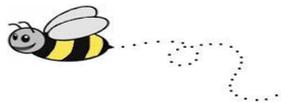


The Tivvy Buzzette

Newsletter of the Tiverton Beekeepers – October 2013

OUR NEXT BRANCH MEETINGS



Wednesday 16th October

Dr Richard Lee – Bee Sting Allergy

Wednesday 20th November

AGM & Bob Ogden – Bee Folklore

Wednesday 11th December

Christmas meal – reply on or by 16th October,
please see attached menu and booking form

15th January, 19th February & 19th March, 2014 –
details in next edition. Please come out and
support your branch at our meetings.

Notice of Branch AGM – 2013

The Annual General Meeting of the Tiverton Branch- Devon Beekeepers Association will take place at Uplowman Village Hall on Wednesday 20th November at 7.30pm.

Any member wishing to propose any matters for discussion at this meeting must notify me, as Branch Secretary, at least 14 days (6th November) before the meeting in order that it may be placed on the agenda.

I look forward to receiving your items.

I will give you further details of the meeting and the Agenda in the next edition of the Buzzette.

Tony Lindsell

The queenless colonies and its remedies, By Ian and Ruth Homer

The autumn/winter programme of talks started with nearly 40 Branch members enjoying a fascinating presentation by both Ian and Ruth Homer on a topic which certainly caused concern in 2012 and is relevant at all times. Ian has been a Regional Bee Inspector, keeping bees for a number of years. However, the first slide of the presentation was the Certificate Ruth received in 1959 as a Junior Beekeeper, (I thought no gentleman revealed a lady's age!).

Although a lack of brood may seem to be the most obvious sign that a colony has no queen, this is not necessarily the case. It may be, for some reason, the queen has stopped laying. Ian and Ruth both felt the best sign was if when opening the hive the beekeeper was greeted with a roar instead of the usual hum. The bees become agitated and aggressive, but do not seem to have any real purpose to what they were doing. A warning is sometimes given when bees aimlessly clustering around the entrance. Within the hive brood cells are not polished, but the most obvious sign is the building of queen cells.

The evidence for a drone-laying queen is obvious – a lack of sealed workers brood and too many drone cones. Laying workers, with their shorted abdomens, lay eggs at the side of the cells and quite often multiple eggs in one cell.

The reasons for a colony being without a queen was classified into Deliberate, Accidental, Apparent and Hopeless: *Deliberate* - by the beekeeper who makes up an artificial swarm to prevent swarming, a natural process, and makes new colonies.

Accidental - a beekeeper makes a mistake and loses the queen or when the queen ceases to lay. It was pointed out that a year old queen could lay up to 2000 eggs a day, but this halves each year she gets older.

Apparent - may not be all it seems. There are reasons for a queen to stop laying for a time, i.e. forage is scarce the workers may stop feeding her resulting in her not laying. The advice was to wait and read the signs. The general advice was not to rush out and buy a new queen. If she does not seem right to the workers they will kill her and we would have wasted money to no avail.

Hopeless - neither a sign of the queen and definitely no eggs. Uniting colonies seems to be the main remedy, but we were warned not to unite a colony with egg-laying workers as this will do little good to the stronger colony.

The main advice seemed to be that the raising of our own queens in nuc boxes could ensure the ready transfer of a queen into a colony without one and learn from the behaviour of the bees. Books recommended were "*At the hive entrance*" by H. Storch (on Thorne's booklist) and the books by Thomas D. Seeley – "*The wisdom of the hive*" is available on Amazon, but very expensive. "*Honeybee democracy*" is a more recent book and may still be in print. Colin Wellard.

Preparing for winter

By late September feeding should be almost completed, although it has often been mid October before I have finished feeding my bees, with no ill effects noticed. This is probably due to the milder weather in the south west. My preference is to use plain white granulated sugar (Sucrose). You may prefer to use ready to use Ambrosia syrup, good stuff but about twice the price of mixing your own, however it does have one or two things in its favour besides being ready to use. Ambrosia is slightly more concentrated than you can mix and the sugar has been partially inverted which saves the bees having to do the extra work. Sucrose is a complex sugar (disaccharide) found in the nectar of a few flowers, Hellebores for example, whereas the cabbage family contains only glucose and fructose Monosaccharides). Bees will add sucrase; old name invertase, which the bees produce from their hypopharyngeal glands to change sucrose into the simple sugars of glucose and fructose; ready for storage in the cells having further reduce the water content of the syrup. I used Ambrosia last year for the first time when I deemed I had some hives that still needed a top up in mid October. Ambrosia being stronger syrup it does not ferment if it has not been capped. If needed I will be doing the same this year. No excuses for your bees not to be well fed for winter.

