



I realise it is rather late for the May Comment, but perhaps it is better late than never! Much of what I have to say in this note is equally valid for June, so this could be regarded perhaps as an early June Comment.

May has been a very mixed month with rain wind and sunny spells, but often quite cold – in fact even cold enough for hail and sleet on occasions!

In spite of the poor weather the bees have been building up and storing a little honey. Due to unforeseen circumstances I was later than usual in doing my first major inspection and the bees were already sticking the crown board to the top frames with brace comb and honey. It is important to ensure that the bees have plenty space for storing their honey –remember that what they are collecting is nectar which can require a great deal more space for its initial storage than honey as it can have a high water content, possibly 80%. The bees have to spread it around the empty cells in order to evaporate off the excess water and reduce the water content to around 18% before filling the cells and capping them. The main cause of swarming is congestion in the hive which occurs when there are too many bees crammed into too small a space with nowhere to store the incoming nectar and the queen has too few empty cells to lay in. A single National brood box does not provide enough space for a good queen, which is why beekeepers adopt the deep and shallow or double brood box systems to give the queen extra space. It also provides the bees with a lot more space, which facilitates the transfer of the queen's pheromones, which control the swarming impulse. Putting on honey supers above the queen excluder ahead of time also helps to delay the building of queen cells. The second super should be added on top as soon as the first super is well filled with bees. If you are going away on holiday, you can put two supers on top, but the problem with this is that the bees will tend to fill up the middle combs in both boxes. To avoid this you should place a sheet of thick plastic between the boxes which leaves a couple of inches of space at the sides so that the bees have access to the upper box after filling up the lower box. The first super above the queen excluder should have drawn combs in it. Subsequent boxes can be with drawn combs or foundation. It is generally better to put frames with foundation directly above the queen excluder as the heat from the brood nest helps the bees to draw out the foundation.

Apart from congestion, swarming can be caused by the lack of queen substance (pheromone) due to the queen ageing, or simply a propensity for swarming due to the particular strain of bee. As obtaining honey depends on three things – having a strong colony, good weather and plenty of forage i.e. flowers for the bees, it is important that you do what you can to help. You can do nothing about the weather. You can try to choose a good site for your bees and perhaps plant some useful trees and plants but it is fairly limited what you can do to make a real impact in this respect. Having strong colonies is what you must try to achieve. Clearly the weather and the forage play an important part in this but the

queen has to be good and not prone to swarming. The hive has to be free from debilitating diseases and varroa infestation must be kept below harmful levels. However even if you have all these things taken care of, you will get very little honey if your colony swarms and half your bees depart with the queen. If this happens your hive will do very little for several weeks until the new queen's progeny are out foraging, by which time the summer is almost over! Hence it is important that you keep a close watch on your bees and have a method of dealing with them when you see them making preparations to swarm. Simply rubbing off queen cells may buy you a little time but it is likely that they will swarm a few days later than they had planned and they will leave after building emergency queen cells and you may well end up with an inferior queen. First queen cells built under optimum conditions are clearly the best and should be used to raise replacement queens. This can be achieved by creating an artificial swarm. There are a number of different methods – the Demarree method, the Horsley board, the Taranov board, splitting and making up nuclei. It is always useful to have a spare nucleus hive or two to replace losses, which can occur over the winter or even the summer if a virgin queen fails to get mated due to bad weather. No method is 100% certain, but there is a good chance that you may avoid losing a swarm and a potential honey surplus, and also raise a new queen for next year. Some methods, like using the Snelgrove board are much too complicated – you need to have a straightforward method. Some require you to create a separate hive, which involves much more equipment -- I feel it is easier to keep the colony on the one stand using a board on top of the supers with a back entrance, then the crown board and roof. The board should have access to the hive underneath through a “feed” hole which can be covered with a piece of queen excluder initially then a few days later with a piece of gauze. When the young queen is mated and laying satisfactorily, the old queen below can be killed and the hive on top united using newspaper *. Alternatively leave the old queen below and unite using newspaper with a queen excluder on top of the paper and it can be worked as a two-queen colony with both colonies storing honey in the same supers. Another option is to lift it off and set it up as a new colony. There are slight problems with this due to the existing height of the entrance, so it is often easier to move it away to another apiary for a few weeks or simply to unite it on to another hive in the same apiary. The other option is to set it down beside the existing hive on a stand, an empty deep box then a new floor with the entrance closed and facing in the same direction as the back entrance, then the brood box. Put the board with the open back entrance on top, then an empty super and roof. This keeps the hive entrance closer to the way it was. After the bees have settled you can then go in the evening a few days later when the bees are all inside and close the top entrance and open the bottom entrance then later again remove the bottom empty brood box in the evening. You have to give the bees time to adjust to small changes in the position of the entrance to the hive. The hive can be gradually turned a little at a time until it is facing forwards.

