



Southampton & District Bee Keepers Association

May 2009 *Foragings* *Newsletter*

Contributors this month

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PESTS & DISEASE

In line with the CSL guidelines the Varroa count for May

Level and Control Required	Average Mite Drop per Day	Proportion of Infested Drone Pupae
Low No Action	1 or less	< 1 in 50
Medium Plan Action	Between 2 and 5	Between 1 in 25 and 1 in 50
High Take Action	More than 5	More than 1 in 25

Confession of a New Beekeeper

By Kerry Davies

I am here today to swallow my pride and to step up and be named and shamed as the new beekeeper who has been 'caught out' by the beginning of the season.

Having acquired my bees quite late last season it did take a while for them to get into gear and 'do' something. My early weekly checks simply involved seeing that the bees were drawing wax, the queen was still there and laying eggs, and that towards winter they had enough feed to see them through the winter. All in all, they seemed to be the perfect low maintenance pet!

Although I was keen to see them produce honey (not realistic that late in the year) I was just happy enough to open my hive and hear the hum of a nice tempered colony.

I continued to check my bees over the winter every 2 weeks or so (weight of stores, Varroa count) and have to admit I started to become somewhat complacent.

Looking after bees? No problem, I cried!

Now, two weeks ago I carried out a hive check and all seemed to be well, brood was appearing and the numbers seemed steady. I was thankful my colony made it through the winter (I am a worried parent really!) but they still hadn't drawn the two end frames or started drawing wild comb for drones on the shallow frame. Nothing to panic over, all was good.

Well, that was until I checked them this week.

Having been a little busy last week and 'safe' in the knowledge they still weren't doing much, I didn't worry that I missed my weekly check. After all, what could happen in a week?

A population explosion is what can happen.

Arriving on Saturday I opened the hive and immediately thought - where did all these bees come

from?! They were practically overflowing the sides of the hive, like I'd just uncorked a fizzy bottle of bees. Were they really all mine?

It turned out, not only had the bees finished the end and shallow frames, they had also built wild comb on the bottom of every frame, attaching them to the floor of the hive, so as I removed them to look, I pulled open all of the brood that has been laid in them. I was now a bee murderer!

By now I was truly in a panic and did the only thing I could think of - I phoned Andy to hyperventilate at him.

According to him, spring has sprung and due to factors such as lots of rain last year, consistent sunshine recently, plants blooming and other things I didn't really understand through my haze of panic, it seems bee activity happens pretty fast this time of year.

The one thing I did take in however was the berating (a gentle one) of not doing my weekly check. Who knew such things could happen?

So the following day at the end of the apiary meeting (shook swarms - very interesting) I undertook some essential housekeeping on my hive. With the help of Tony (thank you so much!) I went through and removed the excess brood that had appeared on the frame bottoms, queen cups that had appeared and the general removal of wild comb.

I was finally able to add my super - after having to hastily put together 11 frames that morning - my neighbours were so pleased with the hammering.

Having remedied these problems I felt a little better but hadn't learned my lesson just yet.

'Hopefully you'll be lucky and might have changed their minds about swarming' Andy now comments.

What? Swarming? My bees - leaving me?

And now my brain kicked into gear, my bees had run out of space, expanded in numbers, had no super to move up in to and were producing queen cups - they were thinking of moving home. All of the information I tried to gather last year I had seemingly forgotten over winter and now I might lose my colony.

A horrible lesson to learn if that's the case.

Next weekend (during my weekly check!) I shall find out if my bees have been convinced to stay for now - fingers crossed.

For all of you others out there I've been told to make the message clear - ***do your checks and don't get caught out.*** (If for no other reason than you won't have to face the public humiliation of being made to write about your mistakes in the newsletter!)

Good luck ☺

Here today, Swarm tomorrow

By Tony Mabey

The Easter weekend came and went but the accompanying sunshine and preceding week's fine weather were enough to herald the start of the 2009 swarm season. I received a phone call on Tuesday 14 April from our Secretary asking if I could collect a swarm that had come to rest in a garden of The Obelisk public house, Woolston.

