

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter

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HAPPY VOLUNTEERS AT BIRNIE APIARY



from left to right. Simon Tucker, Arlene Ritchie, Gordon Ritchie, Neil Mathieson, Raefe Lettey & Ian MacAndie

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any organisation and these happy chappies turned out in freezing temperatures for the second working party at Birnie apiary in March.

Almost 90 paving slabs have been laid along with tonnes of hardcore, sand and cement and the apiary is progressing well toward the 'state of the art' facility we are aiming for.

Work at the apiary is progressing well and it is hoped that it will be ready for the 26th April when MSP Richard Lochhead will officially open the new facility. Other local dignitaries and friends of MBA will be in attendance and a class from Mosstodloch Primary School will make a presentation on 'Bees and their Importance to the Environment'

**OUR NEXT MEETING IS AT BIRNIE APIARY ON SUNDAY 28TH APRIL, 1.00PM
START WHERE, WEATHER PERMITTING WE WILL BE CARRYING OUT FIRST
INSPECTIONS AND MARKING AND CLIPPING QUEENS. PLEASE BRING SOME
CASH FOR THE RAFFLE AND YOU CAN PAY YOUR 2013 SUBSCRIPTION**

Full details of all Monthly Meetings, Open Apiary Sessions and Courses are at
www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk

OILSEED RAPE

by Tony Harris



hives in OSR field

Many beekeepers steer clear of oilseed rape (OSR) due to the problems it can cause if the hives are left unmanaged, BUT autumn sown OSR which flowers in late April/May can provide an abundance of spring honey, and if it does, this could be the only honey you get if the summer is a washout!

I learned early on in my beekeeping career that bees can build up rapidly on the rape and need stringent management if you don't want to lose a swarm or two. I ended my very first year with 9 hives of bees and after feeding them up and treating them for varroa I was pleased that they all made it through to the spring. The farmer proceeded to sow 25 acres of OSR in the field over my fence and with the sun glaring down for most of February and March the bees were very busy working the early flowering rape. I removed a couple of supers of honey on 17th April and was thinking to myself how easy this beekeeping lark was! Moray Beekeepers came to my apiary a couple of days later for their monthly meeting and the smugness was wiped off my face when the queen couldn't be found in hive 1. Sealed queen cells were however in abundance and it transpired that the queen had scarpered with an early swarm and there was a similar scenario in my other hives! The following few weeks were pandemonium as I tried to keep on top of the swarming instinct with very little knowledge and I failed miserably. I did however get a good crop of honey and I learnt much, especially what not to do.



honeybee on rape flower

So I move some hives to the oilseed rape every year now, normally about the middle of April when it is due to flower. You will be surprised to discover that a strong colony can draw out and fill a super of foundation in just a couple of



bright yellow osr pollen

days if the weather is right! You then need to remove it from the hive, almost on a frame by frame basis, as it granulates very quickly and can set in the comb. A way of testing if it is ready is to shake the frame over the hive. If fresh nectar flies out of the comb it is NOT ready and you need to leave it in the hive for another day or two. If it doesn't you can remove it from the hive and extract immediately. I don't use porter bee escapes to clear super of bees but rather brush the bees off each frame so that it is still warm when I extract it.

If the honey does set in the comb it is impossible to extract it. To harvest this set honey, cut it out of the frame into a bucket and place in a warming cabinet until it is mushy (don't overheat though), When it cools down the wax should settle on the top and can be scraped off while the honey can be poured off – a messy business to be sure!



melt down, dead bees!

Select a strong colony of bees with at least 7 frames of bees in early April. It is best to keep the colony in a single brood chamber as it is much easier to move. Place a queen excluder over the brood chamber a day or two before the move and a super of drawn comb or foundation over that followed by a ventilated travelling screen. Secure the hive with straps and screws and move the next morning after blocking the entrance with a strip of foam. It is important to provide additional ventilation for the bees when moving them as they can overheat, especially if confined for a long time. The results are devastating for the bees and upsetting for the beekeeper. The wax reaches melting point and honey pours out over the bees killing them. If there is an open mesh floor on the hive make sure you remove the floor insert during the confinement and move!

You need to be 'on the ball' with swarm control measures otherwise you will undoubtedly lose a swarm and subsequently your honey yield will be much reduced. I clip my queens and check the brood box every 10 days.

As soon as queen cells with larvae are found I implement my own method of swarm control (more on this next month). If you want to make increase or have a go at rearing a few queens then colonies at the osr will invariably give you the opportunity to do so.

If you run the honey straight into jars it will set like concrete and it will be difficult to remove from 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 hour 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!



'creamed or soft set OSR honey'

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.

The neonicotinoid pesticide debate is hot on the agenda at present with passions high on both sides. Most OSR grown in the UK is seed dressed with neonics and it is claimed that this causes dramatic harm to and losses of honeybees colonies.

