

April *NEWSLETTER* 2010

Ormskirk & Croston Beekeepers Branch

Chairman Ray Dowson 01704-892118 Email: (ray.dowson@ormskirkbeekeepers.co.uk)
Secretary Penny Oakley 08445-867841 Email: (penny.oakley@ormskirkbeekeepers.co.uk)
Treasurer Keith Hemming 01204-694857 Email: (keith.hemming@ormskirkbeekeepers.co.uk)

Website: <http://www.ormskirkbeekeepers.co.uk>

E-mail Addresses

If you have an e-mail address please can you inform the secretary so that the Newsletter and other information can be sent to you without incurring postage charges; it all helps to keep down the cost of membership.

A reminder of the next meeting at the Out Apiary, King's Moss

Our first out door meeting of the year will be held at our Kings Moss out apiary on Saturday 24th April starting at 10.30 am. We have Ian Molyneux our Regional Bee Inspector and Stewart Beattie the Seasonal Bee Inspector for Cumbria demonstrating & lecturing. Due to the anticipated numbers we will be split into two main groups. The areas covered in 4 sessions are:-

1. Lecture on disease recognition, control and treatment and record keeping
2. Full clean up and inspection for disease particularly Foul Brood. Taking a sample of bees for analysis for acarine and nosema.
3. Demonstration of shook swarm and Bailey comb change.
4. Analysis of samples for acarine & nosema.

If you bring a sample of 30 of your bees we will endeavour to analyse them for Nosema & Acarine. A lunch of soup & sandwiches & a hot drink will be provided at a cost of £5.50.

Important!

If you would like lunch provided on the day it is really important to let our Branch Secretary know by 22 April so that this information can be passed on to Edwina and Alan at Fir Tree Farm.

Car Parking at the Out Apiary

We are expecting many more people at the practical sessions this year. Ray Dowson asks if you are not bringing equipment, please park in the overflow area of the Seasons Cafe car park at Fir Tree Farm. You can gain access to the yard by walking along the northern end of the barn.

Details of future meetings and events are given below.

Schedule of Events for 2010

Saturday 24 th April	Out Apiary 10.30 am	Ian Molyneux, Stewart Beattie Disease
Saturday 15 th May	Out Apiary 2 pm	Swarm control & increase
Saturday 5 th June	Out Apiary 2 pm	Queen rearing
Sunday 27 th June	Out Apiary	National Insect Week event
August	Out Apiary 2 pm	Meeting and Barbecue
September	Out Apiary 2 pm	General meeting
October	Eagle and Child 7.45 pm	Branch Dinner

Wednesday 17 November	Eagle and Child 7.45 pm	69 th Annual General Meeting
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Basic Assessment in Beekeeping

Do you want to learn more about the craft of beekeeping? If you're a new beekeeper (or not so new for that matter) and want to learn much more about beekeeping then come along to our Basic Assessment in Beekeeping course. Although you might hate the thought of taking an exam, this is not compulsory. Just do the course and you'll have the opportunity to learn the basic things all beekeepers need to know. It is expected that practical sessions will be arranged to take place at the Branch out apiary during the Summer (evening/weekend). The final exam will also take place at the Branch out apiary. The dates for the theory sessions along with practical and exam dates will be arranged with course attendees. Mark Ball isn't able to run mid-week sessions so Ken Calveley and Margaret Murdin have agreed to run this year's training. For more information, please contact Margaret Murdin at [REDACTED] or telephone [REDACTED]

General Husbandry Certificate

Over the past few years many of you have taken your basic assessment and progressed with your beekeeping. Are you now ready to take the next step and have a go at the General Husbandry certificate?

Here are some comments from Ray Dowson who has been through the process:

It is an assessment (no written answers) following on from the basic when you have to carry out a number of practical activities such as making up a nucleus, inspecting for disease, marking queens, demonstrating a method of queen rearing.

The Assessor will inspect your honey and wax processing equipment.

If you would like to have a go next year you need to start your preparation now.

