

The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter
Hot off the 'press'

Issue No: 4/10

June 2010

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PLUSCARDEN ABBEY VISIT

The beautiful surroundings of Pluscarden Abbey was the venue for our May meeting and despite the date clashing with the 'staggies' efforts to win the Scottish Cup, live on television, and another final south of the border (also on t.v.) just short of 30 members and guests turned out on a lovely spring day.

The apiary comprises 14 hives at present, housed in the very large modified dadant hives, and the bees are under the watchful eyes of MBA members Father Benedict and Rob MacKenzie.



Pluscarden Abbey



The apiary and the modified dadant hives

A group of beginners, led by Andrew Tassell, were shown through a couple of hives and MBA member, Donna Clarke, was the first to spot the 'golden drone' (previously marked by Rob). The more experienced beekeepers inspected several 'problem' hives and they found a couple with drone laying queens, and a number of others that were not building up as quickly as they should have been. These weaker hives had their feeder frames topped up with sugar syrup, house bees shaken in from stronger hives to strengthen them, and all queens were found and marked.

A delighted Rob MacKenzie said, 'I am really happy that the queens were found and marked as no matter how hard I try I just can't spot them!'

The afternoon was topped off by another fine tea, thanks to Fiona Tassell and helpers, Adam and Sarah. And thank you to Father Benedict for allowing us into the apiary and Rob and Angie MacKenzie for making the afternoon a success

OUR NEXT MEETING IS ON **SUNDAY 20TH JUNE** AT GRAHAM & VIV HILL'S APIARY AT BLOSSOMBANK, BIRNIE, **2.30PM** WHEN WE WILL BE CARRYING OUT A 'SUMMER INSPECTION' (directions to follow)
Full details of all Monthly Meetings, Open Apiary Sessions and Courses are at
www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk

THIS MONTH IN THE APIARY by John Salt

June is an exciting month when the hive is bursting at the seams and bee numbers reach a peak. If you are lucky, you will get your first honey harvest of the year.



Also in June, after the spring flowers and before the summer yields, we have in the UK what is referred to as the 'June gap' and this can cause a sudden risk of starvation even at the height of summer. To quote Ted Hooper, 'dead colonies get you no honey'.

In such circumstances, a small emergency feed of syrup made by mixing white sugar with warm water (2lbs:1Pint) will save the colony and be used by the bees as food and not stored. Never use unrefined or brown sugar as this causes dysentery in the bees.

In early June the hive should still be expanding reaching a peak by the middle of the month and you need to carry out regular 7-10 day colony inspections. Keep a look out for eggs, brood of all stages, if you don't see the Queen don't bother as long as you can see she has been laying. If you notice something out of place, possible brood disease and are not sure, call for help. Check for Queen cells.

Don't forget the dreaded Varroa mites. Use an uncapping fork to check drone brood. If you do take a swarm, treat it for varroa as soon as you have it, while the mites have no brood cells to hide in.



Honeybee on bramble



Rosebay Willowherb



Honeybee on lime blossom



Eggs on the left and larvae



Varroa on drone larva



Healthy brood pattern



hanging outside the hive



Liquid Gold – first honey harvest

By the end of the month, make sure the bees have plenty of space i.e. more supers to store the main summer nectar flow. This usually fits well with the month of July, but with our earlier summers, it could start at the end of June. This nectar flow tends to be from lime trees, brambles, and rosebay willowherb.

Once it starts, a strong colony can fill a super in a few days, then they'll run out of cluster space inside the hive on a wet day, and have to make hive space by hanging outside, perhaps in the rain. Such over-crowding tends to make colonies swarm too!

Finally, don't forget to make a little time to sit beside the hive: relax, listen, watch and wonder!

SBA EXAM SUCCESSES

Congratulations to Barbara Westie who has recently passed Module 5 'Honeybee Biology' and so gains her Scottish Beekeepers' Association (SBA) Intermediate Beekeeping Certificate, and Tony Harris (Modules 6,7 & 8), who now receives the SBA Advanced Beekeepers' Certificate.

