

JUNE 2019 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our June newsletter. Hopefully in the future I shall try to get a regular newsletter out to you, to keep you all informed of how things are going.

If anybody would like to contribute a story, article or picture to the newsletter, please get in touch (contact link below) I hope you are all busy bees and checking on your colonies to see they have enough stores in June. I myself live in the highlands and the weather has been very mixed. With a little luck, all will settle down soon and we shall all be happy bees.

Can I also just put in a reminder that we have set up a facebook page for members only who wish to join /discuss breeding groups. This was discussed at the AGM, and requested. Please use this facility, dont be afraid to ask questions and join in with discussions, it is a closed page, and only SNHBS members can see it. You must however have a facebook account to use this.

[click here to join group](#)

Please read on and enjoy our few articles, you never know, I might be inundated with emails containing wonderful tales from your apiaries to put in the next newsletter!

[CONTACT Dawn Rigby](#)

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PUBLISHED ON [13/04/2019](#) by [SNHBS](#)

(<https://www.snhbs.scot/samma-fund-open-for-applications/>)

NATIVE COLONY RESCUE

In late September 2018 we received an urgent call for help from the BT Openreach engineers who received an unwelcome greeting from angry bees when they opened a large junction box set in the ground. Our first assessment confirmed a vigorous and well established colony of dark looking bees with good honey stores in an unusual and difficult location.

The ground area was an unused wild corner of surrounding gardens and one nearby resident informed us she had known the bees had been there quite a long time but that she had not wanted them disturbed and so had kept quiet. Bless her soul! There are good people out there caring for nature. The box space was about the same dimensions as a Maisemore nuc but with comb running across and the entrance was through a small hole in the heavy metal covering. About the same size as we would expect a swarm to take up residence in as Tom Seeley taught us but in completely the wrong place. Rather than 15 feet up a tree it was set into the ground. Obviously prone to dampness and almost impossible for workers to drag out dead or dying bees but nonetheless a well chosen spot. I was not aware of any nearby beekeepers but many years ago there were 2 or 3 older beekeepers who had kept bees within a mile. Most of the swarms around here are obviously Buckfast bees but this was decidedly different and more welcome to me. Not only was it well established and no bother according to local residents but they were dark and looked like a survivor stock. I confess I felt a twinge of sadness at disturbing them as they had survived very well without help from anyone and found their own niche. But BT had to remove the junction box as there were broadband problems in the whole area and the cost did not matter! So we completed our assessment and decided on what was required and made arrangements to return the following day as the worst to be expected from the weather was an intermittent light drizzle.

And so next day we arrived with Maisemore nuc box, frames, rubber bands, queen cage, smoker, spray. You name it we had everything. Neighbours were to stay indoors and we got into our bee suits expecting the worse. So we set to work. Soon we discovered that there was a heavy cable running through the combs at a right angle and this meant comb had to be divided midway and could not be completely cut out. This was getting to be seriously hard work with bees flying everywhere and our hands dripping with spilt honey. For the sake of the bees we quickly established a shared work pattern with Jeff working in the bowels of the junction box handing me the combs which were then held in the frames with thick rubber bands and adhering bees and placed in the poly nuc. Then a stroke of luck! The queen was spotted, caged and placed on the frame tops in the nuc safely out of harm's way. She was unmarked, of good size and dark in appearance. Spare messy comb with honey was placed in a bucket and covered to prevent bees drowning in honey. They certainly had enough stores to survive a winter if undisturbed.

The remaining bees were then smoked out of the cavity and the lid replaced and the old entrance blocked. The nuc with frames and most of the bees and caged queen was moved to stand on top of the junction box with the entrance open and made secure. All was then left to allow the bees to settle which they soon did. I was able to work without gloves and had only one sting from accidentally trapping a bee. There was no following or aggression shown by the bees and a couple of days later I was able to move the hive to the safety of my garden and contact a delighted BT manager with the news, "mission accomplished".

Postscript

A couple of days after the move when dribbling honey was cleaned and the new frames stabilised the queen was released and moved down safely. I then used additional frames to effectively 'double up' the nuc for winter and give more room for food storage from feeding as we had to remove nearly a bucketful of honeycomb. I was able to slip a mesh protected plastic tray under the nuc open floor mesh and after a few days realised there was a moderately high Varroa mite fall probably confirming that they had been managing alone for some time and may even had come from a feral colony. The weather remained mild so I treated with MAQS as wished only to use more 'natural' methods to assist the bees yet

allow them to do their own work in cleaning up. They were noticeably vigorous in their cleansing activities removing deformed bees; by the time I managed to examine the mites more closely this was 8 days after the insertion of a MAQS so I could not expect to see groomed mites only those killed by the treatment. However there were some with damaged limbs. Over the next few weeks there was a steady drop in mite counts as the colony went into winter. Eventually no more deformed bees appeared and the cluster remained deep down in the hive.

