

BASINGSTOKE AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2008

Hello

Welcome to the third newsletter in the new format.

I have an apology to make to David Purchase whose article – A Burning Issue - was included on September's issue minus a paragraph. It is therefore included again in this issue in its entirety.

I have included all contributions I have received, and any relevant information I can find. If you have any views as to items you would like included in future issues, or material for inclusion, please let me know 10 Milkingpen Lane, Basing, Basingstoke. Hants RG24 7DD.

Regards

Annabelle

Diary of Events

In the Bothy at 7.30 p.m.

18th Dec Xmas social and hand bells

2009

15th Jan AGM

19th Feb Andy Willis Plants for Bees

19th March Eric Denton Swarm gathering

16th April Max Watkins from Vita Europe
(Aiguard/Apistan)

Any ideas for future speakers gratefully received.

A BURNING ISSUE

I am frequently asked what I use for smoker fuel. The answer is almost anything.

As a Bee Inspector, I was not provided with smoker fuel. I had to beg, borrow or steal it. I became very good at improvising.

I do avoid corrugated cardboard if at all possible. It seems to burn at a higher temperature than most other fuels and produces a lot of tar. Sometimes it is difficult to light because it has been treated with a fire retardant. Use it by all means if there is nothing else available, but it is a good idea to soak it in water and let it dry beforehand. That will reduce or eliminate any fire retardant.

Several beekeeping friends have kept me supplied with hessian or sacking. I leave it in the garden for a few months to weather, following which I dry it out on the greenhouse bench. It is then easier to light because it has started to rot, and, as with corrugated cardboard, any fire retardant has been reduced or eliminated.

Another favourite of mine is rotting wood. Generally it produces cool, pleasant smelling smoke, which is inoffensive to me and probably less offensive to the bees than other sources of smoke. I find oak and silver birch particularly good. Once the smoker is lit, it doesn't matter if the wood is slightly damp. If the wood is dry, it is a good idea to damp it down with a handful of green grass. It helps to produce a nice, fragrant smoke and prevents the smoker from becoming a flame thrower.

A former Bee Inspector colleague bought grass pellets, intended for cattle feed, from agricultural merchants. It did produce plenty of cool, fragrant smoke, but of course at a price.

A few years ago, a bee farmer I was working with produced several carrier bags and led me to the field adjoining the apiary. A maize crop had been harvested, leaving hundreds of small cobs on the ground. We filled the bags and shared the spoils. The cobs were quite wet so I left them on the greenhouse bench to dry. It proved to be a very useful supplementary fuel.

The same bee farmer, but a different site, this time in the New Forest. Again, he produced a number of carrier bags, but this time the target was dried pony dung. It was in effect compacted dried grass, and it did make excellent smoker fuel. Remember though it must be dry! I am reliably informed that elephant dung is very good, but I've yet to find a source locally (Marwell Zoo doesn't have elephants).

Other fuels that I have used successfully from time to time are pine cones and hay, though the latter will burn very quickly unless it is compacted or mixed with other material.

My absolute favourite, though, is the dried heads of lavender. It produces nice, cool smoke and is wonderfully fragrant. The bees seem to like it, and it certainly makes me feel good! It should be mixed with other material, as it is insufficiently compact on its own.

One thing doesn't change much from fuel to fuel. Lighting the smoker.

There is a perverse law of beekeeping that says that if you are working alone you can light a smoker in 10-15 seconds, but if you have an audience it takes at least three times as long!

David Purchase

APIARY UPDATE

As we all know, a week is a long time in politics. It is equally true of beekeeping.

In my last report, penned 26th September, I expected to have to feed colonies before the winter, something I had done very little of in recent years.

Very soon after that, the weather perked up and my colonies went mad on the ivy, collecting copious amounts of nectar and pollen. In some colonies this was stored at the expense of brood rearing space and in others a small surplus was stored in supers.

So, instead of feeding I found myself replacing brood frames containing stores with empty drawn comb (shallows, as I had no deeps) to provide much needed brood rearing space. The frames of stores are being kept in reserve for returning to the colonies later on if necessary. The frames would be returned to the hives from which they came to avoid the risk of spreading disease, despite the fact that I gave my colonies a 'health check' before bedding them down for the winter. Alternatively, I would feed fondant.

I am not sure how other beekeepers are faring, as I have received mixed reports, but it does illustrate the importance of monitoring colonies for stores from autumn until springtime, by weighing or 'hefting'. Although my hives are heavy at the moment, that could change and I might still have to feed before next spring.

