

north staffordshire beekeepers association February 2011 Newsletter

www.northstaffsbees.org.uk

next meeting
Wednesday 2nd February
2011
The Friends Meeting House
Miller Street, Newcastle-u-Lyme ST5 1JD
7.00 for 7.30

The Queen Marking Colour for 2011 is WHITE

"Chairman's Chat" February 2011

It was status quo at our AGM last month; all senior officers agreed to carry on for a further year, but Ray Day and I indicated that we will be standing down at the next AGM. We did manage to attract some new blood to the Committee however. We will need to replace these senior positions so get your thinking caps on. It is healthy to change the officers regularly in any case, so that it does not become too onerous on any one person and may well encourage volunteers in the knowledge that it is only for a short time. (Commercial over!)

Tim Wayne has had difficulty tying down speakers for our new programme, but has managed to come up with a great one for our February meeting on Wednesday 2nd at the Quaker Meeting House. John Goodwin has agreed to present "Beekeeping my way". John is from South Cheshire and has been getting mated Greek Queens through a friend in East Anglia and making up nuclei to sell. I am not sure if this is to be the basis of his talk this month, but is sure to be interesting, so do come along. The balance of the programme will be complete shortly and Nick is contemplating sending this out to you all in postcard form instead of the old pink card system. I hope to see you all there.

We are well in to the 'course in a case' for new beekeepers. We have changed venues and are now in the Rugby Club at Newcastle, much more room and facilities including a 'bar'! Last week we had 28 turn up; this must be very healthy for our craft, and hopefully our association. **See you on Wednesday.**

Dave Cheek (davidcheek@talktalk.net)

Dates for your diary:

Wednesday 2nd February 2011

We welcome John Goodwin from South Cheshire Beekeepers Association as our guest speaker and John will be talking to us about the way he keeps his bees with an aptly titled talk called '**Beekeeping My Way**'.

Wednesday March 2nd 2011

Dave Buckley will be discussing "Queen rearing in a honey production colony"

Janet Waye (Jan)- Remembered

The end of January marks the first anniversary of the death of Tim's wife Jan and our thoughts are with Tim and his family at this time.

Jan and her beaming smile might no longer be with us but she is not forgotten.

Please remember Tim and his family in your thoughts. †

The December (Christmas Social) Meeting

Whilst Christmas has gone and the New Year has begun, it is still not too late to wish everyone the best wishes for a happy and good beekeeping New Year!

Many members look towards our Association Christmas and Summer social events and were disappointed that the Christmas meeting had to be cancelled. That decision to cancel was made after a great deal of discussion but it was thought that the (then) prevailing weather conditions would have made it either difficult or dangerous for people to travel to the meeting and your Committee hope that you understood the situation and the reasons why that decision was taken.

Fortunately, we did have telephone contact details for the majority of our members and it did prove to be very useful. Thank you for your understanding and support. **DT**

The CHANT and the ANSWERS

What do we Need and When do we need it? We need YOUR Help and Views NOW!!

1. Summer Social Meeting

Tim Waye included a note about the 2011 Summer Social in the November NewsLetter and to-date has been overwhelmed by the silence so, because his head is still sore from banging it against several brick walls, I am trying again on his behalf.

We can call the Summer Meeting what ever we want but it is simply an excuse to “down veils” and relax for a couple of hours to enjoy good company, food and drink together with some summer sun (we hope).

For now, all Tim needs is two things:

- **A venue – will you volunteer your garden or even your shed for the afternoon?**

And

- **Your thoughts about the event.**

Please contact - Tim Waye, NSBKA Programme Secretary – 01782 611890 or tim@microwayes.net

2. NSBKA Equipment Storage Location

We still need a dry and secure place to store some of the Associations assets which cannot be stored at the Friends Meeting House e.g. the marquee. We are willing to pay for the storage and the amount of space required is not great. If you can help or would simply like more information before committing yourself, please call Nick Mawby on 01538 387506.

Thanking you in advance - DT

Linking the Olympics, food & farming



Farmers and rural businesses are urged to join a campaign to ensure their produce is on the menu for at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Award-winning

baker Sarah Gayton, from The Staffordshire Mooreland's has launched a site on Facebook called “Farmers on Film, Feeding the Olympics Dream”.

Sarah is asking anyone who produces home-grown food to upload a 15 to 20 second video clip, taken with your mobile phone, showing what you make or grow. She then hopes that the food promoted in this way will be among the produce sold at the Olympics.

Sarah said: “We want to show the Olympics organisers and politicians the high-quality food we have here. We have the whole world coming to this country in 2012 and they will need farmers to feed them. We cannot sit and wait for people to come to us asking if we can supply food items to the Olympics, so I took the initiative”.

Over the past few months Sarah has presented talks at the House of Lords at the Women in Food & Farming Union, 24th November 2010, University of Derby, Buxton, West Midlands Regional Food Academy, Harper Adams University College, Taste of Staffordshire Awards Ceremony September 2010 and achieved several awards for the campaign.

