

Comblings

The newsletter of the York and District
Beekeepers Association.

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Winter 2017.



York and District Beekeepers 2017/18

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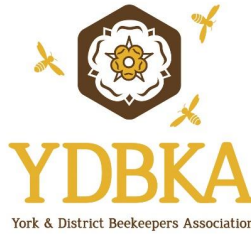
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"Combings" is the newsletter of the York & District Beekeepers Association. Views expressed in the newsletter are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Association as a whole or of the editor.

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

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

18th February 2018.

Two Eds.

Another year has almost reached its conclusion, our colonies should all be nicely tucked up and well-fed, and beekeepers can relax, content in the knowledge that the job is well done.

There is not much beekeeping to be done at this time of year, but don't forget about your bees! Remember to check the hives every couple of weeks as hives can be blown over, flooded or attacked by vermin. And check on the stores, feed fondant if you are in any doubt at all.

Use the quiet season to plan for next year, clean and repair where necessary and order any extra kit you may need, many of the equipment retailers hold winter sales.

The front cover of this edition shows "Rosette cappings", John Fuller's explanation this unusual occurrence can be found on page 8.

Have a very Happy Christmas and very best wishes for 2018.

Top tip

During winter, the old adage of "three feet or three miles" for relocating hives can be ignored and colonies can be moved within the immediate vicinity. If possible, choose a period of frosty weather so that the bees come out slowly and carefully. Do wear a beesuit though, as bees can, and do, still sting in winter!

Misleading statistics?

A much-circulated statistic from the BBKA is that the average yield per hive this season was in the order of 20-25 lbs.

Whilst this technically may be true, insofar as it was the product of dividing the reported honey yield by the number of hives of those responding to the survey, the figure hides a far more important reality.

Experienced beekeepers were reporting good, if not record, yields this year, with a productive start and end to the season, decent results on the heather and with only an occasional mid-season wobble, where some hives actually had to be fed.

The 25lb average is actually a reflection of the increase in new-ish beekeepers across the country. Their increasing representation in associations serves to reduce such averages, and demonstrates that basic beekeeping and honey production are two separate skills, both of which need to be practiced and improved over time

Honey Show 2017

Thanks to Peter Crosby for this account of the recent Honey Show.

The show attracted a larger number of entries than last year with the most popular class being the "Jar of Honey Labelled and Presented for Sale", with thirteen entries. Thirty-five members attended the evening, twenty-three making entries and ten members going away with an award of some kind.

The only class failing to find an entry was the novice class for "Honey Dark Clear".

We were very pleased once again to have Ivor Flatman from APHA as our show judge. With more entries, judging takes

longer of course, and while the judging took place, a 'bring and share' supper was served, followed by a very keenly fought quiz; the questions being set by John Thompson. The quiz required two further sets of five questions to separate the two teams which were equal after the main round. As the teams tied again after this, the prize (packs of super foundation) was split between the two teams.

Ivor commented on the improvement of the quality of the entries with many suitable for entry to competition at a higher level. Despite the improvement, he did note one or two entries of honey that displayed the "Yorkshire pound", i.e. a short measure, with the honey not reaching the bottom of the lid.

Ivor also commented on the classes for "Honey set – Not stirred" and "Soft set", as some of the entries were not suitable for the class in which they were entered, but would have done well in the other class.

Following Ivor's comments the committee will be reviewing the show and will be looking into giving clearer details for these classes as well as considering a separate class for "Creamed honey".

Finally the results;

The Alf Race Memorial Trophy. A good range of high quality entries is needed to take home this trophy for the entrant scoring the most points. Once again this was awarded to Robert Parnaby with an outstanding nine class wins. Kate Wallace and Alan Johnston tied for second place.

The John Fuller Trophy for the best block of wax over 1lb. was won by Alan Johnston

The David Gray Trophy for Best Honey in Show was awarded to Robert Parnaby for his jar of Honey for Sale

The best exhibit in show. Robert Parnaby for his sweet mead

Other Class winners were: Paul Appleton, Rob Coleman, Jennifer Holland, Alan Johnston, Vicki Leaf and Kate Wallace.

Other placings went to: Bruno Hanneman, Christine Hacker, and Lyndsay Stark.

Alan's advice:

Winter management

By the time you receive this magazine, brood rearing in colonies will be at a minimum, and will only start to pick up again in mid-January. Bees will not tend to form a tight cluster with the queen safely in its centre, until the first "proper" frosty nights.

The temperature in the inner core is dependent on the presence, or otherwise, of brood and the tightness of the cluster, but it's still a living unit, taking in food and secreting some waste products, and needs to be treated as such.

