

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

Newsletter August 2014

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Calendar at-a-glance

25 th August	Kent festival of bees, Canterbury
26-28 Sep	BIBBA Conference, Llangollen
11 th October	Bucks county autumn gathering, Aylesbury

Queens and Nuclei for sale - member advert

Introductory offer - **queen** bees. British Black reared locally. First come, first served.

- Mature queen bee cells - £5 per queen cell
- Virgin marked queen bees - £10 per virgin queen bee
- Mated and marked queens - £23 per mated queen bee
- Clipping £2 per queen bee

Pick up from postal address below or for mated queens postal delivery by Royal Mail 1st Class for £4.50.

Five-frame 14x12 **nuclei** for sale (in polystyrene). The price is £195 each nuc, which comes with mated marked queen. Available now. First come first served. Reservation for £50. Please get in touch, should you have any questions. Place your order via email.

Contact Details: Bertalan Lorincz, 07589714764, lorinczbertalan@gmail.com, 173 Windsor Street, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, MK12 5DP

Kent festival of bees

Members might also be interested in entering the honey or confectionery classes in the Kent Festival of Bees, which Mann Lake UK are sponsoring. This event will be held on Bank Holiday Monday, 25 August, in the Canterbury area. Classes are free to enter and there are three prizes for each class. The festival is family friendly and there are some great activities lined up including talks, skep making demonstrations, crafts and bee products, face painting and more. Details here : <http://kent-festival-of-bees.co.uk/> The organisers are also looking for stewards for the day - all helpers will be given a £30 Mann Lake UK voucher and lunch.

Education update from the Eelbecks

The British Bee Keeping Association (BBKA) has a series of modules which make learning about bees into bite-size chunks (actually usually a 6 week module). Depending on interest there may be the opportunity to combine with Bedfordshire beekeepers on some modules. The modules are below and the BBKA holds assessments in November and March but there is no obligation to take the test at the end.

Module 1 - Honey bee Management

Module 2 - Honey bee Products and Forage

Module 3 - Honey bee Pests, Diseases and Poisoning

Module 5 - Honey bee Biology

Module 6 - Honey bee Behaviour

Module 7 - Selection & Breeding of Honey bees

Module 8 - Honey bee Management, Health and History

If you are interested in finding out more and would like to express an interest please contact Andrew and Fiona Eelbeck (tel:01908 551886) andrew@eelbeck.fsnet.co.uk.

Bees on the menu

<u>EVENING MEALS</u>	
CHEESE BURGER <i>100% BEEF</i>	£3.00
DBL CHEESE BURGER <i>100% BEEF</i>	£4.50
BACON & CHEESE BURGER <i>100% BEEF</i>	£3.60
DBL BACON & CHEESE <i>100% BEE</i>	£5.10

Lessons learnt while uniting

This being my fifth season I am by no means an expert beekeeper, and have united only a small number of colonies. This year I performed a uniting operation and came away with some lessons learnt, which I'd like to share with you.

I wanted to unite a nucleus which had taken off much better than expected, with a colony that was the subject of a split but which did not produce a new queen and was now dwindling. Uniting two boxes of equal size is fairly straight forward, one essentially just puts down the newspaper and lifts the one box atop the other at dawn or dusk, and hopefully no bees are disturbed. Similarly, relocating a colony from one box into another box is straight forward – just lift the bees frame-by-frame into the new box and ensure the new box is in the same position as the old when you're done; the bees provoked into flight during the manoeuvre will easily return to the colony in its new box in the old position.

What turned out to be more difficult was to unite a nucleus in a small box with a weak colony in a standard box. I first moved the nucleus from one apiary to another in the car, at dusk, and placed the nuc on top of the target hive. The next day I took an empty full-sized brood box down to the bees and started by lifting the nuc's frames into this box. I then wanted to place this box over newspaper on top of the other colony's brood box, under that colony's supers.

What I did not anticipate was the following.

Firstly, the nuc's bees were flying profusely, having been disturbed more than the full colony by being lifted out. Once the two boxes were together, these bees had great difficulty in entering the hive, because the entrance was unfamiliar to them and did not smell right. The poor things could smell their sisters through the cracks between the two boxes and were gathering there. It would have been better to either transfer the nuc into a new box a day prior to the uniting, to incur fewer fliers during the uniting operation, or to have placed the disturbed bees at the bottom of the stack and the undisturbed bees on top.

The second lesson is about the smell of the old box. Having emptied the bees from the nuc I placed it a few yards behind me while I worked. When I turned round after uniting lots of bees had gathered in and on the empty box, even though it was in an unknown position. They were surely attracted by their own smell. I shook the bees off and wrapped the boxes in black bin bags. The lesson here is to ensure one wraps immediately after emptying, to hide the smell and sight.

Thirdly, I left the queen excluder on the old full-sized colony in the old position, immediately on top of the old box and under the new box. This meant that the only thing between the new box and the old supers above it was another layer of newspaper. The configuration, from ground up, was: old box, QX, newspaper, new box, newspaper, super. It would have been better to put the QX above both brood boxes, of course, but I simply forgot to move it.

Finally, a pre-cursor lesson to all this is that your colonies which are strongest at the start of the year might be the weakest by the end, and a weak colony kept independent for security might end up being the strongest.