Studying for these exams is a great way of increasing your beekeeping knowledge and it will also improve your beekeeping management skills. You can start the ball rolling by taking the Basic Beemaster's Certificate, a practical examination when an experienced beekeeper comes to your apiary and observes while you examine your bees asking basic beekeeping questions as you go along.

You can then progress as far as you wish with the remaining syllabus and as the exams take place in March, you have the dark winter months, when the bees are confined to the hive, to swot up.

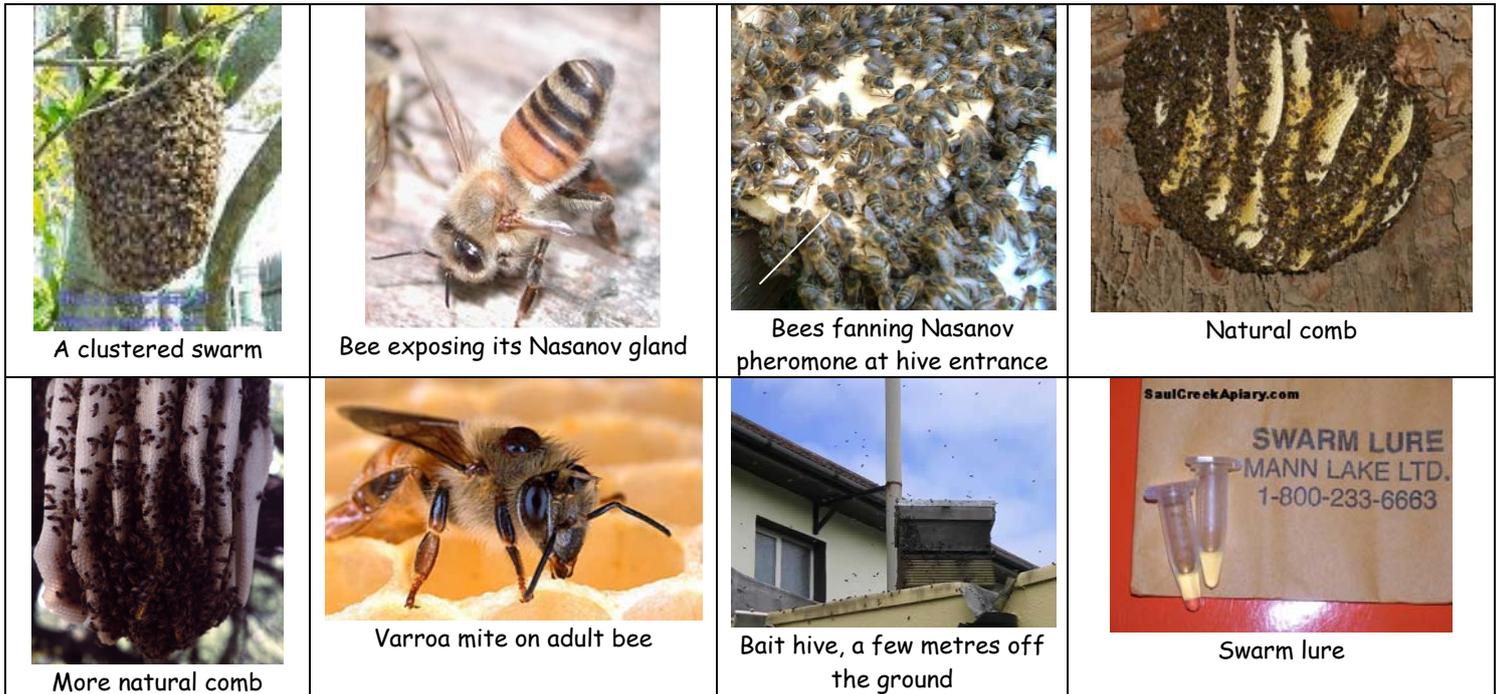
You can view or download a copy of the syllabus along with application forms at the Scottish Beekeepers Association web site, address here: <http://www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk/learning/html/syllabus.html>



Continuing the spirit of coalition after the recent General Election, MBA President, Andrew Tassell and Father Benedict, Pluscarden Abbey, cemented the amicable relationship between our two organisations, vowing to work together in the best interests of the honeybee.

