

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter

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PLUSCARDEN 2012

It wasn't the warmest day we've ever seen in May but at last the sun was shining as Moray Beekeepers gathered for their annual visit to the hives at Pluscarden Abbey near Elgin. The setting was as beautiful and inspiring as ever and it wasn't long before bee suits were donned, smokers lit and 4 groups led in turn by Tony Harris, Andy Watson, Tom Balch and Gerry Thompson headed off to inspect the Abbey's hives.



Gerry's group

The hives are looked after by local beekeeper Rob McKenzie and he explained that the recent cold spell meant that all hives has required feeding.



a fair few bees

The Abbey uses Modified Dadant hives and the sight and weight of a full frame in one of these hives is impressive indeed.

After that it was back to the Abbey for a well earned cup of tea and a cake baked by committee member Anne Black.



the first sitting!

JUNE MEETING & DEMONSTRATION

OUR NEXT MEETING IS AT BIRNIE
TRAINING APIARY ON SUNDAY
17TH JUNE, 2.30PM START.

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

FOUNDATION AND JARS 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

VARROA



VARROA MITE

Varroa is endemic across Moray so if you keep bees here you can be sure that they will be infested with the varroa mite. But that shouldn't give you cause to panic! Beekeepers should be aiming to keep the varroa mite below the level where they cause significant harm (that's officially less than a 1,000 mites per colony in the U.K.) by using a combination of controls, at different times of the year. The bees, with a little help from the beekeeper, can learn to live with varroa, but, if you do nothing to tackle varroa it is more than likely that the colony will die out within a year or two.

Even if the bees were treated for varroa last autumn, the mite can build up quite rapidly as the Queen increases her laying rate and if left untreated can lead to sudden colony collapse later in the summer. Remember this - with an 80% kill rate the danger level (of 1,000 mites) is reached again in only 65 days and with 90% in 100 days!

Also, there are now pyrethroid resistant mites in Scotland so it is unwise to simply rely on a varroacide like apistan.



So what simple steps can the beekeeper take now to attack varroa?

The ardent Beekeeper should check the varroa infestation level in spring time and during summer and into autumn, by counting the dead mites on the floor of the hive over a given

number of days (open mesh floor and insert required), or, by uncapping drone brood and looking for the mite there. Very roughly, if more than 5-10% of drone pupae are infected, then the infestation is serious, and urgent treatment is required – seek advice if necessary.

Regardless of whether you have the time or inclination to measure the varroa levels in your colony, DRONE BROOD REMOVAL is a very simple way of fighting back against varroa, it doesn't require a high level of skill and is something you should be doing now up to the end of July!

How does it work? Well, varroa prefer to lay eggs in drone brood due to the extra days it takes for drones to emerge from the cell (they can make more babies) and beekeepers can take advantage of this. Simply insert a shallow frame of drawn comb or foundation in the middle of the brood chamber, and invariably, the bees will build drone comb on the underside of the frame. Once the queen lays in this comb the varroa will move in and once it is sealed, the sealed drone brood, along with the varroa mite inside the sealed cell, can be cut away and disposed of. The shallow frame can be immediately replaced in the brood box and the entire procedure repeated again and again. It is very important not to let the drones emerge because if this happens the beekeeper is actually making the situation worse rather than better!

DUSTING WITH ICING SUGAR

To compliment this we need to also attack the mites that live on the adult bee and we can do this by dusting the bees with icing sugar. Drone brood trapping and sugar dusting is an excellent method of controlling varroa in your hive, attacking the mites in the brood whilst also knocking them off the bees. It's safe, doesn't hurt the colony, can be used even when they are storing honey, works any time of the year that bees are not tight in a cluster, is cheap and only takes seconds. The drawbacks are that its application is dependent on fair weather and it may also draw ants into the hive.

Here's how to do it. The equipment needed is a bee brush, a 1 cup measuring cup filled with icing sugar, a wood rimmed travelling screen, and the colony should be on a screened bottom over an open mesh varroa floor.



brush over the top bars

Technique: Smoke the colony, remove the crown board and smoke the bees down off the top bars. Put the travelling screen over the frames and then use the cup to spread the icing sugar on the screen over the bees (some beekeepers don't use the screen and apply the sugar direct onto the top bars). Then use the brush to sift the sugar through the screen and onto the bees. Lift the screen and continue to use the brush across the top bars so that the sugar falls between the frames. Replace the cover.

Mites will begin to fall within seconds and if you have rubbed Vaseline on the floor insert you can get a good indication of your mite level in an hour.



dusted bees

It is claimed that if you dust once every 4 weeks and continue Drone Trapping the varroa mite population will be held in check

Bee Health Day

The Scottish Government (SG), Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) and Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) are holding a Bee Health Day on Saturday 10th June and members of Moray Beekeepers Association are invited to attend.

The venue is the Scottish School of Forestry, Viewhill, Inverness, IV⁹ 5EA, and the day runs from 9.30am to 5.15pm.

