

The Tivvy Buzzette



The newsletter of the Tiverton Beekeepers ~ April 2017

Tiverton Beekeepers are a branch of The Devon Beekeepers Association. Registered Charity No 270675.

Branch Meetings.

**Sunday April 9th Apiary Inspection at
Knightshayes 10:00 am.**

**Bees under the microscope inc Nosema testing
evening Wednesday April 19th,
Uplowman Village Hall 6:30.**

**We still have a vacancy on the committee for a
Branch Secretary, to replace Tony. Interested?
Then please contact the Chairman Malcolm
Jenkins.**

The Branch meeting took place on the 15th March at Uplowman Village Hall, Malcolm Crook stood in for the Chairman and after club business and announcements the 27 gathered members settled down to a very interesting talk by Claire Densley who explained the complexities of Phermone Communication in the hive. Claire works at Buckfast and she gave us an insight into the research she has been involved in and new research that she will be undertaking in the future.

The meeting was in two parts and after a tea & coffee break we all went back into the hall and there followed a question and answer session with Claire. Malcolm then thanked Claire and the meeting closed around 21:50.

Give them a chance

Last year was not the best of years for my bees. The spring was not too bad and the bees built up quite well and as usual I had some of my hives preparing to swarm in early May. So far so good, but June turned out to be wet and not ideal for my young queens to be out on the town looking for fit handsome drones, the result poorly mated queens of which some quickly developed into drone layers. The first week of July was lovely, just what is needed for a good summer honey flow. Not to be, the weather changed again cool and dry and that was the end of the summer flow in mid Devon. The dry conditions was most noticeable on the brambles, yes they flowered or shrivelled and failed to produce fruit. By mid July I was not a popular beekeeper with my local farmers. The bees in general were aggressive and having a go at anyone who came near even if they were in a tractor cab, I had not experienced this before. Yes I have had grumpy bees before but not like this. Speaking to other beekeepers in the area this behaviour was quite common even from well behaved colonies. I think the problem was quite strong colonies with nothing to do; the same situation happens when Oil Seed Rape comes to an end, the bees are always very touchy.

I decided to move one of my poorly mated nucs to another site but as a temporary measure put them in our small cottage garden, in almost forty years of bee keeping I have never had bees in the garden before. I have not bought in any queens for a long time but decided that as I had three colonies with poor queens that were of no use I would try and buy some new queens although it was now late August. Local reliable good queens are not always easy to find and I did not want to buy foreign queens even if they were from the EU.

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I decided that Crediton was not too foreign for Tiverton and they would probably have the same accent. My friend supplied me with three queens and these were duly introduced to my failing colonies. The bees in the garden romped ahead in their four frame Langstroth nuc box so much so that I placed a second box on top. About a week later I could see all was not well with the garden bees. Wasps were hanging around and I could see dead larvae had been thrown out of the nuc box and very little pollen going in, time for a good look. On inspecting the bottom nuc box the queen was soon spotted and looked well but very few eggs, the unsealed brood was not right and some was clearly dying and was being thrown out. Plenty of honey and some pollen although there was a lot of flowers around, no sign of Wasps attacking. I could not identify what was wrong, time to ask an expert. If I lose a colony or something goes wrong I like to try and identify what has happened. During the winter months I help teaching beginners and as such find myself answering all sorts of awkward questions, frequently what went wrong with their bees? For this reason I was keen to find out what was happening to my poor colony.

My colleague who spends a lot of time looking for bee diseases; you can guess what he does, kindly agreed to come and have a look. After a very thorough inspection he too was unable to give an answer, a virus was possible but no sign of Varroa mites around. We both agreed that they would not make it through the winter. Asked what I was going to do? I said I would give them a couple weeks, look again then decide. The following day I gave the bees a small feed of Ambrosia syrup and left them to it. Dead larvae were still being thrown out but not so many. A week after the inspection it was noticeable that there was an increase in the amount of pollen going in and they were still guarding their small entrance and keeping the wasps out. Fourteen days had elapsed, time to look inside again. Everything looked in order, plenty of eggs and pearly white larvae just as it should be. Problems like this do not just happen there has to be a reason. What would a good detective do? Location, my back garden, nuc box raised off the ground at the base of a Devon bank with a Beech hedge on top. Wasps, nest located in the top of the bank under the hedge, strong and only two meters from the nuc entrance, well done the bees for keeping the wasps out even though they were few in number. In the other direction my greenhouse three meters away with the door facing the nuc box. At last I think I have an explanation. About a week before finding the dead larvae being thrown out I had been working in my greenhouse and had accidentally left the door open. In the greenhouse on the work bench were a few brood frames with a little honey in the corners, they should have gone in my solar wax extractor but I had packed it away as the sun was getting too low for it to work well. Bees had found the frames and honey but had not found their way out of the greenhouse and were clustered in the gable end. I left the door open till dusk hoping the bees would remember their way home but they did not. The problem was I think a sudden loss of adult bees. For the colony to stand a chance of survival the colony must reduce food consumption, how do they do this? The queen must still be fed but they can put her on short rations which will reduce her egg laying capability. Some of the eggs in the cells may be eaten by the workers and larvae will be sacrificed and thrown out. The remaining bees will look after the queen and a reduced number of larvae to keep warm. As soon as new young workers are able to start gathering fresh pollen the colony will again start to build up. This is what I think happened to my nucleus.

