

NHBKA Mid-Summer 2013 Newsletter

Bees are enigmatic creatures at the best of times but during the swarming season they seem to be even more so. We all know why bees swarm, don't we? Bees swarm to make increase, triggered mostly by too many sisters with too little wardrobe space when the weather and forage provide ideal conditions for setting up elsewhere. There seems to have been considerable swarming activity this year, possibly concentrated because of the late spring. We've had colonies swarming following an artificial swarm procedure; we've had nucs swarming; we've had a swarm taking up residence in a hedge for so long they created capped queen cells. None of these tick boxes that would lead us to think that the bees are likely to swarm!

The wasps seem to be a little late this year, so keep an eye on activity at the hive entrances, perhaps reducing the entrance for weaker or smaller colonies. Despite the late spring, the honey yields seem to be quite promising with several members reporting large volumes. We may have come to the end of the seriously hot weather but if it continues make sure there is sufficient ventilation in the hive, putting matches under the corners of the crown board will allow some of the heat to escape.

The training sessions or taster sessions at our apiary at Odyssey have been well attended. There are nine hives there now and Helen has organised three Saturday visits for new members and non-members who would like some experience of beekeeping. The Odyssey apiary also hosted the BBKA Basic examinations. A big thank you to Christine, Helen and Ray for all their efforts to make sure everything ran smoothly. We should have the results through for the next Newsletter.

There have been two apiary meetings since the last Newsletter, one at Standalone Farm with Dave Matthews in June and another at Little Offley on a very hot Sunday in July with Pete McKenna. Roman gave us a master class in bee-handling at Standalone Farm, scooping up handfuls of bees in his bare hands. Some of us have so far to go we're not even in the tunnel yet! There was as ever a splendid selection of cakes at both meetings, and it was quite challenging attempting to finish all the cakes at Peter McKenna's in the unseasonable heat. A big thank you to Dave and Pete and the unseen sandwich and cake makers for ensuring the meetings were a success.

There are two more apiary meetings this year, the first at Vincent Wright's site in Steeple Morden, and the final one is at Robin Dartington's Honeyworks site in Hitchin. The Honeyworks visit includes a BBQ, an excellent incentive for getting together to compare notes for the season. We are providing the food for the BBQ, so if you're planning to attend let Helen Amey know and discuss with her what you can bring along. Let's round off the year with good attendance. Dates on the Calendar page.

And finally a cautionary tale about expanding foam...

Once upon a time there was a family living peacefully in a house in a little village. The house was so pleasant in fact that a colony of bees decided to take up residence in the roof. Now the family were quite happy about the bees until they needed to repair the roof, then the bees became a problem because the roof repair man didn't like bees. The beekeepers' answer was an empty, inviting (for the bees) hive on the roof connected to the only entrance of the colony by a one-way tube. To make sure it was the only entrance, a small amount of expandable foam was used to block all the other likely entrances. The small amount of foam soon became a large amount of foam, and the large amount of foam became a huge amount of foam, visible for miles around as it grew from the space under the roof to cover part of the house. Unfortunately not only did the foam not completely block all the other entrances, the bees seemed to like it, chewing through it to get out of the roof, completely ignoring the one-way tube to the inviting hive. The inviting hive was eventually home to a passing swarm who were the only winners in this tale. The family, the repair man, the beekeepers and especially the bees in the roof were very unhappy. The moral of this story is not a warning about expanding foam but that even the wise must recognize their limits.