

NORTHERN LIGHTS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTH DEVON BRANCH
OF THE DEVON BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

I hope that you are having a good season and that you will be rewarded with a honey crop. The surplus crop will soon need to be removed from the hives and extracted. If you are a new beekeeper or are unsure on how to proceed Liz Wilson will be conducting a teach in session on honey extraction at Horestone on Tuesday 18 August - so come and join us.

Once again we have had a slightly strange season with swarming still occurring well into July. I am hoping this means the bees know something we don't and that we will have a hot and sunny August / September. But in case you thought it a good time to relax – then you may need to think again because what the beekeeper does now has a major bearing on next years season. Varroa control during the last 2 weeks in August is a must (see Patricks messenger dated 15th July). If treating with Apiguard then get your order in to Dave and Jean, as it can take 2 weeks for his suppliers to deliver it. Start varroa counts now so that you know the level of infestation. Also keep your eye out for signs of associated virus infection such as sac brood and deformed wing virus. Another option for a badly varroa infested colony is a shook swarm (see notes from teach in session with Peter Auger). This is also a good time to have a general tidy up around the colonies. Long grass can cause dampness to be retained and should be removed.

I hope to see lots of you at our various meetings, teach in sessions and shows—have a good August.

Sylvie

BRANCH HONEY SHOW - I do hope you are all busy preparing entries for the Branch Honey Show at St John's Garden Centre on Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th October. The 2009 Schedule will be with you shortly, though the classes of entry are much the same as in previous years.

We are now building a Honey Show Team to help set up, stage, run, and dismantle the Show. The team is led by Margaret Kay (mkay761@googlemail.com) assisted by Sylvie Barber, and they seek volunteers from you—the general membership—to join the team in some capacity.

So ... please contact Margaret if you would like to be part of this Branch event.

By the way ... being member of the team does not “let you off” submitting entries!!

Patrick

Apiary Manager's Update

Oh! the ups and downs of beekeeping! The enjoyment of creating apideas, wondering at the beautiful natural comb the bees draw out, only to have a wandering blue tit whip away the returning mated queen before she had time to say 'bees wax!'

Our colonies were building up really well, until a few queens, for some reason best known only to themselves, decided they would down tools and disappear. Quite a few members have experienced this sudden loss of a queen, or the continuous formation of queen cells, sometimes within 6 days! The Irish beekeepers site has fascinating discussions on their forums, and we'd like to hear about your experiences to have some idea of how widespread this is in North Devon.

On a brighter note, the Fremington Bee day was amazingly well attended considering the monsoon drenching, and the observation hive was great attraction for all ages.

The interest for prospective beekeepers who signed up for a course was considerable, and it was decided to hold 2 Taster Days to accommodate the enquiring public.

Our first was attended by enthusiastic enquirers who were very well read on the recent concerns affecting the bees. Our second day will be held on August 16th

Our teach-ins have benefited from our seasonal bee inspector's demonstration of a shook swarm. The next demo day will be August 18th when Lizzie Wilson will offer new beekeepers a honey extraction afternoon, so all are welcome.

Other interesting days are planned for the autumn and winter, including Adam Vevers discussing bee diseases, especially foul brood (frames available for a visual picture of these dreaded diseases), wax handling day with Chris Tozer and a Balm making day with Marie Wallingham. It would be great to see members who are unable to join us on Tuesdays able to share these weekend days.

Sally Wilson from the WI, will be our honey cake judge for the show at St Johns, and we'll soon publish the recipes for practicing in the meantime! Happy cooking, happy show preparations and happy honey extracting.

Flora



BEETOUR GOES TO PORTUGAL

2009 marked the 30th year that the Kent Beekeepers have set off for a Beetour trek to explore and investigate beekeepers and their bees in Europe. The tours are led by Brian Palmer and James Edwards, and usually about 36 beekeepers join the party. This year the choice was Northern Portugal, and from England's South West there were six takers. We were deposited at Oporto airport at 08.30 by Ryanair, so you can imagine an early start. Oporto was shut, hungover from an annual enormous party the night before to celebrate the Festival of St John, but before we headed north there was time to tour the city and inspect and sample Sandeman's port wine production. The town where we were to stay five nights was Barcelos, half a day's drive north. Ancient and fascinating city, with the biggest weekly market in Portugal opposite our hotel the next day. Splendid shopping.

