

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter
Hot off the 'press'

Issue No: 1/11

April 2011

MEMBERS CAN SPONSOR THIS NEWSLETTER FOR JUST £10 – IT HELPS COVER THE COSTS!

SBA EXAM SUCCESS TOASTED IN MORAY

A jam packed Moray Beekeepers Association (MBA) AGM at the end of January toasted the success of 3 members in the Scottish Beekeepers examination syllabus during 2010. Long-standing member, Barbara Westie, passed module 5, Honeybee Biology, and having now completed 4 modules was awarded the SBA Intermediate Certificate. Tony Harris passed module 6, Honeybee Behaviour, module 7, Selection and Breeding of Honeybees, and module 8, Honeybee Management and History, and having now completed 7 modules was awarded the SBA Advanced Certificate with a distinction. Viv Hill, in her second season as a beekeeper, was awarded the Basic Beemaster Certificate and she also passed with a distinction. CONGRATULATIONS AND WELL DONE TO ALL THREE!



Barbara Westie, MBA Secretary, Tony Harris, and Viv Hill with their certificates

A delighted Barbara, said, 'I have really enjoyed taking these exams. It's been a challenge but I am very proud and far better equipped to look after my bees.'

MBA Secretary Tony Harris commented, 'We have doubled our membership in the last 2 years to over 100 and are encouraging members, new and old, to start the ball rolling by taking the SBA Basic Beemasters' Assessment in 2011. Not only do these assessments improve your beekeeping skills and knowledge, they increase your enjoyment of the bees and studying helps fill the long winter nights when the bees and beekeepers alike are confined indoors.'

Seven members of varying beekeeping experience have recently started a 7 week long course, run by Tony Harris & Viv Hill that will prepare them for the Basic Assessment so MBA should have more 'qualified' beekeepers at the end of the summer.

OUR NEXT MEETING IS ON SUNDAY 17TH APRIL AT BIRNIE APIARY, 2.30 PM START WHEN WEATHER PERMITTING WE WILL BE CARRYING OUT FIRST INSPECTIONS AND MARKING AND CLIPPING QUEENS

Full details of all Monthly Meetings, Open Apiary Sessions and Courses are at
www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk

FIRST INSPECTIONS

If you have bees and they have been fortunate to come through the ice, snow and floods of winter, and you have successfully treated them for varroa, and escaped the attention of the woodpeckers, it would be a shame to lose your bees in spring wouldn't it? But, as experienced beekeepers know, this is a critical time for your bees and they can easily starve to death. This is because, between February and April, when the Queen has resumed laying, and the amount of brood is greater than the adult bees for a while, a cold spell will prevent the bees foraging and they can quickly run out of stores and be unable to feed the growing larvae. So keep a close eye on them and feed a thin syrup if necessary, 2lb of sugar to 2 pints of water. Use a contact feeder and once you start feeding syrup, keep going until the spring nectar flow starts or the weather improves. If it is very cold, and stores are low, place a block of fondant directly onto the top bars of the hive or over the crown board feed hole, as in the cold the bees don't take syrup down very readily.

If you haven't done so already it is important to check for stores NOW and you can do this by hefting the hive, i.e. lifting it up on each side, front and back to give you an idea of the weight. It is a good idea to do this regularly during the summer too as you will then have an idea of what a hive with plenty of stores feels like and you can use this as a comparison in winter.



winter weather



flooding can be a problem in winter



varroa mites on adult bees



woodpecker damage



contact feeder



fondant & pollen patty on top bars



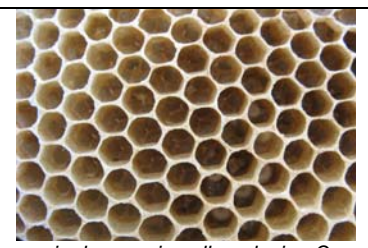
pollen coming in – a good sign!



willow catkin – early spring pollen



a fine Queen laying an egg



single eggs in cell – a laying Q



a good frame of brood & stores



a marked queen

In March, when the bees are flying and bringing in pollen you can change the floorboard, remove the mouseguard and if you have an open mesh floor it is a good idea to replace the floor insert as this will mean extra warmth, useful in helping the bees to incubate the brood at a time when it can still be really cold at night.

In April, on a warm still day (over 14C) you can carry out the first inspection of your brood chamber. You need to check for stores and check that a Queen is present and laying. How do you do that? Well, if you see a Queen you know she is there and if you see single eggs in the base of cells it is a sure sign that the Queen is laying and brood of all stages will re-inforce that view.

