

# north staffordshire beekeepers association May 2011 Newsletter

[www.northstaffsbees.org.uk](http://www.northstaffsbees.org.uk)

**next meeting**  
**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011**  
**Friends Meeting House**  
**Newcastle under Lyme**  
  
**7.00 for 7.30**

**The Queen Marking Colour for 2011 is WHITE**

## **"Chairman's Chat" May 2011**

**Dear All,**

I hope that everyone is enjoying this spell of good weather, let's hope that it continues.

Those members who were able to attend the joint meeting with South Cheshire to listen to the professional beekeeping exploits of John Holme

Even though John Holme was a bee farmer running several hundred hives and therefore doing things on a large scale, from my perspective, it made me appreciate how organised we all have to be when undertaking our beekeeping and those members from North Staffs who were able to attend the meeting had a wonderfully interesting evening and all thoroughly enjoyed the South Cheshire's hospitality.

Please do try to support our meetings because they are arranged for your interest and enjoyment and I look forward to seeing you at the next meeting to listen to Brian Goodwin.

Happy beekeeping.

**Dave Cheek ([davidcheek@talktalk.net](mailto:davidcheek@talktalk.net))**

## **Beekeeping – Buy & Sell**

If you have any spare equipment or even bees that are superfluous to your requirements or you want something. Place a **free** advert in our NewsLetter

## **New NSBKA Apiary Site - Reminder**

The details were published in your last NewsLetter but, to-date nowhere has been identified and we still need to find somewhere so please keep your eyes open for us.

## **Dates for your diary:**

### **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011\*\*\***

Brian Goodwin from Shropshire Beekeepers will be talking about a very appropriate subject for this time of the year – "Swarming and swarm control"

**This marks the end of our season of meetings at the FMH and more information will be published in the next NewsLetter.**

## **Swarm Catchers**

You should have (by now) submitted your name and details for inclusion on the BBKA "Swarm Catchers" list but in addition to that I will be contacting all of the local Councils etc to ensure that their local lists are correct.

It is appreciated that (for what ever reasons) some members might be reticent about having their names included on that list so if you would still like to be included on the local lists, please contact me ASAP.

Please- also read the information at the end of this NewsLetter

**David Teasdale**

## **NSBKA Equipment**

We are still trying to find suitable storage space for some of the Association items of equipment and if you can help or know of anywhere that is suitable – please have a word with Nick Mawby.

Dave Magnier has done a great job of identifying and recording all of the equipment assets of our Association but it does need to be checked. If you have any items of equipment etc would you confirm that fact with Dave on 01538 360611.

## A Handy Checklist

*Adapted from the Beehive, published by Northwest Ohio Beekeepers Association By Alan Stonell, Kennet Branch of Wiltshire BKA, from Honeybee Times Issue 4, 2010 Courtesy of eBees*

Over the last month or two, I have had a number of calls from new beekeepers phoning to check about problems which they have encountered with their bees this season. As always, my advice is to get to know what normal healthy bees and brood look like and check if you are unhappy or not sure about what you see in your colony - quite often Sally or I will go and have a look at them with the beekeeper.

Inspecting the brood combs of a honeybee colony is the only way to determine the health and general condition of the colony. However, you have to know what you are looking at and what it means in order to make a diagnosis.

In general, a healthy brood comb simply 'looks healthy'. The brood cappings have a 'digestive biscuit' colour; the larvae are white, glistening and 'fat'. The cappings of the brood cells are uniform and the overall pattern is solid, with few holes. A good queen will start laying eggs in the lower centre of the combs and radiate out from there. Once the oldest brood emerges, the queen lays in those cells, and the youngest brood on the comb will now be in the centre. Once the brood-rearing cycle gets underway in the spring or following the introduction of a new queen, all stages of brood should be found at each inspection.

I came across this check list recently which would be helpful when inspecting your colonies. Here are some conditions you may observe during your brood inspections and their possible causes:

### **No eggs, no brood present**

- (a) Not brood-rearing season.
- (b) No queen.
- (c) New queen not yet laying.
- (d) Extended shortage of pollen.

