

NHBKA September 2013 Newsletter

September started with temperatures in the high twenties but by the middle of the month we were considering turning on the central heating and I'm sure that I noticed the signs of a ground frost in Hitchin one Saturday morning. Thankfully by the end of the month we were to be back to more seasonal weather.

If beekeepers thought they had earned a little break after a busy August extracting honey, unfortunately, September doesn't offer that opportunity, not a time for *dolce far niente*. Most of us will have been feeding our colonies for several weeks now, hefting the hives to get some idea of the weight. This will help next year when we need some idea about feeding fondant. Remember a colony needs about 40lbs of stores to get through the winter, that's 8 or 9 full British Standard brood frames; to give you some idea of comparable weights, for 40lbs, think three stones of potatoes, or the Easy Jet baggage allowance. At this time of year the feeding is not only to build up stores but also to reduce the amount of stored ivy nectar. Ivy crystallizes quickly so is not an ideal source of food for early in the year when the bees would need a ready supply of water to use it. Better that they stock up on Fairtrade White Granulated or Tate & Lyle. Keep feeding until the bees stop taking the sugar syrup, this is likely to happen midway through October.

Our local Bee Inspector, Peter Folge, offered the following advice for this time of year, 'Check bees have enough food after supers are taken off especially before treating otherwise they can starve to death very quickly. I have seen one such colony already. Plenty of pollen is coming in but virtually no nectar. There is also a huge wasp burden in some apiaries so please keep an eye on this too. Reduce entrances and remove any empty unoccupied frames that can not be protected by a strong colony.'

A new acronym, MAQS, has entered the beekeepers' lexicon. It stands for Mite Away Quick Strips and is a recent ally in our fight against the varroa mite. If you haven't seen the treatment, it comes as strips saturated with formic acid that are placed within the brood chamber and is a similar type of application to thymol. Several members tried the treatment this year with encouraging results. The instructions suggest that the minimum amount of ventilation required during treatment is achieved by removing the entrance block, obviously not an ideal suggestion with a high level of wasp activity. But sufficient ventilation can be achieved with an open mesh floor and open venting in the crown board, retaining a reduced entrance that the bees can defend; an empty super without frames on top of the brood boxes gives the bees an area to escape to, away from the fumes. Egg laying slows down to nothing during treatment, and there were very few dead bees. Where the varroa drop was checked following a treatment, no varroa were found. Egg laying recovers within a couple of weeks after treatment. All the members I spoke to who had used the strips had similar success, even for a colony with K-wing deformation and visible varroa running on the comb. One drawback is the price, a considerable hike up from the cost of the treatment in the States.

As the temperature starts to fall we need to be thinking about mouse guards and woodpecker protection. Remember that if you use netting to deter the woodpeckers, it needs to be supported a distance from the hive, otherwise the birds will just use it as a purchase to attack the side of the hive. This month's BBKA monthly magazine has a very good article about winter preparations. Anyone who saw the examples of woodpecker damage to beehives brought to meetings by John Hill and Frank Everest will be in no doubt about the havoc the birds can cause.

A reminder that our indoor meetings start again in October, the first, a discussion on bee diseases by our Bee Inspector, Peter Folge, is on Tuesday, 15th October at Howgills and starts at 19:30.

Graham Beesley will be running the Association stall in the Old Market Square in Hitchin for the annual Apple Day event on Saturday, 19th October. If you would like to help Graham with the stall for an hour or so during the day please let me know. The Apple Day event runs from 10:00 to 14:00