

Combings

The newsletter of the York and District
Beekeepers Association.

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York and District Beekeepers 2015/16

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"Combings" is the newsletter of the York & District Beekeepers Association. Views expressed in the newsletter are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Association as a whole or of the editor.

Contributions to, and comments on "Combings" are always welcome. I would particularly appreciate your pictures for "Reader's Hives".

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Combings is published quarterly.

Please note that the last date for copy for the next edition is:

18th November 2016.

Two Eds.

Firstly, apologies for the very late delivery of the summer edition of "Combings". As many of you will already know, there were problems with getting the last edition printed, but hopefully as a new printers has been found, such problems are now behind us and future editions will appear in the appropriate season.

YDBKA Vice-Chair, Paul Taylor, has resigned from the Committee as he has now moved from the area. Our thanks to Paul for all his work on behalf of the Association over the last few years, we wish him well for the future

It has not been the best season for honey-getting, so few of us will be over-burdened with spinning-out but hopefully you have enough to meet your customer requirements.

Sharing the dual honour of the front page and Reader's Hives (back page) pictures this time; John Thompson's and Tricia Miller's colonies had an unfortunate encounter at the Bossall training apiary. Read all about it in John's account on page 9.

Alan gives some advice on testing the water content of your honey on page 11.

Membership fees:

The next year starts on 1st October 2016, and runs until 30th September 2017.

Rates are:

Full member:	£25.00
Partner member:	£20.00
Junior member:	£25.00
Social member:	£12.50

As of this year, you may pay by cash, cheque or direct electronic transfer to our Bank Account, details are on the updated membership form, which is available from the website.

Some autumn advice from Alan.

Uniting bees – basic principles.

Some beekeeping topics seem to lend themselves to annual review and as autumn approaches, it's uniting-time again!

Uniting of course, can, and should, be done at any time in the season, as required.

Why might we want to unite?

- Colonies too small
- Creation of large, honey-gathering unit prior to a flow
- To improve the chances of getting bees through winter
- To combine a queen-right colony to a queenless one
- Uniting a nuc to a larger colony as a way of queen introduction

A few basic principles need to be observed to improve the chances of a successful manipulation.

- The mixing of the two colonies must be done slowly
- Disorientation of the bees helps
- Confusion or masking of the separate colony odours helps

There are a few fairly reliable methods of uniting, of which the newspaper method is the most common. Books tend to recommend that the colony with the queen to be retained is placed in the bottom box, with the queenless unit on the top, though I've done it the other way round without a problem. If you don't want to look through two brood boxes at the end of

the process to find the queen, then try wrapping your sheet of newspaper (ideally a broadsheet) around a queen excluder, thus restricting the queen to only one box. It won't restrict the movement of bees or otherwise interfere with the uniting process.

If you're performing the manipulation during really hot weather, then a travelling screen rather than a solid crown board on the top of the stack would be wise. Leave everything alone for a minimum of three or four days to allow bees and odours to mingle, and rearrange the two sets of frames into a sensible configuration.

A less well known method, which doesn't require the use of newspaper or any other barrier, is the "exposure to sunlight" method. I first tried it some ten years ago having read it in Wedmore's "Manual", although it is apparently attributed to Brother Adam. I use it once or twice a season when uniting small ones, and it has not, so far, failed. Exposure to light has a calming influence on bees, making them less likely to fight with "strangers".

Place the frames from your two (or three) hives alternately in a full-sized brood box, leaving as much space between them as possible. Leave the crown board off for 10-20 minutes, perhaps whilst you complete your work on another hive, this exposing the frames to the light. To be extra safe, cage the queen you wish to keep in a queen cage, filling the exit-hole with soft candy, although I've always just left her free on the frames. After 10-20 minutes, lightly smoke the bees and close the frames up, placing the queen cage between frames of brood if you have chosen to cage her. Wait three or four days before inspecting again.

As we look to the ending of another season, it's time for the annual reminder about the need to unite colonies before going into winter. The desire to go into winter with all your colonies separate is understandable, but unwise if your colonies are

small. Small units are far less likely to survive the winter than larger ones, and these larger ones can always be divided again in the spring if you wish to make increase.

Small may be beautiful, but in beekeeping, bigger is always better.

