

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter
Hot off the 'press'

Issue No: 4/09

July

THIS MONTH'S NEWSLETTER IS ANONYMOUSLY SPONSORED BY AN M.B.A. MEMBER – THANK YOU!

SBA EXAM SUCCESSES

Congratulations to MBA members Andrew Tassell (Module 2, 'Honeybee Products and Forage'), Barbara Westie (Module 3, 'Honeybee Diseases, Pests and Poisoning') and Tony Harris (Modules 3 & 5, 'Honeybee Biology' and SBA Intermediate Certificate) who have recently been successful in the Scottish Beekeepers' Association Examinations.



Andrew, Barbara & Tony with their certificates

If you wish to increase your beekeeping knowledge then why not start the ball rolling by taking the Basic Beemaster's Certificate. It's not rocket science and if you are looking after your bees you will be halfway to passing already.

An experienced beekeeper comes to your apiary and observes while you examine your bees asking basic beekeeping questions as you go along. It shouldn't take more than an hour and if successful you will receive a nice certificate to go on your sideboard. You can then progress as far as you wish with the remaining syllabus, modules covering subjects such as Honeybee Management, Honeybee Behaviour, Selection and Breeding of Honeybees and Microscopy

You can view or download a copy of the syllabus along with application forms at the Scottish Beekeepers Association web site, address here: <http://www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk/learning/html/syllabus.html>



Rob Mackenzie receiving a bottle of wine from Andrew Tassell

FIFE COTTAGE DELIGHT

Just about 50 members and visitors attended the MBA monthly meeting in June hosted by Rob and Angie MacKenzie at their beautiful home and four acres of gardens at Pluscarden. Once again it was a glorious day and the bees were in fine form bringing in nectar and pollen off the broom and local wild raspberries. MBA President Andrew Tassell took a group of beginners through some nucleus boxes of bees (very small hives) and a very enjoyable and informative time was had by all. New member Peter Crees-Turner delighted with the afternoon, said, *'It was far more relaxed looking at the smaller hives and I was able to see lots more than last time.'*

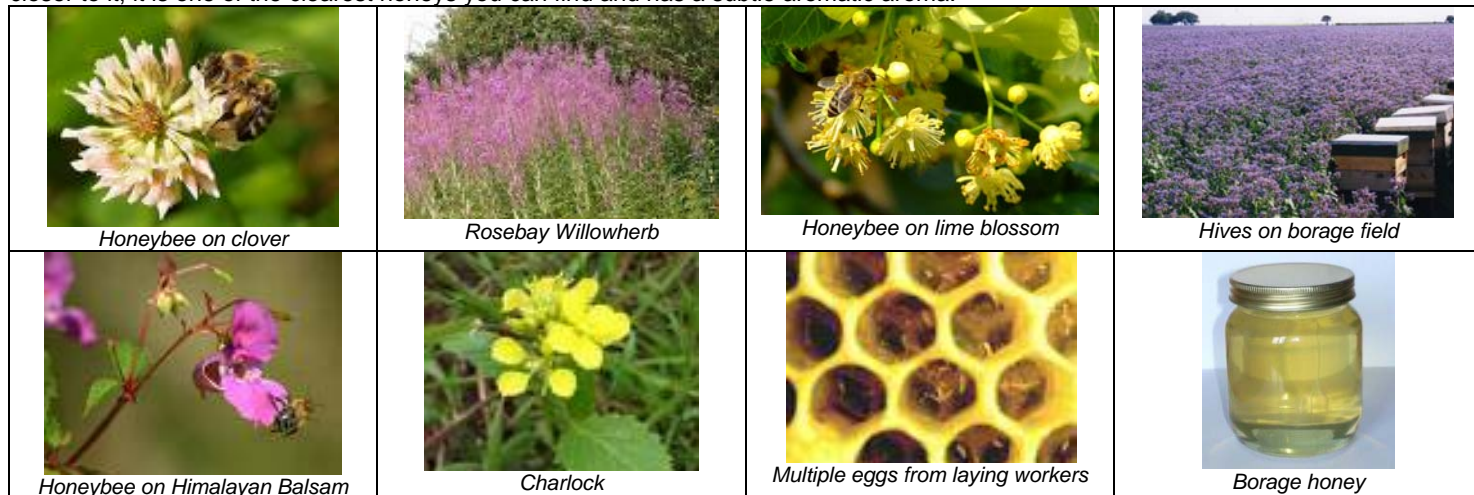
So thank you Rob and Angie, and all who helped, for a marvellous afternoon and a great tea afterwards.

THIS MONTH IN THE APIARY by John Salt



July ... The spring flowers have now finished and the summer blossoms are well under way and this is the Month of the main honey flow. All the hard work you have put into your bees to prevent swarming and to ensure brood rearing and foraging bees to coincide with this main flow should now pay off.

