

# North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

## Newsletter May 2012

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### Calendar at-a-glance

22 <sup>nd</sup> May	Committee Meeting
16 <sup>th</sup> & 17 <sup>th</sup> June	Loughton Open Day
25 <sup>th</sup> September	Committee Meeting
13 <sup>th</sup> October	County and NBBKA honey shows and County AGM

## News Articles

### *New apiary sites*

The Association is currently on the look out for additional apiary sites. We urgently require a site to quarantine collected swarms. If any member knows of or has a suitable apiary site we can use, or knows of someone who has the requisite land and may be amenable to us housing an apiary on it, then please contact Karen Glasse our general secretary, [secretary@nbbka.org](mailto:secretary@nbbka.org), or Ken Neil, [chairman@nbbka.org](mailto:chairman@nbbka.org).

### *Website Update*

Hopefully by now you will have seen our new members' area. To help us run the club, please log to to the site and update your profile data, especially your swarm preferences, photo, hive details, beekeeping years and yearbook option. As an incentive to encourage you to update your profile, we will draw from the first handful of people to do so within a week a winner who will receive a beekeeping prize when we have finished securing a sponsor.

## **Event report – BBKA Spring Convention**



Having never been to a Spring Convention I wasn't sure what to expect. I had a look at the brochure sent through by BBKA but because I booked so late in the day I didn't see much point in trying to book any of the workshops. Since I could only attend on the Saturday I wouldn't have been able to do much more had I done so. The venue was good, the parking adequate, and the exhibition area seemed adequate for the amount of people there. I was told during conversations with stall holders that there were definitely fewer attendees but that they thought this was because it was the first year at that venue. They all seemed to be doing steady business and Thornes pre-selling on the internet meant that there was less chaos in their area. Apart from the major bee supplies companies there were a few interesting stalls. I had a long conversation with a printers whose labels though durable can be peeled off after use. Having spent ages trying to remove glue from jars I thought that this was interesting and grabbed a sample pack to try out. I

also took the photograph attached of a beesuit made for £1 from sacking that was on the Bees Abroad stand. Having worked and lived in the third world I have seen old produce sacks turned to many uses and even had a shirt made of flour sacks myself, but this was the first time I saw a bee suit. I attended a couple of lectures in the afternoon, and was turned back at the door of another having queued for twenty minutes. They were extremely interesting. The first was on solitary bees and the second was on forage and disease given by Juliet Osborne from Rothamstead. The second lecture was fascinating as Juliet detailed how they infected some hives with nosema ceranae and then radio tagged bees to see what the non-return rate was to the hives compared to two control groups. The non-return rate was around 11% for the control groups and over double this for the diseased bees. However since flight patterns for all the groups seemed similar they were unsure as to whether the higher rate of the diseased non-returning bees was actually due to stress and exhaustion or whether the bees were choosing not to return to the hive. The experiments have, as they almost always do, raised more questions than they answered and the research is ongoing. a few attendees that I spoke to were of the opinion that since quite a few of the more popular lectures were turning people away that they might have to look at pre-booking these in future. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and I plan to get a jump on it next year, book some workshops, and go for the entire weekend. I was told that the accommodation at the college halls of residence was adequate and cost effective. Not to hotel standards, but comfortable enough as a place to hang your hat and lay your head.

All in all a great day out despite the four hour round trip from Milton Keynes.

*Report by Ken Neil.*

## ***Get to know your committee: secretary Karen Glasse***

**Name:** Karen Glasse

**Occupation:** Human resources consultant

**How long have you been beekeeping?** This is my third season

**Where do you keep your bees?** In a field near home.

**What do you like most and least about being a beekeeper?** I like most being with my lovely bees and telling them all my news. When I first started bee-keeping, an experienced bee-keeper told me, "You do know that you have to tell your bees all your secrets and share with them everything that is going on in your life?" - and that is what I like to do. What I like least about bee-keeping is disease. I learnt the hard way by taking bees from someone who had many years of bee-keeping (and who isn't local to Bucks) but preferred the natural way of bee-keeping. The bees- had varroa which I am still treating!

