

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter

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Chairman:
Bob Malcolm
Brackenlea,
Nether Dallachie,
Moray, IV32 7QX
Tel: 01343 821453

Secretary
Yvonne Stuart
The Cottage,
North Darkland,
Lhanbryde, IV30 8LB
Tel: 01343 842317

Treasurer:
Donna Clark
Primrose Cottage,
23 St Andrews Road,
Lhanbryde
IV30 8NZ
Tel. 01343 843072

Newsletter Editor:
Tony Harris
Cowiemoir,
Fochabers
IV32 7PS
M. 07884496246
tonyharris316@btinternet.com

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OPENING CEREMONY SUCCESS!



Mr Richard Lockheed, MSP and Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, officially opens the re-furbished apiary at Birnie.

Local dignitaries and 'Friends of Moray Beekeepers' joined special guest, Mr Richard Lockheed, MSP as he officially opened the newly re-furbished Training Apiary at Birnie. Over 50 guests enjoyed glorious blue skies on the afternoon of 26th April, as the culmination of many hours hard work reached fruition.

Mr Lockheed said: "Bees have a crucial role to play in our environment and the new training apiary will help make more people aware of this and give them the chance to get more involved in beekeeping."

Pupils from Mosstodloch Primary School, in particular, Kerri Stuart, gave a presentation to the VIP guests on the importance of bees in the environment.

Moray Beekeepers Association members were particularly pleased to welcome Scottish Beekeepers Association President Phil McAnespie, General Secretary, Bron Wright and Education Convener, Alan Riach, along with their partners.

The apiary looks absolutely brilliant and the facilities are excellent. The aim of making it a 'state of the art' apiary has certainly been achieved and it will be put to good use over the next few months for courses and school visits.

A great big pat on the back and thank you to everyone for making the Opening Ceremony such a tremendous success!!

MARKING & CLIPPING QUEENS

Despite the cold and showery weather, 18 members attended Birnie Training Apiary for the first apiary meeting of the season in April and were rewarded when the sun came out allowing some hive inspections to take place. Two groups were formed led by Tommy Balch and Tony Harris and 3 queens were found and marked in double quick time, just before a very heavy downpour put a stop to further inspections. Plan 'B' was put into operation and refreshed by Anne Black's wonderful cake and a cuppa, Tony gave a power point presentation entitled '1st Inspections and Spring Management' that was enjoyed by all.

Just after everyone had left, the sun came out again so Tony, assisted by new member Raefe Letty, took the opportunity to mark the queens in the remaining hives. Due to the cold and changeable weather conditions none of the queens were clipped but the plan is to do this next time.

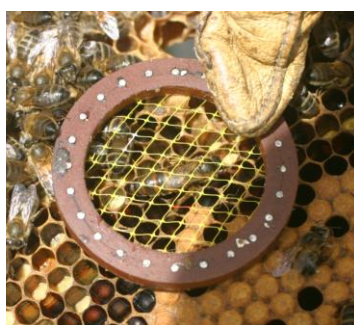
Queens are usually marked early in the season when the colony is small and easy to handle, making queens easier to find. Also, there are usually no drones in the hives in early spring so the bees should think twice before trying to replace her. Any new queen would struggle to mate adequately in a cold spring with very few drones around so if you are going to clip your queens, do it in the spring time!

The main reason we mark queens is 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.



PRESS IN CAGE

Another reason for marking a queen is to be able to know how old she is.

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

Marking the queen will also let you know if she has been superseded (replaced) by the bees when you next enter the hive.

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.

Make sure you don't apply too much paint as you may inadvertently glue the queen's wings together so she won't be able to fly at all and you will make her unattractive to the workers!

Also, when releasing the queen from the cage always place her onto a frame containing brood where the bees would expect to find her. I also blow some smoke from the smoker over her to mask the scent of the paint.

Ian Craig gives some good advice on marking and clipping queens in his online publication, 'My Beekeeping Year' which can be found on the Scottish Beekeepers Association website and I reproduce below in italics.

'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 IS EASY TO SPOT!

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'. Thanks Ian!

Some beekeepers also glue a small number on the thorax of a queen so that they can identify her. This is useful if you are engaged in a queen rearing programme with many queens and wish to breed for a particular trait.



A NUMBERED DISC GLUED TO THE QUEEN'S THORAX

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



CLIPPING A QUEEN BY PICKING HER UP!

Clipping a queen is a swarm control technique that allows more time between inspections, 10 days rather than 7 with an unclipped queen (see page 4 for more information)

If you have never clipped a queen before you can always practice on a few drones, or just do it. When using the press in cage, be patient! She invariably sticks a wing up through the cage and it is then easy to snip with a pair of sharp scissors.

