



The HBKA

Buzzzzz
Word



JANUARY 2016

The Newsletter of Herefordshire Beekeepers' Association
www.herefordshirebeekeepers.org.uk

DATES FOR YOUR 2016 DIARY

Tuesday 16 February - 7.15pm for 7.30pm - HBKA Evening Meeting - Three Counties Hotel, Hereford

Thursdays 25 Feb and 3, 10 and 17 March - HBKA Beginners' Course - WRVS Centre, Vicarage Road, Hereford, HR1 2QN

Saturday 5 March - 9.00am to 4.30pm - Beetradox - Hall H3, Stoneleigh Park,, CV8 2LG

Tuesday 15 March - 6.45pm for 7.00pm - HBKA AGM - Three Counties Hotel, Hereford

Friday-Sunday 8, 9, 10 April - BBKA Spring Convention - Harper Adams University, Newport, TF10 8NB

SIX WEEKS EARLY...!

Where has Winter gone? The pictures below were taken on New Year's Day!



Prunus Kursar



Daffodil



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10 HOLBY CITY EMERGENCY WARD DOCTORS ER POSSIBLY?

It was like something out of Holby City. Wait, we can be more glamorous than that, it was like something out of ER.

Two operations had to be carried out almost simultaneously, with a mercy dash between the two theatres. The patient would die without a transplant, but the timing had to be right.

What are we talking here? Heart, kidney, lungs? No. It was a queen bee that was needed. Fortunately, a donor had been found, so the team put together a plan, gathered the kit they would need and – gowned, masked and gloved - prepared to operate.

But let's give you the back story first. An unsuccessful attempt at uniting two colonies had left Ann Shawcross queenless. The workers had tried to rescue the situation by building emergency queen cells, but it was too late in the season to rely on any emerging queen to be mated properly, if at all.

Meanwhile, in an apiary not too far, far away, two other colonies had queens – new that summer – that had got into their stride and were laying well. However, the colonies were small and unlikely to last the winter unless they were united, which left one queen surplus to requirements.

Cue the ER music....

The first phase of the operation took place in Ellen Davies' apiary, where she and Ann united the two weak colonies. The surplus queen was captured in a queen cage, together with a couple of workers to keep her company, and this was loosely folded in bubble wrap to keep them all warm for the mercy dash to Ann's apiary. There, they dismissed the attendant workers who might have tried to protect their queen, causing her some damage in the melee, and prepared the recipient hive by knocking down any queen cells.

Then the donor queen was transferred to a Butler cage, a slim construction of wire with one open end which was covered with newspaper so that, by the time the bees chewed through, they should all have become accustomed to each other. The mesh is the right size for the bees to feed and groom the queen, and to encourage this, Ellen and Ann liberally sprinkled the cage and several frames with icing sugar. They weren't sure it would do any good, but figured it couldn't do any harm.

Then they suspended the Butler cage between frames which contained brood, closed up the hive – and waited, for nearly two weeks. Come the day, the roof was lifted and the inspection started. The Butler cage's string had been chewed through and it had fallen to the floor – empty.

The first few frames were removed – nothing. Tension rose as the examination progressed. Had the transplant been accepted or rejected?

Then, there they were, a lovely cluster of newly-laid eggs. Next frame in, there was the queen, running around as if she owned the place. Fantastic!

Shortly after, the colonies in both apiaries were prepared for winter, with viable queens to help see them through. Now all they have to face is cold, damp, shortage of stores, invasion by mice, attack by woodpeckers, being overturned by badgers or boars nobody said it would be easy.

Many thanks to Ellen Davis for taking us into winter with this exciting story with a (relatively) happy ending. (Ed.)



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MAKING MEAD: Part 1 – Getting Started

Equipment:

All you will need in way of basic equipment for your mead making are:- two one gallon demijohns, a plastic funnel, a metre length of 5mm bore plastic tubing, a saucepan (preferably stainless steel), a wooden or stainless steel spoon, some sterilizing powder (such as Chempro SDP), some bored corks (to fit the jars), a fermentation lock, some Campden tablets, wine yeast and yeast nutrient.

Most of the above items can be found in the average kitchen. Or you can google “wine making equipment” and find your favourite internet supplier. Local chemists may also have a wine-making section. Demijohns are the most expensive items if you buy new, but they can often be found in charity shops or on bric-a-brac stalls for around 50p. Also, you will eventually need half a dozen punted, straight sided, clear glass, 75cl wine bottles. Save any that you acquire, or ask your alcoholic friends to save them for you. Also save some of those plastic corks from opened bottles of wine.

Other items that are handy, but not essential, are:- A thermometer, a wine hydrometer and test jar, some plastic stoppers for the wine bottles and a glass siphon tube with a ‘U’ bend at the end.

Preparation:

First, clean and sterilise all equipment.. The demijohns, if dirty, can be cleaned out with hot water and washing up liquid. A 2 foot (clean) garden cane with a pad of kitchen paper towel fixed to one end with an elastic band will aid cleaning the inside. Rinse out with clean water and half fill with tepid water and add a heaped teaspoon of sterilising powder. Swirl the jar to dissolve the powder and fill the jar to the top with more warm water. Leave for a few hours, or overnight, empty out and rinse with clean water. If any stains remain, repeat the above. Fit a stopper or a plug of kitchen towel to the jar to keep it clean until required.

