

NHBKA April 2013 Newsletter

Before I started beekeeping, there were a few things I knew, there were things I didn't know I knew, and there were things I knew I didn't know. I didn't think there were things I didn't know that I didn't know¹. In the last category I would put something like the maximum non-fatal flow rate of bees in a partial vacuum. This important information was one of many highlights of a thoroughly interesting presentation by our vice-chairman, Vincent Wright, entitled 'Getting bees out of buildings and catching swarms'. The presentation was part of the final indoor meeting before the start of the beekeeping season proper.

Before the presentation, our chairman, Helen, asked for support for some of the events being attended by the association during the season. Providing the weather holds up, these events are very enjoyable and an excellent opportunity for correcting some of the misconceptions the public has about bees, and for raising the profile of beekeeping. One event where we need volunteers is the Herts County Show at Redbourn on Saturday, 25th May and Sunday 26th May. Usually there are sufficient people available so that you are only required for half the day and can spend the other half at the Show. We would like to provide an observation hive if possible, so if you want to help either with attendance or the hive, please contact me or Helen. Details of all the events are available on the website, <http://www.bbka.org.uk/local/northherts/>. Helen also reminded members about the BBKA Swarm List Registration, and several members put their names forward during the meeting. A big thank you to them!

The first part of Vincent's presentation concerned bees in buildings and he started by asking why we would want to remove bees at all, then went on to discuss the various options. The first two options – leaving them alone, and killing them were touched on briefly. The first option leaves the bees creating honey and wax (a fire hazard), and the possibility of swarms in the future, so this might not be acceptable. The second may be cost effective but doesn't remove the honey or wax, leaves dead bees in the building and the chemicals used may affect other bees and insects. So we arrived at option three, often the most invasive and highest cost option; removing the bees – but first we need to find them! If you can find the point of entry, you might be able to follow it back to the colony; you can use a stethoscope to pinpoint their sound, use the heat they generate and signs of honey and wax to locate them.

Vincent identified the two ways to remove the colony; starvation and physical removal. To starve the bees out, they must be flying and the trick is to prevent the flying bees returning to the colony. A rather clever box is attached to the point of entry and has a non-returnable exit for the bees and a non-returnable entrance for the flying bees both of these lead the bees to a second hive connected to the box by a pipe. As the flying bees fail to return, the non-flying bees begin to eat the honey, and the queen stops laying. All the brood will have hatched after 21 days, and during that 3-4 week period the bees will start to leave the building as they run out of stores. After 6-8 weeks the process should be complete.

Another starvation method used a cone of mesh with an exit the size of about 2 drones; the base of the cone is placed over the entry point to the colony. A spare hive with a couple of frames is located as close as possible to the entry point and as the bees are unable to reenter through the top of the cone they go to the spare hive. Again this is a 6-8 week process, the bees exiting the building as the stores run out.

And so to the physical removal of bees and the partial vacuum. Vincent's vacuum box is large enough to contain frames of foundation or drawn comb at the bottom and a large space at the top to accommodate the bees as they are sucked in. A vacuum cleaner is connected to the box via a pipe which enters the box via a 'Richardson' bee sieve. The large surface area of the sieve helps to reduce bee fatalities. A second pipe exits the box and is used to suck up the bees. A handy control flap on the box regulates the pressure in the box. The right pressure is reached when the bees are just being picked up by the pipe. Vincent did describe the experimental stages of this

¹ Thank you to Donald Rumsfeld, a master of linguistic circumlocution and a shining example to us all

process when the vacuum he used was too great, I will avoid a complete description in case you are eating.

One removal that Vincent described in detail was of a colony of bees located between floor joists. The essential points were: stop the bees spreading to other rooms, work from the bottom, make sure you can get out, ensure you have everything you need, check the direction of the joists, avoid any services (electricians, etc.), use plastic sheets to cover everything, and, most importantly, tell the householder exactly what you are going to do. The necessity of the last point became clear when the hole between the joists that Vincent cut in the plaster ceiling was enlarged to almost twenty feet long. A newly decorated room too!

The final part of Vincent's presentation dealt with swarm collection. Ideally, none of us want to attend to collect a swarm that isn't a swarm of honey bees, or is in an inaccessible place. Vincent's advice is 'the more questions you ask, the better, and the more informed the decision you can make' – and remember to take all your equipment; secateurs, smoker, straps, steps...! So

- Confirm they are honey bees – perhaps ask to be emailed a photograph
- How high are they? – if more than 6ft up, they will be hard to identify
- Is access easy?
- How long have they been there?
- What are they hanging off?
- If attending, give the caller your mobile number – if the swarm departs, at least they can let you know

The containers used to house the swarm can be

- a cardboard box – not good if wet, and if covered in wax, is attractive to bees
- a swarm box – use a 14 x 12 hive with a large gap at the top
- a skep
- a spare hive

There is the iterative method involving a bag and a rope attached at one end to the branch where the swarm has landed, and the other end to your foot. If after a sharp pull on the rope, the bees miss the bag and usually land on you, the next time, you stand in the right place!

We have had made some progress in our search for new out-apiaries and now have several hives at the Odyssey Health Club, most of these were hives moved from Graveley. We are also in discussions about a site in Knebworth and a possible roof top site in Stevenage. There will be further details if these options become viable.

Gary Hammond has been busy developing a NHBKA Facebook page. If you search Facebook for 'North Herts Beekeepers Association', you will get to the link, <https://www.facebook.com/NHBKA>. The more people who 'like' the site, the higher up the ratings it will go and attract more visibility.

And so to our caption competition for the picture at the end of the newsletter. It features three of our intrepid members, Messrs. Hammond, Murphy and Mercer, who visited the BBKA Spring Convention earlier in April. (I'm not sure if it was Robin Dartington, also attending, who was the photographer). Please send your caption entries to me or Helen.

As the outdoor temperature in April tantalisingly approaches double figures, we will be apprehensively opening up our hives for the first time. I hope the sight that greets you is a welcome one; don't forget that we could get swarms over the next few weeks, so make sure to check for any queen cells, and dust off those notes you took of Frank Everest's artificial swarm presentation. You have got a spare hive ready, haven't you! Best of luck.

The next indoor meeting is in October, and will be a presentation by our local bee Inspector, Peter Folge. In the meantime, there are visits to member's apiaries, events where NHBKA

members are involved, and some opportunities for new beekeepers learn some of the practicalities for beekeeping.

