

# The Auricle

## Moray Beekeepers' Association Newsletter

Issue No: 3/12  
May 2012

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Scottish Charity Number SCO42185

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## Beekeeping Auction

The Aberdeen and District Beekeepers' Association and the Moray Beekeepers' Associations' joint **auction of bee stocks and beekeeping equipment** will take place at Bucharn Farm, Huntly, AB54 4PU\*, on **Saturday 5 May**. This will be a great opportunity for members of both associations to buy and sell surplus equipment, nucs and colonies, as well as a chance to meet up with fellow north east beekeepers.

- Registration of Goods intake is from 10.00am until 12.30pm.
- Given prior notice, live bee stocks will be accommodated on site from 8.30am.
- The sale starts at 2.30pm
- Goods purchased **must** be paid on the day of the sale by cash or cheque only (no credit card facility available). It is anticipated that administering and paying out sales income will be done subsequent to the sale day
- To cover incidental costs, a 5% commission will be charged to both the seller and purchaser of goods
- We hope to have mobile catering on site from 10.30am to around 4.30pm

If you are planning to enter items into the sale, please notify Jock McGregor, 01224 790468

Volunteers are needed to take on registration, stewarding and other duties on the day so if you can help, again contact Jock on the above number.

*\* From the A96 roundabout, 1.8 miles south toward Rhynie. NB: sat-nav systems will usually take drivers to the cottages 200yds south of the steading we are using*

### **MAY MEETING & DEMONSTRATION**

**OUR NEXT MEETING IS AT PLUSCARDEN ABBEY ON SATURDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2.30PM START.**

**WEATHER PERMITTING WE WILL BE CARRYING OUT SPRING INSPECTIONS INCLUDING SWARM CONTROL.**

**FRAMES AND FOUNDATION WILL BE ON SALE AT DISCOUNTED PRICES AND YOU CAN PAY YOUR 2012 SUBSCRIPTION, SO BRING CASH OR CHEQUE BOOK WITH YOU.**

**A RAFFLE WILL TAKE PLACE AND REFRESHMENTS WILL BE AVAILABLE AFTERWARDS!**

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

[www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk](http://www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk)

# MAY IN THE APIARY

by the Apiarist

May is the month when your bees start thinking about swarming but with the cold and wet weather we have had lately, you are more than likely going to have to feed your bees to keep them alive rather than taking swarm control precautions. It is important that you check your hives for stores! If you can't go into the hive because of the cold, heft it by lifting it a few inches off the floor at the back and on each side. This will give you an idea of its weight and if it feels light you can place 50:50 syrup in a contact feeder over the crown board hole, or fondant or a bag of sugar that has been soaked in a bucket of water for 30 seconds will do.



CONTACT FEEDER

I moved 8 of my hives right into the middle of an oilseed rape (OSR) field on 8<sup>th</sup> April and the temperature hasn't risen over 12C since. The fields are in full flower but the bees are confined in the hives. Unless there is a break in the weather soon I am afraid there will not be much honey from the OSR this spring but we live in hope.



HONEYBEE ON HAWTHORNE

In May the bees will be foraging on oilseed rape, sycamore, horse chestnut, bluebell, top fruit (i.e. apple, pear, plum, cherry, hawthorn), laurel dandelion and raspberry and the brood nest should be expanding quickly. Make sure the queen has room to lay!

Remember, congestion is a major cause of swarming! If necessary remove outside frames containing excess food or pollen and store them so you can feed back to the bees in the autumn. Also, additional supers may be required this month - use drawn comb if you have it, if not foundation will do.

Regular inspections of the brood chamber should be started this month as part of your swarm control. (see article on next page).

My colonies are in double brood chambers and when queen cells are found I adopt my swarm control technique immediately! I artificially swarm the colony but do so under the one roof, using a modified Snelgrove board. This separates the queen and flying bees from the brood and nurse bees, raises a new queen but does not affect the honey harvest. The colony can be re-united later or split if increase is wanted. Click [here](#) for the method in full and scroll down to the month of May.

