

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

Contents:

New Life Members	1
First Inspections	2
Exam Success Toasted in Moray	3
Carrying Out a Hive Autopsy	4
The Amateur's First Year	5
Notice Board	6

NEW LIFE MEMBERS!



Andrew Tassell being presented with his Life Membership certificate and inscribed hive tool plaque by retiring Secretary, Tony Harris

Two Life Membership awards were presented at the Moray Beekeepers Association A.G.M. in January in recognition of meritorious and long standing service. Retiring Chairman Andrew Tassell and 'Pluscarden Abbey' were both awarded the highest honour available in our Association.

Andrew joined the Committee in 2003 and took over as Secretary in 2004. He has been heavily involved in organising the Association affairs and running meetings since and in fact our meetings have often been the Tassell family show as Fiona, Adam and Sarah have been regular helpers with the reputation of preparing a rather fine tea. He has served as Secretary, President and Chairman and his calming influence has been appreciated by many during some turbulent times. He is a knowledgeable and respected beekeeper and on top of that he is a really good bloke who will be missed.

There has been a great history of beekeeping at Pluscarden Abbey for many years as can be witnessed by the 'bee boles' in a section of the Abbey walls.

With its stunning and picturesque setting, the Abbey is our most popular apiary meeting and has been for many years. In recent years, Father Benedict has been responsible for the bees at the Abbey and he always gives a very warm welcome to visitors to the apiary and freely imparts his beekeeping knowledge.

So, on behalf of the membership Tony thanked Andrew and 'Pluscarden Abbey' for their commitment and dedication to bees, beekeeping and Moray Beekeepers Association over the last decade. Andrew was presented with a 'Life Membership' certificate together with an inscribed hive tool and plaque and it is hoped that Father Benedict will accept the certificate on behalf of Pluscarden Abbey at our May meeting.

FIRST INSPECTIONS

by Tony Harris



Winter weather

If you have bees and they have been fortunate to come through winter, and you have successfully treated them for varroa, and escaped the attention of the woodpeckers, it would be a shame to lose your bees in spring wouldn't it? But, as experienced beekeepers know, this is a critical time for your bees and they can easily starve to death. This is because, between February and April, when the Queen has resumed laying, and the amount of brood is greater than the adult bees for a while, a cold spell will prevent the bees foraging and they can quickly run out of stores and be unable to feed the growing larvae. So keep a close eye on them and feed a thin syrup if necessary, 1kg of sugar to 1 pint of water. Use a contact feeder and once you start feeding syrup, keep going until the spring nectar flow starts or the weather improves. If it is very cold, and stores are low, place a block of fondant directly onto the top bars of the hive or over the crown board feed hole, as in the cold the bees don't take syrup down very readily.



Contact feeder, 1 kg of sugar to 1 pint of water

If you haven't done so already it is important to check for stores NOW and you can do this by hefting the hive, i.e. lifting it up on each side, front and back to give you an idea of the weight. It is a good idea to do this

regularly during the summer too as you will then have an idea of what a hive with plenty of stores feels like and you can use this as a comparison in winter.



If very cold add a block of fondant

In March, when the bees are flying and bringing in pollen you can change the floorboard, remove the mouseguard and if you have an open mesh floor it is a good idea to replace the floor insert as this will mean extra warmth, useful in helping the bees to incubate the brood at a time when it can still be really cold at night.



Pollen going into the hive – a good sign!

In April, on a warm still day (over 14C) you can carry out the first inspection of your brood chamber. You need to check for stores and check that a Queen is present and laying. How do you do that? Well, if you see a Queen you know she is there and if you see single eggs in the base of cells it is a sure sign that the Queen is laying and brood of all stages will re-inforce that view.



Laying queen surrounded by her retinue

It is also a good idea at this time to take a sample of adult bees for checking for any disease that may be in the hive such as nosema or acarine. Do this by running an open

matchbox over the bees on the brood chamber so that you have about 30 bees in the box and quickly close it. Place the box and bees in the freezer for at least 6 hours and that will see them off (don't make the mistake of thinking they are dead after 1 or 2 hours as you may be surprised to find them 'waking up!') You can then arrange with Tony Harris to check the bees under the microscope.

