

NHBKA March 2013 Newsletter

As I write, the bright morning light of the first few days in spring has been replaced with the reflected light from a blanket of snow that augurs well for sledging over the Easter weekend. Goodness knows what the bees think of all this, no sooner are they out collecting pollen from crocuses and hazel than they are back in the rugby scrum.

We held our AGM on Tuesday with a good attendance from members. We had thirty at the meeting, a fair number for an AGM. Perhaps the numbers were swelled by the keenly competitive Annual Honey Tasting Competition or Frank Everest's insights into the Artificial Swarm Procedure, coupled with a realisation that a lot of us will be involved in its practicalities fairly soon. Or perhaps members were drawn by the anticipation of a few bargains on the Bring and Buy table, the nearest NHBKA gets to a car boot sale.

Helen Amey, our Acting-Chairman at the time of the meeting, chaired the AGM steering us through a very full agenda. The good news is that we have an alternative site for our training (possibly two in fact as we go to press!). This opportunity for new beekeepers and those with a fledgling interest in bees proved very popular last year at Graveley. Even though a number of the meetings were cancelled because of the appalling weather in the early part of the season and we didn't start in earnest until mid-May, several new members joined after one of the Saturday visits.

Helen was confirmed as Chairman at the AGM and Chris Mercer was elected Treasurer to replace Pat Veasey who decided to stand down after 14 years sterling service for NHBKA and 34 years on the Herts committee. .

Though examinations are not everyone's cup of tea, five NHBKA members passed their BBKA Basic Examination last year and we have a few more members interested in taking the exam this year.

We attended at several events last year, taking an observation hive to the Bee World display at the County Show in Redbourn, the Hatfield County Show, and Stevenage Day in August. Stevenage Day was very popular, two new members were recruited and Derrick and Helen sold all the honey they took to the event. There are a number of events that we are participating in this year so please try to join us. See the web site for an up-to-date calendar.

Two other opportunities for members to volunteer were mentioned at the AGM. The first was registration on the BBKA Swarm List. This provides a post code link for the public to beekeepers who will collect a swarm. Helen has queried the BBKA about the coverage for this service as Bedfordshire members are not currently listed. Bedfordshire is not part of BBKA and it wouldn't be appropriate for North Herts beekeepers to be listed for swarm in faraway Bedfordshire.

The other opportunity is for some of our experienced members to give something back to our new beekeepers through a mentoring scheme. New beekeepers would have an experienced member as a contact who they could phone for advice. Again volunteers welcome.

The Apiary Meetings early in the year suffered because of the weather but there were successful meetings at Little Offley hosted by Peter McKenna, at Robin Dartington's Honeyworks, and with David Matthews at Standalone Farm. Opportunities are still available for hosting apiary meetings this year!

Derrick has enlisted the support of Frank Everest and John Hill as members of a formidable Queen Marking Team, guaranteeing to find your queen in all circumstances, if you have one elusive Queen? Ring Derrick on 01438 861227.

After the formal part of the AGM, Frank Everest demonstrated the Artificial Swarm procedure with a number of clearly marked boxes representing different parts of the bee colony; the queenright colony, the required empty brood box, a super, etc. together with a rather robust representation of the queen on her frame (queen supplied by Derrick). At various points the queen was in the queenright colony, and then in the empty brood box which replaced the original box, now a queenless colony, on the original site. Tommy Cooper did a wonderful sketch with boxes and hats, with his inimitable dialogue of 'Box, Hat,. Hat, Box,...', and there were hints of this in Frank's demonstration. The point of the procedure is to mimic the process that goes on in a swarm and end up with a colony that is in the state it would have been in if had it swarmed, i.e. a queen on a new set of frames, together with the flying bees, with the remainder of the colony in a different location from the original site, with a virgin queen.

The Artificial Swarm process can be used for increase or not. If the additional colony is not required, then the two colonies are combined (using the newspaper method to initially separate the colonies). If increase is required then the colonies progress as separate entities. The only drawback in the process is that in a normal swarm the flying bees will have filled up with honey before their departure so will have food available in their new colony. In an Artificial Swarm they do not, and the colony will need to be fed. Even then the bees may decide the new location is not for them and decide to leave. There is an inevitable delay in creating new adults in both of the colonies (bearing in mind this will occur in the peak of the season) although Frank has seen an empty brood box (a deep and a shallow) be completely drawn in 10 days. Helen suggested using coloured drawing pins as a labeling device for the different boxes as it's quite easy to become disorientated in the mêlée of bees. Even though there will be a disruption to the availability of honey with an Artificial Swarm, Frank said that honey should be available in a fortnight

Members were invited to submit one or more jars of honey for the Annual Honey Tasting Competition. The first three prizewinners are presented with a trophy and the winner of the first prize is published on the website. More than a dozen entries were submitted and these were tasted and marked over the tea/coffee break at the AGM.

The results of the competition were as follows

First Prize – Graham Beesley
Second Prize – Dave Fewell
Third Prize – Brian Fairey

Congratulations to Graham and all the members who supplied honey for the competition

This month's tip comes from Graham.

'At this time of year, February/March, when inspecting your hives, check under the roofs for queen wasps. They like to hibernate there, kill them now and avoid a lot of trouble later'

If you are keen to get involved in some of the opportunities mentioned, or help at some of the events contact me at northhertsbees.secretary@gmail.com, or Helen at northhertsbees.chairman@gmail.com.

The next meeting is on Tuesday, April 16th 2013 at 19:30. Our Vice-Chairman is talking about 'Getting Bees Out Of Buildings' (without doing too much damage to the infrastructure - or perhaps not). Hope to see you all then.