The first bee visit took place in the afternoon of Market Day, not very far from Barcelos, to Mr Jorge's vineyard and apiary. The apiary was set out behind an old but elegant homestead, crumbling and disused, with the apiary on a terrace overlooking grape vines and Kiwifruit.

There were ten or twelve hives painted in pastel colours, good tempered bees working the eucalyptus, pines, sweet chestnut and wonderful assortment of wild flowers. A few cows wandered around the ancient farm buildings while we tasted the honey. Mr Jorge became a firm friend and came with us the next day when our coach took us north through pine and eucalyptus country to another apiary, much bigger and set out in spaced areas amongst the trees. This apiary was not far from his home, where he gave us a picnic lunch, sold us some honey, guided us to yet more bees at another apiary. All the bees we saw seemed to be of the same mixed breed, housed in the square ten framed hives (solid floors) we found throughout. Very productive, reasonable temper, with 12 or so hives grouped in each of separate locations over an extensive area. The soil was light and quite sandy, rainfall in the area plentiful - it is an Atlantic climate.

Further visits followed, into Spain for a trip to Santiago de Compostela- with the traditional groups of pilgrims limping in from their long long trail (we took Mr Jorge and family with us for that day out) - to a wonderful bee museum and working apiary at Arzua, a trip up the Douro Valley where the amazing terraced hillside vineyards rose almost vertical from the river for miles and miles. Finally there was a visit to a large beekeeping equipment shop, always a highlight on these tours. Much of interest here, sales were brisk, most popular were their smokers. It was a great tour, the usual good company, perhaps we will see you one of these years.

Beryl

Bees SOS

I had a call in the early spring from a holiday home neighbour whose bungalow is 4 miles from me. He was calling for assistance to rescue a hive that he had inherited 3 years previously when he bought the house. Although the hive always looked a wreck, this last winter completely finished it and it seemed to have crumbled completely. Colin and his wife knew nothing about bees but did wish to continue having the hive if it could be saved. He explained that they had bought a new hive and would place it near the one in question.

Sylvie and I arrived one Sunday morning in June to assess the situation and work out what could be done. The hive looked to be in an impossible state of collapse, yet the bees seemed to be in control. All the wood was clearly rotten and on taking off the roof there was no crown board, no sign of a queen excluder, 2 supers but no brood box, and no floor. The hive was revealed to be one great big mess with no obvious way to disentangle the frames. Intrepid Sylvie with a no nonsense gesture took out 3 super frames that appeared to have some brood on them and placed them in the new hive putting the new frames on either side. We then proceeded to shake and place handfuls of bees into the new hive just hoping that amongst them would be the queen. We managed to rescue some comb for them to take as a starter.

Reassembling the new hive we found that the floor was not right and the super that was provided allowed gaps which would have encouraged robbing.

The old hive and all other wax we burnt. We left that day with our fingers crossed that all would be well. A week later I was able to visit and to my great delight saw that the bees were flying into the new hive. A few weeks later we were able to speak to Colin directly and explain about how his hive did not meet quality standards, also to encourage them to go to bee classes near their home. After a week or so we again visited to give some sugar syrup and thankfully saw the queen and able to mark her. There were eggs and larvae. Good job done!!!!

Mel



Intrepid Mel



Greetings all members! Well, my recent email post about "nuc needers" and "nuc sellers", problems with drone layers this year certainly provoked a small flurry of comment! What is more, there are a couple or more threads on the BBKA Forum from others in the country having troubles.... e.g. : <http://www.britishbee.org.uk/forum/showthread.php?t=2795&highlight=mating+problems> It seems a good time to pass on a document by Roger Patterson, one of the BBKA Exec, who has had concerns over an apparent rise in queen mating problems over the past few years. He is keen for his writing to be disseminated, I hope you find it useful.

