

## North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

# Newsletter July 2015

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### Calendar at-a-glance

7 <sup>th</sup> July	Honey show preparation, Rectory Cottage
12 <sup>th</sup> July	Picnic
9 <sup>th</sup> August	Stewkley Bee Safari
27 <sup>th</sup> September	Honey show
6 <sup>th</sup> October	NBBKA AGM
20 <sup>th</sup> October	Lecture
17 <sup>th</sup> November	Lecture
19 <sup>th</sup> January	Lecture
16 <sup>th</sup> February	Lecture

### Event report – Emberton Country Park

I want to thank you all for everything you did in making our presence at this event a success, *writes Jeff Martins*.

I'm always amazed at how much energy and enthusiasm our members have for bees and all thing related and that shone through at our stand on Saturday [6<sup>th</sup> June].

I have received great thanks from Milton Keynes Council that we were able to attend

The public's interest in bees seemed to be heightened this year, maybe with the help of the BBC and Martha Kearney and for us to do our bit has both educated and promoted our association.

Once again, thank you so much for making Saturday a success.

## For sale

### Bees

Locally-reared queens and 14x12 nucs for sale.

Queens £32/each (+ £8 postal fee if it is requested). £2 clipping.

5-Frames Nucs £195/each

Pick up from address:

173 Windsor Street, Wolverton, MK12 5DP

Bertalan Lorincz - [lorinczbertalan@gmail.com](mailto:lorinczbertalan@gmail.com)

## Essential Beekeeping Equipment

What's the one piece of non-standard bee equipment you could not do without? Have you invented a gadget to make your inspections easier? Share with your fellow members here.



Daniel Clarke's essential item is a sweat band. This is not just to help one look stylish. A hot day in two layers of clothing, handling the smoker and the heavy boxes, will surely cause anyone to break into a sweat. This accessory stops sweat from falling onto the inside of the veil (making it difficult to see through) and out onto the bees (potentially causing them alarm).

*Left: John McEnroe*

## Swarm Collection Service

Since the introduction of our 0845 helpline and its subsequent prominence on the NBBKA website (along with getting it on the MKBC, AVDC and Thames Valley Police databases) I have been taking many calls throughout June. The number of calls has varied tremendously from no calls for a few days to more than ten in a day!

It is quite clear that there is a need for the service from both the public in general and beekeepers alike. The majority of calls, and subsequent visits, have been about bumblebees. It's unfortunate that the relatively new species of bumblebee - *bombus hypnorum* (Tree or New Garden Bumblebee) - looks to the untrained eye like a honeybee as this has proved to have been the most common cause of calls. What I don't know about this cute little bumblebee now isn't worth knowing!

As a result of this issue, I have started asking for a text photo to my mobile to confirm the identity of the bees before I set off. The elderly, who are less technically minded, have still been the cause of false calls but I see no easy way around this (any suggestions?).

Of the calls that have identified honeybees all but two have resulted in a successful swarm

collection. Of the two unsuccessful swarms, one was in a cavity wall and the other under a first floor tiled roof and even though the homeowner said I could dismantle the roof, I declined!

All of the swarms have been re-homed and a big 'thank you' to those members who have assisted me both onsite and in collecting bees from me at home. To those who are still waiting for bees, you are all moving up the list and haven't been forgotten.

With all this, I have travelled over 300 miles and been on approximately 40 visits resulting in about 20 swarms being collected. I am grateful that the swarm season is drawing to a close.

What has become apparent since I took up this responsibility is the inaccurate data on our members' website profiles regarding who will collect bees and who will receive them [*despite last month's request to update this data - editor*]. Many have agreed to collect purely to re-stock after winter losses and, once this is achieved, are no longer interested in collecting. Others, for various reasons, have put such restrictions on times and places where they are happy to collect from, that it makes it realistically impractical for me to consider them as 'swarm collectors' at all.

And, finally, the inaccuracy of the profiles of members who want bees has caused unnecessary work and phone calls. Profiles that state 'want bees' end up not wanting them after all, having sourced bees elsewhere in the meantime. I have gently requested numerous members (including committee members!) to update their profiles accordingly.

