

Application Form

Name:	
Address of apiary(ies)	
Number of colonies:	Docility – (a) very (b) tolerable (c) not happy bunnies (d) vicious no-good swine! (Choose one.).....
Preferred equipment (type of hive)	Your skill level (a) beginner (b) established (c) it costs £5 to talk to me (Choose one.).....
Are you interested in Queen rearing? Y/N	Would you like to receive Queens? Y/N

Your comments please:-

Bee Improvement Group

Introduction

I recently re-read some of my notes on a talk by Micheál McGiolla Coda about decisions made in Galtee re docile stocks. It struck me that he had a very good point when he said that all beekeepers should take a pro-active stance on docility. Because of geographical isolation, it was easier in their case, of course, but the Galtee breeders came together and made a positive commitment to eliminate all aggressive queens and mongrel stock in the area – the first step being to re-queen all colonies with carefully bred and selected docile queens.

I have seen for myself in Southern Germany and if you have visited continental apiaries, like Micheál you cannot fail to be impressed by the fact the docility and high productivity seem to go hand in hand in many cases. As we (the Bromleyites) are privileged to know, Peter Spriggall's sterling efforts mean we can meet without worrying about veils etc. I think we all know, furthermore, what a downer it is to have bees flying up at your veil from the hive and hammering away at your defences right the way back to the car. The problem is that too few people seem to want to follow Peter's example. The penalty? The penalty is that eventually all his good work will go to waste if it isn't carried on and expanded.

I was slightly disturbed, therefore, to pick up a chance remark Peter made when he was stung a month or so ago in the Apiary and said, "it looks as though my bees may not be so docile anymore". Let's hope he was wrong and it was merely a glitch but he is making a positive move by buying in a new breeder queen from Galtee.

I proposed at the **AGM** that (under Peter's guidance) we investigate the possibility of setting up a proper monitoring and breeding programme with a small Group or Section dedicated to Queen rearing and encourage all our members to participate. Barry supported me by suggesting to Peter that we could assist him in his own programme. This was met with a favourable response from Peter.

One member made the valid point that some beekeepers out there are irresponsible and simply would not respond to the idea of re-queening with docile queens. I admit this is a problem but it is not the end of the world. We can still tip the balance in favour of high numbers of docile local drones if we can maximise our own efforts in this respect. Furthermore, what have we got to lose? It would be an interesting project and make our beekeeping that much more enjoyable. If you have a problem with an aggressive colony, why not take the positive step of re-queening? It is amazing how quickly docility ensues.

Another point we should consider is that we are not knowledgeable enough about what is on our own doorstep. How many of us know exactly how many colonies the rest of the members actually have? What steps have we ever taken to do a census of beekeepers in our area and find out why some of them are not members? Why would anybody in their right mind want to buy queens through the post if we could expand on what Peter started and have members breeding docile queens and selling them for peanuts to local beekeepers (or giving them away as an incentive to attract members)?

BIBBA sometimes does one-day courses on queen breeding, which includes giving the delegates a free queen-cell ready to hatch. Worth exploring?

If we start by walking before we run, how about a pilot scheme to do a grid-search of the area within a two-mile radius of the Club Apiary and find out exactly who is keeping bees in the area (including non-members). If enough of us work at this it should not be an impossible task. A newspaper article might help. I don't know about you but it seems obvious by the coverage we got for our own Honey Show and Peter's birthday celebrations that we have the ear of the Press – let's use it.

I am setting up a grid-search spreadsheet and would appreciate assistance to try to make sure we have an accurate census before next Spring. I will also be contacting you regularly and pestering you for updates on your colonies.

Let's try to make a pleasure and profit thing out of this.

I am in the process of getting a Nursery site up and running at Park Hill, Croydon. Although the two full colonies there are wonderfully placid, unfortunately it is not sufficiently isolated to guarantee purity of breeding, but I know my chances will be improved by shuttling the virgin queens back to Kenthouse Road for their mating-flights. Within reason, I am happy to offer temporary accommodation for nucs that you need to distance 3 miles from your own apiaries. I have also been offered the chance to set up an Apiary at Norwood Hill near Leith Hill in Surrey on a 5 acre site which, once I get it worked out, will be able to provide a similar opportunity well away from the area.

If there is commitment; results must follow. Let's start by getting the attached form filled in and hand them to me at the BBQ in January so that can collate them.

You can run but not hide – I *will* be in touch. Remember, like the advert says, "I've got your number."

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