

Y.B.K.A. eNews

AFFILIATED TO THE BRITISH BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Welcome to our new newsletter

The YBKA committee has decided that we will produce an 'newsletter' every month in order to keep our very large membership up to date with what is happening in the association and in the wider beekeeping world. Copies will be mailed only to those members who do not have an email address. This new eNews will be shorter than the old '3 times a year' newsletter but will hopefully be more useful to members. We propose to include more useful 'how to' and 'when to' articles rather than more complicated issues - though these will be discussed when necessary. Extended printed copies of the Y.B.K.A. News will still be issued at the Spring Conference and November A.G.M.

The start of each newsletter will be an article about beekeeping during the month ahead. I will try to relate the advice to the weather and conditions that affect us here in Yorkshire this year rather than make general comments and I hope that you find this useful - though as with all things in beekeeping this will probably generate more questions - so email the questions in and I will provide answers in the next issue.

This month the most important thing of all is, on behalf of the full YBKA committee, to wish all of our members a happy and successfully beekeeping new year.

January 2010

January is the quietest of months for bees although they may be active, on warm sunny days, collecting water or taking essential cleansing flights. If any pollen plants are still in flower they may even collect some pollen but most of the bees are very wise and stay clustered within the hive. Providing the bees are housed in a sound, dry hive, with adequate stores to see them through until March and beyond they will be healthy and most importantly dry.

During your weekly inspection, just looking from the outside, make sure the colony is fine and that nothing has blown over and that, important today at least, the entrance is not blocked by snow. Resist the temptation to lift the crownboard - the bees are best left alone at this time of year.

Experienced beekeepers will 'heft' the hive to check that the colony has plenty of food stores - however if you made sure that the brood box was full in autumn you shouldn't need to worry. If you are concerned then consider purchasing some fondant (candy) to act as a solid food source for the bees - you cannot feed liquid at this time of year unless you use a frame feeder - which I would not recommend for new beekeepers. Fondant is placed above the central hole in the crown board - If you buy expensive, especially prepared fondant then just cut a 3cm x 3cm section of the plastic coating away and place this over the hole - if you buy the cheaper alternative bakers fondant then this is best fed to the bees by placing it inside an recycled plastic tube with a hole cut in it in a wrap of cling-film. In both cases you are trying to feed the bees while exposing as little of the fondant to the high humidity within the hive - the fondant will absorb the moisture and 'flow' through the feeding hole onto the combs below. You'll need to place an eke or empty super above the crown board, but under the roof, to give room for the fondant candy.

continued....

You Keep an eye on the entrance to the hive which should still have the mouse guard fitted to the hive entrance or have an entrance block fitted that reduces the hive entrance to a height of 8mm - the width of the entrance space is not critical but as you will still have the bees on an open-mesh floor the width can be as little as 3-5 cm. Check that no dead bees are blocking the entrance - you can use an L-shaped piece of rigid wire to clear any dead bees from inside the entrance. Old coat-hangers are a good source of wire. In the present weather check that snow is not blocking the entrance - this occurs a lot on hives that have a landing board.

If you did not treat the colony, for varroasis, with oxalic acid in December consider doing this now. Get a friend to help you so that the crown board can be lifted off the colony for the shortest possible time. Do this when the environmental temperature is 3-5°C on a still, dry, preferably sunny day at about mid-day. Be gentle and do not cause a disturbance to the colony that will break the cluster.

January is also the month when you should construct a written plan for the beekeeping year ahead. Will you work with your bees to expand the number of colonies you have or will you go for maximum honey production ? Or possibly you'll be sensible and go for a little bit of both.

If you only have one colony you should plan to increase to two or three colonies using artificial swarming techniques in April/May/June (depending on the weather). You can create two small nuc colonies on which you can lavish lots of TLC (and learn lots about bees in the process) while keeping one strong colony that will give you some honey to shower friends and relatives with. Once you've made your plans then check that you have the equipment you'll need to do it. Thornes sale is a useful way of obtaining equipment at minimum cost.

Jobs for January

In the Apiary

Monitor hive entrance for build up of dead bees and blockage.

Watch for staining at entrance

Wedge up the back of the hive to ensure the floor slopes gently forwards.

Repair Woodpecker and other damage to stop wind / weather getting in.

Ensure the roof is secure; bricks, blocks and/or a strap will do the job.

