

# The Auricle

Moray Beekeepers Association Newsletter  
Hot off the 'press'

Issue No: 7/11

October 2011

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## BIRNIE WORKING PARTY



*Birnie apiary site looking good!*

September's working party meeting went exceptionally well with 30 members turning up to clean up and carry out repairs to the apiary, storage hut and the portacabin. Weeds and grass were strimmed down and raked up, and an area was rotavated and de-stoned before being planted with bulbs and sown with flower seeds.

A broken window and the door on the hut were repaired as well as a hole in the portacabin roof and guttering. Inside the portacabin furniture was moved and cleaned, and the younger helpers painted the noticeboards (as well as themselves!).

After a welcome mug of soup and a softie, Andrew Tassell gave a brief talk on preparing hives for the winter, and this was followed by tea and cake.

Many thanks to all members who helped and who brought along tools and equipment to do the work.

**OUR NEXT MEETING IS A TALK BY M.B.A.MEMBER AND 'MASTER BEEKEEPER', DR STEPHEN PALMER, ENTITLED, ' MY BEEKEEPING YEAR'. THIS WILL TAKE PLACE AT ELGIN LIBRARY (IN THE GALLERY) ON WEDNESDAY 26<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER, 7.00PM START AND IS FREE TO MEMBERS ON PRODUCTION OF MEMBERSHIP CARD. NON - MEMBERS CAN PAY £2.00 ON THE DOOR.**

Full details of all Monthly Meetings, Open Apiary Sessions and Courses are at  
[www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk](http://www.moraybeekeepers.co.uk)

# SELECTING AN APIARY SITE

The main criteria in locating your bees is that the flight path should not cross footpaths or other areas where there is likely to be human or animal activity. The reason is obvious, as you don't want your bees stinging the neighbours or the neighbours' dog or horse. If you have no option but to keep the hive in your garden, and you do have close neighbours, you can face the hive entrance a few feet from a high fence or wall. If this is say 6 or 7 feet high the bees will have to fly to that height when they leave the hive and will then be flying above the heads of passers-by. But you will have to take into account that your bees may end up drinking at neighbouring bird baths or garden ponds, they may swarm into your neighbour's garden and they may soil the neighbours' washing as they make their cleansing flights in winter and early spring! So think carefully if you live in a small suburban garden with close neighbours, whether it's worth keeping your bees at home and falling out with the family next door.



raising the flight path



wind protection is important



a good stock fence



water supply is essential

Ideally there will be plenty of space around each hive (if you have more than one) for colony manipulation and maintaining the site, e.g. grass cutting. Also, leaving a 2 metre space around the hive will give you room for future expansion. Placing the hive on some sort of hive stand is also advisable, say 18 -24 inches high as this will prevent backache when opening it, and will provide ventilation around the hive, which is beneficial to the bees.

A poorly selected site for your apiary can also be a contributing factor in the loss of your colonies over the winter. For example, don't place your bees in a frost pocket or in any area prone to flooding! Protect hives from the prevailing winds and have the hive entrances facing south or south westerly if possible to take advantage of any winter sunshine. Make sure that you have access to the apiary by road at all times of the year as honey supers and equipment can be heavy to carry, and if livestock are in the vicinity the site should be surrounded by a stock-proof fence.

If you have more than one hive then place them in an irregular pattern with the entrances each facing slightly different directions. This will help prevent bees drifting into the wrong hive, which can spread disease. Finally, a nearby water supply should be available for the bees, especially so in winter as they need water to dilute the winter stores, and the low temperatures at this time prevent them flying far. You can help by placing a moss filled shallow tray, soaked with water within a few metres of your hives and topping it up regularly.

## POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS – HIVE INSULATION!

We all have our own ways of looking after our bees and it is probably good that there is such a variety of views on beekeeping management systems. There are though many views held by beekeepers that have been formed without any 'evidence' and here we will look at just one of them, the idea often stated that 'warm bees in the winter are happy bees'.

