

NHBKA February 2013 Newsletter

Our first meeting of the New Year was a presentation by Peter Tomkins but before the evening started in earnest we had some association business.

Graham Beesley reported back on the Hertfordshire committee meeting held on 8th January. The good news is that the county association finds itself particularly well-endowed financially. So much so that no capitation fee will be levied this year. The Hertfordshire chairman is keen on promoting training. This has actually become important because the BBKA Basic examination (a good mixture of theory and practical skills for the new beekeepers) can only be assessed by someone in the county who has completed the BBKA General Husbandry qualification. In Hertfordshire at the moment, this weighty responsibility rests on the shoulders of a single person. The official Bee World event will be hosted by Bishop Stortford at the Bishop Stortford carnival on 22nd June. Other Bee World venues are proposed at Capel Manor in September and at the county show in Redbourn. Members intending to provide honey for sale at these events are reminded that a charge of 15% is levied on honey sales to go towards the cost of hosting the event. A proposal was made at the Herts meeting by Bishop Stortford that a marquee be purchased for the association with additional costs for signage, storage, etc. The NHBKA representatives voted against the proposal and the County wanted to gauge the level of support for the proposal. There was some agreement at our meeting that the cost (£2500) was a little excessive and whether the anticipated benefit would be realised by all the associations in the county. GB has responded already to Peter Mathews, the Herts chairman.

Christine Phillips reported back on a BBKA Educational Workshop on 9th February. There was an emphasis on a life-long learning approach, appreciating that not all beekeepers interested in training wanted to participate in examinations. Further discussions involved the use of mentoring where experienced beekeepers are available as a main contact for a small group of new beekeepers. Christine requested members who had not already done so to contact her with their thoughts on training at christineyallop.phillips@gmail.com.

Helen announced that Pat Veasey, our current Treasurer, has decided to step down after more than fourteen years in the role. Pat wasn't at the meeting but Helen passed on our thanks for his huge contribution. This means that the post of Treasurer is vacant and a new Treasurer will be elected at the AGM in March.

Peter Tomkins spent 40 years working at Rothamsted and during the period between 50's and 70's, was working among a group of top scientists that included James Simpson, Colin Butler, Leslie Bailey and Brenda Ball. Bailey was working on bee viruses and identified 10 viruses that could be present in colonies. Ball identified that viruses could kill colonies in a short period of time. The presentation, entitled '**Colony Compromise Disorder**', focused on the part we (the world-wide community of bee-keepers) play in the spreading disease - some things being unhelpful, and some harmful.

In a series of slides we saw hives disturbed by falling trees, by passing livestock, by flood, and by changes in the environment. Several slides showed apiaries with high densities of hives, and of the disturbance caused by migratory bee-keeping on a large scale.

Several issues arose from the Rothamsted work –

- Virus can kill bees in a week
- Nosema is stress related
- Apiaries should be of <10 hives
- Pollen should be mixed
- Less is more with regard to manipulations

- Most foraging done within ½ mile of hive
- Workers travel 500 miles in their lifetime (so the further away the source, the less the number of forages the bee can complete)
- Colonies in the wild are 5m – 10m above the ground
- A double stand causes vibration in the hive not being examined
- Drones drift more
- Only use swarms for increase and refrain from bringing in bees from another area (if possible)
- Honey should be taken off in July
- Colonies should be treated in August
- Breeding for temperament and honey may breed out beneficial characteristics
- Use acetic acid to treat combs
- Use the Bailey comb exchange to limit the spread of pathogens

In the discussion of viruses, the following were of particular note –

- Paralysis virus – can kill in days
- Acute paralysis virus (associated with varroa) – bees soon die
- Deformed wing virus (associated with varroa)
- Black queen virus/Filamentous virus/Bee Virus Y (all associated with Nosema Apis)
- Bee Virus X - Nosema, Shorten life span
- Cloudy Wing Virus – airborne; bees soon die if heavily infected; present in 15% colonies in UK
- Slow paralysis virus – can kill bees in 12 days

As Bailey noted – ‘*probably all of the wide variety of bee pathogens can occur in colonies that nevertheless can continue to appear healthy...*’ The appearance of varroa swung the balance unfavourably against the bee. The difference between success and failure occurring at the tipping point.

(Further details can be found at

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~msbain/elbka/Diseases/Virus%20diseases.pdf>
<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=275&video=01#video>

also see the recent BBKA article about varroa by Dr Stephen Martin entitled ‘*Hawaii Provides a Key Piece of the Varroa Virus Puzzle*’ – December 2012)

The relationship between beekeeping practices and viruses was highlighted in the following –

- Excessive manipulation – Nosema, Amoeba (that causes cycts)
- Migratory beekeeping – Nosema, Acarine, Amoeba, EFB (aggravated in the spring)
- Overstocked apiary or area – Acarine, APV (Acute Paralysis Virus), Sac Brood
- Queen rearing – Nosema, Acarine, Amoeba, EFB
- Transferring brood – AFB, EFB
- Reusing comb from dead colonies (in the USA these are known as deadouts) - Nosema, EFB, AFB
- Overcrowded brood – EFB, Numerous viruses particularly Paralysis

Peter summarised the presentation in a series of points of best practice for beekeepers that identified preventative measures to reduce the impact of pathogens

- limit number of hives in apiary <10

- reduce unnecessary manipulations; brood and comb transfers
- resist temptation to save small colonies
- artificially swarm for increase
- try not to let the hive become too overcrowded – provide extra space when moving colonies
- change as many combs as possible ; replace at least 2/3 combs in middle of brood nest
- artificial swarm for increase
- clean and sterilise equipment before use
- limit movement between apiaries
- caution in bringing things into apiary

Thank you to Peter Tomkins for a thoroughly absorbing evening and sharing his many years of bee keeping experience. I'm sure much of his presentation has caused us pause for thought.

The refreshment break needs a special mention. Not only did we (again) have a delicious cake from Helen (banana) but also some lovely bee-inspired cakes from Dave Fewell's wife. Jan (I'm fairly sure Dave didn't bake them). The break tends to be a major part of the evening and an opportunity to catch up with other members, and this meeting was no exception.

You may have been accosted by Derrick Richardson with a new style sliding entrance block he has developed. It ingeniously combines all the different options from a fully open entrance with mouse guard to a single bee space. The block is completely eco-friendly, being created from second hand materials. I'm sure it will be available for sale at the AGM, and you can probably pre-order from Derrick.

Make sure you don't neglect your bees. Check the weight of the hive and feed as necessary. Check the entrance is clear, especially if we have more snow. Let's hope the spring is a little more bee-friendly than last year.

The next meeting is on Tuesday, March 19th 2013 at 19:30. This is the AGM where we elect the committee representatives for the forthcoming year with entertainment being provided in the form of our annual honey tasting competition (has anyone got any honey from last year to taste!). There will also be an opportunity to buy and sell any bee-related paraphernalia at the Bring and Buy table. Hope to see you all then.