**Share something interesting about your beekeeping?** Last year whilst trying to catch a swarm in our village I found myself wandering down the High Street following the bees in my bee kit, clutching a skep, sheet, bee tools etc. when a cycle race came pelting past me. From the brief glances of the cyclists I could see they thought I had escaped from a nuclear holocaust.



## ***Teaching and apiary update***

Our beginner sessions for 2012 have progressed from the classroom to the apiaries at Calverton and Cosgrove. I ask all of our experienced members who have not yet come forward to offer their assistance in teaching the craft to our newcomers to please contact me at [chairman@nbbka.org](mailto:chairman@nbbka.org) to offer their help. Our latest members would benefit greatly from your experience and it would give both you and them the opportunity to get to know one another. Our apiary managers Karen Dale and Phil Gabel would welcome the opportunity of your presence and advice in the apiaries. If one session is all that you can manage then that would be welcome. I will gladly send you out a schedule of the sessions and discuss with you when would be best for you to come along. I am sure there are experienced members out there who would also benefit from having someone local to them help out in their apiaries with the grunt work for the privilege of benefiting from their years at the craft. It is essential that our new bee keepers learn the skills required to keep bees to the best of their abilities and who better to learn it from than those who have been doing so for years.

## Regular Columns

### ***Gardening Column by Bob Sibley***

Well after the 2nd wettest April on record in the area very few of us have been able to pursue our planting quest in what must be the ideal month.

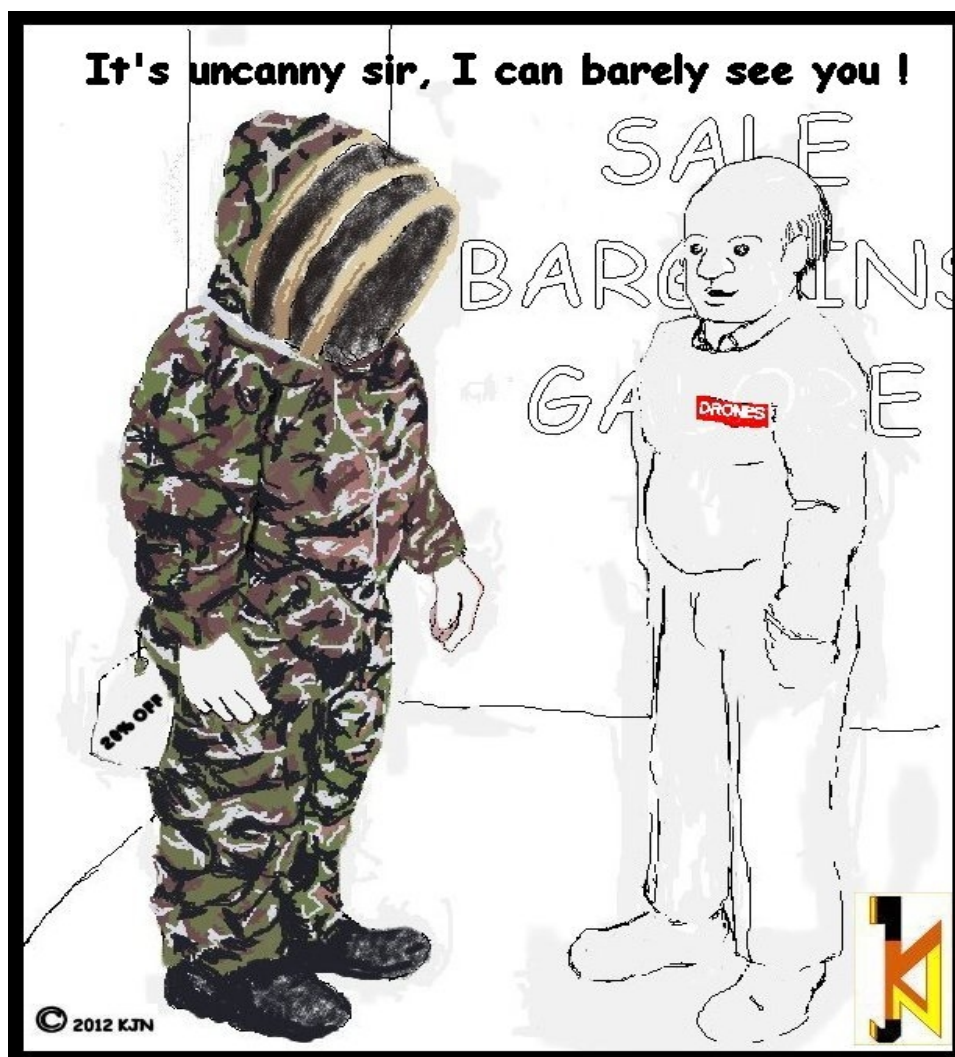
My dad a master of the gardening trade would tell me as a kid do not plant or sow until May; unfortunately he never taught me patience.

