



South Chilterns Beekeepers Association

President: Ian Wootton

The August Apiary meeting is on Saturday 21st starting at 2.30pm. The venue is by courtesy of Lynn Penfold. See Secretary's note.

Newsletter No.20

August 2004

Forthcoming events:

FBBKA Honey Show
September 30th

National Honey Show
October 21st – 23rd
RAF Museum, Hendon

Apimondia Dublin 2005
(Details later)

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In the Apiary, August

As the normal honey flow is now almost over, once the supers have been removed varroa treatment can begin. At this time many queens will cease laying for a short period. This is an ideal time for treatment. Recently when the "Bailey Shift" was being discussed, I was asked if this was a good time to apply varroa treatments. Any time when there is no sealed brood in the hive will give optimum results. Remember, current advice is that treatments should not be applied during a honey flow. A late flow from the ivy could cause a problem.

This month, start thinking about next season! You will require healthy bees. Thoroughly examine the brood. If you have any doubts regarding disease call for assistance. Although it is possible to over-winter small colonies – even mini-nucs - it is generally recognized that five combs is a minimum. Anything smaller than this is better united to a stronger colony provided that both are healthy. I have nursed small nuclei through winter over strong colonies above double screens but all must have adequate stores

Storage of honeycombs: the use of PCDB is now frowned upon - an alternative is acetic acid. Better to cut out the comb leaving a small strip as a starter for next season or fit new foundation. There is nothing worse than picking up a super only to find that instead of combs you have a mass of webs, cocoons and wriggling moth larvae. Bees seem to be happier and more industrious when building new comb.

Some beekeepers will replace their queens at this time. This is all very well as long as the new queen is accepted but if she is not, the colony will try to raise one of their own. If there are now no drones flying this could be disastrous so make sure that drones are still available before introducing new queens or trying to raise a new one. However, when a colony is headed by a failing queen and they do not replace her, they will often retain drones through the winter. If you

take a chance and leave her, pessimistically she will run out of sperm and be a drone-layer in spring, optimistically she will be superseded in the spring. There are mixed views whether or not these queens are any good but in any case the colony headed by a spring-superseded queen will usually be viable so something can be done about it.

Ron Crocker

FROM THE SECRETARY

AUGUST MEETING

The August meeting will demonstrate how to extract all the honey that has been harvested this season. The demonstration will be held at Lynn Penfold's home at The Thatch, Littlewick Green on August 21st at 2.30pm. Grid Ref SU839 801

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Unfortunately, I was unable to be present at the President's day meeting but our demonstrator; Dr. Ian Wootton provided the following report on what appears to have been a very interesting afternoon. Thanks go to Marcella for playing hostess on the occasion.

June Meeting

The President's day for 2004 was held at Marcella Skinner's apiary at Gallows Tree Common on June 19th. It threw up two separate puzzles that provoked a lively discussion.

The first concerned a small colony that was not doing well. On opening it, the only brood present was undersized drone brood scattered through the brood nest with occasional cells holding more than one egg. It was agreed that this made it more likely to be laying workers rather than a drone-laying queen and a careful look failed to find any queen. The only treatment for such a colony is to unite it with a strong queen-right stock, so this was done. The failing colony was placed on top of an adjacent stock possessing several full supers, separated by newspaper and a queen excluder (the latter in case we were wrong about the laying workers! Re-examination two weeks later showed that this policy had worked. The drone brood had ceased and the brood combs were being used as additional storage space.

The other puzzle was presented by a strong colony with several full supers. Bees were seen flying in and out of cracks between supers as well as through the entrance. When opened, there was sealed brood and mature worker larvae in the top super but no eggs or young larvae. Evidently a queen had been up there until about a week earlier. In the conventional brood nest, at first sight there was only sealed brood but no larvae. It seemed that there might have been two queens in the hive until eight or nine days before but where had they gone? A careful search revealed just a few eggs in a little patch in the bottom brood chamber but no queen was seen. It was decided that the right course was to close up the hive and await developments: two weeks later, all is well - one queen laying properly in the correct brood chamber.

The meeting ended with a short demo of handling loose bees for purposes such as stocking queen-mating mini-nucs or conducting varroa sensitivity tests.

George Butler (Chairman)

Observations of a novice

Lots of interesting things from the June meeting at Marcella's.

Ian, aided by Reg Hook, opened up three of Marcella's hives on a warm but showery afternoon. The first was noticeably unhappy, and it was decided that they had been queenless for some time and a laying worker was present – as seen by the singly spaced drone cells which were smaller than normal.

A colony is soon aware that the queen has been lost, and pressure mounts on the workers to do something. Eventually the ovaries of a worker develop, and she begins laying- but only unfertilised eggs which will be male.

The colony is doomed, as no females can be produced (and at this point I wish I were a poet!). As some fundamental failing in the biology has occurred, the colony thinks all is well, and would resist the introduction of a queen or would fight with a similar small colony.