It is also a good idea to change 3 or 4 brood frames every spring with frames of wax foundation as this prevents build up of disease pathogens in the comb and gives the bees something to do preventing early congestion which can lead to swarming. Choose frames that are brood free, clogged with pollen, have too great a percentage of drone brood or have holes in the comb and move them to the outside of the box. You can make the change there and then if stores are adequate or do it at the next inspection.



A good frame of brood & stores

Many beekeeping management techniques involve finding the Queen so if she is marked it will really help you. (Editor's note: come to the April meeting at Birnie if you want to learn how to mark and clip Queens!).



A marked queen is easier to find

From the end of April onwards, if you want to prevent the loss of a swarm and thus save your honey harvest, you will have to carry out inspections to make sure your bees are not preparing to swarm. If your queen is unclipped these should be at 7 day intervals, if she is clipped, 10 days will be OK and in next month's Newsletter we will look again at what to do when you do find Queen cells in your hive.

EXAM SUCCESSES TOASTED IN MORAY



From left to right. Ron Clark, Morag Henderson, Andy Watson, John Willoner, Anne Black, Tony Harris, Yvonne Stuart, Davey Stuart, Dianna Baillie, Grant Scanlon, Arlene Ritchie & Barbara Westie

A packed A.G.M. IN January saw a large number of MBA members presented with certificates after sitting assessments or modular exams under the Scottish Beekeepers Association (SBA) examination syllabus.

Chairman Andrew Tassell presented the certificates and here is what he had to say.

'The SBA has a comprehensive Education programme for beekeepers wishing to improve their beekeeping knowledge and the first step on the ladder is the Basic Beemaster Assessment, a practical assessment of beekeeping skill and knowledge, held at the apiary usually in June. For 2012:

Basic Beemaster Certificates are awarded to **Anne Black & Loraine Larkworthy**

Basic Beemaster Certificates, with distinction, are awarded to **Dianna Baillie, Ron Clark, Vicky Dawes, Morag Henderson, Amanda Peterson, Arlene Ritchie, Grant Scanlon, Davey Stuart, Yvonne Stuart & John Willoner.**

The next step after taking the Basic Assessment is to sit some of the modular exams and congratulations are due to **Gerry Thompson** who was successful in **Module 1 'Honeybee Management' and Module 2 'Honeybee Products and Forage'**.

There are 8 modules in all and **Barbara Westie** completed the set in 2012, passing **Module 7 'Selection and Breeding of Honeybees'** and **Module 8 'Honeybee Management and History'**, and she is now awarded the **Advanced Beemasters Certificate.**

Hazel McKenzie passed the **Aparian Certificate** in 2012 and having previously been awarded the Advanced Certificate she is awarded the **Expert Beemasters Certificate**, the highest level beekeeping qualification available in Scotland.

So where do you go from there?

Well, **The National Diploma in Beekeeping** is the next level up and is the highest qualification available in the UK and they also run a series of short courses. Four MBA members successfully completed the **NDB Train the Trainers Course** in 2012 and are now formally qualified to teach beekeeping. **Arlene Ritchie, Yvonne Stuart, Andy Watson & Tony Harris** and **Tony** also completed the **NDB Advanced Husbandry course in 2012'.**

MBA will be running further courses in 2013 to prepare students for the Basic Beemaster assessment as well as an Improvers Course for those wishing to sit modules.