Patrick Moore

Queen Performance Issues – A Help Sheet by Roger Patterson *(These guidance notes are to help beekeepers overcome the problem of queen failure during the active season)*

Introduction: In the early years of the 21st century many beekeepers have experienced unexplained and unexpected problems with queen performance. Similar problems have also been seen in other countries. They will all occur naturally but at a very much lower level than is currently seen. Many colonies are unexpectedly being found queenless or with failing queens, even in the active season when there shouldn't be a problem. The reasons have not yet been fully researched and it seems possible there may be several causes, or combinations of causes, some possibly being beyond the control of individual beekeepers. Queen failure is often blamed on bad weather, but in many instances the weather is perfect when queens have mated, it should have mated. As this is a new phenomenon no information will be found in books, and the purpose of these guidance notes is to help beekeepers overcome the problems by prevention, or colony management techniques. Those that have come into beekeeping in the 21st century will not know the success levels beekeepers used to enjoy, but will accept what they have experienced themselves. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the problems are not recognised or accepted by some beekeepers

What are the problems? There are basically 3 issues and they may be connected.

1. **Queens "disappearing"**. These are usually queens that have been laying what appears to be perfect brood, and often they have been laying for some time. There is sometimes evidence that egg laying slows down, but not always. Sometimes there are emergency queen cells, but often not, tending to suggest that the queen goes off lay for a few days before "disappearing". If emergency cells are not built then obviously the colony becomes hopelessly queenless, and will need help from the beekeeper to survive.

2. **Supersedure**. Natural supersedure usually happens late in the season, when anything from 1-3 queen cells (usually the lower) are normally built. It is quite rare for supersedure to occur during the active season. The normal life expectancy of a prolific queen is 2-3 years, and a non prolific queen 4-5 years before being superseded. It is now common for young queens to be superseded in their first season, even when laying what appears to be perfect brood, and often before the first brood is sealed. It is not often noticed by the beekeeper due to the time of year, lack of inspections, or the Q/C's are missed because they are often on outside combs that may not be inspected. Supersedure cells can be mistaken for swarm cells and be removed by the beekeeper, and may result in the queen going on to become a drone layer if she is not replaced.

3. **Queen cells not resulting in mated queens**. This is often associated with poor weather during the time mating should occur. There has however been a large increase in mating failure even when the weather has been good. There are a growing number of instances where queens haven't developed in the cells, or if they have they have been deformed in some way, usually their wings, and are unable to fly. Because many beekeepers are not able to check their colonies regularly they assume the queen has emerged, and been lost on her mating flights. These problems are not confined to home mated queens, as there have been many reports of failure with imported queens. All queens can be affected, however they are reared.

What can you do, and what do you need to know? In giving the following advice it is assumed the beekeeper know the life cycle of the queen and workers, and can work out the consequences of any action taken. Some of these suggestions will be considered good practice and should be done as a matter of course.

~ **Fully** understand what should be happening in the colony and note anything abnormal. It may not appear significant at this inspection, but it may at the next. ~ **Check** all the colonies on a regular basis for disease, especially varroa mite count and both types of nosema, and take action where necessary. ~ **Keep** hive records. There are a number that can be downloaded from the web, or you can design your own. Many are far too complicated for the average beekeeper, so use something simple. Make sure you can record that both eggs and queen are present, and the state of the brood. A simple record sheet is available on <http://www.wgbka.org.uk/Record%20Sheet.pdf> together with guidance notes on its use. ~ **At** every inspection check for the presence of eggs and make a greater effort to see the queen.

~ **Clip** and mark queens. Colonies can swarm leaving one supersedure cell that may not have been noticed. If a queen is clipped there is less chance of a swarm being lost, and a possible nuisance to someone else. If you mark a queen you will know if the queen you see is the one that was there at the last inspection. ~ **Keep** good queens for as long as possible. There is no point in replacing a good queen with one that might fail. This goes against normal advice, but the non prolific "native types" should normally last for 3 or 4 years without losing colony productivity.