I am not a scientist but on a practical side all I can say is that I have been moving my hives to the OSR in spring for a few years now and they have not suffered unduly at all. On the contrary, the bees at the rape have flourished, produced lots of honey and have survived as healthy, strong colonies the following spring.

'APRIL IN THE APIARY'

The poor winter and very cold spring is proving catastrophic to honeybee colonies in the UK and there have been wide spread losses reported across Scotland with more no doubt to come as the cold spell continues. As I write, British summer time has just begun but the lazy hazy days of summer seem a very long way off.



Prolonged cold spell this spring

I have lost just 4 out of 50 colonies up to now so cannot complain but for beekeepers who only have a couple of hives, to lose just one of these is bad enough but to lose both is a complete disaster. For those beekeepers who obtained their first bees last summer it has certainly been a harsh introduction to beekeeping, particularly if their bees have died. I was scanning through some of the beekeeping forum sites the other day and noticed that there are many more losses being reported in England than they usually get, again a reflection of the disastrous summer of 2012.

It's worth remembering that bees don't freeze to death' rather they starve to death. As long as they have direct contact with stored honey or sugar syrup or fondant or even a damp bag of white refined sugar, they 'shiver', i.e. micro vibrate their direct flight muscles to generate heat. Honeybees survive in very harsh climates in Scandinavia and Canada for example where the temperature drops to -30C and below for much of the winter and they still survive, so why is it that a colder than usual winter can kill so many colonies in the UK?

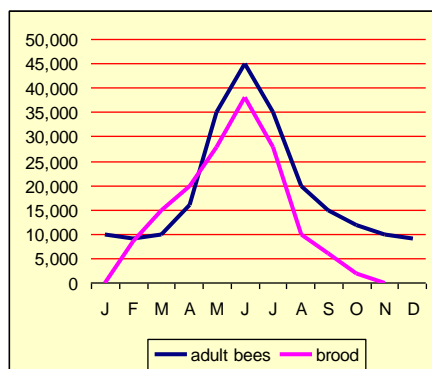
Well, obviously, the longer the cold spell, with the bees confined to the hive and no forage to be had, the more food they will consume and they could very well run out. That's why we should check the food supply by hefting the hive regularly over winter and if it feels 'light' a block of fondant should be placed in the hive. Many beekeepers make the mistake of placing the fondant over the feed-hole in the crown board and then wonder why their bees have starved to death

It is a harsh lesson to learn but in very cold temperatures the bees cluster together more tightly and as they contract the cluster can lose contact with the fondant. They are too cold to move up through the feed hole and thus can starve.. This can also happen when there is lots of food in the hive and the bees succumb not being able to cross just a three inch gap to where the stored honey is located. It is known as 'isolation starvation' and is very frustrating and upsetting particularly to new beekeepers. You can give your bees a better chance by placing the fondant directly on top of the cluster, i.e. on the frame top bars. You can then add a super and place a good layer of insulation over the bees and fondant (I use loft insulation all winter), before replacing the crown board and roof. Every week or so I remove the roof and crown board to see if the cluster has moved and if it has I re-locate the fondant, again so it is directly over the cluster. You may squash a few bees doing this but it is worth the sacrifice if your colony survives!



Add a block of fondant directly over the cluster

Don't make the mistake of thinking your bees have survived the winter yet as February to April is the most critical part of the year for a colony especially with the sub-zero temperatures. This is because the queen would have been laying eggs a few weeks ago, before the cold spell moved in and this was evident in my hives as fresh pollen was going in from the gorse. The adult bee population will be reducing as winter bees die and the amount of brood will be greater than the adult bees. The sudden cold spell keeps the bees in the hive and results in the bees consuming their remaining stores to feed the brood and they can very easily run out, being unable to feed themselves and the growing larvae.



Critical period – February to April

This time last year we were in a heat-wave and I counted over 40 queen bumble bees on

Just two beds of spring heather one afternoon but this year I haven't seen any!



Queen Bumble bee

The queen bumble bees will be emerging from hibernation just as soon as the temperature rises and I have made another attempt to entice some of them into my bumble bee nest boxes. I failed miserably last year although there were plenty of 'natural' nests in my garden. After researching the subject further I have inserted the remnants of a couple of mouse nests discovered over winter in the boxes as the queen bumbles are attracted to abandoned mice nests, the smell of mouse urine being the equivalent of a 'For Sale' sign to the queen 'home hunters'.



