



CBKA Newsletter

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In the Apiary

There's still time to clean and disinfect your old hive bodies, frames and floors. A butane gas torch as used by plumbers is good, but I find an electric paint stripping gun less likely to bring the pyromaniac out in me and is a lot more controllable. It is especially good for cleaning and sterilising gummed up queen excluders. Place the excluder flat on some newspapers and start heating the wooden frame. When the old wax and propolis start to melt, gently scrape with a paint scraper without damaging the wood. Keep wiping the mess you scrape off onto a sheet of newspaper. Heat the metal wires and use a crumpled up sheet of newspaper to wipe them as you go along. Heat and sterilise the inside, outside and top and bottoms of brood boxes and supers, scraping off any old bits of wax and propolis. Count the number of squashed bees you scrape off the top and bottom of the boxes and promise you'll be more careful this year. Don't worry if some of the wax or propolis is "painted" onto the wood as you do all this as it is a disinfectant. Watch for wax moth pupae hiding in corners and make sure you kill these. An electric heat gun is hot enough to badly scorch and blacken wood so don't overdo things!

Put foundation into cleaned frames and have those supers and brood boxes ready. Have a spare clean floor ready for every one of your hives - the bees have over wintered on the old floors and they will need swapping when the weather improves.

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My First Year in Beekeeping

Not another swarm!

I have always had an interest in bees and having just acquired an allotment at Saltersgill, I was excited to start last year's beginners' beekeeping course. I thoroughly enjoyed the course over the 10 evenings and was impressed by the depth of knowledge and practical experience delivered in a friendly and informative manner. A variety of speakers gave presentations and they made the subject sound fascinating. I was impressed by the gems of information such as how long it takes a bee to make a

teaspoon of honey, and what happens to the poor old drone's genitalia after mating, ouch! It also became obvious that Beekeeping was not a straightforward subject, theories abound and if you asked three beekeepers the same question you would get five different answers. I was fortunate to have as a mentor an experienced beekeeper at my allotments, and I pestered him with pleas for help for most of the year.

Having bought my hive and set it up in the allotment, I had the good fortune to buy a splendid nucleus of bees from a club member. I was able to visit his apiary and watch while the bees were swapped over into my hive and check the colony and the queen, so beginning my practical experience. I remember worrying about loading the car up with the hive and what would happen if they got out in the car. All exciting stuff! It was the start of an exciting journey into the beekeeping world.

The weather was good in the spring and the bees did well, my mentor remarked how lucky I was at the prolific expansion of the colony. The first lone inspection of the hive in April was memorable, it went well, or so I thought. I obviously couldn't see the wood for the trees as it all looked OK to me, but I had missed a queen cell, hello to my first swarm. The swarm was hanging onto a conifer conveniently, and even more helpfully my bee mentor was with me. He quickly had it placed in a box and we watched while the stragglers joined the main swarm, all magic to a novice. Fortunately I had followed advice and had a spare hive ready and they were quickly re-homed. Turned out I must have missed two queen cells as a few days later I watched fascinated as a cast emerged and landed in a nearby garden. This was re-housed in another spare brood box and re-homed in the apiary, I was now becoming a beekeeper, proud owner of three colonies, how would I break the news to my wife about the additional cost? It was an amazingly warm spring and the colonies did well expanding in numbers, and as the supers went on I was hopeful there may be honey in the future. In June the weather became wet and I omitted to do my weekly check and was duly rewarded in seeing another swarm develop. It was an

impressive sight with a really strange roaring sound. I couldn't tell which hive they were swarming from. I videoed it all on my phone, though my next door allotment holder wasn't that impressed and retired quickly into his shed. I made mental note to give him a jar of honey! Again the swarm landed conveniently nearby but alongside the road. As I was now in the public eye I had to act as if I knew what I was doing. The swarm was at an awkward height up a tree, and borrowing a ladder I just managed to reach it and shake it into a box without disgracing myself by falling from the ladder or tree! Four hives now, wife was not too sure about this increasingly expensive hobby but I was loving it. During the summer my bees seemed to be intent on making lots of queen cells - it seemed to be an unusual year and little point in practising artificial swarming, everyone seemed to be in the same boat. I was trying to get my head around what the bees were doing and not becoming any wiser, but I was enjoying the journey. Another mistake I made was to go on holiday for ten days; do beekeepers only have winter holidays? I came back to several sealed queen cells and obviously reduced colony numbers. The next day again witnessed a swarm develop before my eyes; it was also starting to thunder and rain, I thought the books said that shouldn't happen? I decided not to increase the empire, I thought the expense wouldn't go down well at home and quietly amalgamated the swarm back into a hive and hoped for the best, it seemed to work out OK.

Despite the bee's determination to swarm, come September some of the supers had capped honey. I was looking forward to some honey for breakfast. Honey harvest finally came, and another mistake! I underestimated how difficult it would be to separate the bees from their honey. I didn't think I needed to use the Porter bee escapes to clear the supers, I thought I could just brush them off and put the frames into a box. It was my first experience of angry bees; I managed to get the frames' into sealed

boxes but with lots of accompanying bees. Also I had that sinking feeling that must happen to lots of new beekeepers, that "OHMYGODIHAVEABEEINMYVEILWHATDOIDO?" moment, I was eternally grateful that no one saw me running up the garden!! Still what's a couple of stings on the bonnet, compared with the pleasure of bringing home the honey? I borrowed the club extractor and did the removal process in the bathroom as I heard it was a sticky business. I was rewarded with 25 jars of wonderfully dark honey which seemed very special to me. The extraction process seeing the golden honey pouring into jars was indescribably satisfying. Later after feeding the bees up with thick syrup and then putting on the Varroa treatment it was time to put the mouse guards on, and put my feet up, and look forward to a quieter time in the apiary. During the back end of the year I filtered my accumulated wax and made up some lip balm and hand cream. I also bought some candle moulds to make Christmas candles for the family which was enjoyable and well received. During the winter I find myself worrying about the hives weight, the weather, Varroa, whether the colonies will come through the winter, and hoping for an early spring, etc. I even planted some early flowering bulbs to greet them in the spring. I definitely feel like a beekeeper now, just hope the bees agree.

The first season had been harder work and busier than I had anticipated. It had been more expensive than I thought but also more enjoyable and rewarding than I could have imagined. What was also unexpected was how interested friends and family were with my tales from the apiary, people seem to be universally interested in bees and understandably so, and I didn't feel at all like "a nerd who keeps insects in wooden boxes".

John Baines

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Happy Beekeeping

Secretary: Derek Herring, 8 Wardale Avenue, Acklam, Middlesbrough. Tel 01642 282030

Winter meetings (September to April) are held on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7:15pm in the:

Southlands Leisure Centre, Ormesby Road, Middlesbrough, TS3 0HG. Visitors and new members welcome.

BEEKEEPING SUPPLIES

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