

# The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter  
Hot off the 'press'

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**THIS MONTH'S NEWSLETTER IS SPONSORED BY COMMITTEE MEMBER, ANNE BLACK –THANK YOU!**

## EXAM SUCCESSES FOR LOCAL BEEKEEPERS



*Congratulation to the successful candidates in 2011*

A packed Moray Beekeepers Association (MBA) A.G.M. at the end of January toasted the success of several members in the Scottish Beekeepers Association syllabus during 2011. John Baillie, Donna Clark, Wendy Jamieson, Pam Nairn, Gerry Thompson & Andy Watson were presented with their Basic Beemaster certificates (all passed with distinction) and Barbara Westie, well on her way to the Advanced Certificate was successful in Module 6 'Honey Bee Behaviour'. Tony Harris passed the Aparian Certificate and having previously passed all 7 modules in the syllabus was awarded the Scottish Expert Beemaster Certificate, also with distinction.

MBA Treasurer Donna Clark (front left), said, *'I really enjoyed the course and the assessment and would recommend it to everybody. It has given me increased confidence and I have learnt lots.'*

In presenting the certificates, MBA Chairman Andrew Tassell encouraged members to take the Basic Beemaster Assessment. He said, *'Not only do these exams improve your beekeeping skills and knowledge, they increase your enjoyment of the bees and the certificate is useful if seeking to set up an out apiary on someone else's land'.*

In addition to Introduction to Beekeeping courses and Honeybee Taster Sessions, MBA will again be running a course from April to May to prepare members for the Basic Beemasters' Assessment later in the summer.

**OUR NEXT MEETING IS A WORKING PARTY AT BIRNIE APIARY ON SUNDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 12 NOON START. FRAMES AND FOUNDATION WILL BE ON SALE IN THE PORTACABIN AT DISCOUNTED PRICES AND YOU CAN PAY YOUR 2012 SUBSCRIPTION, SO BRING CASH OR CHEQUE BOOK WITH YOU. SOUP AND A SWEET TO FINISH!**

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

# FIRST INSPECTIONS

If you have bees and they have been fortunate to come through 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, 1kg of sugar to 1 pint 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.



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 again at what to do when you do find Queen cells.

# CARRYING OUT A HIVE AUTOPSY

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, top insulation and shelter 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. It has been a really mild winter for a change and there doesn't appear to have been the same high losses as those experienced in recent winters. But colonies have died out, some belonging to very experienced beekeepers, and the first thing to do when it happens is to seal up the entrance to prevent other bees entering the hive and maybe spreading disease to other hives in the vicinity. If you can it is also advisable to take a sample of the dead bees for examination under the microscope and MBA Secretary, Tony Harris will do that for you for a small charge.

Now, 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'.



*cluster of dead bees*



*heads in cells - starvation?*



*wax moth damaged brood comb*



*drone laying queen?*



*sign of dysentery or nosema*



*bee with K wing - acarine?*



*deformed wing virus - varroa?*



*pepper-pot brood pattern*

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, although Nosema can only be confirmed by microscopic examination.

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, again needing confirmation under the microscope.

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.

Varroa remains the most serious threat to your bees. One member treated their bees with apistan strips in September and after trickling oxalic acid at the end of December was surprised to see hundreds, if not thousands of dead varroa dropping onto the floor insert. So you must be vigilant and regularly monitor your hives for varroa. There are pyrethroid resistant mites in Scotland so an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach is recommended (more on that next month)

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 eliminated or reduced.

# EFB - GOOD APIARY HYGIENE

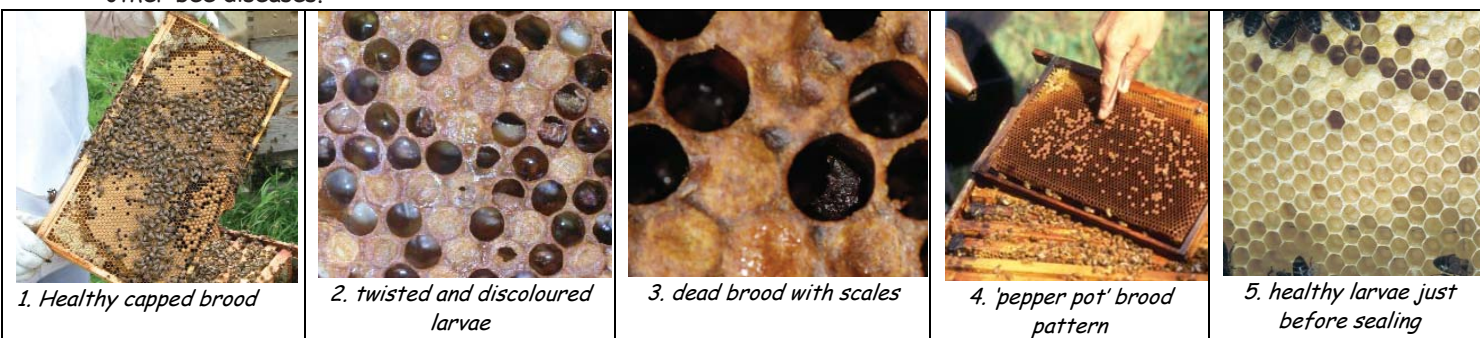
Local Bee Inspector Kirsty Sutherland gave an interesting talk entitled, 'My Life as a Bee Inspector' to our February meeting and it was well appreciated by the 34 members who attended. Kirsty spoke about her work in tackling foul brood disease and gave some useful advice. The following '10 Rules for Foul Brood Control' are worth highlighting and adhering to.

