Issue 5, November 2016

BDBKA News

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Note from the Chair

Since the last newsletter many colonies have begun to show signs of settling down for winter with clustering and very little brood. Some have required a large amount of feed while others have been quite heavy with no help. There should be no reason to open them now until early next Spring apart from the winter Apibioxal treatment for varroa, which we advise for December.

We had a successful Honey Show at the end of September with a fair number of entries and a good spread of cup and prize winners. Congratulations to all those who won an award. It was held at Whalebones with an excellent ham and cheese lunch which we were able to eat outside. Many thanks to Linda and Mary who yet again managed it all so well and to all those who helped and took part. Thanks also to our judge Rt. Rev. Robert Ladds who did a thorough and

Diary dates

2016

5th November - **Candle making by Beulah Cullen at Whalebones, 2pm.** Beulah is experienced in all candle making techniques and has won many prizes at National Honey Show for her work, Good ideas for using up all that excess wax during the winter months.

12th November - **Nosema Diagnosis Session at Whalebones, 10:30am.** If you would like your hives checked collect a sample of 30 bees from the hive entrance as soon as possible and store

meticulous job and was very encouraging. It would be great to see more entries next year, so think about what you might like to enter and plan well ahead. A few members have entered the National Honey Show and we wish them luck. There will be a talk on how to prepare exhibits for show next summer.

I am sad to report the death of Ramsay Shewell-Cooper, owner of our Arkley apiary. Many of you will have attended Arkley when it was our training apiary. We are grateful for all the support he gave, and that his family continue to give, to our Association and our thoughts are with them.

We have some interesting talks coming up on subjects to occupy you during the winter with a demonstration of Candle making by Beulah Cullen Saturday 5th November and a talk on mead making in January (date to be confirmed). Our Christmas Social will be 7.30 pm Wednesday 14th December at Whalebones with an informal honey tasting to find the one liked best by most of us. Bring some food to share and come for an enjoyable evening. See you there.

Pat Morgan

them in the freezer until the morning of 12th. Come along for microscopy and a chat about how to manage it.

26th November - **A.G.M.** Papers will be sent out shortly with all necessary information.

3rd December **- Leaf Clearing at Whalebones.** Please come along to help tidy Whalebones, the more volunteers the quicker we will be done!

14th December **- Christmas Social at Whalebones, 7:30pm.** Bring and share seasonal food. Honey tasting fun competition - bring some to enter. More details nearer the time.

2017

25th February - Federation Day

Why everyone should support the Barnet Honey Show

As the beekeeping year draws to a close your thoughts should turn towards the honey show. This took place in September this year and was an opportunity to meet your fellow beekeepers, enjoy some good food and a convivial drink (even the sun put in an appearance); for the more competitive there was even

the chance to bag a trophy or two! There were numerous classes to enter your hive products in from honey, to wax, to cakes and biscuits; so no reason not to enter. Even those of you who thought you were not competitive will be surprised how proud you feel when you win an award.

This year we had a great turn out and a big thanks is owed to Mary Block and Linda Perry (and all those who assisted) for organising this years event. For those of you who have never entered (or attended) the show please think about doing so next year. It would be great to see even more entries and people. Who knows maybe your bees will produce award winning honey.

Tony Queenan

You can never have too many Crown Boards

A few years ago I found myself to be in urgent need of a crown board. My planning is never that good and – as usual – I had run out of beekeeping kit.

I phoned up a big retailer and ordered a crown board to be sent next day. Ouch! It cost more than I thought at £21.50 (including postage) at today's prices! However within 12 months, the crown board had lost a rim strip and when left it outside the hive for a week, it got very damp and the thin ply warped making the crown board unusable. I wondered if it would be cheaper to make my own. However, I have few DIY skills. Sawing a 46cm square of plywood for a crown board by hand was a definite no-no and using the circular saw I got for Christmas many years ago would have sent me straight down to A&E (minus a few fingers).

But I still wanted to make my own crown boards, so I decided to make them using 12mm ply not the thinner ply in proprietary boards. B&Q price was £23 (today's prices) for a 1220⇥2400mm sheet and £22 for thinner ply. My DIY crown boards may be heavier but they warp less. B&Q will normally cut your ply sheet for free into 46cm squares though some retailers charge the sheet of ply makes ten 46cm square boards and with the bits left over I make dummy boards. Other timber merchants may do it cheaper, so look around.

