

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter
Hot off the 'press'

September

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'PREPARING FOR THE WINTER'

The morning of our August meeting dawned to torrential rain and the forecast was for more of the same throughout the day. Despite this, just under 40 members turned up at Tony Harris' apiary at Dallachy and were duly rewarded when the skies cleared and the rain stopped for a couple of hours in the afternoon.

Again, there were quite a few beginners and after splitting into 2 groups led by John Salt and Tom Balch, they were shown the inside of several of Tony's nuclei hives. These colonies had been made up in June with a sealed Queen cell, stores and bees, and the good early summer weather resulted in a 90% success rate for mated queens, and allowed them plenty of time to build up for the winter.



Andrew demonstrating the oxalic acid trickle method, Viv Hill watching on

Tony then gave a talk on 'Preparing Bees for the Winter' and Andrew Tassell demonstrated various techniques for treating varroa at this time of year.

The afternoon was rounded off with a fine tea party and a good natter! Thank you to all who contributed in making it another very enjoyable and informative meeting!



'Just a couple of swells'. John Salt and Rob Mackenzie, enthralled by the afternoon' speakers, and they managed to stay awake!

THIS MONTH IN THE APIARY by John Salt

Now that the active season for beekeeping is all but over, you will be looking for something else to occupy your mind, now is the chance to turn to some of the other occupations associated with Beekeeping. Honey Show 5th September, next weekend



It is always noticeable that there is a good turnout for this event but this does not match the entries in the show itself. Why this is I do not know. You don't have to be supremely competitive to enter but surely, if you call yourself a beekeeper and your end product is honey, it should be a matter of pride to show your fellow members that you can do it. There's no stigma attached to not winning. The only person who knows who has entered is the Show Secretary so if your entry does not win there is no label on the jar that says 'Joe Bloggs' didn't win because he's got a bee's leg in his honey. So let' go for it ... if you need any advice/help, give me a call.



Heather damaged by heather beetle



A healthy heather moor



Honeybee on Michaelmass daisy



Honey bees on ivy

Whilst on the subject of honey, although this has a better year for the bees, it has been a very poor one for honey. I and many others were feeding our bees in July and the heather moor up past Dallas is 90% decimated by the heather beetle, producing very little to no crop at all.

I was talking to one beekeeper in Glasgow last week who is selling last years blossom honey to the local butcher at £5 per lbs, who is selling it on to the general public, wait for it, at £9 per lbs. and the butcher can't get enough of it.

The last crop of honey you might get this year is from Ivy. Didn't know Ivy had a flower? Then have a good look next time you pass a tree covered with the stuff. Not the best of honey for the bees to over-winter on as it crystallizes very fast, very similar to oil seed rape honey.

The bees need a lot of water to dissolve the crystals and if they have a lot of water in their gut and can't leave the hive to 'relieve themselves' ... it can spell trouble.

A major cause of winter losses is starvation. There are two types of starvation. One happens when there is not enough honey/stores in the hive and the bees are unable to leave the hive to forage. This is unforgivable in a managed hive so please make sure it doesn't happen to you. The other is isolation starvation: the bees die surrounded by an empty area of comb, seemingly unable to cross over to neighbouring combs that still contain some stores. The question arises whether the colony was not strong enough or the weather was too cold for them to move and unfortunately there is little the beekeeper can do to avoid this type of situation.

Finally, Did you know, *God provided rainy days so that Beekeepers could do the housework!*

MORAY BEEKEEPERS HONEY SHOW SATURDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER, FORRES TOWN HALL

Extracted Honey

- Class 1 - 2 x 1lb jars of light blossom honey
- Class 2 - 2 x 1lb jars of medium blossom honey
- Class 3 - 2 x 1lb jars of dark blossom honey
- Class 4 - 2 x 1lb jars of heather honey (granulated)
- Class 5 - 2 x 1lb jars of heather honey (liquid)
- Class 6 - 2 x 1lb jars of creamed honey

Comb Honey

- Class 7 - 2 x sections blossom or heather honey
- Class 8 - 2 pieces of cut comb Blossom Honey (8-16oz)
- Class 9 - 2 pieces of cut comb Heather Honey (8-16oz)
- Class 10 - 1 Shallow frame Blossom or Heather

Wax and Honey products

- Class 11 - 1 cake of Beeswax (minimum weight 8oz)
- Class 12 - Wax Products e.g. Candles & Polish
- Class 13 - 4 small Honey Cakes
- Class 14 - 1 Bottle of Mead

Prizes: 1st - £1.50 ... 2nd - £1.00 ... 3rd - 50p
Trophies and Silver Plate to be awarded

Bottle of Malt Whiskey for Best Overall Exhibit

Exhibits can be staged on Friday night until 22:30 and on Saturday morning from 07:00 until 09:00. For more information please contact the Show Secretary, Viv Hill on 01343 542919

PLEASE SUPPORT YOUR HONEY SHOW!