And there is an easy way to remember the correct colour marker for a particular year – Check the colour of your membership card!!

'MAY IN THE APIARY'

The poor summer of 2012 and the very cold late spring is proving catastrophic to honeybees in the UK and there have been wide spread losses reported across Scotland with some commercial bee farmers losing more than 50% of their colonies. Hobby beekeepers have also suffered and many of our members are now without any bees at all.

The trees are just about budding yet as I write we have just entered the month of May, usually a month where the bees are building up rapidly on the spring nectar flow.

May is usually 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.

I moved some of my hives to the oilseed rape (OSR) on 8th April last year just as it was flowering so you can see that with the rape still not close to flowering we are about 6 weeks late with the spring weather. Indeed some farmers have given up on the OSR, cutting their losses and ploughed their OSR fields ready for the next crop.

In May, probably towards the end of the month now, the bees will be foraging on oilseed rape, sycamore, horse chestnut, bluebell, top fruit (i.e. apple, pear, plum, cherry, hawthorn), laurel dandelion and



HONEYBEE ON HAWTHORN FLOWER

raspberry and the brood nest should be expanding rapidly. Make sure the queen has room to lay and place a super of drawn comb or wax foundation on the hive so the bees have room to hang the ripening nectar!

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, there were many swarms in Moray last June, mainly issuing from managed hives. If you leave a bait hive out containing wax foundation or old comb and maybe insert a swarm lure you just may pick up a passing swarm!

MSP RICHARD LOCHHEAD IS SHOWN SOME COMBS BY 'BEAM' PROJECT MANAGER, TONY HARRIS



MBA 'ADOPT A NUCLEUS' Programme 2013

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 £50 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 £50.

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.

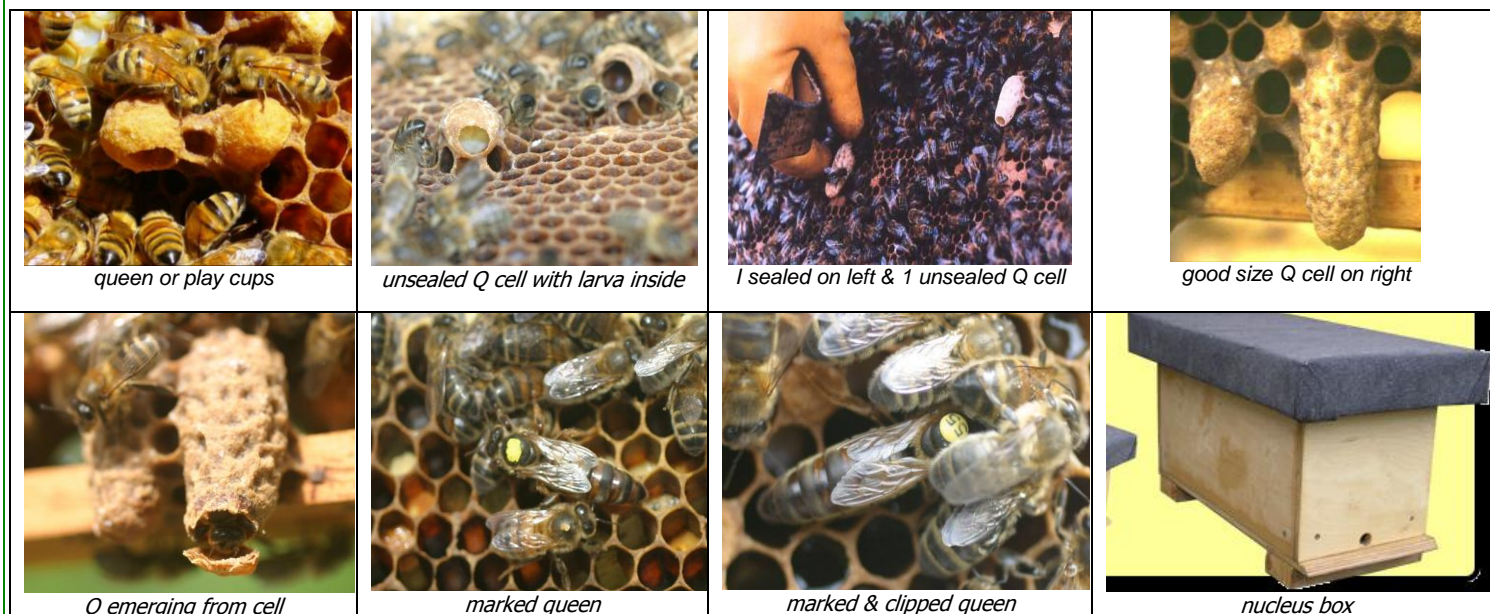
Swarms and nucs will also be offered to members who have lost bees recently (depending on availability).

