

HELENSBURGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER No.161 JUNE 2011.

MEMBERS MEETING : THE HALL AT RHU CHURCH ON THURSDAY 23 JUNE AT 7.15 pm.

This is the last indoor meeting of the current season that stretches back to September 2010. We are repeating the format of last year's successful mid summer meeting when members shared their experiences and concerns to get a better understanding of the season so far (and it has certainly been a roller coaster this year) and what it means for their bees and beekeeping. Anne Ritchie will be facilitating the meeting and getting everyone to contribute this or her thoughts: home baking and biscuits as usual.

BASIC BEEMASTER'S CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS.

Over the last two weekends 12 members have been sitting the basic Beemasters Certificate Examination. Many Congratulations to Fi, Nikki and Eddie, Gordon, Nick, Howard, Susan and Sandy, Anne, Scott, Jamie, and Reg for passing. The official results will be published in the autumn in the "Scottish Beekeeper". Thanks are also due to the examiner Ian Craig and to Gordon for masterminding the schedule and for organising the weather.

ASSOCIATION APIARY EVENTS AND USE.

The association apiary is being well used this season. To date there have been two introduction to beekeeping events, a queen marking afternoon and a simple bee breeding demonstration. Following suggestions from members a Varroa diagnosis and treatment event is to be organised sometime in the next 2 months

(Coordinator: Jim McCulloch 01436 831664 and at jmcculloch1@btinternet.com).

Details will follow by email in due course.

Neil Sandison, the apiary manager is aiming to have 4 strong association hives going in to the winter that, hopefully, will provide the platform for bee breeding next year and to help in the supply of bees to members (see also item immediately below). Neil reminds all members that the apiary is available for members, particularly those keeping bees in isolated areas wishing to ensure that there gene pool is sufficiently varied, to bring nucs to the site for mating (contact Neil on 01389 841408 and at neilsandison@aol.com).

BEEES FOR MEMBERS

We have had requests from both members and non-members for bees. You can imagine the response to the latter group. Members are requesting bees for a number of reasons: new members are keen to get started, members have lost all their bees during the winter, and others want to supplement their stocks. Some are looking for nucs and a few are requiring queens (or queen cells) only. Unfortunately this year the association does not have bees to dispose of from a beekeeper leaving the area, as happened last year, and May has been poor for bee breeding with reports of few queen cells and worries about the unfavourable weather for mating.

However over the next month we hope to be able to provide bees those who need stocks. Most will come through mentors so it is essential to talk to them about the arrangements for moving and installing the bees on their new sites. Prior to receiving bees new beekeeper should have already handled bees (and have some confidence when doing so) and possess the necessary equipment. This

will include a feeder as the first task will be to encourage the bees to draw more comb and to build up so that they are sufficiently strong to go through the winter.

The site must be carefully chosen bearing in mind safety issues but also the well being of the bees. This has been said before but the entrance of the hives should pick up those 2 hours of precious sunlight in the middle of the day in midwinter. New bees do not necessarily guarantee that the bees will not swarm this year so weekly inspections are essential until August, something that new beekeepers will want to do in any event. Finally, if you have not already done so, join the SBA in order to obtain insurance cover as well as other benefits.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

As the Reverend new beekeeper knows I am having trouble getting my smoker lit. A couple of weeks ago I failed, yet again. There was not a sign of life. Wanting a fresh start I emptied the contents into the empty compost sack that acts as a bin in my barn. At the second attempt the smoker blasted into life and we spent a happy hour and half going through all the hives. Returning to the barn at the end we found a small, solid heap of solid plastic on the floor where my sack had been. It had been set alight by the far from dead smoker fuel and, without a draft, had burnt away, the flames not touching the adjacent old dresser that act as a tool chest. As the Reverend pointed out, it was miracle that the barn did not go up in flames. The road to hell etc etc.....

Mike Thornley

Secretary