

NLB

Annual Review 2010



Photo Farokh Khoroshi

Chairman's Report 2010

This is my 10th and last year as Chairman. I took over from Robert Carpenter Turner who had raised the association from near collapse. Membership in 1985 was a mere 17 and Robert increased this to over a 100 by 2001. We now have 170 and had to suspend our membership early in the year to avoid over-expansion!! Most other associations have had similar problems.

Throughout my time as Chairman I have had great support from the committee and thank them for their hard work, time and commitment. Liz Jack become Secretary at the same time as I took office and I would particularly like to thank her for her loyal support and sound advice. She has been there to help me through many taxing times, to bounce ideas off and to comment on many aspects of our work.

Educating beginners in the UK is widely practiced and we have strived to improve our teaching skills. The use of an overhead projector has now been replaced with powerpoint and Claire Lehain has achieved a City & Guilds certificate in "Training the trainers". This was sponsored by the National Bee Unit. We have every intention next year to increase the skills of established beekeepers to widen their knowledge and ensure that good beekeeping husbandry is maintained in our urban environment. Half a dozen members took the Basic Assessment test and one the Junior Assessment (see photo). Well done to all of them for passing and getting their names in the BBKA News.



Photo Alex Schajer

Ilana Schajer receiving her Junior Certificate

Keeping up-to-date is really important for all of us and I do recommend that you take either *"BeeCraft"* or *"Beekeeper's Quarterly"* and study them, together with the *"BBKA News"* to become familiar with all aspects and new ideas of our craft. Bee behaviour is definitely changing; Queens seem to fail sooner and colonies swarm more often than a few years ago. Research is taking place at the NBU and at many universities in the UK, as well as most EU countries and the States. Many reports feature in these magazines, enabling you to respond positively when friends ask about the "plight of the bee".

Our "Garden Party" was held in Malcolm & Kate's long Tufnell Park garden with its apiary at the far end protected by a pergola of climbing roses. The local fox thought twice about joining us, before disappearing next door! A friendly afternoon with fantastic tea. The other social event was our Honey Show and Pot Luck Supper at the Highgate Society. It was a shame that we had to limit numbers for this, as several members were disappointed not to be able to come. This was the 5th time we have held the supper and it is a really lovely occasion with a delightful selection of food and, if course, interesting company. In both cases, a big thank you to those involved in organising these events.



Photo Farokh Khorrooshi

One very positive event this year was the redesign of our website. Research was undertaken on ways of doing this and eventually we accepted a great offer from Bob Jack to recreate the site and be our web master. I hope that you have visited the site and explored the various sections, to inform you about us and beekeeping in London. Please visit it regularly as we will be up-dating the Newsletters and News every month or so, with the latest information, locally and Nationally. We thank Martin Stevenson for designing the original site and keeping it going for the last 15 years or so.

I wish you a very Happy New Year and a good beekeeping season to come.

Apiary report 2010

After a long and cold winter the Association's colonies were halved in number and in order to service the 'adopt a hive' groups for the coming season, John Hauxwell kindly donated some nucs. The student groups had to double up for their Sunday inspections for the first time ever and this probably led to the reduction in numbers attending the fortnightly morning sessions. Johan bought in some New Zealand queens but they did not do as well as hoped.

The hot dry spell in mid June raised hopes for a good honey harvest but dry conditions do not always help the foraging bee as we found out when Angela led a foraging walk around the Heath. Clover was in bloom everywhere but not a bee could be seen on the open flowers because clover only gives forth nectar when conditions are cool. Angela and Claire organised the sowing of sunflower seed in The Ecology field which Richard Payne broadcast for us and despite a Mexican Wave of squirrels whenever we appeared to check growth, many germinated and our bees and many other insects enjoyed the harvest. We hope to do more this year.

Because of the lack of spare strong colonies on the Apiary we decided to abandon the queen rearing programme this year but we had a good early harvest of honey and all the student groups worked hard to extract and bottle it, ready for the summer festivals - thanks everyone who helped in the shed night after night!

"*Api life Var*" was used as a varroa treatment this year and "*Fumidil B*" applied against the two Nosema diseases. Oxalic acid was used in December and in spring the hives will be treated with

Formic acid. Johan plans to shook swarm the colonies at the beginning of the new season. Sadly EFB is in the Muswell Hill area and the apiary falls within the 3 kilometre parameter. We are fighting on all fronts!