So, as the swarm season comes to a close, what lessons have been learnt?

Firstly, it is a major commitment that needs proper planning. We need a comprehensive list of volunteers who are prepared, even if for only a few days, to commit to being on standby to collect bees even at some inconvenience to themselves, and, finally, we should consider if the 'bee buddy' system could be used to collect bees for new members. One member holding the phone disseminating calls to a core of trained collectors for the benefit of the community and our budding new beekeepers.

To end, a big big thank you all those who've made this seasons swarm collection a success.

Andy Fenner

Swarm officer

## And the winner is....

One of the less exciting jobs that seems to have fallen to me, **Jeff Martins**, as temporary secretary of the association is to make sure our asset register is up to date, so as a committee we can meet one of the obligations of the constitution and report to you, the members of the association, what we have and where it is at the next AGM.

Many of those assets are things like hives, supers, crown boards etc etc. But, then we get to some really interesting stuff like the Honey Show awards - we have a whole series of cups, shields and awards with such rich and interesting names.

I'm aware, as a newbie to the association, I don't know the background of these Trophies - but would like to. Not only for my own curiosity, but to ensure we have some of the association's rich history documented.

So I invite you all to tell me the stories behind the cups, shields and awards - are you the person that cup is named after, or are you a relative or friend of that person? I'd like to have setup on our website a page that tells us all the meaning of these awards and the generosity, great beekeeping spirit or any other reason why we have such wonderful trophies named after these people.

In case you don't know of them they are:-

- Lady Chesham Challenge Cup – Highest overall points total in show
- Stoke Road Apiary Shield – Second highest overall points total in show
- Clara Furness Award - Highest points total for wax and mead
- Albert Toms Shield - highest points total in the open honey classes excluding any class for which a specific award is made
- BW Apiary Cup - winner of class 9, six jars as for sale
- Mini cup - winner of class 16, fruit cake
- Arthur Foreman Cup - highest total points in novice classes
- BBKA Blue Ribbon - best exhibit in the show

So, if you can shed any light on one or more of these awards, please get in touch.

## **Mentors or Bee Buddies**

At the May committee meeting we discussed, amongst other things, the need for ongoing support for this year's new intake via the Beginners Training programme.

After much discussion of various options, the one that seemed to answer most questions was the idea to set up "Mentors or Bee Buddies".

How this would work is for a list of would be Mentors / Bee Buddies would be held by the Trainers, they would then pair up one or two of this year's new starters to someone on the list. The new starter(s) would then get more support, experience and guidance from the Mentor / Bee Buddy with also the aim of the new starter having the opportunity to start a Nuc of bees with the help of the Mentor / Bee Buddy and the Mentor / Bee Buddy has the opportunity of a little bit of help from the new starter when it comes to some of the tasks that need to be done at our apiaries.

As one committee member suggested, it helps with the new member "to move on from learning on how to pass their driving test, to how to learn how to drive in the real world".

If you would like to become a Mentor / Bee Buddy then please contact me and I'll pass on your details to the training team. Please, don't be put off by the fact that you are not yet an "expert" bee keeper. I'll let you into a secret, very... very few of us are, but the bees know what they are doing, we just have to learn what on earth they are planning and it

always helps to talk ideas with others. So contact me if you want to become a mentor / bee buddy or want to know more.

Contact me by email on [secretary@nbbka.org](mailto:secretary@nbbka.org) or, alternatively, my phone number is 07973 669908.

## Renewal of membership

We're overhauling the renewal process to reduce the burden on members and the membership secretary, and to remove paper from the process.

As of this Autumn's return, your Committee has approved a change to an electronic process. No longer will you need to print, sign, and scan your return. No longer will there be a margin for arithmetical error in calculating your own dues. Instead you can do everything online (except if you want to pay by cheque of course).

