

Fleet Beekeepers

Fleet Foraging - July 2010 Newsletter of the Fleet & District Beekeepers Association

Hello and welcome to our Summer 2010 newsletter that is packed with fantastic news.

To start with, we have been fortunate as an Association to be awarded two rather large grants of money recently. Some time ago Geoff and David Thurgood wrote an application for funding to Grassroots and thanks to their efforts and hard work, we were successful in being awarded £1,500 as a contribution to the costs of buying new training materials including a laptop computer, projector, microscopes and other materials. Even better, and almost out of the blue, we were also awarded £6,000 in a vote by the staff of SC Johnson & Co in Frimley as part of their "Giving Back" programme.

Being awarded these sums is very timely because as our membership grows rapidly, we need to obtain new equipment that can be used by our members such as a honey extractor (£900each!), uncapping trays etc.

Hiring Equipment

As mentioned previously, being a member of Fleet Beekeepers entitles you to hire the following key equipment that you might need. the Association provides the following equipment for hire through the shop;

- A motorised centrifugal honey extractor that takes 12 frames at a time.
- A heated cappings tray for separating honey and wax.
- An electric wax melter for reducing comb into beeswax.
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These are all essential tools when extracting honey. Most of these are kept at the Association store, but at this time of year they are usually passed directly between members one after the other. You can arrange to hire the above items of equipment for a small fee by sending an email to equipment@fleetbeekeepers.com or contacting Tony Holbeche at the Association shop on a Friday night.

Please note we are holding a training session on honey extraction at the Willis Hall on the 8th September, please feel free to come along and see how it should be done!

Improving our Image

Most of you have probably seen that our web site has an updated design including a new FBKA logo (shown above). We are keen to improve our image generally and as part of this we have printed business cards and some brochures for handing out to interested members of the public at the various events we attend during the year.

Polo Shirts

We are also planning to have some good quality, embroidered Polo shirts made up mainly for when we represent Fleet Beekeepers at various events, but it may well be that other members would like them too.

The example here is in white, but the current favourite colour is light blue. They will come in a whole range of sizes and can be ordered with long sleeves etc as required. At this stage, we just want to judge any interest., so please let Simon know if you might be interested in a shirt (cost around £10 each) and we can place a bulk order to reduce the overall costs.



Web-site changes

The Fleet Beekeepers web-site has recently undergone a lot of changes and improvements including adding a calendar to the site with a list of our upcoming meetings and other events. We also now have a blog on the website and would really welcome more contributions from other members. Please contact either Simon or Mark Bowyer via the website contact form for an account so you can add your own articles.

Tasks for August

August is a busy month for the beekeeper as you harvest any late honey crop before immediately treating the hive for varroa mites and then starting the preparation for winter.

Harvesting - It's decision time! - You either leave any sealed honey in the super for the bees to feed on over the winter or extract it and feed sugar syrup and/or fondant early September. As the Queen gradually stops laying eggs in the brood chamber, the workers will start to fill the vacant cells with honey gathered from late crops such as Ivy. If you use the Association extractor, please read the Instructions first - you will be liable for repairs if you damage it.

Varroa treatment - the message is, if you don't treat for Varroa, you will probably lose the hive over the winter or early Springtime. You have many treatment options, all well listed in issued leaflets and several of the options/medications available from the FBKA shop.

Most of us tend to use Thymol based ApiGuard treatments this time of year. Firstly, close up the hive by inserting a white board into the base and leave it for a day. Next day remove the tray carefully and use a magnifying glass (or a small child with sharp eyesight!) to count the number of mites, before returning it clean to the hive.

You then place one 50ml tray of ApiGuard on top of the brood frames flattened slightly so the bees can crawl onto the tray to remove the Thymol and distribute it round the hive as they do so. Leave it in for two weeks and then replace the process with another tray. Count the mite drop in the tray and divide the total by the number of days to get a daily drop rate.

You need to start this 4-week process by mid August at the latest otherwise the weather will be too cool for the Thymol to evaporate within the hive.

Consolidating Hives - You may need to combine two weak hives together to provide sufficient bees to generate enough heat to sustain the cluster over the winter months - but remember to feed them too. It is also a necessary practice if you discover a Q-less hive late in the season and therefore too late to generate a new queen.

Preparation for Autumn/Winter - several 'must do that' items - after treating for varroa.

1. Either buy or make restrictors for the hives to close down the entrance and help the bees repel wasps as well as mice and other undesirables.
2. Purchase some chicken wire or a roll of plastic fencing or black plastic wrapping to protect your hives later in the year from woodpeckers.
3. Clear undergrowth from around hives; complete the feeding schedule.

Training News

The good news is that we are planning to run another "Beekeeping for Beeginners" course next year over the course of seven weeks on Wednesday nights starting on the 16th of February 2011 at Elizabeth Hall in Hook. If you know of anyone keen to learn the art and science of beekeeping, please ask them to contact either Geoff or Simon either directly or through the contact form on the website (www.fleetbeekeepers.com).

As we plan next years beginners course, it would be very helpful for any 2010 trainees to give us feedback on the training you have received thus far, particularly if there should have been more emphasis on any specific area of the programme.

We will also be running an intermediate course for those 2010 trainees and others in the Association who wish to learn more advanced techniques such as varroa management, artificial swarms, colony merging and queen rearing etc. We will also help to prepare members to take the BBKA Basic Beekeepers Assessment in mid 2011. You will need to have kept bees for a year and should have kept records of your visits and observations of your bees during that time. (You have been keeping records, haven't you...???) The Basic Assessment lasts about an hour and is largely practical, judging your general bee-handling skills, along with your ability to spot and manage diseases amongst other things. More information here: http://www.britishbee.org.uk/files/syllabuses/basic_all.pdf

The even better news, is that thanks to the fantastic generosity of one of our members, Lisa Wilkinson, we will be creating a new and dedicated Fleet Beekeepers training apiary in an orchard in the grounds of her house near Hook this Autumn. This incredibly useful facility will enable us to run regular practical training courses throughout the beekeeping year and will have six hives on-site throughout the year laid out so that we can provide a good level of access to a group of trainees at the same time.

We will set up a couple of working days in the Autumn when we will need volunteers to help us create the apiary and install the small shed where we will keep bits of equipment on site. We will send out an e-mail with more details on this later.

Helping us to help you...

As Fleet Beekeepers continues to grow in numbers, we need more members to step up and assist those of us currently on the organising committee to run various aspects of the Association. So please let us know if you would like to assist us in any of the following areas;

Membership Secretary - We need someone to assist Geoff in managing various admin functions - ideally, it needs someone who is organized and methodical and who might even consider taking on the position at some time.

Bookkeeper - Do you have finance and accountancy skills? We need someone to help David our treasurer to manage our finances and our membership reports to BBKA.

Equipment Manager - We are adding more equipment to our list of items for hire this year and now we need someone with space in their garage or shed etc to both store and maintain the extractors as well as managing their hire out to various members throughout the year.

Website assistant - Simon has been extremely busy building and running the website and needs some assistance in maintaining the site as well as putting entries in our blog as well as possible creating a Facebook page for the Association. So if you have basic web skills or would like to contribute to our blog or Facebook page, please let us know.