Colonies that are slow to build up are a pain and normally indicate they have a problem, often these are the colonies that are robbed out by wasps, the problem may well be Nosema, you can use Vita Gold in the autumn feed or you can use it in the spring coupled with a frame change, this will help to reduce the level of infection. Better to take a sample of bees in the spring and bring it along to the branch Nosema testing day. My reason for raising this problem now is **robbing**, it is not just wasps that rob the hive of honey but bees from other hives will join in. Returning robbers will transport Nosema spores back to their hive and any other nasties that are lurking. All good beekeepers will of course have reduced their hive entrances, the smaller the colony the smaller the entrance. When feeding always feed of an evening when the bees are at home and they will have got over their excitement by the morning, also feed all the colonies in an apiary at the same time; reduces the chance of robbing. Should you be unfortunate enough to have a hive robbed out, close the entrance as soon as possible. Give the hive a good old thump to drive out most of the bees, and then close the entrance and leave for a week for the robbers, bees and wasps to die off. It is good experience to examine the dead hive and see what you can find, you may well find that there was no or little brood maybe with drone cells and no queen. Queenless colonies or poor drone laying queens are often the ones the wasps attack. If it is any consolation it probably was not any good any way. Always clean up and flame the insides of a hive that has died out. Frames can have the old wax taken out and put in a black dust bin liner and tied up ready for the wax extractor next year. The frames can be scrubbed up during the winter when you are looking for something to do.

By the end of October or early November I will be putting my mouse guards on the hives, making sure the holes in the guard are flush with the floor. This will make it easier for the bees to drag out the dead during the winter and not having the dead pile up on the floor. If you have a wire floor with a narrow full width entrance you will not need a mouse guard. With a solid floors I will be raising the crown board at the back with match sticks to create a good air movement from the front of the hive up the back of the hive and out of the top. Any feeding holes in the crown board will be closed. This procedure should keep the hive nice and dry throughout the winter.

Do not forget to heft your hives from time to time. This practice will help you judge whether you need to feed early in the new year with candy or sugar paste.

Talking of wasps and bees, while working with my bees putting on a second Apiguard I heard a different buzz, I knew what it was, a large hornet (*Vespa crabro*) on the hunt. I quite often see hornets around the apiary in summer and autumn. They may be large and make a lot of noise but they are much less aggressive than wasps, and as yet I have not been stung by one. As I watched this particular hornet darted at something and dropped into the grass. On parting the grass I observed that it was holding on to an insect; was it one of my bees? Before I could find out it flew up on to a tall flowering grass stem. I could now see it was dismantling a wasp. One up to the hornet, I wonder how many wasps it takes a day?

Keith

So you want to become better beekeepers . . .

We all want to become better beekeepers. Even the most experienced and successful admit there is still more to learn about our bees. To those of us who are relatively new to beekeeping our bees seem to keep on raising new questions and problems to be solved. Of course if we become better beekeepers, not only is this good for our bees, but we produce more honey and wax for use and sale! Maybe we might even recoup some of the not unsubstantial investment we have made in our new hobby!

The tried and tested method is to ask an experienced beekeeper. We would all be at a loss if Keith and Bob decided to change their phone numbers and not let any of us know! The winter series of Branch meeting is intended to be interesting and informative and discussion with Branch members during the coffee interval is always useful. Recent attendance has demonstrated that a substantial number of us find these meetings useful.

Over the past three years fifteen of our members have taken and passed the BBKA *Basic Assessment in Beekeeping*. This is a practical and oral examination aimed to test our basic knowledge and ability to work through a hive, ensuring that we are safe to handle bees and are competent to ensure their safety and that of the general public who may come in contact with our bees.

For those keen to extend their knowledge there are two possible routes. The practical is to take the BBKA *General Certificate in Beekeeping Husbandry*, recently taken and passed by Keith. To progress onto this it is necessary to have passed the *Basic Assessment* and have kept bees for at least three years.

