

Combing

The newsletter of the York and District
Beekeepers Association.

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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 editors.

Contributions to, and comments on “Combings” are always welcome. We would particularly appreciate your pictures for “Reader’s Hives”.

Please send any copy or comments to: Combings@gmail.com

Combings Editor: Kate Wallace

Assistant Editor is Alan Johnston.

Combings is published quarterly.

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

18th August 2014.

Two Eds.

It’s that time of year again and hopefully any swarms you are called to are all as accessible as the one on the front page!

This year we have over 30 new beekeepers taking up the hive tool – welcome one and all, we wish you many years of fascination with the craft.

Do remember when collecting swarms from an unknown source, that these may carry disease, so hive them onto clean foundation, in a clean box and then isolate the swarm until two brood cycles have completed, which should show up any foulbrood disease present. If you think there may be disease present in the swarm, contact our bee inspectors and if you are

just plain unsure, ask one of the experienced YDBKA members, who will be only too happy to advise.

If you haven't met the Inspectors before, you will find them both most helpful and friendly. And grateful for cups of tea...

NB. The Inspectors' phone numbers are shown on page 2.

It may be interesting to hear about any early swarms – do let us know if you had any before mid-April which was the first one we heard of this year.

We hope for a good summer and lots of full supers. If you can, please join us for the YDBKA Apiary Visit at the Editor's apiary on 15th June. Alan will give lots of tips on maximizing honey production.

From the Chair

It is at this time of the year that the preparation work put in last year really begins to make a difference. You may have received warning emails from the Bee Unit about high levels of varroa in colonies inspected during the spring. With the mild winter some queens continued to lay and the varroa was able to take advantage of this, so their population will rise earlier than usual. If you managed to take preventative action last year and in January, then you should be ok. But if not, then do check your colonies before varroa takes over. Bee Base has advice on how to work out what action you need to take. Visit it on www.fera.defra.gov.uk and register with Bee Base if you haven't already done so.

Your committee invited Bob Hunter, Treasurer of Yorkshire Beekeepers Association (YBKA), to our Half Yearly meeting to talk about the advantages of YDBKA being a member of YBKA. Members who attended heard a range of views about either staying or leaving YBKA. In order to give all our members the

opportunity to both consider the issue and have a say at the AGM on the 16th October, we invite you to contact our Secretary, Andre Scruton, to express your views. A selection of these will be published. In the next edition of Combings, there will be a voting slip which you may post to Andre should you be unable to attend the AGM.

We have a new apiary at Monks Cross courtesy of John Lewis. It is to the left of the entrance to the Park and Ride, a pathway leads to it from the road. The apiary will be used by Beginners. John Lewis partners who are interested will be able to join our Beginners Course next year and J.L. will pay for them. The apiary looks raw at present because the 14 foot square site is fenced with a 6 foot paling. We have planted blackthorn whips around the outside to soften this and to add to security. By the time this edition of "Combings" goes to press, we shall have our first colony there.

Membership of the Association continues to grow; it stands at 152 at the last count, in May. There was a good number on the Beginners Theory Course this year and all but a few wanted to follow this with the Practical Course. There is already interest in next year's course and if you know of anyone who would like to join, suggest that they come to our meetings at Murton. Visitors are always welcome and we hope that we can sustain their interest through the winter. In the meantime, enjoy the summer and the fruits of your bees.

Paul Taylor, Chairman YDBKA

IMPORTANT!

If you read nothing else in "Combings" – please read this.

As you will have seen above in Paul Taylor's report, there is to be a vote at the AGM as to whether YDBKA is to stay within the wider Yorkshire Beekeepers Association (YBKA). I invited the

Committee to give the reasons behind the proposal for those of us who were not present at the half-yearly meeting, as yet this has not been forthcoming; I hope it will be available for the next issue of "Combings".

In order for the members of YDBKA to make this decision at the AGM, we must be in possession of the facts as to what the benefits of leaving YBKA would be. The benefits of staying in are clear enough and if nothing else, very many of us take advantage of the discounted price on wax foundation at the beginning of the year and more than recoup the £3 capitation fee via this channel.

However, my thanks to Tony Jefferson, Chairman of Yorkshire BKA, who did respond to my invitation to put forward his views on the benefits of YDBKA staying within YBKA.

