

# The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter  
Hot off the 'press'

Issue No: 5/10

July 2010

**THIS MONTH'S NEWSLETTER IS SPONSORED BY M.B.A. MEMBER JOHN FALCONER – THANK YOU!**

## BIRNIE APIARY VISIT

Our June meeting took place at the Association apiary at Birnie and was attended by about 2 dozen members and guests. It was a fine day and the bees were flying well.

Andrew Tassell led a group of 'beeginners' and he showed them the inside of a couple of nucleus hives that had been made up as part of the apiary swarm control programme.



MBA Chairman, Andrew Tassell, showing beginners inside a nucleus



Hard at work! Mike Reid (in white) had the important job of recording what work was carried out in the hives

Rob MacKenzie and Tony Harris each led a group of more experienced members and completed general beekeeping tasks including swarm control and checking and topping up stores that were low due to the 'june gap'. Four of the six colonies in the apiary have been split following swarming preparations and the discovery of queen cells so the Association should have a few more hives for next season. The plan for next year is to commence a queen rearing programme and to make up as many 'nucs' of bees as possible for onward sale to new members.

The afternoon was finished off with another fine tea thanks to Fiona Tassell and helpers, Adam and Sarah. Thank you to all those members who helped out with refreshments, DIY work on the shed, selling raffle tickets, and organizing bee suits for visitors.

OUR NEXT MEETING IS ON **SUNDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> JULY** AT ROB & ANGIE MACKENZIE'S APIARY AT FIFE COTTAGE, PLUSCARDEN, **2.30PM** WHEN WE WILL BE HAVING A LOOK AT HIS WARRE HIVES  
(directions to follow)

Full details of all Monthly Meetings, Open Apiary Sessions and Courses are at  
[www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk](http://www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk)

## IAN CRAIG'S BEEKEEPING YEAR - JULY

This is the month when we will find out if our colony management is going to bear fruit. Given good weather, the bees will be foraging at the main honey flow on plants such as white clover, bramble, bell heather, lime and willow herb. Varroa should continue to be monitored. During the first fortnight, check to see if some colonies are still attempting to swarm, although most if not all will have passed that stage and the brood chamber need not be opened. Make sure that the hives have adequate super room and you can go on holiday during the second half of the month. Unless you have re-queened your colonies in May or June (which I do not) you must check your colonies every week from mid-May until mid-July in order to control swarming thus giving yourself the chance to obtain a good honey crop.



Early in the month, move the shallow frame drone traps to the outside of the brood chamber and when the worker brood which they contain has hatched, the frames should be removed and stored in a bee proof and waxmoth proof location for deployment during the following May. This will save the bees having to draw the worker foundation from scratch next spring.

Sealed brood should be in complete slabs with few 'missed' cells. (Except, perhaps, along the lines of the foundation wires). The proportion of empty cells in the sealed brood area is an indication of the extent of in-breeding. In the honeybee a fertilized egg is diploid, having 32 chromosomes and will develop into a female caste; an unfertilised egg is haploid, having 16 chromosomes and will develop into a male caste. With multiple matings of the queen with, say, up to ten drones diploid females are usually produced. If in-breeding occurs some of the eggs would produce diploid drones. Diploid drones are detected by nurse bees whenever the egg hatches. They are not seen in the colony because they are not tolerated and are eaten by the worker bees leaving a 'pepperpot' appearance to slabs of brood. In-breeding can occur in isolated apiaries affecting up to 50% of the brood. However, with the demise of the feral colonies of honeybees, due to the ravages of varroa, in-breeding is becoming more likely in the more heavily bee-populated areas of the country. Colonies where in-breeding has taken place fail to build up to full strength. In-breeding should not be confused with any of the brood diseases.