Fondant and syrup for sale

David Bough has plenty of syrup and fondant in stock as usual: syrup is £18 per jerry can and fondant is £19 per box.

David is in Holtby. Contact him via email at david.bough@wardstheflorist.co.uk or by phone 07713 256522

Alan Johnston also has syrup and fondant for sale at the same prices. Alan is near Selby, his phone number is 01757 633202. For the one-hive beekeeper, Alan will sell a single 2.5 kg pack of fondant at £4.

YDBKA foundation purchase

The Yorkshire Beekeepers Association have advised that they will not be running a countywide foundation offer this autumn, so Treasurer John Thompson has decided to arrange a bulk purchase for our Association.

“Following enquiries with a number of suppliers it would seem that they are reluctant to offer any really good deals. The best that I can find is from Maisemore Apiaries, who will offer a 25% discount on their list price for a bulk order, with free delivery to an address of my choice – that will be my home. I will then organise distribution of orders to participants. Our order last year came from Maisemore and their product seemed to be very satisfactory.”

Please see John's email to members on 18 August for details, or contact John directly.

Two books are reviewed by Alan this time

Haynes Bee Manual, Claire and Adrian Waring

Haynes are perhaps best known for their car repair manuals, and so I was slightly put off when the "Bee Manual" came out a few years ago: the tie-up just didn't seem right, and so I didn't acquire a copy. I was at an event recently, however where it was being referenced and widely praised. I consequently picked up a copy and wasn't disappointed.

The authors, the Warings, are high-profile UK beekeepers and writers, and have produced a book aimed primarily at beginners and improvers. Their long experience shows through in the writing, they write "well within themselves", the work is accurate and in seven chapters cover virtually everything beekeepers will need to know in their formative years. Other books may be needed if the reader wants to pursue a topic in greater depth but it's a good starting place for most subjects. There are photos or diagrams on every one of the 160 pages, and a decent glossary, bibliography and index.

Its A4 size, and so is an indoor book rather than a field manual. If you are looking for a comprehensive starter book, however, this would have to be on the shortlist, and with Christmas on the horizon, it would make a decent present to oneself or another beekeeper.

Available from Thornes £22.99.

Following the wild bees, Thomas Seeley

Since reading Seeley's excellent work, "Honeybee Democracy" a few years ago, I've made a point of keeping up with everything he publishes, and his latest book "Following the wild bees" is yet another good read.

It details how Seeley, a professor of biology at Cornell University, USA taught himself to hunt wild bees in a large forested area near his place of work. Luring feral bees to a small bait hive, he describes how he works them, releases them, takes compass bearings, times their return flight to gauge distance, and gradually moves the "bee line" to locate their nest.

He intersperses the descriptive sections with smaller pieces on the underlying scientific involved – bee flight, navigation, nest cavity requirements are all covered in good detail giving the book a nice balance. There are good quality photos or tables on virtually every page, print standards are high and at under £20, it's good value for money. And it gives plans for his twin-chambered bait hive – I'll certainly be making one at the end of the season for use next year! Recommended.

Available from Northern Bee Books, £17.95

Many thanks to YDBKA Treasurer John Thompson for this article.

Please also see the pictures on the front and back pages.

LATEST RESULTS:

BEEHIVES	0	HOT AIR BALLOON	2
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On the evening of Monday 27th June 2016, our Beginners Practical Class at the Out Apiary on farmland at Bossall came to an end, and the group of nervous new beekeepers carefully took their precious colonies home. However, two full colonies remained belonging to myself and Tricia Miller; these two had been used to help train an overflow of Beginners from the Murton Apiary, following huge demand this year.

At just after 10:00 hours the following Monday, 4th July, I walked happily through the flowering meadow listening to the skylarks, and up to the hives in order to take some honey off, having been the previous afternoon to put a clearer board on. I was met by a scene of devastation. Both hives were smashed and scattered over a wide area, and there was a huge swathe of flattened grass along the hedgerow where the Beginners hives had been located. Immediately suspecting that poachers had been "lamping" during the night - quite a problem around these parts – I hurried to see the farmer. To my surprise, he told me that a hot air balloon had crash-landed earlier that morning, with 16 people on board.

Presumably 16 well-stung people! The balloon company had recovered the balloon and the passengers and had left the farm, making no mention of the hive damage, but fortunately not before the farmer had taken a note of the balloon company name.

