

The talk this month on the **15th** is by the secretary of the KBKA on the subject of swarming, what leads to it and its control. Should be very interesting as because of losses of stocks due to the afore mentioned mite we are all re-stocking with swarms and thus propagating the swarming instinct. Let us hope that this cold snap is history by then and none of you have the excuse to snuggle up by the TV on that score.

I just raised the roofs on two of the weaker stocks in the apiary and spread some candy over the tops of the frames and closed up quickly. Let us hope I did less harm than good.

I fitted three new frames in the observation hive at Hornimans' but there is no brood there and the bees are very thin on the ground. I can't see any chance of swarms from this stock even if they do survive. *Peter Springall*

Diary Dates

Sunday 6th March 2005 - Branch Apiary Meeting. The opening of hives depends on the weather. Starts 11:45am. Includes refreshments.

Tuesday 15th March 2005 - A lecture by John Hendrie entitled Swarms and their Control. Starts 7:30pm at the apiary club house. Includes refreshments.

Sunday 3rd April 2005 - Branch Apiary Meeting. The opening of hives depends on the weather. Starts 11:45am. Includes refreshments.

Saturday 16th April 2005 - The British Beekeepers Association Spring Convention at Stoneleigh-Park Exhibition and Conference Centre, Warwickshire CV8 2LS. Opens 09:00-1700.

Sunday 1st May 2005 - Branch Apiary Meeting. The opening of hives depends on the weather. Starts 11:45am. Includes refreshments.

For more information

Peter Springall 020-8690-3906 Mobile: 07779 970104

Email: ps@zbee.com

Tom Winks Chairman 020-8777-3144

Clive Watson 020-8658-3786

Steven Turner (editor) 020-8698-0313 Email: crow@zbee.com

Visit our website: <http://www.kentbee.com/bromley>

Join our mailing list by sending an email to: mailserver@zbee.com with the command in the subject or message body "subscribe bbk" (no quotes) and wait for a confirmation message to complete the subscription.

Advertisements

(free to members or £10.00 for non-members)

Bromley Bee News Monthly Update Published by the Bromley Beekeepers Association

Welcome to the **March 2005** issue of Bromley News.

Even educated fleas do it

Some of you are aware that I have been trying to put together some suggestions for a branch queen breeding group. At the AGM I put the proposal forward to consider building upon and to run alongside Peter Springall's sterling efforts. The idea was well received. There was some suggestion that it was a waste of time because neighbouring beekeepers (obviously not club members) had such a poor attitude towards quality of queens as to render any efforts on our part a waste of time.

I do not agree with that for several reasons; particularly because whatever the circumstances, we can *improve* quality even without co-operation, if we are determined enough. Don't forget *our* docile drones are just as effective when it matters as *their* aggressive yobbos. When Peter embarked on his programme of selective breeding he was in the same position regarding neighbouring beekeepers but persisted, with the excellent results we have seen.

Another factor which may be considered is the way in which some strains of bees, particularly the native or black bee, differs from the largely imported type of bee. Native drones tend to fly in cooler weather than the imported variety and therefore earlier in the season in some cases. Coupled with the queen's preference to mate as quickly as possible and not necessarily wait for a drone assembly to form, it is possible that there is a tendency towards insular breeding, which is of considerable benefit to maintaining or recovering the pure strain. If this interests you, read Beowulf Cooper on the subject.

I was speaking to Jenny Spon-Smith at the February meeting and she pointed out that for those who keep hives in their gardens, there is a definite need to maximise docility to keep the neighbours happy. I would also argue that anybody keeping bees on allotments should seriously consider this point. Some of our members have found to their cost that Allotment committees are fickle and that tenancy for beekeepers is far from secure. We must not give ammunition to those who object.

I keep bees on three allotment sites and perhaps it would be useful to those who are thinking of doing so, if I mentioned the different approach to each one.

Case 1 – A 24 acre site with 360 plots and two other beekeepers. I set up a 30 by 20 foot bee-garden with masses of flowers at the back end of a 10 rod plot with a greenhouse, several fruit trees and a high fence behind and gardens of houses beyond that. Although I say it myself, it is a beautiful sight. I enclosed three sides of the area with

six-foot high green builders netting and made sure there is a sign with my phone numbers for people to contact. I also made sure before I got too deeply into it that both my neighbours were sympathetic. I take every opportunity to introduce my bees to other people, making sure there is spare protective clothing available. I have four docile colonies there at present and will increase to six this year. My only problem is trying to persuade one of the other two beekeepers to take some active interest in re-queening with docile bees.