1. Make sure you are familiar with the signs and causes of foul brood and other brood disorders.
2. Inspect your colonies at the very least every spring and autumn, **specifically** to check for brood disease. If you are unsure, seek expert advice.
3. Never transfer combs between colonies, or divide colonies, without first checking for signs of brood disease.
4. Never bring colonies, combs or equipment into the apiary unless you are sure that they come from a disease-free source.
5. Never buy old combs. Always sterilise second-hand hives by thoroughly scorching them with a blow lamp before use.
6. Control robbing in the apiary. Never leave combs or honey exposed to robbing bees. Never feed honey from another source.
7. If a colony of bees dies out at any time, seal the hive to prevent the remaining stores being robbed out, pending examination of the brood combs for signs of disease.
8. If any colony is not thriving, and the reason is not already known, examine the brood for signs of disease.
9. Be suspicious of stray swarms. Hive them on foundation rather than drawn comb, keep them "isolated" from the rest of the apiary as the colony expands and inspect them for disease once they have become established.
10. Regularly and systematically replace old brood combs in the apiary by melting them down and replacing them with frames fitted with foundation.

EFB is caused by bacteria that multiply in the mid-gut of an infected larva, competing with the larva for its food so that those that succumb actually die of starvation.

## SIGNS OF EFB

- EFB affects mainly unsealed brood, killing larvae before they are sealed in their cells.
- An easy way to remember is that EFB = *E* (early infection before sealing of the cell).
- The EFB infected larva moves inside its cell instead of remaining in the normal coiled position characteristic of a healthy larva of the same age.
- When it dies it lies in an unnatural attitude twisted spirally around the walls, across the mouth of the cell or stretched out lengthways from the mouth to the base.
- The dead larva often collapses as though it had been melted, turning yellowish-brown and eventually drying up to form a loosely attached brown scale. (fig 3 below)
- The gut of an infected larva may be visible through its translucent body wall. It has a creamy white colour caused by the mass of bacteria living within it. An unpleasant smell (like rotting fish) may be present
- A minority of infected larvae may die after the cell is sealed. In such cases, there may be sunken perforated cappings resembling AFB infection. However, the cell contents although brown and sticky cannot be drawn into a 'rope' as with AFB.
- Where larval remains dry to form scales, these are variable in colour, loose within the cell and somewhat "rubbery", unlike the hard black firmly attached scales of AFB.
- Because the bees move the dead larvae, then a 'pepper pot' brood pattern must always be a possible sign of EFB as well as other bee diseases.



So please be vigilant and make sure you check your brood frames for signs of EFB. Bees should be gently shaken from the frames to allow full inspection, as abnormalities are then easily spotted.

Carefully examine the whole frame by holding it to the light and checking both sealed and unsealed brood for abnormalities such as unusual brood patterns, discoloured larvae, perforated cappings, or loose EFB scales in the cell (completely dried out larvae).

Open any cells with abnormal looking cappings and check the consistency of any dead remains by probing with a matchstick (ropy - AFB, not ropy - EFB). Dispose of the matchstick into the lit smoker, do not discard it as it will be infected.

If EFB/AFB is suspected then you must immediately contact your local Bee Inspector who is Kirsty Sutherland, Inverurie, Tel 01467626247, (this number is also in your membership card) or e mail: [kirsteen.sutherland@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:kirsteen.sutherland@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

For more information on EFB and other foul brood diseases you can follow the links below.

Foulbrood Diseases (CSL) <<http://www.edinburghbeekeepers.org.uk/downloads/foulbrood.pdf>>

EFB Recognition and Management <<http://www.edinburghbeekeepers.org.uk/diseases/EFB.pdf>>

Beekeepers are urged to register on Beebase, the national bee database. This will give them access to up-to-date information on control of AFB/EFB and bee related issues. Click here <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/public/register.cfm>

## MBA 'ADOPT A NUCLEUS' Programme 2012



Aimed at members who do not have bees, have signed up for the Basic Beemaster course and Assessment or have attended one of our 'Introduction to Beekeeping' courses.

Pay £40 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 £40.

Advice will be given on how 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 (depending on availability).

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

## MAKE UP A BAIT HIVE TO CATCH A SWARM

One of the questions at the Beekeepers Question Time after the AGM in January was, 'where do I get my bees from? And Tom Balch sitting on the panel advised setting up a bait hive to get a free swarm. Here's how!

A bait hive can be almost anything – a nuc box, a spare hive, a roughly made up box or even a skep or wicker type basket. You will increase your chances of attracting a swarm if you fill it with frames of wax foundation or even better, frames of drawn comb, and, you place the hive off the ground and in the vicinity of a feral colony of bees (about 100 metres away).