Please read on:

The rise in capitation may have initiated the proposal to leave YBKA; it should be noted however it is not the YBKA capitation that has increased, it is only the BBKA element of the capitation which has increased.

I would advise careful thought on leaving YBKA, as the £3 capitation does provide significant benefits to members. It should also be noted that it is not automatic that York would be members of The British Beekeepers Association (BBKA), this would have to go to the Annual Delegates Meeting (ADM) and be voted on; and it could result in no public liability insurance for members of York and District BKA.

I am sure I speak for all the YBKA General Purpose Committee (GPC) when I say we would not like York to attempt to divorce itself from Yorkshire BKA.

Some of the benefits of being part of YBKA:

- Yorkshire is the largest area Association within BBKA, and this does carry us some "clout", such as getting first

chance of the Overseas speaker, following the BBKA Spring Convention;

- YBKA has reserves that enable us to purchase of the bulk foundation offer and the bulk foundation scheme discounts are only possible due to the sheer volume of wax that YBKA procure – this is done as a no margin basis to YBKA – the members get the direct benefits;
- the GPC work hard for all members of YBKA and do not claim any expenses for committee work;
- education and examinations are progressed for the benefit of all – a tremendous amount of effort goes into this and putting on good events / training;
- the BBKA exam module tutorials are well-received and are open to all YBKA members;
- Great Yorkshire Show and the YBKA honey show at the Countryside Live event at the Harrogate showground; the honey sold at these events takes a small margin to YBKA to top up funds. Any YBKA member is allowed to sell honey at these events (at a higher than normal price) which covers the margin and more to the seller! It is also a beekeepers shop window and opportunity to present beekeeping to the public etc.
- YBKA are progressing Ben Jones' PhD research project at the National Bee Unit – members donation monies are matched by YBKA (plus more);
- the recent Annual Convention was arranged for all members and it was a great event to build upon – the overseas speaker gives all YBKA members the chance to attend and listen to world class speakers;
- great networking opportunities;
- YBKA organise gift aid which is passed back to the districts.

In my view, working together with local Associations is the best way forward and I am sure that the benefits of being part of

Yorkshire BKA is worth the £3 element of the annual subscription.

Tony Jefferson

Chairman Yorkshire Beekeepers Association

Tony has offered to attend any YDBKA meeting, other commitments allowing. Would this be useful?

YDBKA Auction

Thanks to Nigel Davies for a report of the annual auction.

The auction took place despite the heavy rain for most of the time, although it was reasonably dry for the arrival of lots and viewing. Numbers of attendees seemed down on recent years. Twelve sellers brought 124 lots (of which seven were bees) to the auction, and although 67 people registered as buyers, only 34 actually bought anything.

There were no full colonies of bees for sale but there were some nucs, which went for prices ranging from £170 - £50.

Martin Ainsley acted as auctioneer for the day and managed to sell every lot that had been presented for sale.

Did you know?

“Tanging”, the act of banging metal objects (i.e. pans) together to make a clanging sound is reputed in folklore to induce flying swarms to settle. Despite the apparent success in this clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAHLe5L0hjc>

- it is unlikely to work! You would be better following the instructions for making an artificial swarm when you see definite signs of swarming preparation.

Artificial swarming; the Pagden method

This method requires an additional complete hive (i.e. floor, brood box, crown board and roof, complete with frames of foundation and/or drawn comb).

The keys to the success of the Pagden method are:

- Preparedness (having the necessary extra equipment ready in advance);
- Regular (7 day) inspections from April onwards to find any queen cells before the bees swarm;
- Having a marked queen to aid the finding and isolation of her;
- Timing - acting once the bees have begun to raise queen cells but before they swarm.

Method

Remove the roof, supers and queen excluder and place the existing hive (with floor and crown board) more than 1m to one side. It will help if you strap up the hive with a ratchet strap, especially if you are working alone.

Place a new floor and brood box (with frames of foundation and/or drawn comb) on the original site and remove two frames from the centre to create a gap.

Inspect the old brood box and find the queen. Place her on a frame with unsealed brood in the gap in the new box. Ensure there are no queen cells on this frame. Take care not to allow the queen to fall off during the transfer (use a marking cage to keep her in place if necessary). Close up the gap and add a

spare frame to one end. Replace the queen excluder, supers, crown board and roof.

Note: if the queen is on the only frame with queen cells or the best queen cells, move the queen to a different frame so these queen cells can be retained.