~ **Keep** a spare colony or nucleus so you have a spare queen and/or brood that can give instant help to a colony, without depleting another honey producing colony. ~ **If** a queen is being replaced try to keep her until her replacement is performing well. This can easily be done in a nucleus. ~ **Learn** how to tell the age of eggs and larvae in case you need to know how long the queen has been off lay or missing. ~ **Make** sure you can identify swarm, supersedure, and emergency queen cells. Do not rely on positions some books will tell you they will be found in, as this is unreliable. In general 3 and less will be supersedure, 6 or more will be swarming. Emergency are built on existing worker larvae. ~ **The** removal of supersedure cells usually results in the building of more. Experience has shown the queen may go off lay and/or “disappear”, leaving the colony hopelessly queenless. The best option is to clip the queen, recede the Q/C’s to one, and let nature take its course. Leaving two can still result in a swarm. ~ **Be** aware that a colony can swarm on supersedure and emergency cells. ~ **If** you raise your own queens even by using natural Q/C’s, then aim for at least 2-3 times the number you need. ~ **If** possible get queens to emerge in cages such as the “hair curler” type. You can then check to see if the wings are deformed

~ **Queens** that have been mated in mini-nucs when introduced to full colonies will often result in supersedure cells being built. These can be removed until the queen gets up to speed. This may be overcome by introducing the queen to a nucleus first. If the bees continue to build Q/C’s then there is a problem with the queen.

~ **When** you expect the queen to be taking her mating flights (about 5 days after emergence) check a circle of about 20ft on the ground around the colony for a small group of bees about the size of a golf ball. If found, this could contain a virgin queen with deformed wings. ~ **In** normal circumstances a queen should come into lay 8-20 days after emerging, depending on circumstances. It has now become common for queens not to start laying for 4 weeks even in good weather, so if you are sure there is a queen there be patient. ~ **Inspect** your colonies on a regular basis ie 7-8 days with unclipped queens, 12—14 with clipped queens. Some of the problems can happen quickly, and you need to deal with the colony as early as possible. ~ **Inspect** EVERY frame in a broodchamber and lightly shake the bees off to avoid missing hidden Q/C’s. Very often 1, or possibly 2 supersedure cells are built on outer combs, and sometimes on frames with no other brood. Do this even if the queen appears to be laying well. ~ **Nuclei** and small colonies should be inspected for Q/C’s, even if the queen is young and you would not normally expect to see Q/C’s. ~ **If** emergency queen cells are found it could mean the queen has “disappeared”. You will need to take a decision on your course of action. If you leave them the colony could swarm. Depending on the circumstances probably the best thing to do if you had other Q/C’s available would be to cut out all emergency cells and replace with a swarm or supersedure cell. Look at the age of the brood and try to work out when the queen stopped laying, and record it. There may be a delay between the queen stopping laying and emergency cells being started.

If there is no unsealed brood or emergency cells during the summer (and assuming there is plenty of food) check to see if the queen is there. If you can’t find her either give a “test” comb or a sealed queen cell. If the bees destroy the queen cell then a queen is present. The use of a test comb on occasions has become unreliable, as often emergency cells are not built when the colony is obviously queenless. ~ **If** queens go off lay during the summer they often lay a significant number of drones in worker cells, or become total drone layers when they start laying again. This should not happen, and should be taken as a sign there is trouble on the way. ~ **Look** for a significant amount of drone brood in worker cells. Young queens will sometimes lay drone eggs in worker cells for a week or so before settling down, but after that there should be no more than the odd few. If you get, say, 4 per comb side then keep an eye out for other problems at future inspections such as “disappearing”. ~ **If** only 1 colony is kept and it goes queenless you will need help from another one. Try to keep 2 colonies as a minimum, so you don’t need the help of another beekeeper if you have a problem. ~ **If** you practice drone brood culling check the level of mites before destroying, and leave it if the level is low. A high level of parasitized drones in an area will affect the quality of mating, but we need to maintain a healthy drone population. ~ **It** is good policy to have one frame of total drone brood in a broodchamber, but you must be alert to the fact that varroa are attracted to drone brood and you will need to uncup it regularly. If the level is high then freeze the comb for a couple of days and replace it with an empty one. This will help keep the number of healthy drones up, and in the control of varroa. ~ **Avoid** buying bees in the autumn or winter unless there are good reasons to do so. A colony with a failed queen is worthless. ~ **It** is now common for queens in swarms to quickly fail. This may be because the colony the swarm came from had swarmed on supersedure cells. Check regularly for several weeks after hiving. ~ **If** a colony has a problem after the end of September it is probably better to unite it to another one.

