

## NHBKA October 2012 Newsletter

The first indoor meeting of the season was opened by our acting Chairman, Helen Amey, who welcomed new and experienced beekeepers to a well attended meeting. She introduced Vincent Wright who has been asked to be part of the committee and adds valuable experience from his time at Canterbury.

Pat Veasey briefed us about the recent Executive committee meeting where a motion was put that the Herts and Ware branch should be excluded for actions that contravened the principles of the Charity Commission. Pat said that the training shortcomings of the Herts & Ware branch that formed the basis of the motion did not warrant such exclusion. Derrick Richardson, who was Chairman of the Executive committee at the time Herts & Ware were inaugurated, agreed. Our Executive members, Pat and Graham Beesely, voted against the motion. The position of Herts & Ware will be reviewed again by the Executive committee at their next meeting in January 2013.

Frank Everest gave us an entertaining presentation accompanied by some excellent photographs about many aspects of beekeeping; the organisation of the hive, swarming, bee parasites and bee products. The evening should perhaps have been entitled, 'An evening of Bee Theatre'. At one point, Frank played a recording of the piping of a newly emerged queen, a noise created by the vibration of her wings and as haunting as the song of a whale. The sound is used to elicit a response in other queens. Those new queens still trapped in their cells can only manage to respond with a faint drumming noise. But the cells soon become their tombs as the newly hatched queen locates them and stings them through the cell wall. A Shakespearean drama! The image that lingered most was not a photograph but the description of Frank and Dr Hill demonstrating the recovery of a swarm that happened to occur during an apiary meeting. As it was high in a tree, Frank and Dr Hill used a swarm box atop a long aluminium deck mast. Unfortunately the combination of the position of the swarm, being too high, and the length of the mast, being too unwieldy, caused them to slowly fall over backwards much to the amusement of the onlookers. And they say that slapstick is dead! Frank's engineering credentials showed themselves in his latest salvo in the war against the woodpecker. He has had some sheet metal plates made that completely cover the sides of a hive turning it into a Fort Knox for honey bees. We anticipate a response from Woody in the form of a beak fashioned into an elaborate tin opener. Frank signalled the use of neonicotinoid insecticides as an increasing threat to the honey bee, a problem that is making itself felt as Colony Collapse Disorder in the States. If all these problems weren't enough, Frank also highlighted the likely arrival of the Small Hive Beetle. A big thank you to Frank for an enjoyable evening; something for new beekeepers and those with more years of experience that they may like to admit.

A point mentioned by Frank and noticed by many members has been the reduced level of varroa infestation this year. By now you will have applied whatever remedial measures you feel are necessary and counted the mite drop to give you an indication of the infestation in your colonies. Although some bees are still out collecting from ivy and Himalayan Balsam, the beekeeper will not be attempting any more manipulations of colonies until next year. An average colony needs 40lbs of stores to get through the winter, that's about eight full brood frames full of honey. The bees will eventually stop taking syrup from the feeder as the temperature falls. Don't forget to heft your hives to get an idea of their weight. Although you won't know the exact weight by lifting the hive at least you will have a practical indicator to use as we move through the colder months to know whether your bees need further feeding with fondant. It's a bad beekeeper who lets their bees starve. Don't forget to protect your colonies from predators overwinter. Now is the time to put in mouse guards and woodpecker protection (even if it's not metal cladding). If you have hives that are in remote locations, remember that they become more exposed as the leaves fall from the trees. Some kind of netting might provide some level of camouflage.

At our last committee meeting, we discussed a couple of items that members may like to think about. One was the formation of a small queen marking team. Frank mentioned queen marking in his presentation, but first find your queen! This is essential if you want to manage the swarming

activities of your colonies. The idea would be to use the team as a last resort when your efforts to find the queen have been unsuccessful. One other item discussed was the use of mentoring to provide advice and assistance to new beekeepers in the early stages of their ownership of a colony. A mentor in their local area would be appointed from the existing membership. So if you consider that you have sufficient beekeeping experience, you may be asked before the start of the 2013 season if you would like to volunteer your services.

Our next meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> November by Chris Evans discusses the Apimaye hive that originated in Turkey.

Don't forget to support Hitchin Apple Day on 20<sup>th</sup> October, we will have a stall in the Old Market Square. The festivities run from 10:00 to 14:00.