

NHBKA February 2015 Newsletter

Gary Hammond, our Chairman, opened the first meeting of the New Year.

The first agenda item covered the revamped Herts AGM which will be held in Tewin Village Hall on Saturday, 28th March, starting at 13:00. Following poor attendance at previous AGMs, the meeting will now include something to attract even the most curmudgeonly beekeeper; a county honey competition, a wax exchange, a woodworking corner, microscopy, a bring and buy stall, a sales table and even a ubiquitous quiz. Almost incidental to the proceedings will be the AGM itself and the election of officers for the forthcoming year, so please come along and lend your support.

Gary provided details of several training courses that are being organised by the Welwyn branch; see the details are at the end of this newsletter.

There are two posts on our committee that become vacant in March. Vince Wright is standing down as Treasurer. The post is not too onerous and most of the work is concentrated at the start of the year when subscriptions become due. As well as the normal accounting tasks, banking cash and cheques, supplying annual accounts and Gift Aid details to Herts, there are the capitation costs to Herts and BBKA, and the Bee Disease Insurance to pay. Apart from the handling of the subscriptions, there is very little activity in the accounts. The other post is the Training Officer. Helen Amey held this post whilst our training apiary was at Odyssey. We are in the process of moving our training facility to Hillbrow in Letchworth so it is an ideal time for someone to start in the role. The Training Officer is responsible for coordinating and running informal introductory sessions for new bee keepers and non-members interested in beekeeping during the bee season. The sessions would normally be planned at the weekend, and scheduled for once or twice a month, and other beekeepers are always available to lend a hand. If you are interested in either of these roles contact me or Gary if you need further information.

North Herts is organising both the Bee World event this year and also a Bee Disease Course. Bee World is part of the Herts County Show and is on Saturday, 23rd May and Sunday, 24th May at the Redbourn Showground. The Bee Disease Course has been underwritten by Herts and is eligible for a BDI grant, and is on Saturday, 30th May in Knebworth. We will need volunteers for both events so please pass your name to Gary or me if you are interested in helping.

We are planning a day long event featuring Roger Patterson. Gary has agreed with Herts that they will underwrite the event. The day will include lunch and will be open to other BKAs. Again we would like volunteers for a group to organise the event.

The meeting moved on to the keenly anticipated Bring and Tell part of the evening and while not wanting to give too much away with a spoiler alert, it started with a stretcher case and ended with a stripper.

Frank Everest brought along several useful additions to the beekeeper's armoury, and the first item looked as though its origins may have been military. It was a device for carrying hives, a difficult job at the best of times, and was a series of straps hung between two supports so the hive is carried as though on a stretcher. Next was a timely re-appearance of the customised woodpecker deterrent, pieces of galvanised metal sheeting cut to cover the side of the hive with a folded lip at the top to ensure the sheet fits tightly to the outside hive wall. This was swiftly followed by a blow torch to light your smoker (and on a windy day much more successful than a box full of matches), a sharpened hive tool that exactly fitted the slots in a comb for the sheet of foundation and is used for clearing out the wax, and finally the pièce de résistance, a neat swarm collecting box with a handle fitted underneath. If you've ever been at the top of a ladder, a large box balanced on one hand, hoping you haven't under-estimated the weight of the bees (let's say, 3500 bees to the pound) waiting to fall into your box, you could immediately see the

benefit of the handle. Apparently the Mark II version will be designed to accommodate a few frames to reduce the urgency of transferring the captured bees to a hive, and a quick-release mechanism to facilitate the release of the frames from the box and into a hive. Anne suggested a couple of poles through the box that could be withdrawn to act as a fairly straightforward release mechanism. Over to you Frank.

Gary presented his take on swarm collection next with a collecting box atop a light expandable pole. These poles are sold in various places with a variety of attachments; the secateurs looked very useful for cutting through the branch where the swarm had collected, and so into the collecting box. So that would be two expanding poles, would it? Derrick mentioned at this point that beekeepers should be discouraged from ascending more than 3 metres up a ladder as your insurance would be invalidated.