Return to the old colony with the eggs, brood and nurse bees and inspect the colony for queen cells. Select a healthy-looking, large queen cell and place this frame in the centre of the brood box. Carefully close up the gap and place two spare frames at the outer edges. Replace the crown board and roof.

At this stage the original colony has been artificially swarmed. That is, the old queen and flying bees (now in the new box) have been separated from the brood and nurse bees (in the old box). Any flying bees from the old box, will return to the old site and re-join the queen.

After 6 or 7 days, relocate the old brood-containing hive more than 1m to the other side of the new queen-containing hive. Newly flying foraging bees trying to return to the old hive will drift to the new hive, thus adding to the numbers of the artificial swarm.

How many queen cells to leave?

When it comes to leaving queen cells in the old brood box, this is down to a matter of opinion as to how many to leave. Some advocate leaving two – “an heir and a spare”. If two queens emerge together, then it is assumed that one will kill the other. In some cases this may work, yet in others it may not. Practical experience has shown that sometimes when such a colony is particularly large (despite losing the artificial swarm), then it is quite possible to lose a secondary swarm. Also, bear in mind that if two queens are left to “fight it out”, both may be damaged in the process, reducing the viability of the winner.

Other beekeepers may leave several queen cells in place believing that the bees will reduce the number to suit their colony size. This is potentially disastrous as it will probably lead to secondary swarming if there are too many bees remaining. The simplest route is to leave one unsealed (that way ensures there is a larva) large cell, taking care not to damage it.

Disinfecting honeycomb with ozone

US Department of Agriculture (USDA) research has shown that fumigating honeycombs with ozone gas can reduce pests, pathogens and pesticide levels. The two-part study was led by Rosalind James, an entomologist in the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) Pollinating Insect - Biology, Management, and Systematics Research Unit.

Pathogens such as chalkbrood fungus and the American foulbrood bacterium can persist for years on beekeeping equipment and in hives as dormant spores. They germinate when conditions are optimal and they attack the colony's most vulnerable members - the larvae. Furthermore, the waxworms of the greater wax moth feed on the honeycomb.

Methyl oxide and gamma irradiation are among treatments that have proven effective for disinfecting honeycomb, but these treatments can be costly and impractical. James noted that fumigation with ozone - a highly reactive state of oxygen - can be easily set up by beekeepers on their own.

The first part of the study, published in 2011 in the *Journal of Economic Entomology*, demonstrated that fumigating combs with ozone at concentrations of 215 to 430 parts per million (ppm) killed all life stages of the greater wax moth, depending on length of exposure. Ozone also destroyed spores of the

chalkbrood fungus after 24 to 36 hours using 1500 ppm, while the American foulbrood bacterium required longer exposure times, high humidity levels and an ozone concentration twice as high.



Interior view of the ozone generator that supplies ozone to the fumigation chambers used in the studies. Photo by Rosalind James.

Honeybees are also exposed to pesticides while visiting flowers that have been sprayed or when they are treated for parasitic mites, said James. In January 2013, the team published results from the second part of their study in the journal *Agricultural Science*, this time detailing ozone's breakdown of coumaphos, fluvalinate and several other pesticides that can accumulate in hives.

In experiments with glass vials containing residues of the pesticides, ozone exposures of 500 ppm for 10 to 20 h degraded 93 to 100% of coumaphos and 75 to 98% of fluvalinate. The ozone treatment also reduced or eliminated eight other common agricultural pesticides. Higher ozone concentrations and longer exposure times were required to

reduce pesticide concentrations in wax and honeycomb samples.

The treatments also degraded the pesticides better in new honeycombs (less than three years old) than in older ones (more than 10 years old). James noted, "There's something about the wax that can impede this breakdown, especially in a comb that's been re-used in hives for many years. It may be that organic materials build up inside the wax, and these materials adsorb or break down the ozone before it can react with the pesticides."

Beekeepers may be reluctant to discard honeycombs - even those which have become discoloured from years of use - because of the considerable effort bees put into making them. Ozone offers a solution for decontaminating honeycombs before re-use and can be carried out by beekeepers using commercially available equipment.

Credit: USDA/ARS

Rhododendron nectar - poisonous to both bees and man.

We are sometimes asked if any plants are poisonous to bees – yes!

