

# North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

## Newsletter October 2012

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### Calendar at-a-glance

13 <sup>th</sup> October	County and NBBKA honey shows and County AGM
25-27 <sup>th</sup> October	National Honey Show, Weybridge
30 <sup>th</sup> October	NBBKA AGM. 7pm, Rectory Cottage, Bletchley
20 <sup>th</sup> November	Committee meeting

### News Articles

#### *Editorial*

There's not a lot to report this month. We have fresh apiary notes again from Andrew Beer and an important announcement about the AGM and the discussion of the proposed new constitution. Membership renewals have been sent out recently. Don't forget to submit your entries for the honey show to choose your event for the Stewkley extravaganza.

Please let me have your contributions, however small, for inclusion in next month's letter.

#### *Bee Joke*

The man who is the world's leading expert on wasps is walking through town one day when he passes an old vinyl record shop. Looking in the window, an album catches his eye: "The Sounds of Wasps from Around the World". He enters the store and asks the salesgirl if he can listen to the album. "Sure...just go into the booth and put on the headphones," replies the shop assistant. He does this and listens to ten minutes of

buzzing noises until he can take no more.....he leaves the booth and says to the salesgirl, "I'm an expert on wasps and I have to say that I didn't recognize any of those noises". "Oh, I'm so sorry," answers the assistant, "I was playing you the B side."

## Regular Columns

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



I would hate to think that these notes ever came across as from "Big Brother" (and I am not thinking about "the House"). Their purpose is solely and wholly to help you, especially beginners, tend to your bees as I try to tend to mine, but never forget the saying "If you have three beekeepers in a room, you will get five views!"

It is a fact that experts' views will differ – usually to a small extent – and for the beginner this can be very confusing. To you I would say, select a modern teaching book and stick to it. The writer will be a successful beekeeper and you will not go seriously wrong, if at all. When you have more experience, you can follow the book which serves you best. Against that background, I submit these offerings which suit me, but perhaps not others.

#### **Final tidying up for the year.**

Feeding should by now be complete but perhaps, for one reason or another, it is not. Don't worry - one or both of the following steps may satisfy your bees' feed needs. Try to complete feeding as soon as possible, and in any event, by 10th October. Slightly increase the feed mix to, say, 2 ¼ lb of sugar to one pint of water. Follow the advice of the great R.O.B Manley, who in his book "Beekeeping in Britain" stated (see page 269):

*"Since I have used thymol....I have not had the slightest trouble with fermentation of unsealed syrup fed late....To prepare thymol, dissolve 1 ounce of thymol crystals in five fluid ounces of surgical alcohol and use one half an ounce of this [meaning the mixture] in 112 pounds of sugar made into syrup. To measure the right amount for smaller quantities, you can add water to the mixture to increase the bulk for greater convenience. If you add water to the fluid ounces to make it up to 8 ounces say, then two ounces of this will be just right to mix with 28 lbs of sugar made into a syrup, or, pro-rata".*

I last used thymol in this way about 15 years ago, my bees did not suffer. The danger of strengthening the mix, is that instead of assisting your bees (as above)

they will be put at risk of not getting enough food because of the mix's propensity to crystallise and become inedible. It is a case of "suck it and see".

Nothing, however, is a substitute for completing feeding in September.

N.B. Since writing this, Gunter Weber tells me he always feeds fondant rather than syrup after 1st October because bees are reluctant to store syrup in colder conditions.

In any event you must regularly heft your hives (as previously described) and if a hive fails the "heft test" it must be fed or it may die. Whilst the practice of winter feeding has its critics, liquid feeding in any form after about 10th October is not an option and you will have to resort to solids - my preference being ambrosia, available from the usual suppliers. In fact, I use ambrosia on and after 1st December regardless of the weight of hives in an attempt to overcome isolation starvation - more later !

### **Robbing**

In a mild Autumn wasps can live through and robber bees can be active until mid-December and if the bee/wasp "mob" gain entry into a hive the incumbents, however powerful may soon be overcome. As mentioned often earlier, "Mind the Gap" and if in doubt seal it up, not with the likes of grass, which shrinks, but for example, with wire mesh held in place by pins. Your hive may end up looking like a patched-up road accident victim but your bees will be grateful, and make a note now to replace the offending hive part at the first opportunity in Spring. Be very wary of bee sleuths (bees disguised as good guys, or, rather, girls) duping the guards, taking rich pickings and making their exit before the alarm is raised. If you have some "dark" bee colonies and some "light" ones, look into a "dark" hive and if you spot a few "light" bees, then you are almost certainly witness to a crime. Sorry, I am only telling you what I think and getting it off my chest! I am dumbfounded by beekeepers who, after the season is over, leave their bees with entrance blocks with a 4 inch rather than 1 inch opening or, worse still, completely open (and I get even more incensed by the equipment manufacturers who do not sell the blocks with separate independent 1 inch entrance settings thus luring beekeepers (beginners, particularly) into a false sense of security by using the 4inch setting. End of straff!

Note: If you use entrance blocks in combination with a solid (not wire) floor then, once the robbing season is over, place 2 pencil-thick bits of wood below the cover board to provide ventilation and prevent mould. However, continue to be watchful for robbing, now and at any time of the year.

