

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter
Hot off the 'press'

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July 2011

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PLUSCARDEN ABBEY VISIT

from Viv Hill's Blog at www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk

Saturday 18th June dawned bright and sunny and so we thought 'hooray!' just the day for our outing to Pluscarden Abbey. My joy was short-lived as by ten o'clock the dark clouds appeared and the weather slowly but surely deteriorated.

Off we set to arrive in good time only to find that the drizzle was even more determined to rain on our parade. Undeterred by the weather almost 40 beekeepers and guests appeared and it was the beginning of what turned out to be an excellent afternoon



Rob MacKenzie's demonstration



Happy Beekeepers!

It had become clear that we had a lot of new folks in our midst and so the plan was that they should be split into three groups with a view to them, at least, being able to see into a hive or two. The groups were headed by Dr. Stephen Palmer, Tony Harris and Andrew Tassell with two groups going to the new apiary, St. Scholastica's, to where some of the hives have been moved and the other group going into the hives at the original site.

Those bees, at the old site, proved to be quite difficult and so the hives were closed quite quickly thus proving that it isn't always a good idea to go into hives when the weather is inclement. After the beekeeping business was finished with we all retired to the tea-room at the Abbey and a fine repast was had by all. The raffle, which was most ably organized by Angie MacKenzie was drawn and in all there were eleven prizes. Father Benedict joined us during the afternoon and also the Abbey cat – a jolly black and white person with a very short tail.

It was excellent that we had so many new beekeepers with us and Tony did a fine trade in selling various new or second hand beekeeping goodies. Moray Beekeepers' Association is in fine fettle and thrilled that all the work our Association has put into promoting beekeeping and awareness in our area is growing so well. So you see, every cloud does have a silver lining, especially on this day at our favourite site, Pluscarden Abbey, where the wonderful peace and tranquillity (except for a few rather grumpy bees!) was there for the taking. Thank you to everyone who helped make the afternoon a huge success!

**OUR NEXT MEETING IS ON SUNDAY 17TH JULY AT GRAHAM & VIV HILL'S APIARY, BIRNIE, 2.30 PM
START WHEN WEATHER PERMITTING WE WILL BE CARRYING OUT SUMMER INSPECTIONS**

Full details of all Monthly Meetings, Open Apiary Sessions and Courses are at

www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk

INTRODUCING A QUEEN TO A COLONY by Tony Harris

As with most things beekeeping there are various methods described for introducing queens, from simply running a new queen into the hive, to caging her for a few days inside the hive, half drowning the queen in water or even weirder still, dunking the queen in royal jelly and then placing her in the hive. But when the time comes for you to introduce a queen, how are **you** going to do it, and how should you prepare the hive to ensure the bees accept her?

We can do no better than to quote from Ted Hooper's, 'Guide to Bees and Honey' in listing the general conditions for introducing queens. 'When introducing a new queen to a colony it must be done in such a way that both the colony and the queen are in the right condition to accept each other. The colony must be queenless, should not be in an excited condition from any cause, and should come into contact with the new queen fairly slowly. The queen should be in an undisturbed condition, should be hungry enough to solicit food from any worker who comes into contact with her, and if possible, her odour, which will be that of a stranger, should be masked or her direct contact with the bees delayed until her scent has changed to something nearer their own.'



Queen in travelling cage with attendants



Home made cages



Cage is fixed onto the top of a brood frame



Good result - Queen laying well!

The time of year is also important as queen introduction is usually easier during late August and September when the main flow is over, and in April and May, only where there is no oilseed rape to producing foraging excitement. If you were to introduce queens into large colonies any time between, when swarming, the excitement of foraging and bad weather confinement can make the bees 'edgy', many queens will be lost.

So what I am going to describe is considered to be one of the safest ways to introduce a queen and that is by introducing the queen first to a nucleus and then introducing the whole nucleus to the full colony. This is particularly relevant if you have received an expensive bought queen through the post and you want to minimise any risk of getting her killed and this is what you do.

Make up a 3 frame nucleus, ideally of young house bees, from the colony to be requeened and place next to it but facing the other way, so it is ready to receive the new queen. If you want to make sure the nuc is hopelessly queenless, i.e. the bees are unable to raise a new queen, you should make up the nuc and seven days later go into it and remove any queen cells the bees have made. It is a good idea to feed sugar syrup, 2lb of sugar to 1 pint of water, as there will be few flying bees in the nuc.

