

Bee Matters - Bees Matter!

FBA and DWFBA newsletter September 2010

Robert Baird Simpson, our Honorary President, died 3 July. His funeral, at Kirkcaldy Crematorium on 12 July, was attended by many beekeepers. The service was taken by Willie Taylor, who stressed Bob's love of nature and of bees in particular. Bob had kept bees since he was seven, learning from his father James. Both father and son were President of Fife Beekeepers, James Simpson from 1975-1978, and Bob from 1978-1984 and again from 1994-2000, when he was given life membership and was made Honorary President. SBA members will have seen his obituary in August's *The Scottish Beekeeper*, p219, written by his friend and fellow beekeeper – and another FBA President, Bill Duff. I remember above all his gentleness when handling bees – he took a demonstration at my apiary years ago when I had not long had bees, wearing no gloves, no veil, and though I had thought I was gentle in handling them, his gentleness was in another league! His name will long be remembered in the beekeeping world. Janice Furness

CHANGE OF DATES

PLEASE NOTE THAT FROM OCTOBER 2010 FBA's MONTHLY VONEF MEETINGS WILL BE ON THE **SECOND THURSDAY** OF THE MONTH, NOT THE THIRD, usual time: 7.30pm.

SBA Queen Rearing Workshop – Breeding from the best of our local bees.

On the 29th and 30th May the Dunfermline and West Fife Beekeepers hosted the Scottish Beekeepers' Association Queen Rearing Workshop at their Association apiary. The initial stages of the development of the apiary site, led by Graeme Dickson and a team of willing (and hard-working) helpers were completed in time for the course. This allowed improved access and room for the provision of a marquee, toilet facilities, parking space and catering. All in all the weekend was a resounding success with a glowing report by Mike Thornley in the *Scottish Beekeeper* July 2010 issue.

The SBA Forum, which can be accessed via the SBA website, has a number of complimentary comments on the course.

The course was led by Terry Clare, President of BIBBA (Bee Improvement and Bee Breeding Association) and a leading light in bee breeding circles in the UK.



Terry Clare

His depth and breadth of knowledge of the subject gave a real substance to the whole course. His presentation and humour added greatly to the enjoyment and learning process.

The first day of the course was a general introduction to the subject well within the scope of beekeepers with small apiaries and less experience. On the second day more advanced methods were discussed including grafting very young larvae from chosen colonies into queen raising stocks. The whole course was geared around practical demonstrations of methods alongside teaching of the theory.

Terry explained convincingly that the ingredients of success lay in maintaining strong and healthy colonies from the start of the venture. This begins as soon as the honey is removed by treating to control any varroa infestation in August using thymol based substances and following this with oxalic acid trickle treatment in December. There is a problem here in Scotland in that the lateness of the season, especially for those at the heather, means the temperatures may be too low for effective treatment with thymol. The nutrition of colonies, something often overlooked, is also important if they are to produce first rate queens. They should be well fed and if there is a lack of pollen then substitutes in the form of patties should be considered. Further factors are the need to keep good records so that the qualities of the queens and the behaviour of the colonies can be more accurately appraised. We were reminded of the need to provide drones in large numbers from some of our best colonies and co-ordinate queen cell production so that queens are ready for mating when the drones are mature and flying strongly.

Another aspect is that we

Everting the drone's sexual organs to test for maturity:



consider the behaviour of the bees we wish to select. First the bees should be docile; they should remain quiet on the comb and should not be over-defensive or 'follow'. They should be able to forage at low temperatures and pack pollen closely around their brood nests. They should winter well and maintain compact brood nests. Usually brood rearing will be curtailed when the weather turns foul and there is no foraging. The best will have a low swarming tendency and a willingness to supersede their queens. Overall this is a bee which requires less 'maintenance' as it is suited to our local climate.