-- *Daniel Clarke*

Seasonal Notes - August

We are having a great season and rumour has it that the good weather will last for three more weeks. We'll see! Writing seasonal notes for August is always a bit tricky because you never know quite when the flow will end. Whilst here in the countryside things normally slow down by the first week in August, our beekeepers in Milton Keynes would, I think, be expecting it to last rather longer. Solution? Two sets of notes, one for "season continuing", one for "season ended"; hopefully, all needs will be met!

A. Season continuing:

Some thoughts:

1. Partly full super frames:

Encourage bees to fill these by swapping with fully sealed frames. This reduces the risk of your being left with un-ripened stores which will ferment. This also makes extraction easier – full frames of a similar weight make for an easier ride in the extractor which will not behave like a runaway train. It is a good idea, too, to reduce supers surplus to requirements. They will need removing anyway, so do it now. Don't offer bees undrawn foundation unless your colony needs it for perching space and you cannot offer drawn combs. The downside is that bees will ignore the foundation or worst, chew it to bits.

2. Robbing:

I can probably bore you more about robbing than anything else! Come August, all strong colonies should be reduced to an entrance of 1" wide x 3/8" high. Stocks on fewer than 6 frames and nucs, one bee space. However, you will need a mesh floor to assist ventilation. Now, you will say, this will lead to congestion. Yes, but that is the point. It takes a very brave, very determined robber bee, wasp, or perhaps hornet to push its way past a crowd of lady bees who (though much weaker) can apparently round up and heat the intruder to its death! OK, you can laugh if you like at my caution – I have not lost any stock to robbing for as long as I can remember.

3. Shambles:

At this time of year, your apiary may resemble a dance floor after a very good party. Don't worry. This is the time gently to start some consolidation – stocks which have gone queenless, time wasters, and especially the nasties. They need sorting. David Warren, who helps me, has alerted me to the fact that at one of our Great Brickhill apiaries, beekeeping is now banned on Wednesdays; a rather nasty lot of bees chased the gardener all over the place when he struggled to cut the grass after our last visit. It will only be de-queened and united to its friendlier cousins. Please do not put up with the nasties – they do immense harm. Tidying up the apiary may involve movement of hives within the apiary. You can either do this with moves not more than 3ft per day, but only after good flying days (which is really boring) or you can leave that part of the shambles in place until February, and, at the end of a cold spell when the bees have not been flying for a week or so, you move the required hives without any precautions whatsoever to wherever you want. The colony will immediately re-locate to its new position (as they do after any cold spell when they have not been flying).

4. Nucs:

What about all those little nucs I urged you to raise in April's talk? Keep them steadily fed as needed. Rapid feeders are best – not more than two pints of syrup at a time, and you will "fast forward" their progress to full colonies. If you have a stock which can spare a frame or two of soon-to-emerge brood pass it on. Take from that nasty colony I suggested you liquidate (as above), if you wish, as it is preferable that the nasty is not too strong when you are uniting it to another colony. You want each nuc to be covering a minimum of six National Deep Frames in late September – easy to achieve with a small nuc started in July if you have kept up the feeding and given it some TLC.

B. Season ended.

You know because bees are more testy, sitting “on their hands” at hive entrances and the buzz of activity has stopped. What to do next?

1. Get It In!

Get all that honey off your hives and run it through your extractor as quickly as you can. A good practice is to remove full supers and return empty ones for the bees to lick clean. Do this at about 6.00 p.m. because however careful you are your visit to your bees will not go unnoticed. Arriving late in the day means that bees have a relatively short time later to fly excitedly around, homing in on robbing targets, before it is time for bed. After a good night's sleep, bees will emerge far less malevolent in the morning. Remember – no spills, minimum of exposure of combs to robbers, clean up all spills (with a bleach/soda crystals mix but keep this clean-up well away from combs and honey to avoid spoiling the crop); keep narrow entrances in place and block up gaps or imaginary gaps in hives.

2. Feeding

When each hive is clear of supers, heft it. **BE AWARE:** a strong colony with a box full of brood will have perhaps no stores in the brood chamber. Until winter feeding starts (see below) each brood chamber must contain at least 10lbs (or two National Brood Frames) of stores. If it hasn't, give an immediate feed (I suggest a mix of 2lb of sugar to one pint of water).

3. End of Season Inspection

As soon as colonies are clear of supers it is time to do an end-of-year assessment. Rather than recite the list at length please refer to any of the standard books. Stop if robbing starts.

4. Winter Feeding

In the last 10 days of August (or later when your hive is clear of supers) it is time to winter feed. Do this as quickly as possible. The aim is to fill brood frames required for its storage before the queen takes to laying there (which will often happen if feed is only offered in, say, 1 or 2 pint quantities). Get the job done by 20th September, 30th at the latest.

C. Surplus Stocks

In my absence (in Ghana) David managed to increase my colony/nuc numbers and this currently stands at about 33. We are ready to pass some on to good homes. Deal? Donations, in an amount of your choice, gift-aided to Bees Abroad, my chosen charity will be welcome.

I have just had an e-mail from the BBKA asking for 10 colonies! And to think that my bees used to be called – well, I won't tell you!

Interesting fact: one hive of bees will help keep a kid in Africa in education for one year, year after year!

Cheers,

Andrew Beer.

P.S. (1)

I have just come back from an amazing (hate the word) evening at the Feelbecks. Bee talk (much) and food (more). It made me realise just what NBBKA can, and must, offer. We clearly need more keen folk at the "point of delivery". This is something we need to put right at once.

P.S. (2)

Our very own Daniel Clarke wrote a very learned letter to BBKA News (August 2014). Read it and, like me, you will learn!