

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter April 2012

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Calendar at-a-glance

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

News Articles

EGM and new Committee matters

The Extraordinary General Meeting early in March was a success and was well attended. It met its goals of presenting the audited accounts, the asset register,

discussing changes to our constitution (more below), and electing members to the four vacant committee positions.

We introduce the following new committee members: Ken Neil is chairman (see below for an introduction), our new treasurer is Rod Pakes, general secretary is Karen Glasse, and Ken Neil also holds the position of membership secretary.

Apiary update

Phil Gabel reports that bees at the association's teaching apiaries are doing well, though the same can't always be said of their hives. One or more woodpeckers, likely green woodpeckers, have damaged several hives. The worst damage is shown here.

It is important to protect hives using wire, but one must ensure that the wire wholly protects all sides of the hive without gaps, and that the wire is sufficiently far from the wood. If the wire is too close, the birds will just peck through the mesh with their long fine beaks.

Photo: some damage from a woodpecker at the association's teaching apiary.



Event report – Nick Grey on “preparing products”



As usual, it was a delight to have Nick Grey, from Chalfont Beekeepers' Association, come and speak to us at our March meeting. Nick dispenses wisdom and advice in such a joyous way that it is impossible not to learn anything. As always, Nick, who often comes to judge our Honey Shows, introduces a fun and tricky element to get us thinking.

This time we were asked to taste four different honeys and tick the one we liked best. There was A – Tesco value at 99p (no votes); D – Eucalyptus honey, it had the highest votes at 9; C – the second highest scoring – 8 votes – which was Nick's own honey; and B...this was not honey at all and four people voted it as the best tasting honey! See what I mean about Nick being tricky, having fun and making us think?

“Honey” B had never been near a honey bee but apparently was a honey substitute during WWII. Try it for yourself, it is detailed below.

Swarm Collection and receipt

As you will have read from Karen, we are organising the nomination of swarm collectors to supply to Bucks County and British BKAs. The national association runs an online database of swarm collectors so that the general public may find a local beekeeper, but the list of interested collectors still has to be supplied by associations.

In addition to allowing the public or beekeepers to find people who will collect a swarm, the other side of the coin is to find a home for a swarm that was collected by someone who does not want it for themselves. In the coming weeks, many enhancement to your website, www.nbbka.org, will be launched, one of which will be the ability to express your interest in receiving a swarm. A collector in our association will be able to contact receivers via our site to offer the bees. Watch this space, and please check the site regularly for updates.

Swarm warning

Talking of swarms, it was reported on Thursday 29th that the season's first swarm was collected in Leighton Buzzard. This is over a week earlier than 2011's first swarm, but apparently two days shy of the all-time record.

Time for those first inspections and swarm preparations? See Ken's notes below.

Get to know your committee: chairman Ken Neil

Name: Ken Neil

Age: 56

How long have you been beekeeping?

This is my third season beekeeping. As a lifelong gardener I had always been fascinated by bees. I could watch them for hours as they clambered over my blackberries and raspberries. I was always amazed that as I picked and worked amongst my fruit canes surrounded by hundreds of them that they never took a blind bit of interest in me. Their diligence and single mindedness always impressed me. I had often thought about taking up beekeeping and had kept putting it off until one day I thought to myself "What are you waiting for?" and took the plunge. That was definitely one of my better decisions.

Where do you keep your bees? I am a beekeeper for our Woughton Community Council Project and therefore have no bees of my own. The bees are owned by the project and are used for the purpose of educating new beekeepers from amongst the local community, to promote a greater



understanding of bees and their value as pollinators to the allotments and community which surround our apiary, and to fund the bumblebee and solitary bee conservation part of our project. I am hoping to keep some hives of my own very soon.

What do you like most and least about being a beekeeper? I like the rhythm of beekeeping. The sheer timelessness of it. Sometimes when I am working the bees it is almost as though the whole world shrinks down to a bubble containing the bees, the hive, and I. The part I like the least is my seeming inability to clear my tools and kit of propolis.

Share something interesting about your beekeeping? One of the questions I was asked when taking my basic beekeeping was "How do bees evaporate the water they bring back to the hive in Summer?"

I couldn't for the life of me remember at the time, but I never will forget watching the bees rush to harvest the light raindrops that fell on the top bars of the frames as I worked the hive one day last spring.