When a queen arrives through the post she will be in a travelling cage along with half a dozen or so workers to look after her and a small amount of food in the form of candy or fondant. She will likely be in a poor condition physically and not in lay so a slow introduction to the nuc is called for. Take the travelling cage to the bathroom (with all doors, windows and plug holes closed) or to the car, again with doors and windows closed (and ventilation slots below windscreen covered up) and release the attendant workers. Being very careful, introduce the queen into a Butler cage, one end being plugged permanently and then cover the other end with newspaper and an elastic band. If she manages to fly off at this stage she will fly towards the bathroom or car window but won't be able to escape and you will easily be able to catch her. Be careful if handling a queen and only hold her by the wings or thorax not her abdomen but better still, try and coax her into the cage without touching her.

Attach the Butler cage near to the top of the frame of brood with a nail so that it hangs down over the brood, close the hive and top the feeder up with syrup. The mesh in the cage allows the bees to have contact with the queen, to feed her but they cannot harm her. The bees normally release her after 24 hours or so but if you want to be extra careful you can plug both ends of the cage and supervise her release yourself. Then leave the nuc alone for 2 weeks by which time the queen should be laying. You can then unite the nuc with the parent hive, after removing the old queen, via the newspaper method, or by simply placing the 3 frame nuc back in the hive in the same place the frames were removed from a couple of weeks before. Introduce the nuc immediately after the old queen is removed and it is also a good idea to spray both the colony and the nucleus with sugar water to stop the bees running about. A quick examination of the colony from which the queen has been removed is also advisable in case there are signs that the bees are starting to think of swarming and if any queen cells are present you must destroy them. Queen introduction using the nucleus method is a very safe method at any time although, as any beekeeper knows, there are no guarantees!!

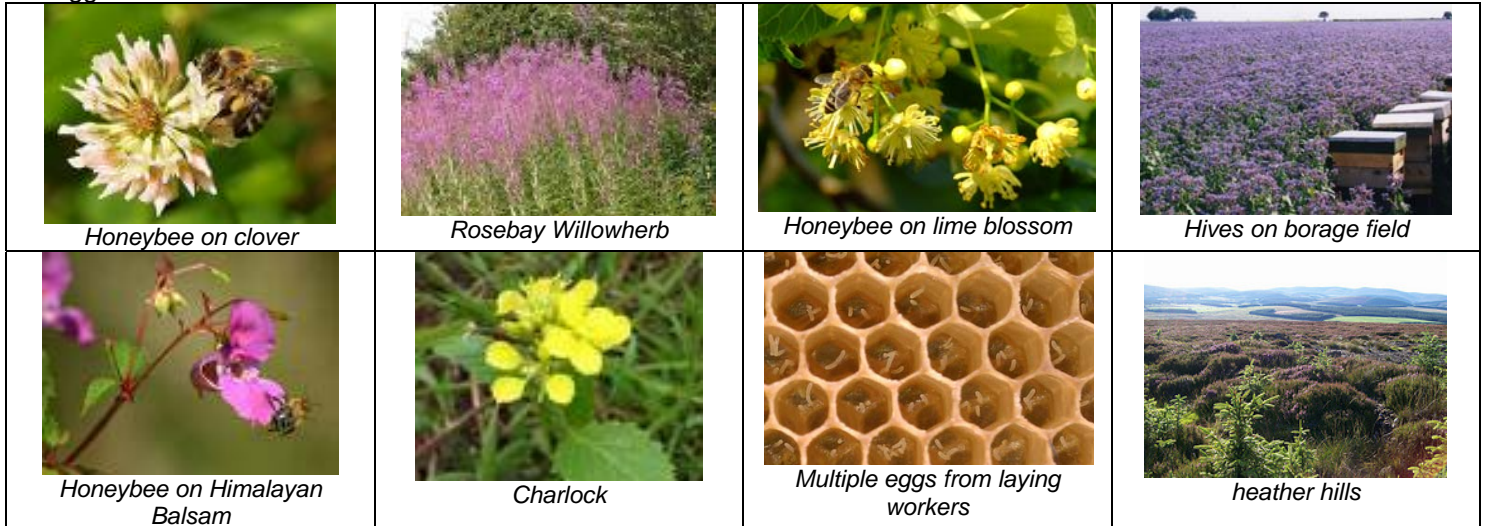
MAKING A NUCLEUS OF YOUNG HOUSE BEES

Nurse bees are the best for forming nuclei, first, because they haven't flown so won't abscond and second, because they accept a new Queen more readily. To make up a nucleus without finding the Queen take 3 combs, at least one containing plenty of unsealed brood and the others plenty of honey and pollen, out of the hive and shake all the bees from these combs back into the hive. Place these brood frames, now devoid of bees, into a fresh brood chamber, with the unsealed brood in the centre. A Queen excluder is placed over the original brood chamber and the 3 comb box is placed on top and this is covered with a crown board. In a very short time, about 30 minutes, young bees will have come through the excluder and will be covering the 3 combs, and these can be safely removed, knowing that the Queen will be below the excluder in the original box, and placed in a nuc or spare hive. Feed this nuc a thick sugar syrup as there will be no flying bees in it.