A large number of bees were dead, dying or had fled. As Tricia was away in Edinburgh, I called for assistance from Nigel Davies who brought some spare kit, and I collected a spare hive from home and off we went to try to salvage what we could.

Every component in my hive was smashed beyond use, and all of the frames were wrecked or damaged. Even the breeze blocks under the bread basket temporary stand were both

broken in half by the impact. I managed to retrieve some bees (no queen though) and hived them up with some eggs, so we shall see what develops.

Tricia's hive was not as badly damaged in the event, as it appeared to have only been struck a glancing blow, but the brood box and frames were "totalled", together with one of the super boxes.

Needless to say, the balloon company has now been stung with a reparation demand for replacement hardware, bees and loss of production.

I'm glad that I struggle to get up early of a morning these days – I could have been collecting my honey when it hit...

John C Thompson

Refractometers

As we take off our vast honey crops at the end of another great season (!), a refractometer will be found to be a useful piece of beekeeping kit. It is used to measure the water content of the honey.

In a perfect world, all of your frames would be completely capped on both sides before extraction, virtually guaranteeing no problems due to excess moisture. But life is not usually so neat and tidy, and occasionally bees to cap honey before all the excess moisture has been fanned off and so a refractometer, although not absolutely vital, is certainly a most useful item to have.

The traditional ones are about 6 inches long, silver-coloured, with a rubberized eye-piece at one end, making it look like a miniature telescope, and at the other end is a hinged, split prism. The honey sample is placed on the split prism, and the

eye-piece focused, through which can be read a scale (or often multiple scales) showing the water content of the sample.

In practical terms, it is useful to know the water content, because too high a level is likely to result in the honey fermenting in the jar or bucket, rendering it inedible, unsaleable and messy.

In legal terms, it is unlawful to sell honey if the water content exceeds the levels stipulated in the Honey (England) Regulations 2015.

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/1348/pdfs/ukxi_20151348_en.pdf

These regulations stipulate two maximum water-content levels, one for heather honey and one for all other honey. These are 23% and 20% respectively.

A look on the internet will reveal a whole range of refractometers looking virtually identical to those shown in the beekeeping catalogues. I invested £20 in one as a "spare": it's beautifully made and nicely packaged. I've still got no idea what it measures, but it certainly doesn't measure the water content in honey. It gave a reading of 60 for thinly-spread lemon curd, but that wasn't too helpful.

On a more serious note, very expensive digital refractometers are now available. A test last year on a known sample gave two different readings on traditional and digital instruments.

I'd settle for a good-quality traditional model from a bee-keeping supplier. The cost of a bucket of honey, ruined by fermentation, would more than cover the purchase cost. Storing your buckets somewhere cool and dark also helps.

Alan Johnston

N.D.B courses

The "National Diploma of Beekeeping" organisation (the "N.D.B") has begun a series of short, two-day courses for beekeepers. Although the N.D.N qualification is the highest available in the UK, the courses are aimed at the "average" beekeeper, who perhaps is beyond the beginner stage.

There are various nationwide venues: the northern one is based at Manchester BKA's apiary in Heaton Park, Manchester. I've attended one, and the quality of the teaching and the facilities were first class.

Future courses at Manchester this year are:

"Honeybee behaviour" 17-18 September

"Teaching Beekeeping" 25 – 26 November

"Seasonal Management" 27 – 28 November

Course fees are reasonable, as costs are partly subsidised by Defra's "Healthy Bees Plan". See the N.D.B website for further details.

From the BBC website on 16 August 2016

The large-scale, long-term decline in wild bees across England has been linked to the use of neonicotinoid insecticides by a new study.

Over 18 years, researchers analysed bees who forage heavily on oilseed rape, a crop widely treated with "neonics". The scientists attribute half of the total decline in wild bees to the use of these chemicals. Industry sources say the study shows an association, not a cause and effect.

In recent years, several studies, conducted in the lab and in the field, have identified a negative effect on honey bees and bumble bees from the use of neonics. But few researchers have looked at the long term impacts of these substances.

This new paper examined the impacts on populations of 62 species of wild bees across England over the period from 1994-2011.