You should be seeing your bees on Clover and depending on the location and source, clover honey varies in colour from water white to light amber to amber. Blackberries secrete nectar at fairly low temperatures and bees will often work them early morning or late evening. Lime trees, a really lovely honey with a hint of green colouring. Willowherb, sometime referred to as Fireweed offers up copious quantities of nectar. Charlock or sometimes referred to as wild mustard, not quite so common these days as it is considered too much of a weed and is sprayed. Bees love Himalayan Balsam and a bee that has visited a Balsam flower will often look completely white after covering itself in pollen, the honey is amber coloured, it has a fairly thick consistency but will still run off a spoon. It has a very distinctive taste with a background flavour not dissimilar to toffee. If you see a field of Borage, move your hives a bit closer to it, it is one of the clearest honeys you can find and has a subtle aromatic aroma.



The swarming season is normally over by July but it is still possible for colonies to swarm. July swarms do not normally have time to build up into strong colonies to survive the winter and you might decide to kill the queen and unite the bees with another perhaps weak colony.

During your hive inspections you might notice that the hive has neither queen nor sign of any eggs ... has it swarmed and maybe that the new queen has not yet started to lay? It takes 16 days for a new queen to emerge from an egg and then another 7 – 10 days before her mating flights and then another 7 – 10 days before she starts laying, but the weather can mess up these timings somewhat.

A new queen will often lay more than one egg in a cell, don't get confused with laying workers, their 'butt' is a lot shorter and the eggs get fixed to the cell walls. The pattern of laid worker eggs is far more erratic than that of a queen. Never rush to mark a new queen. The workers are very protective of her and will often roll her up in a ball and drop to the bottom of the hive, sometimes damaging her in the process.

Make time for Varroa treatment. Fit and check your floor inserts. Count the number of mites and divide by the number of days you have had the insert installed. Check the table on our varroa web page to see if you need to treat. Think about which method of treatment you might wish to use this coming back-end and don't get caught out !

Finally ... Happiness is like honey. You can't spread even the smallest amount, without getting some on yourself.

DISCOVER THE BUMBLEBEE

Unlike the honey bee the humble bumble is gentle and slow. As she trundles around the garden collecting pollen and nectar she is quite different to her streamlined relative who dashes about everywhere. Even her body shape is different as you can see from the pictures. The bumble is round and furry and not at all like her wasp shaped cousin. In fact, as you can see from the photo, there are three kinds of bumble bee, the large Queen, the smaller imperfectly formed female worker bee and the tiny male or drone bee. All are seen at different times of year. Only the Queen and the worker bees have a sting



Some Interesting Bumble Bee Facts

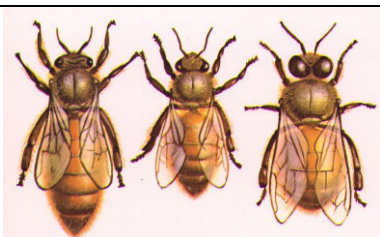
- Because they live in small nests bumble bees never swarm
- Bumble bees do not produce enough honey for commercial use, just a few grams at a time to feed their young
- Not all bumble bees have a sting. Drones (smaller male bees that hatch in mid summer) have no sting at all.
- A bumble bee's biggest enemy by far is a man armed with a pesticide spray. Like every other form of wildlife they are under serious threat from the chemicals we pour on the land.
- Bumble bees are much less aggressive than honey bees. Generally they will not attack a human at all, unless their life is under threat.
- Bumble bees do not lose their stings and die if they use it as a honey bee will.

DRONES HAVE FEELINGS TOO!

'The useless drones' 'Big gangly drones!' 'Daft looking things' 'Why do the bees bother with the drones anyway? Just some of the comments I heard at the latest MBA meeting, made in jest I know, but it does seem that not everyone appreciates the drone and their contribution to a honeybee colony. So let's have a closer look at the male honeybee, the drone.



A larger drone on the left in comparison with the 2 worker bees



Queen, Worker and Drone



Notice the very large compound eyes covering almost the entire face and top of the head



Drones being evicted from the hive by worker bees

The Drone bee is large, but rounder and slightly shorter than the queen and has no sting. His head is large and almost spherical, mainly composed of the two large compound eyes which are on top of his head. He has long legs and very large wings that completely cover his abdomen, which is stumpy and almost square at the rear. Beeginners can easily confuse a drone for the Queen when looking in a hive (ain't that right Ishbel?) but once the Queen has been spotted she is beyond comparison.

As a colony builds up in spring the Queen will begin to lay unfertilised eggs which hatch out as drones and it is estimated that a normal colony will contain about three or four hundred drones at its strongest.

As far as we know the drones only function is to mate with a virgin Queen and as the drone dies when it mates any seen around have apparently served no purpose at all. But there are many things we don't know about the honeybee and there are some (Ted Hooper for one) who feel the drones value to a colony are not fully appreciated, evidenced by the fact that '*colonies which are denuded of drones never seem to handle normally*'.

