



June 2010

Meetings: Our main meeting this month is at the branch apiary on Sunday, June 20, starting at 2.30pm. Ken Basterfield will work through some colonies and show how he reads the combs to understand what the bees are doing. Ken is a very experienced beekeeper and holder of the National Diploma in Beekeeping, the NDB. Devon has only two members with the NDB, and the other one has given up beekeeping, so we are fortunate in having Ken as a branch member. Do come along and see what you can learn. As usual we will probably finish the afternoon with tea and cake at the Roundhouse. We have had to postpone the meeting on top-bar hives while modifications are made to an unusual Warré hive.

Queen rearing course: this will take place at the branch apiary and is intended for members who have enough experience to handle bees with confidence and wish to move on to selective queen rearing to improve the standard of their bees. The organisation of the course will depend on the number taking part. Brian will lead the group and will provide notes on each stage.

If you wish to take part then please contact Brian before June 5.

Meet the Bees: this is an opportunity for members of the public to meet at the apiary and look inside a hive. The date will be fixed when we have more indications of interest. If you know someone who is interested in beekeeping ask them to contact Rod Saffery, see contact info on the back page.

The Totnes Show will be held on July 25, a Sunday this year. Rod will need some honey to sell and some volunteers to help on the stall.

Last month

Early in the month a group of optimists met at John Laidler's home hoping to see the results of his shaken swarms from the previous visit. But the weather was cold and damp so instead we sat indoors with tea and biscuits and enjoyed the company despite the weather. John has written a note on his bees, see below.

Then we went to Landscope to see Jeremy's bees on the oil seed rape. For this visit the weather was better, but not good, and I was surprised to see such a good crowd there.

Jeremy and his bees did a superb demonstration for us. The bees were flying quite well, the equipment was in good order, no one got stung, and Jeremy went through the bees' brood on his knees with good explanations.

Then we were directed to move a little further down the field where we found Lilah with a steaming kettle and a great supply of cake. Thanks Jeremy & Lilah.

John Laidler writes -

Last month's visit to my bees in Kingsbridge was a disappointment as the weather was too cold to allow the bees to be inspected. The aim of the meeting was to follow up the colonies given a shook swarm on our March meeting when two colonies were shaken onto wax coated plastic frames. Although the actual day of the meeting was too cold John was able to look inside the colonies the following day (9th May) where he found one colony was doing very well and was now on a double brood chamber with about 15 frames of brood. The second colony unfortunately was much weaker and during the inspection John noticed a bee with deformed wings.

A shook swarm is supposed to be a very effective way of reducing the varroa population so seeing a bee with deformed wings, which suggested a high level of varroa in the colony, was unexpected. John's response was to treat the colony with 60% formic acid, dribbling 20ml onto a square of corrugated cardboard resting on the brood frames. Within 24 hours several hundred mites fell onto the varroa tray and they continued to fall for several days, after which John repeated the treatment. This colony is now being fed both syrup and a fondant containing pollen in an attempt to build up its strength, which at the end of May was still very weak.

During the March meeting as well as the two shook swarms John moved a colony which had overwintered as a nucleus into a full sized hive. These bees subsequently raised a new queen in what appeared to be supersedure. At the inspection on 9th May there was no sign of any brood but John found a small queen scuttling around, almost certainly a virgin. For the rest of the month John left them alone but on 26th May John found two small patches of eggs, indicating the queen had successfully mated.

During May John used the very strong colony on two brood chambers for some queen rearing and at the end of the month he had a frame of capped queen cells which will be distributed to mating nucs in early June.

Selective queen rearing

Last month this note considered the use of a split to increase stocks; a method giving little control over the breeding. In selective queen rearing we choose the source of the larvae, and may choose to rear many daughters from a good queen.

So let's look at this in more detail in preparation for our queen breeding group.

The basic needs are the same as they were last month

1. Start with very young larvae,
2. Have the larvae in contact with large numbers of young worker bees who are well fed,
3. Have plenty of mature drones available,
4. Have good weather at the right time for mating flights.

The process splits easily into three parts:

1. selection of the source of larvae,
2. selecting young larvae, placing them into queen cups so that the workers will feed them generously,
3. making nucs with single mature queen cells and allowing the queen to mate.

Much has been written on (1), an easy method is to pick the colony which brought in the most honey-provided that it has a good temper and no serious disease problems. For (2) we will start with CC Miller's simple method and also with grafting which is widely used, there are many others. Followed by Cloake's method. This was described at Apimondia in Australia in

1977, one of the few innovations in the last century.

For (3) many worker bees are needed, so of course members wanting a new queen will have to provide a 3-frame nuc which will receive a mature queen cell and provide a home for the queen at least until she is mated and laying.

Because it is so new Cloake's method is not described in many books.

Harry Cloake was a beekeeper in NZ raising many queens. His experience led him to conclude that the best queens are started in a queenless colony but finished as supersedure cells in a queenright colony and with as little disturbance as possible.

To achieve this combination he built up the queen raiser to two brood chambers and between them fitted a slim 3-sided eke which had a groove in all sides so that a sheet of plywood could be slid in to separate the two brood chambers. With the queen in the lower box and young larvae in the upper one then with the sheet in place we have a queenless upper box and once the cells are started the sheet is pulled out and the cells are finished as supersedure cells.

There is a little more to it, particularly with the entrance to the lower brood chamber; but that gives you an idea of what is involved. If you would like to give it a try, and are confident in handling bees let me know [this week](#) and we will get started at Dartington.

For Sale

Bees for sale, National and Commercial nucs now available
contact Rod Saffery 01803 782190

Not for sale (yet) please keep back some honey for our stand at the Totnes Show on July 25

Needing help?

Our branch has two Master Beekeepers and Ken holds the highest UK bee-keeping qualification, the National Diploma in Beekeeping, so if you feel the need of some instant advice then you can telephone with a good chance of getting through to one of us. If you need help then phone one of:

Ken Basterfield NDB 01404 815885

Brian Gant 01364 642233

If you have a brood disease problem then phone our Regional Bee Inspector

Adam Vevers 01364 653325

or Seasonal Bee Inspector Clare Densley 01626 211684

Branch contacts:

Web site for branch news (still under development)

<http://www.britishbee.org.uk/local/totnes-kingsbridge>

Chairman: Jeremy Wells 01364 72180,
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Your local agent for beekeeping equipment of all kinds, including varroa treatments, frames and foundation.

Phone John Harler on 01364 642517 or mobile 07769 878476
or e-mail to fire221@btinternet.com.

Collections from 12 Hembury Park, Buckfast TQ11 0ES

The Totnes & Kingsbridge Beekeepers' Association is a branch of the Devon Beekeepers' Association which is a registered charity no. 270675