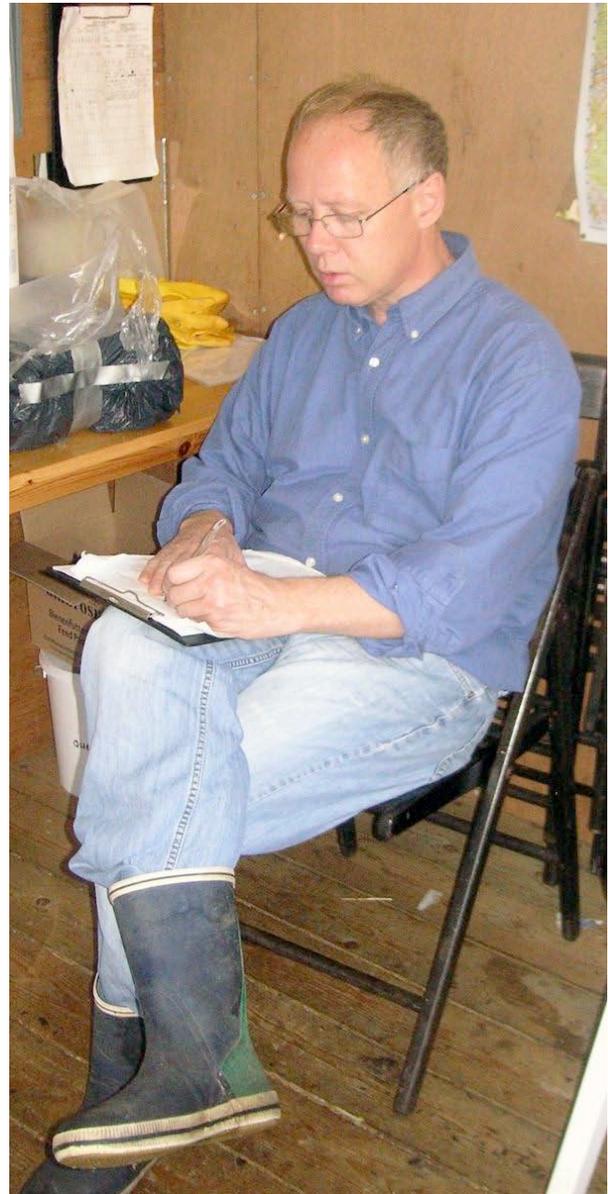


Photo Simon Hewitt

We would like to thank all those who have helped so diligently on Thursdays, and those who have kept the scholarship hives producing. Many thanks too, to all the tutors on Sunday mornings who gave their time to help the novice beekeepers.

We all wish you a better season in the coming year and look forward to seeing old and new faces on the apiary at the Shed party in the Spring.

Johan, Angela and Claire.



Photo Farokh Khorrooshi

Honey Show 2010

On September 15th the association's honey show, again in tandem with a pot-luck-dinner organized by Liz Jack, took place in the Highgate Society's Hall. This event was one of the highlights of NLB's year.

A total of 15 members submitted 31 show entries. These were judged by Moyra Davidson, BBKA senior show judge, for the fifth time in succession. It is immensely encouraging that over this period she has found a steady improvement in standards. We owe her a debt of appreciation for staying with our relatively small show and taking trouble to explain the reasons for each entrant's success or failure to achieve an award. This year it was good to find several new names amongst the entrants and Chavi Schneck, age 11, is to be congratulated upon being one of our prize winners. Congratulations are also due to Malcolm Balston who won the Challenge Cup for best honey in the show, the Marsh Cup for wax and the Riley Cup for a frame for extraction. John Hauxwell, winner of these three cups in 2009, promises that there will be stiff competition for these awards in 2011!

The show and pot-luck-dinner have now almost outgrown the space available at our familiar venue, the Highgate Society Hall, and Liz Jack has already started to explore alternatives to provide more seating places for dinner and a better opportunity for show exhibits to be seen by everyone. *(If you have any suggestions for a larger venue, let us know)*

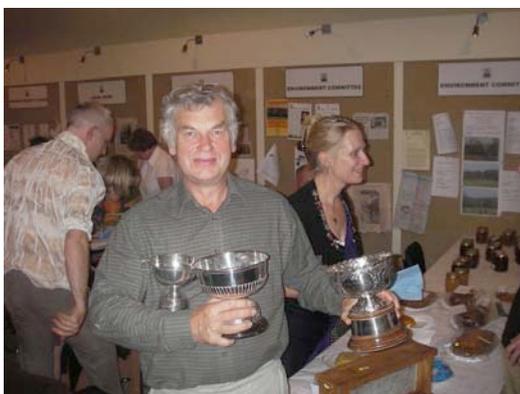


Photo Bob Jack

The following is the list of prize winners:

Light honey: 1st A.Dougall, 2nd H. & M. Saunders, 3rd J.Schneck, Comm (C.) N.Faith.

