

Leiston Beekeepers' Newsletter

January to April 2012

(an associate branch of Suffolk Beekeepers' Association)

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It has been a good season!

Every season is different. The weather governs the growth of plants and the production of pollen and nectar, insects' food. For a good season the weather needs to coincide with the needs of plants and the life cycle of insects. If these conditions are present honey bees will be able to feed themselves, expand their populations, swarm and collect sufficient food stores for the coming winter thus ensuring reproduction and the survival of the species.

Winter Losses

Six of my eight colonies came through the winter being strong and two being weak. I removed the weak colonies shaking all the bees from the combs allowing them to seek refuge in the remaining colonies. My visits to inspect the colonies, every seven days, from April on were a pleasure, the weather being mostly sunny and warm. The populations of the colonies steadily grew with enough food being brought in to maintain the early expansion. The supers were a little slow in filling as the bees needed all the incoming nectar for themselves.

Signs of swarming

Drones were being produced in April but I found no signs of queen cells being produced until mid May when three out of the six remaining colonies wanted to swarm. These three colonies were strong so I made up three nucleus hives from them. Each nucleus was headed by one of the old queens along with a frame of brood, food and foundation frames with lots of young bees shaken into each nucleus box. These nucleuses were then fed with sugar syrup to encourage the bees to build new comb on the foundation frames. I ensured that the other, now queenless colonies had only one queen cell to prevent them throwing cast swarms.

First honey crop and June gap

I gathered my first crop of honey a little later than usual in mid May amounting to 220lbs. I have two apiaries one in Aldeburgh and the other in Leiston. There was oil seed rape in Leiston but none within striking distance from Aldeburgh. After taking this crop of honey came the June gap. Throughout June this season there was little available nectar. In all my 20 years of beekeeping I have not experienced a gap like this. I resorted to feeding my bees with a 'wodge' of candy over the feed hole purchased from my local bakers.

Further swarms and expansion

In July another colony showed signs of swarming. This queen had one wing clipped. I allowed only one queen cell to develop and as soon as it was capped (on the eighth day) the queen swarmed with half the colony. The queen having only one wing fell to the ground and was lost. The swarm soon after gathering realised it had no queen so returned to their hive. The chosen queen cell was the only cell left in the hive. I inspected this hive six days after the swarm to seek out and destroy any cells that had developed from eggs and young larva left behind in the hive by the swarm. This prevented any further swarms. The new queen emerged two days later. It took a further two to three weeks before she had mated and was then able to lay fertile eggs to further develop her colony. I was called out to collect a couple of small swarms one in July and another very small one in September. Both were hived in nucleus boxes with foundation frames and fed with sugar syrup. Both now have enough bees to safely overwinter. So I now have twelve colonies ready to go into action next spring. Having no further worries about swarming the supers were soon ready to be taken off for the next crop of honey.

Second honey crop and varroa treatment

This second crop of honey in mid August, again later than usual, amounted to about 450lbs. Soon after this I treated for varroa with Thymovar and let the colonies alone. I then purchased twelve, twelve kilogram containers of ambrosia to feed the bees after the varroa treatment. I still have this syrup as a local farmer planted fields of phacellia with an undercrop of clover within striking distance of all my bees and they filled their hives to bursting with nectar and pollen from this crop. There was so much food in the hives I worried there would be insufficient space for the queen to lay the winter population of bees. I reduced the entrance size and put chicken wire around the hives for protection against woodpeckers, mice and 'closed up shop' for the year. I believe the queens have been laying throughout September October and November in the unusually warm weather we have been having. My bees were still out flying and bringing in pollen as late as 28 November.

The last job - oxalic acid treatment

The last job will be to open the hives in early January when the brood will be at it lowest and all remaining varroa mites will be exposed on the bees. A very weak oxalic acid sugar syrup solution is trickled over the seams of bees. This will kill these remaining varroa mites and ensure a clean colony to emerge from winter into the spring in a healthy and vigorous state.

Leiston and District Beekeepers' Association AGM

Saturday 11th February
2012
2.30pm

United Reformed Church
Chapel Road
Saxmundham, IP17 1BJ

(Bring your subscription along if you have
already not paid)

After the AGM there will be a general
discussion around the pros and cons
of using various designs of beehives.

Suffolk Beekeepers' Association AGM

Wednesday 7th March 2012
Creting St Mary Village Hall
All Saints Road
IP6 8PJ
7.30pm

A Call to Arms!!

The Secretary, Treasurer and
Stock Manager are to step down
this year so there is a need to fill
these posts. You do not need to be
an expert bee keeper to become a
committee member. Please
consider becoming a committee
member. See below note:-

L&DBKA needs You

Cambridgeshire Beekeepers' Association –

One Day Seminar, Saturday 10 March
2012 "Survival in spite of all odds"

Norman Carreck: "Honey bee viruses -
what are they and why are they
important?";

Professor Andrew Bourke: "Eusocial
evolution, social behaviour, foraging
ecology and conservation of bumble
bees";

Catherine Thompson; "The status of
the feral honey bee in the UK";

Norman Carreck: "Honey bee colony
losses - what are the causes?"