What did I do wrong? One never leaves old frames around where the bees might have access for an easy meal. Do not assume that bees lost in a confined space will find their way home. I had thought that the bees in the green house may have come from somebody else; as the green house door was facing the nuc box I would have thought that the bees with straight flight path home would be alright.

It is now mid March and the colony is building up well, the Wasps died out in early December and never did attack the colony.

I leave you with the thought that if honey bees or bumble bees come indoors through open window they rarely find their way out but wasps can, why?

Keith Owers

Beginners' corner: choice of hive

Right at the beginning of our beekeeping career we have to decide on the type of hive to work with, yet at that stage we lack the experience to make the most suitable choice. A young person makes a choice/falls in love and gets married long before he or she really knows what it's all about. This piece is an attempt by way of an 'arranged marriage' to summarise the pros and cons of a few of the hives widely available in the UK, in the hope of avoiding a painful and costly divorce and change of partner later on, when you decide a different type of hive might suit you better.

On the Continent the Langstroth hive is almost universally used by both professionals and amateurs; in the UK, by contrast, there are at least a dozen different designs of mostly incompatible hives, perhaps reflecting such British qualities as genius, invention, enterprise, non-conformity, independence - or is it eccentricity. In addition to the National, and the Langstroth, we have the WBC, Commercial, Modified Dadant (MD), Smith, Centenary, Warre, Dartington, Top Bar, Rose OSB and the 'Natural' hive. (It is tempting to add the customary 'to name but a few' but that would be unfair – this must be a near-complete list.)

For some of these hives, there is also a choice of different types of frame; the National hive, for instance, has some six different frame types to choose from (perhaps more a con than a pro). Here are some pros and cons of the three most common British hives.

The National is the most widely used – some 80% of UK hives - and that in itself is an advantage, perhaps its main advantage, because it is easy to buy new or second hand equipment, as well as nuclei of bees. Its other advantage is that the components are small and therefore light and easier to handle – an important consideration for some of us.

On the down side is the fact that the brood box (b/box) is too small to accommodate a very strong colony, and so people resort to 'brood-and-a-half', that is brood box plus super below the excluder, or even a two brood arrangement, but then inspection involves looking through twenty frames instead of just ten, and this can take longer and cause more disruption. There is also the option of the 12X14 (jumbo) b/box, but now the weight problem rears its head, and this box is heavier than a Langstroth b/box. The National is a 'bottom bee space' hive, which some consider a disadvantage.

A **Langstroth brood** frame has nearly 40% more area than a National one, and yet the full *super* is only marginally heavier than a National super. It is a top-bee-space hive; all major suppliers stock it and it is the favourite of many professionals. There is only one type of brood frame, which is self-spacing.

The WBC (named after its inventor William Broughton Carr 1836-1909) is quite unique. Its main advantage, from the point of view of the resident bees, is that it is a double wall cavity construction which keeps the inner parts dry, well ventilated and probably warmer too, and the bees often winter well and thrive in it. It is also an attractive archetypal hive to look at. Its disadvantages to the beekeeper are that it has more parts and is therefore more complex and more expensive, and involves more work in opening and closing. It is also an awkward hive to seal up and move. Professional beekeepers tend to avoid it.

The frames of a WBC are identical to those of a National, and therefore a nucleus bought on National frames can be installed in a WBC. It is also quite possible to use a National as the inner of a WBC: place a National hive on a WBC stand, pile up the lifts (outer layer of the WBC) and top those with a WBC roof. The National floor and roof would now be redundant. However, as soon as the weather warms up, the lifts can be removed and stored, and the hive worked as a National till late autumn, when the lifts are restored for winter.

Summarising tentatively I would say that if you intend to keep no more than say five hives, then a WBC should be a strong contender. A Langstroth is a good compromise between practical size and weight, and is the simplest choice. The National is the most common and the lightest. *Continued on next page.*

Later in the season we are aiming to create enough nuclei at the Knightshayes apiary so as to be able to provide the beginners class with a nucleus each, and those would be on National frames, which are also WBC compatible. However, if you choose to work with the Langstroth hive, we should be able to populate that too, using a swarm or otherwise.

Baruch Livneh.



If you have any interesting articles relating to Bees & Beekeeping, please do not hesitate to forward them to me by email to jon.gubb@voddens.co.uk by the 27th of the month for inclusion in the next months edition of the Buzzette.