Selecting the honey:

Good mead demands good honey. If you use your own honey, you will gain a certain amount of satisfaction from drinking the mead made from your own produce. Almost any honey can be used to make mead, but the light honeys produce the most delicate flavours. Spring blossom honeys are very good and mead made from these lighter honeys will often mature faster, being quite drinkable after maturing for only 3 to 6 months. However, good mead does take a long time to really mature properly and the best meads have probably been kept for 10 years, or more. One good reason for starting early, especially if you are a new beekeeper. It does not make any difference if you use liquid or granulated honey, but for your first attempts, avoid the dark honeys like Heather honey. If you buy in your honey, look out for Acacia, Clover or Orange blossom, but ensure that it comes from a reliable source.

How much will you need? 3 lbs of honey to make a gallon of mead is the normal amount used in most recipes. Therefore, when you have collected together your equipment, put aside your selected honey until you are ready to start your mead making. Spring or early summer is a good time to start off your mead, the reason being that the ambient temperature at that time of year is around the 70/80degF mark, which is the correct temperature for the fermentation process.

Next month I will deal with mead recipes, types of yeasts and the procedure for making mead, give you some useful hints and tips and hopefully encourage you to have a go at this very worthwhile addition to your bee-keeping activities.

This is the first of three consecutive articles by the redoubtable John Harley, taking the reader through all the processes and stages of making mead. Many thanks, John. (Ed.)



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KEEP IT CLEAN - Celia Davis

When we consider hygiene, it is worth bearing in mind the activities of the bees in maintaining their own healthy environment. The hive is essentially a clean place and worker bees are very industrious little cleaners, constantly licking surfaces. Small amounts of hydrogen peroxide, an antiseptic, are produced by the breakdown of glucose by the enzyme glucose oxidase from the bees' hypopharyngeal glands. This gets into the saliva of the bees and so into the general hive environment.

The second really important substance is propolis. Yes, I know, it's sticky and messy and hard to clean off ourselves and our equipment, but it is a very important substance, which is antibacterial, antifungal and probably antiviral as well. The more work that is done on propolis, the more we recognise its importance and we should be pleased if our bees are liberal propolis users, as mine are.

So the bees are pretty good but how can we help them? Why should we help them? The answer to this is that we are keeping them in an artificial situation where their normal precautions are probably not adequate. Inside our hives a burden of pathogens builds up and this adds to the stress the bees suffer and makes them more prone to get sick.

There are three components to a hive:

- The boxes
- The frames
- The comb

All these need to be cleaned at intervals.

The boxes

The brood box needs to be taken out of use periodically. The time interval varies and some beekeepers do this every year, others do it every three years or so. Put the frames in a clean box and clean the old one by scraping well and then singeing with a blow torch. We'll come back to this.

The frames

Brood frames may be stripped of their old wax and scraped well, then cleaned thoroughly in very, very hot washing soda solution. Alternatively, quite a few beekeepers have reached the conclusion that frames are better burned and replaced. It is really a question of whether time is more important than money and whether you have access to a boiler of some sort for cleaning them. Again, how long you keep them is a personal decision.

The comb

Old comb is a repository for pathogens and chemicals. The latter (particularly Varroa treatments), are often soluble in wax and other oils. It needs to be replaced at least every three years in my opinion, but many beekeepers, especially those in disease hotspots, replace it all every year. Clearly, if you are not recycling frames, the whole lot can be burned, but otherwise the wax can be stripped out and burned. This is a much better solution than trying to salvage a bit of grubby wax out of them.



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Fumigating with ethanoic (acetic) acid

We saw earlier that boxes could be sterilized by scorching with a blowtorch and this is the method used by Bee Inspectors when treating disease outbreaks; but it is not possible to singe frames and certainly not combs, so there is another method which can be used. The frames and boxes must be well scraped clean first then fumigated by stacking up boxes, with their frames, and putting a pad or dish containing 150ml of 80% ethanoic acid on top of the frames. A number of boxes can be stacked together but must be sealed up. I use wheelie bin liners to enclose them. The acid attacks metal, concrete and humans, so take care where it is all put (outside) and protect yourself with gloves and goggles. Avoid breathing the fumes. Leave the stack for one week then dismantle, dispose of the pads and air the equipment well. This can work well for relatively new comb, which is in good condition. Winter is a good time to make a start on cleaning those boxes which are lurking in the bee shed. Then next spring they are ready to have their new foundation in ready for your Bailey comb changes or shook swarms. Keeping everything clean will really benefit your bees and result in better, healthier colonies.

Happy scraping!

This article comes courtesy of Celia Davis and Warwickshire BKA via eBees - many thanks to all concerned. (Ed.)

BOB'S BEELINES FOR JANUARY

The weather is still very mild and blackberry and holly are in flower. The bees are still very active so keep a careful regular check on their food stores and feed candy where necessary.

Now is the time of year when we usually treat our bees with oxalic acid 3.2% - BUT HOLD BACK ON TREATMENT for now as the abnormally mild temperatures won't have stopped the queen from laying and there may well be 3 or 4 plus frames of brood. Any oxalic acid treatment you apply may therefore destroy some or all of the brood; so wait until mid-January when we'll hopefully be having some colder weather. Or you could simply delay treatment until the spring and then use just a single application of Apiguard or Apline Var. If in doubt seek advice.

That's about it – but I would like to take this opportunity to thank Geoff Blake and the South LAN for inviting Kath and myself to their Christmas party and making us so welcome; and thanks too, to Chris Stowell for making an excellent job of the Buzzword.

Happy New Year to you all,

Bob and Kath.





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