Bumble Bee nest box

As soon as the weather 'breaks' your bees will be collecting nectar and pollen from flowering currant, dandelion, willow, cherry, gorse and blackthorn. You can then give them a couple of litres of thin sugar syrup in a contact feeder and this should give them a boost (1lb sugar to 1 pint of water)



Flowering currant



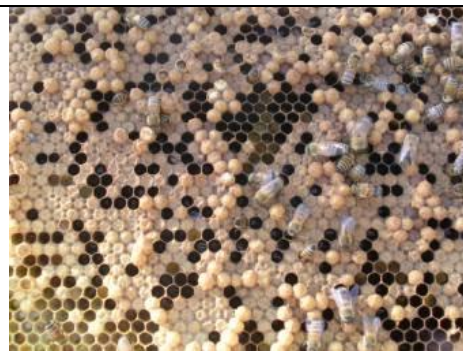
bee on willow catkin

When you see bees taking pollen into the hive and hard, grey old pollen pellets on the alighting board, it is a good sign that the queen is laying and the bees are expanding their brood nest. However see page 4 Drone Laying Queens & Laying Workers before you throw a party! It's so stressful, isn't it!!

DRONE LAYING QUEENS & LAYING WORKERS

If, during your first inspection in April you find enlarged worker cells with drone cappings (raised), small stunted drones running about, with areas of neglected drone brood, and the brood area just doesn't look right, you may well find that you have a Drone Laying Queen (DLQ) or Laying Workers (LW's),

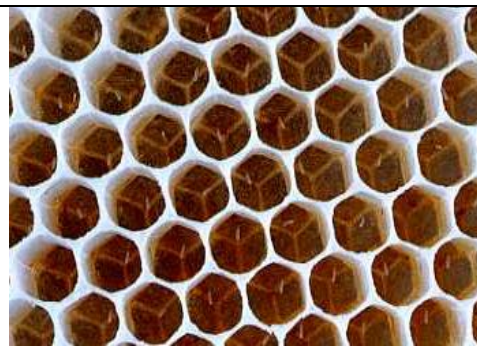
A queen can become a drone layer due to inadequate mating meaning a shortage of sperm, a physical inability of the queen to fertilise the eggs correctly or it may be due to a genetic fault. LW's appear due to queenlessness (for more than 3 or 4 weeks), e.g. the queen failing to return from a mating flight or simply dying over winter, when there are no fertilised eggs or young larvae for the bees to make a new queen.



*compact brood nest, raised cappings
over worker cells - DLQ?*



*scattered brood pattern and raised cappings
over worker cells - LW's?*



single eggs at base of cell - Q present



multiple eggs - a sure sign of LW's



Q present - not LW's!



charged queen cells

If you see the queen you will know it is a DLQ but how else can you tell the difference? Well, a DLQ will keep a tidy brood area. The laying pattern will be orderly, i.e. compact patches of brood with very few empty cells whereas with LW's the laying pattern will be scattered and haphazard. Additionally, a DLQ will usually lay one egg in the base of the cell while LW's will lay multiple eggs in the same cell and they are more often than not on the sides of the cell wall because a worker's abdomen is much shorter than a queen. A DLQ will often lay areas of drone brood in the middle of larger patches of worker brood as she runs out of sperm. And finally, if the colony is trying to build charged queen cells it is more likely that LW's are present in your hive.

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 very difficult, 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.

The books recommend one way to save the LW's colony but it is doubtful whether it will work. The bees are shaken and brushed out of the brood chamber a good distance away from the hive, e.g. 25 metres, and they will fly back and enter the hive, which has been replaced on the original site. Laying workers, it is said, cannot fly and thus don't return to the hive! Efforts can then be made to introduce a new queen.

Another way, if you have more than one hive, is to add a frame of brood every week for say 3 weeks before introducing a new queen or uniting as this can be more successful. BUT remember, the experienced beekeeper is unlikely to waste time trying to save a colony with LW's especially in early spring.

DYSENTERY

Following on from a cold winter and one of the coldest springs for decades your bees will have been confined in the hive for long periods of time, and being unable to exit the hive for a cleansing flight, or to collect water to dilute granulated stores, you may find dysentery present in your hive.



The first signs will be brown stains (excrement) around the hive entrance and this will undoubtedly be the case inside the hive as well. It is not a disease, however, it is a condition, telling you that something is wrong inside the hive, and it can happen to the best of beekeeper's bees.

Dysentery is caused by excess water in the intestine of the bee, which manifests itself mainly in the winter and can be due to any of the following:

Unripe honey or late feeding

Granulated stores

Alcohol due to fermenting stores

Feeding brown sugar, raw sugar and acid inverted sugars, and

Possibly, wintering for long periods solely on heather honey.

Although the winter bee has the ability to extend its rectum, when the rectum weight approaches a third of the weight of the bee, comb soiling starts, and if a half weight of the bee, dysentery is certain.

In severe cases, in bad weather, it can kill a colony, but it is more likely that the bees and the colony are so weakened that it succumbs to viral infections.