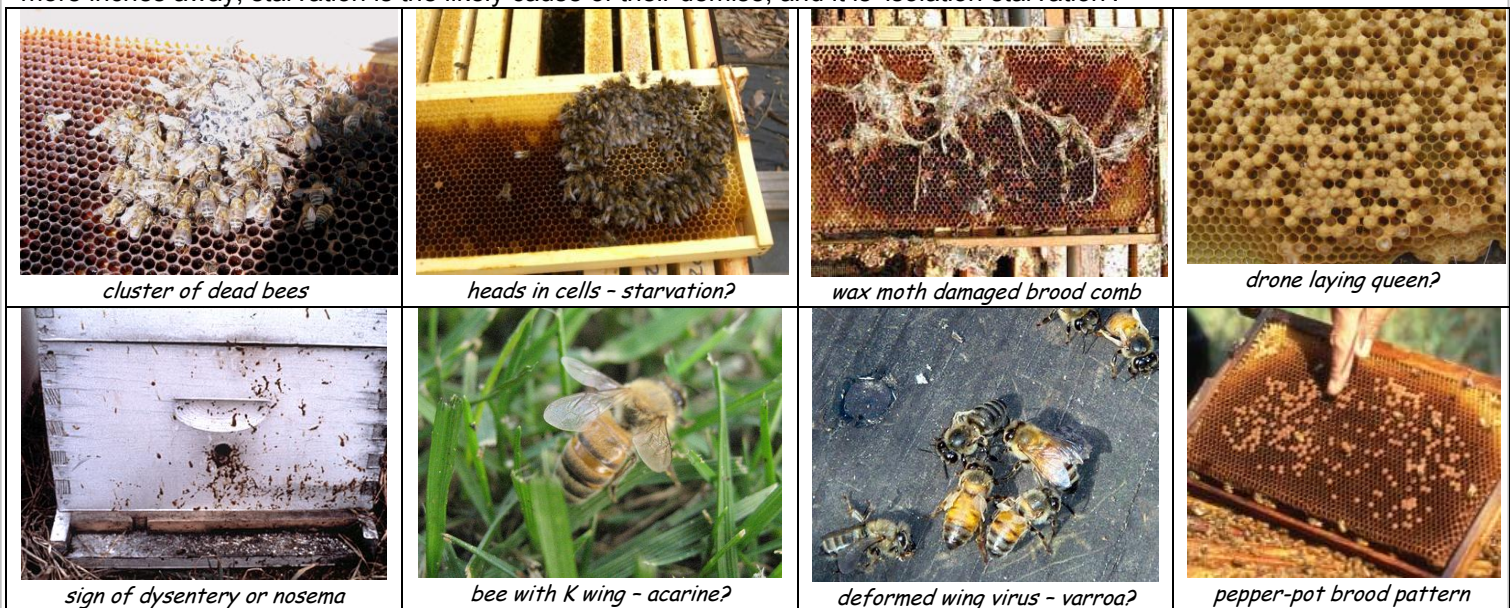
If you would like any further information please contact Training Team Leader Tony Harris or any Committee member of successful student from the 2012 list.

CARRYING OUT A HIVE AUTOPSY

After caring for your bees all summer, feeding them in September and treating them for varroa over the winter, it can be very upsetting to find that the colony has died out, can't it? But, if you did the right things, provided some ventilation, top insulation and shelter from cold winds – you should want to know what went wrong and a way of doing that is to carry out an autopsy of any dead hives. It hasn't been a really harsh winter and there doesn't appear to have been the same high losses as those experienced in recent winters. But colonies have died out, some belonging to very experienced beekeepers, and the first thing to do when it happens is to seal up the entrance to prevent other bees entering the hive and maybe spreading disease to other hives in the vicinity. If you can it is also advisable to take a sample of the dead bees for examination under the microscope and Tony Harris will do or arrange that for you for a small charge.

Now, let's have a look at some of the symptoms and probable causes. The first thing to be aware of is that bees can still starve if there is plenty of stores in the hive – it is known as 'isolation starvation' when it has been just too cold for the bees to move onto the next frame for example.

So, if the remains of the dead cluster contain bees that are positioned head first in cells with any remaining honey two or more inches away, starvation is the likely cause of their demise, and it is 'isolation starvation'.



If there is no honey left in the hive and wax cappings from the stored honey area have been ripped open with jagged capping pieces on the floor board, it is likely that the hive died out or was too weak to defend its stores from robbing by other bees or wasps.

If combs, brood or dead bees are covered with mold or mildew it is a sure sign that the hive died out a while ago or was just too weak to maintain the combs. If you discover a build up of webbing on the combs containing small black pieces of debris; remains of old cocoons and rounded elongated indentations in the wooden ware; disintegrated combs or grey moths either dead or alive, you can be sure that Greater or Lesser wax moths moved in once the colony succumbed.

If you find remains of numerous drone brood cells sometimes scattered within worker brood on the same comb it indicates an old or failed drone laying queen, and that would have seen the colony off over winter.

