

HELENSBURGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER 174: AUGUST 2012

HONEY COMPETITION AT H&GHS SHOW SATURDAY 25 AUGUST

A reminder that there are three honey classes to compete for at the Helensburgh and Gareloch Horticultural Society Show in the Victoria Hall on Saturday 25 August. Entries can be submitted on Friday night 5.00-10.00pm and on Saturday morning 8.00-10.00am. Details of how to enter and what to look out for have already been circulated. If you are hoping to enter, please contact Gordon by Tuesday teatime.

FIRST MEETING OF THE WINTER PROGRAMME

This will take place at 7.15 pm. in the Hall at Rhu Church on Thursday 27 September. The programme for the evening meetings over the winter will be published in the next Newsletter.

REQUEST FOR OLD HIVE AND NEW HONEY

A farm shop is being opened at Auchentullich Farm on the A82 opposite the Carrick Golf Course. The proprietor would like to hear from any member who has an old disused hive that can be used to promote sales of local honey which is also being sought. If you have a spare old hive or honey for sale please contact Ishbel Campbell, Auchentullich Farm, Arden, G83 8RF or phone 01389 850240.

BEE INSPECTOR IN THE AREA

Steve Sunderland, the lead bee inspector for the Scottish Government, visited Ben Bellamy and Mike Appleton's apiaries recently. Apparently this was an interesting and useful exercise and we hope to get feedback from Ben and Mike at our first meeting on the inspections so that members can understand what is involved when their bees are examined in the future.

SBA CENTENARY CELEBRATION AND DISPLAY

It is not too late to book for this once in a lifetime event: enough said.

The National Museum of Rural Life at Kiltochside, East Kilbride is hosting a display on beekeeping in Scotland for one month only (September 1-30) in association with the SBA as part of its Centenary. John Durkacz has done much background research and if the picture of the two ladies standing by the immense Glen hives in this month's Scottish Beekeeper is anything to go by this show should also not be missed: perhaps a case for an outing and sharing of transport?

VARROA TREATMENT

OK so you will be already tired about hearing about Varroa treatment but it is that time of the year again. I worry about beekeepers that say that they have not seen much Varroa in their hives, as if suggesting that somehow their treatments are working well or bees are beginning to deal with the problem in some unknown way. To be blunt low mite counts are often the result of poor counting, weak colonies and the outcome of swarming that the beekeeper has probably missed.

At the end of July two of my mid strength colonies, both of which had swarmed this season, gave a daily natural drop rate of between 3 and 4 mites a day. In the first 24 hours after being treated with Apivar strips both hives showed 200 mites with a further 150 mites dropping in the following 5 days (with the counting still continuing till the end of the treatment period). Nothing particularly remarkable there except the striking similarity of the figures. My weakest colony, little more than a nuc, showed only 2 mites over 3 ½ days natural drop period and gave 87 mites in the first 24 hours of treatment and a further 55 thereafter. So there was Varroa there and rising exponentially unless treated.

My strongest hive, formed by amalgamating two colonies, confirmed this scenario. One of the colonies had shown relatively high natural drop rates earlier in the season. We treated with formic acid and then took fright and removed the treatment worried that we had overdosed it. The natural drop rate at the end of July was 13 a day and the first 24 hours of treatment gave 513 mites with a cumulative total of 1778 now after 13 days of treatment. What I am trying to say is that each colony has different Varroa levels. A strong colony, with lots of activity, can suggest health and vigour when in fact there is also a high level of Varroa and indeed it is known that the strongest colonies collapse fastest unless treated. Furthermore a sample one or two colonies taken as being typical of the Varroa levels in all hives can be totally misleading, creating a false sense of security and the underestimating of the need for treatment in the apiary as a whole. Each colony has to be assessed individually if you are deciding on whether to treat or not and, if you are, with what type of product.

Of course you can get round all this analysing and numbers business by adopting a rigorous treatment regime for all colonies. Assume the worst and treat. 16 members are now using Apivar but what about the dozen or so other beekeepers? Perhaps Apivar has been obtained on the Internet. Alternatively Bayverol or Apistan might be continuing to be used although there are widespread reports of resistance against these products. Or perhaps thymol based products like Apiguard or other modern elixirs are being employed. For the good of the bees, and neighbour's bees, I suggest, if these treatments, are being used, that Apivar is inserted for a short period at the end and the results checked. I have a few spare strips available for those wanting to do this test. Finally the SBA has requested that local association Presidents take responsibility for organising resistance tests in their areas, which would be a long awaited and useful initiative.

