckinghamshire Annual Seminar, Wendover: Saturday 5th March 2011

John Catton has now sent details of this ever popular event which attracts beekeepers and others involved with bees from most parts of the country. Interestingly, the topics cover scientific and biological issues so there will be much on offer for us to learn.

Speakers:

- Dr Nigel Raine: Insect Sensory Systems.
- Dominic Dyer: Can Pesticides & Bees Co-exist?
- Stuart Roberts: The Decline of Our Insect Pollinators.

Plus, related stalls, inc. NBU and BBCT, and exhibits. Cost for the day £12.00, inc. refreshments and lunch.

Pay at the door but please book in advance with: John Catton (01494 726616), or email richard.catton1@ntlworld.com.

This is an event NOT TO BE MISSED and given the attractiveness of the programme YOU SHOULD BOOK FOR THE SEMINAR NOW!

Next Month

Your contributions are always welcome. Please kindly send to me by January 15th to: 1 Kings Street, Stewkley, LU7 0YA or by email to andrewbeer@tiscali.co.uk or Christine at cgoodley@btinternet.com