The initial cost is £2.30 per 46 cm flat board. These flat board without bee space can be useful just on their own. I have half a dozen and use them to top and tail or dividing supers full of honey when transporting or short term storage to keep wasps and bees out, (no need to use proper crown boards and have to seal the porter holes with gaffer tape).

The 5mm to 9mm bee space rim caused me a problem for a while because 6mm or 9mm pine strip wood is not readily available. However a smaller retailer had crown boards for sale with 10mm pine strip rims and they worked without too much extra brace comb. B&Q again was my suppler at £2.75 for

18mm⇥10mm pine strip wood in 2.4m lengths (provides five side strips).

I don't measure the strip wood because when measuring a length of wood twice or thrice then I get different measurements each time (LOL). What I do is take a short off-cut of the strip wood and I temporally nail it to one edge in the corner. Then pin and glue the next strip of wood to one edge at right angles to the temporary. I tend to use 18mm frame pins with Evostick outdoor PVA wood glue, but gorilla glue is better. I then use a handsaw to trim the strip level to the side of board. I then repeat for side two and side three. Once three sides are made, I remove the temporary off-cut and complete side four.

You now have a one sided solid crown board. Do you require it double sided? Well you don't need it double do you? How many times do you turn it over on your hive? I never turn any of my proprietary double sided boards over; the double side seems just to be there just to reinforce the thin ply and stop it warping. If you place a super on a flat crown board the super provides a bees space as it is bottom bee space, place it on a proprietary board and you had double bee space. Why is double bee space needed?!

You now have to cut the feed holes. Neither you or I are going to accurately cut out those funny porter escape holes are we? You would have to measure the hole, calculate where to drill the two end holes and fret-saw out the waste! No! To drill the hole, find the centre of the board by drawing lines from corner to corner and drill a 70mm (or 3") hole with a hole saw or just two 30mm holes with a wood drill bit. A 70mm is better because you can buy a circular escape from Thorne for £5, but I don't buy the escapes as I make my boards into rhombus escape boards (see below).

Making a crownboard. From the top left: a plain 46cm plywood board; temporally nailing the strip of to one edge in the corner; trimming the strip so it's flush with the edge; repeat for side 2; repeat for side 3; remove the temporary strip and complete slide 4.

One thing I have always made is ekes for the Apiguard tray, but I end up with a wobbly square made out of 25mm ⇥ 18mm planed wood (£3.50 for 2.4m) that didn't quite fit due to poor measuring. Then they go trapezoid when you pick it up and falls apart after a year or so. However, if you nail and glue the api eke to the flat side of your crown board, it lasts for years, and you have a multi-purpose combined crown board and eke that won't fall to bits or be wobbly. It is always on the hive and you use it by just turning over your crown board and putting your Apiguard tray on the frame tops.

This multi purpose api eke & Crown board can now be turned into an efficient clearing board using a plastic Rhombus (Thornes £2.37 figure 7). The rhombus is screwed over the 70mm hole and is easily slipped off the screws to convert it back to an api eke crown board. A rhombus clearer (figure 8 a) can clear bees down quicker than porter escapes. These are now my standard board as they are crown board, feeder board, api eke and rhombus clearer (if you haven't a 70mm/3" hole saw then drill three smaller holes in a 3" triangle and cut the triangle away).

We can also make other boards from the basic flat sided crown boards, such as a split board (sometimes called a simplified Snelgrove board) and it is used for vertical artificial swarm control on small tight apiaries when you cannot do a full artificial swarm by the Pagden method.

In order to make a split board make a standard flat one sided crown board but don't drill the hole. On the other side fix the 18⇥10mm strip with wood screws but not glue, 5 screws per side with one of screws in the middle of each of the sides (figure 8), then carefully cut entrances with two parallel diagonal saw cuts across the strip wood. Want to make a full double sided Snelgrove board? Starting with a flat sheet, instead of gluing one side, just attach a strip, cut entrances on both sides, drill your 70mm hole and cover with Varroa mesh to provide the Bee contact. That is under £10 for a Snelgrove board that retails for £35!

Making a Split Board

Is there anything else we can build? Yes! Canadian escapes, Hawsey boards, hive division base boards, nuc-to-national combining board and cheap solid floors! So you might need all those ten 46cm square of plywood after all!

So as my Tutor used to say, "you can never have enough crown boards". However, some of his crown boards were made of lino or sacking... now that's another article.