If as part of swarm control, you left a queen cell in a hive, check if the Queen has been slow to mate because of bad weather and has become a drone breeder. If you find more than one egg in each cell, the young queen is either just starting to lay or there are laying workers in the hive. If it is laying workers, the eggs will have been deposited on the cell walls because the worker's abdomen is too short to reach the bottom of the cell. If for example the virgin queen has been lost during her mating flight, the bees have no means of raising a replacement. Some workers will develop the ability to lay unfertilised eggs which will only produce drones. By the time laying workers appear in a colony, it is hardly worth trying to save it because the bees will all be nearing the end of their lifespan and they are almost impossible to re-queen. If I find a colony with laying workers I carry it one hundred metres from its site, shake all the bees on to the ground and return the hive to its original position. The idea being that the laying workers will be too heavy to fly and the others, all being field bees, will fly back home. You can try to unite a queen-rite nucleus to the colony twelve hours later or set it above the open feed hole of another colony.

When adding foundation to an expanding brood nest during a honey flow, it should be put two positions in. It is a mistake to add it to the flanks as the bees will draw it and quickly fill it with honey before the queen has time to lay in it. .

## GOOD APIARY HYGIENE

1. Always keep the apiary clean and tidy
2. Never throw propolis or brace comb on the ground; be sure always to place it in a suitable container and remove it from the apiary
3. Never buy old combs
4. Never buy colonies of bees unless it is known that they come from disease free apiaries
5. Always disinfect second hand hives and other equipment before use
6. Never feed honey or allow bees to gain access to it; refined sugar is the only acceptable feed for honeybees
7. If a colony dies out during the winter (or at any other time) and the trouble is not due to starvation, close the hive, pending the examination of a sample comb and bees, to prevent the remaining stores being robbed out
8. Never exchange brood or super frames/combs between one colony and another unless it is known that all colonies are free from disease. Where possible, supers should be marked and always used on the same colonies
9. Take care to prevent robbing at all times by observing no. 2 and not spilling syrup or having leaky feeders
10. Arrange all hives in such a way that drifting is reduced to a minimum

It is also a good idea to renew combs in the brood chamber once every three years on a rotational basis as this is another way of getting rid of disease pathogens.

# SELECTING AN APIARY SITE

So you've been on an introductory beekeeping course, decided on a make of hive, bought a bee suit and are hoping that a swarm will turn up soon with your name on it! Or you have ordered or intend to purchase a nucleus of bees for delivery next spring. In the meantime you will need to decide where to keep your bees and how to position the hive in your apiary. A lot of wasted time and effort can be saved later if you make the right decisions now!

The main criteria in locating your bees is that the flight path should not cross footpaths or other areas where there is likely to be human or animal activity. The reason is obvious, as you don't want your bees stinging the neighbours or the neighbours' dog or horse. If you have no option but to keep the hive in your garden, and you do have close neighbours, you can face the hive entrance a few feet from a high fence or wall. If this is say 6 or 7 feet high the bees will have to fly to that height when they leave the hive and will then hopefully be flying above the heads of passers by. But you will have to take into account that your bees may end up drinking at neighbouring bird baths or garden ponds, a crowd of roaring bees may swarm into your neighbour's garden and they will soil the neighbours washing as they make their cleansing flights in early spring! So think carefully if you live in a small suburban garden with close neighbours, whether it worth keeping your bees at home and falling out with the family next door.



*raising the flight path*



*wind protection is important*



*a good stock fence*



*water supply is essential*

You also have to assess if there is adequate forage available for the bees. For example, if a neighbour has a dozen hives nearby, your bees will be competing with his bees for the nectar and pollen available locally. Ideally there will be plenty of space around each stock for colony manipulation and maintaining the site, e.g. grass cutting. Also, leaving a 2 metre space around the hive will give you room for future expansion. Placing the hive on some sort of hive stand is also advisable, say 18 -24 inches high as this will prevent backache when opening it, and will provide ventilation around the hive, which is beneficial to the bees.

A poorly selected site for your apiary can also be a contributing factor in the loss of your colonies over the winter. For example, don't place your bees in a frost pocket or in any area prone to flooding! The old beekeeper's saying that, 'bees in a wood ne'er do good' is very true, so don't place your hives under trees in or on the edge of a wood. Protect hives from the prevailing winds and have the hive entrances facing south or south westerly if possible. Make sure that you have access to the apiary by road at all times of the year as honey supers can be heavy to carry, and if livestock are in the vicinity the site should be surrounded by a stock-proof fence.