The process is very easy – just confirm your current personal details, confirm a few details about the level of your membership/insurance/donations, and click save. You can then make a Faster Payments transfer using your online banking. Our membership secretary's workload will be greatly reduced to just the outlying cases, and you have minimal effort to renew.

Please could I have a couple of volunteers to test the system and provide feedback. Contact Daniel Clarke on [website@nbbka.org](mailto:website@nbbka.org).

## Clearing Supers

Here's some information for beginners about a few ways one can clear supers.

*What is it?* Clearing is the process of removing bees from a super full of honey, to leave the super vacant apart from combs of honey.

*Why do we do it?* So that you can take the super away to be harvested without bringing a boxful of bees home with you.

*How is it done?* Here are a few methods of varying difficulty, speed, cost and kindness. I, Daniel Clarke, have used all except the blowing method, and here are my thoughts.

- a) Blowing. Favoured by bee farmers for its quick results, bees are blown out of the boxes using a leaf-blower of similar. The super is lifted off the hive and air is blown down between the frames. It is fast and easy, but in my opinion unkind to the bees.
- b) Smoke. An ordinary bee smoker is puffed over the super to make the bees go down. In my experience it's not very effective, you need to use great quantities of smoke which easily disturbs the bees in the lower chambers. Pros: free, medium speed; cons: unpleasant for bees and keeper, ineffective.
- c) Almond scent. A commercially-purchased liquid is sprayed onto felt mats or pads and these are placed on top of the super while it's still on the hive. The smell makes the bees walk away from it, down into the brood chamber. Remarkably effective, these can clear a super in minutes. Warnings: always use the pads, don't spray onto the bees or combs directly; and never use a

crown board underneath the super to be cleared (bees walk down the *edge* of the super on the hive's inside walls and are reluctant to walk into the middle of the hive to use the crown hole). Pros: fast and effective; cons: harmless but not pleasant for the bees, costs money.

d) Physics. Bees are shaken/banged or brushed off combs back into the hive, and the bee-less comb put into another box on the floor. Watch out that bees don't find the combs behind your back and repopulate while you're working. If you brush, use a goose feather and not one of those "bee brushes" with plastic bristles – bees loathe them. Pros include the ease and free cost. Cons include the slow speed and causing the bees to cloud around you (don't do this in a back-garden apiary).

e) Trap doors. A one-way valve is fitted below the super. Bees can move down into the lower chambers but no new bees can come up into the super. Eventually the super is emptied, especially as the bees return downstairs for a cool night. It is achieved by inserting a crown board underneath the super to be cleared, in which is fitted a Porter (or other) bee escape. This is a trap door with two vanes of metal that allow passage in one direction only. The bees are left for a day or two and the empty super can be removed another time.

Make sure you put escapes on all holes on the crown board, make sure you observe the direction of escape, and make sure you check last year's escape for signs of propolis.

Pros include not needing to disturb the bees when you remove the super, not angering or troubling the bees with touching or smoking/gassing them, and the cheap price of the escapes.

Cons:

1. It's a very slow process, you have to come back another day.
2. There's no guarantee the bees will vacate – the process does not force them to do so, so you might come back to a still-full super.
3. Once vacated, the honey is left unguarded and if you leave it too long after the bees go down there is a risk of theft by wasps or other bees.
4. Bees' wings could be slightly damaged by the vanes. Other models of escape don't have this problem.
5. Bees can glue the vanes open with propolis, rendering it useless.



I advise beginners to observe several methods, not just the method that your mentor or tutor uses, and to make up your mind based on your own requirements of speed and cost balanced against the need each of us has to be kind to bees.

## Seasonal Notes

When law came first in my working life, and bees a very poor, say, tenth, I always regarded the period from about 20th April (or when apple trees bloomed) to about two weeks after oil seed rape fields faded as the 'Silly Season'. I still do. Yes we can – and must read 'the books' and practise swarm control – and the like – but bees can't and don't read and can take matters into their own hands, and can be, frankly, silly.