### **No eggs, but brood present**

- (a) Brood-rearing ceased - end of the season.
- (b) Queen has died or colony is preparing to swarm.
- (c) Lack of pollen curtailed brood-rearing.

### **Test for Presence of a Queen**

If there are no eggs and you can't determine if there is a queen present, put in a brood comb with young larvae from another colony. Check back in three days; if the suspect hive starts queen cells, it has no queen.

### **Eggs present, but no brood**

Brood-rearing has just resumed after being halted for some reason.

### **Wet-looking pollen - in the centre of the broodnest**

If there is no queen and during the off-season, pollen may be stored in the centre of the brood nest and can take on an unkempt look - wet or glazed over. When the workers anticipate needing the pollen to feed brood, they move the pollen and freshen it up and it has a dry look.

### **Clean, empty cells - in the centre of the broodnest**

The opposite of the wet-pollen look. When the workers anticipate that brood cells will be needed for eggs, they move nectar and pollen out of the way and give the cells a polish.

### **Too many eggs per cell**

- (a) Young, inexperienced queen, usually settles down quickly to laying one egg per cell.
- (b) Something happened to queen and laying workers developed.

### **Scattered brood**

Same-age brood scattered over the comb, not in adjacent cells, means:

- (a) A failing queen running out of sperm.
- (b) Something is killing the brood. In early spring, cold nights when there are too few adult bees to keep the brood warm can result in chilled brood. Sometimes pesticides or poison pollen can cause scattered patterns.

**Clue:** *Is only one colony showing the symptoms, or are several?*

### **Raised cappings on worker cells**

The cappings look like the ends of bullets. Cause: Drone brood is developing in worker cells, because:

- (a) Queen has become a drone-layer. Usually her sperm reserves are depleted, due to her age.
- (b) Laying workers; lay only infertile eggs, resulting in drones.

**Continued Over:**

## Raised cappings in drone cells

Normal drone brood has a 'bullet' look, but not as pronounced as when it is in worker cells. Normally, queens lay unfertilized eggs in the larger (both in circumference and depth) drone cells. These are frequently found around the bottom edges of the brood comb and in areas where the comb has been damaged. The presence of some drone brood indicates a vigorous, well-nourished colony.

## Queen cells

Queen cells are constructed along a vertical plane, as contrasted with the horizontal plane of worker and drone brood cells. They somewhat resemble peanuts (in the shells).

- (a) Queen cells near the centre of the comb, growing out of worker brood cells – these are replacement cells the workers have developed in emergency loss of queen.
- (b) Queen cells everywhere, particularly near bottom of comb. This is swarm preparation - the old queen will soon depart with about half the bees (called the 'prime swarm').

**Tip:** For a quick check of swarm preparation, in a hive with two brood boxes, break the boxes apart and look along the bottom bars and bottoms of the combs in the top box. Most colonies preparing to swarm will show cells along comb bottoms.

## Dead larvae (not white)

- (a) Chilled due to cold snap (usually in spring) when there are too few adult bees to keep the brood warm.
- (b) Died due to lack of care for some reason.
- (c) Disease: Sacbrood, American foulbrood, European foulbrood. Call the Bee Inspector.
- (d) Pesticide damage.

## Mummified larvae

Older stage larvae turn white and hard. This is probably Chalkbrood.

## Mouldy pollen

Soft, white stuff in pollen cells – probably due to insufficient hive ventilation.

## What about mites?

After some training, you can pretty easily identify Varroa mites on adult bees' abdomens and on your open mesh floor tray. Also, you can uncap pupae and pull them out of the cells and check for dark Varroa attached to the white pupae. Varroa are especially attracted to drone brood and can often be found in the bottom end of the cells from which drone pupae are extracted. They may run out of the cells as pupae are being extracted.