JULY IN THE APIARY

July is a month of bounty and given half decent weather, honeybees will be hard at work, foraging on white clover, bramble, lime, charlock, bell heather and rosebay willow herb. It is now that all your efforts in managing your colonies and preventing swarming will reap a harvest and the strongest colonies will fill one, two or maybe three supers with honey.

Your chosen swarm control technique should continue until mid July by which time the swarming season should be over and provided you have enough supers on the hive you can go on holiday for a week or two. If you previously left a sealed queen cell in a hive as part of your swarm control, you need to check that she has managed to mate and is laying well. If she has been slow to mate due to bad weather she could become a drone laying queen (DLQ), i.e. capable only of laying unfertilized eggs and she will need replacing. If you find more than one egg in each cell, the young queen has either just starting laying or there are laying workers (LWs) in the hive but how can you tell the difference? Well, with laying workers, you will find that the eggs have been laid on the cell walls as the worker's abdomen is too short to reach the bottom of the cell.



Laying workers will develop if the queen has died or been lost, on a mating flight for example, and the colony is 'hopelessly queenless', i.e. the bees have no means of raising a replacement queen on their own. It usually takes about 4 weeks for the workers' ovaries to develop until they start laying the unfertilized eggs that will only produce drones. Other indications are that a DLQ will keep a tidy, compact brood area and lay single eggs in cells while LW's will have a haphazard laying pattern while laying multiple eggs in the same cell. Both will have raised cappings over worker cells and many miniature drones running around.

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.

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 out and quickly fill it with honey before the queen has time to lay in it and we want the honey upstairs in the super, don't we? Whilst you should super early in spring it is wrong to over super towards the end of the season as you will find that the bees will half fill one and then half fill the second, whereas if you leave just the one it should be filled and capped nicely.

You should continue to monitor for varroa and should be thinking about which treatment you will be using when the honey flow is over. Fit and check your floor inserts. Count the number of mites and divide by the number of days you have had the insert installed and this will give you an idea of whether you need to treat. (if in doubt seek advice)

The first week in August is the time to take your bees to the heather, and if you prepare the hive right, and there is a couple of weeks of warm, sunny weather, you should earn a reward of at least a super of heather honey. Hives for the heather should be absolutely packed full with bees and you can supplement this by adding up to 2 frames of emerging brood from another disease free hive a couple of weeks before the move.

If your hives are in pairs, as long as there is a honey flow on you can move one to another part of the apiary, allowing the flying bees to safely enter the remaining hive going to the heather – this will give you a very large number of foraging bees.

Young queens, preferably of the current year's hatch, are also essential for heather going hives as they tend to continue laying longer, again meaning less space in the brood frame for the bees to store the precious honey – Remember, we want the honey in the supers!

Other tips include moving frames of eggs and brood to the outside of the brood frame and frames of honey to the centre. As the bees usually like to store honey in the outside frames, leaving the centre frames for the queen to lay in, they usually move this honey to a super, and this should be done a couple of weeks before and then a couple of days before the move.

The day before the move, remove these supers and place a super of drawn comb, or thin unwired foundation for cut comb on top. Secure your hives with ratchet straps or the like, and move to the heather at dawn. It is easy to block the hive entrance with a strip of foam rubber and it is always a good idea to add a travelling screen on top to allow greater ventilation during the move. Hives can be brought home from the heather in the 1st or 2nd week in September and you then have to get your hands on that beautiful heather honey! (Editor's note: see September's Newsletter for article on extracting honey)

QUEEN REARING - THE COOK METHOD

By Gerry Thompson

After last week's manoeuvres, the plan now was to rearrange the colony to make the bottom brood box, full of young bees, queenless and place the queen and the bees with her in the top box over a split board. For those who don't know a split board is basically another floor that separates the top storey of a double brood box hive and gives the upstairs bees their own exit. So before we swapped the position of the brood boxes over and introduced the split board we had to check the upper brood box for queen cells and destroy any found. The bees in this box had moved up to accompany the brood but had been separated from the queen by an excluder last week.



charged Queen cells



modified frame & wax cups



the grafting process



Success?

As you can see we found some and I, in my wisdom and seeing how keen the bees were to build queen cells, was heard to utter the immortal phrase, **"I think we're on to a good thing with these bees!"** Needless to say Tony was to quote this back at me on numerous occasions as the day proceeded.