Medium honey: 1st M.Balston, 2nd N.Faith, 3rd H.Saunders & M.Leigh, VHC. J.Schneck, (C.) H.J.Stewart.

Dark honey: (C) A.Dougall.

Granulated or soft set honey: 3rd M.Balston.

Cake: 1st. A.Kahane, 2nd M.Balston, 3rd H.J.Stewart, (C) M.Ogle.

Beeswax: 1st: M.Balston, 2nd: N.Faith, (C) J.Schneck.

Comb or section: 2nd: M.Balston.

Frame for Extraction: 1st M. Balston

Interesting or instructive: 1st: N.Faith, 2nd S.Hewitt, 3rd E. de Witt, VHC B.Haddon, HC J.Kember.

Photograph(s): 1st M.Balston, 2nd C. Schneck, 3rd: R. Dow, VHC F. Kharouski.

To all of you members out there: come on! Make the effort to enter next year and enjoy a splendid evening with fellow NLB members.

Mary Ogle



A participants' report on London's PlanBee Project

The Co-operative Plan Bee Project was extended to London this year at Camley Street Natural Park near King's Cross station.

Around 20 would-be-beekeepers were selected from hundreds of applicants. The training was delivered by Brian McCallum of Urban Bees in weekly group sessions. The trainees were provided with free beekeeping equipment, including hives, suits and bees, fully financed by the ***Co-Operative Initiative***.

Each training session lasted between 2 and 3 hours and included theoretical information as well as hands on practical beekeeping sessions in the Camley Street apiary. The trainees own bees arrived around 6 weeks into the training, which allowed enough time for us to develop some competence before having to manage a hive on our own.

The training sessions, though less frequent now, will continue till the beginning of the next beekeeping season to cover mid-winter feeding, disease treatment and prevention, also swarm management. Additional peer and expert support is available through the PlanBee Blog and website.

For us it is an invaluable learning opportunity, which allowed us to benefit from high quality tuition and great group experience, as well as giving us an opportunity to set up our own first beehive, whilst helping us to develop real confidence as beekeepers. We thank Brian, the Co-operative and all the people involved in this project.

Gianna Lapini Vega and Daniel Kennedy

An advantage being small?

For a 6'5" tall man it takes quite a reversal to think smaller can be better. In this article I will describe my journey to;

Breed smaller bees

Hoping to gain an edge to keep Varroa at bay.

A few years ago I researched on the internet for beekeepers who bred smaller bees and claimed to control Varroa without any additional treatment, although all of them were keeping large numbers of colonies. I had no illusions that my three hives would achieve a life without treatments, but I hoped that smaller bees would give me an advantage against the mites.

According to old records, bees in Europe were smaller and only 110 years ago, when given larger foundation, became bigger. The idea was that larger bees have a longer tongue and can reach deeper into flowers for nectar, foraging greater varieties of flowers and producing more honey.

Cell sizes can vary if bees are creating cells without foundation. However, native Asian bees, which tolerate Varroa, are breeding in cells of 4.8 - 4.9mm. Another important factor of their tolerance of Varroa is their hygienic behaviour, meaning that the size of the cell is not the only contributor to mite tolerance. Our 'modern' bees are not able to adjust to 4.9mm foundation without an intermediate stage. Simply, they have lost the skill over time.



Photo Michael Vandrey

My journey started in 2006 when I purchased 6kg of 5.1mm foundation sheets. 5.1mm is required as the intermediate size before getting used to 4.9mm cells. Normal foundation is 5.5mm in cell diameter. At the time I only had one hive, increasing to four by the end of the season. I purchased Buckfast queens, because Brother Adam used queens from various geographical sources with different characteristics and perhaps sizes. But any other familiar bee in Europe should be suitable as well. Initially, the bees weren't able to draw 5.1mm foundation at all. Cell diameters were all over the place. Some improvement was visible at the end of the season. I stopped giving normal sized foundation. In the next year I added the first 4.9mm foundation as the 5.1mm frames were improving. I produce my own 4.9mm foundation with a Silicon foundation

press, using only my own wax. (Be warned you need a lot of wax for this method.)

Needless to say, the initial drawing of 4.9mm foundation also looked bad. In this year some of my bees gained the skill to create 5.1mm cells at an acceptable standard. But the goal of 4.9mm cells remained illusive. Now the bad news; with cells that small, bought queens are not suitable, leaving only one option, to breed my own and with only three hives it can be a challenge. I now believe that local queens are better suited in the long term. My colonies, headed by my own bred queens, still found great difficulty mastering the ability to adapt to smaller cells.

