

Newsletter

September 2012

# Aberdeen and District Beekeepers' Association

Don't miss it!

Established 1910  
Charity Number SCO31754



## THE ABERDEEN AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

### HONEY SHOW 2012

THE ENGINEERING LECTURE THEATRE, S.A.C.  
CRAIBSTONE, BUCKSBURN AB21 9YA

**SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER 2012**

The annual Honey Show is the highlight of our year, when members can get together to show the results of their hard work and expertise, see what others have managed to do, and generally chat about the challenges (especially this year!) of beekeeping in the north east. Everyone is encouraged to participate and will be made very welcome.

ADBKA Chair, John Cooper, is looking forward to this year's show and is asking members to support the event, and the association, by bringing something along to donate to the raffle: "To replace the usual talk or video, a raffle will be held at the Honey Show this year, much in line with ones we have held in the past. Raffle tickets will be on sale at the show and we call on the generosity of members to donate a raffle prize, such as 'a box', 'a jar', 'a bottle', 'a packet', 'a bunch', etc, etc.

"Donated prizes should be brought to the show and the draw will be made following the presentation of trophies. If you don't win a trophy you might win a prize.

"I hope that this will round off the Honey Show in an enjoyable way, and any money made will go into ADBKA funds."

Look out soon for the Honey Show Schedule, where you'll find full details of the event and how to enter.

*President:*

Mr R Wood  
Cothal Lodge  
Cothal  
Dyce

*Chair:*

John Cooper  
9 Westburn Drive  
Aberdeen  
Tel. 01224 637774

*Hon. Secretary:*

Rosie Crighton  
29 Marcus Cres.  
Blackburn  
AB21 0SZ  
Tel. 01224 791181  
e-mail:  
aberdeenbeekeepers  
@gmail.com

*Hon. Treasurer:*

Louise Forbes  
56 Morningfield Rd  
Aberdeen  
AB51 0YJ  
Tel. 01224 313096

*Area SBA Rep:*

Stephen Palmer  
Tel.01888 551367  
e-mail:  
palmers@fintry.plus.  
com

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### It's September already – the start of a new beekeeping year!

This month, we should be feeding our bees to ensure that they have sufficient stores to take them through the coming winter.

We also need to think about treating for Varroa. The best source of advice is the leaflet, 'Managing Varroa', published by fera. It's

available on-line at

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=93>, and a hard copy can be ordered by e-mailing [nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk) or by writing to National Bee Unit, The Food and Environment Research Agency, Sand Hutton, York, UK, YO41 1LZ.

### The Bee's Knees

Congratulations to ADBKA member, Hazel MacKenzie, on being awarded the *Apiarian Certificate* and the *Expert Beemaster Certificate* by the Scottish Beekeepers' Association. This is a major achievement indeed.

Well done, also, to four association members who have achieved the Scottish Beekeepers' Association's *Basic Beemaster* qualification. They are: David Morland, Emma Chapman, Rosie Crighton and Graham Torrie.

### Autumn Lecture Series - change of dates

A couple of the dates for the autumn lectures published in last month's issue of the newsletter were wrong. The last two lectures will take place on 1 and 8 November. The full programme is reproduced on page 2.

## Members' Events

**APIARY DEMONSTRATION**

Saturday 15 September at 2.30pm

John Cooper and John Steele

**VARROA TREATMENT AND WINTER PREPARATION**Association apiary, SAC, Craibstone,  
AB21 9YA**ANNUAL HONEY SHOW**

Saturday 13 October 2012

The Engineering Theatre,  
SAC, Craibstone, AB21 9YA**AUTUMN LECTURES**Six-week programme starts Thursday 20 September  
at 7.30pm

Presenter: Dr Stephen Palmer

**AN INTRODUCTION TO BEES AND BEEKEEPING**Aberdeen Grammar School Lecture Theatre, Skene  
Street, ABERDEEN, AB10 1HT**Programme**

- 20 September: The Beehive
- 27 September: The Biology of the bee
- 4 October: What do I need to keep bees?
- 11 October: The products of the hive
- 1 November: Help – there is something wrong with my bees!
- 8 November: The beekeeping year

*In the July issue of our newsletter we reproduced a letter published that month in the Scottish Beekeeper concerning honeybee colony winter loss rates, neonicotinoid pesticides and oil seed rape crops. The debate continued in the August edition of the Scottish Beekeeper with an article by the authors of the July letter. This month, ADBKA member, Stephen Palmer, wrote to the editor of the Scottish Beekeeper challenging the authors' conclusions. Stephen's letter is reproduced here, with his permission.*

Sir,

The article entitled 'Investigation of winter loss rates' published in the *Scottish Beekeeper* (August 2012 p.205) is a very misleading and unhelpful contribution to the important debate on the possible effects of neonicotinoids on honey bees.

