

# Mid Bucks Beekeepers Association



## Newsletter for March 2011

### Next Meeting

### **"An Evening with Roger Evans, Master Thatcher"**

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March**  
at 7:30pm in the Bowls Club

Every year we try to hold one meeting that is a bit different, usually on a nature or environmentally related subject.

This year we are very pleased to welcome **Roger Evans** who is a master at the traditional craft of thatching and has been responsible for restoring



Roger Evans working on the Alfriston Clergy House

many historic buildings.

His recent projects have included the **Alfriston Clergy House** for the National Trust and the **Arborfield Barn** at the Chiltern Open Air Museum.

It is an excellent opportunity to find out more about this ancient craft.

### Apiary Opening and Frame Competition

#### Apiary Opening and Barbecue

The official opening of the apiary this year will take place on **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April, 11 am - 3 pm**. Normally we spend the day tidying up after the winter and doing the odd jobs needed to prepare for the coming season.

This year however, Sean and his team have done such a good job over the winter that there isn't much housekeeping left to do! There are many beekeeping things we can do however, weather permitting.

Assess each of the colonies

Check that the queens are all present and marked

Set up some **Bailey Comb Changes**

Perform a **Shook Swarm** if weather is suitable

Bailey Comb changes and Shook Swarms are described on pages 2 and 3 of this newsletter. It will be a good opportunity to see how they are done.

The barbecue will start at about 1 o'clock. Please bring along some food to share.

#### Super Frame competition

This year we are borrowing an idea from High Wycombe Beekeepers which should prove to be great fun.

Each person entering will be given a super frame (un-assembled) with a code number on it. You must assemble the frame with the supplied foundation and place it in one of your colonies.

At the AGM in October, the **same frame** must be returned, whatever its condition, and we will give prizes for:

The heaviest frame

The most attractive looking frame

The least attractive looking frame

It will cost £2 to enter and you keep the frame afterwards.

Frames will be available for collection at the meetings on 16<sup>th</sup> March and 20<sup>th</sup> April and at the Apiary on 10<sup>th</sup> April. Hope everyone will join in.

### Dr. Alan Bowman

**Dr. Alan Bowman** of Aberdeen University has been working with **Dr. Giles Budge** of the National Bee Unit to develop a technique called "RNA inhibition" where rogue genes are introduced into the DNA of the varroa mite which causes them to "self destruct".

Although it is still early days, this might prove to be a novel and effective way of controlling Varroa.

Alan Bowman will be describing his work to the **Chalfonts Beekeepers** at 7:30 pm on **Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April** and Mid Bucks Members are welcome.

The meeting will be held at **St. Joseph's Priory, Austenwood Lane, Chalfont St. Peter, SL9 8RY**.

### Future Events

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April**

**Apiary Opening and Barbecue**

Association Apiary at Stoke Mandeville

**See page 2 for more details**

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April to Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April**

**BBKA Spring Convention**

Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire

**Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April**

**"Varroa – the fightback"**

by **Dr. Alan Bowman, Aberdeen University**

See details alongside

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April**

**"Sniffer Bees"**

by **Mathilde Briens**, Inscintinel Ltd.

7:30 pm at the Bowls Club

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May**

**Woodworking day**

Assembly of hive boxes and preparation of frames.  
More details will be given in the next newsletter



## Changing brood comb

In the past, beekeepers used to keep brood frames for quite a few years, changing perhaps only one or two frames each year. The National Bee Unit now recommends that we try to change all of the brood frames every year. It may be more expensive in time and brood foundation but the extra expense normally pays for itself in stronger, healthier colonies and more honey.

There are two methods of doing a complete change - the Bailey Comb Change and the Shook Swarm.

### You will need

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Spare brood box                                | Full set of frames fitted with new foundation |
| Queen excluder                                 | Feeder (bucket type is best)                  |
| Two dummy boards (for Bailey Comb Change only) |   |

## Bailey Comb Change

The idea behind this technique is to place a new brood box on top of the old one. When the bees have started to draw out the new foundation, the queen is moved into the top box and kept there by placing a queen excluder between the two brood boxes.

### What to do

- 1) Prepare a complete set of frames in a clean brood box using fresh foundation. If your foundation has been stored over the winter and has gone hard, warm it gently with a hair dryer to release the natural oils.
- 2) Remove all of the old frames that do not contain any brood. Put dummy boards either side so that the remaining frames are directly above the entrance.
- 3) Place the new brood box on top of the old brood box. **Do not** place a queen excluder between them.
- 4) Make up strong sugar syrup from 2 kg granulated sugar plus 1.2 litres water. Place this in the feeder above the new brood box. If your feeder is not big enough to hold this amount of syrup you will need to go back after a few days to replenish it.

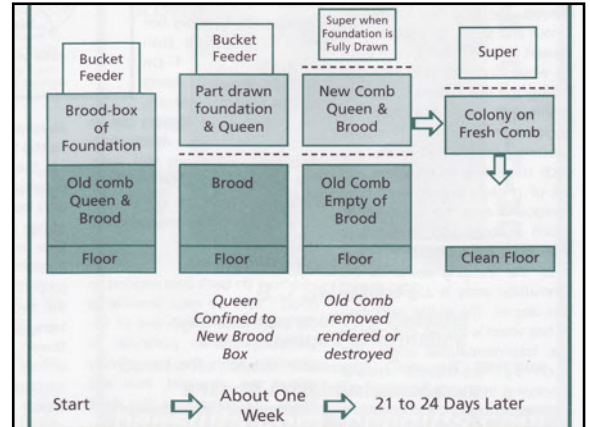


Diagram: Richard Ball BBKA News Feb. 2009

- 5) After 7 days, check that the bees have started to draw out the new foundation. If they have, find the queen and put her into the top box and place a queen excluder between the two brood boxes (see diagram). Make up another 2kg sugar syrup and refill the feeder.
- 6) If the bees have not started to draw out the foundation after 7 days, leave them for another 7 days before moving the queen into the top box.
- 7) After a further 3 weeks, all the brood in the bottom box should have emerged and the box can be removed. During this time you can put on a super with a second queen excluder above the new brood box.
- 8) At the end of the operation you should fit a new floor or thoroughly clean the existing floor.