My confidence started to fade as I achieved the opposite when counting huge numbers of mites and detecting typical signs of Varroa damage i.e. Deformed Wing Virus. I became ruthless and kept only strong colonies, eliminating very weak ones in the autumn.

To the despair of my wife, I built more hives so that I had a spare for each of the three active colonies. Introducing the artificial swarm to control the swarming season gave me the breakthrough. The artificial swarms could now built 4.9mm cells, holding three 5.1mm and six 4.9mm foundation sheets, the 5.1mm in the middle. These days only 4.9mm sheets are given. The absence of larger cells or foundation probably helps this development, with the help of the urge to create quickly new breeding space. Interestingly enough, bees from the same old queen, who couldn't create small cells in their old hive are gaining the skill in the artificial swarm.

So where am I now at the end of the 2010 season.

1. All of my three queens are laying eggs in 4.9mm cells.
2. I induce swarming usually by the end of May.
3. I treated for the last time with oxalic acid in the first week of January 2010; I might regret no further treatment bitterly.
4. After a very low Varroa count at the end of August, I decided against the usual formic acid treatment.
5. I removed the first sealed brood frame of the artificial swarm and destroyed the brood, revealing always lots of mites.

I don't expect that my smaller bees will be capable of coping with the mites entirely without any treatment. All of my queens are homebred for the last three years and I replace two queens every summer.

This year I couldn't detect symptoms of Varroa damage, which could be a false assumption. As we know, no season is the same.

Michael Vandrey

30th November 2010

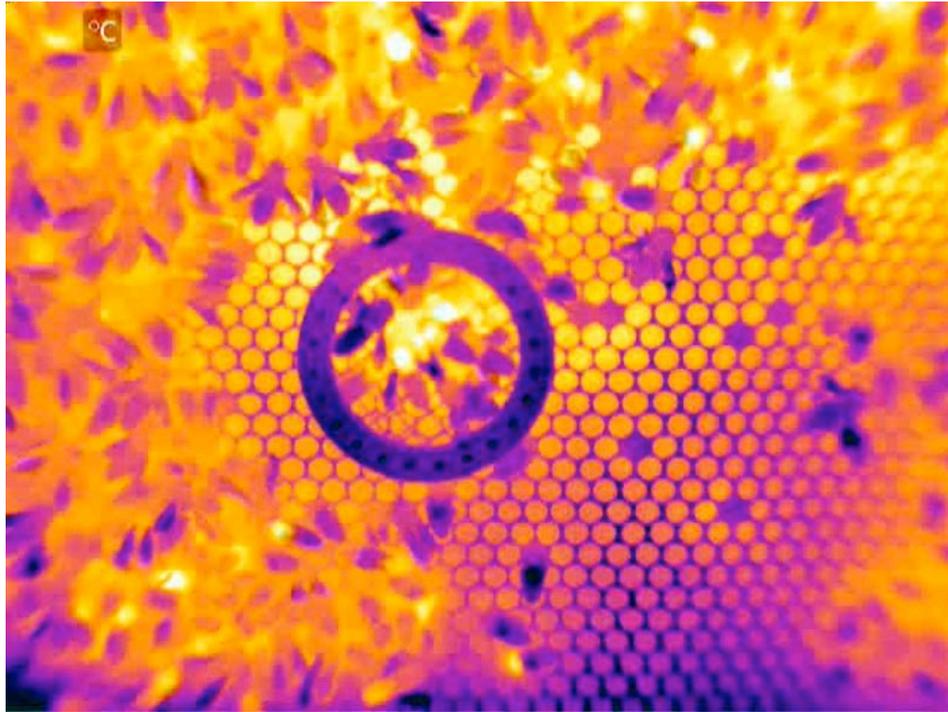


Photo Farokh Khorrooshi

Thermal secrets of a Hive

Early last summer Farokh used a thermal imaging camera to try out on a hive. He will be showing and discussing the surprising results during the season.

Federation Of Middlesex Beekeeping Associations BEEKEEPING DAY

Saturday 26th February 2011

To find out all the information – venue + content

Go to our website

www.beekeeping.org.uk

The “Welcome” page has “Diary Dates” click and all will be revealed

There will be 3 very interesting lectures and lunch

£6 + lunch extra

At

Holy Trinity Church Hall
Medway Drive, Perivale UB6 8LN

Put this in your diary NOW