

HELENSBURGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER No. 176 OCTOBER 2012

GAVIN RAMSAY SPEAKS ON "BEE COMMUNICATION" ON THURSDAY
25 OCTOBER at 7.15 pm IN THE HALL AT RHU CHURCH.

Gavin is a professional geneticist and has been a beekeeper for about 16 years. He works at the James Hutton Institute, newly formed from the Scottish Crop Research Institute in Dundee and a sister institute in Aberdeen, where he manages a potato gene bank and researches the traits to be found in it. The aim of the research is to attempt to keep one of the world's major food crops productive in the face of a changing climate and the various stresses that will bring. He happily speaks his mind when science and beekeeping interact, convinced that only the cold light of rational consideration of the evidence should guide our actions and our campaigns.

That passion for improving the quality of beekeeping debate helped drive him to set up SBAi, the internet discussion forum for Scottish beekeepers, and caused him to give up his position on the SBA Executive when it decided to collaborate on a high profile research project which seemed to him unlikely to deliver sensible science.

Will his enthusiasm for science be on show in his talk 'Communication in Bees'? Come and see! Gavin says that he really enjoys giving this lecture. He mostly lets the videos do the talking and he can watch the faces of the audience instead. Almost all beekeepers learn something from the talk and many will walk away with a new respect for those insects we keep in boxes.

"TRAINING THE TRAINERS"

ALASTAIR CAMERON

This two day course at Auchencruive was aimed at raising the standard of teaching beekeeping in Scotland and was sponsored by the Scottish Government, the Scottish Beekeepers' Association and by individual local associations. So I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to attend. Hopefully, we (16 of us) all learned how to be more organised with specific aims and objectives (two different things we were told!), schemes of work, and assessment of the effectiveness of getting the information across. We certainly picked up a lot of new ideas, so perhaps we will have more varied and more interesting talks and courses, which will help people be better beekeepers. A further course ran a day or so later in the north of Scotland

RICHARD BALL ON "INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT"

Richard Ball, until his retirement the chief bee inspector in England, was this year's SBA travelling speaker and gave a talk under the auspices of CABA to a packed room at Partick Burgh Hall. His theme was Integrated Pest Management, which he dealt with comprehensively. It is impossible to summarise all the advice he gave but here are a few points that stood out.

A telling graph showed the declining bee population in a colony at the end of the summer coinciding with a rapidly increasing build up of Varroa. Late treatment, say in September and October, results in the bees that are to take the colony through the winter already being damaged by Varroa, shortening life expectancy and reducing the chances of the colony surviving. It is really important to keep the Varroa levels low. If colonies are treated with products such as Apiguard that are perhaps less than 70% effective the mite levels will return to their previous high level prior to treatment within 3 months, hence the importance of oxalic acid trickle treatment in December which Richard Ball called his lifesaver.

But relying only on an autumn and winter treatment regime is not good enough these days. It was pretty clear that unless we have very low natural mite fall in the spring there are enormous advantages to be gained by taking some action then to get the Varroa levels down to avoid potentially high levels later in the summer. Richard was less good at recommending what these interim measures might be although he indicated a number of options that were available. But we are operating in the dark unless we regularly monitor our colonies. Richard does this every day and therefore it should not be beyond the capabilities of the rest of us to monitor at least for one week per month.

Resistance by mites to treatments such as Bayverol and Apistan is a major problem and we can only expect 10 years maximum for alternatives such as Apivar. We could extend its use by varying treatments ideally on a 3 year cycle, but this requires the co-operation of all beekeepers in an area to avoid resistance spreading from one colony to another. HDBA has a good track record in organising and supplying treatments. Could this be extended by creating an IPM regime that would be adopted by all our members?

Another useful point is that Apivar requires more time to be fully effective. I have found that 8 rather than 6 weeks is required and other beekeepers even consider 10 weeks are necessary but, again, monitoring the effectiveness will give you this information. Finally do not use Vita Feed Gold if you are feeding with Ambrosia. They combine to produce an effect that is toxic and will kill bees.

Despite the publicity in the newsletter and emails, there were only 2 representatives from HDBA at this important presentation.

EXCLUDE QUEEN EXCLUDERS

In case any one has forgotten: if you are overwintering your colonies on double broods, or brood and a half, remember to remove your queen excluder. If left in place the queen can be stranded on her own when the cluster rises (as it will, especially if it is short on stores), into the top part of the hive, and she will die. In fact there is no case for having a queen excluder on any colony at this time of the year at all.