

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

MAY 2010

www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

Ten days ago my colonies were mostly small ----healthy but small with some brood and expanding slowly. The last ten days have been sunny and warm, the nights cold and the mornings often frosty. When I inspected the colonies on April 20th I found that most had increased fourfold and were making comb in the roof space and the frame feeders. They were laying down stores of honey and pollen in good quantities. A sign of good things to come, I hope! We've had the hardest winter for decades followed by a spring display of flowers and pollen that is truly spectacular. Does one always follow the other? I hope you are all seeing the same healthy expansion in your colonies.

At the end of June the club bids farewell to one of our most respected and senior beekeepers when Beryl Smailes leaves North Devon to set up home in New South Wales. We will miss you Beryl and wish you all the best of luck in your new life. Take care Chris

Mel Browne Several of our members have expressed the wish to plant a Memorial Tree at Horestone to honour the memory of Mel. If you would like to contribute towards this and offer suggestions for a tree or a shrub, that would be loved by both the bees and all those that visit the apiary, please contact Derek Hunter.

DIARY DATES

Beekeeping Taster Days at Horestone May, 27th June and possible date to be arranged in August (contact Jack Mummery for further information).

May 20/21/22 Devon County Show

Sunday 6th June - Dowland Fair.

August 4th - North Devon Show

18th & 19th September - Chapleton Steam Fair

26th September - Rosemoor Food Fair

30/31st October - St John's Honey Show

Auction of Beekeeping Equipment

Saturday 15th May

at Umberleigh Village Hall

**Items for sale accepted between 8:30 and 12:00
on morning of sale.**

Auction starts at 1:00

**Please support us and take this opportunity to turn
your unwanted equipment into cash
or to purchase items**

Winter Losses Survey 2009—2010

We have once again been asked as a Branch to participate in the Winter losses survey. The committee have been asked to contact every 3rd person on our members list to ask how many colonies including nucs, they had last autumn and how many they have lost over the winter. And also how many colonies, big enough to expect to make a surplus, they lost between May and September of 2009. Colonies found to have no queen or a drone-laying queen should be counted as dead as should any colonies which are judged by the member to be so weak that they are unlikely to survive as useful colonies. As well as the numbers it would be useful to have the member's opinion of the likely cause of death, e.g. starvation, wasp attack, varroa etc.

Please be assured that names or any other information will not be passed on. Beekeepers tend not to like to dwell on their losses but these types of survey are important and much more urgently needed in order to illustrate the full picture of colony losses.

We need to reply to the DBKA annual survey team by 15th May and so many of you will be hearing from us shortly.

Thank you for your help.

April Notes from Horestone

The new season has now started at Horestone and we are pleased to say that we have so far come through the winter fairly well. We may have a drone laying queen and we have had to combine a colony that had a failed queen but the rest are building up quite nicely. It appears that the TLC that the colonies received at the end of last year and during the winter months has paid off.

On 20 April we invited Peter Auger, our Seasonal Bee Inspector, to join us at the Apiary to help carry out a comprehensive spring inspection. We systematically checked all the colonies and recorded the information carefully. The inspection including shaking the bees from the frames to look for signs of brood disease or abnormalities. We counted the number of seams of bees in each colony, checked that there was brood at all stages and looked for the queens. All those members that managed to join us found it extremely useful.

The following page gives a rough picture of what was found and how the colonies have been building up since. Fingers crossed that the weather continues to stay warm and dry - we could certainly do with a little help from nature this year.

Rough Notes from Horestone April Spring Inspection 20/4/10 and update for 27/4

Red 1 - problem here as lots of sealed drone brood in brood box so ?? drone laying queen or laying workers. Queen was found in super with some eggs and was placed in lower brood box and QE put on. Not sure if the eggs will be drone or worker. ??check next week. Plenty of stores.

Update - 1 week later - still a little sealed drone brood and lots of drones wandering around. No signs of eggs or larvae. Queen not found but while searching for the queen a queen cell with egg and royal jelly was discovered. Check next week to see if they seal it, but most likely they will destroy it.

Update - 1 week later - no sign of queen or the queen cell - a queen cell and some eggs taken from white section with the hope of saving the colony.

Red 2 Good strong colony with brood at all stages on 9 frames. May need 2nd brood box soon. Super full of stores. Another super of new foundation was added. Disease inspection showed chalk brood and sacbrood on first couple of frames. Varroa count not done as too much debris. Update 1 week later: play cups seen. Bees beginning to draw out foundation on the new super.