## TACKLING VARROA

Continue to monitor floor inserts for varroa! And, place a shallow frame of drawn comb or foundation in the brood



CUTTING OUT DRONE BROOD

chamber as part of your battle against varroa. The bees will build drone brood beneath it and as this is more attractive to the mites, if you cut it out and discard when sealed you will be removing good numbers of varroa as well. Replace the frame and repeat until the end of July.

If your bees are near to OSR you will have to remove and extract supers as soon as they are full as OSR honey crystallises very quickly on the comb. Don't forget that you can borrow an extractor from the Association.

Finally, leave a bait hive out! (details on this in the March issue of Auricle)

## BEGINNERS COURSES 2012

New members looking to start keeping bees are encouraged to attend one of our 'Introduction to Beekeeping' courses, held at our training apiary at Birnie. This full day course includes a theory session in the classroom in the morning and in the afternoon we go into the hives. You will learn all you need to know to get started and take home a Honeybee Conservation Pack and a handout of material used on the course

Full protective clothing, lunch, tea and coffee are provided and it is well worth the £30 course fee.

**Dates: Saturdays 26<sup>th</sup> May, 30<sup>th</sup> June and 11<sup>th</sup> August.**

Contact Tony Harris or any Committee member to book your place. Numbers are limited and will be allocated on a 'first come first served' basis.

Please note that new members will not be considered for our 'Adopt a Nuc' programme unless they have been on a course.

## MBA 'ADOPT A NUCLEUS' Programme 2012

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

Pay £40 to 'Adopt a Nucleus' of bees in June/July.

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!



# SWARMING

Swarming is the honeybees' natural process of ensuring the survival of the species but there are certain factors that bring the swarming process on quicker than normal and if you have an understanding of this you can stay one step ahead of your bees.

The main reason a colony swarms is due to a reduction in the amount of 'queen substance' (Q.S.) being passed around the hive. This can be due to an aging queen who will be producing less Q.S. or due to overcrowding in the hive. Q.S. is a pheromone produced by the queen and it is passed around the hive to each worker by reciprocal feeding, also known as trophallaxis. Q.S. prevents the development of the workers' ovaries and inhibits the building of queen cells in the colony. Any congestion (overcrowding) in the hive would interrupt this process of food transfer and thus act as a barrier in the distribution of Q.S.



FOOD SHARING OR TROPHALLAXIS

A minimum threshold amount of Q.S. is required by each worker bee to prevent the building of queen cells. When the supply of Q.S. is below the threshold required for colony cohesion, the queen's egg laying rate will rapidly decrease because of reduced feeding of the queen by the workers. Those eggs that have been laid in the queen cups, which are part of every normal colony, will not be removed but will be allowed to hatch out into larvae. Queen cells will result and the colony will be on its way to swarming.

The usual behaviour of the bees changes in the run up to swarming. Foraging decreases and redundant foragers become scouts and start to look for a new nest. As the first queen cell is sealed the bees gorge on honey ready for departure.

Emergence of the swarm is preceded by the 'whir' or 'buzz' dance where the bees run backwards and forwards across the combs in horizontal lines buzzing with half open wings every half to three seconds. As the excitement builds the bees will stream from the hive in their thousands and the air will be thick with flying bees before they settle nearby and form the recognisable swarm cluster.



A QUEEN OR PLAY CUP

## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT/CONTROL SWARMING

The very first thing to be aware of is that a strong colony, on 7 or 8 Brood combs should have at least 2 supers on by mid May, the first of drawn comb if available, the second, which can be placed either above or below the first, of foundation. Most books will tell us to add a super when the bees are covering about three quarters of the brood combs and then add another super when they are occupying the same sort of space in the first super. But when there is a heavy nectar flow on, such as with OSR, the bees will need much more space than you think as the nectar has to be 'hung' in empty cells in the comb, for the water to evaporate off, and a restriction in this space is a factor that can bring on swarming. So the answer in keeping ahead of your bees on the OSR is to check the brood chamber before the flow starts and if necessary remove frames of old granulated stores and replace with empty brood combs or foundation, and super early to provide much more space than the bees can actually occupy.