If you see significant brown spotting or large patches of brown staining on frames (like diarrhoea), combs or at the hive entrance it indicates dysentery or Nosema disease, although Nosema can only be confirmed by microscopic examination.

Numerous dead bees lying in front of the hive, maybe combined with the brown staining described above and bees that have disconnected their two pair of wings and rotated them into an orientation that resembles the letter 'K' it could indicate tracheal mites, Acarine disease, again needing confirmation under the microscope.

If you find small pin holes in brood cell cappings; numerous dead bees with deformed wings and/or short abdomens, with numerous varroa mites on dead bees, in sealed brood cells or on the floor, your colony has likely succumbed to the varroa mite or associated viruses and this is now known as 'parasitic mite syndrome' or PMS!

Varroa remains the most serious threat to your bees. One member treated their bees with apistan strips in September and after trickling oxalic acid at the end of December was surprised to see hundreds, if not thousands of dead varroa dropping onto the floor insert. So you must be vigilant and regularly monitor your hives for varroa. There are pyrethroid resistant mites in Scotland so an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach is recommended (more on that next month)

So, what about your dead hive? Why did the bees die? Don't just accept it if you have lost bees or continue to lose bees over the winter. Carry out a 'hive autopsy' and after identifying why they died, take measure to ensure the chances of the same problems occurring next time are eliminated or reduced.

THE AMATEUR'S FIRST YEAR

Neil Mathieson

"Why don't we get some bees?", she asked. "we've got the space in the back garden and it would be nice to have a few honeybees flying around". "Sure", was my immediate response, "they can keep the dog, cats and chickens company". So started our foray into beekeeping. How hard can it be, we thought? As it turns out, quite hard for someone who thinks he can do anything, given a little knowledge.

After hearing a number of news reports and documentaries about the decline of the honeybee across the world, it felt like we could do something to help the bee population in this little corner of the world.

We were aware of the importance of the honeybee, but had not been aware of the extent of its global decline. If you carry out an internet search on bee decline, immediately you're presented with some startling statistics:

In the UK in 2008/9:

- nearly a third of honeybees were lost
- 40% of hives died out.
- the European Honeybee pollinates over 90 crops. In the UK this is worth £190 million and in the US sixty times that amount.
- the honeybee accounts for 80% of insect pollination.

In the US in 2008/9:

- One beekeeper lost 360 out of 400 hives and a big commercial beekeeper lost 200 million bees.
- 600,000 hectares of almonds in California represent 90% of income for beekeepers
- beekeepers own around 70,000 hives which are transported huge distances across continental USA.
- because of the decline of bees, aeroplanes are ferrying bees from Australia to California and back.

I started as a lot of people might: I hit the internet to get some information. It was a matter of a few clicks, and we had bought our first hive and bees.

The hive arrived a few days later, construction and site positioning followed, and then all we had to do was



The new hive arrived

wait for the bees.

The ParcelForce driver was pleased I was in the house to accept the package when he rang the doorbell to deliver a buzzing parcel. According to him, the bees had only started to come alive in the last 20-30 minutes, so it was a package he didn't want to take back to the depot, and have to do it all again the next day.

A few days' acclimatisation beside the hive was followed by the ceremony of inserting the bees into their new home, amid photographs of some idiot in a bee-suit wielding a smoker. Settled into their brood box, the well-travelled bees were then left to get used to their new surroundings.

This was followed by weekly checks of the brood, but of course, my lack of experience and guidance from people like those in the MBA, meant that I did not know what I was looking at, even though I had read a couple of books on it: pictures in books are not the same as eye-balling the brood frames, and there is no substitute for seeing the real thing with the help of experts.

It was shortly after this that I became aware of the existence of the Moray Beekeepers Association, and although a little off the beaten track for me, I joined and started attending meetings. I started to learn what was what in the brood box. The first meeting I went to was at the heather stance at Ballindalloch, and that was an eye-opener, as I could start to relate what I was seeing in my hive with what was being pointed out. Other meetings were equally interesting, and there is always a wealth of knowledge and a willingness to help at the events.

However, I still wasn't seeing the text-book colony structure, with the circular structure of honey, nectar, eggs and covered brood, and of course, my lack of experience was telling. As time went on, I checked the colony every week, sometimes finding the queen, but other times not locating her. After a few weeks, I concluded the queen supplied

with the nucleus was no longer present. A replacement was sent and introduced into the hive, but it was too late for the colony to build up.

