



Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

Dalehouse Lane Apiary Hedge Clearance and Replanting

It is spring; the sun is out, the new hedge plants delivered and the WLBK members raring to get on with things. In the background a few bees were beginning to move (possibly to supervise the changes to their home surroundings).

The Dalehouse Lane Apiary proved to be a wonderful focus for members to get together and to collectively make what could have been a daunting task into one that was completed in the morning. In fact the numbers who turned out at the Dalehouse Lane Apiary to lend their hands to the hedge cutting, clearing and preparing for planting far exceeded the expectations of the organizers. It was so successful that we even attracted a local politician due to our numbers and our "social activism" as a canvassing target with opposition to HS2 in mind.

With the expertise on hand and with the accompanying array of tools, both old and vintage, and with a number of chainsaws expertly handled, the members made short work of the hedge clearance. It was agreed to leave the replanting to another day as more plants were needed than were on site. This will be at a date to be announced later and if the turnout is as good the WLBK will most probably make short work of the replanting. Spades at the ready!

Irene Cox



An Evening of Diseases – talk by Clive Joyce & Dave Blower

Having not managed to get to a meeting for ages, I only really went to this one as I had to take the boiler back (what a great way to clean off those frames, recommend it!), as the title of Brood Diseases doesn't sound a crowd puller. However, there were a lot of people there, from new starters to old hands and as usual our expert presenters made it worthwhile. Clive Joyce explaining how even he can get caught out (so we don't feel too responsible if the worst happens) and David Blower's "infectious" enthusiasm for all things slimy, bloated and misshapen led to a fascinating evening.

At all these events I am reminded of how little I know, but quite frankly there was some stuff I didn't really want to know..... however, the crucial point was that we should learn what healthy brood looks like, pearly white, nicely curled in the cell, an even slab of brood with few gaps, and regular slightly rounded "digestive biscuit" colour cappings. If your brood doesn't look like that then check it out carefully, (you can learn a lot by poking with a cocktail stick!) ask someone who knows, and if it looks bad then call the bee inspector - that is what they are there for.

After a break for coffee, and biscuits the colour of healthy cappings, we then had a practical session to prepare us for the Spring Inspection (due in May, and yes everyone needs to take part), so many thanks are due to Clive, David and also Roger for their time and effort. We all learned a lot, and come the Spring Inspection we will be there, better prepared, with our cocktail sticks in hand.....

Elizabeth Holding

May Bee Talk

With Christine away please send all copy and items for entry in May Bee Talk to Roger.

Roger.wilkes@kenilworthhoney.co.uk

Peter Spencer

Flower power, love, peace and mind altering substances were very much features of the 1960's when Peter Spencer started keeping bees. This was the start of a 50 year long career in which flowers, passion and mental stimulation played, and continues to play, a central part although, judging from the citation in recognition of Peter's achievement, summarised below and delivered at County AGM by Seasonal Bee Inspector and BBKA Trustee, Julian Routh, there seems to have been very little peace!



"Practised to a high standard in the many of the aspects of our craft, including successful entries in many of the classes of honey shows at branch, county and national level, enthusiasm and altruism have been the hallmarks of Peter's long bee keeping career. Combining these traits with his formidable communication skills acquired as a school master, he has trained and inspired generations of new and established beekeepers alike and has applied his energy and organisational skills in numerous roles at national, county and local level. To name but a few, he has been BBKA General Secretary from 2000 to 2004, Warwickshire County Chairman and Treasurer, Spray Liaison Officer and Gift Aid administrator, Warwick and Leamington Branch Chairman (twice), and Coventry Branch Chairman. He continues to this day to promote bees and beekeeping to the wider public and is a true ambassador of our craft."

In presenting Peter with his BBKA 50 years certificate, Warwickshire Bee Keeping Association's President Stan Dolphin recognised the contribution of the support given by Peter's wife, Rosemary, in this achievement by presenting her with a floral arrangement. Peter and Rosemary can be seen examining each other's award in the attached photo with Stan Dolphin in the background.

Ivan A Perry

(DWV) and *Nosema ceranae*

An article in Bee Talk, March 2014 reported that there was 'widespread acceptance by many scientists that deformed wing virus (DWV) and *Nosema ceranae* are being passed on from honeybees to bumbles at an alarming rate'.

I believe this stemmed from a paper published in Nature, 19 February 2014, entitled 'Disease associations between honeybees and bumblebees as a threat to wild pollinators' by M. A. Furst, D. P. McMahon, J. L. Osborne, R. J. Paxton & M. J. F. Brown, which reviews research carried out into the exchange of pests and pathogens between bee species. It was subsequently picked up by other areas of the popular press and the stories that they ran suggested that the honey bee was spreading disease to the bumble bee and solitary bees.