If you don't have any drawn comb you can add supers of foundation from the start but bear in mind that the bees will only draw it out if there is a honey flow on - if there isn't you will have to feed sugar syrup. Also, use fresh foundation from a sealed pack. If it has been fitted to frames from last season you can warm it with a hair dryer or place it in a greenhouse or even the car to raise its aroma and make it more acceptable to the bees.

The two management techniques to control swarming are firstly, clipping the queen's wings early in the season and secondly, rigorously timed inspections to ensure the beekeeper does not miss queen cells, once built up.



SEALED QUEEN CELLS

If you have a clipped queen and your bees are not making queen cells you can safely

carry out inspections every 10 days. If your queen is not clipped then you should carry out 7-day inspections. The reasoning is that a queen cell is sealed 8 days after the egg is laid and an unclipped queen will usually emerge with a swarm on day 8. A clipped queen however will usually emerge with a swarm when the first virgin is about to emerge and that will be on about day 16. The clipped queen, being unable to fly, will usually be lost on the ground and the swarm will return to the hive, awaiting the emergence of the first virgin queen when they are likely to leave with her. This gives the beekeeper an extra week to take action and although the queen is lost, the bees are not and it is they that gather the honey.



LARVA INSIDE AN UNSEALED QUEEN CELL

Despite your best efforts a time will come when you will find queen cells in your hive and some method of swarm control must then be used or the honey yield will be dramatically reduced. Don't confuse what are called 'queen cups' with queen cells. The bees build queen cups all the time but unless you see one of these actually with a larva in it you can ignore it as far as swarm control is concerned. It is best to have a plan now! In simplest terms you will need a nucleus box or a spare hive for each colony of bees you own. The idea is to separate the queen, along with some brood, bees and stores, from the queen cells, brood and remaining bees. If all goes well with your chosen swarm control technique you will have doubled your number of colonies or if you don't want to make increase you can unite the two colonies after killing the oldest queen.

Some books tell us that if we find charged queen cells, i.e. with larva inside, we can destroy them and this will give us 7 days grace to sort out some spare equipment for our chosen swarm control technique, as it takes 8 days for a QC to be sealed and thus no swarm will emerge for another 8 days, right? No. Actually it is very wrong! If the bees are set on swarming they can take a 3 day old larva and feed it royal jelly so it becomes a queen. This means that a queen and swarm may issue from your hive as early as 2 days after your inspection. This is because the egg hatches after 3 days, and if the bees then select say a 3 day old larva, it will be sealed 2 days later on day 8, and the swarm will be gone before you know it.

SWARMING continued.

If your bees do swarm and you know what hive they came from you must go into the hive to check for QCs. Remove with your hive tool anything that looks remotely like a QC leaving just one unsealed QC that you know has a larva inside. Apart from this frame, shake the bees off all the other frames so you won't miss a QC. Mark the frame the QC is on with a drawing pin after brushing the bees from it to make sure no other QCs are on it.



A NUCLEUS BOX

Seven days later you must go back into the hive and repeat the process, leaving just the now sealed QC (frame marked with the drawing pin) and removing all the others (you can get away with leaving for 7 days in this instance because a swarm has left and no queen is present). Then, leave alone for 3 weeks by which time the Queen should have mated and commenced laying. If you have several hives and you don't know which hive the swarm came out of there is a way of finding out. Put some icing sugar into a honey jar and run the jar along the clustered swarm so you trap about 30 bees in it. Close the lid and shake lightly to disorientate the bees and coat them with the icing sugar. If you then let the bees fly from the jar they will fly back to their original home and you should be able to see 'ghostly' looking bees entering a hive and this will be the one that has swarmed.



And finally, it isn't the end of your colony if you do lose a swarm - it happens to all beekeepers now and again! A third of the bees in a hive are foragers and it is a half of these that fly off with the queen when they swarm. This means that one sixth of the bees will be gone and as long as you don't then lose cast after cast, the colony should be just fine.