Red 3 Brood on a brood and a half. 5 frames at all stages in brood box. 4 frames of brood in super with a few eggs. Not much in the way of stores. Queen not seen. Varroa count not done as too much debris. Chalkbrood and sacbrood seen. Wax moth. A couple of frames in poor condition (mouldy) and will need changing.

Update: Not strong but improving.

Green 1 ?was a brood and a half until Sunday 18 when QE put in. Brood box 4 frames of brood at all stages. Super still has a little brood and plenty of stores. Brood pattern poor, pepper pot with chalk brood.

Update: has build up from last week - still only 4 frames of brood but area of brood much larger. Still a little sealed brood in the super.

Green 2 2 frames of brood at all stages. Poor brood pattern, pepperpot. Plenty of stores in super.

Update: has built up since last week—now 4 frames of brood at all stages. Queen not seen.

White 1 - This is now a brood and a half. Above this is QE with super, 2 frames of which have small amount of sealed brood from before QE put on. Another super of foundation was added today.

Strong colony with brood box containing 9 frames of brood, 4 of which have eggs. The brood super has 7 frames of brood, 3 of which have eggs. Queen not seen. Play cells removed. Signs of wax moth.

Update: Brood increasing. Queen found and marked. Drone brood checked for varroa - non present. Supers rearranged to encourage bees to bring the nectar down towards the brood.

White 3 This is a double brood box. Good strong colony - super of foundation put on.

Top brood box has 3 frames of brood at all stages.

Bottom brood box has 7 frames at all stages. Varroa count not done as too much debris. Queen seen. Bald brood seen and a few sac brood.

Update: Top brood 6 frames of brood at all stages. Bottom brood 8 frames of brood—1 new frame of foundation put in. Super foundation not pulled yet. Queen not located. Varroa check completed—nothing found. Advanced Play cups - not polished.

Blue 3 This colony was united with a nuc from White Team as it was queenless. At inspection the paper slightly chewed through at one corner!! Queen found and taken from the top brood box and put into bottom brood box. Top one removed. No eggs were found – just half a frame of sealed brood left. Not looking hopeful.

Update good news, uniting seems to have worked, queen seen and eggs, larvae and sealed brood on two and a half frames.

Blue 4 Strong healthy looking colony on a double brood box. Top has brood at all stages on 4 frames. Bottom has brood at all stages on 6 frames. Varroa count not done as too much debris.

Update Top Brood box - brood at all stages on 8 frames. Drone brood on lower edges. Bottom brood—brood on 4 frames. Drone on lower part of cells.

Boxes congested - lots of stores. 2 frames with stores removed, 2 frames of foundation put in.

Plan for next week: check for varroa and treat with icing sugar. May is the start of the swarming season so if necessary put plans for swarm management into practice.

My tribute to Beryl Smailes

I have known Beryl for a relatively short time, meeting her up at the Horestone Apiary when I was a beginner beekeeper four years ago, but I soon learned to respect her knowledge of bees and enjoy her quiet yet determined manner.

Beryl first learned Beekeeping when she lived near Guildford in 1976 by attending a whole year's evening classes at Merrist Wood in Surrey. She found the local association there very unfriendly, but then she went to live abroad again. She returned to live in North Devon in 1987 when she attended evening Beekeeping meetings in the Henry Williamson Room in Barnstaple Library. She picked up equipment from auctions and began her committee work in about 1990. She has been Show Secretary, Social Secretary and Vice Chairman of the Horestone Apiary in the past. For the DBKA she worked on the 3 day annual conventions first held at Seale Hayne, a former Agricultural College near Newton Abbot, and then at Exeter University and then became the Education and Examination Secretary.

She has taken all the modules leading to becoming a Master Beekeeper and has worked hard at the County Shows mainly on the Honey Tasting stall. She always went on the annual Beekeeping tours to Europe and has attended Apimondia conventions in Slovenia, Melbourne and Vancouver.

Beryl has made a huge contribution in teaching Beginner Beekeepers. She and Chris Utting taught at the North Devon College for 4 years and she was part of the teaching team at Horestone for many more years than that. She tells of the 'old days' up at the Horestone Apiary when it was smaller and much less ambitious. Everything was run from one small shed where all the equipment was stored. There were four teams – honey, teaching, queen-rearing and experimental. George Lake was in charge of honey production and about 12 hives of bees during the summer produced 600lbs of honey, which provided the funding.

Beryl remembers taking many inventories of the equipment and holding committee meetings in each other's houses.

