



Quantock Quest

The newsletter of the Quantock Bee Keepers Association (QBKA)

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The Chairman's Musings

June is here already and we are still living in very strange times. On a personal note may I offer my sympathy to any who have been affected in any way.

Many of us in the division might be considered vulnerable and the resulting isolation means we have not been able to offer each other the support and friendship which would have been usual. Our regular drop ins and Saturday meetings have had to be on hold, though it maybe as things progress that we will be able to reinstate some of these on a modified basis. Members of the committee have been offering advice over the phone, and a small team has carried on with the maintenance of the apiary, the production of queens and the making up nuclei for replacements and Rentahive.

There have been a considerable number of swarms and I have so far been called out four times, starting in April. The most notable phone call was during the VE Day celebrations in a nearby village where a swarm arrived during a socially distanced street gathering. No-one was stung. (Well, maybe me when I squashed a bee!). As I ran one of these swarms into its destination hive I looked out for the queen and caught it, putting it into the entrance to encourage the other bees to speed up. This they did. Then I saw another queen! If I had been prepared I would have caught and used the 'spare' queen in an Apidea or nuc, but I was too late and she ran in. No doubt a fight was to ensue. I suspect that this swarm may have been a large cast with two virgins, or maybe two casts that joined together. Does anyone have any better ideas?



I suppose that this year most of us are well on top of the gardening and there has been time and opportunity to look after the bees as we would want to. I even used the opportunity to have a go at making my own foundation. It's probably not economically worthwhile, but for some reason I was stuck at home.....

You may have looked at some of the online resources on beekeeping. I was particularly interested in Ken Basterfield's zoom meeting on double brood chamber working, without queen excluders. This was based on his experience of commercial operation in Devon. He was very persuasive, and though I have used double brood chambers I have never dispensed with the excluders – until this week on a couple of hives. This is the year for experiment as I feel there is nothing to lose. It's the sort of thing we would normally be able to discuss and report

I wish you all well, both in your beekeeping and your health. In fact, I am pretty sure that beekeeping and gardening, as part of an active outdoor life, will help us all.

Best wishes

Barry



SWARMING - Did YOU get caught out?

(The Editor recounts a cautionary tale!)

So, It's the middle of April or maybe the start of May and you, the alert Beekeeper, are being vigilant and checking regularly for any sign that your prize colony is making Swarming preparations. Those cunning little Bees are doing their utmost to make sure that they build their Queen Cells in the most obscure and difficult places to find! I know that mine did. I carried out an inspection on the Saturday and found nothing. Not a single sign that Queenie was about to take flight. On the Wednesday, whilst sat in my Garden having a well deserved Coffee I actually witnessed my own Swarm emerge and settle in the nearest apple tree! Fortunately, as a Swarm collector I had all my gear to hand, and promptly recaptured my own Swarm! In the evening, after successfully walking them in to their new home in a separate part of the Apiary, I checked the Parent hive. There, nestling in the most concealed part of one of the central frames was a sealed Queen Cell that I had managed to miss. Lesson for next time then.

So, what went wrong? I had noticed about a fortnight earlier that there were a couple of "Play Cells" that they had constructed in open visible areas on the combs. Knowing that they were "Play Cells" I decided to do what I had always done. And what was that, you ask? What do you do when you find your first queen cell of the year? Many Beekeepers will just rub it out (to stop them swarming) and check next week to see if they really meant it, and that is EXACTLY what I did! So in the light of experience I decided to do a little research into this obviously flawed technique.



It would appear that this action can cause more issues than it stops. The first queen cell of the year is done under no unnatural pressures, and will probably be the best queen they produce this year. It may be a supersedure cell or a swarm cell.

If you set the colony back by destroying this cell, their response may be heavier and rushed, in the form of many more cells, of slightly dubious quality, rushed and not started from an egg, and hence not as well developed. The queens hatched from these will not be as well developed and may not mate as well as the first Queen would have done, they are more likely to go off lay and fail more quickly in the future.



So why don't you make a nucleus with the old queen, and let the Queen cell in the main colony hatch out and get mated (if there are more than 2 cells reduce to 2). If for some reason the mating fails (weather) or you don't like the brood patten, you always have mum left in the nucleus that you can re-unite the colony with.

Doing it this way you have a spare if you need it, and its two hives that shouldn't swarm and give you any issues for the rest of the season.

This will guide my actions next year, for certain. I was certain that I had taken the necessary precautions and done it by the book. The problem, as an old Beekeeper once told me is that Bees don't read Books! Lesson Learnt.

The newsletter of the
Quantock Bee Keepers

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COVID 19 and this Newsletter

For reasons that are rather obvious the Beekeeping world has continued but in a socially isolated way. The effects on a group such as ours needs little explanation, with no Drop In's and social activities taking place. Rentahive has still taken place but with individual Committee members doing the work on socially distanced Apiary visits. New Rentahivers have not been able to get the "Hands On" experience that they need, nor have they seen their colonies develop.

For this, and many other reasons, the Editor has not received much in the way of copy for this June edition of your Newsletter. I therefore apologise for the lack of content, but I do feel that it is important to stay in touch, and remind ourselves that our Colonies still need us, and that we are all in the same boat and getting on with it as best we can.

What I ask, given we are continuing our hobby in exceptional times, is that you send me any articles that may assist with future Newsletter production. How did you cope? How did the Lockdown affect your Beekeeping activities? How were your colonies affected by the changed routine? Did Lockdown actually affect your Beekeeping at all? These have been worrying and interesting times all round, but I feel sure that there are many interesting stories that could be told about how we managed, and how we came through it. Please, Please, Please, send me those stories so that they can be shared amongst the membership. Nobody has a monopoly on good ideas, and your solution could help someone else if we have to go through this again. Thanks in advance. Get that story written down and sent to me. Pictures would be useful as well.

Stay Safe

Bill

And Finally!

A message from SBKA: Are you interested in joining a webinar beekeeping study group?

SBKA are drawing up a Zoom webinar programme for the coming year and, following requests for Zoom study groups, we're scoping the demand to support members who are interested in any of the BBKA modules. The modules span many beekeeping subjects and help beekeepers to develop their knowledge and understanding of the honeybee and apiculture. You don't have to start with Module 1! You can see the available modules at <https://www.bbka.org.uk/modules>

If you want to put your knowledge to the test, you can sit a written exam. BUT you can study just for the reward and fun of it – you don't need to take the exam and you'll find that the extra knowledge really helps your beekeeping practice. Please complete our short online survey by Friday, June 19 to help us gauge demand: The link is in the SBKA email that should have been sent to you.

With best wishes from

Richard Bache, Alan & Tricia Nelson, Bridget Knutson and Lynne Ingram (SBKA Education Team)