

## NHBKA April 2014 Newsletter

It was an evening of firsts at our April indoor meeting; the first meeting with our new chairman, Gary Hammond, the first time Chris Mercer addressed our little gathering from the front of the hall, and the first time we had a Mexican Wave. After welcoming us all to the meeting, Gary opened a very busy agenda with an overview of the BBKA Spring Convention, a 3 day affair with the first two days given over to a trade show with companies like Thorne, and Maisemore Apiaries. It was attended by members Gary, John Murphy, Chris Mercer and Robin Dartington among others. There are numerous lectures, most are free but some have an entrance fee and require you to pre-register. Gary is quite interested in bee photography so attended a camera lecture and learned features of his camera that he didn't know about! Other lectures covered flower planting for bees, and insecticides - all lectures given by leading lights in their field.

Gary previewed the Herts Bee World event at the Herts Show on Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> May, and Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> May; our Association has been invited to cover the virtual hive and candle making. He reiterated the need for volunteers and more members have offered their help as a result.

The swarm season is upon us already and Gary reminded us to register on the BBKA Swarm List. Members can contact the secretary who will pass their details on the BBKA. The member's name and contact number are available to the public on their web page; swarm collectors are located by post code.

Gary followed up on the idea of a logo competition, the logo needs to encapsulate North Herts and Beekeeping. He suggested entries be submitted as .JPEG, .TIF, or .PDF files, but for those who are still resisting the advance of the computer age, a hard copy will be acceptable. We will collate all the entries and have a member vote at the indoor meeting in October.

Gary, a self-confessed social media geek, reminded the meeting of the North Herts Facebook page that he maintains at [www.facebook.com/nhbka](http://www.facebook.com/nhbka), and our Twitter account, @nhbeeks. We have also registered the nhbka.org.uk web address to bring us in line with BBKA ([www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)) and Hertfordshire ([www.hertsbees.org.uk](http://www.hertsbees.org.uk)) and our web site can be accessed at [www.nhbka.org.uk](http://www.nhbka.org.uk).

The focus of the April meeting was prompted by the BDI initiative to award grants to associations that can demonstrate their implementation of the DEFRA Healthy Bees Plan, and Gary was pleased to announce that our representation was accepted and we will receive a grant of £100.

Chris Mercer kicked off his part of our healthy bee evening with a comprehensive discussion of bee diseases, The Good, Bad and The Ugly ("il buono, il brutto, il cattivo" - cue soundtrack by [Ennio Morricone](#)), delivered with slides that illustrated what you would encounter in the hive. He started by reassuring us and not to panic, although we would certainly encounter common problems like varroosis and chalkbrood, we were very unlikely to see either European Foul Brood or American Foul Brood in this part of the country. The key to a healthy hive is a strong colony and good husbandry, with regular examinations in the swarming season (that's now folks!), following the old adage 'prevention is better than cure', and keeping up to date with new pests and diseases. Chris recommended registering with BeeBase, the FERA National Bee Unit website, at <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/> (something that was also mentioned last year by Peter Folge, our seasonal bee inspector). The examination of your hive should be based on knowledge of healthy bees and your bees in particular; knowing what healthy bees look like, what healthy brood looks like, the smell of the colony, the activity at the entrance, whether they are bringing in pollen.

After a discussion of 'The Good' that we need to look for in a colony, Chris began on 'The Bad, and The Ugly', starting with Nosema. It has symptoms of dysentery and lethargy and infects the bee's gut. A colony in good health, that is well fed with a prolific young queen, is less likely to be susceptible. There are two variants, Nosema Apis and the more recent Nosema Ceranae and it has been reclassified as a fungus. A Nosema Apis infection will show as streaks of orange and brown discharge at the hive entrance and on frames. It is not notifiable (i.e. beekeepers do not need to report it to the National Bee Unit) and there is no recommended treatment in the UK although colonies can be treated with Nozevit, and Vitafeed Gold. The advice is to requeen with queens from more tolerant stocks that are more able to resist the infection.

Then Chris moved onto Varroosis, an infestation of Varroa Destructor mite. The mites breed in capped brood and the adults attach themselves to adult bees. On worker brood, 1.73 viable mites are produced per cell, whereas on drone brood this rises to 3.62 viable mites because of the longer period that the cell is capped. It is not notifiable and the mites can be detected in brood, especially in drone brood, and on open mesh floor inserts. Various treatments are available; MAQS, Apiguard, Apistan, etc. as well as practical steps that break the brood cycle.

Chris went on to describe other problems that bees face. Braula Coeca, the bee louse (Apistan will kill it off), Tracheal Mites (also known as Acarine, and the Isle of Wight disease), neither of which are notifiable. Tropiaelaps, the Asian Hornet, and the Small Hive Beetle, are all notifiable but not yet present in the UK. The Small Hive Beetle is a big problem in Australia and the States. The two foulbroods found in the UK, American (AFB) and European (EFB) are both notifiable. AFB is the most destructive brood disease in the UK. What with wax moth, chalkbrood and other brood disorders, green woodpeckers with 4 inch tongues, mice and inquisitive animals like badgers and deer, it's a wonder we get any honey at all.