You can continue to sow broad bean however extremely late varieties such as Green Long Pod & Windsor are worth a try. Bonnie Lad is a dwarf multi-stem variety so this can be planted in single rows rather than double and is an ideal choice for a small garden. French beans, also known as kidney bean, the Prince & Master Piece are probably the two oldest varieties however if you are limited to space choice a climber such as Blue Lake. Moving on to runner beans, the variety is endless if you are a proficient gardener you probably have your favourites, if you are new to the trade Enorma or Painted Lady will not let you down. Beetroot you should by now have some showing their heads so plant some follow-on crop. Cabbage Savoy can be sown now. Several varieties are on the market, Wirosa is a good quality head available for you to cut on Christmas Day, however if you choose a later variety Ormskart Late will produce fine heads right up until Feb/March. Winter cabbage: you will not go wrong with January King of Tundra. Calibrese & Sprouting Broccoli, two totally different plants White & Purple Sprouter varieties such as Red Arrow & Late Purple Sprouting White sprouting varieties are somewhat limited I just plump for early white Sprouter which produces spears branching out from side stems. This will not be available until late winter or early spring the following season. It is well worth growing because the prices in stores can range from £2 for 5 spears, but I can readily go to my plot & cut fresh spears from a crop of just 12 plants on a regular bases. Calibrese on the other hand is a name given to green sprouting and not winter hardy. Go for a variety called Corvet or Shogun. All brassicas require firm soil so it is well worth stamping your plot down prior to planting and once plants have been put into the growing position heel in really well. Watering can be moderate as they all contain a tap root. Continue to sow carrots & peas.

I recently promised an article on bee-friendly plants. I would suggest you visit the following site. Read the miscellaneous information regarding honey bee plants for the ornamental garden look at coriander for instance.

[http://www.theMelissaGarden.com/TMG\\_Vetaley031608.htm](http://www.theMelissaGarden.com/TMG_Vetaley031608.htm)

**Bee Cartoon by KJN**



## ***Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer***

*Notes from May 2011. If you'd like to become our seasonal notes contributor please contact [website@nbbka.org](mailto:website@nbbka.org).*

Here in Stewkley the honey flow is over by about July 15<sup>th</sup> and I imagine the picture is similar for you unless you are fortunate enough to have a late crop such as borage. Sobering thought, the season is so short! If it is your plan to secure a reasonable crop from your bees (lawyers love the term "reasonable" because it can mean so many things!)

I trust that you will find these notes especially helpful. As usual, I am really writing for beginners. From now on timings and your action plans no longer depend upon the calendar but upon what is happening in your hives, their locations and, of course, the weather. When you have more experience, your plans can be developed but until then I hope these simple rules will serve you well. Let us start with regular inspections.