At the end of June, Beryl is off to Australia to live in a mobile home while a new 'house on stilts' is being built for her on her son's mango farm. She has a new laptop so that she can keep in touch with us and all the rest of us can do is to admire this wonderful lady! Thank you Beryl, we are all the richer for knowing you.

Best wishes and keep in touch.

Glenis Beardsley



Good luck Beryl - you will be missed. Thank you for your help and support over the years. We wish you all the best in Australia and hope that you will be very happy with your family, on the mango farm. We look forward to hearing all about your new home once your laptop is up and running and we in turn will let you know what's happening with us. Take care and very best wishes.

From North Devon Branch

To North Devon Branch - letter from Beryl.

Dear Members of the Branch.

Sometime way back in the past—like February or March this year—I was astonished to have my cheque for annual subscription returned by Denise, along with a beautiful card telling me that I had been made a Branch Honorary Life Member. I still cannot quite believe this. This is the kind of thing that happens to other people who so obviously deserve it a lot more - but as nobody has said it is a big mistake, here I am to say thank you very much.

The North Devon Branch has a long and valuable history, starting in the early 1920's with a group of the Bideford "gentry" replenishing the stocks of the local beekeepers—the "cottagers" - after the Isle of Wight disease had wiped out nearly all the colonies.

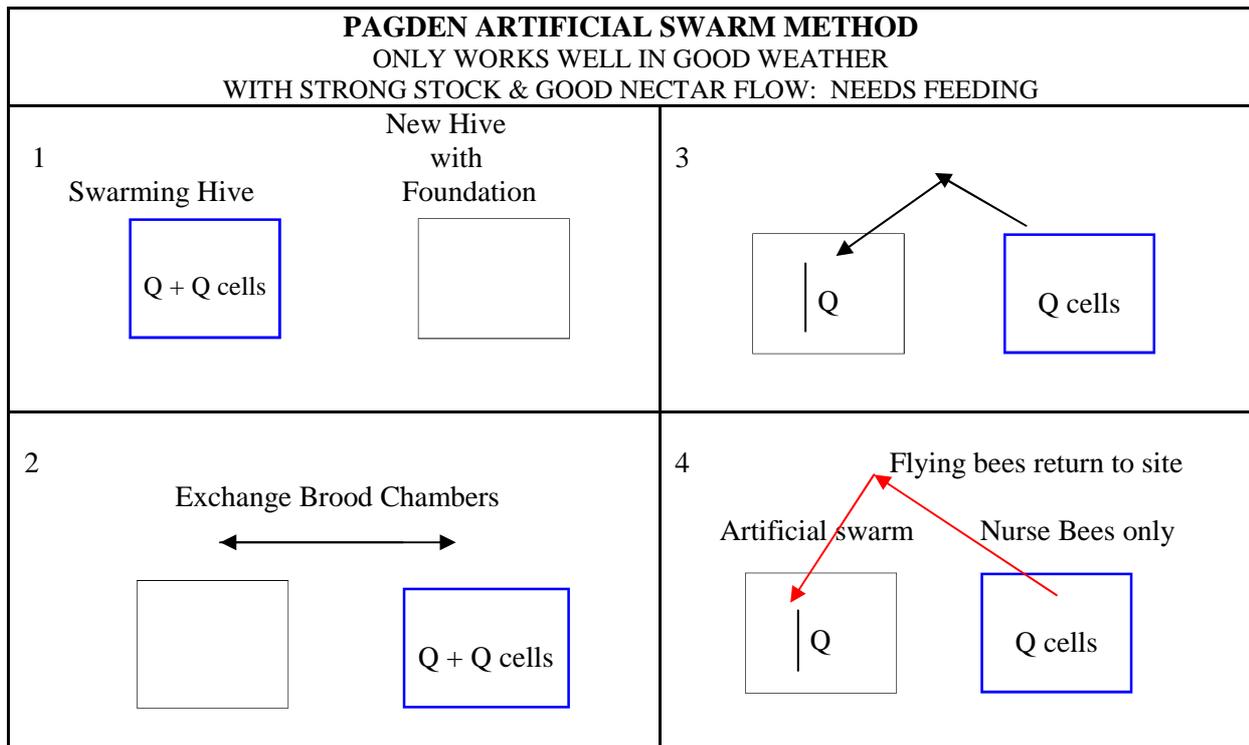
What fun the first members must have had in those early days. And what enjoyment, interest, comradeship and achievement has continued and developed since that generous beginning. So keep one eye on the long-ago past dear beekeepers, as you steer a way through the much more difficult present.