The paper was one of several pieces of work carried out under the Insect Pollinator Initiative which were recently presented at a gathering organised by the National Bee Unit at York. I attended the meeting and my overall impression is that scientists involved in other related work did not show widespread acceptance, indeed there was widespread scepticism of the underlying science and conclusions drawn in the paper. For example the paper does not consider how the diseases (DWV & Nosema) would be transmitted (how does an internal virus parasite of the honeybee get into bumble bees?), nor does it consider the background levels of disease prevalence in bumble bees or solitary bees that have had no contact with honey bees. Likewise it fails to consider that the disease path could have been in the opposite direction with honey bees being on the receiving end!

Since the meeting and the publication of the paper there have been responses from individuals and organisations (including the BBKA), urging caution with the findings and conclusions made in the paper, or asking for access to the primary data as it indicates significant differences with results published elsewhere. These discrepancies need to be addressed before the honey bee becomes falsely perceived as a threat by the public.

As keepers of social honey bees we have the responsibility to manage and care for our bees' health in a way that is not possible with solitary or bumble bees. While this debate goes on we must remain vigilant and ensure we take necessary action to minimise the disease risks. That includes keeping varroa levels low, changing comb regularly and reducing drifting between colonies. We must also be prepared to better inform the public who may express some negativity towards honey bees following this paper.

David Blower

BBKA Exam Successes

Jane Medwell seen here receiving her Master Beekeepers' Certificate from Stan Dolphin at The County AGM.

Other successes recognised were Tim Foden, Steve Bates and David Blower in the module exams to add to those of Gill Grimshaw, Steve Bates, Liz Bates, Julia Smith and Carol Farrant in the Basic Assessment.



NFU Matchmaking

Last May the National Farmers Union had matchmaking a programme to put farmers in touch with beekeepers in their area to offer a hive space on their land. It has now become apparent that an insufficient number of farmers have responded thereby leaving beekeepers struggling to find suitable sites for their hives. In spite of the increasing number of amateur beekeepers there is a sharp decline in professional beekeepers who make up the largest number of beekeepers. Growers should be encouraged by offering sites on their fields.

Economics is partly to blame, but also the difficulty of finding suitable sites has contributed to the decline in honeybee populations. We seem to be very fortunate in our area with the availability of hive sites although many local farmers have welcomed members placing hives on the periphery of their fields. Farmers can vastly help in providing solutions to problems with declining pollinators. We must not forget this option as Warwickshire has a fair amount of arable land as well as enthusiastic beekeepers.

Adapted from NFU weekly

Site available for a hive

The Allotments Association in Whitnash are looking for someone who wants to keep bees on the allotment site. If you are interested, please contact Mick Partridge on 01926 334618, 07773 724603 or email him on mickpartridge@hotmail.com

Swarms

The swarming season will soon be upon us. If you want a swarm, please make a request via the link on the homepage of our website www.warleambees.com. If you are advised of a swarm, or collect one and you don't want it, please refer to our website under "Contacts" for details of our Branch swarm collectors for 2014. They will know who in the Branch wants a swarm.

Tim Foden
Swarm Co-ordinator

Hive moving

No these are not invalid bees it's our Chairman way of moving her bees onto DHL.

I am told this chair is at DHL for members to use if they need to move beehives

Roger



Nitrile gloves

The Co-op is now stocking Nitrile Gloves. These are disposable gloves which have a long cuff and come in boxes of 50. They are available in small, medium and large sizes and cost £6.05 per box. Please go to the Co-op page of our website to place your order.

Queen rearing miscellany

Something topical this month – a number of items for queen rearing which is likely to start in earnest at the end of this month (weather permitting). There's actually very little specialized kit you do need; the items described below (other than the mini-nucs) generally cannot be purchased from the usual suppliers but can be knocked up very easily at home.

