

# The Herefordshire Beekeepers' Association

Established 1882

Affiliated to the BBKA, the National Honey Show and the Midlands & South-Western Counties Convention  
(Registered Charity No. 510732)

## HONORARY TREASURER

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## HONORARY SECRETARY

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## JULY 2011 NEWSLETTER FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### July

Sun. 3rd  
2.39pm

**Garden meeting**, Hoarwithy,  
By kind invitation of Mr & Mrs J.  
White

It will have taken place by the time you read this! The Editor hopes to receive a report, though (is that a big enough hint? See our 'report' in '*Looking Back*' below!).

### August

There are no planned meetings  
for August

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## LOOKING BACK

**The Three Counties Show.** No report has been received.

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## LAN REPORTS

**The East Herefordshire, Bishops Frome, LAN** Group meeting on 7 June 2011.

14 members of the group, including David Sutton, our 'expert', arrived at 6 pm to see Will Brandt's hives at Felton. It was a good warm evening with little wind. We found an excellent hive of bees that had started last year as a nuc. of Buckfast Abbey bees. The brood frames were filled wall-to-wall with brood, so much so that they were just on the point of swarming with a full queen cell not yet capped. The three supers were all pretty full, and capped. They possibly held 60lbs of honey. Dave advised Will to do an artificial swarm as soon as possible, if he could find the queen, and extract his honey. This would be his first time extracting, and he was very impressed with the success of this Devon nuc.

Most of the group then moved on to see Julie Cooper's hives at Ashperton and these are her notes:

'As a beginner, it was with a small amount of trepidation and some excitement that I greeted the chance of having the LAN group come and visit my little apiary, and to meet the fabled Dave Sutton.

**Hive B:** We started by looking at the swarm I captured from Malvern on 8 May. The swarm came from a colony that live in a chimney in an old property, so as a feral swarm were likely to, and proved to have, varroa. First we found that the swarm had pulled out a good amount of comb and the queen was laying. Dave Sutton labeled them 'fidgety bees' though they were very busy on the combs we lifted. Then we found the queen and marked her, with Dave demonstrating how to hold and mark your queen. After we released her back onto the comb he took a closer look at some comb that had caught his eye. It

had ragged holes in it where the bees had realised that something was amiss and had started to tear open some of the brood; and it was slightly discoloured. In addition there were un-emerged bees with protruding tongues and malformed wings. The diagnosis was that varroa had introduced disease to part of the brood. The treatment was to whizz out my Apiguard and treat the hive for a month. This was in addition to having used oxalic acid dose the bees within the first week of having them. It was a helpless feeling not being able to help the brood, but at least I can tackle the varroa on the emerged bees - and hard.

**Hive C:** We then looked at the swarm that I had collected from my neighbour on 1 June. These bees were in fine form and quite lively, and already pulling out wax, but on the brood comb that I had given them from another hive, there was a queen cell. This prompted much discussion of options:

1. There was already a queen cell on the brood comb that I missed when I put it in, or
2. that the swarm were not happy with their queen (or had lost her) and had built it up ready to replace her - within six days. Only time will tell. In the meantime, with no brood and possible feral stock, the Apiguard is going in there too.

**Hive A:** Our next challenge was to look into the hive in which I had housed my Maisemore bees. I had purchased a six-frame nucleus which was collected on 4 May. Much to my surprise, when we opened it, we found the queen, but also a collection of queen cells that I had not expected. Whilst I had been checking the hive for stores and space, I had not been doing an in depth inspection

through the brood chamber for a couple of weeks. Dave helped to cage up the queen so that on the following morning I could carry out a Pagden manoeuvre.

#### **Learning points:**

- Manipulations: With the last hive and heavier frames, Dave reminded me of good posture and to work close to side of the box without twisting around. He also reminded us how to best use the frame holder - making sure that the first frame out was the one to create the space to better manipulate the bees and to squeeze the frames back in once you were done with good spacings.
- Varroa: Watching the state of the brood is important and curling tongues, malformed wings and non-emergent bees are bad signs. Oxalic acid alone may not do the trick.
- Swarming nucleus: Don't assume that a nucleus is not going to swarm!
- Holding your queen: when holding the queen, hold her by two legs to reduce the risk of ending up with a five-legged queen. Let the mark dry before you put her back on the comb, and put her back on the comb, not from the side, so you don't surprise the bees.

**North Herefordshire LAN.** Fifteen people gathered at John Robinson's apiary at Swainshill on a beautiful sunny Wednesday evening on 1 June. The group included four people who were completely new to beekeeping including one very brave junior. It was encouraging to note that three people had not yet attended the 'Beginner's Course' but their enthusiasm and zest for learning and gaining 'hands-on' experience was evident from the beginning. John first explained the situation in each of his eight hives and with many of the colonies going through transition periods it was decided that only two of the hives could be inspected that evening. As a result Mary took responsibility for working with the newcomers on one hive and John worked with those with a little more experience on another hive. We all kitted up and tramped over to the paddock complete with smokers smoking as we entered an extremely busy area.