*bait hive up a tree*



*A swarm moving in!*



*basket bait hive entices swarm*



*swarm lure*

In the days prior to swarming, scout bees will be busy searching for a new nest site. Ideally they are looking for a cavity of between 20 and 80 litres, with a relatively small entrance of less than 70cm square at the bottom of the cavity. They prefer the cavity and the entrance to be a few metres above the ground and if the cavity has comb in it, built by a previous colony it is particularly attractive to the bees as they can use it immediately to store nectar and pollen.

So make your bait box as attractive to the bees as you can and you may be rewarded with a new colony of bees!

A final tip is to use 'Swarm Lure', a mixture of pheromones, which can be bought from suppliers and pinned inside the hive or box. It is said to attract swarms into the hive and so maybe increase your chances further.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING UPDATE

39 members and 1 guest attended the A.G.M. at Elgin Library and here is a short resume of decisions made.

- New membership categories and subscriptions were introduced as follows: Full – Adult, £12. Full Concession – over 65 years, £7. Youth – 12 to 16 years, £7. Junior – 6 to 12 years, free. Conservation member for non beekeepers, £10
- A joining fee of £5 was introduced for new members or for members re-joining after a year or more away
- A late payment surcharge of £3 was brought in for Full and Full Concession members if subs are not paid by 1<sup>st</sup> June, £2 for Youth members
- MBA will be buying frames, foundation and jars in bulk for onward sale to members at discounted prices in 2012
- A new Committee was elected, details as follows: Chairman: Andrew Tassell, Keith, tel. 01466 771243, Secretary: Tony Harris, Fochabers, tel. 01343 821282, Treasurer: Donna Clark, Lhanbryde, tel. 01343 843072, Committee members – Librarian: Anne Black, Lossiemouth, tel. 01343 808990, Deputy Apiary Manager: Ron Clark, Lhanbryde, tel. 01343 843072, Webmaster: Gerry Thompson, Knockando, tel. 01340 810229, Equipment Officer: Andy Watson, Huntley, tel. 01466 760277 and Don Vincent, Forres. 01309 675618, These people are your representatives so please feel free to make contact with the Committee member in your area. They are not all beekeeping experts but will be able to keep you up to date with what's going on in Moray Beekeepers Association.

## THE BASIC BEEMASTER COURSE 2012 IS NOW FULL!

### SUMMER PROGRAMME 2012

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> March        | Working Party, Frame and Foundation sale, Birnie Apiary, 12 noon start |
| Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> April        | Queen Marking/Clipping, Birnie Apiary, 2.30pm                          |
| <b>Saturday</b> 19 <sup>th</sup> May | Spring Inspection, swarm control, Pluscarden Abbey, 2.30pm             |
| Sunday 17 <sup>th</sup> June         | Summer Inspections & Swarm Control, Birnie Apiary, 2.30pm              |
| Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> July         | Queen Rearing, Tom Balch's Apiary, Forres, 2.30pm                      |
| Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> August       | Trip to the Heather & Meal, Delnashaugh Hotel, Ballindalloch           |
| Sunday 30 <sup>th</sup> September    | Talk & Demonstration, 'Extracting Honey' Birnie Apiary, 2.30pm         |

### FOUNDATION, FRAMES AND JARS FOR SALE

The Association was in a position to bulk buy frames and foundation over the winter and this will be on sale to **paid up members** at the Working Party meeting at Birnie Apiary on 18<sup>th</sup> March and all subsequent meetings.

- B.S. deep wired foundation - £7 per pack of 10
- B.S. shallow wired foundation - £4 per pack of 10
- B.S. shallow unwired foundation - £4.30 per pack of 10
- B.S. shallow premium foundation for cut comb - £4 per pack of 10

DN4 frames (for brood boxes) unassembled, £10 per pack of 10, assembled £12  
SN4 frames (for supers) unassembled, £10 per pack of 10, assembled £12

These prices are cheaper than Thornes and you don't pay any postage charges so grab yourself a bargain. When it's gone, it's gone, as they say! A selection of **honey jars** will be available later in the season.

If all goes to plan there will also be a selection of **bee friendly plants** on sale to entice bees and butterflies into your garden.

Our thanks are due to MBA Equipment Officer, Andy Watson for his valiant efforts in sourcing this equipment. If you are interested in purchasing Fondabee fondant or Apisuc inverted syrup please contact Andy on tel. 01466 760277 or see him at our apiary meetings.

### ASSOCIATION HONEY EXTRACTORS



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 and we have 2 of both



You can borrow them for free by contacting either

Andrew Tassell (Keith area) Tel 01466 771243

Or

Tony Harris (Fochabers area) Tel 01343 821282

### SCOTTISH BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION (SBA)

Moray Beekeepers Association is affiliated to the SBA and you are encouraged to join. Membership of £30 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](http://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/](http://www.bbwear.co.uk/)

#### A WARM WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

Maria Dawson, Helen Mustard, Alastair Hughes, Lynn McLeish & Douglas McLeish

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](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) or phone 07884 496246

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO PAY YOUR SUBS FOR 2012, NOW £12 ADULT, £7 OVER 65YRS AND 12-16YRS!**