Kathryn Bentham

If you have access to a PC, please have a look ED

BBKA Annual Delegates Meeting January 2011

The Annual General Meeting (ADM) of the BBKA took place in early January.

There was much to be debated to set the agenda for the BBKA activities of the forthcoming year and there was some disconcerting (which almost verged upon the unacceptable) aspects of the meeting relating to the use and support of pesticides by the BBKA but a full report will be published in your next NewsLetter.

DT NSBKA Delegate

NSBKA AGM – January 2011

As already mentioned by DC in his introduction to this NewsLetter. We had a very lively and productive meeting and again a full report will be published in your next NewsLetter. One item that all members could help with is the use of the legacy that the late Alan Silver left to our Association.

Alan was hoping that his legacy could be used to enable the creation of an Association apiary more centrally located within the area so if members have any ideas or have seen a suitable land, please contact Nick Mawby

DT

Varroa, Oxalic Acid and Red Light

The floors are getting full of waste material, which means that the queen may be laying or they have been very hungry over the past few weeks. Some say that in cold weather (below 3°C) you can open a colony without causing any problems. I say leave well alone because you can't very well do much if, for example, they have not started to lay or have all died during the past few weeks. Besides, if you do open up, some will be out onto you because you are warm. Those that fall onto cold rarely get up so perish, and so you lose a few valuable bees and it's best to have them. I noticed a few weeks ago that a couple of colonies were light so I have been giving them set honey in a Varroa tray (the heat from the hive starts to melt the honey and the bees come up to feed). Really, this late/early feeding is the fault of the beekeeper in not giving enough stores at the back end. To be honest, I think these colonies have been very greedy or they did not store the honey well last year. Who knows? Besides, if you're unsure it's best to give them a little and often until the spring now. Bees don't digest all of granulated honey, they masticate it to get the goodness and "snowy" white flakes they can't eat can be found outside the hive.

The other day it was about 4°C so I decided to treat an apiary with acid. We dribbled oxalic (bought from the association at £1 per jar) over the first hive seams, then opened the second hive – these so-and-sos started to attack us immediately. Within minutes they had soiled us quite heavily. Were they so scared that the literally messed themselves, or were they so full of it that a little light gave them the excuse to deposit all over us? Anyway, I think they told their mates because by the tenth hive our white tops were dark brown stained, our dark trousers were stained and stung – plus, we forgot to take a smoker with us. I thought it was going to be easy, like last year. —Be prepared!! was my old school motto, and I normally am but had a change of car at the last minute and could not be bothered to get all the kit out. After all, it is winter!

I got to another apiary today and the temp was around 10°C, sunny and the bees were flying and so I decided to inspect the floor to see how many Varroa had dropped. To my surprise, after four weeks (with me a bit lazy this year) there were only 5 mites on average across all the hives – which is really good. For me, this year has been pretty Varroa free compared with last. I think it was the oxalic treatment from last year that did the trick. Although I've heard rumours that acid treatment killed queens last year? The sun then went in and all the bees' frantic flying stopped. Most of them were in the hives now and there was a chill in the air. So I took out my big syringe, filled it full of acid and started to treat the hives. It's best to shake the jar before you fill up, so that the contents are well mixed and have it at about 20°C. I really don't think watching the temperatures is all that big a thing. Bees are very hardy creatures and anyway, they were welling out over the hive now and so I pushed them back with smoke (hey, remembered the smoker today!) They get excited when the acid hits and within 15 seconds the job's done and on to the next hive. Apply 5ml per seam, depending upon how full the seam is and no more than 50ml per hive.

Tonight, (13 Jan – New Year's eve for old calendars) I had my last lot of hives at home to treat. At 8.30 pm it had started to rain, but I was all prepared to go. Outside it's quite warm and the bees are tucked up inside. Daniel carried the torch, smoker and umbrella and I had the hive tool and acid, so we smoked the first hive a bit down below, removed the roof and crown board – it's dark in the garden so on went the torch – and the bees carried on as if nothing had happened. *Hey Dan this is really good the bees are so calm. Ooh, I'll just shake these off the crown board.* They landed nicely in the hive, a bit of smoke sent them scurrying between the seams and, armed with the hypodermic syringe I dribbled down each seam. *Are you going to follow me with that torch, and hold the brolly over the hive? Don't want the beggars getting rained on as well. Hey, a little bit of smoke over here and the torch light. That's that done – on to the next. Wait, I'll just fill up, you get the roof off, now the crown board and shake the bees into the hive.* Their behaviour is amazing. They don't fly, not welling over and so docile. Night beekeeping under red torch light is the way to go for beekeepers! Think I'll try red sunglasses next week, during the day if this keeps up. *Anyway Dan, brolly over the hive, where's the smoker, follow me with the torch – you know there's a TV program at 9 I want to watch... What, when you can beekeep like this, come on... follow me with the torch? What's he put that flood light on for? Oh no, here they go, more smoke, don't go, wait Dan, that one's in your pants – just squash it. Just a couple more seams and this last one's done, hold still they won't sting, what's he put that flood on for? They can see everything now.* Then as quick as it was on it's off and the bees stop where they are in their blindness, on our backs and trousers up my leg, but not flying, totally docile.