Above are some of the bees from this colony. They are dark and tomental bands are narrow but I estimate visually there are about 10% workers of a more hybridised appearance looking at the active bees around the colony on several occasions. This is supported by wing morphometry examination of a small number of bees.

On 31/12/18 I applied a single Varromed treatment and had a small rapidly reducing Varroa count. Now it is very much up to the bees themselves to see how they pull through. They are collecting pollen on some pretty cold days which is a good sign. The colony was acquired far too late in the season to assess them thoroughly so I eagerly await the time for the first spring examination. My message here is one of encouragement for those of us who cannot yet acquire native or near-native bees but desperately want go that way. Suitable bees can be found in the most unlikely circumstances and if they come from neglected or feral colonies that have managed to survive then they may well fulfil your wildest dreams.

John Durkacz

Jeff Baxter

MORE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE COLONY IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

Queen Rearing

Cheviot Breeding members, joined by East Lothian, Edinburgh & Peebles beekeepers, met to learn more about the raising of queens, led by Kate Atchley.

A lovely sunny day greeted the 8 participants of the Queen rearing course on the 7th June at Roxburgh in the Scottish Borders. After the initial meeting and greeting it was down to work. A quantity of young worker bees were required to make up mating nucs. Kate has a nifty way to get them off the super frames and into a bucket without too many escaping!

Collected young, drone-free bees to make up mating nucs

A short journey later and we were at Morebattle where we were guided through making up nucs for queens raised in a brood-free cell starter/finisher. Kate had followed Clive de Bruyn's method for this, though she wished she had shaken bees in from eight or nine brood frames rather than the six he suggests.

The queen cells for this had been prepared earlier using grafted larvae. An inspection 2 days prior had shown 8 queen cells had been raised but by our visit 3 had been torn down. It was unclear why this was the case but in future Kate agreed it would be safer to cage the cells when they are fully formed around day 10. Three of the cells went into double nucs using the frames and bees from the starter colony and the other two went into a double MiniPlus mating nuc. Jim Lindsay had brought a box of young bees with him which were used to supplement those we had collected earlier to fill up all the nucs.

Queen cell ready to go into nuc

After a picnic lunch we chatted about the importance of the lifecycle and role of

the workers in rearing queens, raising queen cells and methods of increase. Jim explained the Nicot system to us.

After lunch we practised using a cell punch to supply larvae to go into another starter colony. This had already been made up 8 days in advance by removing 1 frame with the queen on and leaving the other frames with brood in the box. It was checked and all Queen cells removed the day before the workshop. Cell punching entails removing a larvae of the correct age from the comb using the cell punch and placing it, with the punch and dowel, into a frame. A much better explanation can be found on Dave Cushman's website <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/cellpunch.html>

Cell punching of day-old larvae

At first it felt very fiddly but everyone soon got the hang of it. The frame containing the punched larvae was lowered into the centre of the starter colony.

Time ran away during the afternoon and we were unable to visit the mating apiaries in the Hownam Valley.

Many thanks must go to Kate who provided us with a very informative and hands-on day. I came away with lots to think about and filled with enthusiasm.

By Deborah Mackay

Photos by Justine Swinney & Andrew Mossop

SNHBS at the ROYAL HIGHLAND SHOW 20 - 23 June 2019

<https://www.snhbs.scot/snhbs-at-the-royal-highland-show-june-2019/>

Celebrating its 179th year, The Royal Highland Show is one of Scotland's most iconic events, showcasing the very best of farming food and rural life. A great day out for everyone of all ages, get up close to the country's top quality livestock,

taste exceptional food & drink and experience rural living at its most vibrant. [The Scottish Beekeepers Association](#) have very kindly allowed us to have a small area in the main honey tent this year. We shall be there with information and enthusiasm. Please come and say hello.

AND FINALLY.....

You may have noticed the honey bee logo in between articles, this was very kindly designed for us by Hannah Sharp, daughter of Alastair Sharp (Trustee). We shall be using this for our sticker design at the Royal Highland Show. We would like to thank Hannah for her time and effort in doing this.

Thank you.

SNHBS