It is also a good idea at this time to take a sample of adult bees for checking for any disease that may be in the hive such as nosema or acarine. Do this by running an open matchbox over the bees on the brood chamber so that you have about 30 bees in the box and quickly close it. Place the box and bees in the freezer for an hour or two and that will see them off. You can then arrange with MBA Secretary, Tony Harris to check the bees under the microscope.

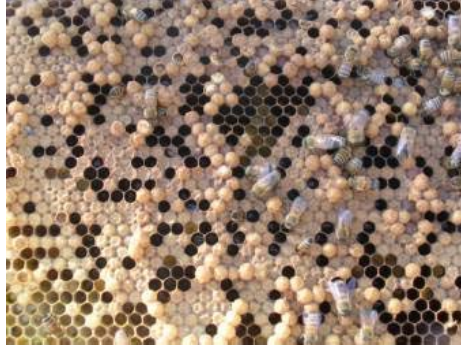
It is also a good idea to change 3 or 4 brood frames every spring with frames of wax foundation as this prevents build up of disease pathogens in the comb and gives the bees something to do preventing early congestion which can lead to swarming. Choose frames that are brood free, clogged with pollen, have too great a percentage of drone brood or have holes in the comb and move them to the outside of the box. You can make the change there and then if stores are adequate or do it at the next inspection.

Many beekeeping management techniques involve finding the Queen so if she is marked it will really help you. (Editor's note: come to the April meeting at Birnie if you want to learn how to mark and clip Queens!).

From the end of April onwards, if you want to prevent the loss of a swarm and thus save your honey harvest, you will have to carry out inspections to make sure your bees are not preparing to swarm. If your queen is unclipped these should be at 7 day intervals, if she is clipped, 14 days will be OK and in next month's Newsletter we will look at what to do when you do find Queen cells.

DRONE LAYING QUEENS & LAYING WORKERS

If, during your first inspection in April you find enlarged worker cells with drone cappings (raised), small stunted drones running about, with areas of neglected drone brood, and the brood area just doesn't look right, you may well find that you have a Drone Laying Queen (DLQ) or Laying Workers (LW's). A queen can become a drone layer due to inadequate mating meaning a shortage of sperm, a physical inability of the queen to fertilise the eggs correctly or it may be due to a genetic fault. LW's appear due to queenlessness (for more than 3 or 4 weeks), e.g. the queen failing to return from a mating flight or simply dying over winter, when there are no fertilised eggs or young larvae for the bees to make a new queen.



compact brood nest, raised cappings over worker cells - DLQ?



scattered brood pattern and raised cappings over worker cells - LW's?



single eggs at base of cell - Q present



multiple eggs - a sure sign of LW's



Q present - not LW's!



charged queen cells

If you see the queen you will know it is a DLQ but how else can you tell the difference? Well, a DLQ will keep a tidy brood area. The laying pattern will be orderly, i.e. compact patches of brood with very few empty cells whereas with LW's the laying pattern will be scattered and haphazard. Additionally, a DLQ will usually lay one egg in the base of the cell while LW's will lay multiple eggs in the same cell and they are more often than not on the sides of the cell wall because a worker's abdomen is much shorter than a queen. A DLQ will often lay areas of drone brood in the middle of larger patches of worker brood as she runs out of sperm. And finally, if the colony is trying to build charged queen cells it is more likely that LW's are present in your hive.

The recommended procedure for dealing with a DLQ is to re-queen (if you have a queen available) or to unite to a queenright colony after removing the old DLQ. It is virtually impossible, however, to re-queen a colony with LW's as the colony usually kills an introduced queen, and the bees from the LW's hive are just as likely to kill the queen of any colony it is united with. The best thing to do is to shake the bees out in front of a large colony and let them sort themselves out, entering any hive that will let them in.

