

# *Bee Matters - Bees Matter!*

FBA and DWFBA newsletter January 2011

Subscriptions for 2011 are due on 1<sup>st</sup> January.

DWF have raised subscriptions to £10 and £5 for family members resident at the same address. DWF members please send payment to John Tout at 13 Middlebank Holdings, Dunfermline, KY11 8QN or bring to the first meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> January.

FBA are still £7 and £3.50 for any other family members resident at the same address. FBA members please send payment to Isabel Brown at 35 Viewforth Place, Pittenweem, KY10 2PZ or bring with you to the first meeting on 14 January.

**2011 Beginners course, £50, starts on the third Thursday of January, the 20<sup>th</sup> at 7.30pm at Portmoak Hall, Scotlandwell. Early registration is advisable.**

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## **Message from the Presidents.**

Our two Fife Associations continue to grow with the addition of many new members who have attended our Beginners' classes and started with their own bees during the course of the season. Inevitably some have been disappointed as there were not sufficient nucs to go round but in 2011 we will once again be making it a priority to make up nucs for beginners.

The 2010 season has been better than the previous year and some did quite well for honey. The spring was very delayed and the Queen Rearing course we hosted set back our production of nucs. Hopefully in 2011 we will not be diverted! Another problem, due to the patchy weather experienced, was the difficulty in getting new queens mated and laying.

Let's hope that the bees come through this tough winter. If you have any doubt about the varroa situation with your hives now is the time to apply an oxalic acid trickle treatment. Watch the stores on the hive and add a block of fondant raised on a couple of wood strips and add some insulation for good measure. Check the mouse guards and make sure the hives are weather proof and then you can relax for Christmas.

On behalf of the committees we extend Best Wishes for the Festive Season and a Happy New Year to all.

John E Durkacz

Enid Brown

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## **FBA Question Panel 11 November.**

This event has become a regular one in FBA's winter programme, and this year was as interesting as ever. Gavin Ramsay, SBA Diseases Convener, chaired the panel and FBA Committee member Jim Bell, FBA President Enid Brown and EMBA President Dave Wright, all regular honey show prize winners and all with many years of beekeeping experience behind them, completed the panel.

The first question was how each of them had treated for Varroa this year and why. Between them they had covered many methods:

Jim Bell had experimented with formic acid in an evaporator, as this is the only treatment known to get to the mites inside the capped cells. This is the first time he has used it, and he only used it on strong colonies – nucs were given an Apistan strip. The formic acid, bought at 98% had to be diluted to 60% for use and he had used distilled water for this. He warned that great care needed to be taken when using it, gloves and a mask were essential. In early spring he intends to do oxalic acid sublimation from the top downwards, and throughout the summer he used icing sugar to help dislodge mites from bees.

Enid Brown was now trickling a 3% oxalic acid syrup solution rather than using the sublimation method. She found trickling safer and simpler than sublimation. She had already treated her heather apiary, possibly slightly early as there may well have still been brood, and given them candy at the same time.

Throughout the summer she had dusted with icing sugar to encourage grooming.

Dave Wright had sometimes dusted with icing sugar but not at every inspection. He had trickled oxalic in early January, agreeing it was safer than sublimation. He used 5ml on each seam of bees and stressed that this should not be exceeded. In March – April he used Apiguard, one tray in for 2 weeks then another for a further 2, making 4 weeks in all. In October he repeated the Apiguard and left it in for 5 weeks to allow for the cooler temperatures - it should be at least 15 degrees for it to be effective. He monitored the drop each week with a Perspex tray, putting a sheet of paper under this with 5 columns drawn on it when counting mites – it made it easier. He divided the total by the number of days the tray had been in and found his daily drop varied between one and fifteen. He no longer sacrificed drone brood as this dangerously reduces the gene pool. While not yet recommending this, he mentioned two recent Beecraft articles proposing a new approach: not treating at all, then breeding from those colonies which survived, since these must be more hygienic bees better able to deal with the mite. Enid was dubious about using Apiguard in the spring as it can taint the honey.