The part of NSW where I will be living is beautiful, with rolling countryside, heavy rainfall, loads of trees and crops, plenty of honeybees, plenty of native bees too. HOT!

I will try to send news about the local beekeepers, if I am lucky enough to meet some.

Meanwhile, thank you again. *Beryl*

Various methods of swarm control and queen rearing.



The Pagden Artificial Swarm Method This method has been used for a long time but there are several variations. It is virtually 100% successful. You must become very familiar with the artificial swarm method if you are going to keep bees successfully and produce a honey crop. In simple terms the original site will have a new hive containing the old queen, one frame of brood and all the flying bees. The old hive is moved to a new site a few feet away containing the queen cells, the rest of the brood frames and all the non-flying bees.

Step One Assemble a new hive on a stand 6 feet to one side of the colony with queen cells. The new hive consists of a floor, brood box containing 10 or 11 brood frames of new foundation, a crown board and a roof.

Step Two Exchange the two hives.

Step Three Take a brood frame with the old queen, destroying any queen cells on the frame and put it into the middle of the new brood box that is on the old site.

Step Four This is carried out by the bees. The flying bees will return to the old site with the old queen. The younger non-flying nurse bees will stay with the queen cells on the new site. If there are supers of honey place these on the old site. The new site with the queen cells must be fed with medium strength syrup as they cannot yet forage and the entrance is reduced to discourage robbing.

Notes from a Basic Beekeeping Course

Queen Rearing (reprint of June 2008 article) by Beryl

One of the most mysterious aspects of beekeeping for the beginner is the idea of raising his/her own queens. It is also one of the most rewarding. Try your hand at queen rearing right from the start of your illustrious career, but stick to simple methods at first. Think bee. What is it that a colony of honeybees wants most? To lay in a stock of stores and to reproduce. Go with the flow and try one of these:

1. By the second or third week in May, have one big strong colony (which has good temper and is industrious) in one single box. Before the first signs of queen cells, split this colony into two by dividing the brood and bees of all ages into two halves, i.e. in two boxes instead of one. The queen will be in one brood box, the other box will have enough eggs or very young larvae to raise another queen. Fill up the spaces with foundation, and place the boxes next to each other. The older bees will return to the parent colony, so feed the other colony with a gallon of medium syrup (1kg sugar to 1 litre water) and reduce the entrance to 1". This colony will produce a new queen.

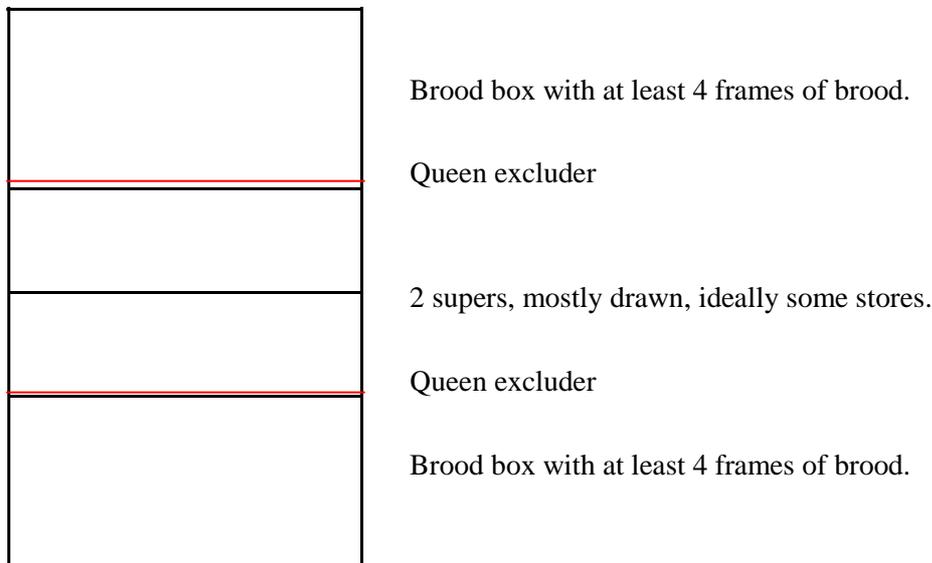
2. In August or September select a colony you really like. Keep this colony near home to reduce travel. In the early spring feed well with medium strength syrup and added pollen saved from last summer (dried and frozen to keep well) stirred into the syrup. When queen cells are advanced, make an artificial swarm (Paden method). After 4 days or so, the parent colony can be split into 4 or 5 nuclei, each with a queen cell (or two). Feed your nukes. 3 weeks later each should have a mated laying queen.