There is one way to save the LW's colony but it is doubtful whether it will work. The bees are shaken and brushed out of the brood chamber a good distance away from the hive, e.g. 25 metres, and they will fly back and enter the hive, which has been replaced on the original site. Laying workers, however, cannot fly and thus don't return to the hive! Efforts can then be made to introduce a new queen BUT remember, the experienced beekeeper is unlikely to waste time trying to save a colony with LW's.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

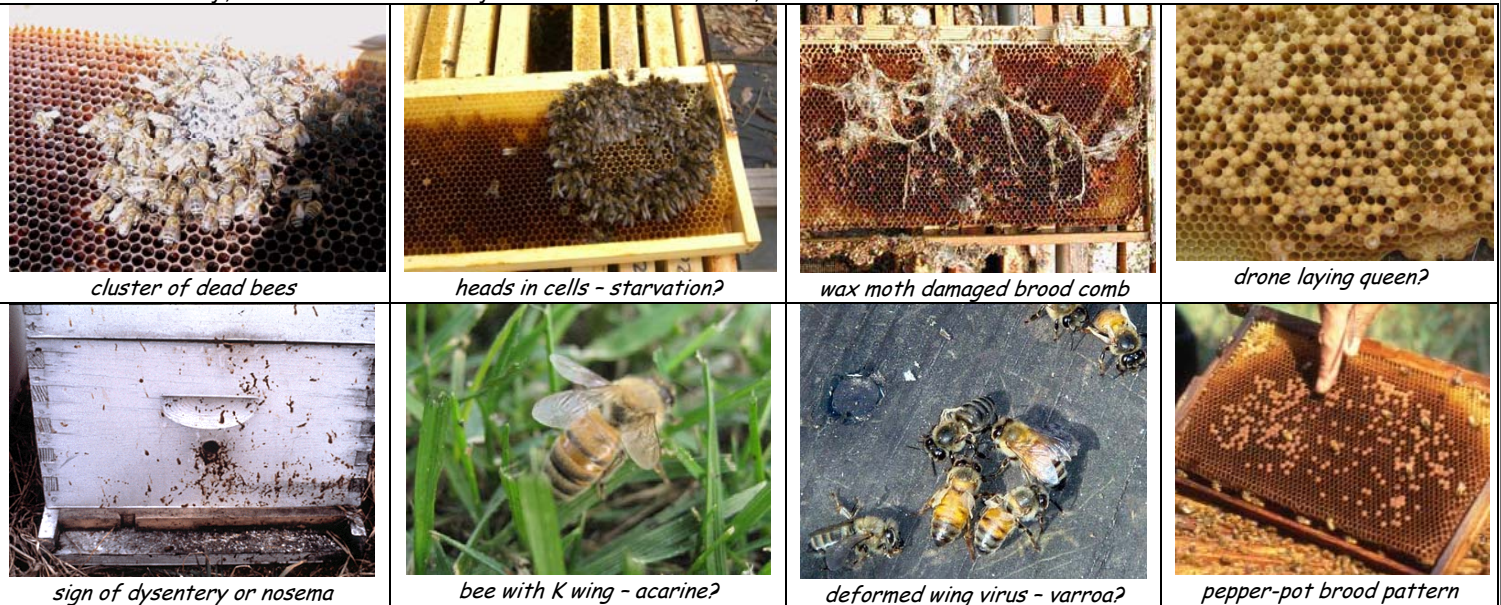
Sunday 17 th April	Queen Marking/Clipping, Association Apiary, Nether Birnie, 2.30pm
Sunday 15 th May	Alasdair Joyce's Apiary, Dallas Dhu, General Inspection, 2.30pm
Saturday 18 th June	Pluscarden Abbey, Summer Inspection, swarm control, 2.30pm
Sunday 17 th July	G & V. Hill's Apiary, Blossombank, Birnie, 2.30pm
Sunday 21 st August	Trip to the Heather & Meal, full details to be confirmed, 2.30pm
Sunday 18 th September	Talk & Demonstration, 'Extracting Honey' Birnie Apiary, 2.30pm

CARRYING OUT A HIVE AUTOPSY by Tony Harris

After caring for your bees all summer, feeding them in September and treating them for varroa over the winter, it can be very upsetting to find that the colony has died out, can't it? But, if you did the right things, provided some ventilation, insulation and protection from cold winds – you should want to know what went wrong and a way of doing that is to carry out an autopsy of any dead hives. In my first four winters of keeping bees I didn't lose one hive but the winter just passed has seen off 11 of my colonies and I didn't do anything different this time round so let's have a look at some of the symptoms and probable causes.

The first thing to be aware of is that bees can still starve if there is plenty of stores in the hive – it is known as 'isolation starvation' when it has been just too cold for the bees to move onto the next frame for example.

So, if the remains of the dead cluster contain bees that are positioned head first in cells with any remaining honey two or more inches away, starvation is the likely cause of their demise, and it is 'isolation starvation'.



