

Bee Brief

Plym Branch News Letter April 2014

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Branch Meetings 2014



PLYMOUTH BEEKEEPERS APIARY PROGRAMME 2014

APRIL / MAY / JUNE

APRIL

(Easter: Good Fri. 18th / Sunday 20th April)

Sunday	6 th	10 am	Novice Meeting (3)
Sunday	13 th	10 am	Novice Meeting (4)
Sunday	27 th	10 am	Improvers Meeting (2) & General Meeting – All Members
Talk: Spring Plans/Quality Nucs – Kathy Lovegrove / Steve Arthur			

MAY

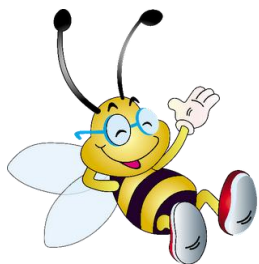
(Bank Holidays Mon 5th + Mon 26th)

Sunday	11 th	10 am	Novice Meeting (5)
Sunday	19 th	10 am	Novice Meeting (6)
Sunday**	25 th	10 am	Improvers Meeting (3) – All Members

JUNE

Sunday	1 st	10 am	General Apiary Meeting – All Members
Talk: Summer Plans – Kathy Lovegrove/Steve Arthur			
Sunday	8 th	10 am	Novice Meeting (7)
Sunday	15 th	10 am	Novice Meeting (8)
Sunday	22 nd	10 am	Improvers Meeting (4) – All Members
Sunday	29 th	10 am	General Apiary Meeting – All Members

Chairman's Blog – April 2014



Another month has passed and it has been a good one for the bees. We have had some warmer days, the foragers have been bringing in a nice lot of pollen and the queens should have been laying well. Even the rape is starting to come into flower. I have not opened any of my hives, as I prefer to let my colonies build up first. The heat loss on opening a hive is significant at this time of the year and there will be fewer bees to maintain the correct temperature, especially as many of them will be out foraging. I have given them some sugar syrup with a dose of Vita Gold, which they have all taken down. It was a 1:1 solution, as the bees will consume it and at this strength they will have little or no “watering down” to do. The bees will be storing little of the nectar and pollen that they are collecting, as this will be needed for brood rearing, so if there is a change in the weather, they will need to rely on stores. Make sure they have enough and, if in doubt, feed!

On the subject of Vita, I was chatting to Max Watkins at the Beetradox exhibition a few weeks ago. He confirmed that Vita Gold is as good as FumidilB was for treating nosema. Furthermore, he showed me their apishield trap should the Asian hornet cross the channel. It is a complete mesh floor which includes a trap for the hornets and works for wasps as well. Also, they are bringing out a new Varroa treatment called HopGuard and yes, you are right, its main ingredients are hops! It can be used at any time of the year and is in use in the USA already. They hope to have obtained Pan-European veterinary registration by the end of the year. Details of all their products –no, I am not on commission! – can be seen at www.vita-europe.com

The DBKA Celebrity Lecture takes place on April 8th. Full details are in Beekeeping. I cannot stress strongly enough how beneficial it is to listen to these top speakers. As many of you know, I am not an academic, but talks I have attended over the years have (mostly) left me better informed. So don't worry if you think that the subject will be too technical for you, I very much doubt that it will be. £5 to listen to an expert from the USA is exceedingly cheap!

The DBKA President's Day and AGM took place on 15th March. Congratulations to Neil Downing-Waite for winning the Frank Alston Skep for the highest overall marks in the Basic assessment; also, to Tony Curnow for receiving his certificate for 50 years of beekeeping. That is something I will never get unless I will be keeping bees in my late nineties!

Last, but not least, the BBKA News April edition will have arrived on your doormats in the last few days and if you read nothing else, please have a look at “April in the Apiary” on page 113, as that saves me typing it all out!

Keep buzzing!

DAVID MILFORD



Evening talk at Torbay presented by Mr Jack Mummery

Torbay Branch has finally settled upon a date for a talk by Mr. Jack Mummery entitled: 'Preparing Hive Products for the Show Bench'. Jack will be talking to Torbay Branch members on the evening of Tuesday 29th April at the Gerston Christian Centre, Torquay Road, Paignton TQ3 3DX.