### **1. Regular Inspections**

The short point is that once queen cells appear (not those funny little 'play' or 'acorn' cells) and you see an egg in a bed of jelly or larva in it your bees have 'decided' to swarm and unless some unexpected event occurs, your bees will. I do believe if you can keep this point in mind your beekeeping will become immeasurably easier. Assuming we either don't want our bees to swarm or to swarm in a way which we, as beekeepers, can control, your action plan should be as follows.

From now until mid-July: make regular 7-day inspections. Miss an inspection and away could go a swarm and 60% of your honey crop or even more if castes are allowed to emerge. It really does help if you can team up with another beekeeper to cover holiday M.I.L (mother-in-law) visits and the like! May I just add that in certain situations the 7-day inspection programme can and must be suspended – see the Waring book (below).

On your inspections look out for and keep asking yourself the following questions:

- Does the colony have enough space?

For example, if the brood or top box is 75% occupied then it is time to add a super. If your super frames contain plain foundation and the super is the first or only one to be placed above the brood chamber, give the bees a run of it for a week or so or until they rise into it without a queen excluder before putting it in place (but first check that the queen is in the brood box below!) A colony not only must have enough space but for the queen to lay too. In a typical situation you may find honey nectar or pollen on, say, four out of 12 combs in the brood chamber and the remainder stocked with brood in various stages and no space for the queen to lay. Alleviate the situation by adding 1 or 2 fresh brood frames of foundation in place of those you remove which if healthy can be given to another colony or put upstairs for the same colony to hatch in a temporary brood box above the queen excluder and any supers. Be wary of transferring comb from one colony or nucleus to another because of the risk of spreading disease or other trouble. Best to discuss with experienced beekeeper first.

- Is the colony developing and looking healthy?

A good healthy colony should in a good spring and forage area by the time plum

blossom is out have say good slabs of brood in 4 to 6 brood frames and by the time the apple blossom is over 6 to 8 brood frames. Anything less requires further investigation and discussion at least with a more experienced beekeeper and there may be a perfectly sound reason. For example, the colony is a slow starter, will build up steadily make no attempt to swarm and secure your largest crop.

- Is there enough food?

A colony must always have at least 15 lbs of stores and in a cold wet late spring can easily run short. In particular bear this in mind when supers have been removed for harvesting – your colony could have almost 100% brood in the brood chamber, a week of wet weather follows and on your next visit a sorry pile of soggy dead bees awaits...

- Is the colony going to swarm?

It is said that bees don't read books and sadly we cannot read every bee instinct (an instrument called an apidictor went on sale in the 1950s and it was claimed that it was able to detect an intention to swarm up to 15 days before the event but then nothing more was heard of it for reasons which are easy to guess!) To find out the colony's intentions we need to open up the brood chamber (try to do this between noon and 3.00 p.m. on a fine day when most of the flying bees - the ones which sting - will be elsewhere) and steadily go through the brood chamber. The use of a dummy board will save a lot of jolting of the bees as do the use of Hoffman frames but others have different views. Starting from the outer comb in the brood chamber check each comb first as to whether or not it contains eggs, larva or sealed brood or stores. The probability is that you will find brood on the second or third comb in. Once you have reached the brood, you look out for queen cells with eggs or larva. The chances are that you will not be able to see the comb without removing some of the bees and easiest way to do this is to do a "beekeepers' shake" of each comb within the hive (so bees fall into and not out of the hive!) to improve your view. But don't shake a hive with a queen cell in it because it will not do its incumbent any good. So how can you avoid shaking those combs upon which there might be a queen cell? The solution is to use a bee brush – personally, I collect birds' feathers when out with the dog and they do just as well. And then you reach that potentially "Titanic" moment when on your look out you see that "iceberg" straight ahead or in bee terms a pregnant queen cell and after your initial shock and perhaps a cup of tea you want to know what to do. Please read on.