The hive was healthy and we found brood in all stages in the centre with plenty of stores. There was some evidence of 'Chalkbrood' though it did not present itself as much of a problem. The sheer density of the bees on the frames was at times overwhelming and had much to do with the proximity of the hives to the Wyevale Nurseries which provided the colonies with a constant flow of resources! Each of the team was able to handle frames and see for themselves the healthiness of the colony though none of us was able to locate the unmarked queen. There were plenty of larvae and sealed brood with pollen

- Bright green pollen: comes from field beans and is not mould!

**Hive 'Chris Kirk':** Also on site is one of Chris Kirk's hives which I was bee-sitting. It had been given to Chris in a dire state, with horrible comb riddled with wax moth. We had worked through the brood box and had removed lots of wax moth, and then settled the girls down to see if they had a queen. There was a suspicion that they might be queenless, having been moving at a vulnerable time when the virgin queen left behind after a swarm may have been on her mating flight. However, Dave was able to confirm that there was indeed a queen in place with BIAS (Brood-In-All-Stages) in the brood box. The bees had even made efforts to clean up the comb. We discussed what on earth the hive was and whether it was a museum piece, but the consensus was that it was probably a Langstroth. Regardless, the recommendation was to sacrifice the BIAS now that we know a queen is active, and move the colony onto nice clean wax in a nice new home.'

**Martin Hewitt**

being taken into the hive on an extremely regular basis. We pursued our observations into the supers but by this time the bees were beginning to become seriously agitated and so we re-assembled the hive and retreated safely.

Mary opened up one of John's colonies for the beginners who had never peered inside a beehive before. The colony was prospering, the brood box congested with brood, and two full supers ready for extracting. She pointed out drones and worker bees, but there was no prospect of finding the queen in such a mass of bees. There were a few queen cups, but no serious swarm preparations. The brood looked healthy, with larvae and capped brood, but few eggs, probably due to the sudden turn in the weather. The bees started to get annoyed, so the hive was closed up quickly. It seemed as if most of the group were stung which encouraged Mary to lead them on a sudden hasty retreat! Amidst all of the laughter some ladies were refusing to disclose the whereabouts of their stings and one unfortunate team member claimed she had been the victim of ten stings! There was much for us all to learn and share and much evidence of developed camaraderie. We all retreated to the lawn where a sumptuous tea of homemade treats had been provided by Anne, John's wife. After more tea, cakes and chat everyone departed well satisfied and looking forward to the next event.

**Keith Mitchell**

## **HBKA EQUIPMENT & LANS**

The Association has recently invested in some books, DVD's and equipment for Members to borrow. Each LAN group now has an extractor; there is also an uncapping tray and Burco boiler (for sterilizing used frames) available centrally. To borrow an extractor, contact your LAN co-ordinator who should know where it is. The Burco boiler and uncapping tray are held centrally, and John Robinson is the first port of call to ascertain their whereabouts. There is a small hire charge to borrow these items.

In addition to the library books which Anthea holds, each LAN group has a set of the Yates Study Notes for the BBKA basic assessment and modules. We also have a copy of Clive de Bruyn's 'Practical beekeeping', and DVD's: 'The Honeybee' and 'Keeping bees'. Please let your LAN coordinator know if you would like to borrow any of these resources.

**Mary Walter**

## **SUCCESSSES IN THE BBKA EXAMS**

We are very pleased to report further successes in the BBKA exams (or, as BBKA would prefer, Assessments). Lin Hoppe and John Robinson both achieved their BBKA Basic qualification. Well done all those who've had a go at these and other exams this year. It is really satisfying as an examiner (sorry, Assessor) to see a good number of HBKA Members deciding to have a go. Let's hope that many more people will join them next season.

A couple of points about the Assessments might be worth noting. The first is that the weakest area has to do with that vitally important subject, disease. That's not to say people didn't know about disease, but mostly (there were some notable exceptions), answers were a bit weak.

This is something we all need to check up on; hopefully next year's candidates will be much better! However, one area I was extremely impressed with was candidates' ability in handling bees. In the past, many people have displayed their nervousness. But everyone handled the bees very competently, both gently and calmly. Well done! Because handling in this way reduced by a long shot the likelihood up aggravating the bees, some people actually forgot to ensure their smoker stayed alight - one poor person leaned the lesson rather sharply, but nevertheless, recovered the situation very well. But I doubt if smokers will be forgotten so much in the future!

*Len Dixon*

## **A REMINDER - DO YOU NOW HAVE BEES?**

Many beginners hope to obtain bees as soon as possible - swarms or nucs! Others bide their time, getting hands on experience, before taking the plunge themselves. But do remember, if you joined as an Associate, as soon as you do obtain your own colony, big or small, you should upgrade from Associate to Full

membership. Would LAN coordinators ensure that newer Group Members are aware of this.