The meeting will commence at 7.30 pm and will end at approximately 9 pm.
Light refreshment of tea, coffee and biscuits (fresh) will be served during the meeting.
The subject of this talk is particularly relevant coming, as it does, ahead of the Devon County Show and the D.B.K.A. honey show.

Members of our neighbouring Branches, Newton Abbot, Totnes & Kingsbridge and Plymouth are most cordially invited to come along to Paignton and hear what Jack has to say.

We shall be delighted to welcome your members 'on the day'.

With my kind regards,

Doug Westaway,

Hon. Secretary,
Torbay Branch.

Winter Study Group Meetings

These meetings, led by Kathy Lovegrove in January & February, were well worth attending. The 2 meetings covered the topics of Queens & Hives. There was a lot of information presented – obviously someone had carried out a lot of research! – and this led to plenty of discussion by the members attending. There is always something new to learn ~ whatever your level of experience.

The meetings are very informal and I would recommend them to everyone in the PBKA; so, even though summer is around the corner – hopefully – look out for next winter's meetings and attend!

Neil Downing-Waite



AN UPDATE FROM YOUR EDUCATION TEAM



I'm pleased to report the first General Meeting of the season was both successful and well supported. Kathy led a topic based discussion on "At the Hive Entrance" which prompted some interesting conversations and stories.

Our Novice Programme is now underway, attended by 12 very enthusiastic new beekeepers. The programme timing ran so smoothly that on the first meeting, we were able to give these guys a quick look into a bee hive; the expressions on some of the faces were of delight and sheer amazement (it reminded me of my first look into a hive!).

The branch apiary programme for April consists of two Novice sessions (6th and 13th) plus a combined Improvers and General meeting on Sunday 27th.

There will be a topic based talk/discussion on "Spring Plans/Quality Nucs" followed by an Improvers session. All members are welcome to attend this meeting.

I would also like to remind you that DBKA is running a Celebrity Lecture on Tuesday 8th April at Hannah's at Seale-Hayne, Newton Abbot (formerly Seale Hayne Agric. College). Full details are shown on page 64 of your DBKA Beekeeping Magazine. I have attended two Celebrity Lectures and have gone away on each occasion learning a little bit more about bees; additionally it's a great opportunity to meet and chat to members of other branches. It's an enjoyable evening out and I am sure car sharing could be arranged if you are interested in going along.

Finally, congratulations must go to Neil Downing-Waite who took his Basic Assessment last year and was presented with the Frank Alston Memorial Skep at the recent DBKA AGM. This award is presented to the candidate achieving the highest marks in the BBKA Basic Assessment in Devon. Well done!

Jean French

On behalf of the Education Team
April 2014



VARROA CONTROL USING PREDATORY MITES

Those members of Plymouth Branch who attended President's Day on 15 March were treated to an informative presentation by a former National Bee Inspector, Richard Ball. He talked about a variety of bee diseases and pests and inevitably this included the Varroa destructor mite. He expressed a degree of optimism about the effectiveness of predatory mites (*Stratiolaelaps* mites for those who like long Latin words) as an entirely natural form of control and he certainly sparked interest from the audience of Devon beekeepers. Valerie and I used predator mites last year, so I thought it might be helpful to share our experience with other PBKA members.

As novices in 2012, we were quite bewildered about Varroa, especially as some more senior beekeepers (no names, no pack-drill) regularly alluded to the fact that the only really effective control was Apivar and that only those 'in the know' could obtain it. One of these senior beekeepers described Apivar as 'the French stuff' because it could be obtained in France, but it was not available for sale in UK and had to be prescribed by a vet. We initially used Apistan but found it was not effective because the pesky Varroa had built up a resistance to it. Undeterred, we did an Internet search and found the Bee Vet in Exmouth. After a conversation with him to ensure that we had tried other control methods unsuccessfully, he agreed to prescribe 'the French stuff' (Apivar) for us and we used it in our first year with considerable success. However, we don't particularly like using toxic chemicals in our hives, especially as there remains a risk that Varroa will eventually become resistant even to Apivar (a real fear that the Bee Vet expressed to me). We hoped to find a more eco-friendly method.