Our needs are met by the local 'dark bee', which should be a uniformly dark colour and show characteristic patterns on studying wing morphometry. This sounds technical and complicated but it is really very simple. All that is being done is measuring the size and shape of the wings as it has been shown conclusively that the 'dark bee' has a larger body and wing and it is postulated that this is a characteristic of *Apis mellifera mellifera* and is an inherited feature of bees suited to fly in the conditions experienced in northern Europe. The 'dark bee' is also a more hairy bee and when in a winter cluster is able to efficiently conserve heat.

There are other subtle differences with other races as it is thought that this bee has higher levels of gut enzymes which enable it to contain waste material for longer periods.

These are some of the reasons we are so concerned to conserve this bee in Fife (and Scotland of course) but there are other reasons. It is accepted that when we come to selecting characteristics such as docility it is far easier to fix these if the strain of bee is reasonably pure. Also if there are cross strain matings, such as 'dark bees' and Carniolans, then the resulting progeny can be exceedingly vicious. Do not be misled by the stories of the great honey gathering abilities of the Carniolans or their local crosses. Carniolans are excellent in good summers with long warm spells, when there is no doubt they can do very well. But in poor years, and we have plenty of these, they will not manage well and will tend not to conserve stores well and rear excessive brood. A well acclimatised local bee will be able to stop and start its brood rearing cycle and so conserve stores. The other bugbear is that Carniolans prove to be inveterate swarmers! And another point: the first crosses of Carniolans and local bees often show remarkable hybrid vigour (and defensiveness) and can get good honey crops but this behaviour is difficult to fix.

But to come back to our queen rearing course. Having learned to rear the queens and having some idea of what we wish to select, how do we get them mated? The well tried and elegant method of using mininucs was very well demonstrated and some of you may have seen the results at the DWF Association Apiary summer meeting.

Mininuc:



The main points are that it is efficient in that small numbers of bees are required for the mininucs and queens are more quickly mated. They are also useful as queens can be introduced to queenless colonies by placing a newspaper with a few pinpricks over a colony, sliding out the base of the mininuc, placing it over the colony and closing up the hive with a spare box and roof. This can be left for a week and the bees will be united and the new queen will find her way down into the main colony.

In our association we are continually trying to improve on such matters as providing nucs to beginners, trying to conserve our better local bees and to rear new queens. Hence the reason for improving the West Fife Apiary and planning a new building for these activities. However, queens require to mate with 12-20 drones to be well mated and as you know drones will fly considerable distances so it is difficult to be sure of suitable within strain matings. This has prompted us to look for an 'Isolated Mating Site' where we can move chosen drone rearing colonies and our mininucs and so hope to have more control over the process. It looks as though we have a good site so hopefully next year we can progress further. John Durkacz



Some of the participants in the Queen Rearing Course

FBA to have an association apiary!

Inspired by the developments at Muirside, your FBA committee are very excited at the prospect of an FBA association apiary. Earlier this year, Bill Macrae approached St Andrews University to ask if they had any possible sites they would allow us to use. Their response was immediate and very positive. Bill, Enid and Janice met Roddy Yarr and his staff and visited two very promising sites with them, and later Bill was taken round even more. The first two are the preferred options, one in a walled garden in the centre of town and the other on the outskirts. The latter, Newton Bank, is the one we'll start with, and the university have already laid slabs, made and erected stands, and put up a large hut for storage. They could not have been more helpful. Below is a photograph of Newton Bank, which we'll set up as a teaching and mating apiary. Unfortunately the planned

demonstration there on 22 August had to be cancelled and moved to Lethangie, as Fife Council are not yet happy with the exit onto a very fast road and want to widen it. Next year, however, should see us holding plenty of demonstrations there. We have set up a sub-committee (Bill, Enid, Janice and Ian Dorward) to draw up rules and guidelines for its use. We have already purchased 10 suits in various sizes for use there for beginners who haven't yet bought their own.



*First signs of progress!
Newton Bank Apiary*

Why Native Bees?

