

# North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

## Newsletter September 2012

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### Calendar at-a-glance

25 <sup>th</sup> September	Committee Meeting
13 <sup>th</sup> October	County and NBBKA honey shows and County AGM
25-27 <sup>th</sup> October	National Honey Show, Weybridge

### News Articles

#### *Constitution Update*

The draft new NBBKA constitution was sent to all members by email, and comments are open for **about 10 more days**. The new constitution will be presented at the AGM for voting and approval by members. Please note that it is not expected that we will enter into discussion of the proposed constitution at the AGM; the time for that is now.

#### *Small Trader Review*

We would like to hear from all members who have used the smaller bee traders this season, as part of a review and critique of bee vendors. We're all familiar with the big guys, but if you have used one of the small guys please rate your transaction by emailing [website@nbbka.org](mailto:website@nbbka.org). We'd like to hear about value for money, quality of goods, speed of delivery, delivery charges, and quality of service. The aim of this is to recommend to members the best alternative vendors.

## **Aylesbury Bee Shop**

A note from member Andy Fenner follows.

*I thought that it might be useful to let members know that I have been slowly trying to persuade Martin Blackburn, the director of Brambles Country Stores (Fleet Marston, Aylesbury HP18 0PZ Tel: 01296-655111) to stock basic bee supplies such as varroa treatments, fondant, Ambrosia bee syrup etc. alongside his horse and chicken feeds! He has made an appointment with the salesman for the area to see if it's a realistic financial option for him. I have advised him that I would do my bit by advertising his new potential line through the NBBKA committee in the hope that local beekeepers can make it a success for him. I know that it'll be very useful for me to be able to pick up such things on a small scale without having to go to Thornes and the like.*

*Would you be able to let members of the association be aware of this potentially very useful service? The more people that contact him/use his store, the better we will all be served I believe.*

## **Regular Columns**

### **September 2012 apiary notes from Andrew Beer**

You will remember I suggested in last month's notes that because of the peculiarities of the present 'bee season' it might be sensible to leave a super in place until about 20th August to catch any late 'flow'. Several of my stronger stocks seem to have enjoyed the 'Olympics', or should I say the Olympic weather, and produced another 20-30 lb of honey to extract. Every pound counts in this difficult year! However, by the time you receive this newsletter, supers should have been removed and preparations for winter be well under way.

It may be helpful, for beginners especially, if I review the steps we need to take for each stock of honeybees, and indeed complete by 20th September. The date is not absolutely crucial, but a target date helps getting things done in time! The steps:

#### **1. 'Bee Right'**

We need to check that the stock, colony, nucleus or whatever, is fit for winter. Is the queen laying well (I suggest that in September it has at least three National Deep frames of brood)? Does it cover at least six National Deep frames? Do the bees look happy (difficult to know when you are a beginner)? Strong happy bees in September will tend to loll about the combs, not have a care in the world: indeed, be rather



pleased with themselves. The vibrancy of summer flights will be replaced by an attitude of "Not me, Jack" (or Jill) approach to flying, with many bees sauntering at the hive entrance. Please forgive this literary licence, but it is how I see things!

## 2. Enough Stores

Each colony is going to need 40 lb of stores to get through the winter. Working on the basis that a full National Deep Broad frame yields 5 lb of stores, look at each comb in turn and compute roughly the amount of stores in the hive. If you judge the stores to be below 40 lb, you must provide feed to make up the shortfall. My own practice is to heft (meaning lift) the hive from each side at any time in the year that I am concerned about the amount of stores, and if my body says "ugh" because the hive is sufficiently heavy, then I know there is no need to feed. Sounds daft but you will soon get the hang!

## 3. Disease-free

Here we are talking about diseases affecting brood, more particularly American foul brood, European foul brood, chalk brood, sac brood and bald brood. The first two are serious, notifiable to the authorities by law and are killers; the others are burdens which will weaken rather than kill a colony. In late Summer (and also in early Spring) we need to do a brood disease check. In other words, if you have not done a brood check this Summer, then please do it now.

Your brood check involves removing each brood frame and shaking off sufficient bees so that you can closely examine it. It will probably be best to remove one frame first and put it in a safe place – the queen may be on it! You can then shake bees off frames, having inserted them as deep as you can into the brood-box in the gap you have created. If the bees are feisty, towelling placed over the frames not immediately being inspected may help control things. What you want to see is white larvae comfortably curled in each cell, or in the case of sealed worker brood uniform slightly domed cappings. Anything else then is suspicious! May I suggest that until you have more experience you check each and every cell not complying with the above criteria. How? Get a matchstick and prod it into each faulty cell. What may you find|?

I set out all the possibilities, but stress straight away that American foul brood and European foul brood have comparatively rarely been found in Bucks. Long may that remain so!

(a) American foul brood, indicated by perforated cappings which may look greasy, have a pepperpot appearance or (sometimes) a bad smell. Pepper pots may also be caused by a heavy varroa infestation, resulting from bees removing dead larvae or leaving larvae to die.

(b) European foulbrood, indicated by larvae lying uncomfortably in cells, or dead larvae appearing to be melted down yellowish/brown in colour.

(c) Chalk brood. The larvae appear as white chalk mummies. Later they may turn black. Removed mummies may appear on the hive floor or entrance. Seems to be bad this year, but overcome by re-queening.

(d) Sac brood. The larvae lie stretched out in the cell. Rarely, if ever, a serious disease and is overcome by re-queening.