Fat dummies



The 'Ben Harden' queenright queen rearing method uses a double brood box in which much of the space in the top box (above the queen excluder) is filled with oversize dummy frames ("fat dummies" ... not an insult if used carefully). These have the effect of forcing bees in the top box to be concentrated on the frames containing young larvae and, critically, the grafted larvae in the cell bar frame. Normally the frame containing the grafts is accompanied by a frame of unsealed brood and two frames containing ample levels of pollen. The fat dummies that flank these occupy the remainder of the box and therefore each need to be the thickness of three and a half frames (*i.e.* 133 mm). They can be built from pretty much anything convenient – thin plywood around a softwood frame or Correx held together with duct tape work equally well. To make them slightly more useful they can be filled with expanded polystyrene chips. They can then be used to 'dummy down' a weak colony in a standard brood box for the winter, effectively converting it to a four-frame nuc (assuming two are used) without having too much dead space for the bees to keep warm. If there is no

flow grafted larvae will usually be ignored. To avoid this it is necessary to simulate a flow by feeding with thin syrup. It is therefore useful to build at least one fat dummy with an integrated frame feeder. Dave Cushman describes construction of fat dummies with a very narrow feeder, negating a requirement for a wooden float. Mine are wider, about 20mm, because that was the size wood I had at the time ... I've not had problems with them being a bee graveyard.

Frame feeders for mini-nucs

The polystyrene frame feeder supplied with Kieler mini mating nucs occupies one third of the box. Although it can be used to feed syrup or fondant it only fits the bottom box and is too deep to be used in the upper body (which you really need if you're intending to overwinter queens). Even during the queen rearing season the supplied feeder is not ideal – by occupying a third of the box it takes valuable space bees and brood could occupy. To overcome these problems I build simple frame feeders to take fondant. Using scrap wood and some offcut queen excluder they occupy half the space of the supplied polystyrene feeder. With 21 mm softwood for the frame these can take ~200g of fondant. They can be used in either the lower or upper body of the mini nuc. I place them at the opposite end of the box to the entrance, immediately below the plastic sheet used as a cover board. Checking them only requires lifting the corner of the plastic and replacing them takes just a few seconds – this can usually be achieved without disturbing the colony at all. Finally, unlike the supplied poly feeder, I've never had brace comb built within one of these frame feeders and so the queen doesn't enter them.



Mini mating nucs

Mini nucs are used for queen mating. You prime them with a cup full of bees and a ripe queen cell, leave them in a shady corner of your apiary (or, even better, an apiary with good quality drones) and come back to a mated queen a fortnight later. To be honest, these really are not worth building. The prices for Kieler or Apidea mini-nucs are extremely reasonable (perhaps £12 and £20 respectively if you try Modern Beekeeping and BeeEquipped). These are made of dense polystyrene and only need a couple of coats of masonry paint for UV protection before use. There are other types now being produced, including 'doubles' taking three, half-size frames, from manufacturers like Abelo. These are being well reviewed by those who have tried them. You can even use one of the two frame nuc boxes published in the February '14 article.

However, for those interested in bodging something together, here is a design I used last season with some success. The intention was to make a small mating nuc to take a single National brood frame. This offers a reasonable space for brood to be raised, enabling the quality of a mated queen to be checked. In addition, there is the possibility of getting the frame drawn out (and even populated with brood) before putting it into the mating nuc box. Finally, at the end of the season, the



remaining brood can be used to supplement a production colony once the newly mated queen has been moved out to her new home.

However, a single frame needs quite a few bees to keep the brood covered and warm. The queen rarely lays enthusiastically on the side of the frame adjacent to the hive wall, probably because it's slightly cooler there. To overcome this problem I (again) copied a design from Dave Cushman's website to make a tri-fold National frame. The idea being that, folded up, this would offer two enclosed spaces for the queen to work. This was a little fiddly to construct; using a couple of hinges from Screwfix and a suitably butchered standard brood frame with four additional side bars. The one thing to take particular care over is to ensure the side bars make the proper contacts when folded – with the Hoffman 'angled' and 'flat' edges meeting correctly. Cut a shallow semi-circle out of the top bar to take the queen cell (see picture below). I built a simple ply box to accommodate the folded frame, with a mesh inset in the floor and an integral feeding compartment separated by a scrap of queen excluder. A Perspex hinged crown board allows the feeder to be refilled without disturbing the little colony and a simply ply roof – subsequently covered with DPM (damp proof membrane) as it started to delaminate – topped it all off. These certainly worked as mating nucs and I got a couple of queens mated in each of the pair I built. However, both colonies were robbed out by wasps late in the season. This might be because they were simply too weak, but Kiellers in the same apiary were untouched. Instead, I rather think it was because the entrance and relative orientation of the frame was poorly designed. As just about visible in the photo below, the entrance – which is probably too big anyway – opened onto the side bars of the folded frame, rather than onto the frame face. Effectively the folded up frames were orientated "cold way" round (perpendicular to the entrance). With limited numbers of bees in these small boxes I suspect that there were very few available to defend the entrance. Perhaps it would be better oriented the "warm way" round? I've read that Beo Cooper, one of the founders of BIBBA, used this reason to justify his preference



of the "warm way" for a full-sized colony.