What this little story means is that, in a totally dark apiary in the wilds of Leicestershire we can work with our bees and only twilight will cause us problems. So here's to long cloudy nights of moderate temperature!

Health hazards: watch neighbours with 500 watt floods. Research into manipulating bees under the honex.biz red light is carrying on apace and I'll get back to you with more info later in the year. Meanwhile, if you see a glimmer of red in the Leicestershire and Rutland fields, don't worry. It's only night beekeepers in action, not UFOs. If you need to speak with me about this or any other aspect of beekeeping, please call me – number at the back of the newsletter – only too pleased to help.

Petar and Daniel Bogunovic Courtesy of L&RBKA & B.E.E.S.

Notes for January

Happy New Year to you all! This is the time of year when we begin to notice the days getting longer and lighter, and so do the bees and plants.

After the very cold December, when the bees were confined for days on end, the sight of great numbers of bees pouring out of the hives on Wednesday 29th December was a welcome sight. Cleansing flights, as well as housekeeper bees bringing out the dead and the general debris from the hive gave a chance to heft the hives without breaking up the cluster.

If the bees were fed well in the autumn then leave them alone during January and February. If the temperature is low then the bees will be immobile and will use stores at the rate of ounces rather than pounds per week. Any disturbance, such as taking the roof off, will alarm the colony and that will be enough to raise the temperature of the cluster. This increase in temperature shortens the life of the winter bee and will cause problems in March/April, just when the colony needs as many adult bees as possible. If you feel, after hefting the hive, that a colony is low in stores then make up some candy. Put 6lb of refined sugar into a pint of boiling water. Boil up, stirring constantly until the sugar is dissolved. Simmer for ten minutes and then allow to cool to about 120°F. Stir the mixture until it thickens and pour into suitable containers. Place the containers upside down over the feed hole, with a super or eke put on top of the coverboard to accommodate the container. Sacking or insulation material will keep the warmth in and heat from the bees will soften it. The queen has probably commenced laying by now, so any oxalic acid treatments should have been administered when the colony was all but broodless. At this time efficacy will generally be in excess of 95% when used in solution, lower if sublimated (vapourised).

Once the queen begins to lay, the temperature in that part of the combs must be raised to full incubation temperature of about 35°C to 37°C. This marks a considerable change in regime, a considerable increase in the demands of the food supply and on the heat generating activities of the bees.

For the bees, the worst part of winter is the spring. An early start followed by a prolonged cold spell results in a serious drain on food reserves.

There is nothing stopping us beekeepers from getting an early start with our preparation for the coming months! Equipment should be checked for wear and tear, stored hive bodies treated with Cuprinol or boiled linseed oil, old comb rendered down and cleaned, then the frames sterilized and all those bits and pieces that you promised yourself would be sorted by next season – get them sorted! Treat your bees to some new brood frames and foundation. For the cost of a few jars of honey these can be purchased and assembled, ready for exchanging with the old brood comb you worked to edges of the hives last season.



Finally, snowdrops, mahonia, aconites, viburnum and gorse are being visited by the foragers in this area – watch out and note down what's being visited by your bees.

Tamsin Courtesy of The Newsletter of the West Cornwall Beekeepers Association – E.B.E.E.S.

Solar Extractor

After a year or two of keeping bees you should be in a position of collecting a lot of surplus wax. Do not throw this away it is valuable! Most people render wax down to trade in against new foundation. This should provide you with more than enough, so that you will rarely need to buy in.

If nothing else you should get yourself a solar extractor. This is simply an insulated box in which you put spare wax; it sits in the sun, the wax melts and runs off into a suitable container. All the usual suppliers will have something in their catalogue, at a price. If treating this as a business proposition then you will be looking at a fairly lengthy payback time. On the other hand if your bees are highly productive and you are getting a good price for your honey, then you may see it as a good investment.

As solar extractors work well even if poorly manufactured, most people make their own. The main box is probably easiest made out of marine ply. Don't bother with fancy joints, just use strips of baton to screw the sides together. Just ensure exposed edge is well protected against the weather. The window should be doubled glazed for maximum efficiency, and the whole thing lined with insulation. This could be expanded foam, felt etc. But, 2" roofing insulation board is very easy to work with. The most difficult part is making the inner tray. Commercial units are made in stainless steel with welded joints. An old cooking oil container, made of tin plate, from your local take away is free and easily worked with tin snips and a soldering iron. Make sure all cut edges are folded back to avoid cutting yourself.

I am reminded by a winning entry at the National Honey Show by John Nailard of St Albans which he built out of material retrieved from skips. The body was a high density polystyrene packing box, the window was triple glazed polycarbonate sheet and the tray knocked up from an old oil drum.

You can go on to refine your wax and use it for candle making etc, which is worth more than a trade in. But, for now rough filtered wax will be very acceptable to KBS, Maisemore, Thornes etc. This little project should keep you quiet until the end of February!

Peter Mathews Courtesy of Herts BKA – E.B.E.E.S.

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