NBBKA Constitution

A working party has been created to overhaul our constitution, a copy of which is available on our website (log in with your BBKA membership number, no registration required) and was emailed round twice recently.

To ensure "safe passage" of the changes we are asking for all comments to be submitted to either Daniel Clarke (website@nbbka.org) or Karen Glasse (secretary@nbbka.org) by the **end of May**. A revised version will be circulated for final comment before the AGM. A very dim view will be taken if you decide to wait until the AGM for your comments (it really isn't fair to all those working on it).

Please let us know your thoughts or any input that you have, and whether you want to be included on the team working on this.

Bee Chat

Are you interested in discussing your bees and learning tips from other bee-keepers? The plan is to trial meeting up socially in the evening in a small group to discuss bees (no "association" chat - just bee gossip). We will keep the group small (about 8) so that everyone can feel involved. The group can decide the exact timings, frequency and place that fits everyone the best.

If you would like to join, please contact Karen Glasse on secretary@nbbka.org or 01908 312389.

Bee Buddy

NBBKA would like to investigate the interest in a "bee buddy" scheme. This is where beginners join experienced beekeepers at their apiary. Both buddies benefit, the beginner develops experience and the experienced beekeeper gets a helping hand.

If you are interested in being either buddy, please express an interest to any member of the committee.

Invitations to visit experienced members' apiaries

Some of our experienced beekeepers have in the past extended invitations to all, especially novices, to join them at their apiaries when they tend their bees. The experienced beeks often arrange a visit at the last moment, so it has not always been easy to announce or invite interested parties.

NBBKA is currently trialling a new means of extending invitations, especially last-minute invitations, to beginners and novices. The system works by email. Interested novices sign-up to a simple mailing list in advance, the experienced member then sends an email to this (closed) list, which is distributed immediately to the novices, who may then accept, decline or ignore the invitation.

To sign-up as an attendee, please send an email (a blank one is fine) to apiaryMeetings@nbbka.org. Upon joining, unsubscription information will be sent.

To sign up as an expert, please email website@nbbka.org to express your interest.

Please remember that we're just trialling the new system to see how well it works, so we don't promise anything.

Regular Columns

Library and equipment

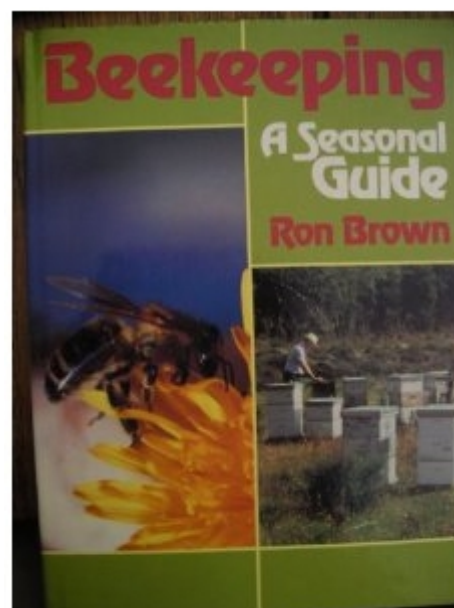
Nick Grey told Libby Culshaw and other attendees at his recently lecture to NBBKA that *Beekeeping - a seasonal guide* by Ron Brown is his bible.

According to Amazon.co.uk, this book "provides information about the characteristics and behaviour of bees, discusses beekeeping equipment and tools, and indicates the tasks to be performed during each season."

ISBN 0 7134 4489 4.

We have his excellent book on wax in our library:

www.nbbka.org/library.



Gardening Column by Bob Sibley



It has to be said April is possible the busiest month in terms of planting & sowing, all be it under glass or direct. I have a variety of brassicas to sow this month my Savoys & Winter Cabbage. January King will be sown into my seed beds ready to be planted out in their permanent growing positions May/June. But summer cabbage Golden Acre & Brussels Sprouts Revenge plants I have brought on from seed in my glasshouse will now be planted into their growing position. Golden Acre can be planted quite close: 6" apart & 12" between rows. Protection from slugs is always a debatable view I leave up to the individual to make their own decisions. However on my plot they do need protection from pigeons. Sprouts on the other hand will need a good

18" between each plant & will also require staking later in the year.