Geoff Hood

Winter Treatment - Managing Varroa

There is a school of thought that you should apply your winter treatments around the Christmas break, but there is plenty of research to suggest that this is not as effective as doing it earlier. With most varroa treatments (not just those which have oxalic acid as their miticide) efficacy is inversely proportional to the amount of brood in the colony. If there's brood that's where the majority to the mites and going to be (parasitizing the colony's larvae) so doing your treatments when there's no brood means that there's nowhere for the varroa to hide and your treatment has the best chance of killing the mites. I therefore do my winter varroa treatment in late November or very early December, when my colonies are most likely to be broodless.

How do I know they're broodless? I look of course! This may make many beekeepers throw their hands up in the air in despair, but if you go to your hives with a fellow beekeeper on a sunny day that's warmish and work quickly, you can crack the crownboard, remove the dummy and even an end stores frame and then lever apart the centre of the brood nest and very quickly check the central frame. You can be in and out in no time if you work together.

What if you find brood? Some of the most current thinking coming out of LASI at the University of Sussex is that you should fork out the sealed brood so that you're sure your treatments will be effective. Again, I do see a lot of beekeepers having issue with this, but the alternative is low efficacy for your treatment. Doing the treatments earlier in the late autumn, early winter time has in my experience encountered little brood and if I'm honest, I've not noticed much there and left it. However, I did have a couple of colonies that did have brood in them last time, and they did have a lot more of a problem during the course of the year.

You say oxalic, I say Apibioxal

Well the first thing to note is that you are now not authorized to use Oxalic acid (either in a bought pre-mix solution, or mixed up yourself of sublimated as crystals). The only authorized treatment is now Apiboxal. Read the packet and you'll find out how to mix it up. Indeed, now that Oxalic Acid Dihydrate is classed as a poison, you can't legally possess it (more than a very small amount) without a licence. Right, that's the scary legal bits over.

So, here's the drill I use (with a friend to help and weather permitting).

A day or two before you want to apply the treatment, go to check the hives to see which, if any, have brood and to get the varroa trays in place. If you find brood, deal with that situation as you see fit, but remember that if you find brood, your treatment probably won't be as effective as without. This is also a good time to check weights.

For the treatment day we watch the weather and choose a still day with temperatures around 6 Celsius. Warmer is OK, but we don't want the bees flying.

When I do it with Geoff, we decide a route between apiaries so we're confident we both know what we're

doing when we get there. The warmest part of the day will pass quickly and planning can minimize faffing about! We'll also have the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) checked and in good working order. The other thing we'll check is the applicators: dribble bottles and made up solution.

Trickling:

One of you starts by taking off the roofs, insulation and then cracking (but not removing) the crownboards. The one with the dribbler, then takes the board off and applies their solution at a rate of 5ml per seam of bees. If you have adequate insulation on your hives, the cluster will be pressed up against the crownboard and easy to see. If not, you might want to take along a little torch to shine down in-between the frames so you know you're dribbling the treatment where the bees are. Once you're done, you can gently pop the crownboard and on close up (this is where the third beekeeper comes in handy.) For the dribbler, PPE includes disposable gloves, goggles and your other normal beekeeping kit.

Leave your varroa trays in for a couple of weeks to monitor the drop.

Steve Leveridge

Winter Tips

Warm head, cold toes is the motto to follow in winter. Varroa trays OUT. Insulation On Top of the crownboard. Feed holes in crownboards should be closed tightly - no matchsticks! Your open mesh floor provides more than adequate ventilation.

Plenty in the association favour rigid Kingspan or Celotex insulation. But I prefer an old pillowcase filled with beanbag filler, all in an empty super. Rigid insulators are alright, but what happens when you want to add a block of fondant?

It's easy to buy your own fondant from Bako. When you slice it up, first wrap each block in clingfilm. Then it's easier to handle and you'll get it in a ziplock type freezer bag a lot easier. Do the whole box and you'll have it ready for when the hives need it.

But don't over feed! Learn to heft (or get some digital luggage scales – fiver or less on eBay!) and monitor the weight of your hives over winter. Don't add fondant unless your hives need it – they'll need to have cleared those stores frames so the queen can lay them up in the spring.

Belt up! I always strap my hives down tightly – then I know they'll be able to stand-up to any winter winds.

And if you are in a windy location, stand the whole hive on an empty super, stopping drafts at the back

(where the inspection tray slides in) with a piece of plastic, ply or strong gaffer tape, which will create a pocket of still, insulating air under the mesh floor.