THE SWARMING SEASON IS UPON US! PART 2

So, despite your best efforts, one of your hives has swarmed and the swarm is hanging on a branch about 5 feet from the ground just waiting for you to come and collect it (well, we can but dream!). John Salt gives some useful tips on collecting a swarm on page 3 but this article explains how the swarm behaves once it has issued from the hive and how and why a new home is chosen. If you can get an understanding of this you will be able to increase your chances of picking up a passing swarm.



Assuming that the weather is favourable, the swarm will emerge at about noon, and with the queen will settle, usually within 10-20 metres of the hive, the bees attracted initially by the queen pheromone and then by the Nasonov pheromone from the worker bees who find her first. (also know as 'the come and join us' pheromone, it comes from the Nasonov gland on the base of the bees abdomen, and the bees raise their abdomens (bums) and fan their wings when releasing it). As the bees will have gorged on honey before leaving the hive, swarms are usually good tempered although they can cause alarm to members of the public when settling as there are thousands of bees flying to and fro!

They cluster to conserve heat and the scout bees continue their search for a new home. 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 to store nectar and pollen and the queen can commence laying earlier.

Returning scout bees perform different dance routines on the surface of the cluster indicating the site of a new nesting place, and eventually the most vigorous dances are accepted and a decision reached. Sometimes the bees are unable to reach a decision or find a new home and they commence comb building where they are clustering, and although they may thrive in the summer, they are unlikely to survive the winter.

Prior to leaving for the new nest site, the scout bees perform the 'whirr dance' on the surface of the cluster and the swarm takes off for the new home. Upon arrival the scout bees begin fanning the Nasonov pheromone telling the other bees to 'come and join us' and before long the swarm has taken up residence.

It is quite surprising how quickly a swarm can draw out a few frames of foundation into comb but they do so using the stores of honey they previously gorged on. The colonies survival depends on them building comb quickly, collecting and storing nectar and pollen, and the queen commencing egg laying as soon as possible!

So, with this knowledge what steps can you take to try and catch yourself a swarm? A bait hive is a good idea, fitted with a few frames of old comb and/or frames of foundation. Some beekeepers smear the inside of the bait hive with beeswax and remember that it needn't be a proper bee hive, any similar container can be used! You can place your bait hive in your own apiary or better still 50 to 100 metres away, or, you can place it a similar distance from where you know a feral colony of bees is located. If you place the hive a few metres off the ground all the better!

Beekeeping suppliers sell a product called 'swarm lure' that you place in the bait hive and it is said to be even more of an attractant to passing swarms! And if you are fortunate enough to 'catch' a stray swarm, it is a good time to treat for varroa, as any mites will be on the adult bees until comb is built and brood is sealed. This could give you a few days or a week or so to insert one or two strips of apistan for example, enough time to kill off lots of varroa mites!

CATCHING A SWARM by John Salt

Swarms start to appear as if from no-where in June... just hanging on a nearby tree ... and you ask the question ... 'not from my hive I hope??'. Panic sets in and you say 'What do I do now?' ... HELP!!! First ... get an empty cardboard box, or better still a 'Skep'. Place underneath the swarm and raise 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 skep. Place a wooden board over the top and invert.



Locate your inverted skep as close as possible to where the bees were hanging and lift one corner to allow the bees to come and go. If the Queen is in the box, you will see bees at the entrance with their 'bums' in the air ... 'fanning' ... telling all others 'This is the place to bee'. If they all come out and back into the tree, you have missed the queen and will have to start again.

Now go off and make up a Nucleus box or if you are lucky enough to have a big swarm, a complete hive with frames of foundation and if you have it, some drawn comb.