My onion sets, Struron, are in 6" apart & 12" between rows & the same for my shallots all of which went into a well manure bed last year. I have treated the soil to a handful of general fertilizer, growmore or blood fish & Bone & raked into the surface. I now have 3 rows of early peas Feltham 1st showing their heads, but the meteor sown under glass a month earlier are streets ahead. With correct rotation you should be able to find yourself in a position to harvest right up until October more of this in a later column.

I have never planted my runner beans until the end of May & I sow direct to cane. I am fortunate however to look after another plot & have some seeds under glass ready for an early crop. Once again with this rotation system you should be in a position to pick right up until the 1st frost.

Now if like me you like your hanging baskets & containers you should now be sowing your companion plants to go with your main stock i.e. fuchsia, geranium & begonias. A packet of lobelia seeds contains approx 1,000 seeds will set you back £2. Here's a tip: fill a 40-cell module with the medium I explained last month, gently scatter your lobelia seed over the 40 cells & within 3 weeks your module will be a turf of lobelia, just the right size for holes inside your hanging baskets. I love taking fuchsia & geranium cuttings & it is pretty simple to do. With fuchsias I take a top stem cutting cut just below a leaf node approx 2" long dip the cutting into some rotting compound & using a dibber place gently into a 2" pot give it a drink of water. Geraniums, I take side stem cuttings; you need to look at your stock plant & find nice fleshy cutting this can be snapped away from the main stem once again cut just below a leaf node approx 3" long & once again pot into a 2" pot. I used the medium I explained last month for all my seed sowing & cuttings taking cuttings is always a bit of a gamble & last year was a bit of a failure. This required me to buy some new stock plants I have a contact in Wales. I have just finished potting on trailing fuchsia Happy Wedding Day & standard Taffeta Bow standard geraniums Apricot & trailing Scarlet Bi colour all very healthy plants at a reasonable price.

All my summer bedding will come from seeds Pansy, Marigold, Cosmos, Lupins, Nemesis, Sweet peas to name but a few. Please do try to grow from seed, it is far cheaper & much much more rewarding.

I said last month that I would mention **bee-friendly plants**. However you only have to walk round any Garden Centre to find an area devoted to insect loving plants this inspired me to set up my own Floral Meadow due to the fact I have the land available I have brought a packet of Floral Meadow Mixed Flower seeds it contains 45 flowering species ranging from Gilia Leptantha, to Layiaplatyglossa all sounds like rocket science to me but we will see how it fairs & I will let you know. Last but not least if you sow your Parsley on Good Friday it will always germinate.

Happy Gardening – Bob

Seasonal recipes (from the Nick Grey lecture)

Parsley Honey Substitute

- 6 oz fresh parsley
- 1½ pints water
- 1 lb sugar – approx
- ½ tsp vinegar or juice of a small lemon.

Wash the parsley well and dry thoroughly. Chop roughly, including the stalks. Put into a pan with the water.

Bring to the boil and simmer gently for 30 minutes.

Strain through a jelly bag, for several hours or overnight if possible.

Measure the resulting juice into a clean pan with the vinegar or lemon juice.

For every pint of parsley juice add a 1lb of sugar.

Stir well over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved then bring to the boil.

Reduce heat and simmer gently for 30 minutes or so until the mixture is clear and syrupy, like honey!!!

Pour into warm sterilised jars and cover and seal whilst hot.

Honey Liqueur

Nick gave us a taster of his HONEY LIQUER – so simple but so very tasty –

- Buy a bag of frozen fruits such as “Fruits of the Forest” from your local supermarket or use your own produce if possible.
- Put the fruits in a large lidded crock with a pound of honey.
- Pour in a bottle of vodka (cheap vodka is fine)
- Mix together. Shake every day for a month.
- Rack the liqueur off and eat the fruits, which are good with ice cream.

With all these ideas – Honey Show, here we come!

Apiary Notes from Ken Gorman

Hive observations

Thousands of bees are running in through the hive entrances with full pollen bags—mostly yellow, possibly from early flowering rape, although some orange from dandelion can also be seen. Apparently pollens from different plants have different nutritional ratings. Dandelion isn't one of the highest, but it all helps.