## Swarm Catching - "SWARMS" of Bumble Bees and Wasps?

If you are contacted about a "swarm", before you "dash off" to collect it (what ever **it** is), read the following:

Whilst we beekeepers can identify various insects, we should not forget that the general public do have great difficulty discriminating between Honey Bees, Bumble Bees and Wasps especially if they are totally scared of any insect which flies and buzzes. This can lead to some confusion especially if you are contacted and told that a person has a "swarm of bees" in their garden or home. If I am stating the obvious please forgive me but this is an important subject that can reflect upon beekeepers and our Association.

If you are contacted by a member of the general public who has a problem of this nature, what ever you do, do something even if it is just offering them advice or passing them on to another beekeeper who can assist them.

Always appreciate that the member of the public is usually desperate and does need some help or advice. So please, do not just refuse to talk to them because providing no help or advice could also result in a member of the public being injured through their ignorance and consequential bad publicity for beekeepers.

### Continued:

If you are willing and able to assist a member of the public, there are a number of facts which need to be obtained, some aspects of the task which you need to be aware and that the caller needs to appreciate: -  
*As a starter, it is always useful to point out (even though it is not strictly true) that all bees are protected and they must not do anything which will either increase the danger or put them into danger. Problems of this type do not just go away, they have to be correctly and safely dealt with. That should (at least) prevent them from doing anything foolish, dangerous or untoward.*



## **Identify the insect:**

### **Question the person to determine what the insects are:**

- ◆ What shape are they – are they big/fluffy or narrow/slim?
- ◆ What colour are they? If they are iridescent bright lemon and black striped, they could be Wasps.
- ◆ Where are they – under the ground, behind a rock in a rockery, in a roof, hanging from a tree etc?
- ◆ How many are there? Whilst the answer to this is usually thousands, but if you calm them down you can obtain a more accurate answer.

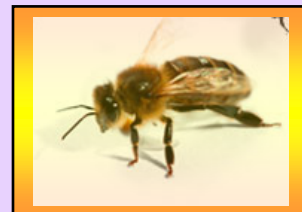
Answers to these questions will give you some clues. Remember that both bumblebees and wasps do make nests in places where you would not normally expect to find honeybee's i.e. in rockeries and under the ground.

### **Options and possible actions.**

#### **If you determine that they are:**

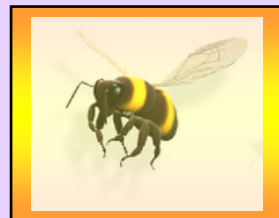
##### **Honey Bees**

They need to be removed but if you are unable to help – pass the person onto another beekeeper, please do not just ignore the cry for help from the general public.



##### **Bumble Bees**

Bees should be protected and should not be destroyed if that is at all possible. The colony will be very small (up to one hundred bees in peak season), it is not normally dangerous unless they are severely disturbed and it will die out when the first frost arrives. There is generally a low risk of the site being re-infested next year so if they are not causing the person a problem, tell them to leave them alone. If they are a problem, the colony can be removed to a safe place, which in my case is usually a plant pot in our garden where they can continue to live for the remainder of the season



##### **Wasps**

These present a very different scenario and can be very dangerous because the colonies can contain several thousand wasps which can deliver multiple stings so they must be treated with great respect. Some beekeepers will deal with this problem (usually when they are called to a swarm of bees and discover that they are wasps) but the Council Environmental Services Departments are well equipped to deal with them.



The nests look like magnificent papier-mâché structures which can be very large. Even though the colony dies out once the frost arrives, though I have no proof, I believe that wasps do reuse old nests therefore it is advisable that the nests are properly destroyed and measures taken to prevent re-infestation in the future which usually means blocking up the access hole.

A word of warning – Some time ago, I dealt with a Wasp colony and because the nest looked so beautiful, I gave it to a friend for his school to use. What I failed to recognise was that the insecticide did not penetrate the sealed larvae cells and therefore after a few days in a warm environment more wasps started to emerge from the nest to the consternation of the teacher and the students – very embarrassing.