"Where is it?" I enquired, "Is the swarm accessible from the ground, how big is it, who is on the swarm list, where is the swarm co-ordinator?" to which I got the response "I have the telephone number for you".

Having Googled the postcode and phoned the landlord I discovered that the pub was on the other side of the city centre from me and as they had been trying to find someone to help for most of the day, I said I would be over in the hour. The bees had already had a lucky escape as the local pest controller had earlier been turned away because they were going to destroy the bees.

I found the swarm hanging underneath a children's slide and left to get suited up and bring an empty hive from the car. I was able to place a sheet on the floor and hive directly under the swarm which then only left a short distance for the bees to fall. By this time the locals had taken their seats and were providing moral support, but

at a safe distance. The swarm had been in the garden most of the day and moved from bush to bush before settling on the slide. Someone mentioned that a retirement home in the neighbourhood had some bees so the swarm may have decided to visit it's local.

With a swift kick of the slide the cluster fell into the box with only a handful missing the target. The flying bees soon noticed that the swarm had a new home and the bees at the entrance were fanning the way home. With the crownboard on I used a water spray and smoker to remove the remaining bees from the slide and mask any residue of the queen to avoid the cluster growing again.

After half an hour or so all but a few stragglers were tucked up for the evening in the hive. I left the roof off and used some mesh to cover the crownboard holes. With the entrance blocked and the hive securely strapped the bees were ready for moving to my out-apiary. The hive was positioned and the foam removed from the entrance. One solitary guard bee came out for a look and that was it for the night.

I left the bees for a couple of days to use their reserves to draw some wax as this can help reduce the risk of disease. At this stage two frames were already drawn and the queen was laying. I was able to find

her and mark her red using last years colour. I then added a gallon feed of sugar syrup to give the bees a boost before closing the hive up.

The last inspection was twelve days after the original date of swarming. The bees have already drawn seven frames of wax and the queen has laid five full frames. So far the temperament is good and the bees well behaved.

If the old adage is right, a swarm in May is worth a load of hay.

Despite my ability to collect a swarm I still have to give some more practice my own swarm control. I have successfully completed shook swarms on three of my colo-

nies and planned to do the others when the colonies were stronger. Despite weekly inspections and the removal of a couple of queen cells I have to report losing a swarm or two this year. One was lucky to come through the winter and I was amazed at the rate of increase within the colony.

A word to the wise, swarm season is defiantly upon us!

And finally, collecting a swarm is not that dangerous but local news recently reported that a shooting occurred in the Obelisk car park only two days to the minute after the swarm was collected. One injured, one arrested and now helping the Police with enquires.

Lucas Marshall Answers

The talk given by Lucas Marshall on Monday 6th April was very informative.

A couple of questions were asked by members of the audience that Lucas wasn't able to answer. He has consulted with his work colleagues and supplied us with the following answers.

Q. Do we have to register with the Council as a food premise?

A. Small quantities of direct sales of primary products (honey) are outside the hygiene requirements, provided it is not unfit for consumption or injurious to health.

A registration form is on the web for those that wish to register (free and can not be refused) Honey production is considered very low risk from a hygiene perspective.

Q. Bespoke Hygiene training for the Association.

A. The Council do not run Hygiene courses themselves, but have sent us a list of suppliers which are on the web.

A parting comment by Lucas was, the tests run on samples of honey 5 years ago were all clear and as such they consider honey a low risk product.

BBKA Spring Convention

Stoneleigh, 17 - 19 April 2009

By Tony Mabey

The Spring Convention is billed as one of the key events in the BBKA's calendar and this year was no exception with increased ticket sales and three full days of lectures, workshops, seminars and courses.

Saturday sees the convention open to the paying public and the much awaited opening of the trade stands and exhibition. Queues start to form before the 9.00am opening and when the doors finally open the crowds dissolve into the various trade halls. The E H Thorne stands are always popular for hive parts but all exhibitors are now offering bargains and it pays to shop around on the day.