You need hive records for a full year; 3 colonies of bees and a nucleus. Do some queen rearing (not just from swarm cells) this year so that you are ready next year.

The full syllabus can be found on the BBKA website

http://www.britishbee.org.uk/examinations_and_assessments.php

When you look at the syllabus it is rather off putting, but I found the actual assessment was less daunting than I had imagined. If there is the demand early next year I am sure our new education officer, Derrick Harris, will be organising a workshop to help candidates.

Branch Library

Margaret Murdin is to be the librarian for the new Branch library. For more information, please contact Margaret Murdin at [REDACTED] or telephone [REDACTED]

New Branch Acquisition

We are sourcing an Omlet Beehaus to give members experience of this new hive. More details are available here

http://www.omlet.co.uk/products_services/products_services.php?cat=Beehaus&subcat=Bees+and+Honey



Assistant Treasurer

We are looking for a volunteer to assist our treasurer Keith Hemming with inputting the Beekeeping Course members onto an Excel Spreadsheet and issuing BDI Certificates to the same. Use of Excel Spreadsheets is essential as is an Internet connection. Each year we have been registering approximately 50–60 new members with the BBKA. The time required for this task is approximately 20 hours. If you are prepared to help with this role, please contact Keith directly e-mail([REDACTED]) or by phone([REDACTED]).

Education Opportunities across the Lancashire & North West BKA Branches

All of us want to become better beekeepers, but this does not happen by accident. To help everyone progress, the Association is aiming to provide opportunities for as many people as possible to develop their practical skills or with academic knowledge. Everyone is encouraged to reply and indicate areas of interest, to help us plan for the benefit of as many people as possible.

Full details of the BBKA exam structure and requirements can be found at http://www.britishbee.org.uk/examinations_and_assessments.php#framew

The Exams include

- **Basic** For everyone. It aims to bring beekeepers up to a minimum level of competence. It is practical and involves no writing.
- **Modules** Written exams covering various areas of knowledge about bees and beekeeping. They can be taken in any order and at any pace. Depending on how many modules are passed, the qualification awarded is either the Intermediate or Advanced Theory Certificate.
- **General Husbandry** A practical assessment of a more-experienced beekeeper's skills of bee management and processing the products of a hive.

Help and support studying

If you are intending to study for any of the exams, please let Derrick Harris know: (i) what you intend to study, (ii) where you are based, and (iii) whether you would be interested in being tutored or joining a study group. None of this commits you to taking any particular exam. However if I know who plans to do which courses and where, it may be possible to organise tutoring or study groups as necessary. These can make the learning experience more effective and enjoyable.

Microscopy Courses 2010

The Association plans to arrange a series of microscopy courses for 2010. Venue and dates have yet to be arranged, but they are likely to take place on Saturdays near Liverpool. There will be a fee charged for each, but the amounts will be kept to a minimum. Full details will be provided before bookings are taken. The precise content of each course will be confirmed later, but there are likely to be three:

- Bee diseases
- Pollen
- Dissection techniques

The first two courses would be open to any members of any of the Branches. The third would be open to all members, but priority would be given to those studying for Modules, in particular the anatomy Modules (4 and 5). To gauge interest and assist in planning, please e-mail Derrick Harris to indicate interest in attending one or more of the courses. Again, this is not to commit anyone, but rather to establish whether there is an interest for such courses to be organised.

Courses, Tutors and Mentors

Study and training is helped immensely by good tutors and mentors, for all the different exams and qualifications. Please e-mail Derrick Harris to confirm whether you are planning to run courses (eg. for the Basic), or you would be interested in tutoring or mentoring candidates for any of the exams. Derrick can then put students and tutors or mentors in touch with each other. If you have any questions or comments, please also feel free to contact Derrick Harris, Education Officer, L&NWBKA derrick.harris@ormskirkbeekeepers.co.uk

National Insect Week: Open Day Sunday 27th June 2010

Many may recall that 2 years ago the Ormskirk Branch ran an Open Day as part of National Insect Week 2008. We want to do the same this year, on Sunday 27th June 2010, at Fir Tree Farm.