Gently heft (lift) the hive to check food weight, if light put block of Candy over the feedhole, a shallow eke may be needed.

Record your observations for each Hive in a book each time you visit so you learn what works for the bees you have in the place you have them

At Home

Attend the January district meeting

Read some beekeeping books or watch DVD's from the district library

Plan your activities for the year (Increase, maximise honey crop, queen replacement, queen rearing, new techniques)

Clean and prepare spare equipment (Supers, Nuc boxes, Replacement brood frames, Spare brood boxes, Queen excluders)

Plan for your own development as a beekeeper - Consider taking some assessments (Basic, Husbandry, Modules esp. Mod 3)

Bill Cadmore
Editor

Winter Pests

Most hives happily survive the winter but some are subject to attack by some very destructive critters. Mice can be avoided by use of a mouse guard, as described above, but rats and woodpeckers need special precautions.

RATS

In this cold weather rats can be very destructive - they will use their teeth to tear the woodwork apart to get into the honey stores. Little will deter them once they have found their way into a hive but if you have lots of rats near your bees there are precautions you can take:-

1. Make sure the hives are on stands that provide no purchase for the rats and that lift the hive a 'rats height' off the ground.
2. Surround the hive with chicken wire - a loose net rather than a tight bundle
3. Remove any materials that will encourage rats and remove any likely nesting sites for the rats

WOODPECKERS

As this picture from Temple Newsam show woodpeckers can do real damage to a hive. The colony represents an excellent food supply for the woodpecker and is encased in wood - so once the bird has worked out that it is safe to be so near the ground it will make short work of the thin timber that makes up the hive walls. Beautiful birds but a real pain if they start on your bees.



It is seven years since we last had woodpecker damage at Temple Newsam - a neat hole in the side of each hive just like

one of the hives this year. We saved the colonies by patching the damaged side with a sheet of aluminum and luckily the bird hadn't eaten too many bees or destroyed too much of the food stores.

In subsequent years we avoided attack by loosely wrapping chicken wire around each hive. If the bird can't get a firm grip with its feet it can't use its chisel beak to break into the hives. As with all things, after seven years, it is easy to forget about the need to protect the hives and this new attack reminds us all to protect colonies if woodpeckers are active nearby. Robin Tomlinson places CD's on the hive sides to deter the birds.

Regional Bee Inspector

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Telephone: 01904 462510

Web site: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/>

BOOK REVIEW

THE HEALTHY HIVE

The BBKA Pictorial Guide to a Healthy Hive - £12.85

This new BBKA book has been given much publicity via the monthly BBKA News. It was just finished in time to be rushed to the 2009 Apimonda conference where it won a Gold Medal in the multi media competition. It's a photographic guide to hive health and is designed to help new and improving beekeepers spot whether things are well or not in their colonies. I decided it'd be a good addition to my bee books and I could use it on the various courses that we run. It went on my Christmas list.

It's a great idea. Photo's of both sides of every frame in a healthy hive with a few notes alongside telling the reader what to look out for. There's a section at the end showing what happens when things go wrong i.e. diseased colonies.

After all the hype I was really looking forward to getting my hands on a copy. What a disappointment. They have reduced the pictures by 50%, which renders the things pointed out in the text impossible to see. They tell you to look at pollen on the bees legs, open cells containing uncapped bee larvae, pollen and nectar in cells etc. Great, these are all signs of good healthy colonies. Sadly the pictures have been so reduced in size that you just cannot see any of these features. I'm sure that they're there, and that you would have been able to see them clearly if they had used full sized pictures, but not on the ones used in the book! And while I'm in "full grumpy old man" mode there's no pictures of queen cups or queen cells. Even though this colony wasn't producing them at the time the photos were taken they could have used another colony. After all queen cells / reproduction is the ultimate in bee health I'd have thought? The disease section though is good as they have used full sized pictures of part of the frames and you can see clearly all the things of interest. Most of us have healthy colonies. I've never seen, let alone had AFB / EFB in 30+ years. Stressing how to recognise good healthy colonies is every bit as important (in my opinion) as when things go wrong.

I feel quite bad criticising BBKA, it's like complaining about an old friend, but what a disappointment. Such a simple yet brilliant idea. What an opportunity lost.

I'm half tempted to take my own photos to use with our classes.