- Egg in bed of jelly or larva within an open queen cell.

Your bees are going to swarm unless some external factor (including you) stops them in their tracks. It is as simple as that. To prevent them you have got to put in place your swarm control plan. It is my advice that until you have more experience you simply follow [as advised in the April newsletter] the artificial swarm or nucleus plans set out by Claire and Adrian Waring in their book "Get Started into Beekeeping" which is helpful to me because I don't have to waffle on except in the following respects:

- ✓ Have the equipment ready and set out in your apiary at the start of the season to receive artificial swarms (and natural swarms) and to make up nuclei. If your house was on fire you would at least be miffed if the fire engine ran out of fuel en route! And so with beekeeping! A safe rule is to have one additional hive or nucleus box for each colony at the start of the season ready for immediate

action.

- ✓ Bear in mind that you can still operate a swarm control plan without ever seeing the queen (see the Waring book and April's notes) and even if there is a sealed queen cell (normally indicating that the queen has gone) she may still be around. If so, you can still operate your plan.

## 2. Natural swarms

A swarm could have come out of one of your hives, a fellow beekeeper's or a wild colony. Here are some "rules".

- Beginners should not have a go at collection without help from an experienced beekeeper so as not to imperil their own and others' safety, apart from reducing the risk of the swarm absconding. Please bear in mind that stragglers left behind after a swarm has been removed will understandably be angry so always try to remove a swarm after flying for the day has ceased.
- Swarms may carry disease or may have undesirable characteristics such as bad temper or be inveterate swarmers.
- Swarms can, of course, from the right source be a marvellous (and today given the price of nuclei and colonies) cheap way of securing increase. For that reason those wanting increase are advised to put out bait hives (see April Notes). If I may mention it, beginners please be nice to those collecting your swarm for you. There is never going to be a perfect way of getting bees with their own agendas and timings into the hands of those wanting them. Unfortunately, unlike a baby, one cannot select the time a swarm will depart (or perhaps I should say, arrive)

## 3. Harvesting

When you set out in beekeeping a principal motive I am sure is to collect honey rather to do some of the exotic things like rolling candles or making up a potion from your supply of propolis, so I will just deal with honey harvesting. Of course this means not only removing it from the hive but ensuring that when it reaches either your or another's plate it is the perfect product it ought to be and, indeed, in law, it must be even if you are only producing a few jars for friends. It is worthwhile, perhaps, to reflect that by the time you as a beginner are taking off your first crop of honey you will have spent say £250 for each hive you own and between say £120 - £250 for each colony. The last thing you probably want is to have a large outlay on honey processing equipment and the good news in this Association is that there may be no need. Why? Because the Association has an extractor for hire (contact Bob Sibley on 01908 647597 or me, Andrew Beer on 01525 240375 and so long as you have, say, just three hives and are producing, say, up to 200 lbs of honey each season and have a well provided clean up to date kitchen there will be virtually nothing else you need.

Can I now make a number of points:

- If you are in an oil seed rape area or an area in which honey can be expected to crystallise quickly you need to take off honey, comb by comb, as soon as it is ready. This is not an option if you have many hives. If you wait until the super is full, some crystallisation may have occurred. I go to the bees in the evening, go through the super combs removing all sealed combs and all unsealed combs from which no honey emerges when the comb is held face down over the hive



and violently shaken. Don't use this technique earlier than say an hour before sunset or after say 1<sup>st</sup> July to avoid setting up robbing or if robbing is otherwise a risk. Finally, clear up any honey spills.