By now, hives should have mouseguards in place, 40+ pounds of stores, be weatherproof and strapped down if necessary. The milder the weather going in to winter, the more food the bees will consume, and the earlier you need to consider feeding fondant.

Opinion is divided about whether to feed below the crown board, using an eke to accommodate the fondant, or above the crown board with access through a feed hole. I prefer the former, and re-adjust the position of the fondant fortnightly to match any movement the cluster may have made. Any temporary loss of heat is more than made up for by knowing that the cluster won't miss the food.

Varroa is still an issue and whilst their reproduction is restricted to a significantly smaller number of brood cells, winter offers a chance to get even further on top of the problem by attacking the mites in their phoretic stage; whilst riding /hiding on the

bodies of the bees. The traditional oxalic acid has now largely been replaced by the licenced product Api-bioxal, and a demonstration of its use by Martin Ainsley, the Association's Apiary Manager, should be advised via email nearer the date. (The use of sublimation equipment, which turns oxalic acid crystals into a vapour for administration will be the subject of another article).

The degree of ventilation is also something which excites, or otherwise, the beekeeper in winter. The number of beekeepers who wrap bees in layers of polystyrene, old carpet or towels to the exclusion of all fresh air seem, thankfully, to be diminishing. A gentle ventilation, in through the mesh floor and out through some small opening in the crown board is probably best, removing the damp air produced by 12,000 or so bees. Avoid a serious draught however particularly in the spring, as it will retard brood rearing at a time when the colonies are trying to kick-start their expansion.

Fuller's Earth

Many thanks to John Fuller for this report on an unusual phenomenon known as Rosette cappings.

Amy Butler, Steve Goulden and I were inspecting their hive, we had found the queen and were looking through the rest of the frames at a leisurely pace, when I saw an unusual pattern of brood cappings [see picture on front cover, Ed.] and commented on it. Amy and Steve had noticed the pattern on a previous occasion.

I did some research but was unable to shed any light on the matter.

It was not until I showed the picture to Season Bee Inspector Nick Mitchell, and he suggested that the bees were recycling wax, that the "penny dropped". The bees had taken wax from

the points where cells meet, thus causing the dimples in the surface which are known as rosette cappings.

Although gaps can often be seen at the sides and bottoms of frames, the bees are not chewing it off and disposing of it, but are reusing it elsewhere. This probably happens when there are not enough young bees to secrete wax, or when there is not enough food stored or coming in through the front door.

Top Tip

Green woodpeckers are now becoming quite common in the local area. In winter when the supply of their insect food can be low, some of these birds learn how to drill into beehives. You can protect your hives with a guard of chicken wire to keep those long, strong beaks away from the hive sides. Plastic can also be used to protect hives, but may well cause problems with condensation forming.

NB. It is only the green woodpecker that will attack hives, not the black, white and red woodpeckers.



CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION VOTE RESULTS

The Special Meeting was held at YMOF at Murton on 22 November 2017, as planned, to vote on the new Constitution and other issues, as outlined in my email to members dated 25 October 2017. 19 members attended the meeting.

1. Whether to accept the proposed new 2017 Constitution to replace the 2008 Constitution

Result: Accepted unanimously

2. Extending the current financial year end from 30 June 2018 to 30th September 2018

Result: Accepted unanimously

3. Changing the financial year to run from 1 October one year to 30 September the following year, with effect from 1 October 2018

Result: Accepted unanimously

The next step will be to send the new 2017 Constitution to the Charity Commission for their acceptance, and to advise HMRC of the change to the financial year end. These actions will be undertaken in the next few days. As soon as we have approval from the Charity Commission we will advise you of this.

John C Thompson
Treasurer and Membership Secretary

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you haven't renewed your membership subscription yet, the deadline to do so is 31st December 2017 – after which date your membership will lapse.

A downloadable renewal form is available on our web site www.yorkbeekeepers.com and gives full details of the categories and how to pay.

John C Thompson
Membership Secretary and Treasurer

Honey and healing

The re-discovery of the use of honey to treat cuts and burns is well known, but here are a few rather wince-making remedies that you might not want to try at home.

A 4000 year old Egyptian papyrus recommends the following for a gaping wound. "Now after you have stitched it, you should bind fresh meat upon it the first day. If you find the stitching up of the wound is loose, draw it together and treat it with grease and honey every day until the patient recovers"

As a contraceptive, another Egyptian prescription combines the following – powdered crocodile faeces, salt petre and honey. If crocodile faeces are unobtainable the elephant dung may be substituted!