Geoff Fearey extended the meeting brief only slightly and gave us a tour the Warré hive. He was interested in natural beekeeping and didn't necessarily want to take honey from the hive so he built a hexagonal Warré hive and has been keeping bees in it for a year. The hexagonal shape closely resembles a hollow tree, the natural habitat for a bee, and doesn't have the cold corners of a square hive format. A mat of straw in the top section absorbs some of the condensation and allows the free flow of air through the hive. There are no frames of foundation as the hive uses top bars, although Geoff's experience is that the bees don't necessarily use the top bars and sometimes do what they want. He showed a slide of the cross section of built comb and although some of the combs were in regular lines, in some places the comb sections linked together like a maze. The hive is built up of layers of hexagonal sections, and as the bees develop the comb from the top down, additional sections are added at the bottom. Although the hives are less easy to inspect, and finding the queen is difficult, the bees seem less stressed and very calm. Geoff doesn't use a smoker when he manipulates the hive which he does only to check for disease. The hexagonal sections are asymmetric to facilitate reassembly.

Derrick Richardson brought in several variations of the entrance block. A dual purpose block combined a mouse guard and a reduced entrance to eliminate all the problems associated with pinning a mouse guard onto the entrance block in the winter; it is resolved by simply turning the dual purpose entrance block over. A rather more comprehensive entrance block had a triangular entrance format so that the width could be altered by moving the block in and out of the hive.

Derrick continued with a guided tour of his non-intrusive swarm management; his main points are listed below

- swarming is the bees natural method of propagation
- examining the bees every 10 days for queen cells, often destroying all but one, is not good for the bees' temper
- it is better to work with the bees; follow the bees' example, let them swarm
- we will lose the bees unless we do something, so provide them with a home
- the swarming bees will find the new home and the old queen will take up residence
- by letting them swarm, we lose honey production
- if the new home is a nuc with 5/6 frames, the queen will start to lay straightaway
- by the end of the first week (or certainly the second week), there will be capped brood
- take the capped brood and place it in the hive where the swarm originated
- repeat a few days later (you need enough bees to keep the brood warm)
- position the nuc boxes 5/6 feet in the air
- in a prime swarm, the queen's best days are over, if you put them in a roomy box they will swarm again
- for a caste (football size), combine with another colony, either through a queen excluder or smoke them into an existing colony using flour to calm the bees and reduce fighting
- Derrick collected 9 swarms in 3 nuc boxes last year
- the nucs need to be in place by April/May

Gary brought our Bring and Tell session to a close. He started with an automatically lighting smoker¹; the smoker has a diesel engine glow plug fitted in the bottom, and a set of terminals on the outside that you connect to something like a lawn mower battery. Next were some handy magnetic signs for the car, 'Bees in transit', 'Swarm Patrol' – Who ya gonna call?

Gary's bee vacuum device has been used in anger, successfully removing bees from a porch. The vacuum pipe is connected to a hive sized box with a mesh inside covering the hole to discourage the bees from entering the vacuum itself, another pipe draws the bees into the box, and a simple governor regulates the airflow. The trick is to adjust the airflow so that the bees are gently dislodged from their nest rather than exceeding the necessary flow rate and ending up with a lot of disorientated, damaged bees.

Finally we get to the stripper, in fact a wallpaper steam stripper². The wallpaper stripper is connected to a hive roof and sits on top of a standard hive. The hive floor is replaced with a mesh to catch all the detritus with a drip tray underneath to catch the wax melted off the frames inside by the steam.

The ingenuity of the Bring and Tell presentations certainly showed that the spirit of Heath Robinson is flourishing among beekeepers in North Herts.

