



Forest Beekeeper

The monthly newsletter of the Epping Forest Beekeepers

March 2009

www.eppingforestbeekeepers.co.uk

Opening Times

Another bumper turnout for Jim McNeil's presentation on opening the hives in spring

It seems that Jim's presentation was both well-timed and of interest for beekeepers new and old. With attendance at last month's meetings up in the twenties, one member commented, "If it keeps going like this we'll have to look for an alternative venue – or at least start to bring in additional seating".



Jim's presentation was all about the preparations for opening the hives in spring, and what every beekeeper should be doing now to ensure a successful year ahead. We can't stress clearly enough, this is the most critical point in your beekeeping calendar.

Though the chances of your bees making it through this part of the year are really down to how well you prepared them before the winter closedown, there are some things you can do to increase your chances of starting off the year with a healthy and productive hive.

The most common cause for colonies failing at this time of the year is starvation, and this is most likely to occur once they start flying and using up additional energy. As there is virtually no nectar around now, they will be relying heavily on their stores in order to perform cleansing and pollen/water collecting flights. Jim pointed out that a colony without sufficient stores can collapse within 3-days!

Whilst most beekeepers avoid hive inspections at this time of the year, Jim suggested that you should take a very quick look inside to see how they are doing



at some time around the beginning of March. However, full inspections should not be carried out until the ambient temperature reaches about 15° C.

If you find that your colony is getting very low on stores Jim advised one of two courses of action; either feed with fondant or a strong mix of syrup via a contact feeder (at a ratio of 1-pint of water to 1lb of sugar). Feeding with syrup has the added benefit of enabling the bees to build up a healthy amount of comb. However, it can also induce robbing so it's a good idea to put floor boards into mesh floors if you have them. It's also worth remembering that, once you do start feeding, you must continue to do so until the nectar starts to flow. (see Topical Tip opposite for judging your level of stores!)

This is also an important time to remove your mouse guards. On warmer March days your bees will be out collecting pollen, which is a vital source of protein for feeding young bees. Mouse guards are notorious for stripping the bees of pollen as they enter the hive – which seems an awful shame after they have made all that effort to gather and return it.

If you do look in the hive and find a weak colony don't be tempted to unite it with a stronger one. It might be weak through disease, and therefore you might end up spreading that to an otherwise healthy colony. Try given them a feed!

Finally, when the weather allows for your first proper inspection of the year, remember Ted Hooper's 5Qs.

- Q1 – Do the bees have enough room?
- Q2 – Is the Queen present and laying?
- Q3 – Is the colony increasing in size?
- Q4 – Are there any signs of disease?
- Q5 – Are their sufficient stores?

Our sincere thanks to Jim for an extremely enlightening and entertaining evening. We would also like to thank all members for making the effort to attend. Without their participation it would be difficult for us to attract such competent speakers. We hope to see the same turnout this month. ♂

Next meeting

Our March meeting is going to be extremely interesting for new and old beekeepers – and we hope a little entertaining!

The subject is... Beekeeping Equipment. As our chairperson said, "If I had known that when I started I would not have bought that". How often do we say this? To help us all, members are asked to bring an item or items of equipment to the meeting and talk about the pros and cons of their usage. The item can be any size but should be of interest to other beekeepers whether they have been keeping bees for a number of years or are just beginning. Please also bring any items that you purchased but which you later found were not as useful as you supposed.

The meeting will take place on Thursday 19th March from 7.30pm at Chingford Horticultural Hall, Larkshall Road, Chingford. ♂

EFKA in the news

For those members who missed it, our Chairman, Helen Chadwick, appeared in an article in the local Guardian newspaper featuring a story on CCD.

A PDF copy is available by email from the Treasurer (email below) should any member wish to see it. ♂



Topical Tip

To check whether enough stores remain, hives can be 'hefted'. This is basically a means of estimating stores by the weight of the hive. Gently lift up the back of the hive. If it moves easily then it there isn't enough food; if you find it hard to lift then there will probably be enough. Judging this will become easier with experience, so you should practice throughout the year to get a feel for it. ♂

Contacts

Chairman - Helen Chadwick
Tel: 0208 523 5770
chairman@eppingforestbeekeepers.co.uk

Secretary - Jenny Johns
Tel: 020 8529 2844
secretary@eppingforestbeekeepers.co.uk

Treasurer - Ted Gradosielski
Tel: 01992 890 986
treasurer@eppingforestbeekeepers.co.uk

Newsletter & Website - Kevin Cook
Tel: 0208 532 1584
webmaster@eppingforestbeekeepers.co.uk