### **Risks – Personal, Legal & Property**

If you decide to assist the person, remember to assess the potential risks to both yourself and the persons property:

- ◆ It is illegal to enter property without permission.
- ◆ If you have to cut trees to remove a swarm, ensure that the person understands and gives their permission, there are no prizes for cutting up an expensive plant or shrub.
- ◆ Your Beekeeping Insurance will not cover every eventuality i.e. if you if you damage property or yourself.
- ◆ Do not risk your health or safety by trying to tackle honey bees in dangerous places i.e. hanging twenty foot up in the air at the top of a ladder.
- ◆ Never advice the person to tackle a Wasps nest themselves. When dealing with a Wasps nest and even honeybees, the person undertaking the task must be fully protected and know what they are doing.

The list is endless and in the end, it is up to you what actions you decide to take but remember, **what every you do, be safe.**

### Trying it on.

It is not unusually to have a member of the public to “try it on” after they have spoken to their Local council and discovered that they charge up to seventy pounds to deal with the problem. The general public have also been known to call a beekeeper and say that they are honeybees even if they are not if only to save the charge from the council. Councils generally contact a beekeeper if the problem is honeybees and will only (generally) deal with Wasps or bumblebees and it is usually bad news for the Bumbles so please ensure that the appropriate information is given to the person.

### Who else can be contacted?

If you are stuck or unable to help the person, pass them onto another beekeeper.

### Who does a swarm belong to?

If you collect it, it belongs to you

### Charges

If you do attend the persons home ensure that you make a charge to cover your costs. Remember that if you collect a swarm of honeybees, the first thing that you should do when you hive them is to treat them for potential Varroa that has an immediate cost implication as does the petrol for your vehicle.

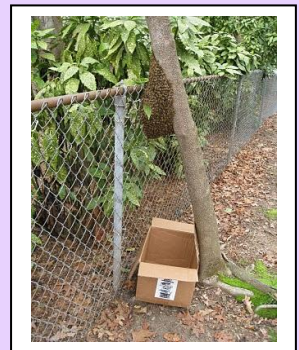
### Catching the swarm

#### Equipment needed:

- A large sheet for the ground
- A swarm collection box – usually a cardboard box with all of the edges taped down so that bees cannot escape from gaps in the box.
- Branch cutters for trees.
- Usual beekeeping equipment including a bee brush but grass will suffice.

The location of the swarm will determine what you have to do which is why very little is written about catching swarms but fundamentally, the idea is to get the maximum number of bees into the box, turn it upside down on the ground, on top of the sheet whilst leaving a gap for the bees to enter. If you have managed to get a large number of the bees into the box, they should then start to fan and attract the other flying bees into the box.

If the bees are hanging from a branch of a tree or shrub, after getting the permission of the householder, cut the branch whilst holding it and then knock the bees into the box. However, the circumstances and location of the swarm will determine your actions.



When you have caught the bees and turned the box upside down on the sheet, all you can do is wait for the remainder of the bees to go into the box which could take some time and cannot be hurried. If the bees appear to be reluctant to go into the box, it could be that the queen is still with the other bees and that could necessitate you using a smaller box to catch as many of the remaining bees and the emptying that box in front of the box on the ground.

When all of the bees have eventually gone into the box, wrap the sheet around the box and make it secure. Take the swarm to where ever it is going to live and put it into a hive. That is usually achieved by firstly, placing a board in-front of the hive leading up to the hive entrance and then taking of the hive roof and crown board, opening the cardboard box and then knocking the bottom of the box to cause the bees to fall into the hive. Any bees remaining in the box can be knocked onto the board and they will walk into the hive to join the colony.



Always remember to ensure that the swarm does not overheat as that can cause the death of the swarm. It is better to leave “hiving” the swarm until later in the day as doing it in full sun could induce the bees to abscond so better to keep them in a cool place until the sun has “gone down”.

This all sounds a little “Heath Robinson(ish), but it does work.

***We all need some help at some time and in respect to problems such as this, we beekeepers are well placed to provide a good service to the community and help our fellow human beings but don't allow your good nature or willingness to help to be abused and what ever you do, do not put yourself or anyone else in danger!***

David Teasdale

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