



WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2008

BOB'S BIT

"Drones hive not with me" said Shylock, (Act 1, Sc. V) and there was much discussion of drone-culling at the Brains Trust meeting last month. Whereas Shylock was being economical, the point of the drone culling exercise is that varroa prefer to breed in drone cells, which may be regarded as expendable.

The discussion centred on how and to what extent to perform culling, and the consensus was that using one or two brood frames a size smaller than the rest will yield a strip of natural comb full of drone brood. This can be cut off with a knife and examined at leisure. Put it in a bag and freeze to kill the brood, then dissect and count the percentage of pupae which are infested. You need to sample about 40 cells to get a statistically valid result.

The next question was how thoroughly to eliminate drone brood? Remember that due to the queen's promiscuity, the chance that any virgin you raise will mate with *your* drones is small, so there is no need to spare a badly infested colony. I have one stock whose genes are best kept out of the gene pool.

I have virtuously prepared a clean brood box, and populated it with foundation, with the intention of doing a Bailey frame

CHRISTMAS SUPPER & QUIZ



7.30 p.m. TUESDAY 9th
DECEMBER

Itchen Abbas Village Hall

*Delicious hot buffet by
'Astronomique'.*

*Warm Gluhwein (also soft
drinks) by Isabel and Alfred –*

*Heavily subsidised price @ £5
per person, **in advance.***

Spouses/partners welcome.

***Please bring your own cutlery
and glasses!***

*Places limited to 25 and only a
few left, so contact Pat a.s.a.p.*

change early in the spring. It is good for everything from chalk brood to noseema. I have tried it before, but the queen was very reluctant to move upstairs. Reading my study notes, (Yates) I find that I was doing it all wrong.

The queen and a frame of brood must be put upstairs, and then an excluder and a temporary entrance put on top of the old box, and the old entrance closed. For the visually challenged like me, who can't find a queen for dear life, the answer is to move all the frames with brood on them.

BRAINS TRUST Tuesday 11th November

Sixteen members had the benefit of the collective wisdom of the very expert panel comprising John Hanks, David Purchase, Bob Geary and Ron Broadway, under the chairmanship of Hugh Sykes.

The questions were wide-ranging covering the use of various acids for Varroa control, the usefulness of solidly granulated honey for winter feeding, the possible impact of drone culling on successful queen mating, feeder design, and the saleability of honeydew honey.

Space (and the editor's lack of shorthand!) mean that only a fraction of the advice imparted during the meeting, can be reported here. But some of the key points that were brought out by the panel are as follows.

Encouraging Varroa control results appear to have been achieved from treating with

oxalic acid, and David has trialled a formic acid pad on one colony which produced a good mite drop.

Solid honey is acceptable for winter feeding provided the bees can get to water on mild days so that they can break it down. David advised that a problem to be avoided with feeding sugar syrup is that the bees will store it and thereby leaving not much room for the queen to lay.

It doesn't matter whether supers left on for winter feeding are above or below the brood box.

Drone brood culling should not be done more than two or three times a year and then only small samples taken (see Bob's advice on page 1).

Chris Howcroft sought, and was given, advice on how to improve the performance of the feeder she had designed, by using mesh to help the bees climb in and out.



David Purchase, Bob and Ron review the design of Chris's prototype feeder.

Nosema prevention by the regular use of Fumidol is not recommended unless it is actually needed.

Since the meeting David Purchase has e-mailed us as follows:

"I enjoyed the informality, geniality and valuable exchanges of the recent Brains Trust. During a discussion on winter losses, I went off at a tangent in reply to a supplementary question about dealing with failing queens.

My answer was incomplete and potentially confusing, so here is my brief attempt at clarification.

Yes, four of my fourteen colonies came out of the winter with drone laying queens. Yes, I found three of the queens, culled and replaced them with frames of eggs and young larvae from colonies that had overwintered in good shape. No, I didn't mention that it is my practice to mark my queens using the universally recognised colour code.

Having consulted my records, the one queen that I failed to find was a late supersedure that I had seemingly neglected to mark. Marking does make life so much easier!

Most good textbooks describe the signs of drone laying queens and laying workers, so I won't repeat them here. In case I confused you, the method I described for dealing with the drone laying queen that I failed to find was the one that is sometimes recommended for dealing with laying workers:

- Move the hive to another point within the apiary, as far as possible from its original site
- Place an empty box on the original site
- Shake the bees from each frame onto a sheet on the ground
- Place the cleared frames in the new box on the original site
- If you don't have a spare box, leave the original in place, and remove and shake each frame individually at the furthest point

The theory is that a queen in lay will be too heavy to fly back to the hive and will be lost. The majority of workers will return. It seemed to work for me as the

colony quite happily accepted a frame of eggs and young larvae from a strong healthy colony, and raised a new queen. Remember to mark the introduced frame and destroy any queen cells that may be raised on the brood from the drone laying queen.

Queenless colonies with laying workers can be difficult to re-queen, or unite with a queen-right colony. Following the procedure described above will eliminate many of the laying workers (again, too heavy to fly). This will improve your chances of successfully re-queening, with either a frame of brood or an introduced queen. Again, it has worked for me. Alternatively, it would reduce the risk to the laying queen if you decided to unite the formerly drone laying colony with a queen-right colony.

I hope this clarifies what might have been a confusing discourse on my part, though please remember there are no guarantees in beekeeping!"

CANE SUGAR

Further to Pat's information in the November Newsletter, Lawrence Bilham has e-mailed to advise:-

"...all Tate and Lyle sugar is from cane and all Silver Spoon sugar comes from beet. Tate and Lyle is the UK's only cane sugar manufacturer.....find out more on www.tasteandsmile.co.uk. I personally would not choose to use icing sugar for making syrup as it includes an anti-caking agent, so it is not pure sugar, though the anti-caking is harmless to people and presumably to bees. I just checked to price online and Tate and Lyle caster sugar is 92p per kilo and their icing sugar is £1.22 per kilo."