If you have more than one hive then place them in an irregular pattern with the entrances each facing slightly different directions. This will help prevent bees drifting into the wrong hive, which can spread disease. Finally, a nearby water supply should be available for the bees, especially so in winter as they need water to dilute the winter stores, and the low temperatures at this time prevent them flying far. You can help by placing a moss filled shallow tray, soaked with water within a few metres of your hives and topping it up regularly.

## QUEEN BEE

Queen bee

**I saw your beautiful body  
roaming in your honey comb  
your busy workers  
in colonies low  
you make our sweet honey  
I love you so.**

**MBA member Casper S Hawkins  
..Age almost 8**

(Editor's note: Thank you Casper for this excellent poem!)

## MBA COMMITTEE VACANCIES

The following members have left the Committee recently and on behalf of the membership we wish them well and thank them for their years of service to the Association. We do hope to see them enjoying their beekeeping and attending our monthly meetings.

John Salt, Kevin West & Rob MacKenzie

This means there are vacancies on the Committee so if you would like to get involved in taking MBA forward please contact Secretary, Tony Harris, 01343 821282 or any Committee member. We meet formally 3 times a year and run a summer and winter programme for members and guests.

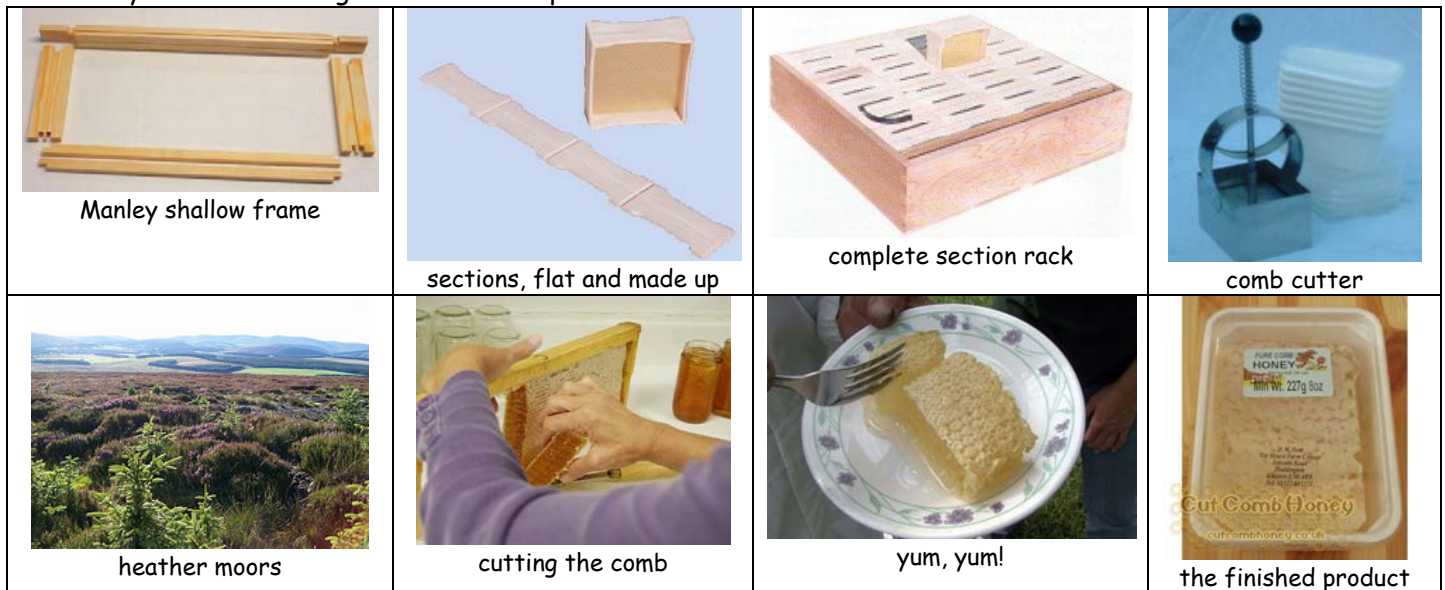
It is good fun, you will increase your beekeeping knowledge, and you will be playing a part in promoting beekeeping in Moray and throughout Scotland.