The brood nest

This is the engine of the colony and needs a temperature in excess of 32 degrees Celsius for the individual young to develop. So even if there is a drop in the current unseasonably high temperatures, energy must be expended to maintain that figure.

At this time of the year therefore, the first inspection places great stress upon the colony and should be brief. Check that there is brood in all stages and that it looks regular and correct: grubs, pearly white, lying correctly and at ease in the cells and sealed brood with dry, domed cappings. Any brood which is off colour, badly shaped or, worst of all, smelling of decay, needs analysing and identifying. Books can help; a second opinion is better and a visit from the Seasonal Bee Inspector may be necessary in severe cases of brood deformity.

If you see viable brood, then there is no need to search for the queen.

If you have spare equipment and you should, then good practice demands that you move the colony into freshly cleaned boxes, later in April. Select a warm, still day, keeping combs in the same order. Clean and sterilise the used equipment, lightly flaming inner surfaces.

Swarming

Most colonies make preparations to swarm in most years; it is the bees' natural method of colony increase. Without swarming, the species would die out. Have a plan to deal with this: the accompanying plan is the standard practice. You will need spare equipment!

Stores

Keep a close eye on the level of stores: try to maintain ten pounds of honey/pollen in the colony at all times. Use weak syrup or Ambrosia at this time of the year: one pound of sugar to one pint of water, or dilute Ambrosia 50/50 with water. Fondant is also fine. It is difficult to maintain a fully functioning colony in a single British Standard brood chamber.

For the future

This article will be my last: at age 75, I'm signing off. If I picked one recommendation for the future it would be to be watchful of your colonies and handle them with care



and reverence: avoid stressing the bees by crushing their little bodies between box edges and frames. Therefore maintain clean, tidy hives: the bees will respond-they will also tell you when you are being careless.

I have one apiary which is twenty miles from home. It does not get nearly as many visits as those closer to home, yet, each time I arrive, they are busy and fully functioning,- without my close, continual attention. They manage by themselves: they've been doing this well for millions of years-until man arrived on the scene.

The association thanks Ken for his invaluable contributions to the newsletter.

*Ken's 2012 **swarming** document can be found on our website, www.nbbka.org, in the "Newsletters" section.*

Future Events

Loughton Open Day

Recently we were contacted by one of the organisers of the National Gardens Scheme (NGS). They are having an Open Gardens Weekend in Loughton on the **16th and 17th June** this year from midday to 5pm. It is usually a well-attended event. As well as the gardens themselves, they are holding a Flower Festival in the church, an art exhibition, and a plant sale. They have also set aside an area in one of the larger gardens where they plan to have some stands of a horticultural or natural history interest.

They have approached us to run a stand and display to promote bee-keeping. Would you be able to help us by running the stall for all or part of an afternoon? Please let Karen Glasse (secretary@nbbka.org) know if you can assist and if so what time and day best suits you.

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 **13th 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, tel.01525 240 235.

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

For Sale

Note: NBBKA recommend that new beekeepers not purchase bees until they have completed a beginners' course and have a full season of experience working with other people's bees. NBBKA also recommend that buyers ensure that vendors are able to offer satisfactory products and after-sale care. Vendors should ensure that buyers have sufficient experience.

*Adverts in the newsletter are open to all but now attract a token **fee** of £5 per month.*

Nuclei from Sue Bird

Five-frame **nuclei** for sale, homebred 2012 queen, ready April/ May: £140 with £40 deposit required. Travelling nuc box available, £10. Please contact Sue Bird on mobile 07811 192467 or email suebirdsbees@aol.com.

Editorial

Seasonal Notes

We are looking for an experienced beekeeper to provide us with seasonal notes for our newsletter. There is not an urgent need because we have notes from every month in previous newsletters, which the authors have kindly allowed us to re-use, but we still welcome fresh contributions.

Website

Lots of fantastic changes will be launched on our website soon. However, the usefulness of many of the features will depend on you, the members, supplying and using data. For example, we plan to manage swarm distribution through the site, but if no member indicates that they would like to be given a swarm of bees then a collector will not be able to use this feature to give it away. Do please, therefore, visit the site in the next couple of weeks to express your preferences. Remember that you do not need to register to access the members-only features, you are already registered through your BBKA membership.