Gavin Ramsay had lost five of his six colonies last winter and spring, and suspected mites from a feral colony nearby. In the summer, if mite numbers built up he treated with thymol, and in December trickled oxalic. He thought shallow frames in the brood box for drone sacrifice were drastic but could be

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useful, and that if the colony had a mite problem the drones sacrificed were probably not very healthy anyway. He knew that John McLean had not treated for three years and his bees were coping, proving very good at uncapping cells containing mites and biting the mites. Gavin had experimenting with not treating one colony, then using frames from it to test other colonies to see how hygienic they were, ie whether they uncapped cells, removed damaged larvae and killed the mites by biting parts out of them. The ability to do this has been shown to be inheritable, whereas grooming is much less so. He had stopped doing this, however, when the foulbroods arrived, not wanting to put extra stress on the bees.

None of the panel had yet tried Apivar Life, but Alex Jarrett had used it and said the smell was extremely strong.

Marion Lang reported much grooming activity on her entrance boards when foragers returned. Bees wanting to be groomed signal this by trembling, flicking their abdomen from side to side; when another bee responds, the first bends its abdomen downwards in order to let the groomer get between the segments, which is where mites normally feed – those just hitching a ride will be on the thorax. She also noticed large numbers of bees flying out with mites on in the early Spring and dying near the hive, like a suicide mission – where they trying to rid the hive of mites? Similarly she had seen a lot of Deformed Wing Virus in young bees at the start of the year, had treated and then seen very little more. She wondered whether the bees stored harmful chemicals in the fats in their bodies over

the winter causing greater winter losses and more DWV. Gavin thought this possible but unlikely. Bees didn't just live off their fat in winter, they lived off their stores too, but clearly some harmful chemicals might get into the wax. Sandy and Miranda had both seen bumble bees with one deformed wing. Gavin said this was not DWV, which always affected both wings, but was more likely to be bird damage.

John Tout suggested encouraging drone comb building as for drone sacrifice, but removing the sealed brood into a special drone colony and treating with formic acid so that there would be larger numbers of healthy drones. There would be enough worker bees to look after them. Enid said that in those colonies whose Morphometry tests indicated they were *Apis mellifera mellifera* she planned to increase drone numbers next year by using a sheet of deep drone foundation either side of the brood nest.

The rest of the evening was devoted to various intruders: slugs, wasps, mice, badgers. Jim had found this a particularly bad year for fat green slugs getting right inside the hives, often up the side walls and next to the brood. Enid had experienced it once in a hive on a pallet but had no problem since putting the hive on a raised stand and scattering slug pellets on the ground. Grapefruit skins were excellent for attracting and catching slugs. Other suggestions were a copper loop stapled to the entrance so that the slugs would need to cross it to enter – they won't. Possibly their slime and the copper produce an electric shock. Coffee

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grounds were also suggested as a preventive, similarly fresh soot, gravel and even shavings of Wrights Coal Tar Soap. Why it has been such a bad year was unclear, but was probably due to the weather. Since slugs emerge at night they were probably only sheltering in the hive during the day when the beekeeper saw them. Gavin had had no problems with slugs since standing his hives on concrete 'breeze' blocks or on poles between blocks – perhaps the roughness of the surface discouraged them. Enid found that raising hives also helped against mice.

Francis Brown said this had been a dreadful year for wasps who seem longer lived than usual. Gavin lost one weak colony to them this year. Reducing the entrance is the first step to take so that the bees are better able to defend it. Gavin described a simple, very effective wasp trap: take a two litre plastic bottle,

put in some jam, water, sugar and a little vinegar, cut holes in the sides just above the contents, then fix duck tape above them. Wasps find their way in, fly to the top of the bottle where they can see light, and eventually tire and drown. They seem unable to find the holes they entered by.

Iain Steven had once had badgers remove the mouse guards and scratch the sides of the hive trying to get at the contents. Fortunately the hives were tied down, otherwise they'd have tipped them over. I had once found supers pushed slightly askew leaving side gaps for the bees to enter, clearly the result of deer scratching against the sides.

The evening ended as usual with more chat over cups of tea and home baking.

Janice Furness



Selecting frames with suitable grubs for breeding.

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## **Bee Breeding and Morphometry Day.**

The Fife Associations once again hosted a major SBA and BIBBA event attended by beekeepers from many parts of Scotland. In May it had been 'Queen Rearing' at DWF's Muirside apiary, and on 27 November it was 'Breeding Better Bees in Scotland' in Portmoak Hall, Scotlandwell, using Morphometry to determine how close the participants' bees were to the desired 'better bee' – *Apis mellifera mellifera*. Terry Clare (TC), Gavin Ramsay (GR) and John Durkacz (JD) were the main speakers, and most of the more than fifty who had registered for the course managed to get there in spite of the snow. Unfortunately the difficult travelling conditions meant the Orkney and Sutherland and Wester Ross speakers couldn't make it, but the day was packed with activity from start to finish.