So at first you may not even have to find the queen, often difficult for a beginner. Have a go and the best of luck.

Various methods of swarm control and queen rearing.

Basic Artificial Swarm based on Ted Hooper. *Technique used and shared by Keith Allen of Gwent Beekeepers*

1. Build a colony to at least 6 frames of brood.
2. Put a second brood box on top of the first, under any super, with at least 4 frames of drawn comb.
3. Wait 7—10 days
4. If the colony now has at least 8 frames of brood, prepare to split. Make up as below.



If not big enough for 4 frames in each box, wait another 7 - 10 days. If not then, give up.

Queen can be in either box, nod need to check.

5. 3 - 7 days later
 - a) Place new floor alongside.
 - b) Lift top brood on to new floor
 - c) Move supers aside, open both boxes and swap 2 frames of brood
 - d) Add queen excluder and a super with some stores to each
6. 5—10 days later:

Check 1 box has eggs (and thus a queen) and the other queen cells. If no queen cells then transfer a frame of eggs, with or without bees (maybe even with the queen) from the other box.
7. Repeat 6 up to 3 times if necessary. If still no queen cells, recombine over newspaper.

Simple really

Notes:

The new floor doesn't have to be alongside, but it makes things easier if there are problems.

If colony is the bare minimum 8 frames it is best to check relative sizes of the new colonies the day after the split. If there's a major imbalance, swap a frame or 2 of bees, OR if the largest box is on the original site, and the boxes adjacent, just swap them, so the flying bees redress the balance.

Obviously cold/wet weather may slow or prevent progress. Bees can't make queen cells if they can't fly!

Step (4) can be omitted, but reduces success rate. Occasionally, if the queen is in the bottom box at this stage, the top box will start making queen cells. The main reason for this stage is to reduce pheromones in one box, and thus the shock of queenlessness, while keeping the brood warm.

Handling within boxes is mostly while the boxes are separate. So les bees and easier work.

Don't be afraid to reduce the queen cells to 2 or 3 good big ones, or even to split again if the good queen cells are on different frames.

Most years I get 5 or 6 splits making queen cells happily. Even in the wet summer of 2007 3 of 6 succeeded.

A special recipe for Beryl to take with her to her Mango Farm.

Mango and Honey Flan

1 14oz can condensed milk
1 16 oz can evaporated milk
1 large mango
4 oz cream cheese
1 tbsp vanilla extract
4 eggs
1/2 cup honey



Pre-heat oven to 350 F

Slightly heat a 10" round baking tin and pour in the honey. Swirl the tin to cover sides and bottom with the honey.

Blend the rest of the ingredients together and pour into the tin. Pour about 1 inch of water into a large roasting tin and put the baking tin into it (bain marie). Cover with foil aluminum paper. Bake for 60 mins or until a tooth pick comes out clean.

Put the baking tin on a wire rack and let it cool for at least 1 hour. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours before unmolding.

To unmold, put a plate on top of the tin facing down and flip the tin over and slide it off

Delicious.

Membership Secretary - every member should be receiving a copy of Northern Lights either as an email copy or as a hard copy. If anyone has been missed please let Denise know.



Community of Beekeepers Bitz4Bees.

Shop opening hours
Tuesday's 11 am—1.30pm
Dave & Jean 01237 475705
Derek 01769 561033

If you are going to buy a Hive from Bitz4Bees, contact either Dave Morris or Derek Hunter to place an order. There is a back log of orders at the moment, so please try and think ahead.

Dave



Winter talks

Our last winter talk by Phil Chandler 'Natural Beekeeping—The Way Forward' was, as expected, very interesting and entertaining. He said that as natural beekeepers our most pressing work is to restore bees to their original, healthy state. He uses top bar hives because it is as simple as beekeeping can get, while maintaining provision for inspections, everything you need is in one box—the beehive. As the colony within the top bar hive expands he moves the divider boards outwards and the colony grows. He never uses a smoker—only a water spray. With a top bar hive you learn to be gentle with the bees. You can find fully-illustrated instructions on how to build and use a top bar hive on his web site www.biobees.com.

After the meeting Chris Tozer and Kay presented certificates to all the branch members that had achieved the BBKA Basic Assessment and module examinations for the year 2009.

A big thank you went to Julie Elkin who organized the very successful series of winter evening talks.



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