A wide range of lectures are scheduled during the convention and S&DBKA member, Andy Willis, had been invited to attend all three days and present sessions titled Bees & Plants and Feast or Famine. Andy was originally scheduled to give three lectures but, by popular demand, was asked to step in and give a further lecture. His Friday lectures were full and the convention organisers moved the subsequent sessions to a larger and more regal setting within the Royal Pavilion.

We were lucky enough to find a seat in the Bees & Plant lecture on the Saturday and the doors were closed ahead of the scheduled starting time with all seats occupied. Andy gave an informative talk based around his vast collection of slides. The content included a mix of bee related advice, information and anecdotes mixed with a knowledgeable account of the associated flora and fauna. The lecture itself lasted an hour and with a further thirty minutes or so used to answer the many questions that followed from the audience. The session was rounded off with rapturous applause.

I would thoroughly recommend the convention to all beekeepers, new and old. Now that I am a veteran of the last three years I feel I am able to offer a couple of tips;

1. arrive early ahead of the scheduled start times of any lecture you hope to attend.
2. don't offer assistance to a lady beekeeper who appears to be carrying her own weight in hive parts as she will invariably have forgotten where the car is parked and you will walk twice as far as needed.

See you next year?

A Thank You for Donated Bees

By Di Burrows

As everyone knows, last year was a bad bee-year, with honey yields down and winter losses higher than usual for many people. As a new beekeeper last summer, with a late swarm courtesy of the Broadlands Apiary coming my way at the end of June, I nurtured my first bees as best I could through the Autumn and Winter, following all advice for feeding and varroa treatment. All to no avail, however, as the colony eventually died of unknown causes, just before Easter.

Having bought a couple of the discounted National hives from Vectis Apiculture last year, they were now set up in my garden ready for an early swarm, if lucky. I was really pleased, therefore, to hear that I would be the recipient of one of three colonies belonging to a long-standing S&DBKA member, Ted Chivers, who had decided to give up beekeeping, and was very kindly offering to donate his three colonies to new beekeepers.

During some beautiful weather on Easter Monday, at the Nursling Apiary, Andy showed me how to do

a shook swarm from Ted's Langstroth hive into one of my new Nationals. The bees seemed fairly good tempered, which made me feel confident about eventually moving them to my garden in Southampton. However, they were left at Nursling for the time being, with a gallon of weak syrup and the promise of a spell of fine weather to come.

At the end of two weeks, the honey flow during the warm weather had been so good that they had only taken half the syrup, but had drawn 8 frames, with brood in 6 of them. Andy recommended waiting for the remaining frames to be drawn before moving them, but hopefully within the next week or so they will be settled in my garden and enjoying what the local area has to offer.

Many thanks to Andy for his help and advice, and also of course to Ted Chivers for his generous donation - I'll certainly be offering him some of my first batch of honey later in the summer.

WATCH OUT, THIEVES ABOUT

There have been reports of about 80 hives being stolen so far in the country this year, six of them belonging to HBA's President, John Cossborn.

So don't be complacent and check on your hives regularly. Colonies of bees are selling at about £300 for a full size colony and a nuc is fetching about £250. **You have been warned!**

Dates for the Diary

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**Sunday, 10th May, 13:45 for 14:00 start**

Broadlands Apiary, Romsey

## **Apiary Meeting**

How to do an artificial swarm as part of your swarm / varroa control.

A shook swarm demonstration and checking on how the colonies are doing 2 and 4 weeks on from a shook swarm.

Finding and marking the queen in a recently housed swarm.

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Saturday, 16th May, 10:00 till 12:00

Witts Hill Allotments

SAGA Plant Sale

If you have honey to sell, or wish to assist, contact [Graham Watson](#) who is co-ordinating and representing the Association.

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**Sunday, 31st May, 13:45 for 14:00 start**

Broadlands Apiary, Romsey

## **Apiary Meeting**

Checking on the artificial swarm for a new queen and marking her if she has been mated and started to lay.

Varroa control and drone brood culling.

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Sunday, 14th June, 13:45 for 14:00 start

Broadlands Apiary, Romsey

Apiary Meeting