If you can get someone to help ... good. Place your skep over your open nucleus box/hive. The bees will all be clinging to the upper surfaces. Get your helper to slowly slide out the wooden floor and give the skep a quick jolt, the bees fall out and into the top of the hive. Once they have crawled down inside, put on the crown board and feed syrup. *(Editor's note. - or you can always hive the bees in the traditional manner by throwina the swarm on the around in front of the hive. see photo. and watch them march in!)*

ARTIFICIAL SWARM

Another technique to control swarming, once you have found queen cells in your hive, is to carry out an 'artificial swarm'. Simply put, the beekeeper takes the old hive from its original site to a position more than 3 feet to the right or left, finds and removes the old queen and puts her, and the frame on which she is found, in a new hive on the original site. Within a few hours all the flying bees from the old hive will return to the old site and join the queen inside, thus mimicking the situation a swarm finds itself in. i.e. there will be a queen, lots of older flying bees and a new home.

Meanwhile, in the old hive, there will be a number of queen cells, no flying bees, and the remaining bees will have no option but to wait for the first virgin queen to emerge from the queen cell. Another move of the hive to the other side of the original site further depletes the number of foraging bees and the remaining house bees tear down all but one queen cell.

According to Dave Cushman (<http://website.lineone.net/~dave.cushman/artswarm.html>) this procedure will eliminate swarming in about 95% of cases without significantly reducing the honey crop. Once the new unit is queenright (i.e. the newly emerged queen has successfully mated) it can be used for increase or it can be united back to the parent colony at the end of the season.

Equipment needed: Stand, Floor, Brood Chamber, and a full complement of brood frames fitted with foundation, Crown board (inner cover) and Roof (outer cover).

Step by step stages:

- Remove the complete hive from the original site and place 4 feet to the left on a new stand.
- Place the floor and the brood box of the new spare hive in exactly the same position on the original site.
- Check every brood frame in the old hive until the queen is found and then, being careful not to lose her, place the queen and the frame she is on in the new hive on the original site. Any queen cells, either sealed or unsealed on this frame should be destroyed.
- Place a frame of food (usually one of the outside frames) from the old hive inside the new hive.
- The remaining spaces in the brood box of the new hive should be filled with frames of foundation or drawn comb.
- The queen excluder, supers, crown board and roof from the old hive are then placed on the new hive on the original site, and the operation as far as that hive is concerned is complete.
- Returning to the old hive that is now 4 feet to the left, the beekeeper should check to see if there are frames of pollen/honey for the bees to feed on, and if in any doubt, the bees should be fed sugar syrup. It is best to do this at dusk when the bees have stopped flying and to further help reduce robbing, a reduced entrance block can be fitted.
- Seven days later (it must be 7 days even if it is cold and raining!), the old hive is moved from the left of the original site to a similar position on the right. This move will ensure that any bees that have become foragers in the last week will find first and enter the hive on the original site, thus depleting the foraging bees further in the queenless hive, and the bees themselves will then destroy all but one queen cell.
- And finally, leave this hive alone for a minimum of 3 weeks during which time the queen should have emerged, successfully mated and started laying. You can confirm this if you see eggs in the hive after the 3 weeks have passed.

You will now have doubled your number of colonies and they should both build up sufficiently to get through the winter. If however, you do not want to increase your stock, you can kill the old queen and unite the 2 colonies using the 'newspaper method'. (see Beeinners Corner on page 5 if you don't know how to do this)

'BEE'GINNERS' CORNER

Q. I've been on a course and I am keen to get started. What type of hive should I buy, where from and how much will it cost me?

A. Like most hobbies, you can spend as much or as little as you want on beekeeping. Most beekeepers these days use 'National' hives but others use Smiths, Langstroths and WBC's. The latter are a double walled hive and are thought by some to give extra protection from cold winds in winter. They are however, very heavy so are difficult to move. The important thing is not to mix the hives in your apiary as this can cause headaches for you with different size of supers and frames for example. Get all nationals, or all Smiths or all Langstroths etc. The best quality hives are made of red cedar and can cost upwards of £300 but there are plenty of cheaper versions, and second hand hives, and you know what, the bees don't seem to mind. Check out e-bay for hives – one member recently bought one including carriage from England for £95. Also search the equipment suppliers on the internet. Keep an eye out in local newspapers for hives. One MBA member swears by polyhives as they are relatively cheap (under £100), lightweight but strong and arguably provide a better degree of insulation in the winter. (*Editor's note: My first 3 hives were langstroths and cost me £15 each off e-bay*)

Q. What does the term 'Queen right' mean?

A. 'Queen right' is a term used to indicate that a colony has a laying queen. If the queen is absent from the hive the colony is said to be 'queen less'. They can make a new queen from eggs and even 2 or 3 day old larvae but if there are no eggs or larvae in the hive at all, and no queen, they are said to be 'hopelessly queen less', i.e. the bees have no way of making a new queen if left to their own devices!