**In particular we are in need of a Treasurer.**

## CUT COMB / SECTION HONEY Ian Craig's method

Some beekeepers like to produce comb honey from the summer and ling (heather) flows. Spring honey is unsuitable for cut-comb or sections because oilseed rape will granulate in the comb and sycamore is too strong in flavour for most palates. In the past I have produced cut-comb in supers containing nine Manley frames. These frames are spaced at 41mm, (1 5/8in). That is the absolute maximum distance between sheets of foundation if you are going to prevent the bees drawing extra combs between those that you want. I now space cut-comb supers using narrow (34mm/1 3/8in) plastic ends because the resulting sealed combs are a little bit thinner and they fit better under the lid of the cut comb containers that are sold by the suppliers. To prevent the bees propolis the frame shoulders, smear the shoulders with 'vaseline'.

When working for cut comb I use thin unwired foundation cut into four horizontal strips, instead of full sheets which tend to buckle when being drawn. The bees will draw the strip of starter foundation with worker comb and the space below with drone comb. I have not experienced any difficulty in getting bees to enter cut-comb supers, they can be used in conjunction with ordinary supers where required. It is preferable not to place a cut-comb super next to the brood chamber as the bees might store some pollen in it and the cappings soon become 'travel stained' by the bees moving to the above supers..



I produce square sections in hanging section holders each containing three sections. Eight section holders fit into a shallow super allowing twenty-four sections per crate. Metal 'separators' must be suspended between each section holder otherwise the bees are likely to spoil many of the sections by building comb where the beekeeper does not want it. Bees do not like being restricted in little sections and are often reluctant to enter them. The queen is unlikely to enter, so no queen excluder should be used. Full squares of thin fresh foundation should be used when working for sections. Special crates, holding thirty-two sections can be purchased from the suppliers but bees do not like them.

Strong colonies are required when working for sections and bees must have a laying queen which was reared during the current year otherwise they are likely to swarm due to congestion and their reluctance to enter the 'little boxes'. Colonies chosen for section production should have a section super put on top of the current supers one week before the start of the targeted honey flow so that the bees can become accustomed to it. At the start of the flow the section super should be placed on top of the brood chamber with the queen excluder removed and the original supers put above the clearer board. These supers, cleared of bees, can be given to other colonies to complete. To further entice the bees into the section super a partly completed section, saved for the purpose from the previous year, should be placed in the middle of the super. Do not add a second super until the bees have started to draw comb in the first or they may sulk and start to 'loaf'. The second should be added below the first and if the colony is strong and the flow is good a third super should be placed on top of the first. If the flow continues the third super can be placed below and so on. In this way the bees are given tasks a little at a time, whereas if faced with a huge space containing innumerable 'little boxes' they may give up and sulk, or swarm especially if the queen is of the previous year.

Towards the end of July I put cut-comb supers, intended for going to the heather, on top of the supers on strong honey producing colonies in the hope of getting them drawn out. This will give the bees a quick start at the heather.

## 'BEE'GINNERS' CORNER

### Q. I can't find any eggs and I think the queen is missing. What shall I do?

A. Insert a frame from another hive containing eggs and brood. If there is no queen, the bees will very soon begin making emergency queen cells. If they don't make queen cells then a queen is present in the hive, even though she is not laying. You then need to find and remove her. Obviously, you need more than one hive to do this. If you only have one hive, call a Committee Member for help.