If there is no honey left in the hive and wax cappings from the stored honey area have been ripped open with jagged capping pieces on the floor board, it is likely that the hive died out or was too weak to defend its stores from robbing by other bees or wasps.

If combs, brood or dead bees are covered with mold or mildew it is a sure sign that the hive died out a while ago or was just too weak to maintain the combs. If you discover a build up of webbing on the combs containing small black pieces of debris; remains of old cocoons and rounded elongated indentations in the wooden ware; disintegrated combs or grey moths either dead or alive, you can be sure that Greater or Lesser wax moths moved in once the colony succumbed.

If you find remains of numerous drone brood cells sometimes scattered within worker brood on the same comb it indicates an old or failed drone laying queen, and that would have seen the colony off over winter.

If you see significant brown spotting or large patches of brown staining on frames (like diarrhoea), combs or at the hive entrance it indicates dysentery or Nosema disease.

Numerous dead bees lying in front of the hive, maybe combined with the brown staining described above and bees that have disconnected their two pair of wings and rotated them into an orientation that resembles the letter 'K' it could indicate tracheal mites (acarine disease).

If you find small pin holes in brood cell cappings; numerous dead bees with deformed wings and/or short abdomens, with numerous varroa mites on dead bees, in sealed brood cells or on the floor, your colony has likely succumbed to the varroa mite or associated viruses.

So what about my dead hives? Well, most of them were made up as nucs last summer and maybe were not strong enough to survive the extreme prolonged cold spell we had in December. The hives were all fed sugar syrup in December and a block of fondant had been placed over the crown board so I knew I had fed them well. They had also been treated for varroa.

However, the remains of the clustering bees did have their heads in cells, and the frames of stores on the outside of the brood nest hadn't been touched. All of this tells me that these hives died of isolation starvation! The colonies were just not strong enough to survive the extreme, early cold spell, and I probably should have united the smaller nuclei in August.

So, what about your dead hive? Why did the bees die? Don't just accept it if you have lost bees or continue to lose bees over the winter. Carry out a 'hive autopsy' and after identifying why they died, take measure to ensure the chances of the same problems occurring next time are reduced.

NEW FOR 2011 MBA 'ADOPT A NUCLEUS' Programme



Aimed at members who have attended one of our beekeeping courses

Pay £35 to 'Adopt a Nucleus' of bees in May/June

Nuc will be kept at Birnie Apiary – you can 'try before you buy'.

Supervision, guidance and advice will be available from experienced members of MBA during inspections.

End of summer - option to buy the bees for an additional payment of £45.

Assistance will be given to move the bees to your own apiary and into own hive.

MBA members who have nuclei for sale can sell them through this project, will receive the appropriate payment and help a new beekeeper to start out.

Swarms and nucs will also be offered to members who have lost bees recently

Please let MBA Secretary, Tony Harris know if you wish to take part, as a seller or buyer!

MORAY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION COURSES 2011

Following on the success of last summer's courses MBA will again be running 'Introduction to Beekeeping' courses and 'Honeybee Conservation Taster Days' for members of the public so if you know any budding beekeepers or conservation minded people please point them in the direction of the MBA website.

TASTER DAYS

Location: Association Apiary, Nether Birnie, Elgin

Dates: **Saturday 23rd April, Saturday 28th May, Saturday 25th June.** Time: 1.00pm – 3.00pm

This afternoon 'Taster Session' is for those who are interested in bees and beekeeping but don't necessarily wish to keep bees. It is a 2 hour outdoor session looking at the many threats to our native bees, what can be done to help them and how to attract bees into your garden.

There will then be a practical session looking inside a hive, learning about honeybees and their behaviour and explaining all that is going on inside. Refreshments will be provided followed by a 'Question & Answer' time.

The cost of the afternoon is £10 and numbers are limited.

INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING COURSE

Location: Elgin Library, Cooper Park, Elgin (Fri evening) and Association Apiary, Nether Birnie, Elgin (Saturday afternoon)

Dates: **Fri 6th and Sat 7th May, Fri 10th and Sat 11th June, Fri 15th and Sat 16th July, Fri 19th August and Sat 20th August**

Time: Friday evening 7.00pm – 9.00pm, Saturday afternoon 1.00pm – 3.00pm

This course is for those interested in keeping bees and would like to know more. It is held in the classroom on the Friday evening followed by a 2 hour practical session on the Saturday afternoon, looking inside a hive. (weather permitting)

Subjects covered in the classroom will include

- The Honeybee colony
- Inside the hive
- Getting started
- Swarming
- Disease
- The honey harvest

The practical session will include

- Protective gear/Safety
- Opening the hive
- What's inside
- Recognising workers queens and drones

The cost for the weekend is £25.00 per person, under 12 years free. Protective equipment will be provided for all dates. (except Wellingtons or boots, please bring your own. If you have a zip-up anorak please bring it with you). Numbers are limited and places will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

For further details or to book a place on the course contact: Tony Harris, tel 01343 821282, e mail: tonyharris316@btinternet.com

'WORK TO DO IN APRIL'

Continue to pay close attention to the weight of the hive. In a good spring, the colony should be growing quickly and will therefore consume lots more food as the adult bees feed the larvae. Heft the hive (i.e. gently lift it) to check the weight of stores and if very light, consider feeding sugar syrup, 2lb sugar mixed with 2 pints of hot water in a contact feeder.

On a warm day, remove the mouse guard, entrance block and replace the floor if you have a spare. If you don't have a spare you can clear it of dead bees and scrape any debris away before scorching it with a blow torch and replacing it.

Later in the month you can carry out the first inspection of the brood chamber, looking for the Queen or eggs, sufficient stores and healthy brood. It is a good idea to replace 3 or 4 brood frames each spring as disease pathogens can build up in the brood chamber.

If your bees are near to oil seed rape you will need to add supers in plenty of time and commence regular inspections as part of your swarm control, every 7 days if an unclipped Queen or every 14 days if she is clipped.

Be vigilant as swarming can begin in April especially if near to the oil seed rape fields.

HOT NEWS - MBA has just been granted **charitable status** by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. This is good news as it will open up avenues of funding for the Association and assist in our honeybee conservation projects.

ASSOCIATION HEATHER STANCE SOUGHT

MBA Committee are looking for a location for a heather stance in Moray that could be used by any member wishing to move their bees to the heather for the month of August. Obviously, the location should be on the heather and permission should be obtained from the landowner. Other factors worth considering are; some sort of shelter from the prevailing wind would be advantageous, e.g. behind a wall or the like; the site must have vehicular access at all times and not be prone to flooding; and out of the site of the general public and away from public thoroughfares would be best.

If any member can offer any suggestions for a site please contact any member of the Committee (details on the website or your membership card)

SCOTTISH BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION (SBA)

Moray Beekeepers Association is affiliated to the SBA and you are encouraged to join. Membership of £25 a year will give you a monthly magazine, £2 million Public and Product liability insurance, a compensation scheme if you lose your bees and access to beekeepers throughout Scotland,

Contact membership convener: Mr. Phil McAnespie, 12 Monument Road, Ayr, KA7 2RL

SBA web site: www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk

QUEEN REARING PROJECT 2011

Moray Beekeepers will this year be running a Queen Rearing project from Birnie Apiary and Committee Member, Gerry Thompson has agreed to head up the initiative.

Several members have already registered an interest in learning or helping out and Gerry will be arranging an initial meeting soon when a plan of attack can be discussed and decided upon.

Gerry is very keen to raise queens this season, and he said, 'This will be a learning curve for all of us but at this stage I am looking towards raising queens based on the Vince Cook method in his excellent book, 'Queen Rearing Made Simple'.

Anyone who wants to get involved can contact Gerry through the website, www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk

ANALYSIS OF BEES FOR DISEASE

Any member who wishes to have their bees checked under the microscope for adult bee diseases, such as nosema and acarine can now send or take them to MBA Secretary, Tony Harris.

Take a sample of about 30 bees by running an open matchbox across the bees on the brood chamber and trap them inside, OR, you can place a jar over the crown board and when there are enough bees in it close the lid. Kill the bees by placing in the freezer for an hour or two and then get them to Tony asap. It may be best to arrange the timings with Tony first as he does have a full time job away from beekeeping.

You can call Tony on 07884 496246 or e mail tonyharris316@btinternet.com. It will cost you £10.

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 £82.50

www.bbwear.co.uk/



**TICK BITE
PREVENTION WEEK 2011**

11th -17th April
www.tickbitepreventionweek.org

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

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: tonvharris316@btinternet.com or phone 07884 496246

PLEASE REMEMBER TO PAY YOUR SUBS FOR 2011, NOW £10 ADULT, £5 OVER 65YRS AND 12-16YRS!