

# north staffordshire beekeepers association

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

## March 2010 Newsletter

### Next Meeting:

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March  
The Friends Meeting House  
Miller Street, Newcastle-u-Lyme  
ST5 1JD

### Chairman's Chat

I am sure you will all know by now of the premature passing of Jan Waye. On behalf of you all I would like to convey our sadness and sincere sympathy to Tim and his family. Tim came to our last meeting and I do know that many of you had a word with him there. We are all thinking about you Tim.

Returning to matters beekeeping - make sure you are all checking your hives regularly - is there enough food supply going into the Spring. From bitter experience I know how galling it is to lose colonies at this time having brought your bees safely through the Winter, only to lose them when a small amount of candy (not liquid feed yet) will keep them ticking over.

I hope to see you all at the next meeting!

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

### **Cheshire Beekeepers Assn Spring Convention Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

Forest Hills Hotel, Overton Hill, Frodsham,  
Cheshire WA6 6HH 10.30 am to 4.30 pm (approx)

Excellent Guest Speakers, refreshments & lunch  
all for £12 – an excellent day and excellent value:

#### **Tickets available from:**

**Pam Hatton – Tel: 01925 263023**

### **Stoneleigh Spring Beekeeping Convention Royal Show Ground Warwickshire**

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2010**

You should have seen the full information in your recent copy of the BBKA News. It is a very interesting and worthwhile event to attend so make a date in your diary.

If you have not received your BBKA membership card or do not know your membership number that you will have to quote to obtain your discounted ticket, give Ray Day a call on 01782-867352.

### Dates for your diary:

#### **Wed. March 3<sup>rd</sup> - Which hive for me?**

This meeting on discusses a variety of hive equipment available to help you decide just what to beg, borrow or adopt.

Pete Sutcliffe from South Cheshire Beekeepers will explain the pros and cons of hives types based on his experience and writings about various hive types

#### **Thursday April 1<sup>st</sup> - Problems with queens Bradwall Village Hall, Bradwall Road, Bradwall, Nr Sandbach CW11 1RG @ 7.30 pm (Please note date and venue)**

For our April meeting we join the SCBKA for a talk by Dave Cushman of the Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association on the subject of queen rearing problems.

If this sounds advanced for newcomers it is well worth being there even just for a introduction or background into a specific subject. Find out at the March meeting about car sharing with other NSBKA members for the April meeting.

#### **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May**

**"Swarm control & Extracting Honey."**

### **KEELE UNIVERSITY COURSE - FULL "AN INTRODUCTION TO BEES AND BEEKEEPING"**

At the last meeting William Kirk, reported the overwhelming demand and that all places on this course have now been allocated.

However, he was looking at other alternatives for those who were not able to obtain a place but it now appears that might not be possible. If things change, we will keep you informed.

## Emergency Feeding

Around this time of year beekeepers heft (lift) their hives to make sure that they have plenty of food to see the bees through the winter.

With the poor summer and, in some places, a mild autumn it may well be that despite copious autumn feeding (till the bees no longer take down any more syrup) the hives are already feeling rather light.

If in doubt, give your bees an emergency feed of either a bag of sugar or fondant/candy. The bag of sugar should be pieced and moistened with a mug of water and the bag should be placed hole down onto the crownboard. However this might not be the best solution for colonies that need a winter feed since it is difficult for the bees to extract sugar from the solid block.

An alternative is fondant/candy, a form that the bees can eat more easily. It can be also be placed close to the cluster. Bear in mind that in the winter a liquid feed is reputed to lead to dysentery or over-stimulation of the colony. Candy contains more water than the moistened sugar bag so reducing the need for the bees to collect water to take advantage of the food. Fondant is available commercially. However some commercial fondant is aimed at the catering trade and contains preservatives and flavouring.

Candy is easy to make yourself and, if you do, you know exactly what is in it. Candy can be formed into a shape that fits under the hive roof (with or without a crownboard or eke (small spacing box)) depending on the roof design and whether bees can easily get at it through the feed hole.

### FEEDING CANDY

Trying to feed bees anything in cold weather can have its problems. At low temperatures, individual bees cannot leave the cluster to travel far for food. The food, in whatever form, therefore needs to be near the bees. If the cluster is directly below the feed hole, feeding can take place there. If bees cannot be seen under the feed hole, either because it is to the side of the cluster or because it is blocked with brace comb, then the food may be better placed under the crownboard directly on top of the frames.

When you are ready to give your bees a winter feed, place the candy, exposed surface down, onto the top bars or feed hole(s) in the crownboard, directly over the winter cluster. Depending on the thickness of your candy block and your roof space you may need an eke or empty super to lift the roof clear of the candy.

You can place a plastic sheet over the candy to keep it moist and fill the gap between this and the roof with crumpled paper or other insulation to reduce draughts.

There are all kinds of reasons why the autumn feed may not be sufficient to last the winter, some outside the beekeeper's control. Whatever the reason, giving a light colony a candy winter feed is unlikely to do any harm and could well save a colony otherwise destined for starvation.

Modified from an article published in January 2009 *Beecraft* by Margaret Cowley, MSc

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Please send any comments, suggestions for articles or (hopefully) articles to [david.teasdale@ic24.net](mailto:david.teasdale@ic24.net). This is your NewsLetter, please help us to help YOU.

## Meeting Reports/Comments

The February meeting led by Nick Mawby was very well attended and both the new and experienced beekeepers there found the meeting content was interesting and thought provoking.

Whilst nothing can beat "being there" at the meeting to know exactly what was said, it is understood that not everyone can attend all of the meetings therefore it would be useful if someone would volunteer to produce a meeting synopsis that could be published in the NewsLetter. **Will YOU help us by doing a short report?**

I cannot do justice to Nick's talk in a few words but a couple of points in his talk related to disease control and how in nature this might have been achieved through the elimination of the weak and swarming.

I can hear all beekeepers sounding perturbed at the mere suggestion of these thoughts but some ways of achieving this was via artificial swarms and then treating and secondly replacing of all combs rather than a rolling system of replacing all combs over a number of years.

These points can be followed-up in the future issues but it should be noted that if all combs are replaced, the colony should be strong. Whilst total comb replacement is undertaken in some southern parts of the UK with impunity, in Staffordshire where seasons start later, the bees should be fed to encourage the drawing of comb otherwise the bees will be constantly drawing comb at the expense of honey production.

Nick also advocated the destruction of weak colonies rather than trying to "keep them going" or uniting them with stronger colonies. This was based upon experiences of strong colonies being severely (and negatively) affected when united with weak colonies. If a colony is weak/dwindling when other colonies are doing well, there must be a good (health) reason

It is not easy to destroy a colony and disinfect afterwards but that is what would happen in nature when swarms left the old colony.

### Excellent food for thought?

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The block of candy/fondant can be put in position with the backing paper still in place. If bees are not visible, remove the crownboard and put the candy directly over the cluster

DT contact 07971-013787 or 01782-502495