Case 2 – A seven acre site, triangular in shape, with about 50 plots between two converging railway tracks. I persuaded the lettings secretary to rent me the area at the apex of the triangle. This 12 rod area has not been used for cultivation for a long time and is separated from the other plots by a deep belt of brambles about 50 feet wide. Lots of benefits including a deep, secluded, artificial valley situation between the two embankments and of course, large amounts of blackberry nectar. I have four colonies here at present and plan to increase to ten this year. Apart from the rent, I donate 24 jars of honey to the club to sell for funds. There was one other beekeeper at the opposite end of the site last year, with one colony which I think has died out by now. Though it is not as important, as usual I have still aimed to bring the colonies up to a high standard of gentleness.

Case 3 – A nine acre site with 67 plots - a south facing slope with a deep railway cutting behind, now used for the Tramway. They have never had bees there before. Despite enthusiastic encouragement from the secretary, I waited for nearly a year to get the right plot. In the meantime I placed two empty hives next to a main pathway so that people would get used to the idea. The plot I rent is in the south-west corner of the site next to a tree-conservation team's plot full of cultivated saplings and backing onto the boundary above the cutting. I have erected a six foot screen about ten feet long on the side of the apiary next to an occupied plot but very carefully selected the two colonies I placed there for docility. I have posted notices, as always, with my details and phone numbers. After the plot-holders got used to the idea, they became very positive and will often ask me how the colonies are doing or come and sit with me and watch the bees. I had no trouble suggesting that I increase to four hives this year. They also get two dozen jars of honey to sell for club funds.

In each case I waited until I could obtain a plot with at least one side backing onto a perimeter. I made a point of introducing myself to every plot-holder I could find and volunteered to help with ground-work on the site whenever I had the time. You may say that it is costing me more than the plot rent because of the free honey but I believe that is just a good investment in the goodwill of the tenants and committee. I also grow all my own vegetables and fruit on Sites 1 and 3 which probably cover the rent. I make myself fully available by seeing to it that large signs are displayed with my home phone number, mobile and office numbers.

Another good tip for you. Always make sure everybody knows you are willing to deal with their wasps' nests. It is no big deal, you have the protective clothing and a

canister of wasp-killer only costs a pound or so. Make it clear you don't want paying. Last year on Site 3, I dealt with four wasps' nests for them and it does help cement the relationship.

The key to all this is easy. Go out of your way to be open with people, be patient, helpful and generous and remember a smile goes a long way. Give your time and share your hobby. You may even get other people interested in taking up bee-keeping.

Getting back to the main theme, Britain is a significant beekeeping nation but in the last hundred years we have not progressed very far in beekeeping practice. It is difficult to know why this should not be the case. We have not lacked dedicated and highly intelligent people in our Craft but, frankly, I think it is simply lack of willpower and perpetuated conservative attitudes. It is difficult to argue with a closed mind, isn't it? It is not easy to artificially improve on nature but particularly bearing in mind the huge strides that other naturalists and scientists have achieved we really do not have much reason to be proud. So let us try to do something, in conjunction with BIBBA and others to make a change in our own small way which might benefit all beekeepers and, of course, our small friends too.

I shall be contacting people over the next few weeks to try to take the Breeding Group idea forward. Why not give us your support. Apart from the obvious benefits of better quality bees, it is a fascinating subject. Don't be conned by that old wives tale that aggressive bees produce more honey. That nonsense has been disproved scientifically time and again. It is because people perpetuate this myth that we still have far too many aggressive colonies in this country. *Mike Oliver*

Apiary News

It was great to see Dave Harris on his feet again when he turned up at the apiary for the meeting on the first Sunday of February. I was busy talking to the assembled audience when the spontaneous applause heralded his appearance through the vine arch. He told me later that he thoroughly enjoyed his visit but had to rest up the following day due to his unaccustomed exertions. I am sure you will all join me in wishing him a speedy recovery and look forward to seeing him once again as a regular figure at our meetings.

On the other front I have just had words with Robin Spon-Smith and I must say he sounded very chirpy. He is now out of hospital and making good progress and planned to come to the apiary on Sunday weather permitting. As much as I would like to see him I hope I managed to put him off as the cold snap is really getting in my bones and I am supposed to be one of the fit ones.

Once again the talk in February by Terry Clare was well received and we all went home with a little more knowledge about the perishing mite and what to do about it. Thank you Terry and hope you can come again in a couple of years' time and talk about something more agreeable.