Tickets £19.50, (includes lunch and
refreshments). - David J Abson, 6
Ascham Lane, Whittlesford, CB22 4NT
(01223-834-620).

**A great day out and
an excellent start to the season!**

L&DBKA - Notes about annual subscription for 2012

Registered Member

Individuals who have paid a membership fee to L&DBKA, Brood Disease Insurance for 3 hives and a capitation fee to the BBKA and for whom a contact name and address has been supplied to the BBKA.

BBKA £15.00 (increase of £1)

BDI £ 2.00 – 3 hives

SBKA £ 2.00

L&DBKA £5.00

Total £ 24.00

Plus £1.50 optional research contribution

BBKA £9.90 (increase of .66p)

BDI £2.00 – additional 3 hives

SBKA £0.10 (increase of .10p)

L&DBKA £5.00

Total £17.00

Plus £1.50 optional research contribution

Country Member

Individuals not active in beekeeping, who wish to support and be involved with the BBKA, and who have paid a subscription fee to L&DBKA, and a capitation fee to the BBKA, and for whom a contact name and address has been supplied to the BBKA.

Partner Member

Individuals who reside at the same address as a Registered Member, and have paid a membership fee to L&DBKA, Brood Disease Insurance for 3 hives (so 6 hives in total with Registered Member) and a capitation fee to the BBKA and for whom a contact name and address has been supplied to the BBKA.

BBKA £7.50 BBKA (increase of .50p)

BDI £0

SBKA £0

L&DBKA £3.00

Total £10.50

Plus £1.50 optional research contribution

It is a condition of membership that all members will be registered with the National Bee Unit to be placed on the Regional Bee Inspector's list. Please find below a link to 'beebase' which we recommend you to register with. Signing up to beeBase as a beekeeper will enable you to take advantage of the free services the national bee unit offers. No charge is made for an apiary visit by a fully qualified Bee-inspector. The inspector will check for signs of disease or pests, and will provide you with help and advice on good husbandry, and how to tackle any potential problems they may find. All have extensive experience of managing colonies of bees and are keen apiarists themselves. They will always try and keep any disruption during a visit to an absolute minimum and provide you with up to date information and advice. You will also have access to all the latest information regarding disease and pest outbreaks and the results of various research projects and latest advisory information
<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/public/register.cfm>

L&DBKA needs YOU!

Could you contribute to the continuation and development of the Leiston and District Beekeepers' Association?

L&DBKA has been in existence since 1946. In recent years membership has more than doubled, however we still struggle to find enough people to join the committee and take on the vital roles that keep the association and teaching apiary going.

Our committee needs some new members to start next year, as several of us are standing down. Would you be able to spare a bit of time to help your association? It doesn't have to be a major commitment, in fact the more people that volunteer, the less there is for everyone to do.

Could you spend a few hours at the apiary over the winter or early spring and help make up equipment? Would you cut the grass at the apiary every couple of weeks during the growing season? Perhaps you would consider joining the committee in a non-executive role and come along to our quarterly meetings just to help spread the load. Or you could volunteer to become our treasurer, or simply offer to audit our accounts if you have the skills. There are many other possibilities for greater or lesser involvement with the association, but all involve working together with an interesting group of people to help keep the craft of beekeeping flourishing in this part of Suffolk.

If you are interested in offering to help, talking about what's possible or have ideas for improving or developing the L&DBKA we'd be very keen to hear from you. Call me, or any current member of the committee, to find out more:- *Penny Robertson Treasurer (outgoing) 01728 604388, John Blakesley Secretary (outgoing) 01502 478538, Peter Girling Chairman 01728 452307 and Laurie Wiseman Committee Member 01728 454238.*

Did you know?

- All Suffolk branch newsletters/events and much more can be viewed by visiting the recently updated www.suffolkbeekeepers.co.uk
- All members may attend all meetings of any branch. A list of branch events on the website event page www.suffolkbeekeepers.co.uk/page3.html
- Leiston's New Website...will be up and running soon!! It will be regularly updated. <http://leistonbeekeepers.onesuffolk.net/>
- JarsAvailable in 1/2 gross boxes from Ann Dallas. Tel. No. 01728 602295

Stop Press -Would you like to help in the Suffolk Beekeepers' Marquee at the Suffolk Show 2012?

This year the Show is being held on Thursday 7th June and Friday 8th June 2012. As usual Stewards are required to ensure a smooth running occasion. If you can spare a few hours on one or both days please contact me on jackie.mcqueen@ntlworld.com or 01473 420187. If would like to enter in the competitions please do not hesitate to contract me. Full details will be available on www.suffolkbeekeepers.co.uk nearer the time.

Ian McQueen Show Secretary.