The answer? Combine with a strong colony where the scent of queen substance (a pheromone) will gradually swamp the doomed colony and all will be well. (What happens to the laying worker?)

How to do it? Put the offending brood box on the top of the strong colony (with three supers in our example) above a queen excluder – just in case we were mistaken about the laying worker and an unmated queen really caused the problem – a virgin queen. She mustn't be allowed to get down into the 'good' brood box, since she would probably win the ensuing battle to the death with the rightful monarch who is a little too portly for such things.

One sheet of newspaper with six small slits in it were made with Ian's hive tool is enough to keep the two colonies separate for a time and allow the scent to mix, then all should be well.

The third colony opened had a similar interesting or deviant habit. Although yielding a heavy crop so far, brood had been found in the top of two supers and bees were on the outside of the super trying to get in. There were no eggs in the super now, but were found in the brood box. I'll have to leave the explanation to the editor: - (See Chairman's report.)

Ian demonstrated the Apidea queen raising mini-nuc, which I found particularly interesting since I'd had five failures with it this season, and I only know the reason for three of them!

Shake bees from a super into a cardboard box which hasn't got pronounced flaps inside or the bees will get lost in them. Use bees from the super because they will be young ones and won't have been out of the hive yet. Also, they may not yet have developed their stings. I once saw Robin Dartington teach junior school children to handle bees without gloves in an Apidea hive using these young bees, but I guess there's scope for error in this!

Spray the bees when in the cardboard box with water from a garden mist spray. This stops them flying and apparently calms them down. Then fill up a cup with bees and pour into the Apidea. If there is a queen cell inserted through the circular hole of the Apidea, it may be easier to put the bees in through the removable floor of the Apidea. There is no harm inverting the queen cell for this short time. You have already put fondant in the Apidea as a feed. Now close the bees up for five days, and keep them in the garage, or under the bed if it's early in the season.

Open the small hole to allow workers to leave after five days. When the queen has emerged, remove the grill guarding this hole so the queen can leave on her mating flight.

Where best to position the Apidea, since we need some drones?

The value of the Apidea? Well it allows a queen to be held in a laying condition for a time, but takes only 25 or so workers. Originally from Switzerland they are highly insulated, cost about £18, I think, and are available from Thorne's

What went wrong with mine?

1. Released in garage too early – all flew away.
2. Too cold
3. Too hot (heated greenhouse in high temps of early June.)
4. Ian felt on balance that high temperatures were more of a killer when he had a lot of boxes in his garage.

These young bees in the cardboard box are ideal test specimens for investigating pyrethroid resistance (Apistan etc), and Ian demonstrated this.

First catch your bees, add 200 - 250 to a glass screw top jar containing a 1cm x 0.5cm Apistan strip, stuck to a card. Leave three to four hours. Kill the bees with soapy water (very toxic to bees) which washes off varroa.

Count and work out per cent infestation.

(Note: Official instruction sheets and test kits are available from the Secretary or the Editor.)

So, an interesting time- especially when the demonstrator gets engrossed and really starts coming out with some stuff – I wonder if a small microphone and amplifier would help those at the back of the demo.

In fact, I wonder if we couldn't video some of these times in the summer – the open hives I mean, not so much the scenery – and discuss them at length in the winter meetings. I remember somebody saying once when they were demonstrating, "You can learn a lot from just watching the bees at the entrance before you ever open up the hive!"

Paul Moorcroft.

FROM THE EDITOR

Crop reports have been mixed this season, from very little honey to phenomenal yields. My own has also been erratic - going on holiday when the bees needed attention did not help. Two of my colonies in Langstroth hives were offered for sale but had no serious takers. This was fortunate as they yielded over three hundred weight between them and, at the time of writing, the honey flow has not finished

Reminder: The NBU are conducting a very useful survey into bee viruses. We know about nosema and can get samples of bees analysed by our President, but now, by taking part in the NBU research we can have our bees examined for the presence of any adult bee viruses FREE OF CHARGE. In answer to recent remarks and questions, Ian does not have the expensive equipment necessary to examine for viruses

From time to time I am asked for back copies of our Newsletters particularly by newer members. For those with an Internet connection an archive is available on the BeeData website, go to: http://www.beedata.com/files/south_chilterns

Ron Crocker

Newsletter deadline: 10th of the month for inclusion in the next Newsletter.

Advertisements: - Small advertisements free to members. Traders £1 per issue (up to five lines) additional lines 20p per line. Cheques to be made payable to South Chilterns BKA. and forwarded to the Editor.

Wanted: Second hand solar wax extractor. Paul Moorcroft. 0118 9863743 (Not the number on the membership list.)

Wanted: For a group of beekeepers - small, motorized stainless steel honey extractor to take all sizes of frames. Details to the Editor.

Wanted: Observation hive in reasonable condition. Paul Moorcroft. 0118 9863743

Don't Go Miles to get your bee supplies or pay expensive carriage. **Go to John Belcher** who has most of your needs in stock and everything else at the end of the telephone. Please call any time on 0118 984 2321

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