When I read the article I was reminded of a phrase popularised by Mark Twain (and attributed to Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli) that there were 'three kinds of falsehood: lies, damned lies and statistics'. The authors of this article had previously published information concerning winter losses in IBRA's *Journal of Apicultural Research* 49(1): 129-131 in 2010, where they acknowledge that there are many factors involved in winter losses e.g. mis-management, the effects of *Nosema* and *Varroa Destructor*, climate variations and queenlessness.

The article printed in the August edition of the *Scottish Beekeeper* makes no mention of this wide range of factors, nor does it give any indication of how many beekeepers were surveyed or their locations. It is not possible, on the basis of such a small survey, to make the assertion that bees that forage on OSR, where the seed may have been dressed with insecticides, are more likely to suffer from winter losses.

I have kept bees that have had easy access to OSR for more than 30 years and I have never experienced such a high loss rate. During this period the farmers on whose land my hives have been placed have used a wide variety of pest management techniques. In recent years there has been a significant reduction in the number of times the crop has been sprayed - because the use of insecticidal seed dressing which makes it much less necessary. During the 2012 season my local OSR farmer has sprayed only twice and on both occasions it was with a fungicide. I well remember the days in the 1980s when broad spectrum insecticide spraying was commonly carried out to control stem flea beetle and pollen beetles. The effect of this spraying was to kill many other insects – including the natural enemies of the pests. It is an uncomfortable fact for beekeepers to face that the new generation of systemic seed dressing insecticides considerably reduce the pest problem for farmers and for the necessity of broad spectrum spraying.

The possible effect of neonicotinoids on honeybees is a vital debate, but it is not helped by the publishing of flawed research based on very limited surveys. On the basis of this survey there is absolutely no evidence whatever to link the difference in winter losses to the use of neonicotinoids. I am concerned that the official journal of the Scottish Beekeepers Association should be publishing articles that give conclusions and makes assertions that do not bear scrutiny on such an important subject.

Dr Stephen Palmer FRGS FLS

## A Feeling for Bees

A few weeks ago, along with another 21 association members, I was privileged to spend an afternoon in the company of commercial beekeeper, Murray McGregor. We gathered in the sunshine at the foot of Culblean Hill near Loch Davan, shaded by a dense cloud of bees above our heads, to hear from someone who does beekeeping on, literally, an industrial scale.

As you might expect from a man who keeps 2,750 stocks, Murray takes a very practical, no-nonsense approach to getting the best from his bees – his livelihood depends on it. But despite the fact that we caught him at one of the busiest points in his year - the heather honey harvest - he was prepared to take all the time in the world to demonstrate his beekeeping approach and to answer our many questions.

Beekeeping at this level is far removed from anything that I've experienced in the short time that I've been involved in the craft. For example, for me, uniting two colonies involves much planning, sheets of newspaper and more than a little anxiety. For Murray McGregor, the same job is done with 20 or 30 colonies, on his own, often in windy conditions, with a spray of air freshener replacing the part played by sheets of newspaper. (Airwick, if you're wondering.)

Watching and listening to Murray describe his activities, it dawned on me that beneath the procedural 'journeyman beekeeper' approach to his job, there was something else going on; something deeper and really quite moving. There was an interaction taking place. Our host was connecting with these insects using his human senses. Murray McGregor clearly has a *feeling* for his bees.

All the time we were there, the bees were communicating with him. On first approaching the apiary, he was sampling the air: "That's not a good sign, I can't smell ling honey." Opening a



Association members gather at Murray McGregor's heather site

hive: "It's queenless. Can you hear the noise they're making?" Demonstrating how to hold a queen for marking: "You hold her legs firmly enough to stop her escaping, but not too tight or you'll damage them." Glancing at another hive: "I can see they're not doing well - they're only using half the width of the entrance."

It struck me that the only one of his five senses he wasn't using was his sense of taste. Then, almost as soon as the thought had occurred to me, he unzipped his veil, popped a bee in his mouth, and after a couple of chomps announced, "It's a Carniolan!" OK, I made that bit up. But wouldn't it be great if he had?

GT

## Hive Talking

As part of its 'Plan Bee' initiative, the Co-operative has launched a website aimed at matching people looking for sites to keep bees with those who have suitable land and are prepared to let it be used. The website offers this explanation of how things work:

*"Are you an aspiring beekeeper looking for other beekeepers in your area or are you someone with land who would like to host a bee hive? If so, then 'Hive Talking' is for you. You can find out who else in your area is interested in beekeeping and mark on your own location to help others find you."*

The 'Hive Talking' website can be found at:

<http://www.urbanbees.co.uk/maps/>

More on the C-operative's 'Plan Bee' can be found at:

<http://www.co-operative.coop/Plan-Bee/>

## Beekeeping Circles

If you would like to join an existing beekeeping circle in the following areas, contact -

Helen Anderson, based in **Inverurie**, on 01467 620750, e-mail: [sh.and@gmx.com](mailto:sh.and@gmx.com)

Graham Torrie, based in **Torphins**, on 013398 82038, e-mail: [grahamtorrie002@btinternet.com](mailto:grahamtorrie002@btinternet.com)

*The initiative relies on individual members volunteering to compile and share (with permission) a list of names and contact numbers of other beekeepers in their local area, then to take things forward as the members of the circle deem fit. If you would be prepared to co-ordinate a beekeeping circle in your own area, please contact Graham Torrie.*

If you are using chemical treatments for Varroa this month, please be aware that legislation requires that you **keep a record** of the purchase, use and disposal of any honeybee medicines. A helpful guide outlining what you should be doing is available on the BeeBase website at:

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=167>

Click on the 'Bee Medicaments' link on that page to download a useful record sheet.