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

THE SWARMING SEASON IS UPON US!

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, 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 interrupts this process of food transfer and thus acts as a barrier in the distribution of Q.S.

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 the workers feed her less. 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.



Relieving congestion in a hive minimises swarming so it is important to give your bees plenty of space both in the brood chamber and by adding supers in good time. The key is to give the queen room to lay and the bees room to spread out while also providing them with comb space to hang nectar in while the water is being evaporated off. When the bees are covering three quarters of the frames in the brood box, add a super of drawn comb if you have one. When the bees are occupying two thirds of the first super a second super should be added. The second super can be of foundation and if it is it should be placed below the first super, so the bees have to pass through it to reach the top super they have been working in, while it will also benefit from the heat in the brood chamber. 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 other thing worth noting is that the amount of Q.S. produced by a queen decreases as she gets older so it is important to maintain young queens if you can, ideally no older than two full seasons.

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.

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) until the first virgin queen is on the wing.

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' (see photo above) with queen cells. Queen cups are built by the bees 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 later after removing the oldest queen.

If you do not have a clipped queen and you find queen cells in your hive which you destroy, don't fall into the trap of thinking you can leave the next inspection for 7 days (as it takes 8 days for a queen cell to be sealed after the egg is laid, right? WRONG!) If the bees are set on swarming they can take a 3 (or even 4) 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. The same principle applies if you have clipped queens although you will have more time, about 9 days before the first virgin leaves with the swarm.

'NUCLEUS METHOD' OF SWARM CONTROL by Andrew Tassell

Equipment needed: Nucleus hive, (a complete empty hive can be used instead of a nuc hive), dummy board, hive stand.

1st Inspection: If you see queen cups with eggs or young larvae inside cut them out. This might be enough to dissuade the bees from swarming (if helped by a change in the weather for example). It also gives you a week's grace to get equipment ready.



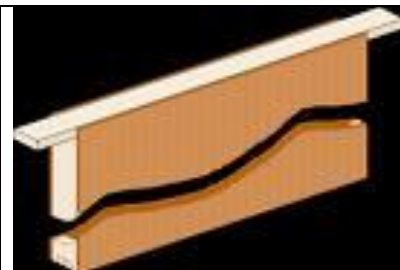
unsealed queen cell showing larva inside – time for swarm control



swarm cells



sealed queen cell



dummy board

Inspection a week later: If there are queen cells with well developed larvae in them you will need to make up the queen right nucleus. Find the queen (this is why it pays to mark her earlier in the season). Place her and the frame she's on in the nuc hive, cutting out any queen cells on the frame.

Back in the hive select a queen cell to raise a queen in. It should be a good size, nice shape and have a well-developed larva in it. Don't pick a sealed queen cell, as it might be empty. Use a bee brush to brush the bees off the frame and destroy any other queen cells. Mark this frame with a drawing pin on the top of the frame.

In the nuc hive place a frame of brood and one of stores making sure there are no queen cells. Shake in bees from a fourth frame and put the dummy board in and close up the nuc hive. Place it on the hive stand 3 to 4 feet from the parent hive and block the entrance lightly with grass.

In the parent colony, without disturbing the marked frame with the queen cell, shake the bees off the remaining frames and destroy anything that looks like a queen cell. Close up the hive.

A week later: In the parent hive go through and destroy any queen cells apart from the one on the marked frame that will now be sealed. Use a brush to remove bees from this frame when checking it so as not to disturb your chosen queen cell. The timing is important - it must be a week later, i.e. 7 days!

Two weeks later: The new queen should have emerged and should be starting to lay. If there are no signs of eggs, leave it for another week. If there are still no eggs, you can place a test frame with eggs from the nuc hive in it; if the bees raise queen cells your hive is queenless, if they do nothing your queen is there and hasn't started to lay yet.

MAKE UP A BAIT HIVE TO CATCH A SWARM

With bees and swarms at a premium in recent seasons you can increase your chances of getting hold of some bees by making up a bait hive to see if you can entice a passing swarm to set up home in it.

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.



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.gov.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/

'QUEEN REARING PROGRAMME 2013'

This year's queen rearing project will commence in mid-
May and to get involved please contact Tony Harris on
Tel. 07884496246,

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!