

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter May 2013

Table of Contents

Calendar at-a-glance.....1
 Pesticide Ban.....1
 Seeking an apiary site.....1
 Regular Columns.....2
 May Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer.....2

Calendar at-a-glance

18 th May	Young Farmers' rally, Stewkley
22 nd September	Honey show
12 th October	County honey show

Pesticide Ban

Luckily the European Commission as a whole has voted to ban neonicotinoid pesticides for two years. Despite events such as *March of the Beekeepers* (right), sadly our own Environment Minister Owen Patterson pandered to the pesticide companies and voted, as he implied to them that he would, against the ban. Nevertheless around half of member countries voted for the ban. The EC used its casting powers to effect the ban, the text for which is being drawn up over the next few weeks.



Seeking an apiary site

If you're seeking a (new) site for an apiary, don't be afraid to just ask. Use Google Maps to look at satellite images of your area to identify likely places and write a letter to the owner. You may be surprised at how much success you have, even among commercial properties such as factories and warehouses.

Regular Columns

May Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer

It's 7 am on Sunday 21st April, and the sun is streaming through the French windows. Fantastic! - Well, it is, considering what has gone before....!

It is undoubtable that our bees have endured, going back to last May, a pretty rough time. Think about it. A cold summer and record rainfall, an autumn which quickly gave way to winter, a winter which was not a really severe one but, worse for bees, was persistent and wet, with no warm breaks (and a chance for colonies to evacuate and reassemble the cluster close to food) - and then those wretched cold winds of March when literally nature stood still. It is not as if similar events have not happened in the past: it is just some "bee years" since we and our bees have felt the "draught".

Against that background: Colonies and nuclei particularly have come through to spring pretty poorly, both locally and nationally (at least that's what I picked up from snippets at the National Convention). At the beginning of April, strongest colonies occupied up to five brood combs (stronger, and you were doing very well), weakest on two, even one. My colonies, well-fed in autumn, still had stores (in most cases on frames some distance from the cluster); others were short (although all had been fed Ambrosia fondant since December); stores of pollen were low, in some cases non-existent, which was perhaps hardly surprising given that there were virtually no flights from hives during the whole of March, and one sensed that bees were dehydrated, for the same reason. Out of my and David Warren's eighteen colonies, three have been lost, I suspect from being too small in autumn, the impact of viruses and perhaps because of nosema (in that case not that I saw many of the tell-tale defecations on hive and hive parts). And we also lost a swarm in a hawk's box which fell from a tree on to a busy road in Dunstable, to the consternation of by-standers and the local constabulary and later rescued (I don't regard this as a loss because we had no time to sort it out before autumn, and it was pretty grotty anyway. Well that is my story.....). And finally, to my mind most surprisingly of all, early inspections of queenright colonies in April revealed just a little emerging brood, but no eggs or larva indicating their queens in March had shut up "shop" (due to adverse weather).

Time to look forward. We need to get ourselves and our bees back into shape as quickly and as best we can. I always suspect bee life in the "big city" is vastly different from that here in Stewkley, and if your bees are already steaming ahead, think of yourselves as having taken £50 from "community chest" and move quickly on! For the rest of us stragglers, there are the things I am doing in the last days of April in this backward bee year:-

1) I am giving all bees a syrup feed (mix 1 pint of water to 1.5lb of sugar – note: granulated CANE sugar). I shall go on feeding until broodchambers are filled with a combination of bees, brood pollen and food stores. N.B. This will enable bees to draw out many combs in broodchambers undrawn in last year's bad weather. Any fondant already in hives will be left for the bees, but I consider syrup is now the preferred option, so as to

make liquid readily available for breeding. N.B. The overall intention is to fill broodboxes so that supers get filled with honey when the "flow" starts.

2) For the first time ever, I shall be giving bees a pollen substitute. Around here at least, the cherry is still at bud stage; the season is perhaps a month late and bees need protein to catch up.

3) I shall be completing all those tasks set out in March's and April's notes which have been delayed because of the weather. Please don't forget the need for comb change and renewal. The system I suggested can be worked throughout the bee season and is not time-critical. Also please bring back to base all those hives whose occupants have died. The whole question of sterilisation has, I believe, become a very important issue as the "bee experts" impose ever-rising sterilisation standards, and ever more difficult to attain. On sterilisation I take the following steps:

a) Hive parts are scraped down and washed in a strong soda crystal-water mix.

b) Frames (if re-used) are first scraped, then steamed in my Thorne's Easi-Steam, then boiled in my Burco boiler, and then finally washed down before re-wax.