**'Cold, even severe cold, does not harm colonies that are in good health! Rather, cold seems to have a decided beneficial effect on bees!'**

Hard to believe? Well, so says Brother Adam, Buckfast Abbey fame in his book, 'Beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey' and he has plenty of experience and practical testing to back up his beliefs. He describes a type of protective wintering case, on the market from America in the 1920's that consisted of up to 8 inches of insulation around the entire hive, and he decided to test the claims made that this was a better wintering management system for the bees. The tests were carried out several times, the latter involving 168 colonies in two different localities in Devon and Wiltshire and the results, which will surprise you, were the same each time.

First examinations of the hives in spring showed that *'they were bone dry and without a trace of mould on any of the combs. But a great disappointment was to follow. The colonies, without exception, failed to build up! The normal brood-rearing urge, managed by the other colonies not thus protected, as well as the upsurge of energy and industry was completely lacking. The colonies wintered in the makeshift hives with little or no special protection, made rapid strides in the spring build-up'*.

The results of these experiments led brother Adam to conclude, **'In short, this form of wintering did not only prove a complete failure but in actual fact had a detrimental effect on the well being of the colonies'**. Ah! you may say, 'But the climate is much harsher here in Scotland so those results don't count for us! Well, Brother Adam reminds us that this form of wintering was gradually abandoned in the much colder climates of the U.S.A. and Canada by writing, *'bee-keepers on the Continent, where extra winter protection was until recently considered essential, have gradually come to the same conclusion as our findings made half a century ago.'*

So to sum up those findings which remember are based on research, he writes,

**'The results palpably demonstrated that undue protection has a positive harmful effect and cold – even severe cold – exerts a beneficial influence on the well-being of a colony.'**

**'Winter losses are not the direct result of exposure to low temperature, but are generally due to a lack of timely cleansing flights, unsatisfactory stores, queenlessness or disease etc.'** Brother Adam goes on to write, *'strong, healthy colonies will manage perfectly well even in adverse climatic conditions. The honeybee is doubtless a creature of the sun, but one that does not need any pampering'*.

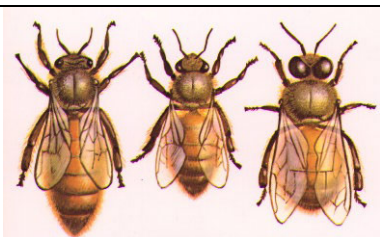
Maybe that will give you something to think about as you are considering wrapping your hives in all sorts of additional insulation, rather than merely insulating between the crown board and roof and protecting from cold winds!

## DRONES HAVE FEELINGS TOO!

'The useless drones' 'Big gangly drones!' 'Daft looking things' 'Why do the bees bother with the drones anyway? Just some of the comments I heard at the latest MBA meeting, made in jest I know, but it does seem that not everyone appreciates the drone and their contribution to a honeybee colony. So let's have a closer look at the male honeybee, the drone.



*A larger drone on the left in comparison with the 2 worker bees*



*Queen, Worker and Drone*



*Notice the very large compound eyes covering almost the entire face and top of the head*



*Drones being evicted from the hive by worker bees*

The Drone bee is large, but rounder and slightly shorter than the queen and has no sting. His head is large and almost spherical, mainly composed of the two large compound eyes that are on top of his head. He has long legs and very large wings that completely cover his abdomen, which is stumpy and almost square at the rear. Beginners can easily confuse a drone for the Queen when looking in a hive but once the Queen has been spotted she is beyond comparison.

As a colony builds up in spring the Queen will begin to lay unfertilised eggs which hatch out as drones and it is estimated that a normal colony will contain about three or four hundred drones at its strongest although sometimes many more.

As far as we know the drones only function is to mate with a virgin Queen and as the drone dies when it mates any seen around have apparently served no purpose at all. But there are many things we don't know about the honeybee and there are some (Ted Hooper for one) who feel the drones value to a colony are not fully appreciated, evidenced by the fact that '*colonies which are denuded of drones never seem to handle normally*'.