Rhododendron honey remains toxic for only a very short period. Honey that is stored in the comb will have lost its toxicity before the first extraction. Also, the bees themselves will consume most if not all of this nectar and honey for brood rearing during the spring and early summer build up.

A study of the species that produce nectar toxic to bees was carried out on The Isle of Colonsay in the late 1950s. Nectar from different rhododendron species was collected, their toxins analysed and also fed to bees and injected into mice and cats.

The species found to be especially poisonous to all victims were *R. thomsonii*, *R. arboreum* and *R. pratti*.

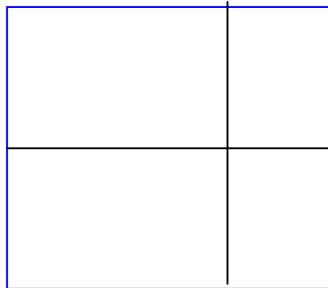
Fuller's Earth.

Thanks to John for some advice to bear in mind when moving colonies:

SECURING HIVES FOR TRAVELLING.

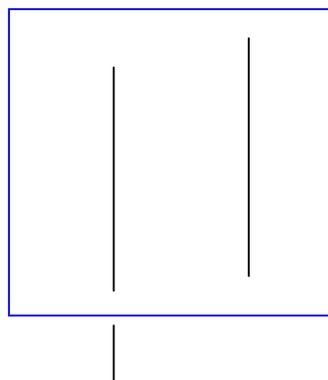
Two of us were moving hives to a crop, along a very bumpy track. One hive fell over, and, because it was only secured with a single strap, it twisted as it fell, and this allowed some bees to escape. Better then, when moving hives, to use two straps positioned off-centre, at 90° to each other.

Diagram A



Or (from the top)

Diagram B



Two straps parallel to each other will do equally as well.

Single straps can allow the boxes to twist, if they are jolted during transit. Two straps positioned 90° to each other, centrally, will also allow twisting, but not to the same degree.

Ratchet straps are probably the quickest to secure the hive, Span-sets can be a bit fiddly to secure, but once fast are as good as ratchet straps. Other ways of securing hives for travelling are toggle fasteners, lock slides and spring clips. All require screwing to woodwork and will require some exactitude when fitting. Yet another system is to use the large hive-staples which are 2 inches long with $\frac{3}{4}$ inch spikes. These can be used to secure the floor to the brood box, brood box to supers and supers to travelling screens, by hammering them into the woodwork at an angle. However, you can imagine the uproar amongst your bees after hammering as many as twelve staples into the hive woodwork! If used frequently the staples can damage woodwork.

I would also advise the use of travelling screens, particularly if moving long distances (say from York to the heather moors). Bees become agitated when they are closed in for travelling and they generate a lot of heat. If the day is hot, then a spray of water through the travelling screen will help to keep your bees cool. Bees can die if overheated [and wax can melt. Ed] so use the night or cooler part of the day for travelling.

When it comes to picking up a hive to move it, be careful – they are heavy! If moving hives only short distances within your apiary, then a hive barrow is useful. (One can be made from a metal garden barrow with the hopper removed). Over longer distances get some assistance and use a “sedan chair” type hive carrier, which, (although the bought ones are on the pricey side, one can be cobbled together quite easily*) make moving heavy hives so much easier.

*In their "Beekeeping in a Nutshell" series, Northern Bee Books do one - Number 55 – 'Make a Hive Carrier'. Cost £1.50 postage paid.

June gap 2014

Mike Marshall emailed Combings@gmail.com to share his thoughts on this year's "June gap", which, he fears, may arrive early due to the mild winter encouraging an early Oilseed Rape (OSR) flowering.

Each year after the OSR has finished, there is a gap in available forage for the bees, so when inspecting your colonies, remember every time to check for brood stages, stores of pollen and nectar/honey and space for colony expansion. Be prepared to feed sugar syrup if your bees are short of food or they may starve to death.

Top tip

If you have some old foundation which is still in the packaging, but looks pale and has lost its aroma; try gently warming a sheet with a hairdryer, it may well restore the colour and scent.

Beginners' course 2014

Adrian Burnside, YDBKA Education kindly sent this report on the 2014 intake.

There are a total of 31 beginners who have completed the theory course and 28 of those are continuing into the practical. They will be joined by two from previous years who didn't do the practical before as they had nowhere to keep bees, but have now.

The split for the practical course: 17 new beekeepers at the Bossall apiary with a further 13 at Murton.