Take this. Two marvellous beginners Mike Josling and Frank Parsons came to give a hand with my bees, and we carried out a classic nuc (not nuclear!) swarm control – i.e. queen found, put in a separate nuc box with two frames of brood (any queen cells destroyed,) and one of the stores, all taken to another apiary over 3 miles away, left to grow into another full colony. No worry about drifting of bees to parent hives as over 3 miles from it. Logic would tell you - feed the nuc as necessary, no need to do a 7 day inspection, let it build up, and, with luck, a nice crop at the end of the season would await....Not with this nuc! In ten days, it produced some 12 queen cells, unchecked, off went its queen with a swarm, later collected and passed to Rod Pakes. My loss of these 'bronco' bees, Rod, is hopefully your gain.

Reading this story against what I will call a hardening of public or media attitude towards beekeepers, as regards bee swarms (perhaps I am becoming too edgy) contemplation may be useful. Some beekeepers have recently been criticised for allowing their bees to swarm. Of course, we owe it to ourselves and to the public to take all reasonable measures to prevent them doing that, or otherwise getting out of control, but even the most careful and experienced beekeeper will continue to lose swarms and the general public must understand, and allow for that. Here in Stewkley, the residents are still pretty understanding of swarms (even if they can't distinguish between a swarm of bees, bumbles, wasps or even honey bees working en-masse a cotoneaster bush). But matters are likely to be more difficult in towns, where the ways of the country may be forgotten. Most reported troubles relate to the collection of swarms. I will, you will be pleased, not go into all the law surrounding their collection, but I shall make these points:

- Don't attempt to collect swarms until you have done it with an experienced beekeeper, and know the 'ropes'. If you don't have the necessary experience, you are unlikely to be covered by the BBKA public liability insurances.
- Don't do anything which a competent beekeeper would not do, and don't attempt anything outside your own competence.
- Keep neighbours, the public and animals well away from the collection point. In the case of swarms in public places, say MK Shopping Centre, insist on the police controlling and cordoning off sufficiently the 'action area' starting at the time you capture the swarm, later for all bees to retire in the evening, into the collection receptacle, and ending when you take the swarm away...No help from the police? Refuse to help if there is any risk to the public.
- Remember the BBKA insurance does not protect you against injury to yourself – consider taking out personal injury insurance if you wish.

The Silly Season does, of course, have this consequence. Disorder for all the other things you try to do in your life, so I apologise for all Association matters needing doing, but not done in this busy period. I will try to do better.

### **Preparing for Honey Show**

We, as an association, are remarkable lucky to have Sue Lang with us. Sue's business life is largely now devoted to honey and other bee products, and her long term ambition is to become a very senior honey judge. Although a long term member of Beds BKA, Sue, I hope, will allow me to say that she has joined us in Bucks, in particular to take forward her career as a judge, so her enthusiasm for honey judging in Bucks is 'electric' and boundless, and we are all the beneficiaries. Having Sue with us will be, I trust, red Letter Years (note years, not days) for our association, a feather in our caps to be proud of, and we must all play out parts.

Part 1 is to be at Rectory Cottages at 7.30 on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July. Sue will be telling us all the tricks of preparing for show. This is unmissable, please come.

Part 2 happens on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September at Buckingham Nurseries, their Apple Day. Here we are enjoined with our good friends, Buckingham BKA, for a combined Honey Show. On our website are our Honey Show Rules which may I invite you to study now and start getting your entries ready. We (as Buckingham Nurseries) want you to make this a real fun day. Buckingham Nurseries do much to support voluntary groups like us, so let's all go out to support them and buy some of their plants. Their Ed Beach and Ian Price are both active beekeepers, so friendly plant and bee advice will always be on tap. And they sell fabulous plants. Have a look at my spuds on one of your visits to Stewkley to which I now turn.

### **Stewkley Events**

Two events, we hope to tempt you. Elizabeth decided to have a party for long standing friends and has arranged some tents. I thought great idea, because when the party was over the tent(s) could remain and you all might come along. We originally suggested the party should be on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July, but that day, unfortunately, no longer suits, so we have to put it back to: Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July, at 7:30 here at 1 King Street, Stewkley.