### Q. What is a nucleus?

A. A nucleus (referred to as a 'nuc') is simply a small box of bees, containing a laying queen, and brood of all stages, i.e. eggs, larvae and sealed brood, on 3 or 4 brood frames. Beginners often buy nucs of bees from suppliers or other beekeepers as they are easier to handle and the beginner can gain experience and confidence handling them before the colony is full sized. They can easily be transferred into a full sized hive when large enough.

### Q. What happens when the bees swarm?

A. Usually, the queen (remember there is only 1 in a hive) and about half the flying bees will leave the hive and set up home elsewhere. The bees bubble out of the hive entrance and settle around the queen in a rugby ball shaped cluster until they decide on a new home and fly off to it. The bees will leave queen cells in the hive and when they hatch there are a number of differing scenarios. Firstly, the first virgin to emerge will kill all the other developing queens in their cells, will mate after a few days and eventually will start laying eggs (after emergence it usually takes about 2 weeks before she starts laying but this is dependent on the weather). Or the first virgin queen to emerge will swarm with about half the flying bees, leaving the next queen to emerge and she will either kill the other queens, as per the first scenario above or she may also swarm, again with half the remaining bees... and so on! These later small swarms are called 'casts' and they get smaller and smaller until one queen is left or a new queen gets on with the mating process.

Shortly after the first swarm has emerged it all appears as normal at your hive entrance with the bees coming and going as normal and unless you witnessed the swarm coming out of the hive you wouldn't know any difference. When you consider that only about one third of the bees in your hive are flying bees, and it is only about half of these that swarm, you cannot always tell whether you have lost a swarm just by looking at the number of bees in the hive! It is only when you find an absence of eggs, and a number of queen cells, usually sealed but they may still be unsealed, that you can figure out that you have probably lost the queen and a swarm. If your bees do swarm you need to destroy all but one unsealed -queen cell. Mark the frame the queen cell is on with a drawing pin. Seven days later go back in the hive and remove anything that looks like a queen cell, leaving the original queen cell, frame marked with the drawing pin, that will now be sealed. Be particularly careful to brush off the bees from each frame as 4 or 5 bees can easily hide a queen cell. Then leave alone for 3 weeks before checking for eggs when hopefully your new queen will be in lay!



### BASIC BEEMASTERS EXAM

Congratulations to MBA Committee member, Viv Hill, who recently passed the Scottish Beekeepers Association 'Basic Beemasters Exam'. This is a practical, oral test (no writing), as an assessor watches you looking through your bees and asks questions as you go along. It is the first step in the SBA Beekeeping syllabus and taking it will greatly increase your knowledge and enjoyment of beekeeping. For further information on what is involved why don't you give Viv a ring, telephone **01343 542919** or contact any Committee member.

### THE SCOTTISH BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

#### AUTUMN CONVENTION

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2010  
8.45am – 5.10pm

At KINELLAR COMMUNITY HALL  
Fintray Road, BLACKBURN, Aberdeenshire, AB21 0JG

Tickets £25 including coffee, lunch and tea

#### TRADE STANDS

Bookings for the Convention to Iain F. Steven  
4 Craigie View, Perth, PH2 0DP. Telephone 01738 621100  
(cheques payable to 'SBA' and enclose SAE for programme/receipt)



Birnie apiary raffle winner, Alan Ranson (left), receiving his prize, a bottle of Glenfiddich, from MBA Chairman Andrew Tassell

**FOR SALE** Formic Acid at 60% ... £4. Please provide your own container/bottle with plastic/cork stopper .  
**Expanded wire mesh**, cut to your size, @ £1.70 sq ft. Ideal for varroa floors or travelling screens.  
Contact John Salt, telephone 01309 673703

**INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING COURSE ON YOU TUBE – VISIT <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnXKKgwIsX8>**

### 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 £81.55 [www.bbwear.co.uk/](http://www.bbwear.co.uk/)

### A WARM WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

James Crombie, Grant Scanlon, Sheena Reid, Issie Frankland, Carol Carlton & Lynn and Alan Ranson

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](http://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](mailto:tonyharris316@btinternet.com)

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