Although, at times there were clearly eggs being laid and brood being capped, my colony was just not expanding beyond the five original frames in the brood box.

The other factor I battled was wasp attacks. I'm not sure if they were after the sugar-syrup I was feeding the bees, or after any honey that had been deposited in the brood nest, but it was clearly the start of the demise (I know with hindsight). I struggled to keep wasps out of the hive, and clearly they were less interested in the jam and marmalade traps I laid that the honey harvest inside the hive.



Wasp traps didn't seem to work!

Shortly after I treated for varroa with Apistan, the colony collapsed in the space of a week. I had managed to starve my colony before the end of September: 4 months - not a good record, and enough to make some people shy away from it for good.

I'm not giving up. I realise I made a number of mistakes, and most likely, the majority of my errors would not have been made by a more experienced beekeeper.

The things I would have done differently are:

- Join a bee-keeping association sooner, before I bought bees.
- Attend any initial training and attend meetings to pick up tips, and to see properly-managed bees.
- Read more about beekeeping to try to understand the background to the lifecycle of the bee: when you understand simple things like why the bees do certain things, like swarming, you can start to understand the insect husbandry that is a bee-keeper's lot

Having said that, sometimes there is no substitute for throwing yourself in and gaining the experience through failure.

Editor's note: many of us learn from our mistakes but it is pleasing to see that Neil is not going to give up easily!

NEW COMMITTEE

Following the AGM in January, we have a new Chairman, Bob Malcolm (Nether Dallachy), and a new Secretary, Yvonne Stuart (Lhanbryde). Several Committee members have retired and we welcome the following onto the Committee: Mike Collins (Spey Bay), Joy Malcolm (Nether Dallachy), Ian McAndie, (Alves), Davey Stuart (Lhanbryde). Anne Black (Lossiemouth), Ron Clark (Lhanbryde) and Andy Watson (Huntly) remain on the Committee. Donna Clark (Lhanbryde) continues as Treasurer and Tony Harris continues as the Apiary Manager and is also now the Bee Aware in Moray Project Manager and Training Team Leader. Tony is co-opted onto the Committee but without the power to vote.

Joy Malcolm now has responsibility for subscriptions and membership cards having taken on the role of 'membership Co-ordinator so contact Joy to renew your 2013 subscription, Tel 01343 821453

'BEE AWARE IN MORAY'

Work has been continuing at Birnie apiary to ensure that we are ready to accept visits from school children over the summer (we have 30 slots in the diary for these visits). The Beekeeping lecture series, organised by MBA as part of the project, and delivered by Dr Stephen Palmer, have been well attended by on average 50 beginners and we will be trying our best to provide them with bees in 2013. Twelve beginners have paid £100 and for this we will provide them with the beekeeping course, a hive of bees, beesuit and gloves and beekeeping equipment. They will be mentored over the first full season and after 1 year will return the hive so we can use it again for other beginners - they can keep everything else. Two Community apiaries will be set up at the Cullen Allotment Association and the Cabrach Community Enterprise and talks to Community groups on honeybee conservation are planned over the summer and winter.

Birnie opening ceremony is planned for Friday 26th April and MSP Richard Lockhead has agreed to attend and officially open it.

Details of subsidised training courses for MBA members on health & disease, honey marketing & extraction, wax days and Nuc making will be published soon!

SUMMER PROGRAMME 2013

Sunday April 28th, Birnie Apiary, 1pm start, 1st INSPECTIONS, QUEEN MARKING/CLIPPING

Saturday May 25th, Pluscarden Abbey, 1pm start, SPRING INSPECTIONS

Sunday June 30th, Birnie Apiary, 1pm start, SWARM CONTROL

Sunday July 28th, Birnie Apiary, 1pm start, SUMMER INSPECTIONS

Sunday August 25th, TRIP TO THE HEATHER AND MEAL, Delnashaugh Hotel, Ballindalloch. Not yet confirmed!

Sunday September 22nd, Birnie Apiary, 1pm start, HONEY EXTRACTION DEMONSTRATION

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

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