David Purchase
Apiary Manager
8th November

BEES ON SITES ACCESSED BY THE PUBLIC

The following report from the minutes of the last meeting of the Hampshire Beekeepers' Association (HBA) is of importance to us all:

'Following the three reported incidents (in Hampshire) of serious stinging from bees positioned on or close to public rights of way, it was thought prudent for HBA to have a Code of Practice for positioning hives. The Chairman stressed that it is the responsibility of all beekeepers to be conversant with any Rights of Way in the vicinity of a proposed site, whether official or discretionary, and to ascertain whether such rights of way have had formal notices of temporary closure issued. Failure to be aware could leave a beekeeper open to action under Criminal and Common Law. A Focus Group of three, headed by David Nield (Portsmouth) will consider existing guidelines issued by the Associations, BBKA, the New Forest Authority and the Bee Farmers Association, and formulate a Code of Practice'.

Chris Mounty
David Purchase
(HBA Representatives)

Murphy's Laws of Beekeeping

Everybody else's swarm is always on the lower branch

Swarming can be greatly reduced by never looking up in the vicinity of the apiary

Swarming can be completely eliminated by keeping chickens instead of bees

**TAKEN FROM THE PETERSFIELD BEEKEEPER
NOVEMBER 2008**

SELECTED ITEMS FROM MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING 6TH NOVEMBER 2008

CONGRATULATIONS

Matters Arising:

- a) Swarm Call Centre Invitation – Eric agreed to write a letter of thanks and an invitation, to Yvonne, for some of the Call Handling staff to attend the Christmas function. Yvonne would then discuss this with the Call Centre manager.
- c) Training. DP reported that the training programme is under review. (*see last page of newsletter*)

Swarm Collection:

There were 82 visits to collect swarms this season. The committee agreed that in view of the petrol increases £10 per visit would be appropriate remuneration.

Programme of Events:

Christmas Social will be on 18th December 08.
The date for Eric's talk on Swarm Gathering is 19th March 09

The Committee would like fresh ideas for new events.

DP suggested a Brains Trust with an experienced bee-keeper in the chair. He also suggested inviting Max Watkins of Apiguard/Apistan, to give a talk in April.

Yvonne announced that she would be retiring from Events Management as she feels it is time for someone else, with fresh ideas, to take over. The Committee understand her reasons for resigning but will be sorry to see her go. She has done an excellent job over the past 3 years.

AOB

The following members of the Basingstoke Association have achieved the Basic Assessment certificate: Chris Mouny, Eric Denton, Chris Flemming. Members of the Committee offer their congratulations.

Next Meeting

11th December 08 7pm

..... to Eric Denton, Chris Flemming and Chris Mouny on passing the BBKA's Basic Assessment.

Basingstoke & District BKA can be proud of the fact that we fielded three of the eight successful candidates in Hampshire this year. According to my reckoning, a total of twelve of our members have gained the certificate over the years.

The Basic Assessment is open to all beekeepers with a minimum of one year's practical experience, or who have attended a course in practical beekeeping. It is part practical and part oral. There is no written test. It is a prerequisite for entry into the next level of assessments.

Some beekeepers question its value. Well, it is a measure of the basic knowledge and skills necessary to manage a colony of honeybees successfully. It sets a standard. It certainly made me think more deeply about why and how I did things. Also, it is a modest challenge, and many of us thrive on challenges.

Chris M and Eric are two of our longest serving and most experienced members. Why not follow their example and 'have a go' next year?

David Purchase

COLONY COLLAPSE DISORDER

I started beekeeping in 1970 when it was customary and important to finish feeding bees by the end of September. We often had early frosts in October and it was drilled into us that, if we did not do this, bees would probably not be able to cap the heavy syrup with which they had been fed. There was then the risk of dysentery setting in, with all that entailed.

One thing I have noticed in recent years has been that we have much warmer autumns and it has been possible to feed bees up to the end of October without any problems occurring. This has meant that the bees have been able to gather a lot of pollen from the ivy and, whilst this is to be welcomed, I believe the nectar they gather has problems. About three or four years ago I took off some ivy honey from a strong stock because there was a separate super on the top above the queen excluder. I found this extremely palatable, tasting rather like a weak heather honey, but very quickly it set like concrete in the jar. I had never experienced anything setting so hard. The following year I took off about 25lbs and, after consultation with David Purchase, added about 30% of ordinary honey in an effort to make it softer. Actually, the percentage ought to have been nearer 50%-60% because it still set very hard and would bend any spoon used to get it out of the jar!

I have heard it said recently that bees died in the midst of plenty and I think it is quite likely that the bees gathered the ivy nectar in preference to taking down the sugar syrup and, if this is so, they could not use it when they needed to. In fact, if you think about it there is so much ivy about in woodlands and hedgerows that the bees find it very easy to gather both nectar and pollen from it. Also there is a mass of berries which the pigeons feed on in the spring.

I am not sure therefore if colony collapse is solely due to a virus induced by the varroa mite but rather this ivy honey, which the bees cannot use in the winter because they have no access to water to use it. In recent years I have only kept two hives but I lost one in the winter of 2006/07 and the second in 2007/08. However, I cleaned up the hive and a swarm went in but, during this disastrous year, the hive swarmed when I did not expect it to, the new virgin queen was lost on a mating flight and, having put in a frame of egg and brood, that queen was also lost! I obtained a nucleus and started feeding from mid-August onwards and I hope I have got enough syrup into the hive so the amount of ivy honey will not be great.