David Barrett
Leeds

BISHOP BURTON 2010

A GREAT DAYS BEEKEEPING CONFERENCE AND A GREAT LUNCH - £25

A GREAT DAYS BEEKEEPING CONFERENCE AND NO LUNCH - £15

Members come from all over Yorkshire and most have empty seats in their cars so why don't we all try to bring along one or two of the many new members we have ?

Your Secretary has application forms
Or contact me direct - bill.cadmore@ntlworld.com

B.B.K.A., FERA and Y.B.K.A.

The 'Bee Press' has had a lot to say about the withdrawal of B.B.K.A. from the project board of the Food and Environment Research Agency Healthy Bee Plan initiative. Both Bee Craft and BBKA News have carried article in which the BBKA executive try to explain their actions.

Yorkshire BKA Executive Committee has made our position on this highly important matter very clear - we think that BBKA was wrong to withdraw from the talks - for the simple reason that we believe that if you want to influence something you have to actually be there to do so.

Dave Shannon, our Chairman, has been working closely with FERA to ensure that YBKA can have some influence on developments in our area. The committee is strongly committed to continuing and improving our excellent relationship with FERA, the NBU and the Bee Inspectors in our area. We feel that we are receiving increasing support from these organisations - and frankly that they are, just at the moment, providing better value than BBKA.

We are backing a resolution at the BBKA ADM to instruct the BBKA to rejoin the board. If you feel strongly about this matter please contact the YBKA committee - but hurry the ADM is on 16th January.

ADM

It is worth looking at the BBKA site and the discussion forum to see what issues will be debated at the ADM. As members you each have the right to have your say and influence decisions on issues as diverse as pesticide endorsement to careful examination of the accounts (you do pay £14 a year to BBKA). Tony Jefferson will be our delegate this year so if you feel strongly about anything contact him - NOW!

Education

Syllabus Changes

There have been a number of changes to the **Module** syllabi in preparation for the removal of Module 4 in 2011. These are all on the Website. If you get the opportunity please make sure your candidates have an up to date copy of the syllabus marked as Revised April 2009

Advanced warning: Changes to Module 8 in 2011

The new syllabus for Module 8 is due to be published in April 2010 in time for the Spring Conference. It will be renamed Honeybee Management, **Health** and History and will be of a more synoptic nature. As such it will become the last module to be taken and will incorporate important aspects of the other modules. The reasoning behind the changes is the need to ensure that beekeepers with the Advanced Theory Certificate have up to date knowledge of bee health matters. A lot can change in the 12 years allowed for completion of the modules.

Change to the entry requirements for the Basic Assessment

The entry requirements for the Basic have been a matter of some debate on the Exam Board for a number of years. Each year, one or more Basic Assessors raise concerns about the lack of experience of some candidates, despite some excellent courses. The Exam Board has reviewed the situation and feels that in order to maintain a minimum standard, all candidates should have a minimum level of beekeeping experience. Hence the entry requirement has been adjusted to:

- 1.1 The Candidate shall have managed at least one colony of bees for a minimum of 12 months.**

Examination Dates 2010

Module Examinations – 20th March 2010
(Applications in by 10th February 2010)

Advanced Certificate in Beekeeping Husbandry
– 19th June 2010
(Applications in by 28th February 2010)

General Certificate in Beekeeping Husbandry
in middle of beekeeping season and
Microscopy usually in October - dates arranged
with the Examinations Board Secretary
(Applications in by 28th February 2010)

Basic and Junior Certificate date by
arrangement with the County Examinations
Secretary
(Applications 1 month before assessment)

YORKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

EVENTS CALENDAR 2009/10

EVENT	VENUE	DATE
BBKA Module tutorial	Normanby Pavilion GYS	19 December 2009
BBKA Module tutorial	Normanby Pavilion GYS	9 January 2010
BBKA Annual Delegates Meeting	Stoneleigh Warks	16 January 2010
YBKA GPC meeting	Normanby Pavilion GYS	5 February 2010
BBKA Module tutorial	Normanby Pavilion GYS	20 February 2010
YBKA Spring Conference	Normanby Pavilion GYS	6 March 2010
BBKA Module Examinations	Normanby Pavilion GYS	20 March 2010
YBKA Honey Judges workshop	Normanby Pavilion GYS	27 March 2010
BBKA Stoneleigh Conference	Stoneleigh Warks	16,17,18 April 2010
YBKA Bishop Burton Conference	Bishop Burton College Beverley	24 April 2010
YBKA GPC meeting	Normanby Pavilion GYS	7 May 2010
YBKA Queen Rearing course	Normanby Pavilion GYS	12 & 13 June 2010
YAS Countryside Days	Great Yorkshire Showground	15 & 16 June 2010
YBKA GPC meeting	Normanby Pavilion GYS	18 June 2010
Great Yorkshire Show	Normanby Pavilion GYS	13, 14, 15 July
YBKA GPC meeting	Normanby Pavilion GYS	24 September 2010
YAS Countryside Live	Great Yorkshire Showground	23 & 24 October 2010
YBKA GPC meeting	Normanby Pavilion GYS	3 December 2010
YBKA AGM	Normanby Pavilion GYS	4 December 2010