TC talked on *Raising Good Queens* emphasising that good drones in large numbers are crucial, GR on an *Introduction to Bee Genetics*, TC on *Breeding Good Bees*, where he outlined the desirable and undesirable traits of the four main European races and showed why A.m.m. was the better bee for us here, and GR on *Prospects for Varroa Resistance*. TC then gave an introduction to manual Morphometry and how to prepare slides, before we filed in groups to the kitchen for Enid's superb soup and rolls (likewise for biscuits and cake at the morning and afternoon tea and coffee breaks). Then JD spoke of the morphological traits of the different races, and the various Morphometry options – manual, then DrawWing and BeeMorph, the two computer programmes. Over the

following hour and a half participants moved in groups from one method to another, and Jim McCulloch who was supervising the DrawWing programme generously offered to take samples from those who didn't have time then and there, test them for us and email the results. I for one was very grateful for this and pleased to learn a few days later that my 76% A.m.m. result was good though not excellent – to be seen as more or less pure 80-90% was needed.

Andrew Abrahams then spoke on Colonsay bees, still Varroa free, JD on the Stoakley and Bernard Mobus surveys and GR on the way forward from here, when many suggestions were made from the floor.

Phil McAnespie summed up the day and gave a vote of thanks to all who had worked so hard to make it the success it undoubtedly was. The Fife Associations should be proud of the role they played in both events.

For further information see:

<http://www.sbai.org.uk/Breeding/>

where you will find the screen displays from the various talks, links to various resources mentioned during the day and additional notes prepared by some of the speakers.

Janice Furness.

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## **Address to a Bee.**

*Thou wert out betimes, thou busy busy Bee!*

*When abroad I took my early way,  
Before the cow from her resting place  
Had risen up, and left her trace*

*On the meadow with dew so grey,  
I saw thee, thou busy busy Bee!*

*Thou wert alive, thou busy busy Bee!*

*When the crowd in their sleep were dead,  
Thou wert abroad in the freshest hour,  
When the sweetest odour comes from the flower.*

*Man will not learn to leave his lifeless bed,  
And be wise and copy thee, thou busy busy Bee!*

*Thou wert working late, thou busy busy Bee!*

*After the fall of the cistus flower,  
I heard the last I saw thee first,  
When the primrose tree blossom was ready to burst,*

*In the coolness of the ev'ning hour,  
I heard thee, thou busy busy Bee!*

*Thou art a miser, thou busy busy Bee!*

*Late and early at employ;  
Still on thy golden stores intent,  
Thy youth in heaping and hoarding is spent,*

*What thy age will never enjoy.  
I will not copy thee, thou miserly Bee!*

*Thou art a fool, Thou busy busy Bee!*

*Thus for another to toil!  
Thy master waits till thy work is done,  
Till the flowers of the ivy are gone,  
And then he will seize the spoil,  
And will murder thee, thou poor little Bee!*

ANTHOLOGY

Submitted by John Parry.

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## **Dunfermline Association Apiary.**

Work on the apiary has been suspended during the current spell of inclement weather. We think you may be interested however to know a little more about the progress made to date and our plans for the future development of the site.



Entrance as it was.



Entrance now.



And the old hive area.



Now cleared.



A lot of work.



Not all by hand!

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We do allow breaks.



And now have better seating!



Overall appearance is cleaner.



But there is still a lot to do.

The work carried out to date has included not only the removal of rubbish, scrub trees and shrubs and the remains of old collapsed walls but has included the provision of a new wire fence adjacent to the access track and a new gate. Some 60 tons of type 1 aggregate has been barrowed in and laid to provide vehicle access, bramble, nettles and willow herb have been cleared and the ground treated to suppress re-growth.

We are planning to plant hedging and additional shrubs or small trees to provide both a visual screen and shelter from the wind. Further work needs to be done to stabilise existing old stone walling and provide shelter for spare equipment.

An area to the South has been cleared in preparation for slabs to give a clean, solid base for hive stands and we also intend to provide weed suppressing fabric and mulch around the paved area.

Ultimately we hope to provide a small wooden building in which training for various beekeeping activities such as grafting and the preparation of nuclei can be carried out.

John Tout.