There are a couple of available apiary sites that may interest members. One is being vacated by Christine Phillips in Offley, the other is at the Novotel Hotel off the A1 at Stevenage where we currently have an Association hive.

Roman Gorski is down sizing his operation and has nucs with bees for sale at £120 and Gary has some 500gm blocks of fondant for sale at £1 in handy plastic containers.

If you have any queries about anything mentioned in the newsletter contact me or Gary.

Our next indoor meeting is on Tuesday, 17th March 2015 at Howgills starting at 7:30pm and is our AGM. The agenda will include reports from our chairman and treasurer, the election of officers, and our normal honey competition. We will select the best 3 jars of clear honey as our entry at the Herts AGM on Saturday, 28th March. We will also unveil our revamped web site that has been redesigned using Wordpress thanks to sterling work by Gary and Ray.

Don't forget to book for the BBKA Spring Convention at Harper Adams University, Newport, the dates are Friday 17th April to Sunday 19th April, details at http://www.bbka.org.uk/news_and_events/spring_convention.php.

Before the convention there is the bee trade exhibition, BeeTradex, on 7th March at Stoneleigh Park, details at <http://www.beetradex.co.uk/>

¹ Supplied by Chris Mercer

² Supplied by Chris Mercer

Training offered by Welwyn BKA

The following courses are on offer

1. New Season Preparation course (places available)
 - A 3 evening course for those with a year's practical beekeeping experience
2. Swarm Collecting course (places available)
 - For those wishing to become involved in going out to collect swarms, and to help those collecting their own swarms when preventative measures have failed!
3. Basic Assessment Preparation course (places available)
 - A very useful 2 evening course for those with two or three years' experience

Registration and payment in advance please to allow Welwyn to organise and make payment for a suitable hall size and refreshments. The course cost £5 per evening; - £15 for New Season Preparation (3 evenings), £5 for Swarm Collecting (1 evening), and £10 for Basic Assessment (2 evenings). Contact Mike Goodhew, mike.goodhew@ntlworld.com, of Welwyn if you are interested in any of the courses.

1. New Season Preparation Course

- A 3 evening course for those with a year's practical beekeeping experience typically with a small young colony, and now preparing to manage a more mature and demanding hive and colony in their second year. It will also be of interest to those with longer experience wishing to use it as a refresher.
- Course includes Pest and Disease Awareness, Hive Inspections throughout the new season, Swarm prevention, Foraging and Honey storage in the hive, Honey extraction, Uniting Colonies, an overview of other produce from the hive, and late summer / early autumn supplementary feeding and treatments.
- Wednesday 4th March 2015 - 7.30 to 10.00 - White Hart Hotel, Welwyn
- Wednesday 11th March 2015 - 7.30 to 10.00 - United Reform Church, Chiswell Green
- Wednesday 18th March 2015 - 7.30 to 10.00 - White Hart Hotel, Welwyn

2. Swarm Collecting Course

- For those wishing to become involved in going out to collect swarms, and to help those collecting their own swarms when preventative measures have failed!
- Course includes Background to Swarming, Swarm Collector coordination, the Swarm Collecting Process and typical equipment involved, and the handling and distribution of Collected Swarm.
- Wednesday 25th March 2015 - 7.30 to 10.00 - United Reform Church, Chiswell Green

3. Basic Assessment Preparation Course

- A very useful 2 evening course for those with two or three years' experience, regardless of whether they've attended previous courses, self-taught, or a combination of the two. It provides a check as to how well they're doing, and areas that might need some 'brushing up'. Optionally they may then wish to take the BBKA Basic Assessment.
- The course follows the BBKA Basic Assessment syllabus, covering Manipulation of a Honeybee Colony, Equipment, Natural History of the Honeybee, Beekeeping, and Disease and Pests.
- Tuesday 24th February 2015 - 7.30 to 10.00 - Christchurch Hall, WGC
- Wednesday 25th February - 7.30 to 10.00 - United Reform Church, Chiswell Green