Full membership provides invaluable third party insurance cover, as well as Bee Disease Insurance, both of which are essential. So please, don't forget to contact our Membership Secretary, Anthea Keller Smyth, when you get your bees.

## **HOW NOT TO CATCH A SWARM**

Like many other Herefordshire Beekeepers, I imagine, Mary has been going hither and yon efficiently collecting swarms, most notably one at the branch of Starbucks bang in the middle of the pedestrian area in the centre of Hereford. The swarm, up under a large umbrella attached to one of the tables outside of the shop, was being guarded by no less than four burly policemen. Guarded that is until Mary started dismantling the umbrella when the law disappeared very rapidly. She left a cardboard box containing the queen and most of her workers so that the scouts and stragglers could join her and we went back at dusk. It was rather enjoyable clambering over police tape marked DO NOT ENTER to collect them.

Occasionally, when life is particularly slow, I insist on coming to 'help'

For instance, last week we loaded the car in preparation for a call to Leominster Infants School. However, when we got there it turned out that the swarm was about 12ft up in a tree and we stupidly hadn't brought any clippers/secateurs - so I went back to remedy this, leaving Mary sheltering from the rain in a toddler-sized Wendy House.

Back to the school and hurriedly into protective clothing: boiler suit, jacket with zippable hood, Wellingtons, gloves. Ladder maximally extended and up I went in bull-at-a gate fashion, ignoring Mary's pleas that we should perhaps think about the best plan of action. My idea was to carefully clip off a few small intervening branches (the swarm was some distance from where it was possible to place the ladder), even more carefully cut off the small branch around which the swarm was clustered and, with extreme delicacy, maneuver this around the matted branches and hand it down to my 'acolyte' below.

Clip intervening branches: check  
Cut off branch with swarm: check

So far, so good. However, as I was carefully moving the swarm in front of my face, I became aware of a teeny tiny oversight on my behalf. I could see the bees very clearly - in fact much too clearly, since I had forgotten to put up the hood. So I was encased and well protected from the neck down but totally uncovered from the neck up. At this point, the bees were beginning to detach themselves in some numbers intent on investigating who was waving them around - and the culprit was all too easy to find.

Extreme delicacy went out of the window - bees were passed downwards rather more rapidly (and clumsily) than planned so we lost some en route. However, I didn't get stung.

On the same evening we collected another colony in a large sealed cider barrel (pictured) which is proving a bit of a puzzle. Any ideas ?

*Stephen Walter*



## OBERSERVATION

We learn something about bees every time we look at them. Normally about this time of the year, beekeepers are breathing a sigh of relief - swarming is over! But don't be too complacent, they have been known to have a second go quite late in the season! Just be aware, that's all. And as I said last month, if your bees do indicate swarming inclinations, try simply moving the queen into a nuc. - but keep a check on additional unwanted queen cells, because if the number of bees is not also reduced (as in normal swarm control methods), casts can become a problem. So the need for inspections continues. However, if you've learnt to read a colony properly, you should have a pretty good idea whether there is any swarming inclination or not. We don't want to disturb them anymore than we have to during the main flow; every time you do, you reduce the foraging effort considerably.

As we move into July, begin to reduce the number of suppers, so that partly filled comb has a better chance of being finished off.

Now to my personal new experience. One of the dangers of inspecting bees when it's too early in the season, or too chilly, is that of balling the queen. Whether this is an attempt to protect the queen or not, I simply don't know. My experience a few days ago certainly suggests it isn't.

Colony No. 1 has been quite large, with at times 17 frames of brood (they were on two National brood boxes). A few days ago, lovely warm weather, just the job, and I was giving them a quick check. This time the queen was in the lower box (she wanders up and down between the two). I found her because there was a tight spiraling

clump of bees behaving in what seemed an extraordinary way. It was only luck that I realised the queen was in the middle of it all. Smoke broke the clump up a bit, but one bee was holding tightly and aggressively on to the queen just below her head, and would not let go. In the end I virtually pulled it off, killing it in the process. I've never experienced balling before, and it's not a pleasant sight.

Things calmed down only a little, so I moved the queen with a frame of sealed brood into a nuc. and shook in bees from the top box. The rest I split into two hives, with eggs in each. They were a lovely, good tempered colony so hopefully I'll end up with three colonies. But why were they balling the queen?

'**Observation**' tries to provide guidance and answers - this time I'm asking a question! Any views or comments, please?

Lastly, don't forget your varroa counts. One of the dangers from varroa is the possibility of slow paralysis virus. As its name implies, this takes time to show itself. If you leave varroa treatment too late, you may think you have dealt with the varroa problem, but the virus continues quietly to take its toll. So don't leave treatment too late, mid-August is the target.

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A follow up. A week or so after the events described above, I opened up the nuc. into which I had placed the queen - no sign of her! It looks as though she hasn't survived. However, there's a nice open queen cell developing. So, back to my earlier question - why did they ball her? I look forward to any answers or suggestions.

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