## SWARM COLLECTING KIT

Last month we looked at setting up a bait hive to catch a swarm but another way of getting hold of some bees this year is to collect a swarm of bees yourself! You will obviously need a hive ready for the bees to move into but you will also need some extra equipment and the kit shown below includes everything (well almost) you will need.



I keep all of this kit, along with a nuc box, in the back of my car from May to August so that if I get a call about a swarm I am ready to go straight to it without any delay. Okay, we all know that there are not as many swarms about as there used to be, mainly due to the demise of feral colonies of bees, but there still are some feral colonies surviving, and, you can guarantee that swarms will issue from many a 'managed' apiary without the 'beekeeper' even knowing about it. And in that situation, unless the beekeeper is trying to catch the swarm himself, it is fair game to the ardent beekeeper!

So, you arrive at the swarm and it should be hanging in cluster on a branch, or it could be on a fence post, gate, wall or just about anywhere. The key is not to panic and to proceed slowly and methodically. Put your veil on and place a sheet, sacking or the like on the ground below the swarm. In the easiest scenario you simply take the cardboard box or skep, place it underneath the swarm and raise it upwards to enclose as much of the swarm as possible. Give the branch a quick sharp knock and the bees will fall off into the box. Place a wooden board or old crown board over the top, turn the box upside down and place it on the floor on the sheet with one corner raised to allow bees to enter. If the Queen is in the box you will see the bees at the entrance with their 'bums' in the air, fanning their wings and calling the other bees to join the Queen inside the box. If you missed the Queen somehow, the bees will very quickly leave the box and will join her wherever she has settled. You then have to start again.

It can take a while for all the bees to join the Queen so once you are satisfied that most of them have, it is a simple task to lower the raised corner of the box, and wrap it up with the sheet, before carrying it to the car and to your apiary. A word of warning here! A large swarm can quickly overheat, and die if there is no ventilation in the box or skep so I always use a ventilated travelling screen as a base, and remove the sheet once in the car.



Once back at your apiary you need to shake the bees into a nuc or spare hive in which you have placed frames of wax foundation and once they have moved into the brood chamber, place the crown board on and feed with sugar syrup. You will be surprised at how quickly a swarm will draw the foundation out and if the weather is fine, the bees will be bringing in pollen the next day.

It is also a good idea to treat the swarm for varroa as the mites will be on the adult bees so insert a strip of apistan for a week or trickle with oxalic acid.

For more difficult swarms you may have to entice the bees up into the skep, or onto an old brood frame, or you may have to brush the bees out of awkward crevices or cut your way through a veritable jungle of brambles and bushes, but that is all part of the adventure!



# BAILEY COMB CHANGE

Last month's *Auricle* gave some advice on the shook swarm technique that replaces all brood frames in a single operation thus removing all potentially diseased equipment at a stroke and minimising disease transfer.

M.B.A. Chairman Andrew Tassell gives some tips here on how to carry out a Bailey Comb Change, similar to the shook swarm method but gentler and less stressful on the bees.

Those members who attended February's meeting and listened to Kirsty Sutherland, our local Bee Inspector, discussing bee diseases may have heard her talk about something called a 'Bailey Comb Change.' For those that don't know what this is, it is for when you wish to change a whole brood box of old combs for new ones with as little disturbance to the bees as possible. It is usually done to move the bees onto new combs if they have been suffering from nosema, though Kirsty said that she does it regularly to prevent a build up of disease.



USE 2 BROOD BOXES

Here's one way of doing it. Prepare a clean brood box filled with frames of foundation. Place this over the existing brood box of the colony that you are carrying out the comb change on. Feed the colony with syrup made at 2lb white sugar to 1 pint of water. (If there is a strong nectar flow on, such as rape, this can be omitted.)

When the bees have drawn some comb out, find the queen and place her on this comb. Place a queen excluder between the two brood boxes, thus trapping the queen in the upper box. Remember to keep feeding the bees so they keep on building comb.

After three weeks remove the lower brood box as all the brood will have hatched. The old comb can then be destroyed or rendered to recover the beeswax.