So far ideas of events and activities are:

- Observation hive
- *Hear* inside a bee hive
- Hive openings (in aid of Bees for Development/Bees Abroad)
- Pond dipping
- Spot number of "swarms" on woodland walk
- Spot different types of flower of use to bees
- Extraction display
- Honey comb available to touch
- Display of honey/honey tasting
- Wasps' nest
- Pollen display
- Dissecting microscope to allow close up views of a bee
- Large pictures of bees etc
- Candle making using rolled wax sheets, so safe for children
- Information regarding honey bees, charities, bumblebees etc
- Moth trapping

Required: Ideas and Volunteers!

Please let Derrick Harris know two things in particular. Firstly are there any other ideas for events or activities? Secondly can you volunteer to help, even for part of the day? Last time we tried to have people do various different activities during the day. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. Also the more people there are to help, the better everything works. Even if you are very new to beekeeping, you would be very welcome to come along and help.

Please contact Derrick Harris derrick.harris@ormskirkbeekeepers.co.uk

Branch Experiments: Results for 2009 and Plans for 2010

General Background

Varroa is generally regarded as perhaps the most serious current threat to beekeeping in Britain. The varroa mites feed on the developing larvae. This weakens them. Perhaps more importantly, the action of feeding enables the transmission of serious bee diseases. Left untreated the colony will die out over a season or two. Various methods of varroa control have been used. Such treatments based on synthetic chemicals, pyrethroids, were effective for a while. However in our part of Britain honey bees have developed resistance. Apistan strips can no longer be regarded as reliably effective.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is currently the only realistic approach to varroa management. This involves using a combination of techniques and treatments rather than a single "magic bullet". Also the best that can be expected is keeping varroa numbers below a threshold where they cause excessive damage.

The 2009 Experiment

In 2009, at the Branch apiary we ran an experiment to compare methods of icing sugar dusting as one part of IPM. This involved running two hives in exactly the same way except for the manner in which icing sugar was applied. In one hive a cup of icing sugar was brushed across the top of the frames in the brood box each Sunday as part of the regular inspection regime. This has the advantage of being very simple, without the disruption of dusting each frame individually. In the second hive, the icing sugar would only be applied if the mite drop on the varroa board suggested the number of mites was reaching a damaging level. It would then be dusted on each frame individually. The aim was to assess whether the simple first method was good enough to be used in place of the more disruptive and complicated second method.

The Results

Beekeepers are used to things being a little complicated. The results of this experiment are no different. At first glance, the results showed the hive dusted regularly was actually *worse off*.

More Background

First, a little more information to understand what might be happening.

- 1 Both colonies and most of the others in the Branch apiary remained on open mesh floors (OMF).
- 2 In 2009 icing sugar was only ever used on the regularly dusted hive. The varroa monitoring never indicated the other hive required treatment.
- 3 A monitoring board was in place for an hour or so after the dusting, to collect the icing sugar and varroa. Varroa were dislodged and collected each time, although the numbers were not counted.
- 4 The varroa monitoring boards were used to assess the daily average mite drop of both colonies and most of the others in the Branch apiary as well. Throughout the year this was never at a level which would indicate any varroa treatment was required. (More of this in a moment....) So no varroa treatment was used until the autumn.
- 5 In September and October 2009, all the hives in the apiary were treated with Hive Clean (<http://www.beevital.com/>). This is a treatment including oxalic acid.
- 6 On 5th December 2009, all the hives in the apiary were treated by trickling oxalic acid. A monitoring board was placed under the floors of several hives for 24 hours afterwards and then again for a further 7 days after that.
- 7 The drop 24 hours after trickling oxalic acid was 545 in the dusted hive (as compared with 474, 605 and 302 for others).
- 8 The average daily drop for the 7 days after that first day was 100 in the dusted hive (as compared to 47, 43 and 28 in other hives).
- 9 By 21st January 2010, the colony with the daily drop of 474/47 was dead. The others monitored were all alive as of 10th April 2010, with between 2 and 4 frames of brood.