* Uniting with newspaper—the method which I use is to place a large board on top of the upturned roof, lay a sheet of the Herald on it and pin it down at the corners with

drawing pins to keep it still, prick some holes in it with a pin then gently lift off the top brood box and place on the paper, use the tacks to tack the paper up the sides of the brood box then lift off the board with the back entrance – if it has a lot of bees still on it, carefully ease off the crown board and dump the bees in and quickly replace the crown board. Place a second sheet of paper on top of the super with a queen excluder on top; prick some holes in the paper. The excluder keeps the paper in place while you tack it down round the sides of the super and it keeps the queen from going down into the supers. A few days later when you see paper shreds coming out the entrance and the bees have united peacefully, you can rearrange the hive or have it continue as it is, depending on whether you have removed the old queen or left her to continue working in the bottom box. For normal uniting, the supers from the queen-less stock would be removed prior to placing the queen-right stock on top.

Contributed by Ian Jamieson.



Co-op donation to British Black Bee Survey.

Alison Benjamin guardian.co.uk, Monday 18th May 2009.

The native black honeybee, found only in a few remote parts of the country, could help reverse the dramatic decline in honeybees in Britain, say experts.

Around a third of honeybee hives were wiped out across the UK last year. As well as the usual suspects i.e. pesticides, parasites etc., some experts believe the problem is made worse by beekeepers' use of an Italian honeybee that is ill-suited to the British weather.

The Co-operative group has launched a fund to map locations of the rare, hardy British black variety and to develop a breeding programme to increase their numbers. Paul Monaghan, head of social goals at the Co-op said "The native black honeybee has had a bad press over the years but it may hold the key to reversing the decline in the UK's honeybee population".

Francis Ratnieks, professor of apiculture at Sussex University says "All things being equal it makes sense to work with what's native. However I have seen some very aggressive and restless black bees, so they should be bred to incorporate their better elements." He points out that our native bees are less likely to starve in difficult times as they eke out their winter food stores for longer than their Italian counterparts and need less food in the spring because they breed less quickly.

Willie Robson a commercial beekeeper and reportedly the nation's largest black apiarist with 1,800 hives across Northumberland lost only about a fifth of his bees—far fewer than the majority of beekeepers with Italian stock, and says his bees are pretty hard and have total resistance to most diseases.

Beginners First Day of Beekeeping

On one of the few fine afternoons recently, the 2009 beginners class had their first taste of hands-on beekeeping.

As well as having the opportunity of going through the hives, some members took the opportunity to make up frames: an essential part of beekeeping is being able to make some equipment which in this case was demonstrated by Bill, with Allan and Ruth being the eager participants.



The group were fortunate to see good examples of brood at all stages of development as well as a hive being demareed before the weather once again changed and it was time to close the hives.

Neilston Show

This perennially popular show once again proved to be a great success; the volunteers were almost overwhelmed by the demands made on their time by the people of Neilston who flocked to the show.

Such was the interest by the public on the beekeeping stand, that Tony, Elizabeth, Phil, Joyce and Lindsay had barely time to draw breath. Refreshment breaks were few and far between.