A full day of lectures and practical sessions will cover: AFB, EFB and other Bee Diseases, Apiary Hygiene, a Shook Swarm demonstration and Integrated Pest Control.

To book a place or for more information you are advised to contact: Allison Knox, Tel: 0300 244 9836, Email: Alison.knox@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

JUNE IN THE APIARY

By the Apiarist

The 10 day period between 19th and 28th May was a mini heat-wave and the bees responded accordingly with swarm after swarm issuing from hives across Moray. I received numerous calls, all from beekeepers asking for advice as their bees had or were swarming. The usual swarm control techniques go out of the window when it is so hot with bees swarming without any queen cells in the hive. The good news is that it has quietened down again now and the bees should still build up nicely for the main summer honey flow. (well, we can but hope!)

You should continue regular 7 day inspections if your bees haven't swarmed and if they have, make sure you only leave 1 sealed queen cell in the hive, and no eggs or young larvae for the bees to make more.

Make sure there is enough space in the hive for the queen to lay, the bees to spread out and for them to hang ripening nectar.

Cut out the sealed drone brood from the bottom of the shallow frame inserted in the brood chamber as part of varroa control and place the frame back in the same place.

You may be able to take off some frames of capped honey or even complete supers if you are fortunate and this should be extracted as soon as possible. Oil seed rape honey should not be left until it is capped as it is likely to granulate in the comb but how do you know when you can take it? The answer is to shake full super frames over the hive and if any nectar flies out, place it back in the hive as it is not yet ready. If no nectar comes out, even if cells are uncapped, remove and extract immediately. The wet supers can be placed back on the hive in the evening for the bees to clean up.

Fine filter the OSR honey into buckets, fill the bucket to the brim, seal the lid and then store the honey at 14C to allow rapid granulation and then below 10C for the best storage conditions after it has granulated. Don't jar OSR in its liquid state unless you don't mind it going 'rock hard' in the jar.

Be aware of the 'June Gap'. This is the period between the end of the spring nectar flow and the beginning of the main summer flow when the bees can actually starve. You need to check stores and feed the bees if required. Don't feed syrup if you have supers on the hive as the syrup may find its way into the honey super and this is a big 'no, no!' Use fondant over the feed hole in the crown board and remove it once the flow resumes

Make sure you have supers ready for the main nectar flow that should start towards the end of the month from clover, lime trees, brambles and Rosebay Willowherb.

And finally, after all that swarming activity, sit back, take a deep breath, relax and enjoy your bees

HARVESTING SINGLE FRAMES OF HONEY

You may be fortunate enough to have a few super frames filled with honey by the end of May and if you do it is quite easy to enjoy it without the use of expensive extractors. It is quite simple to reap a harvest from just a couple or even individual frames and here's how you do it.

The comb is completely cut from the frame into a bowl and thoroughly mashed until the comb cells are broken up and it has a nice even consistency.



Spoon or pour this honey wax mixture into a large jar as shown in the photo. Place a piece of shaped metal mesh over the mouth of another similar jar. Now take the jar with the mesh and turn it upside down, setting it on top of the filled honey jar and duct tape the two together forming a honey hourglass

When a good seal is made, flip the honey hourglass over and put it in a warm place and wait for an hour or two. Your honey will flow right from the honeycomb into the jar, leaving behind the beeswax and you can fine filter it later. Yummy!

One of the benefits of harvesting single combs at different times throughout the season is that you get to sample honey from multiple flora sources because the bees are collecting from different nectar flows at different times during the season and you will be amazed at the differing flavours. And if you intend to enter your honey into the many summer honey shows in the area, harvesting single frames, allows you to get jars of light, medium and maybe even dark honey without just mixing the lot together to get one uniform blend.

DECANTING HONEY FROM THE SETTLING TANK

Once you have extracted and filtered your honey and left it overnight in a settling tank or more simply a bucket with a honey tap you need to decant it into jars. This is quite an easy job to do but when you get to the last few pounds of honey there is always the problem of the surface scum in the bucket mixing with the clear honey going into the jars. Well, here's a really useful tip to stop this happening!

Cut a length of cling film about the same diameter as your bucket plus an extra 6-8 inches. Starting at the gate side of the bucket lay the cling film on the surface of the honey scum but don't allow any film to stick to the inside of the bucket yet. If your bucket diameter is greater than the width of the cling film you may have to use 2 lengths of film side by side. Try to lay it so as to trap as little air as possible and then when done stick the extra 6-8 inches of film to the inside of the bucket.



Lay the cling film on top of the surface scum



The scum ends up stuck to the cling film

Continue decanting as normal. As the level goes down the film should stay anchored to the side where it has been stuck and the film on the surface should now be pulled across the top, dragging the scum with it. Even if you don't get it exactly right (like my effort in the right hand photo) you will still get clear honey right to the last jar. And as the saying goes, 'Practice makes perfect', so give it a go and let us know how you get on.