The deal – please bring a bottle – we provide food of the burger variety.

Please do come if you can, please confirm (including numbers coming) on 01525 240235 or [chairman@nbbka.org](mailto:chairman@nbbka.org).

Sorry, this is extraordinary short notice, so we would appreciate an early response.

Parking should be available in the field behind the house. NOTE this replaces 'SOM Night' – Shoulder of Mutton Night for July.

Then on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August, we invite you to come to the Bee Stewkley Safari, K.O.2pm. I have eight apiaries – the plan would be for groups to visit one or more of them, do their own inspections, rounding up for tea at about 4. Again confirmation as above would ensure cups of tea at the end.

### **Avoiding Colony Disruption**

It seems to me (I can see the brickbats coming my way) that the needed steps needed steps we have to take to minimize health risks can have an adverse bearing on the honey we get from our bees. For example, do a Bailey frame change in April, the colony will quickly recover, but the precious honey crop will not end up in supers (to a greater or lesser extent) but in brood chambers, with the result that queens run out of space to lay, or in OSR areas, the crop crystallizes in the broods comb and becomes a dead loss. Two untried thoughts to improve things:



1. **Use Clearer Deeps.** What you do in order to achieve the advised 50% change of all combs each year is to put 50% of the combs needing replacement into a 'Clearer Deep'. A Clearer Deep is an ordinary brood chamber or something you knock together from whatever wood you can put your hands on. The Clearer Deep is placed above the supers (without queen,) and to speed up the cleaning process, de-cap any honey in the combs. A clearer board is put between the supers and the Clearer Deep, entrance holes reduced to one bee space. Brood is allowed to hatch (young bees will enter Clearer Deep for this job) and a suitable stick is placed under the Clearer Deep to allow the boys (drones) to escape (they won't go through a QX!) Once clear, you take away the Clearer Deep and its comb for re-use.

2. **Uniting.** Unite to free up combs for recycling. This is what I am doing this year. I have bought 6 Ged Marshall queens. Each is in a nuc, will be fed, and with TLC will be a fine colony by 20th September. About 15th August I will identify my 6 nastiest and or laziest colonies for the chop, so to speak. These will be given varroa treatment but will not be winter fed. Around 30th September, the 'bad' colonies will have their queens destroyed (if I cannot find any queen by frame inspection, then I will sieve the colonies through a queen excluder (basically you put an empty brood box on the original hive floor, a cloth in front of the hive leading to its entrance, and chuck out all bees onto the cloth. Return in an hour and the trapped queen should be below the excluder. Once the bad colony settles, place a sheet of newspaper over its brood frames and bang the good colony and its brood box on top. The colonies will happily merge. Go back a week later, de-cap brood frames in bottom box and put a cover board over the bottom box, entrance restricted as per 1 above, i.e. one bee space. Now put an eke, say 2" high, with a 1" wide opening cut into the side of the eke for the combined colonies 'winter' entrance. Block the old entrance. The eke is placed over the cover board mentioned above. Re-assemble the hive. Bees hate having food below their 'feet' so will work any honey in the bottom box up to the top, where, almost certainly, they will take residence. Go back mid-February and gently prise apart the two boxes. The bottom one should be totally clear and abandoned, and if so it can go back for cleaning. If it isn't, treat the bottom box as a Clearer Deep and place above super(s) as 1 above as soon as the season is underway.

There are probably some more important things I should be telling you, but hopefully Daniel and Jeff and you will be picking up where necessary.

Please don't forget:

- Honey Show 'Rehearsal' on July 7th
- The Honey Show 'Actual' with our friends Buckingham BKA and the great Buckingham Nurseries on September 27th

Finally (and most important) the robbing season can start from now onwards. No more chucking of combs to see if they are ripe for extraction, but use Porter Bee Escapes or the like. Reduce all colonies from August onwards (or when robbing is a risk) to entrances 1" wide to one bee space and all small/weak colonies) to one bee space.

Even more important, have fun.

Regards - Andrew Beer