It is clear that more volunteers are needed for this event. We will all need to look at our diaries for next year's show to see if we can fit it in to our schedules.

**More volunteers
required for this event
next year**

Ayr Show



The weather once again played havoc with this year's show which was almost cancelled on Saturday due to the deluge of rain which fell almost the whole day.

On Sunday the sun shone and helped to rescue the weekend somewhat, but the turnout was still poor with mud and standing water making it an unpleasant experience for those unwisely shod.

Stings

Beginners prepare to be stung, it will happen sooner or later.

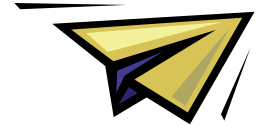
Lindsay has put a notice up in the apiary hut which is well worth reading before the inevitable happens. There is also an excellent little book available in the association library, with thanks to Tony. This is called Medical Aspects of Beekeeping.

For most people a bee sting is a temporary, if initially painful event. The sting should be removed quickly by scraping it off. When suitable clothing is worn on opening a hive, a sting is a minor occurrence. It is important to always wear a veil as stings inside the mouth or on the eye can have serious consequences.

A simple painkiller and cold compress are effective if the swelling and irritation persist. The worst effects are usually over within a few hours: in most cases by the time you have finished at your hives you will have almost forgotten you were stung - being stung through your protective clothing is far less painful than otherwise it could be.

Unfortunately, for a few folk a bee sting can be a very serious occurrence. An anaphylactic reaction can quickly result in unconsciousness and medical assistance is urgently required. Any beginners aware of their potential for reacting to a bee sting in this way must always carry an Epi-pen with them and make others aware of their situation.

A mobile phone to hand is also essential in these circumstances as apiaries are usually situated off the beaten track.



Bees never miss their target!



Last month's Scottish Beekeeper magazine featured an article by Roger Paterson on BIBBA's forthcoming survey of native or near native honeybees and also relatedly, memories of the past by Morna Stoakley. Interestingly an article in the guardian newspaper of 18th May describes how the Co-op is providing some funds towards BIBBA's research into native honeybees. We can all help by sending a sample of our bees to Alan Jones, 14 Dermott Avenue, Comber. BT23 5JE as described in the Scottish Beekeeper.

Ayr and District Beekeepers Association

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The photo is a beekeeper in central Asia helping to preserve trees and forests on the Red List of those threatened with extinction. Genetic diversity will be lost Dr. Antonia Eastwood doing research.



May has been pretty wet up until now; the bee-keeping season is in full swing so we all hope the much promised warm summer is just round the corner. Beginners are keen to acquire their first bees after conscientiously attending classes and api-ary visits. Some are feeling confident enough to volunteer at the various summer shows which are very much a part of the Association's summer programme. Thanks to you all for your enthusiasm and participation - you've been a great class!

Frequently asked Questions

Beginners often ask "how often should I go through my hives?" The best way for you to find out what the bees are doing is to inspect the brood nest regularly. You need to remember the timetable for each stage in the development of the Queen:

Egg	3 days
Larva	5-6 days (the queen cell is sealed on the ninth day after the egg is laid)
Pupa	7 days
Total	16 days

If you add the days as an egg to the days as a larva, you get a total of nine. This is why it is recommended that you inspect your colonies at least every nine days. However for practical reasons most beekeepers inspect their bees every seven days. Carefully inspect all the play cells you can see. Move the bees gently with a gloved finger or a whiff of smoke. If you cannot see into a play cell, open it with your hive tool and make sure you know whether or not it contains an egg or larva.

What does it mean if you make a Saturday inspection and miss a day-old larva in a queen cell? Think of the timings. A day old larva means that you are four days into the nine-day cycle. Five days later, on the following Thursday - two days before you next intend to look into your colony - you will have a sealed queen cell and a swarm. If you missed a full-term egg ready to hatch in a queen cup rather than a day-old larva, the resulting swarm could emerge the following Friday.