“Jump-In” Day at the Introduction to Bee-keeping Course

By Neil Mathieson

The Introduction to Beekeeping course at the apiary on Saturday 25th May read like the practical of the May issue of the Auricle. Before the course officially started, swarm capture was demonstrated, and during the course queen cups were pointed out, brood comb was shown, double brood (or brood and a half) was seen, along with the little tricks like pinning a drawing pin to a frame to remember where your chosen queen cell is.

It all got off to a flying start. On arrival, we were informed that one of the hives in the apiary had swarmed, and the swarm had settled in the gorse bushes close by. It was decided to try to recover it (and investigate the hive later), so booted and bee-suited, Tony led us all into the gorse to show us how to gather the swarm. We learned that in this condition, the bees are happy because they are on a mission to find a new home, but they are also well-fed, gorging on the gorse flowers. The swarm-collecting kit (page 4 of May's auricle) was brought out and put to use in short order: in a calm manner, branches were trimmed away, the bees collected in the skep, laid out on the blanket with the chock of wood under it to create an entry gap, and they were left to settle for half an hour.



propped up skep

At this point there were lots of confused bees flying around, and the bees' fanning action was also pointed out. This is where bees at the entrance of the skep fan the air with their wings to disperse a pheromone issued from their Nasonov gland which sends a signal to other bees that directs them to the opening in the skep where the queen is present.



fanning bees

Then the course started proper. It was fabulous weather, and because the projector had blown when plugged into the generator, Tony ran the theory part outside the portacabin. He covered all the basic of hive components, with Gerry as his faithful fetcher and carrier - "can you get me a super, please?" "Can you bring me a feeder please?". A few sunburnt foreheads later, the swarm that had been enticed into the skep was wrapped up and brought to a hive, and the bees were introduced to their new home. So we were covering events described in the May issue of Auricle (pages 3 & 4).

A short time later a second swarm was noticed which got us all suited again to try to capture this one.

The swarming events were really useful in that they prompted a general discussion on why the bees swarm, trying to understand what life is like for the bees inside the hive at this time of year.

The afternoon was spent inspecting hives, and because of the fun and games from the swarming, Tony pointed out lots of things in the hive related to swarm control. He opened 3 hives: the first was very healthy, and he pointed out the structures in the brood box, along with the nectar, pollen and eggs. The second was the source of the first swarm, and the third was the source of the second swarm.

The last hive reminded me of the colony I tried to cultivate last year, unsuccessfully. There were queen cups on almost every other frame, and because this was a brood and a half (this was effectively one ½ size brood box on top of the original: swarm control described in May Auricle), there were also queen cups between the two brood boxes. Inspection of the hive suggested to Tony that there was a failing queen in the colony, and because it had been clipped, might have been lost during the swarming.

We were treated to discussion on how these could be treated to try to recover the colony, as it was strong, and it might be the queen was just in the process of failing. The exercise of dealing with the hive was going to be left to the following day, when a class for the Basic Beemaster Course would deal with the hive and the queen cups.



queen or play cups

All-in-all, it was a very interesting day, and it covered many aspects of what had been described in the May Newsletter.

Editor's Note: Thanks to Gerry Thompson for the photographs

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.

You can introduce a queen immediately in a cage or leave 7 days till there are no eggs or larvae left for them to make a new queen.

Next month we will look at different methods of introducing a queen.

CONGRATULATIONS

To MBA members **Barbara Westie and Gerry Thompson** for their recent success in the Scottish Beekeepers Association Exams.

Barbara passed Module 7, Selection & Breeding of Honeybees and has two modules to go for the Expert Beemaster certificate.

Gerry has just started on the modules and he passed module 1, Honeybee Management with a distinction and module 2, Honeybee Products and Forage, with a merit.

SUMMER PROGRAMME 2012

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Sunday 17 th June. | Summer Inspections & Swarm Control, Birnie Apiary, 2.30pm |
| Sunday 15 th July, | Queen Rearing, Tom Balch's Apiary, Forres, 2.30pm |
| Sunday 19 th August. | Trip to the Heather & Meal, 12 noon Delnashaugh Hotel, Ballindalloch |
| Sunday 30 th 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 **15th & 16th 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. *Booking open now.*

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

M.B.A. SHOP RULES

It has been the first year we have sold equipment to members so it is a learning curve for us all. To make it easier for all concerned the following rules will come into effect if you wish to purchase equipment from the Association.

You must have paid your subs for the current year and **produce your membership card** at the time of purchase! (if you haven't received a membership card or have lost it please contact Donna Clark)

Equipment will only be on sale at advertised Apiary Sessions or Monthly meetings (see website or membership card).

Pre-ordering to Andy Watson by phone, tel 01466 760277 is recommended as your journey will be wasted if your item is not in stock.

A maximum purchase of 20 frames and 40 sheets of foundation only will be allowed.

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

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/

WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

John Smith, Carole Christian, Marie Mc Kelvie, George Cull, Paul Kieriewicz, Kate Hopkirk, Melvyn & Brenda Morrison & Mark Alexander

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 2012, NOW £12 ADULT, £7 OVER 65YRS AND 12-16YRS!