This procedure should be carried out in the spring, between April and June. It is important that your foundation is 'fresh'; if it is old, it can be freshened up by gently warming it with a hair dryer. Combs at either end of the brood box are often not drawn out properly, to remedy this either turn the frames around or place the frame further into the box.

# MARKING & CLIPPING QUEENS

Queens are usually marked early in the season when the colony is small and easy to handle, the main reason being the obvious one – to make it easier to find her.



WHERE'S THE QUEEN?

This is important because practically all methods of swarm control require the beekeeper to find the queen and a well marked queen makes the task so much easier. Also if a colony becomes bad tempered and the queen has to be changed it can be done quickly and efficiently if she is marked.

Beekeepers clip the queens' wings as an aid in swarm control as it allows more time between inspections (see page 3)



PRESS IN CAGE

Ian Craig now gives some good advice on marking and clipping queens.

'I do not mark and clip queens during the summer in which they were born because there is a danger that the bees will detect your odour or that of the paint and supersede your new queen. Whereas if the marking is done in April, before the drones are flying and fertile, the bees know that she cannot be replaced and there is little likelihood that she will be killed. As a further safeguard, I never handle a queen. When found, I use a 'press-on' type queen cage to first clip and then mark her. Only about a quarter of one pair of wings need be clipped.



MARKING THE QUEEN

When marking, ensure that you allow the paint to reach the hard surface of the queen's thorax. If you only paint the thorax hairs, the paint will very soon wear off. I keep queens for no more than two full seasons, therefore I only use yellow or white marking paint, which are more easily seen in a populous colony.



A MARKED QUEEN

Once marked, I ease the pressure of the cage on the queen and keep her in the cage until the paint has dried. When looking for a queen, concentrate solely on that task. When found, clipped and marked, she should remain in the cage until you have carried out other tasks, so that you know her whereabouts'.

Other beekeepers simply pick the queen up, hold her between thumb and fingers and clip the wing.



CLIPPING A QUEEN

The correct type of marker, which can be purchased from equipment suppliers, should be used, as use of some marking material, eg. Amyl acetate can prove fatal. Also, when releasing the queen from the cage always place her onto a frame containing brood where the bees would expect to find her.

There is an internationally recognised colour code for marking queens as shown below.

COLOUR	YEAR
White	1 or 6
Yellow	2 or 7
Red	3 or 8
Green	4 or 9
Blue	5 or 0

## Auction of Bee Stocks and Beekeeping Equipment

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> May at  
10am  
Bucharn Farm, Huntly

## SUMMER PROGRAMME 2012

Saturday 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, 12 noon Delnashaugh Hotel, Ballindalloch
Sunday 30 <sup>th</sup> September,	Talk & Demonstration, 'Extracting Honey' Birnie Apiary, 2.30pm

## The Scottish Beekeepers Association celebrates its centenary in 2012.

The main celebration will take place on **15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> September 2012** at the **Stirling Management Centre**, University of Stirling. Over the two days, there will be a series of lectures by Prof Robert Paxton, Prof Keith Delaplane, Prof Robert Pickard, and Dan Basterfield NDB.

Accompanying the lectures will be trade stands, Local Associations' displays, workshops, demonstrations and beekeeping exhibits. The highlight of the celebration will be a centenary dinner and ceilidh on the Saturday evening. *Booking is now open!*

To download a booking form, visit <http://www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk/About/SBACentenary.aspx>

## FOUNDATION, FRAMES AND JARS FOR SALE

The following items will be on sale to **paid up members** at Apiary and Monthly meetings throughout the year.

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

1lb jars, Box of 57, £20, 12oz jars, Box of 60, £20, 8oz jars, box of 90, £28

## 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)

### 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 £84.00

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

**WARMEST WISHES FROM ALL OF US GO TO  
BILL COPLAND AFTER HIS RECENT HEART  
SURGERY. YOU WILL BE PLEASED TO KNOW  
HE IS MAKING A GOOD RECOVERY AT HOME!**

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!**