(e) Bald brood. Cells are not capped. Sometimes this is due to wax moth activity, but sometimes is due to a genetic defect.

(f) Some other oddities you may find. Drone brood in worker cells in patches. This almost certainly means you have a drone-laying queen. If brood is laid haphazardly, then you are likely to have drone-laying workers. There will be no disease implications, but the colony will assuredly be dead by next Spring unless dealt with. Finally, you could find food cells ripped apart with wax pitched over the hive floor: a sure indication that your bees are being robbed.

Our marvellous NBU Seasonal Bee Inspector Margaret Holland carried out a very detailed inspection of a number of colonies at the Association's apiaries at Calverton and Cosgrove, and all emerged with clean bills of health and in good order (all thanks to Karen Dale and Phil Gabel for that). Margaret's examination of each colony was an education for beekeepers, experienced and not-so-experienced, and I would like here to drive home one of Margaret's main messages: If you have any worries about the health of your bees, simply contact her (or in the south of the county Julian Parker) and the help you need will be at hand. And if you have either American or European foul brood then you must inform them, or NBU, and if appropriate they will start the statutory process of compliance.

#### HIVE FIT

Your hives have got to be 'up to the mark'. If not, then the colony for which you have paid a substantial sum of money, may get robbed out, killed by winter damp or overcome by woodpeckers or other pests.

#### ROBBING

Stop it starting! I am often amazed to see hives with full entrances in August: it is just asking for trouble. As I have said before, I keep blocks in place throughout the year, strong stocks 4 ins setting during heavy flows otherwise 2 ins, all weak stocks always on 2 ins, sometimes one bee space. Seal any gaps between boxes, cover feeders and seal any holes in covers above feeders. If robbing does set in, it is best to move the affected hives at least three miles, or if you can't do that place a sheet of glass at 45 degrees to the entrances, and stuff the tunnels created with sufficient grass to allow the residents access but to deter others. But far, far better: stop robbing in the first place.

#### VARROA TREATMENT

You need to complete as soon as possible. Apiguard does not work as well in cooler temperatures.

#### TIDYING UP

I am still sorting colonies headed by drone-laying queens or laying workers, or which are too weak to survive next winter. Many of you have reported the long time taken

by new queens to get into lay. I think we all need to watch out for these conditions, given the dreadful Summer. Supers will need returning to colonies for licking clean. I have a number of supers, or frames, encrusted in oilseed rape honey or half full with un-ripened honey, and I shall be placing these below brood chambers, first de-capping any sealed frames. This should help the bees through Winter, and in Spring the supers will be replace above broodchambers, and being 'beesy' should be immediately acceptable as recipients of first crop.

As I now no longer have adequate covered premises for cleaning equipment, I find it best to leave this task until the first frosts, when robber bees and wasps are no longer a problem, and then start it in EARNEST: 2013 will all too soon be upon us!

Mike Jackson asked how successful the Marshall Queen-raising frame had been. It worked well up at Cosgrove, but was ignored by nuclei in Stewkley once: I suspect because the brood in question was all DRONE! How you can spot a drone egg from a worker egg when laid in a worker's cell defeats me. Currently I am using the Miller Queen-raising method (see the books), but following Ged Marshall's practice of putting the Miller frame with eggs immediately above the broodchamber/queen excluder (rather than above the supers) to get better larval food.

I have been reading that some experts are working on a system whereby at a touch of a computer button your bees will tell you their next move. "Hey Andrew, we are, if the weather allows, going to swarm into the Granny Smith apple tree next door. Are you interested? Over and out." Sounds intriguing, doesn't it?! To which the response surely is "Honey, see you then!"

Best regards,  
Andrew Beer

(and please don't forget the Autumn Gathering on 13th October! This is a great opportunity to tell the rest of the county that North Bucks thrives, and to be the host association.)

## Future Events

### ***NBBKA & Bucks Co. Honey Shows and AGM - 13<sup>th</sup> October, Stewkley***

Below is a link to the members' document area of our website, in which you will find four new files. These are the very latest from Andrew Beer, sterling organiser of the combined event. Please take a moment to read them, as it is important to register your attendance at the event, select a course or lecture, and to register your entries into the honey show.

The documents are found at:

<http://www.nbbka.org/members/Documents.aspx>

### ***National Honey Show – Weybridge, 25-27<sup>th</sup> Oct***



The Programme and Show Schedule for the 81st National Honey Show is now available. You can download it from the show website [www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk). Each day there will be lectures by speakers of international renown from USA, Australia, Egypt and UK.

This year you can choose from over 30 workshops covering a wide range of practical and educational subjects. You could try making skeps, candles, toiletries or cooking with honey. Queen rearing, bee photography and microscopy will be popular. You can learn from the experts about preparing hive products for show and you can hear what's needed to pass the NBBKA's modules and assessments.

Workshop bookings will be taken from 1st September. The booking system is only online. The sales page for bookings can be accessed at <http://nathoneyshow.eventbrite.com/> or via the show website (see above). Enquiries to the phone number listed in the schedule (07729 424002) are likely to be routed to a voicemail.

Why not have a look at the schedule of classes for the show and pick the ones you could enter? The entry form can be sent now and it will help you focus on preparing your exhibits. Forms need to reach the Entries Secretary by 1st October.

This show promises to be one of the best ever. Don't miss it!