Of course, one of the benefits of building something like this for yourself is that you can easily modify (*i.e.* correct) this sort of thing. This year I'll drill a suitably sized hole through the side wall of the box, seal up the original entrance and try again!

Take my advice ... buy a polystyrene one ;-)

Next month – another modified polystyrene nuc box.

There will be details of equipment the Branch owns sent to all members via email. If you would like a hard copy please contact the secretary for collection

at the next branch meeting.

Dr. Bodgit

Coming up

April 4-6	BBKA Convention	Harper Adams College
April 16	Country Exec Meeting	WBKA
April 28	Swarm Prevention & Collection	Clive Joyce BBKA 7.30pm
May 10,17,19	Queen Rearing Workshop	D. Evans & D. Blower BBKA time to be confirmed
May 17	Beekeeping Taster Day	Tim Foden Bourton on Dunsmore

Free to a good home

Under the counter fridge already adapted for use as a honey melter.

Contact Val Dillon on 02476 417374 or email val.dillon@outlook.com

In the Branch Apiary

The Bees are looking good and building up well, a preliminary inspection revealed brood and eggs in all hives, as I want to bring the hives on I have been feeding syrup which they are taking down quite readily, now we are coming into a forecast warm spell I will be doing a full inspection in readiness for the new season.

Roger

Hints and Tips

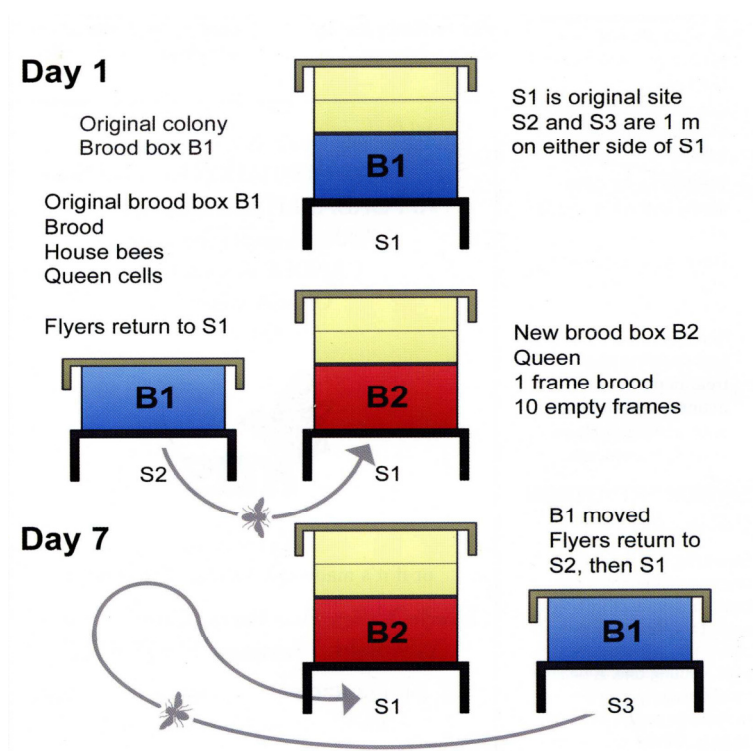
Do you have a problem with excessive pollen being stored in supers? This season try putting drone foundation in the super directly above the brood box. The bees may be more reluctant to put pollen in and so more honey will be stored. Well that is the theory – but I think it is worth a try!

11 to 18 days after emerging, the worker bees are busy making wax and building comb. The wax needs to be warmed before it can be moulded. So once the colony is expanding it is a good idea to move the outer undrawn combs towards the warmer centre so encouraging the workers to draw these out too.

If you are using disposable gloves this season remember to put them into a bee proof bin (and don't leave them in your pocket!)

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to h.essex@virgin.net...

Thankyou Helen Essex



Artificial Swarm

Method of doing an artificial swarm, why not keep it with you records you then have it to hand to help you

Roger

Reminder

Items for May issue to Roger Wilkes 12 Mercia Avenue, Kenilworth CV8 1EU
roger.wilkes@kenilworthhoney.co.uk

Editor Christine Kehrer, email address is ckehrer@gmail.com, or hard copy can be posted to her at:
13, Brookside Avenue, Kenilworth, CV8 1ES. **Content to her for next month by April 27th, latest!**

Please send in plain text, unformatted, using Microsoft Word or another common program.

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