Heavy Man!

When we start beekeeping it is difficult to resist having a peep inside the hive every other day. For the new beekeeper this is fine as it is part of the steep learning curve that we all must go through. But for the poor old bees it is a disruption that is unwelcome. It is a disruption to both brood rearing and foraging. The retention of nest scent and heat is important for promoting the health of the bees. The Germans have a word for it - nestduftwarmebindung. As we gain experience we learn to minimise the number of occasions when it is necessary to open the hives. I'm not advocating leave alone beekeeping. It is still necessary to check for foul brood twice a year and swarm prevention requires that we regularly look for queen cells in May and June. As the years go by I find that I am visiting my bees more often, but I'm opening the hives less frequently. Leaning on the gate or slowly strolling about the apiary watching the comings and goings at the hive entrance can often tell us just as much about the strength and well being of a colony as looking inside.

There is another non-intrusive technique that can be used to assess a colony of bees and that is weighing. It is possible to buy weighing platforms that can be put between the floor and the hive stand and which gives a continual reading of the weight of the colony. This is an expensive piece of kit and I have been tempted but my instinct of keeping my wallet deep in my pocket has always prevailed. A much cheaper and flexible option is to use a spring balance, at the cost of a couple of jars of honey. These are calibrated in pounds and kilograms. I now work in kilograms. To use a spring balance a screw eye should be put into each side of the hive floor. The spring balance is then used to gently lift the hive, easing one side off the stand. The reading on the spring balance can then be doubled to give a good approximation of the weight of the hive. A more accurate value can be obtained by weighing both sides and adding the two values together. I always remove the roof as roofs tend to be heavy and vary in weight. If you are to interpret the weight of the hive it is necessary to have a number of data items tucked away in your head, ready for use in the apiary but not to be brought out during dinner parties.

Weight of a brood box plus empty frames - 7kg
 Weight of a super plus empty frames - 5kg
 Weight of bees - 7700 bees weigh 1kg, and therefore
 40,000 bees weigh 5kg
 Weight of honey in a super - 12kg
 Weight of wax in a brood box - 1.5kg
 Weight of floor plus crown board - 1kg

Weighing is particularly useful during the Spring build up. During March the weight will be continuing to decrease and it will be possible to monitor whether Spring feeding is necessary. From mid April onwards the weight should start to increase, quite rapidly once the OSR comes into flower. Later on the weighing technique can be used to assess



- a) whether additional supers are required
- b) whether hives have sufficient stores during the June gap
- c) judging whether a colony has sufficient stores for the Winter.

Though most beekeepers are numerate I will go through a couple of examples of the mental arithmetic required.

1) to ensure that a colony is heavy enough for the Winter. Consider a colony in a single brood box. To survive the Winter the weight should consist of :

Y o r k s h i r e B e e k e e p e r s A s s o c i a t i o n

Floor and crown board	1kg
Brood box and frames	7kg
Wax in brood frames	1.5kg
Bees (15000)	2kg
Honey	18kg

Total 29.5kg - i.e. between 14 and 15kg when hefting a single side.

2) to ensure that a colony has sufficient stores to survive a dearth in June. Consider a colony with a brood box and one super. Its minimum weight should be

Floor and crown board	1kg
Brood box and frames	7kg
Super and frames	5kg
Wax in brood frames	1.5kg
Wax in super	1kg
Bees (40000)	5kg
Brood (20000)	2kg

Honey (sufficient to ensure survival for a week) 5kg

Total 27.5kg - that is between 13 and 14kg when hefting a single side

This might seem complicated but in fact you can soon do these calculations mentally, almost automatically.

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Barkston Ash

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