



NEWSLETTER 202 – March 2015

Next Meeting Thursday the 26th March at 7:15pm at Rhu Parish Church. Phil McAnespie, ex-president of the SBA will speak on what the SBA does for you. Please make a big effort to come. He is travelling up from Ayr for our benefit. I am sure that he would be willing to answer any practical bee questions as well.

This months Tip

April is the month for the first inspection of the year. Choose a day when it is really warm, a day you could go about in a T shirt. Beware: after a long winter warm days are not as warm as you imagine, especially for the bees. Open up the hive when it is too cold and the bees will get nervous and you could loose a queen by balling or by putting a young queen to inadvertent flight. So you want a sunny day when the bees are working away and there is a lovely buzz in the air.

Of course you are looking for confirmation that they are all right, better still that you are seeing healthy brood and signs that the colony is starting to expand, and if they are expanding whether they are low on stores or there is enough to keep them going; really enough, a few combs of honey at least. If not feed them with fondant.

If things are going well it is a good time for them to draw out new comb, especially if they are on a double brood and the new combs can go in the top box; in any case at the edge of and not splitting the brood nest.

Finally this is the key month for marking queens: absolutely essential. If on a brood and a half or double brood box you will most likely find her near or on eggs in the top box. I'm not going into the details of how to mark her but if you don't know or are worried about it enlist someone to help. Don't delay. The queen must be marked in April if you want to find her in May, which you will, sure as eggs are eggs.

Mike Thornley

HDBA members local association awards at SBA AGM

Neil Sandison and Alastair Cameron were presented with the local association medal and Ben Bellamy received a bar to go with his one, which was awarded some ten years ago.

Beginners and Intermediate Courses

We will run our own "taster" course for beginners on Thursday the 16th April evening followed by a visit to the apiary on Saturday the 18th. Much more comprehensive courses for beginners and intermediates are available from Graeme Sharpe at the Agricultural College at Ayr Tel 01292 525375 graeme.Sharpe@sruc.ac.uk Highly recommended!

Extractor for Sale A Dadant stainless steel tangential extractor will be auctioned at the next meeting. It is pretty old but serviceable. Proceeds to the club.

Oxalic Acid Containers/Dispensers

There is still £1 on offer for each container but please bring them to the next meeting anyway as we will reuse them for the club hives.

C.A.B.A evening with Murray McGregor

Janet Maccallum

On Friday the 13th March, several members of the Helensburgh and District Bee Association attended C.A.B.As evening with Murray McGregor.

Murray is a second generation bee keeper who farms approximately 2700 hives, in the Lothians, Perthshire, Angus, Aberdeenshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Keeping his bees in various regions of Britain "spreads the risk" Where one area may yield a good honey crop, another may yield less than expected, therefore averaging out.

Honey production on this large scale takes Murray and his 3 teams, each consisting of: Lead Beekeeper, Beekeeper and a "Go Fur", two months to harvest the honey from the supers into drums. This does not include bottling and labelling! Two tonnes of wax is then sent to Thornes Bee Suppliers to be processed into comb.

Murray treated us to an insight into bee keeping on a large scale:

Six minutes is the time allocated to each hive inspection! This includes Queen marking and hive splitting during swarming season. With practise, a quick visual scan is all that is needed to pick up abnormalities!

Bee Keeping Year starts in September; The teams make sure the bees are as healthy as possible for overwintering. Merge two small colonies using Airwick spray air freshener to produce a larger stronger colony for winter. As bees have never read a text book, Murray explained that it is possible for the 2 Queens occupy a single hive over winter until spring!

14kg of sugar syrup is dispersed into feeders in each hive (2700 x14 anyone)?

Oxalic Acid is used to control Varroa. However this has not proven to be effective this year. Ian Craig felt the absence of a "brood break", allowing the Varroa to continue to reproduce in the populated brood cell, was a possible explanation.

Hives are not opened too early. The end of April is soon enough in Scotland, 2-3 weeks earlier in England.

One of Murray's first jobs is to find, clip and mark the Queen. This is when last year's Queen is marked green for the year 2014. He advises not to mark a new queen in her first year as she can be too feisty and more susceptible to injury whilst marking.

Murray introduced Jalanta, who is in charge of Queen rearing. His aim is to breed genetically diverse Queens who are strong, hard working and of good temperament. Plans are afoot to produce 1000 or so queens. Breeding pure bred bees can be achieved through artificial insemination; however, he explains Jalanta is concentrating on producing mixed breed "good working Queens" suitable for our climate.

This is a new venture in its embryonic stage which Murray and Jalanta will hopefully be able to show us on the C.A.B.A. bus tour on the 14th June. We will be able to see the 500 planned mating boxes.

The hot topic of Small Hive Beetle (SHB) was raised. Murray's thoughts were most interesting. He feels our British weather conditions are not suited to the SHB. His rationale: SHB needs a damp soil temperature of 20-30 degrees in order to pupate and this is not possible in Britain. He is of the opinion the authorities feel the need to react to the worst possible scenario. It was interesting and thought provoking to hear Murray's thoughts on the SHB.

Home baking and tea completed a very enjoyable evening. As usual time flew and we were persuaded /ushered out still discussing all things bee related.

Sign me up for the jaunt to Murrays place please. It sounds extremely interesting. Look out for the details.