In future I am going to take off the honey as usual in late July, treat for varroa and make sure that the bees have been well fed by the end of September to avoid them collecting a mass of ivy nectar if the weather is fair.

THE SCIENCE OF HONEY

To make Honey two things have to happen.

Enzymes that bees produce turn the sucrose (a disaccharide) into glucose and fructose (monosaccharides).

Most of the moisture has to be **evaporated**, leaving only about 18-percent water in honey.

An **enzyme**, invertase, converts most of the sucrose into two six-carbon sugars, glucose and fructose. A small amount of the glucose is attacked by a second enzyme, glucose oxidase, and converted into gluconic acid and hydrogen peroxide. The gluconic acid makes honey an acid medium with a low pH that is inhospitable to bacteria, mould, and fungi, organisms we call microbes, while the hydrogen peroxide gives short-range protection against these same organisms when the honey is ripening or is diluted for larval food. Honey bees also reduce the moisture content of nectar, which gives it a high osmotic pressure and protection against microbes.

Evaporation - The physical change involves the removal of water, which is accomplished by externally manipulating nectar in the mouth parts and then placing small droplets on the upper side of cells and fanning the wings to increase air movement and carry away excess moisture.

The effect is to make honey a very stable food. It naturally resists moulds, fungi and other bacteria, allowing it to last for years without refrigeration.

Taken from animals.howstuffworks.com

RECIPE

Honey Butter

100kg (4oz) butter
2 Tablespoons Honey

Beat together until soft and heap on to hot mince pies.

Honey Brandy Butter

To make brandy butter for the pudding ,just
Add a little bandy (or liqueur of your choice) to the above
honey butter recipe when mixing.
Store in the fridge.

Classified Ads

AVAILABLE FOR LOAN

The Association has a motorised extractor for loan to members -

Please contact David Coppock if interested on 01256 468177

WHO DOES WHAT

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| President | Charles Oliver-Bellasis | FRICS |
| Chairman | Eric Denton | 01256 882244 |
| Secretary | David Coppock | 01256 468177 |
| Treasurer | David Worboys | 0118 9332126 |
| Membership | David Worboys | 0118 9332126 |
| Apiary Manager | David Purchase | 01256 781288 |
| Asst. Apiary Manager | Jim Parkhouse | 01256 323120 |
| Swarm Co-ordinator | Eric & Jenny Denton | 01256 882244 |
| Newsletter | Annabelle Parkhouse | 01256 323120 |
| Bulk Buy | VACANT | |
| HBA Delegates | David Purchase | 01256 781288 |
| HBA Delegates | Chris Mounty | 01256 329064 |
| Spray Liaison | Chris Mounty | 01256 329064 |
| Committee Member | Nigel Winter | 01256 892538 |
| Committee Member | Eileen Burke | 0118 9326327 |
| Events | Yvonne Lucas | 01256 330991 |
| Education/Training | David Purchase | 01256 781288 |

BASINGSTOKE AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING COURSE

With reluctance, we have decided not to run the course in 2009, because of potentially conflicting commitments. We hope to be able to resume in 2010.

In the meantime, I will be happy to provide you with information, advice and assistance, *subject to my availability*. Please contact me on 01256-781288
Alternatively, contact Gordon (Scott) on 01256-476547.

Also, to help you get started:

- You are invited during 2009, *without obligation*, to attend the 'winter' meetings of the Association at 7.30 pm on the third Thursday of each month from February until April (the AGM is scheduled for January) and September until December, and the practical apiary meetings at 2.00 pm on the first Saturday of each month (weather permitting) from April until October.
 1. Most, but not all, of the evening meetings have a beekeeping theme.
 2. The Association will loan protective clothing for the apiary meetings. You will need to bring Wellington boots and Marigold type household gloves.
 3. For further information, including directions to the venues, please contact me.

- It is believed that the following will run courses for beginners' in 2009:
 1. Don Burgess (Alton), 01420-82972
 2. John Cossburn, c/o Thornes of Stockbridge, 01264-810916,
 3. John Hamer (Woking), 01483-475259
 4. Alan and Margaret Johnson (Bishops Waltham), 01489-892390,

Recommended reading for beginners:

Books:

'Practical Beekeeping' by Clive de Bruyn

'Guide to Bees and Honey' by Ted Hooper (widely acknowledged as *the* best)

'Better Beginnings for Beekeepers' by Adrian Waring

Apart from libraries, bookshops and Amazon, obtainable from:

Bee Books New and Old, 01726-76844

Northern Bee Books, 01422-882751, or via www.beedata.com

Journal

'Bee Craft', monthly by subscription. www.bee-craft.com

Website

www.beedata.com

'the hub to the www of beekeeping'

David Purchase
Education and Training
November 2008