It is very important that we do our best to keep the native strain of bee, *Apis Mellifera Mellifera*, (AMM). Why, because the black bee is hardy, thrifty, less prone to swarming, generally good natured making them easy to handle.

John Durkacz has been doing morphometry on his and some of my bees this year and results were very good. However, we are struggling to maintain this strain because beekeepers are importing bees and Queens from suppliers in England and abroad. This is very much frowned upon and, while it is not illegal, we strongly advise beekeepers not to bring those bees into our area, or anywhere else in Scotland. We know that some of those drones are within flying distance of our bees and we certainly do not want them mating with our new Queens.

Another reason is disease. The suppliers like to say that the bees are disease free but some are suspected of having AFB and EFB. The Varroa mites which will come with them are resistant to the authorised treatments and, while we know that the resistance is travelling north, the longer it takes to come the better.

Please seriously consider purchasing your nucs locally. We will do our best to supply those that are looking for bees provided they are already an experienced beekeeper or have completed the beginners course.

Enid Brown,
President, Fife Beekeepers' Association.
Vice President, Dunfermline & West Fife Beekeepers' Association.

Gormanston, 26 – 30 July, 2010.

I had often heard beekeepers talk about Gormanston and a number of years ago Norman Walsh, Ulster Beekeepers Ass., persuaded me to attend - I have been every year since.

Gormanston is a residential (all meals provided) Summer Course organised by The Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Association held at the Franciscan College, Gormanston, Co Meath. Ireland. Accommodation can be from single study, en suite rooms to dorms.

There are Workshops and Advanced, Intermediate and Preliminary lectures from 9.15am – 5pm and often more activities in the evening, either in the college or at 'The Uni.' as the Huntsman is known in the beekeeping world. There groups of beekeepers discuss various beekeeping topics while enjoying a pint of Guinness.

Each year there is a guest lecturer who, throughout the week, will deliver 7 different lectures to the advanced group. This year we had Prof Dewey Carron, Extension Entomologist, University of Delaware. All lecturers are well qualified and hold their lecturers exam (an Irish exam; candidates must hold their Expert Certificate before they can apply).

There is also the opportunity to take various beekeeping exams and the Preliminary course had 60 sitting their Basic Beekeepers Exam on the Friday. Most had never seen inside a beehive before this week.

Workshops are varied, from Microscopy, Morphometry and Queen Rearing to Sweet making, Skep making, Furniture Polishing using beeswax to a Nature Walk. There is something for everyone.

Not only do you enjoy the lectures and workshops but it is also a very sociable week. This year there was record attendance – over 400!

Enid Brown

President, Fife Beekeepers' Association

Vice-President, Dunfermline & West Fife Beekeepers' Association.

Committee treats.

At our last committee meeting Olive Steven treated us to two most delicious cakes. Everyone was eager for the recipes – so I thought we'd have them in this newsletter. They may well tempt some of you to join the committee!

BREAKFAST HONEY FRUIT CAKE

Serves 9

Ingredients:

Vegetable oil, for greasing
100g/4oz plain flour
120g/4 ¼ oz ground almonds
¼ tsp salt
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp bicarb
200g / 7oz runny honey
3 medium free range eggs
250g/9oz peeled, de-seeded and finely chopped butternut squash
1 tsp almond extract
Finely grated zest 1 lemon
100g 4oz golden raisins
100g/4oz dried cranberries
100g/4oz flaked almonds

Preheat the oven to 180C, 350F, gas 5.
Brush a 22cm/8in square x 5cm/2in deep brownie tin with a little vegetable oil. Line the tin with parchment paper brushed with a little more oil.
In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour with the ground almonds, salt,

baking powder and bicarbonate of soda. Make a well in the centre.

Warm the honey in a small saucepan until it is hot and runny. Combine this in another bowl with the eggs and beat together using a balloon whisk.

Add the grated squash, almond extract and lemon zest and mix to combine.