- When extracting, try to slice through the air gap between the cappings and honey below and go easy with the extractor increasing speed slowly or your combs will part from their frames!
- From the extraction run the honey in to glass or cooking grade plastic containers which are scrupulously clean. Sterilise glass in the oven first.
- Allow honey to settle in containers overnight and remove debris and "honey froth" the following morning. These can be returned in receptacles for the bees to lick clean (personally I keep for winter fondant feeding).
- There is a vast amount of complex law surrounding the processing of honey (and indeed any food) and Andy Pedley wrote a series of articles on the subject in Bee Craft in 2009 which are essential reading for all. Earlier this year I produced a fairly detailed talk about "Bees and the Law" which includes processing of food. Please click here to retrieve the document from the NBBKA website:

[www.NBBKA.org/newsletters/archive/files/NBBKA.org\\_Newsletter\\_2011\\_03\\_BeesAndTheLaw.doc](http://www.NBBKA.org/newsletters/archive/files/NBBKA.org_Newsletter_2011_03_BeesAndTheLaw.doc)

*If the link does not work, and you don't fancy typing the whole thing, try typing this shortened version: <http://tinyurl.com/64c59np>*

#### **4. What Else?**

I think it will be helpful perhaps to reassure beginners that nothing particularly so far as bees are concerned, even for the most experienced, always works according to plan. To take just a few examples, queens may not hatch, take off up to 60% of the colony with them on a mating flight, get lost on mating flights, become drone breeders, produce vicious bees – the list is endless and is not limited to queens. This is the rough and tumble of beekeeping which one just has to accept. On the other hand, even in these days of unexplained honey bees losses, there is usually a solution readily to hand and we urge you if you have the slightest bee worry or concern to have a word with an experienced beekeeper or if you really wish to scrape the barrel, then me on 01525 240 235. The health of your bees and the success of your beekeeping is our concern and all part of the North Bucks Bee Service.  
Happy Bee days.

## Future Events

### ***Loughton Open Day***

As part of the National Gardens Scheme (NGS), an Open Gardens Weekend will be held in Loughton (in MK) on the **16th and 17th June** from noon until 5pm. As well as the gardens themselves, there will be a Flower Festival in the church, an art exhibition and a plant sale. Our bee-keeping association is part of a few groups that have been invited to attend. There will be an area set aside in one of the larger gardens where there will be some stands of a horticultural or natural history interest. We are planning to run a stand to promote NBBKA and to increase the public's knowledge of bees. The Loughton Open Gardens event is usually very well attended so it should be a great event.

Can you help us by coming along for an hour or two to run the stand? Please offer your support! To do this please let Karen Glasse know which day and when you can help on 01908 312389 or [secretary@nbbka.org](mailto:secretary@nbbka.org).

### ***NBBKA & Bucks County Honey Shows and AGM***

A reminder for your diary, that all these events are taking place together in **Stewkley**, a few miles south of Milton Keynes, on Saturday **13<sup>th</sup> October** 2012.

The plan is to give not only our NBBKA members, but also members of other Beekeeping Associations, indeed anyone who wants to come along, a full, interesting and FUN day with lots to do. In the last newsletter we set out the framework of the day. In brief, judging for the Honey Shows, to which you bring your exhibits, starts at 10 am. Participants then disperse to various activities until lunchtime. After Lunch Dinah Sweet, President of BIBBA and Welsh BKA, will speak to us. Her talk will be followed by Honey Shows, Prize Givings, County AGM and Tea.

We want there to be a sufficient variety of activities to suit all tastes, especially those of non-beekeeping spouses and partners who put up with our unplanned absences to collect swarms, extraction, sticky handles and floors. We are also promised a skep-making induction course, a hygiene course and one covering winter jobs in the workshop. We know many members have skills about which we would like to know a lot more! For example, would you like to run a honey cooking demonstration that day? If you are able to **help**, or have a **suggestion** for a feature for the day, could you very kindly tell the Organising Committee, through Andrew Beer, [andrewbeer@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:andrewbeer@tiscali.co.uk), tel.01525 240 235.

*For full details of proposed plan, please see last month's newsletter on our website at ([www.nbbka.org/newsletters](http://www.nbbka.org/newsletters))*