Drones fly out of the hive when the weather is warm and fine in a search of virgin queens and gather in areas known as Drone Congregation Areas (DCA's) usually 30 to 90 feet above the ground. By releasing a pheromone from their mandibular gland, they attract not only virgin Queens into the DCA but other drones as well, thus ensuring a good mix of genetic material from other colonies and minimising interbreeding.

Drones only live for about 3 weeks in summer and are evicted from the colony by the workers usually at the end of summer. The worker bees know the value of the drones though as drones are never evicted from a Queenless hive. So come on, let's hear it for the drones! Big and gangly looking they may be, but we would all be lost without them!

DECANTING HONEY FROM THE SETTLING TANK

Once you have extracted and filtered your honey and left it overnight in a settling tank or more simply a bucket with a honey tap you need to decant it into jars. This is quite an easy job to do but when you get to the last few pounds of honey there is always the problem of the surface scum in the bucket mixing with the clear honey going into the jars. Well, here's a really useful tip to stop this happening and it does work!

Cut a length of cling film about the same diameter as your bucket plus an extra 6-8 inches. Starting at the gate side of the bucket lay the cling film on the surface of the honey scum but don't allow any film to stick to the inside of the bucket yet. If your bucket diameter is greater than the width of the cling film you may have to use 2 lengths of film side by side. Try to lay it so as to trap as little air as possible and then when done stick the extra 6-8 inches of film to the inside of the bucket.



Lay the cling film on top of the surface scum



The scum ends up stuck to the cling film

Continue decanting as normal. As the level goes down the film should stay anchored to the side where it has been stuck and the film on the surface should now be pulled across the top, dragging the scum with it. Even if you don't get it exactly right (like my effort in the right hand photo) you will still get clear honey right to the last jar. And as the saying goes, 'Practice makes perfect', so give it a go and let us know how you get on.



HONEY SHOWS

The Honey Show season is almost upon us so it is time to start thinking about what you may be exhibiting this year. Most shows have classes for different types of jarred honey but also include classes for honeycomb frames, cut comb honey, candles, beeswax blocks, cakes and mead. There are many local shows throughout the summer, commencing in August and Moray Beekeepers hold our own Honey Show as part of the Forres Flower Show in September (the photo on the left shows last years exhibits). August Newsletter will include venues and dates and some useful tips on preparing honey for the show bench.

M.B.A. JULY MEETING

Our next meeting is on Sunday 26th July, 2.30 pm, at Andrew Tassell's Apiary, Fochabers (directions to follow). Andrew will be showing us how he prepares his hives for the move to the heather.

ASSOCIATION HONEY EXTRATORS



If you don't have your own honey extractor you can borrow one of the Associations. The one on the left is a heather honey press and the one on the right is a manual radial extractor for liquid honey



You can borrow them for free (although you may wish to make a small donation to club funds) by contacting either:
Andrew Tassell (Keith area) Tel 01466 771243
or
John Salt (Rafford area) Tel 01309 673703



RAFFLE WINNERS

MBA member, Wendy Haston (left) and guest Nahed Sky were the winners of the free raffle at the Moray Beekeepers' June meeting, and they were presented with their prize of a jar of honey each by MBA President, Andrew Tassell

Nahed from Aldroughty near Elgin attended the meeting with her daughter, Rainbow and they both enjoyed themselves. Nahed, a beginner, has recently acquired several hives and is intending to get them cleaned and ready for the start of the 2010 beekeeping year.

BEE BOOK WEBSITE

Northern Bee Books have a wide and varied selection of books on beekeeping many of which cannot be purchased elsewhere. They now have a new site where you can view and purchase the books and the address is shown below www.GroovyCart.co.uk/beebooks

A WARM WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

Lynda Anderson, Peter Crees-Turner, both from Lhanbryde

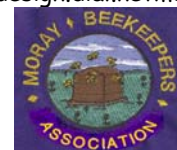
BEE SUITS/GLOVES /SMOCKS

Quality bee suits and clothing from BB Wear, for MBA members who receive a 15% discount (please order via the MBA Secretary)

BB1 Full suit £78.63, BB3 Smock £58.61
BB10 Washable leather Gloves £17.00

www.bbwear.co.uk/

Baseball caps, T-shirts, sweat shirts and fleeces are available with the Moray Beekeepers logo embroidered on from:
EMBROIDERY DESIGNS, Easter Lochend, Balcroy, Nairn IV12 5NY
Tel:01667 404635
E-mail: user@embroiderydesign.dial.netmedia.co.uk



The Association website is packed with lots of useful information on beekeeping and bees and has links to national associations, suppliers and other bee sites around the world. It is well worth a visit - the address is shown below.

www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk

Items for inclusion in the Newsletter to be sent to the Editor: Tony Harris, Cowiemuir, Fochabers, Moray, IV32 7PS or you can e mail: tonyharris316@btinternet.com

PLEASE REMEMBER TO PAY YOUR SUBS!