A gap was left in the bottom, queenless box for the frame of grafted larvae to be inserted in the afternoon. After making sure the queen was in the top box we went our separate ways to return 3 hours later for the grafting, by which time the bees in the bottom box should have realised they were hopelessly queenless and eagerly accept our grafts (well that was the theory anyway!). So we returned and it was now time for the part of the process I was most worried about – the grafting. I had made some wax queen cups and waxed them on to a modified frame with two bars to hold them. And now it was time to take the plunge. I had been really keen to try the grafting but now wasn't so sure.

Given the weather was typically Scottish and it had in fact been hail-stoning about an hour before we had to resort to grafting in the front seat of Tony's car – far from ideal.

Vince Cook advises that it's much easier to graft from larvae in relatively freshly drawn comb but the best candidate from the combs of unsealed larvae we had was a fair bit darker than I would have liked.



mini-nucs laid out



the moment of truth!



6 out of 24 – 25%!



bonus Queen cells

My plan was to cut down the row of cells below the larvae I wanted to graft to allow easier access. But the old comb was harder to cut and didn't break or fold cleanly. Making the best of it I ploughed on. I'd like to say that grafting was easy and the larvae all lifted cleanly and slid off gently into their new cells. Well the ones I successfully lifted were very gently treated but I'm sorry to say there were a good few that I rolled or otherwise damaged and had to be discarded. After what felt like an age I had all the cells filled with the smallest larvae I could find and off the comb went back to the cell raising colony protected from the wind in a nuc box.

We came back the next day to find SUCCESS! Or so we thought!! We didn't brush the bees off to check the acceptance rate in detail but pretty much the whole of the top bar of grafts looked like they had been accepted and it was much the same on the bottom bar. We were very pleased!

Ten days later we carried out the last stage of the process – dividing the sealed queen cells up amongst mating nucs a day or two before they were due to hatch. We didn't get as many pictures this time as everything got a bit hectic whilst we were filling the nucs and all hands were needed.

First we got all the mini-nucs ready for filling with bees. Then it was into the hive to see how many of our larvae had finally been accepted and turned into sealed queen cells. At this point we got a bit of a disappointment as it turned out that although the bees seemed initially to have accepted most of the grafted larvae they had only taken six to the sealed queen cell stage. It was probably my dodgy first attempt at grafting but hopefully better results next time.

But there was a bonus in store for us when we went through the hive. The bees had decided to build a few queen cells of their own. So, not to let their efforts go to waste, we harvested the extra cells and gave one each to its own mini-nuc. And that was that. We spent a chaotic hour piling bees into mininucs and left them closed up in the shed. Tony went back to release them two days later and all seemed well. But a couple of days later two of the Kielers were empty of bees and their queens were dead in their cells. Fingers crossed we don't get any more casualties.

WASP TRAPS

Wasps start to be real nuisance at this time of year, robbing hives of valuable honey as well as chomping through bees as they return from foraging flights. They just love anything sweet, i.e. honey and sugar syrup, and if your hive is left unprotected, wasps can quickly outnumber and over-run your bees, destroying the colony. There are however, a few things you can do to help your bees.

1. Put a reduced entrance block in place so the hive entrance is easier for the bees to guard.
2. Placing a wasp trap next to your hives will catch hundreds of wasps and surprisingly few bees.
3. Take care not to spill any honey, wax comb or sugar syrup near your hives or in your apiary as this will attract every wasp in the neighbourhood. Once they have started visiting the apiary, they will stay around until the frosts kill them off but by this time your bees may have been killed off as well.

You can buy wasp traps from suppliers or you can save a few pounds and make one yourself from a clear 2 litre plastic bottle, as shown in the photographs below. – it will work just as well.

Cut about 5 holes in the bottle, about 1/3 of the way up and above that, about 2/3 of the way up, wrap a couple of bands of duck tape. Pour in the magic mix, then screw the top back on and sit on the ground beside the hive or just park it on the roof. The small holes were originally supposed to be the diameter of a thick straw and round, but two quick cuts with a Stanley knife blade and folded back to expose a small triangular hole is equally effective. If it is windy you can secure the bottle by trapping between a couple of boulders or attaching it somehow to the side of the hive.



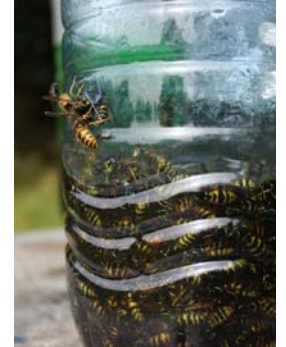
wasps will try and enter a hive



clear bottles worked best



commercial wasp trap



it definitely works!