And if you haven't any honey to exhibit then why not come along and support the exhibitors - you never know, it may inspire you!



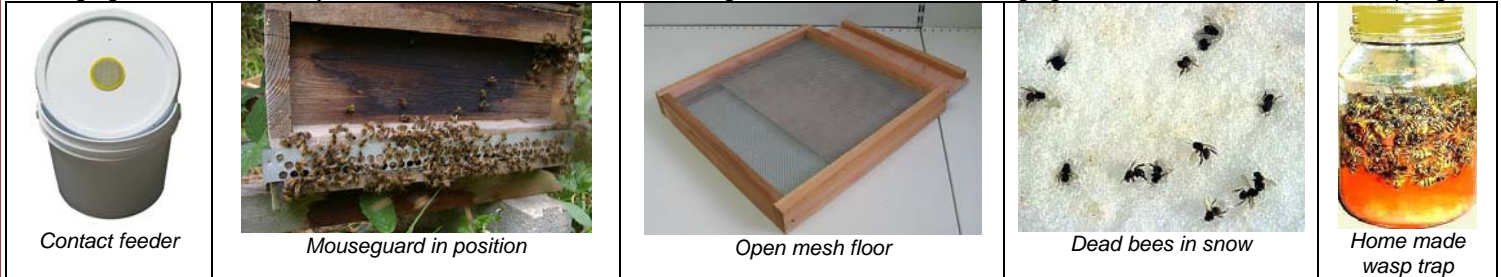
PREPARING BEES FOR THE WINTER

The optimum condition for a colony going into winter is:

1. The colony should have a young queen and plenty of bees,
2. Stores should be sufficient to last until the spring flowers arrive,
3. It should be disease free and protected from pests and predators, and
4. The bees should be in a sound, waterproof hive so that they are dry, preferably on stands with good air circulation around them, and, situated in a dry, warm, unexposed apiary.

Is that all, you ask? Well, it sounds a lot but there are practical steps the beekeeper can take to help the bees through the winter.

It goes without saying that a **YOUNG QUEEN** is less likely to die or become a drone breeder, but more importantly, the younger the queen is, the later in the season she will lay, which means more bees that don't have to live as long under winter conditions. And the more bees emerging at this time of the year the better as it will be the surviving bees that will resume foraging and house bees duties in the spring.



Contact feeder

Mouseguard in position

Open mesh floor

Dead bees in snow

Home made wasp trap

SUFFICIENT STORES The old adage that 'bees never freeze to death, they only starve to death', is very true, so it is vitally important that we provide sufficient stores for them to last until spring. The bees should be fed with sugar syrup (mix 2lb of sugar with 1 pint of hot water) about the 1st or 2nd week of September. There are various types of feeders for doing this (check suppliers catalogues). It is very important to pour a small amount of syrup down the feed hole in the crown board so that the bees know it is there, as sugar syrup has no smell that the bees can recognise.

How much syrup do we have to feed? Well, this will be different for each colony so first of all open up each hive and assess its stores by eye and then decide. If you bear in mind that 1 B.S. brood frame, full on both sides, has about 5lb of honey, and that Ted Hooper recommends 40-45lb of stores, you should be able to work out how much syrup is needed. And if you are still not sure you can do what I do - feed syrup until they stop taking it down, on the premise that the bees know best. It is best to feed the bees in the evening, so that darkness will help quell the excitement, and to feed all your colonies at the same time, as this will help to reduce the likelihood of robbing.

Lift your hive and get to know its weight when stores are plentiful so that you can take action if it you feel it weighing a lot less during winter. If it does, **DON'T** feed with more syrup, as the excess moisture can easily cause dysentery/nosema in weak colonies. Instead, you can place a block of candy or bakers fondant (available in supermarkets) over the feed hole. I place the fondant in a margarine tub from which I cut out a small hole with a strip of queen excluder on the inside. This allows the bees into the tub but when the temperature rises when brood rearing begins, the queen excluder prevents the melted fondant from falling into the hive in a sticky mess.

