

NHBKA August 2013 Newsletter

The Association had a light sprinkling of celebrity fairy dust recently. Our Chair, Helen Amey, was aired on Three Counties Radio during a phone-in discussion about how to deal with problematic bees; the case in question was undoubtedly a colony of bumble bees. A few weeks later, following a request that came via our Bee Inspector, our Association elder statesman, Derrick Richardson, provided some hives and equipment for Elstree Studios to be used as props in a film called 'Bagsey'. I hope he gets a mention in the credits. We wish Derrick well in his recovery from a recent operation. When I spoke to him a few days after he emerged from the Lister, he was full of praise about his treatment and was his normal jocular self, so well on the mend. Last weekend we had a visit to our training apiary site by Natalie from Heart FM who wanted to know more about bees.

We have had several offers of sites for hives around North Herts from members of the public and from businesses, and very recently from a farm in Great Chishill. We hope to locate hives in new sites in Royston, Letchworth, and Stevenage, either for over-wintering, or as new colonies in the spring.

August is the last month for apiary visits and we started the month with a visit to Vincent Wright's hives in his delightful garden setting at Steeple Morden. The meeting was well attended and most of the work required marking queens in several of his colonies; we found and marked all but two! Vincent has adopted a short-hand method for identifying queen-right colonies – the language of the stones. If the hive has a marked queen - no stones on the roof; queen present but unmarked – one stone; queen not present – two stones. This method works well until the apiary is filled with beekeepers who are unsure of the procedure and remove or add stones willy-nilly. Once again the refreshments were excellent so thank you to all the Wright family for helping out. It was noticed that John Hill seems to have developed a natural affinity for following bees - something that was evident last year - for in a group of a dozen people there was a constant flight of bees that refused to leave John alone.

Our final apiary meeting of the season was a splendid affair at Robin Dartington's Honeyworks site in Hitchin which included a tour of the training apiary and a BBQ. The meeting was attended by beekeepers and family members from both North Herts and Buzzworks, about fifty people in all. The site is well worth a visit if you haven't been and has been carefully designed to accommodate the apiary, cabins for training and bee work, seating areas, and a delightful pond, full of pond life. Needless to say, the refreshments were delicious and catered for all tastes and seemed to be never ending. Thanks to Robin and Christine and all the Buzzworks people for organising a splendid day.

Despite the late start to the season, everything seems to have caught up. Butterflies, especially Peacock butterflies, are out in number, as are the wasps ... The bees seem to be back on track and are beginning to evict drones from the nest already, always a slightly unequal struggle between the smaller workers and the larger reluctant drones.

Although several members have noted that varroa infestation has been quite light this year, if you are planning to treat your colonies (you need to start now) there are members with a few spare MAQS strips and several treatments of Apiguard, please contact me or Helen if you would like to acquire either of these.

It's almost September so time to assess whether your colonies will have sufficient stores for the winter and plan to start feeding if necessary. A colony needs 40 lbs (25kg) of stores to get through the winter. A British Standard brood frame of stores weighs about 4.5 lbs if full on both sides – time to do the maths!

A reminder that our indoor meetings start again in October. In the meantime, why not visit the Stevenage Gardens & Allotment Association show on 14th September, or the City Harvest Festival at Capel Manor on 21st September. Don't forget the Thorne's Windsor sale at the end of September too, there are details on their web site.

Finally, congratulations to Chris Mercer, Gary Hammond, Deborah Minnock, Lynn Smith, and Vincent Wright for continuing our 100% record of passes in the BBKA Basic examination. Well done to all. The deadline for the receipt of entries for the November BBKA examinations is 30th September.