Chris concluded with his Ten Rules for Beekeepers – thou shalt

1. Keep you Apiary Clean and Tidy
2. Never throw propolis or brace comb on the ground; be sure always to place it in a suitable container and remove it from the apiary
3. Never buy old combs
4. Never buy colonies of bees unless it is known that they come from disease free apiaries.
5. Always disinfect second hand hives and equipment before use
6. Never feed honey or allow bees to gain access to it; refined sugar is the only acceptable feed for honeybees
7. If a colony dies out during the winter (or at any other time) and the trouble is not due to starvation, seal the hive, pending the examination of the comb and bees, to prevent stores being "Robbed out"
8. Never exchange brood or super frames/combs between one colony and another unless it is known that all colonies are known to be disease free. Where possible, supers should be marked and always used on the same colony.
9. Take care to prevent robbing at all times by observing commandment 2 and not spilling syrup or having leaky feeders
10. Arrange all hives in such a way that drifting is reduced to a minimum. This is essential for minimising disease and its spread in an apiary.

If you think you have a diseased colony, first contact Chris Mercer, our Disease Officer, then the Seasonal Inspector Peter Folge if you need further guidance, all details are on our web site, [www.nhbka.org.uk](http://www.nhbka.org.uk). All notifiable diseases must be reported to the NBU (National Bee Unit)

After the refreshment break we were treated to a version of 'How Clean is Your Kitchen' with Vince Wright and Helen Amey taking the parts of Kim and Aggie. Vince took us through the various stages involved in honey extraction with Helen adding details about the important hygiene issues along the way.

- Testing for extraction

Vince began with the testing needed to establish whether the honey is ready for extraction; is the whole frame sealed?, if not, do spots of honey come out of the comb if the frame is shaken?, it is ready if none appear. A refractometer which measures the refractive index, or a hydrometer which measures the density can be used to assess the water content of liquid honey. It is important to use a honey hydrometer and not the one you use for in your illicit alcohol production. Water content should be between 17%-20% to prevent fermentation.

- Uncapping

You can uncap honey with a kitchen knife using a sawing technique, or an electric uncapping tool, and for small numbers of frames a drone uncapping fork will also work and then you don't have to deal with the removed cappings. Vince's uncapping tool of choice is the hot air gun. It causes the capping to melt and explode as there is usually an air bubble under the capping itself – this process is best done in somewhere other than the kitchen! At this point Helen intervened with a brief description of the requirements of Stevenage Council if honey is sold in Stevenage. They visit the location you use for honey extraction and register you with the Environmental Health & Licensing department if everything is satisfactory.

- **Extracting**

If you have 2 or 3 hives a tangential extractor is adequate. The frames are uncapped and loaded around the circumference within the drum. When one side of the comb (the outer edge of the circumference) has had the honey (partially) extracted, the frames are reversed and the process repeated. This sequence may need to be repeated several times for a set of frames to extract all the honey. Within radial extractors, the uncapped frames are loaded like the spokes of a wheel so it is not necessary to reverse the frames. A small tangential extractor will set you back £100 - £150. After use, the extractors need to be cleaned with hot soapy water. If you're doing this in the kitchen, make sure your extraction schedule doesn't clash with the dinner party – honey gets everywhere.

If you have honey which has solidified in the comb, you can uncap it, spray it with water and give it back to the bees to rework. Put the super underneath the brood box and the bees will move the honey up to the top of the hive. You can also use a double boiler or a honey press (an apple press or a wine press will work as well) to assist with the extraction of solidified honey.

- **Filtration**

After extraction the honey will contain bits of bee, wax, etc. so needs to be filtered, initially through a coarse mesh, and finally through a fine mesh of stainless steel or food grade plastic. A 250 micron fine mesh is satisfactory for general honey, but Vince uses a 90 micron mesh for honey for shows. After filtering, the honey needs to be left in honey buckets to settle to remove any bubbles.

To clean the equipment used in honey extraction, wash in cold water first to remove the wax, then hot water. Remember that any equipment covered in honey should not be left outside for the bees to clean.

Creamed honey production needs a seed of creamed honey. The molecules are smaller and not all honey is suitable. Professor Elton J. Dyce learned to control the crystallization process and was able to produce an extremely fine-grained creamed honey.

Visit [www.masterbeekeeper.org/dyce/creamhoney.htm](http://www.masterbeekeeper.org/dyce/creamhoney.htm) for details of his process.

Remember to check the latest labelling regulations if you are selling honey, for instance, the sell by date is required by law, and remember metal lids will corrode over time. If you are selling honey, Trading Standards can ask for a sample to test for water content and weight.

- **Hygiene**

Helen reminded us that around the apiary make sure the site is clean and tidy, and your equipment and clothing is clean; use disposable gloves to prevent cross contamination. Don't leave honey supers on the ground, number them so they can be returned to the same hive, and put them on plastic sheeting for transportation.

To round off the meeting, Derrick reminded us of the beekeepers' mnemonic 'Really Quiet People Don't Shout' when you examine your colonies

- Is there enough **R**oom?
- Is there evidence of the **Q**ueen?
- Is the colony making **P**rogress?
- Is there any **D**isease present?
- Does the colony have enough **S**tore to last until your next visit?

So endeth the April meeting - and the Mexican Wave? Well you had to be there.

We seem to have had an early onset of the swarming season so make sure you are making regular inspections of your colonies to check for queen cells.

We have concluded our indoor meetings until the end of the season; our next indoor meeting is on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> October at Howgills. In the meantime we have several meetings at members' apiaries and events where North Herts will participate, have a look at the calendar on the web site for details, [www.nhbka.org.uk](http://www.nhbka.org.uk). Our first apiary meeting is at Pat Veasey's on Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> June.

Following a suggestion made at the AGM that we should have a social gathering at one of the local pubs, Christine Phillips volunteered to visit several in the area to assess their suitability (alas, someone had to do it). We have decided to go with the one suggested by Brian Fairey and meet in the bar at **The Buck's Head in Little Wymondley on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> May at around 19:30**. Hope to see you there.