Your bees will normally collect sufficient pollen for winter but if one of your colonies looks short you can insert a frame of pollen from a bountiful colony. And you can help the bees by planting flowers which are good sources of early and late pollen: hazel and willow for spring, and Michaelmass daisy and ivy for autumn.

DISEASE FREE AND PROTECTED FROM PESTS AND PREDATORS Space does not permit a lengthy article on varroa treatment – you can read all about it on the Association web site. On a practical point, I suggest one thing you do, after any honey has been taken off, is to treat your colonies with apistan. You can buy this from suppliers and you insert 2 strips into the brood box and leave it there for a minimum of 6 weeks and no more than seven, otherwise the mites can become resistant to it.

MICE are a problem in the winter. If they get into your hive while the bees are clustering, the bees will leave them alone, and they will eat and remove comb, and can lead to the demise of a colony. So fit mouse guards over the entrance now and leave in place till the spring.

Other predators include **BADGERS** and the way to keep them out of your apiary is to erect a strong wire fence, sunk at least 2 feet into the ground. **WASPS** can also be a problem as they try and get into the hive to rob the honey. An easy way to deal with this is to sink a jam jar filled with sugar syrup or runny jam into the ground – this will catch lots more wasps than it does honey bees.

SOUND WATERPROOF HIVES, GOOD AIR CIRCULATION, IN A DRY, WARM UNEXPOSED APIARY Make sure your hives are waterproof and there are no holes in them. Although bees do not freeze to death due to low temperatures, they can die off due to cold winds, so it is especially important to protect the hives from northerly and easterly winds – if necessary build a wind break!

During winter, the honey bee colony adopts 3 mechanisms to ensure its survival down to very low temperatures. These are, 1. clustering, 2. generating metabolic heat by micro vibration of indirect flight muscles, and 3. ensuring the nest is draught free by use of propolis

And it is number 3 that can cause a dilemma for beekeepers, because if the bees proplise any cracks to reduce draughts, what degree of ventilation should we provide in the hive over the winter? – the experts can't agree! Ventilation is always necessary in order to expel CO₂ and this is true also in winter. Here are some of the options for ventilating your hive,

1. Open mesh Floor with or without floor insert,
2. Raising the crown board by inserting a matchstick under each corner.
3. Crown board completely removed,
4. Feed hole in crown board left open, and
5. having differing sizes of roof ventilation holes

I suggest that you read as much as you can about ventilation and then experiment, before deciding on what technique you are happy with.

Something else to consider is **INSULATION**. Many beekeepers place additional insulation under the hive roof for winter, e.g. polystyrene, loft insulation rolls, but others do not – again experiment and do what suits you.

SNOW can be a problem for the bees because if it settles around the hive it can give the bees a false sense of brightness which can cause them to leave the hive on a cleansing flight, and this can prove fatal at low temperatures. If snow does settle around your hive then simply place a piece of wood over the entrance so that it is kept in the dark and that should prevent the bees from flying.

If your bees are in more than one box and you have a queen excluder between them, please remember to **REMOVE THE QUEEN EXCLUDER**, otherwise the queen can get left in the lower box if the cluster moves above, and that will be the end of her!

And **FINALLY**, tie down the hive or place a large brick on the roof, and then, **LEAVE ALONE** during winter. It won't be long before the first sunny day in February, when your heart will be gladdened as you see the girls bringing in the first of the season's pollen – a sure sign that the queen is present and has resumed laying.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Sunday 18th October, 2pm at Main Farm Apiary (directions to follow), Working party followed by 'Soup and Tatties' at Riach Cottage, Longmorn (Kev & Sheila West's place). Please bring spades, rakes, forks, strimmers etc. so we can finally prepare the site for the hives and bees. We are still looking for any old type of fencing (in order to erect a wind break - we'll just use what we can get our hands on) and a shed to store equipment (we can dismantle).

All being well we should have at least 4 colonies of bees going into the winter, donated by Tony Harris, Andrew Tassell and John Salt. Any more would be appreciated!

MBA 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 honey 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 WINNER

MBA member, Tom Balch was the delighted winner of the raffle at our August meeting and is pictured here receiving a bottle of malt whiskey from Committee member, Viv Hill.

Thank you to all who took part in the raffle, we raised £50 towards the Association apiary set up costs.

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

Ewan Roy and Suzanne Comley

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!