If we do get some real winter weather, don't bother clearing the snow from the entrance – your open mesh floor will provide enough ventilation.

Steve Leveridge

Feeding Colonies through the winter

Once the Autumn varroa treatment is off most of our colonies will need feeding to get them through the winter period of inactivity. The average requirement to get the colony through the winter is 18kg (40 lb). Native black bees may manage with less but some such as carniolan strains may need much more.

Feed can be given as either 2:1 sugar syrup or liquid Ambrosia. If using sugar this must be white, granulated. Brown sugar contains molasses and additives and powdered sugar contains corn starch all of which are bad for bees. While dissolving the sugar the pan if heated should be away from the heat source. Burnt sugar is also bad for bees. You can spare yourself all this by using ready-made Ambrosia liquid. This has the advantages of little or no odour so less attraction of robbers, not going mouldy in the feeder and is already inverted (sucrose broken down to glucose and fructose) therefore requiring less bee energy expenditure to utilise it. The association usually buys this in bulk late summer giving those who opt into the scheme a good discount.

The aim of autumn feeding is to avoid winter starvation. It will also reduce the amount of ivy nectar taken into the hive. Later in the winter this crystallises to a very hard honey which is difficult for the bees to eat, so they can starve despite having stores. If ivy honey is present and crystallised, scoring the surface of the comb helps the bees get at it.

Once adequate frames of stores are present the weight of the hive can be measured with a spring balance usually checked at the back of the hive and one side or by simply hefting with one hand and comparing this with reweighing or hefting later in the season as stores are used. It is also important that the frames of stores are near the brood nest since as the bees cluster and cool during the cold weather they cannot move far to get food. A warm winter will mean the bees are more active. There will be no forage and so they will use their stores more rapidly than in a cold winter when they venture out less and use less energy.

As mentioned above the purpose of feeding is to ensure the bees do not starve during winter. However, there are variables in the quantity of stores a given colony will need, so it is necessary to check the weight of the hive at regular intervals, more frequently if there is a rapid reduction in weight.

Further feeding may well be needed. In cold weather feeding syrup brings unwanted moisture into the hive, increasing condensation which is harmful, and also means the bees have to process the liquid in

their gut. Since in winter they go on only occasional cleansing flights, this overloads the individual bee's rectum causing soiling within the hive. If nosema has been present in a few bees before, this will encourage its spread to the whole colony.

To avoid this, later feeding should be done with fondant. Commercial baker's fondant may contain additives and is best avoided. Some people may wish to make their own but this is hard work. Recipes can be found in bee husbandry books or on line. Ambrosia make a fondant of inverted sugar which the bees can use easily. Other fondants some containing pollen or pollen substitute (Neopol, Nektapol, Candipol to name a few) are also available and are worth considering if you want your colonies to get off to an early start to forage autumn planted rape or if you are considering shook swarming. Pollen is needed for brood rearing. The queen begins to lay again as the days lengthen and so feeding pollen will help the colony build early.

Again, in cold weather the bees cannot move far. The fondant must be accessible. It can be put on over the feed hole in the crown board, in its pack with a large part of the under- side of the pack cut away to allow the bees access. If the cluster is not immediately below the feed hole it is better to put the fondant, completely unpacked, directly on top of the frames pushing it down in empty seams and perhaps sing half a pack at a time.

Honey can be used for autumn feeding either leaving a super or feeding back comb or washings after extraction. This must always be the hive's own honey to avoid spread of disease. Never use a commercial honey. It may contain AFB spores. Later in the winter pollen husks in honey can cause dysentery. This is especially likely if the bees are not well adjusted to the climate and will not apply so much to darker bees more closely related to our native black bee. It is probably safer to avoid honey as feed later in the winter.

Finally, don't forget early Spring. The bees will begin to fly and energy use can rapidly outstrip supplies form stores and available forage at this time. Keep checking hive weight and feed more fondant if needed. A pollen containing fondant is especially good for them.

Pat Morgan

Thornes Sale January

You will know that this hobby can be expensive, so make a list of the equipment you will need ready for the Thornes sale is in January. A good time to stock up on any equipment you will need next year in preparation for any additional colonies or just replacing old equipment.

10% Discount - Freeman & Harding Jars - BBKA Members

BBKA Basic Assessment Syllabus - Click Here

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