So does icing sugar dusting increase the level of mite infestation?

At first glance, the results of the experiment would suggest such a conclusion. However the question must then be: *By what mechanism would the icing sugar increase the varroa load?* Varroa feed on honey bees, so they are not eating the sugar. Perhaps the removal of some varroa reduces the competition and allows more varroa to flourish?

This seems unconvincing. Varroa were actually being dislodged and removed from the colony regularly each week of dusting. Logically if removing competition would increase numbers then those increased numbers would compete and suppress the mite population in turn.

Some studies have concluded that sugar dusting does not work as a method of varroa control. (http://www.ibra.org.uk/articles/20090217_5). Again, it seems unarguable varroa *had* been dislodged following the icing sugar treatment. Perhaps not in sufficient numbers?

So what might affect the numbers of mites dislodged and thus the effectiveness of icing sugar dusting? A little knowledge of varroa and honey bees might offer some suggestions.

Firstly, the varroa lifecycle is focussed on the bees' brood cells where varroa breeding takes place. Obviously, once the cell has been sealed, no amount of icing sugar will dislodge them (nor will oxalic acid have any effect). However by treating every week over an extended period, the icing sugar ought to have caught the varroa when they emerged by the time of the next application or the one after.

Alternatively it is known that varroa hitch a ride on adult bees. During the day in the summer months, hopefully a large number of the adult bees are away from the colony foraging. Of course any varroa on those bees are safe from the icing sugar. Clearly another explanation might be that the simple method of dusting icing sugar across the tops of bars is just not good enough, even if other methods are.

A couple of other thoughts: What would have happened to the colony and its varroa load if we had not dusted at all?? Perhaps it was just a fluke result? Clearly without a bigger sample size, that is an impossible issue to address. It is interesting to see that one of the colonies with a lower mite drop did not survive, whereas the dusted colony did. Of course there are many factors at play at any one time. **So was the experiment of any use at all?**

Personally I think several benefits have arisen:

- 1 Hopefully most beginners (and others?) have been exposed to IPM techniques in practice and have been encouraged to think about the issues involved.
- 2 Testing and assessing methods in a semi-scientific way is always a good discipline in beekeeping.
- 3 It leads into a variation on the experiment this year for assessing whether the timing of the sugar dusting has an effect. (See below.)
- 4 The fact of looking has thrown up another issue which ought to be considered: is the board under an OMF a reliable method of assessing whether it is necessary to be worried about the varroa level in a colony? (Again, see below.)

Experiment 2010

This year the idea will be to develop further from the 2009 experiment.

One colony will be treated exactly as last year: sugar dusted each weekend. This will also serve as a comparison with the results for 2009.

A second colony will be dusted in the same way as the first, except it will be dusted when a majority of the bees are back in the hive and liable actually be covered by the icing sugar.

It would be interesting if as many people as possible would get involved. More data will give clearer results.

Is varroa monitoring with a board effective?

In gathering the data for the experiment, another interesting feature arose: according to average varroa drop assessments undertaken throughout the year, the mite population within the hive was fine. There would be no need to treat during the winter months. Of course, if we had paid attention to such indications, the colony might easily have died during the winter. The colonies were also treated with Hive Clean.

So just how useful are the varroa boards which everyone is encouraged to use as part of IPM? It may be that the Branch apiary's experience is unusual. So we want to hear from as many members as possible: did the mite drop resulting from Apiguard and/or oxalic acid at the end of the year come as a surprise when compared with your experience of average drops during the year?

Please let Derrick Harris know both whether the final mite drop surprised you and whether you are willing to get involved by participating in the 2010 experiment.

Next Newsletter

We always welcome your contributions to the newsletter. If there is anything in particular you would like to see in the next newsletter or if there is anything you would like to contribute about your own beekeeping experiences please contact the Secretary.