Q. What is a 'dummy board'?

A. A Dummy Board is usually a piece of wood the same size as a frame which replaces a frame to maintain proper spacing within the brood chamber of a hive. If your bees are only covering 8 frames for example, you can place a dummy board at each end to make a barrier in the bees' nest and to prevent them building comb in the remaining spaces.

Q. Is it Okay to move my bees in the hive to the other side of the garden?

A. Yes, you can move bees to the other side of the garden but you have to be careful when doing so! The general rule when moving bees is, 'Bees can be moved less than 3 feet or more than 3 miles!' In practice, if you move your hive of bees more than 3 feet the flying bees will return to the location the hive was originally positioned. So the way to move the hive is to move it say, about 2 feet every other day. The bees will fly back to the original site but because the hive has only been moved 2 feet they will find the entrance by sight. The other way of doing it, if the distance is too far or it is too awkward to move in short stages, is to move the bees at least 3 miles away, leave for a few weeks, and then bring back and place at the new location! In the depths of winter you are Okay to move the hive more than 3 feet!

Q. One of the swarm control techniques mentions destroying queen cells. How do I do this?

A. To destroy a queen cell, use the hive tool to break down the cell walls and remove the larva from inside. You will see the larva floating on a bed of royal jelly. Destroy anything that looks remotely like a queen cell when doing this as sometimes the bees will make smaller queen cells which will contain stunted queens and it is easy to miss them. It is important to brush all the bees from the frame as four bees can easily hide a queen cell and make sure you look along the side and bottom of the comb, as well as in any holes in the comb.

THE SCOTTISH BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN CONVENTION
Saturday 11th September 2010
8.45am – 5.10pm

At KINELLAR COMMUNITY HALL
Fintray Road, BLACKBURN, Aberdeenshire, AB21 0JG

Tickets £25 including coffee, lunch and tea

TRADE STANDS

Bookings for the Convention to Iain F. Steven
4 Craigie View, Perth, PH2 0DP. Telephone 01738 621100
(cheques payable to 'SBA' and enclose SAE for programme/receipt)



Pluscarden raffle
winner, Mike Reid,
receiving a bottle of
Glenfiddich from MBA
president Andrew
Tassell

FOR SALE **Formic Acid at 60% ...** £4. Please provide your own container/bottle with plastic/cork stopper. Expanded wire mesh, cut to your size, @ £1.70 sq ft. Ideal for varroa floors or travelling screens. Contact John Salt, telephone 01309 673703

WANTED **Smith hives or Smith hive parts**, will pay reasonable price. Contact Tony Harris, telephone 01343 821282 or mobile 07884 496246
Small calor gas container and valve for use at the Association apiary and meetings

WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

Con O'Keefe, Loraine Larkworthy, Morag Henderson, Anne Black, Carol Carlton, Alan & Lynne Ranson, Pamela Nairn & Mari McCrossan

Baseball caps, T-shirts, sweat shirts and fleeces are available with the Moray Beekeepers logo embroidered on from:

EMBROIDERY DESIGNS, Easter Lochend, Balcroy, Nairn IV12 5NY
Tel:01667 404635



E-mail: user@embroiderydesign.dial.netmedia.co.uk

BEESUITS/GLOVES /SMOCKS

Quality bee suits and clothing from BB Wear, for MBA members who receive a 15% discount (please order via the MBA Secretary)

BB1 Full suit £81.55

www.bhwear.co.uk/

The Association website is packed with lots of useful information on beekeeping and bees and has links to national associations, suppliers and other bee sites around the world. It is well worth a visit - the address is shown below.

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

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