



CBKA Newsletter

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In the Apiary

The continuing mild weather and strong winds mean you should continue visiting your hives regularly to make sure that everything is well. A couple of house bricks on top or a strap around the hive will help it to stay secure and not rattle in the wind. Keep hefting your hives and be prepared for emergency feeding with candy if they feel light. From the middle of January onwards the queen will notice the increase in daylight hours and she will start to increase her egg laying from the winter minimum; some queens stop laying altogether in a very cold prolonged winter. As the bees get more active and the amount of brood increases the food consumption in the hive increases rapidly so it is important to make sure there's enough to eat. Sugar is not a complete diet for the bees and they pollen too. The bees obviously prefer fresh pollen to pollen that has been stored through the winter in the hive and which may have started to go mouldy by now, so very soon if the weather allows they will start visiting early flowers such as snowdrops and crocuses to collect fresh pollen.

At this time of the year if there any Varroa mites in your hives they will be attached to the bees since there are little or no capped brood cells for them to hide in. Check for mite drop and see if your bees need treating. If the check reveals an elevated mite count then you can treat with Oxalic acid solution. Make up a sugar syrup of 1kg of sugar in 1L of water, and then add 75g of oxalic acid dihydrate. This will produce 1.67 litres of solution, which is a huge amount considering how much is used per hive so unless you have a lot of colonies which need treating it is best to make it and share it between a group of beekeepers. Accurate weighing of the oxalic acid is essential because under-strength will give a poor mite kill and over-strength may kill bees! A 50ml medical syringe should be filled and 5ml of the mixture should be trickled between each pair of frames directly onto the bees. Neat Oxalic acid is nasty stuff, wear rubber gloves and eye protection and treat with respect. It is a harsh treatment for the bees and you may see some deaths, but it is very effective against varroa, especially if there are none hiding in brood cells.

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The 'Heir and Spare' Management Method

The heir and spare system is devised for use in gardens where the amount of hive stands is limited and the forage plentiful. It is only suited to hobby bee-keepers with two or three hives and a lot of time to devote to the management of the hive. The method involves the use of double brood box and supers with another brood box containing a nuc placed over the hive using a Snelgrove board for separation. Starting with a double brood box, the initial split is made in May as part of the normal swarm prevention procedures.



The queen is found and the brood boxes arranged so that the queen and a frame or two of sealed brood and some stores are in one box and the young brood and some stores are in the other brood box. The box with the young brood is placed on the original floor, the queen excluder and then the supers added on top. The Snelgrove board is placed on top of the supers with an open upper entrance opposite to the main entrance. The brood box with the queen and the frames of sealed brood is placed on top of the Snelgrove board. A crown board and roof are added as normal. Flying bees will fly out of this entrance and return to their old entrance which is now the queen-less hive. At this stage you have a queen-less hive where the bees will raise a new queen under the emergency impulse. I inspect four days after making a split and remove any sealed queen cells, leaving one or two large well fed unsealed queen cells. The bottom colony should be left alone to allow the new queen to mate for around four weeks depending upon the weather. By this time the nuc will have built up and the beekeeper can bleed bees from the top nuc to the main colony by using the Snelgrove board upper and lower entrances. When the queen has begun to lay in the bottom colony frames of brood from the top nuc can be added to it to reinforce the bottom colony and keep

the top colony with around three frames of brood. A second brood chamber is added to the lower colony along with extra supers when required.

When the season is over, the nuc is allowed to build up and both hives fed. The hive is wintered with the nuc on the top and the colony below on two brood boxes.

When May comes again the system is repeated by killing the queen in the top nuc and replacing her with the queen from the bottom hive, allowing the bottom hive to re-queen itself.

As a system you will have noted that it is overly complicated. When you inspect the bottom colony you must remove the top nuc first, then the supers and then the two brood boxes must be examined. If you have two colonies open simultaneously, there are six brood boxes open as well as supers.

Keeping track of the positions to reassemble them is difficult! The top colony must be kept weak or it will be much more likely to swarm so the bee-keeper is committed to more frequent inspections.

These frequent inspections will reduce honey production which offsets the extra bees bled in.

Every inspection requires forethought and planning and the Snelgrove openings must be adjusted regularly. It is difficult to keep bees this way but the challenge can make it interesting. If you want to know more details please contact me. Tom Rettig

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Bee Candy, without cream of tartar or vinegar

No apologies for repeating the following recipe which comes from an earlier CBKA newsletter. A lot of recipes add some form of acid, usually cream of tartar or vinegar to invert the sucrose (table sugar) into glucose and fructose. The inverted sugars taste sweeter and remain moister but as sugar is such a poor substitute for honey as bee food, I don't think we should adulterate it further by adding other ingredients to the table sugar.

Equipment: A large pan or jam pan, hand or electric mixer, cooking thermometer, margarine tubs or

small take away food containers. The solution will bubble and froth furiously, so make sure the pan is large enough not to boil over.

Procedure:

- Pour 2 kg of granulated sugar into 600ml of water in a pan and bring to the boil stirring constantly.
- Cover and gently boil up for about 5 minutes.
- Remove lid and check the temperature with the cooking thermometer, continue to boil with lid off until the temperature reaches 112C. As the mixture steams off the concentration increases and the boiling temperature will also increase.
- Remove from the heat and cool to 93C.
- Carefully whip with the mixer until the mixture begins to turn white and creamy. Keep moving the outside of the mixture into the centre which will remain liquid for longer.
- Pour into the containers or pour a small amount onto a lined baking tray if you want thin sheets of candy. When cold wrap the thin sheets in cling film to keep moist.
- Allow to cool undisturbed.

If the temperature of the mixture falls below about 68C you will have a pan full of candy which will be very difficult to shift! Pour into the containers while it is still about 70C -75C. Some mixture will remain coating the pan. To clean the pan fill it full of clean hot water and leave for a few hours, the mixture will soften and be easy to remove without a lot of elbow grease.

To use: Invert the tubs/containers over the feed hole in the crown board or put thin sheets directly on the top bars under the crown board. If you want to turn the mixture out of the tubs/moulds then wrap in clingfilm to keep moist. Only partially unwrap the clingfilm when you put the candy over the feed hole, this stops it drying out.

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Wishing you good beekeeping for 2012

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.

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