The idea is that the odour of the mix attracts the wasps in quickly, and when they wish to leave they fly up to the light above the dark bands of duck tape. They eventually fall down into the thick mix and drown.

The mix? Something fruity (fruit juice, jam, actual fruit) plus a small pile of sugar, plus more water and a good glug of vinegar. Then a couple of drops of washing-up liquid to hasten the drowning and make escape unlikely.

If you are new to beekeeping or haven't experienced wasps robbing a beehive you will be shocked at the numbers involved. Last summer I caught hundreds of wasps in the bottle over just a few days!

OILSEED RAPE HONEY



Oilseed rape (OSR) honey is high in glucose and will therefore granulate very quickly so it needs special treatment if you don't want it to set like concrete in the jar. You can obtain a fine textured soft set honey from OSR and here is how you do it.

You must extract the honey before it granulates on the comb and then you must fine filter it before running it into a bucket for storage at 14C for quick granulation. In a matter of weeks it will be rock hard! To make it into a soft set honey you need to heat it gently so that it becomes 'mushy' but not completely liquid and I do this by placing it in a home made honey warming cabinet for a day or two. My cabinet is simply an old fridge with an electric socket for a 40 watt light bulb and if you are very clever you can fit a thermostat to prevent the honey from overheating. But I just check it after it has been in the cabinet overnight and if 'mushy' I take it into the kitchen, and mix it with an electric drill fitted with a paint stirrer until it takes on the consistency of clotted cream. Do this for about 20 minutes (maybe 6 x 3 minute stints) over a 24 hr period and make sure the drill is in reverse as this reduces air bubbles in the honey. If you haven't got a drill you can use a honey stirrer (available from suppliers) and hand mix it.

The next step is simple - you just run the honey into clean, sterilised jars and put the lids on. The honey will set nicely and can be spread on toast like butter - it will never go hard again!

Some beekeepers do not like OSR honey, and it certainly doesn't look like honey being off-white in colour when set. But taste trials have shown that it is one of the most popular with the general public for taste and I sell more of it than anything else.

BIRNIE APIARY UPDATE

After the disappointment of the winter losses, the apiary is looking much better and has built up to 4 colonies of bees, 5 nucs with Queens or Queen Cells and a quantity of mini nucs with QC's. A portacabin has been purchased (a bargain at £380 including delivery) and will enable us to hold the classroom part of the beekeeping courses at Birnie and will also be useful for meetings and demonstrations. MBA member, John Baillie has repaired the leaking shed roof and this will now be used solely for storing equipment. The plan is to go into winter with at least 6 strong colonies of bees, headed by young queens if possible, well fed and protected from the elements as best as possible. To prevent isolation starvation in the hives, fondant will be placed directly on the top bars over the cluster. and will be checked every 3 weeks or so. If the cluster moves, the fondant will be re-positioned directly over them.



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.** August's Newsletter will include further details and some useful tips on preparing honey for the show bench.

COMMITTEE VACANCIES

Due to a growing membership and busy programme of events we are looking to co-opt 3 or 4 members onto our volunteer team on the MBA Committee. It is an exciting time for beekeeping in Moray so if you would like to be involved in some exciting projects, and increase your beekeeping knowledge and enjoyment, please contact the Secretary Tony Harris who will fill you in on what is required. We meet every 2 months during the season and help out at Monthly Apiary Visits and Inspections. Experience is not necessary, just enthusiasm!

WELCOME TO RON CLARK, husband of MBA treasurer, Donna, has been co-opted onto the Committee!

PLUSCARDEN RAFFLE WINNERS



The raffle raised £54.50 towards Birnie apiary funds – Thank You!

ASSOCIATION HEATHER STANCE

If any member is interested in moving a hive(s) to a Heather Stance at Ballindalloch for the month of August please contact Tony Harris

GIFT AID

As MBA is now a registered Scottish charity we can claim Gift Aid refunds of 23% on all membership fees and donations from UK taxpayers and this can be backdated 4 years. A new membership form has been created to include the Gift Aid Declaration and this has been sent out to all members. It would greatly assist the Association finances if each member could sign the declaration and return to the Secretary or Treasurer at the address shown on the form. Thank you!

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

BEESUITS/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 £84.00

www.bbwear.co.uk/

A WARM WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

Oliver Mitchell, George Barton, 15 years,

The Association website is packed with lots of useful information on beekeeping and bees and has an interesting blog that you are encouraged to contribute to. 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: tonyharris316@btinternet.com or phone 07884 496246

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