

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter May 2014

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Calendar at-a-glance

11 th October	Bucks county autumn gathering, Aylesbury
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Apiary Sites Offered

Bob North writes: This may seem a strange request/offer, but I wonder if any of your members would like to locate some hives in the Olney area?

I went through the NBBKA beginners' course a few years ago, and one of the problems I faced at the time was finding suitable locations - my garden being too small. Since then I have build up relationships with local landowners, but don't have the quantity of hives to match all the opportunities available - from famine to feast, as it were.

So, if anyone would like to site some hives in the Olney area please feel free to put them in touch. I have two locations available at the moment: One is beside a clover field just to the north of Olney. A nice location, but will need a 4x4 to access it. The other is in ancient woodland near Emberton, to the south of Olney.

This offer is open to anyone, both beginners and established. If anyone is interested, please ask them to contact me at bob@bobnorth.org or on 07973 550451 and I can show them round.

Top Bar Hives

Jeff Martins and partner currently have National hives, but have been looking at Top Bar hives as an alternative. Is there anyone in the Association that has experience of Top Bar hives that would be willing to show off their set-up and chat with them about both the benefits and pitfalls of using them? Jeff can be contacted by email (bees@mk-forum.co.uk) or mobile phone (07973 669908).

Raising Steam – review of Thorne's Easi-Steam by Jeff Martins

No, not a review of Terry Pratchett's latest instalment about life on the Discworld, but my attempts on a first use of a Thorne's Easi-steam ...

The background

Earlier this year we were given three colonies on national hives. We knew very little about beekeeping at this point and even less about the three colonies we had installed in our "apiary". We did know it was the wrong time of year to do anything with them (apart from moving them), so we left them alone. We managed to do our first inspections in mid march and for two of the three colonies started a Bailey Comb change.

By the second week of April we had completed the Bailey Comb change and that left us with circa 20 brood frames and two brood boxes to clean up and make ready for the rest of the season.

I had read about someone using a Thorne's Easi-steam, how good it was to clean out brood boxes, frames etc. due to the temperatures reaching up to 105 C, and what with my past attempts to burn the house down with a blow torch when decorating this seemed by far the better option to try than "scorching" the inside of the brood box with that offending tool. I also liked the idea of being able to salvage the wax from the frames and recycle that in some way. We've not got into the "craft" side of beekeeping yet, so are not planning on making cosmetics, candles etc. from the wax, but Thorne's wax exchange program seemed to be as good as starting point as any. So we ordered one.

Delivery

The box from Thorne arrived and in it comprised steel tray, eke, steel grid, steel cover with connector, and electric wallpaper stripper.



Contents of the box

Setting-up

To set-up, I needed a solid floor (thankfully I had been given a battered old solid floor that I was keeping to use in an emergency or salvage bits from it), a brood box (I had the brood box, well two of them, as they needed cleaning) and the frames.



What I needed

So the Steel tray went onto my solid floor and the steel grid on top of the tray.

I put the floor onto some bricks to raise it up off the ground enough to put my plastic containers under the tray's draining lip, and propped up on the back brick so it all slopped forward.



The base ready

On top of the floor I then put the supplied eke and then on top of that the brood box with the old frames with their brown a brittle comb. The Easi-steam lid fitted snugly over the brood box and I then connected it up to the wallpaper stripper (after setting up the stripper

according to the supplied instructions).



Ready to go

All steamed up

Then we switched on the steamer and waited.... It took around 20 minutes for the water to start boiling in the steamer and then for the steam to be pushed into the brood box and a few minutes more and then wax, water (from the condensed steam) and any feed still in the comb starting coming out.



We have wax!

We waited another 20 minutes or so before switching off the steamer and carefully removing the scorching hot lid to see how things were inside. The frames were clear of all the comb and only had remnants of cocoon, propolis and the wire supports.



Steamed box and frames

Looking down at the steel grid, it was covered in the cocoon and a little remaining wax, so we fitted the lid onto the eke and gave the remains another shot of steam for 10 minutes or so, to get as much of the wax out as possible.



Remaining cocoon.

The cocoon was then put onto the compost pile, the brood box and frames scraped down of any propolis and any repairs needed were carried out allowing them to be ready for that all but soon swarm control as I try to raise a few nucs this year.

Not all plain sailing (or steaming)

We then went onto to do the second brood box and frames, but, this is when we hit problems.

We set-up, just the same as we had before, and switched on the steamer – bang – the

house earth trip switch went. We reset it and tried again – bang – again. Something was wrong with the steamer. With no reset button on the steamer and it being a sealed unit, all we could do was phone Thorne. The next day a replacement steamer arrived for us.

Again, we set up and with the replacement steamer we were able to steam the brood box and frames clean, but when we tried to steam the cocoon remnants the house earth switch tripped again. We went to the neighbours to try out their electrics, just in case there was something wrong with ours, but no, the same issue there too. Back on the phone to Thorne...

In Conclusion

I love the idea and the results when it works, I am just disappointed at the hassle of having two faulty steamers.

It seems that Thorne has recently changed the steamers they had been supplying as the original website, catalogue listing and instructions told me that the steamer was a 4ltr capacity (was actually 3lts) and that the power cable was 3m in length (was actually 1.8m). When I spoke to Thorne about this, a Director said it was down to human error and that the website and instructions would be updated immediately (they have been).

There is now a third steamer on its way to us so hopefully third time is the charm, if not then the whole lot has to be sent back and I have to start again playing with blow torches.

I now need to learn how to clean the 1.9kg (just over 4lbs in old money) wax we have managed to salvage.

Basic examination

NBBKA would like to find out if there is enough interest for a group to do the BBKA basic exam from North Bucks. Fiona Eelbeck has spoken with potential examiners and they are willing to do the examination of candidates. It is hoped to have enough people to conduct a short course followed by the exam. For anyone interested in taking the BBKA basic exam this summer please contact Andrew & Fiona Eelbeck. Telephone 01908 551886 email: andrew@eelbeck.fsnet.co.uk, fiona@eelbeck.fsnet.co.uk.