There is no prescribed treatment for dysentery although warm thick syrup is said to be helpful.

SHOOK SWARM

Another method is to carry out a shook swarm in spring. The shook swarm technique replaces all brood frames in a single operation thus removing all potentially diseased equipment at a stroke and minimising disease transfer. It is sometimes used by Bee Inspectors dealing with a European Foulbrood affected colony but is also a useful tool for the beekeeper as a swarm prevention

BEST NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTOR 2012



Congratulations to MBA member Neil Mathieson who won a bottle of malt whiskey for the 'best contributor' to the Auricle newsletter in 2012.

Although a relatively new beekeeper, Neil sent in two articles, one to share his experiences as a novice beekeeper, entitled, 'The Amateur's First Year' (see March Auricle 2013), and the second, giving an interesting and humorous account of his attendance at an Introduction to Beekeeping course at Birnie, 'Jump In Day' (June 2012 Auricle)

Neil (left) is shown receiving his prize from the Auricle Editor, Tony Harris (who doesn't seem to want to let go of the bottle!)

This competition will be run again in 2013 with a similar prize so hopefully Neil has inspired you to put pen to paper and you will be submitting stories, photos, or questions to Tony in your droves!.

technique or as part of an Integrated Pest Management and disease regime.

It should only be carried out on a strong colony (at least 6 frames of bees) capable of enduring the stress it undoubtedly creates. The colony should have a satisfactory laying queen and not be heavily infested with varroa. Usually a good nectar flow should have started but in spring, feeding with sugar syrup will help the bees draw out the foundation.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: a clean brood chamber of new foundation, a queen excluder, a clean floor and a contact feeder

5. Move the existing hive to one side and assemble the new hive in its place with queen excluder between the floor and brood box

6. Take out the centre four frames from the new hive and place to one side.

7. Place the queen from the old hive into a queen cage.

8. Transfer the bees from the old hive into the new hive by shaking frames and brushing off any reluctant bees, and then shake the remaining bees from the old box into the new hive.

1. Place the queen in the centre of the new hive and then carefully replace the four missing frames into the new hive.

2. Fit the crown board and feed with heavy syrup (2:1) ideally using a contact feeder.

3. Continue to feed until there is a good nectar flow or 75% of combs are drawn out.

4. Remove the queen excluder and make sure you destroy the old comb from the old hive.

ADVANTAGES

- It is a good swarm prevention technique
- The bees produce new comb which seems to give them renewed vigour
- It removes any old 'clogged up' comb, and ALL incipient disease including varroa

DISADVANTAGES

- Loss of brood so a slower build up ensues
- Loss of drawn comb and honey
- It is stressful to the bees and could therefore result in chalkbrood



An invitation to Beekeepers in the Moray area

**The Scottish Government (SG),
Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA)
and Scottish Rural College (SRUC)**

are holding a

BEE HEALTH DAY

**On Saturday 1st June 2013 from 9.30am – 4.30pm
at Moray College, UHI, Elgin**

*(tea, coffee and a sandwich lunch will be provided) – (PLEASE
NOTIFY US OF ANY SPECIAL DIETARY REQUIREMENTS)*

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

To book your place or for more information

contact: Alison Knox on 0300 244 9836

Email: Alison.knox@scotland.gsi.goc.uk

Cost - £25.00 – Send your cheque, made payable to 'SRUC'
to: Alison Knox, P Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive,
Edinburgh, EH11 3XD

Please note that numbers are limited so book early to avoid
disappointment.

- With thanks to Moray Beekeepers Association -

Scottish Beekeepers Association (SBA) 'NUC' WORKSHOP

On behalf of SBA, Moray Beekeepers Association

are holding a

'NUC WORKSHOP'

**on Saturday 8th June 2013 from 10am to 4pm
at Birnie Training Apiary near Elgin**
(tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided - **PLEASE BRING
YOUR OWN PACKED LUNCH**)

The Nucleus Workshop is aimed at teaching and
demonstrating the methods needed to create robust Nucs
for selling or passing on to beginners.

To book your place or for more information

Contact: Tony Harris on 07884 496246

Email: tony@moraybeekeepers.co.uk

Cost - £20 - Send your cheque, made payable to 'Moray
Beekeepers Association', to: Tony Harris, Cowiemuir
Farmhouse, Fochabers, Moray, IV32 7PS

Please note that numbers are limited so book early to avoid
disappointment

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.



You can borrow them for free by contacting

Yvonne Stuart
Tel: 01343 842317

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/

'BEE AWARE IN MORAY'

To get involved in this exciting honeybee conservation
and education project, please contact Secretary, Yvonne
Stuart or any member of the Committee.

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 2013, £12 ADULT, £7 OVER 65YRS AND 12-16YRS!