As we kept in touch with the Bee Vet, we heard about the predatory mites early last year and decided to try them. We registered for the experimental scheme and ordered our first treatment. The mites arrived in the post contained within sachets along with tiny fragments of vermiculate. We needed six sachets of mites as we have three hives and the dose was two sachets per hive. The instructions were to make holes in the sachets with the hive tool and lay them on top of the super frames; the idea being that the predatory mites crawl out of the sachets, down through the supers and then eat up the Varroa mites in the hive. The advantage of this method of control is that honey production is not interrupted. However, this is where we discovered the first problem with the instructions. We took off our Spring harvest only to find that it was contaminated with tiny fragments of vermiculite. It's non-toxic so wasn't an issue for the safety of the honey but it doesn't look pleasant and it took ages to filter it out. So, for the second treatment (six-weeks later) we laid the two sachets on top of the brood frames to avoid a recurrence of this problem. We did not use any other form of Varroa control in 2013.

We gave our hives three treatments of predatory mites at six-week intervals and we were delighted to find that our Varroa populations had diminished to the point that they were barely discernable (a drop count of zero, one or two per day in August). Our delight was tempered somewhat when we discovered that a significant number of other beekeepers also reported a very low Varroa count last year. So as far as we were concerned, our experiment with the predatory mites gave an inconclusive result. **And that is the position for the Bee Vet this year.** When last week I tried to order more mites for this year, the Bee Vet told me that they had decided not to supply them until they have conclusive, empirical evidence from their field trials that the mites really are an effective method of Varroa control. In line with our experience, they said results so far had been entirely anecdotal, and encouraging though they were, anecdotal evidence is not a sound scientific basis on which to proceed with an entirely innovative control method. However, they are optimistic that their field trial will yield

the data that they need to demonstrate conclusively that the predatory mites are an effective method of Varroa control. Richard Ball certainly seemed to think so and I know he sparked a lot of interest among the Plymouth contingent.

Although the predatory mites can be obtained from pet shops that specialize in reptiles, they would not be in a form so easily dispensed into our hives and there would be no guidance about numbers to use. So, sadly, it looks like we will have to wait until at least next year before we know whether we can try again.

Terry McAuliffe

THANK YOU PBKA

Last year, four of us from PBKA (Claire Orrin, Andy Lennon, Kairen Carter & myself) took our Basic Assessment. Thankfully we all passed – with good marks I believe. At the DBKA AGM & President's Day I was fortunate enough to be presented with the Frank Alston Memorial Skep for achieving the highest marks out of all the candidates in Devon.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at PBKA for sharing their knowledge, experience and time with me as I believe this has helped me a lot. In particular, I would like to mention the 'Education team' especially Mike Hogan who delivered the Beginners course and Patrick Mansfield, Apiary Manager and my mentor Trevor Bushell ~ Thank you

NEIL DOWNING-WAITE

BBKA Spring Convention, Newport, Shropshire

4th, 5th & 6th April

Transport Sharing Opportunity with Newton Abbot Branch

Message from Viv Thorn (Chair, Newton Abbot Beekeepers)

"I wonder if you could forward this to your members to see if we can co-ordinate transport to the Spring Convention in April?

If Plymouth members are going, and are interested in car sharing, or hiring a minibus, could they contact me on vt1154@aol.co.uk? I am happy to collect names and suggest sharing arrangements.

Members will need to send their names, branch and which days they are attending the convention. Many thanks."

More information about the convention can be found on the BBKA website:

http://www.bbka.org.uk/news_and_events/spring_convention.php

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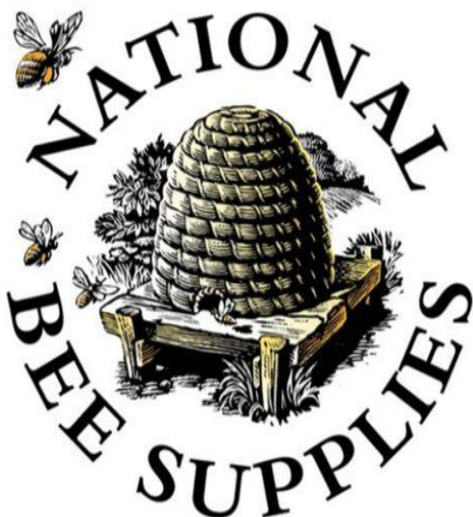
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