Pour the honey, eggs and squash mix into the well in the dry ingredients, gradually combining everything with a balloon whisk until you have a loose, wet dough. Fold in the raisins, cranberries and almonds then tip into the prepared tin and cook in the centre of the preheated oven for 35 mins until risen and golden.

Rest and cool before serving.

CHOCOLATE + BEETROOT CAKE

Ingredients

75g/2 ½ oz cocoa powder or powdered drinking chocolate
180g/6 ½ oz plain flour
2 tsp baking powder
250g/8 ½ oz castor sugar
250g/8 ½ oz cooked beetroot
3 large eggs
200ml/7 fl. oz corn oil
1 tsp vanilla extract
Icing sugar for dusting

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C/355F/Gas 4. Arrange paper muffin cases in a 12 mould tin, or prepare a 7-8 in round tin.

Sift the flour, cocoa powder and baking powder into a bowl. Mix in the sugar and set aside.

Puree the beetroot in a food processor. Add the eggs, one at a time, then add the vanilla and oil and blend until smooth.

Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients, add the beetroot mixture and lightly mix. Pour into the muffin cases (or round tin).

Bake for 30 mins (55 mins if in round tin) or until the top is firm when pressed with a finger.

Cool on a wire rack and dust with icing sugar to serve.

CHANGE OF DATES

As already mentioned on page 1, FROM OCTOBER 2010 FBA's MONTHLY VONEF MEETINGS WILL BE ON THE **SECOND THURSDAY** OF THE MONTH, NOT THE THIRD, usual time: 7.30pm.

DWFBA and Beginners meetings are held in Portmoak Hall, Scotlandwell.

I am currently inviting speakers, but the dates for your diary are:

Thurs 7 Oct – DWFBA
Thurs 14 Oct – FBA
Thurs 4 Nov – DWFBA
Thurs 11 Nov – FBA
Thurs 2 Dec – DWFBA
Thurs 9 Dec – FBA - VONEF
Thurs 6 Jan – DWFBA
Thurs 13 Jan – FBA
Thurs 20 Jan – beginners, class 1
Thurs 27 Jan – beginners, class 2
Thurs 3 Feb - DWFBA
Thurs 10 Feb - FBA
Thurs 17 Feb – beginners, class 3
Thurs 24 Feb – beginners, class 4
Thurs 3 March – DWFBA
Thurs 10 March – FBA, AGM
Thurs 17 March - beginners, class 5
Thurs 24 March – beginners, class 6
Thurs 31 March – beginners, class 7
Thurs 7 April - DWFBA
Thurs 14 April - FBA
Thurs 21 April – beginners, class 8
Thurs 28 April – beginners, class 9

Before all that, remember there is still The Scottish National Honey Show at Camperdown Park, Dundee, on **3-4-5 Sep**, the Fife Open Honey Show at Dobbies (Halbeath Roundabout, Dunfermline) on **18-19 Sep**, and Leuchars and District Show at Balmullo on **30 Oct**. Please support these shows and enter some of your honey or wax. John Tout has sent everyone the schedule and entry form for Dobbies.

Also, have you booked your place at the **SBA Autumn Convention**, on **11 Sep** in Aberdeen? These are always such enjoyable events, but we will lose them if not enough attend. There is a free ceilidh on the Friday evening to celebrate Aberdeen Association's centenary, and Barbara Cruden, SBA Treasurer is organising overnight accommodation for those who require it. (Details in front of magazine)

Contact Iain Steven,
Telephone 01738 621 100,
Email <lomand@btinternet.com>
to get your ticket.

And Finally-

Not the easiest swarm to reach!



Enid Brown spotted this – many thanks. I think I'd have just let it go – or perhaps tried a shotgun, as Alastair Thake once told us an FBA member had, a story I'll never forget. (Not his father – the great Captain L M Thake would have sent him up the tree to collect it!)