## Shook Swarm

In this technique the bees are shaken onto new foundation and the old brood is destroyed. Although it seems drastic, the results can be very good.

Continued overpage



## Going through the winter with a super placed under the brood

Have you over-wintered with a super placed beneath the brood box? If so then they should be reversed now. Don't delay, do it before the end of March.

It is quite simple; if there are two of you the job is very quick. Try to do it without using smoke and you will find there will be very few bees in the bottom box and the queen will almost certainly be in the top chamber.

- o Remove the roof and place a clean queen excluder on top of the brood box.
- o Separate the brood box from the super and lift the brood box clear. If you are on your own, place it carefully inside the upturned roof. Avoid any jerky movements that may cause the queen to drop off the frame.
- o Take away the super and place the brood box on the existing floor.
- o Place the super on top of the queen excluder and then quickly go through it to check that the queen is not there. If you find her, you must capture her in a queen clip and carefully place her on the top of the frames in the brood box.

If there is any brood in the super, this will emerge within the next three weeks.

Often you find there are a few frames still containing granulated stores. These can be left for next winter but, personally, I prefer to remove them and render them down to recover the wax and then discard the old honey.

## Foundation for sale

Sean Stephenson is able to obtain Thorne's **Premium Quality** foundation at very favourable prices:

- |                     |   |                             |
|---------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| B/S Wired deep      | - | £5.80 per 10                |
| B/S wired shallow   | - | £3.60 per 10                |
| B/S unwired shallow | - | £3.30 per 10 (for cut comb) |

To place an order, contact Sean at [apiary@mbbka.org.uk](mailto:apiary@mbbka.org.uk) or telephone 01296 623318

# Changing Brood Comb

## Shook Swarm (continued)

### What to do

- 1) Prepare a new brood box with a complete set of frames fitted with fresh foundation.
- 2) Clean up a spare floor, queen excluder and crown board.
- 3) Move the old hive to one side and place the new floor in the original position.
- 4) Place the queen excluder on top of the floor, with the new brood box above it. This will stop the queen from absconding.
- 5) Find the queen, capture her in a queen clip and put her safely on one side.
- 6) Take out three or four frames from the middle of the new box and shake all the bees from the old frames into the space. Do this by grasping each frame firmly by the lugs, place it about ¼ way into the space and move it down quickly, stopping with a jerk. This will cause the bees to fall off into the new box. Try not to bang the frame against the sides of the box. Any bees remaining on the frame can be brushed off.
- 7) Go through the old frames and find the one that has the most eggs and unsealed brood on it. Place this in the centre of the new box. This will be a "bait frame" to attract the varroa mites that are on the bodies of the adult bees.
- 8) Fill up the spaces on each side with new frames.
- 9) Release the queen onto the top of the frames.
- 10) Reassemble the hive with a feeder containing sugar syrup made up from 2kg sugar plus 1.2 litres of water.
- 11) After 7-10 days, remove the queen excluder from underneath the brood box. Remove and destroy the bait frame. Replenish the sugar syrup unless you are confident there is a strong nectar flow.

### Which one to do

Each technique has advantages and disadvantage

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Bailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ You do not lose any brood</li> <li>✓ Less traumatic for the bees</li> <li>✓ Suitable for weaker colonies</li> <li>✓ Controls Nosema</li> <li>✓ Reduces brood diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× Does not control varroa</li> <li>× Bees are sometimes slow to draw out the new foundation</li> <li>× Ties up your extra equipment for at least 4 weeks</li> <li>× With a strong nectar flow, honey is often stored in the bottom brood box</li> </ul>
Shook Swarm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Gives good control of varroa</li> <li>✓ Strong colonies build up very quickly</li> <li>✓ Inhibits swarming although they may swarm later in the season</li> <li>✓ Quick to do, does not tie up spare equipment for long</li> <li>✓ Controls Nosema</li> <li>✓ Good reduction of brood diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× Requires a strong colony</li> <li>× More traumatic than the Bailey method and weak colonies can be lost</li> <li>× Timing is important (see below)</li> <li>× If the weather is too cold the bees will not draw out the new foundation.</li> </ul>

Whichever technique you use, it is important that you feed the bees with plenty of sugar syrup to encourage them to draw out the new comb.

### When to do it

**Bailey** can be done at any time up to the end of June but it is much better to do it early in the season. Start in late March if the weather is mild.

**Shook swarm** must be done before the end of April because the early spring brood is vital for the main honey crop. March or early April are best, before the brood has started to build up. If you have a severe varroa problem you can also do a Shook Swarm in mid June.

### Cleaning up afterwards

Old foundation can be cut out of the frames and rendered down for the wax. Personally I don't bother with combs that are very black; it can be very difficult to clean up the wax so I burn them.

The frames can be cleaned by steaming or soaking in hot washing soda.

Brood boxes, queen excluders and floors should be sterilised by flaming with a blowtorch.