And finally, for those of us going a little thin on top, why not try a mixture of honey, red ochre and powdered alabaster – it can also be used to treat alopecia, dress wounds, abscesses, sores, and all skin conditions resulting from scurvy. Lovely!

Many thanks to Anthony Day for this tongue-in-cheek account of his season.

Why I must be an expert beekeeper

They say you learn by your mistakes, and I made so many in my seven years' beekeeping, that at the start of 2017 I was sure that I must be an expert. Not so. Here are some lessons I still had to learn.

1. Don't put shallow brood frames in a 14 x 12 brood box.

Well, when you buy a colony they never come on 14 x 12s, so what was I to do? The answer is to perform a shook swarm, but I didn't know that at the time. As the season progressed my bees made more and more brace comb and got angrier and angrier. It became almost impossible to manipulate frames, until came the day when I saw all those emergency cells and I realised I'd squashed the queen. After a few weeks there was no sign of brood and as it was nearing the end of the season I decided to unite the colony with another. Day by day I inched the hive across the apiary and finally completed the union. After a week I decided to remove the queen-less brood box but I thought I'd take out any frames of stores and give them to the remaining bees. That's when I found the brood. Whoops! There must have been a queen there all the time. All I can say is that my colony is now going through the winter on double 14 x 12 and I have no idea how many queens may be in there.

2. Find the lady.

I took part in the queen rearing course, which was really excellent, and I was very pleased to raise a mated queen. Next I had to make up a nucleus for her to live in. I took a frame of eggs out of my strongest hive, put it in a nuc and then realised (a) that frame might have had the queen on

it and (b) I needed sealed brood, not eggs, because the queen needed hatching bees to help her as soon as possible. So I put that frame back and got another couple, this time with sealed brood. There didn't seem to be many bees so I took out a few more frames and shook them into the nuc. Hang on – the queen might have been on them! Too late. I was told afterwards that you shake bees from honey supers into a nuc. The queen excluder means that the queen cannot be among them. All went well for a few weeks until laying workers revealed that my clumsy manipulations had crushed my beautiful queen.

3) And finally a top tip.

Don't put the smoker down on a neighbouring hive while working. Not if it's a poly hive.

Ah well, there's always next year - and I must be doing something right because my two-and-a-half hives gave me 42kg of honey.

BBKA exam success

Congratulations to Amy Butler and Steve Goulden who have passed the BBKA Basic exam.

Programme of Events 2018

You will have received in this edition of Combings an insert: on one side it has contact details for your committee, on the other a list of forthcoming events.

When I am putting together the events programme, I am looking for balance: a mix of practical and academic, a mix of subjects,

a mix of male and female speakers, and of their backgrounds. But most of all, what I am looking for is speakers who have a compendious knowledge of their subject, and an enthusiasm for communication.

Before too long I will be starting on the 2019 programme. If there is a topic you would like included, or an event that could be added, please do let me know and I will try to make it happen. Also, if you have heard a memorable speaker at a conference, show or neighbouring Association, please pass on their details and I will try and tempt them to York.

Finally, heartfelt thanks for those of you who are already scouting and have identified some gems: it is a huge help!

Janet Cole
Events organiser

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@thecottageholtby.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.

Hefting the hive

All beekeeping guides to winter care involve the mysterious practice of hefting hives to assess if there are still enough stores left for the bees to feed; there is much discussion on lifting each

side of the hive in turn or using a spring balance to check the weight. This is very exact, but in reality most beekeepers lift up the back of the hive and if it still feel good and heavy, then there is no action to be taken, but if it lifts easily, there are insufficient stores and fondant must be applied immediately.

Hefting hives every couple of weeks will give a good idea of the amount of stores being used and hopefully avoid the situation of finding too late, that stores have run out.

Parthenogenesis explained

By now, most of the drones will have been ejected from your colonies, cast out quite forcibly once mating requirements are complete. Their "conception", from an unfertilized egg, is known as parthenogenesis (virgin birth) and has some interesting consequences. Some members have asked for an explanation of this phenomenon, so here goes:

- My grandfather married my great-grandmother in 2013. She killed him.
- My father married my grandmother in 2015. She also killed him.
- I was born in May this year, my mother abandoned me.
- The queen I married in July is my mother's daughter, but is not my sister, and also killed me on our wedding day.
- The only female relative I ever saw was my mother.
- Yet 500,000 daughters will be born to me before 2019: a similar number of granddaughters and 4,000 sons will be produced before 2020.
- I am a drone. I am immortal!

Hope this helps. Merry Christmas! (Apologies to JH Armit)

Reader's Hives



Janet Cole visited Myatts Field Park in Camberwell
<http://www.myattsfieldspark.info/> and shared this image of
urban beekeeping.