Drones fly out of the hive when the weather is warm and fine in a search of virgin queens and gather in areas known as Drone Congregation Areas (DCA's) usually 30 to 90 feet above the ground. By releasing a pheromone from their mandibular gland, they attract not only virgin Queens into the DCA but other drones as well, thus ensuring a good mix of genetic material from other colonies and minimising interbreeding.

Drones only live for about 3 weeks in summer and are evicted from the colony by the workers usually at the end of summer. The worker bees know the value of the drones though as drones are never evicted from a Queenless hive. So come on, let's hear it for the drones! Big and gangly looking they may be, but we would all be lost without them!

## 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 and it does work!

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.



## MORAY BEEKEEPERS' WINTER PROGRAMME

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> October, 7.00 – 9.00pm**  
'My Beekeeping Year', Dr Stephen Palmer

**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> November, 7.00 – 9.00 pm**  
'What's Wrong with my Bees?' (Bee Diseases and Other Nasty Things',  
Dr Stephen Palmer

**Thursday 26th January, 7.00 – 9.00pm**  
Annual General Meeting

**Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February, 7.00 pm– 9.00pm**  
'My Life as a Bee Inspector', Kirsty Sutherland

The venue for all winter meetings is the large room at Elgin Library. MBA Membership card gains free entry. Non members pay £2.00 on the door

## AMERICAN FOULBROOD (AFB) FOUND IN INVERNESS

An outbreak of AFB, has been confirmed near Loch Duntelchaig in Inverness-shire..

Beekeepers are being urged to be vigilant for signs of the disease, to maintain good husbandry practices and to notify any suspicion of disease to:

[BeesMailbox@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:BeesMailbox@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

In order to assist Government Bee Inspectors to control this disease beekeepers are being urged to register on Beebase, the national bee database. This will give them access to up-to-date information on control of AFB and bee related issues.

If you have bees in this area you are asked to contact the above e mail address. Further information at [www.scotland.gov.uk/beehealth](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/beehealth)

## 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

## COMMITTEE VACANCIES

We really need to co-opt 3 or 4 members onto our volunteer team on the MBA Committee asap.

If you would like to be involved in some exciting projects, and increase your beekeeping knowledge and enjoyment, please contact Tony Harris who will fill you in on what is required.

Experience is not necessary, just enthusiasm, some spare time and the ability to work as part of a team.

## OXALIC ACID TREATMENT

As part of the ongoing service to members and to the bees, MBA are offering an oxalic acid trickle treatment in December for £5 per hive (each additional hive £2 each).

This is an extremely safe and effective way to tackle varroa and even if you treat with Apistan in late summer it is advisable to use the oxalic acid in winter when there is no brood present.

You must be a paid up member for 2011.

To book, please contact Tony Harris or Andrew Tassell.

**A BIG THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HELPED OUT AT THE BIRNIE WORKING PARTY IN SEPTEMBER. WE ARE NOW ON THE LOOK OUT FOR A PORTALOO OR CHEMICAL TOILET FOR THE SITE SO IF ANY MEMBER HAS ONE OR KNOWS OF ONE FOR DONATION OR SALE PLEASE CONTACT TONY HARRIS.**

## VOLUNTEER NEEDED TO INSPECT ACCOUNTS – PAYMENT A COUPLE OF JARS OF HONEY

As a charity, a person independent of the Association, who is experienced in accounting, must verify our end of year income/expenditure accounts. So if you have a friend, associate or family member who would be willing to check the accounts once a year, please contact the Treasurer, Donna Clark.

## SCOTTISH BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION (SBA)

Moray Beekeepers Association is affiliated to the SBA and you are encouraged to join. Membership of £25 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/)

## HEATHER STANCE

The MBA Heather stance at Ballindalloch proved to be an excellent site with all hives having at least one, some with 2 supers of heather honey!

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

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING DATE IS THURSDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2012**