The team, from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), used distribution data on wild bees, excluding honey and bumblebees collected by the bees, ants and wasps recording scheme.

They were able to compare the locations of these bees and their changing populations with growing patterns of oilseed rape across England over 18 years.

The amount of this crop being sown has increased significantly over the period of the study, from around 500,000 hectares in 1994 to over 700,000 in 2011.

A key innovation was the commercial licensing of neonicotinoid insecticides for the crop in the UK in 2002. Seeds are coated with the chemical and every part of the plant becomes toxic to pests.

Manufacturers hailed the development as a major advance, reducing the need for leaf spraying with other insecticides. Around 85% of the oilseed rape crop in England now uses this method for pest protection.

But this new work suggests, for the first time, that the detrimental impacts seen in the lab can be linked to large scale population extinctions of wild bees, especially for those species of bees that spend longer foraging on oilseed rape.

"The negative effects that have been reported previously do scale up to long-term, large-scale multi-species impacts that are harmful," said Dr Nick Isaac, a co-author of the new paper. "Neonicotinoids are harmful, we can be very confident about that and our mean correlation is three times more negative for foragers than for non-foragers."

There was a decline in the number of populations of 10%, attributable to neonicotinoids, across the 34 species that forage on oilseed rape. Five of the species showed declines of 20% or more, with the worst affected declining by 30%. Overall, half the total decline in wild bees could be linked to the chemicals.

"Historically, if you just have oilseed rape, many bees tend to benefit from that because it is this enormous foraging resource all over the countryside," said lead author Dr Ben Woodcock from the CEH. "But this co-relation study suggests that once it is treated with neonicotinoids up to 85%, then they are starting to be exposed and it's starting to have these detrimental impacts on them."

"What we can't say is what these detrimental impacts are but what it does suggest is you can have these population declines and they can be big - I mean 30% is a big decline."

The authors acknowledge that their study finds an association and doesn't prove a cause and effect link between the use of neonicotinoids and the decline of bee populations.

The manufacturers of the chemicals agree that it is an interesting statistical study, but they argue that intensive farming and not just a single insecticide might be the real cause of the decline.

"Since most of the oilseed rape grown in the UK was treated with a neonicotinoid seed treatment during the years that this study looked at, we believe its findings would be more correctly

headlined that intensive agriculture is causing some issues with pollinators," said Dr Julian Little, from Bayer Crop Science in the UK. "Whether this is due to the use of insecticides is not clear; a lack of nesting sites and pollen and nectar sources in these areas may also be critical factors."

Other scientists, though, believe that the new study is some of the strongest data yet for the impact of these substances over the long term.

"This is the first good evidence that bees are affected at the population level by the widespread use of neonicotinoids," said Prof Henrik Smith from Lund University in Sweden, who was not involved with the research.

"It is the combination of evidence that is persuasive, that the effect depends on neonicotinoid exposure and affect species known to forage on oilseed rape more than other species."

The European Food Safety Authority is currently conducting a review of the scientific evidence about neonicotinoids.

An EU-wide moratorium on their use was implemented in 2013 and is still in place. This new work is likely to be part of that review, along with another, major field study due out in the autumn. However, the National Farmers Union (NFU) say that it doesn't make a convincing case about the extinction of bees in England. "While this study claims to provide an important contribution to the evidence base underpinning the current EU moratorium on some uses of neonicotinoids, experts reviewing all the evidence have concluded that there are still major gaps in our knowledge and a limited evidence base to guide policymakers," said Dr Chris Hartfield from the NFU.

The scientists involved in the wild bee study caution against "simplistic solutions" to the problems of pollinators. They say a

"holistic" approach to the use of insecticides must be taken and they are lukewarm about the idea of banning chemicals.

"When you grow oilseed rape you can't do it without pesticides, there's an underlying reality to this," said Dr Woodcock.

"Just because you say 'don't use neonicotinoids anymore', the likelihood is that another pesticide is going to have to be used to compensate for that, that is going to have impacts on runoffs into waterways and on other species that you can control for."

"It needs to be taken in a very holistic perspective; you can't just say as long as we can save the bees everything else can go to hell, that's not where you want to be at."

The study has been published in the journal Nature Communications.





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Reader's Hives



For the story behind this scene of devastation, as well as the one shown on the front page, please see page 9.