Before inspecting a colony have a look at the records to find out what you should see. Unless there is a good reason you know about the following should not be seen during the active season: supersedure cells, emergency cells, drone brood in worker cells, total drone layer, queenless colony, queen gone off lay.

With these and other problems facing a colony of bees we must all be better beekeepers than our forebears were. We must fully understand what should happen in our colonies, and address any problems from a position of sound knowledge.

Due to the nature of the problems, and research, this sheet may be regularly updated.

Community of Beekeepers - Bitz4Bees Autumn Treatments

Do not leave your Varroa treatment requirement to the last minute.

Please order from CoB - B4B BEFORE you need them.

We have limited stocks of: -

Apiguard **Hive Clean**
Vita Green **Vita Gold**

(The 'lead time' from our suppliers is approx. 2 weeks.)



PLEASE THINK AHEAD

ORDER NOW!!

jeda2@talktalk.net

Notes on a Horestone Teach In

On Tuesday Peter Auger came to Horestone to continue his inspection of our colonies and talked to us about varroa control including using the shook swarm if colonies have a very high varroa infestation with associated signs of virus infection. The shook swarm has been practiced by beekeepers for many years as a control for EFB. It is a fairly drastic solution for varroa control as all the bees are shaken onto new foundation with the resulting loss of all old comb, brood etc but if the varroa infestation is heavy it could prevent the collapse of a colony. Timing is important and the latest time this can be done is August or it will be impossible for the queen to raise enough winter bees.

Method: move the hive to one side and place a clean floor on the original hive site. Put a QE on top of the floor (to prevent queen absconding) then put on a brood box filled with new foundation. Remove the 4 middle frames to make space to shake in the bees. Return to the colony find and cage the queen. Choose one good frame preferably only containing eggs, temporarily place this in a nuc box. This chosen frame will be removed from the new colony in a weeks time after any varroa shaken in with the bees has been sealed in. Make sure you remember to remove it to make sure all the varroa is removed. Now shake all the bees, a frame at a time into the newly made up hive. Replace the frames of foundation and put in the frame of eggs in the middle. Put the queen back into the colony and put on another QE and the crown board. Add a contact feeder filled with 75% sugar syrup. Replace the roof and leave for 7 days. Burn the old comb.

In one weeks time the foundation should be pulled and the queen should have started to lay again. Take the one old frame out and destroy. Continue to feed the colony. The QE can now be removed.

Many thanks to Peter for the teach in session.

Stuffed courgette flowers drizzled with honey

(serves 2 as a light meal or 3 as a starter)

6 courgette flowers
80 g creamy goats cheese
1 pinch of thyme leaves
1 small clove garlic (crushed)
pepper
oil for frying
honey to serve

For the batter:

30 ml beer
30 g flour
1 egg white

Carefully open up the courgette flowers and break off the stigma inside. If your flowers come with zucchini attached, cut through them twice (lengthwise) to make sure all of it will cook.

Combine the cheese, garlic, thyme and pepper to a smooth paste, then gently stuff the flowers, twisting the end of the petals to fully close.

To make the batter - mix the beer with the flour, beat the egg white and gently fold into the beer batter.

Heat plenty of oil in a deep pan, dunk the flowers carefully in the batter, then fry in the oil until starting to brown. Serve immediately, drizzled with honey.



DIARY DATES

Wednesday 5th August - North Devon Show

Sunday 9th August - Brendon Show

Sunday 16 August - Beginner Beekeepers Taster Day - 11am - 4pm.

18 August - Tuesday at Horestone - "teach in-session" talk on honey extracting.

19 August - Basic Exam Day

Thursday 27 August - Quince Honey Farm visit, 7pm - please contact Margaret Kay so that she know how many will be attending - mkay761@googlemail.com

8 September - Tuesday at Horestone - "teach in session" talk on preparing for the Honey Show

27 September (Sunday) - Castle Centre - Bee Diseases Day with NBU 11am—3pm

10 October (Saturday) - DBKA Buckfast Bee Day

17 & 19 October - Eggesford Apple Day

24th & 25th October - Branch Honey Show

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