The combs, whatever their state, are cut out, the black bits burned, and the rest are recycled for wax. I know this is an expensive way of going about things: an alternative is to use acetic acid on the frames, which some use, but I prefer, because of its dangers, not to. As regards the hives themselves, NBU now recommends these are lightly torched. Given that, just as an example, each deep box costs about £25 in the flat and £40 if made up, that has always seemed to me to be a pretty desperate measure - if not futile (evidence now demonstrates that even torching will not kill keep down American Foul Brood spores). Incidentally, if you are in any doubt why your bees have died, consult one of the Association's experts or National Bee Unit (Julian Parker).

Our abiding hope must now be that we now get some "sensible weather", that we can get fully into our bees and that honey may be "on the menu". In other words that we and bees can start doing all the things which we would be doing in a normal year in early April. So what?

1. Healthy bees should now start expanding quickly. Given a week of good flying weather and good forage, bees could be filling broodchambers within a week. When bees occupy, say, eight deep frames, it is time to add queen excluder and first super. You may care to tempt bees up into supers by leaving queen excluders off for a few days, but be cautious because if left too long, queens will happily move into them. N.B. If they do, blast supers with smoke and drive bees into the broodbox below - It usually works. A couple of further points on supering. Some leave a super below broodchamber over winter. This is (usually) an excellent way of clearing supers of crystallised oilseed rape, particularly if combs are first decapped. It also helps keep bees away from the damp ground below. And when supers are placed "upstairs", bees more readily take to them being "home from home". If you wish when "supering", you can put two supers on to a hive, placing a sheet of newspaper between them. The bees then bite the newspaper when ready for the top one!

2. Be ready for the swarming season. Based on my Stewkley bees rather those those of the Great City, I am not expecting any swarm before 10th May. Why? On latest inspections I found no SEALED drone brood (note sealed drone brood seen 23rd April so time is ticking on.) On this basis, assuming a drone brood cell is sealed today, that particular drone occupant will not emerge for about two weeks and will not be potent for twelve days after birth. It probably means that, wherever we are, the swarming season from today is about three weeks away at the earliest, IF the weather now improves.

3. INSPECTIONS. From now on you must do 7-day inspections. We have been through this process in at least two earlier newsletters, so I will not repeat here. If you are new to beekeeping, keep one basic fact to the back of your mind. If you see a queen cell and you see either an egg larval juice or unsealed larva, then your bees almost certainly will swarm unless you take control measures (if you forget everything else you have read in the books, remember this golden rule). If you see sealed queen cells, normally a swarm will have left, but do check because the queen may still with luck be present. You must then follow advice given in previous newsletters, or follow "Haynes" or one of the standard books for your control measure. But may I just remind you that it is possible to do a swarm control measure without first finding the queen or even looking for her (as an earlier newsletter explained).

May I finish on an optimistic note? In May 1959 it rained and rained and bees "sat on their hands" in hives. In early June there was a complete turnaround in the weather and my Robert Manley bees worked their socks off - I know: I was doing my Law Intermediate and precious study time had to be given up for extraction as supers extracted one weekend were ready to be re-extracted the next, week after week. There is no exaggeration in the telling! What we want in North Bucks is for all our beekeepers to have a good summer - if I may say so our beginners especially. There can be nothing more depressing for a beginner than to start with one hive, have it swarm at the beginning of May (and with it the loss of the crop and perhaps even the loss of the colony if the new queen is lost). So this really is a critical time, especially in this very difficult year, and if I have an appeal it would be that all our more experienced beekeepers get a list of our North Bucks members and contact a nearby new member with an offer to help, or at least see that all is well. Beekeeping is so different from, say, sport, where the battle is so much of mind over matter: in beekeeping for our and our bees' welfare we actually must work together as one team.

Sorry to go on. Telephone number for all questions please - 01525 240 235.

Andrew

p.s: Much is being re-sown because of the bad winter. Much is patchy. This means possibly, where it's grown, "OSR" will be with us in some way until August. This means we may need to be more vigilant about extracting combs before they crystallise in OSR areas. Probably best to worry about getting the crop, first!

p.p.s: Do you have a weak colony with only a few occupied deep frames? If so, take any opportunity to replace frames due for changing NOW.