ADBKA member, David Morland, made the news over his arrangement with Aberdeen City Council to site his bees on the clover-abundant Tullos Hill, a former land fill site. You can read the council's press release at:

[http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/CouncilNews/ci\\_cns/pr\\_landfill\\_bees\\_240812.asp](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/CouncilNews/ci_cns/pr_landfill_bees_240812.asp)



## Notice Board



### Aberdeen Bee Supplies

Jock McGregor is the local agent for Thorne Beekeeping Equipment. Contact him on 01224 790468 or e-mail:

[AberdeenBeeSupplies@hotmail.com](mailto:AberdeenBeeSupplies@hotmail.com)

**9-frame radial extractor** (electric) – FOR HIRE £10 per hire period

**Steam wax melter** – available ON LOAN £10 deposit

Both items available from: Jock McGregor, 11 Marcus Road, Blackburn. Tel. 01224 790468

**BeeCraft** is offering a discount to local beekeeping associations who wish to take out a bulk subscription to their monthly magazine.

The price of an annual subscription to BeeCraft in 2012 is £24.00. With a 10% discount that the association would receive, the price for our members would be £21.60 per subscriber for 12 hard copies of the magazine delivered to their home. To take advantage of this offer, the minimum number is 10 subscribers, with the association making one single payment in advance for all those taking part.

(Please note that discounted bulk subscriptions from January 2013 onwards will be £24.30)

If any members are interested in taking up this offer, please contact the secretary, Rosie Crighton, (see front page for contact details) who will make the necessary arrangements.

A preview of BeeCraft magazine can be seen at [www.bee-craft.com](http://www.bee-craft.com)

### ADBKA Equipment



The Association has the following items of equipment available for free borrow: 2 honey extractors, 2 mini-melters, 2 heather honey presses, 1 wax extractor and 1 wax foundation press. These are available from the honey jar store at Danestone Market Garden (directions below) on payment of a returnable £10 deposit.

The maximum length of loan should be two weeks.

We also have supplies of Apistan, Jars, Ragus, Ambrosia Bee Syrup and Hessian for smoker fuel. The store is open between 6.30pm and 8pm on Wednesday evenings and at other times by arrangement with Sandy Gordon (Tel: 01224 484540).

*Directions: At Persley Bridge (Tesco) roundabout turn onto Laurel Drive. Continue for about ½ mile. Look for Laurel Place on your right (it is a semi-circle so take the second entrance into this street). Now turn left into Laurel Avenue. Danestone Market Garden is signposted, on the left, about 100 yards along.*



The impact on beekeeping of our rotten summer has featured in many news outlets in the past few weeks. Amongst them, STV reported the potential for a 50% reduction in honey production in Scotland this year. Read the article and view the broadcast news item (including an interview with Dr Alan Bowman of Aberdeen University) at: <http://news.stv.tv/scotland/187156-wet-and-cold-summer-may-result-in-50-drop-in-honey-production/>

## According to.....

.....Ron Brown in his book *Beekeeping – a seasonal guide*, "At this time of year use a thicker syrup, containing 1kg (2lb) white sugar to 600ml (1 pint) water. The point here is that syrup fed later in autumn is mostly stored and capped for use in winter and spring, and dilute syrup involves unnecessary labour by the bees in evaporating it down to the required honey-like consistency. There is no exact guide to the amount of sugar to be fed, as the bees will also be gathering and storing honey for themselves, from late Michaelmas-daisies and (in October) from ivy, but a good rule is to carry on feeding thick syrup up to the second week in October, so long as the bees take it down. In the northern half of Britain feeding should be completed two or three weeks earlier."

Distributing the newsletter by e-mail realises significant savings for the association. If you do not currently receive the newsletter by e-mail and wish to do so, contact Graham Torrie on 013398 82038, or by e-mail at: [grahamtorrie002@btinternet.com](mailto:grahamtorrie002@btinternet.com)

*We urge as many members as possible to do so.*

Why not think about contributing to the newsletter yourself? We have a wealth of experience and expertise in the association, and it would be great if we could do more to share this around our members. If you have any tips, advice, or experiences to pass on, why don't you jot them down and forward them to the above e-mail address? I would be happy to assist with drafting and formatting, so feel free to call me if I can help.

Graham Torrie