From the Inspectors.

Winter losses have been low this year and colonies on the whole have built up rapidly with the early forage. My wife has over-wintered annuals in her garden which are now in full flower. We are seeing a rapid build-up in the number of varroa mites, which suggests to me that either winter treatments were missed because of colonies having brood throughout [the winter], or for the same reason they were ineffective. With this in mind we would advise the use of an approved varroacide if beekeepers feel it necessary. Remember not to use Thymol-based products with honey on the hives as it will taint the harvest.

At the moment numbers of disease finds in the area are low but we ask all beekeepers to familiarise themselves with the NBU literature and keep a look out. One more thing; we urge anyone who collects a swarm to hive it on foundation and not to feed for 3-4 days, this allows the bees to use up any honey by making wax. Honey can be a vector for foulbrood disease if it is stored in comb by a swarm.

Dhonn Atkinson, Seasonal Bee Inspector

Did you know?

After about six days of being fed and nurtured by the nurse bees, a worker bee larva is fully grown, feeding stops and the larva is capped over; it then stretches out and spins a cocoon using silk from its silk glands and begins its metamorphosis.

Egg to worker in 21 days!

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Agent for Thorne Beehives

Each edition of "Combings" is proof-read by non-beekeeper, Julie Bishop – thanks Julie! (She didn't proof-read that bit!)

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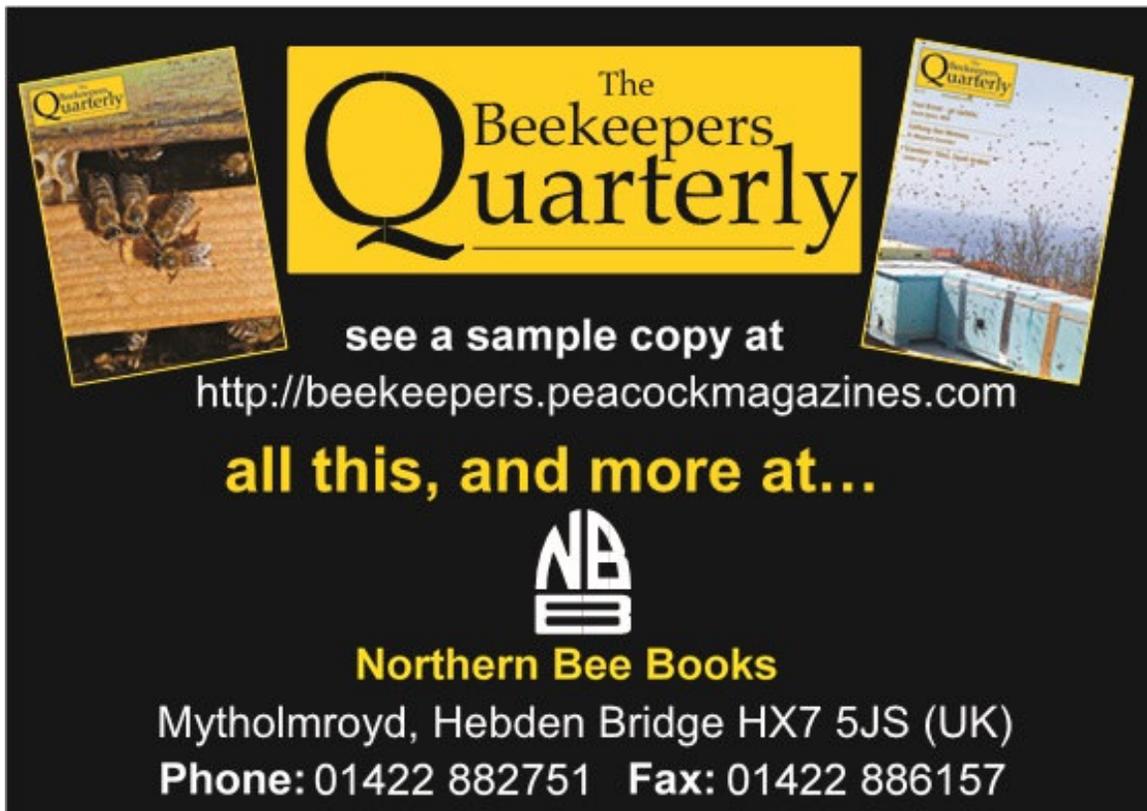
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