**October is the month for final winter preparations.** In a nutshell, you want to put your bees into conditions in which whilst you are merrying on a cold winter day they are snuggled up happily in their hives (winter survival is a colony's greatest challenge).

These tips and DOs and DO NOTs will cover some of the colony's needs:

Hives sufficiently off the ground? Damp grass or other foliage at the base of the hive? Hives placed on bricks or pallets on the ground? These and similar conditions invite trouble. Get hives at least 8 inches off the ground, clear of debris. The actual height

otherwise depends on what suits you, the beekeeper! Suggestion: organise your hive stand so that, when you come to inspect your bees in the Spring, the top bars of the brood frames are just above knee-height. I assure you that when you come to inspect a heavy brood comb you will get a "thank you" from your back and be able to give all your attention to the task in hand!

Roof water tight? Get the roof repaired NOW and put a temporary cover in place whilst you do so. This will do little harm to the bees in October – in January, with a sodden hive, it could be a different story. Cold doesn't kill bees, damp certainly will! But note, for some extraordinary reason, perhaps because of condensation, a perfectly sound roof will be found to be damp underneath at some time, before returning to "dry". The best answer is, when making your winter inspections, always have a spare roof to slot into place.

Put your hives into winter settings. This means removing excluders, surplus supers and feeders and other paraphernalia. A special word about supers. If you have a very strong colony in October, especially if you are on small BS Deep frames, there is a risk that it will "hang out" without sufficient space. The answer is to leave a super. It can be left either above or below the brood chamber – personally mine go below the brood chambers for these reasons.

Colonies tend to hibernate in the upper chamber so in Spring it should be an easy matter to remove the supers from "below", add a queen excluder above the brood and then add the super. Normally, the super will be totally clear of food but bee friendly because of all those winter bee feet passing over it and therefore a welcome receptive for the first honey crop. Putting supers below the brood chamber has another advantage. Bees hate having food below brood so will move it up. Try this with strong colonies and, hey presto, those clogged up oil seed rape supers will be neatly cleaned. But help your bees by "de-capping" the frames first. In Spring, if the queen has been laying in any super, then the proper course (opinions vary here!) is to replace any affected combs. May I warn that the subject of brood chambers used with or without supers is quite a complicated one. For instance, some want to keep their bees on "1½" i.e. brood chamber with a super above throughout the year, others are quite happy to leave a queen excluder between the boxes during winter, and others don't do that, fearing that their queens will be left to their fates separated from their family by the queen excluders! (We are back to the five different opinions in "that room" mentioned earlier).

Are woodpeckers a threat? One year varies from another and you can never tell so best to fear the worst! I suggest you get a roll of light-gauge netting with about a 1 inch setting and of sufficient width to cover the hive from base to top and with sufficient "overage" to make a sort of tea cosy on top. Loosely (not tightly) wrap the netting around the hive, form the tea cosy, and tie together with a bit of string. Don't tie the cosy to the hive. If you do all these things, my wife's best friends will not have a base to attack the hive, and the cosy can easily be removed for winter checks and can be slipped, intact, out of sight during the summer months. There is no particular magic about the netting. For example, use netting for summer peas then use it in winter for the bees!

I am no artist but I will describe my winter hive arrangement for early October. Each of my hives is assembled, base upwards, in the following order:

- Floor and entrance block (note my hives being on stands I have NEVER found

- need for mouseguards but that is a matter of choice.
- Any supers required whether to accommodate a large colony, to provide additional food or to enable the bees to clear crystallised combs (as above).
  - Broodchamber
  - Eke
  - Coverboard
  - Roof

What's odd about this ? This arrangement enables me to leave an open space directly above the brood combs. This is good for ventilation but serves an additional purpose. Once October is over bees will not come up to propolise the cover so it is an easy matter to lift it and take peeps periodically at the brood area to see if all is well particularly that the bees are in range of food. Adrian Waring advises that the greatest winter bee killer is starvation, to which I would add, isolation starvation. More of that next month. Incidentally all 12 Association hives were arranged in October 2011 in the above fashion and all came through the winter successfully. And if you need to feed candy or fondant just place it over the comb in direct contact with the cluster.

### **Reflections**

October is a time for reflection, particularly this year after such a bad summer. Perhaps I can share some of my reflections in next month's notes.

In the meantime, all the best and see you in Stewkley on 13th October.

Regards,  
Andrew Beer

## 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!

### ***NBBKA AGM***

The NBBKA Annual General Meeting will take place on the 30th of October at 7:00pm at Rectory Cottages, Church Green Road, Bletchley, MK3 6BJ.

Should you wish to put forward any matter for discussion or make a proposal to be added to the Agenda and raised at the AGM then please submit it to me in writing by

the 14th of October. My address and contact details are given below. Any correspondence received after this date will not be included. We will be discussing only matters and proposals shown on the agenda at the AGM and will not be accepting additional matters and proposals from the floor so please ensure that you get it to me by the 14th.

We will also be voting on the new constitution which will have been sent out to all of you for your perusal prior to the AGM. The vote will simply be for either the acceptance of the new constitution or its rejection. The time for consultation and comment on this has passed and there will be no discussion as to its content or any proposed amendments at the AGM.

best regards,

Ken Neil (Chairman)

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