For those to whom sitting written examinations hold no fear (whoever they are!) there are *Modules*. These are on *Honeybee management, Products and forage, Disease, pests and poisoning, Honeybee biology, Honeybee behaviour, Selection and breeding of honeybees*, and finally *Honeybee management, health and history*. Success in these lead to *Intermediate and Advanced Theory Certificates*. The 1½ hour examination takes place in March and November.

In support of these Modules the National Diploma in Beekeeping Board run a number of courses, some held locally in Devon by the Basterfields who can be found between Honiton and Beer. Three members attended the Queen Raising course and found it very informative. Attendance at these courses does not oblige one to take the relevant Module.

Bursaries are available to support Branch members wishing to continue their education in beekeeping, currently standing at half the cost up to £70.00. More information is available on the following websites: www.bbka.org.uk and www.national-diploma-bees.org.uk. The process for applying to take the examinations is to contact me who will pass the details onto Chris Utting, the BBKA Examination Secretary.

Colin Wellard.

Editors note – the branch are intending to run another Improvers course in the Spring and it comes highly recommended from this member!

An Introduction to Beekeeping Course will be held at Uplowman Village Hall, starting on Wednesday 23rd October 2013 from 7.30 to 9.30 p.m.

The cost of the course will be £90.00, payable in two halves, half at the commencement of the programme and the remaining half at the January 2014 meeting. On completion of the course, members will be provided with membership of Devon Beekeepers' Association for their first year.

The Programme will include:

October	23rd	A general introduction to Honey Bees	
November	6th	The Colony; queens, workers and drones and	27th The hive and its components
December	4th	The history and origins of bees and hives and	18th The beekeeping year
January	22nd	Swarms, their causes and prevention	
February	5th	Queen rearing,	26th Pests and diseases
March	12th	Bee plants and hive products and	26th Getting started

A series of apiary meetings will follow in the summer of 2014 to provide practical 'hands-on' experience for those completing the winter programme.

For further information and course booking please contact Keith Owers 01884 254977. Application forms are available on the branch website at www.bbka.org.uk/local/tiverton/bm~doc/beginners-2013-4.pdf

The Basic Assessment Ordeal

Having attended the Beginners Course in 2010/11 and the Improvers Course 2011/12 - both being really excellent - it seemed the right thing to do was to take the Basic Assessment this summer. .. And hopefully show that all the effort Keith Owers and others had put into training us was worthwhile!

Along with several of my class mates I put in my application and eventually received the information regarding the exam with the details about what we should know. That was when the realisation set in that the Assessment was going to be a lot more extensive than I had thought.

The day of the Assessment was very damp and miserable and it was raining when I arrived so the examiner suggested I assemble the frame first - that seemed to go OK and then there was a break in the rain so it was action stations to do the hive inspection. Whether it was the sudden rush or what I'm not sure but by the time we were beside the hive to be inspected I realized the Smoker wasn't really producing any smoke. This exact situation hadn't happened to me before but I remembered reading that one should always remove the veil before trying to relight the smoker so moved a short distance away and took off my hood. Straight away a bee or two came buzzing round and I thought a sting was the most likely outcome. Fortunately, however, the smoker got going and the hood was back on before disaster struck. The inspection was fairly straightforward - I was asked to describe everything I saw and the only slap on the wrist was because I talked about "capped brood". This is a big no, no - it's "sealed brood" - only honey is "capped"!

After the inspection we retired to a very well appointed workshop for the question and answer part of the Assessment. That is now all a bit of a blur the only question I can remember struggling with concerned American Foul Brood. He wanted to know what steps I would take if this was discovered in one of my hives.

Having said I would contact the Regional Bee Inspector (who would probably tell me to burn the hive if it was confirmed) and BBKA I couldn't think what else there was to do! However the answer was "Nothing" or to be more precise leave the hive alone and not move anything. I suppose I didn't say that because it would not have occurred to me to move anything anyway....

Finally the ordeal was over - but it took nearer two hours than one! A couple of weeks later I received notification that I had passed. Phew ! What a relief - as the pass mark was 50% it would have been a real disgrace to have failed.

So thank you very much to Keith, Bob and others who gave so much time to our training - hopefully we now all have enough expertise to adequately care for our bees!

Hilary Scott-Wilson

Note from your Buzzette Editor

Many thanks for your contributions. Please keep sending them in to:

Post Galleons Lap,
Plymtree,
Cullompton,
EX15 2LQ

Or pass on a note at the meetings.
Sarah Lines

<http://www.bbka.org.uk/local/tiverton/>