

# **WAX LYRICAL**

## **From The Chair**

I am pleased to welcome several new members to Ryedale Beeping Association including a number from the 2015 beginners course.

When you join Ryedale Beekeepers as a full or partner member, you automatically become a member of Yorkshire Beekeepers Association (YBKA) and, through them, the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA). We rely on these organisations to represent us on a national scale but because beekeepers are all different, there is a wide diversity of views on what they should and should not be doing, establishing a consensus is a challenge.

The obvious benefits of membership of BBKA are public and product liability insurance, much of the membership fee is for this, and its role in education, e.g. the ARK project described on another page. They also have an unseen role representing beekeepers' interests to Government, the media and other bodies. You can join BBKA as an individual but YBKA is a corporate member representing the

largest group of individual beekeepers in BBKA. If any RBKA member feels strongly that issues need addressing, then the route is to put those concerns to Yorkshire and convince it to take them up nationally.

YBKA also provides member services such as bulk purchasing and arranges beekeeping meetings although, in recent years, our members have often supported them.

Many beekeepers consider that the both

BBKA and YBKA could and should be improved but few are prepared to take on the challenge. It can be a thankless task. Stephen Muchow, Secretary of Scarborough BKA, is one of the few and has recently been co-opted into YBKA hierarchy. Thank you Stephen.

Stephen will be our link into YBKA and has demonstrated his commitment is by joining RBKA as an Associate. We will give Stephen an opportunity to tell everyone what is happening and ask questions at future meetings.



*Jack Wilford preparing to graft a larvae at the apiary meeting on 10 May 2015*

Keith Hall

## What's a swarm worth?

"A swarm in May is worth a load of hay  
A swarm in June is worth a silver spoon  
A swarm in July is not worth a fly"

I first heard this rhyme from a farmer in the North York Moors many years ago. There is certainly a basis of fact from the eye of a beekeeper. A May swarm will build up and give a bigger crop of honey than a June swarm but a July swarm would have little time to get a foraging force and is of little value.

But this is not a Yorkshire saying, the rhyme is widely known across the British Isles with some regional variations in value:

A swarm in May is worth:

"a cow and calf that day" in Ireland or

" a Yow and Lamb that day" in Cornwall.

A July swarm "is not worth a butterfly" in Sussex and Ireland

Interesting to see the Yorkshire dialect word for ewe (Yow) is also used in Cornwall

Nor is the rhyme not confined to the British Isles, there are versions in French as well.

"Jeton Avril Vaut une brebis

Jeton de Mai Vaut une vache a lait

Jeton de juin Vaut un boisseau de grain"

The earlier swarming season in France requires the value for an April swarm.

The French seem to set the value of a swarm even earlier in the old saying that "If Christmas is mild and muddy, every swarm is worth a cow". Explain the logic for that?

In Wales around 950AD, Hywel the Good put cash values on swarms:

"Old Stock	24 pence
first swarm	16 pence
Second swarm	12 pence
Third swarm	8 pence
August swarm	4 pence "

We would call a second swarm a cast but Hywel called it a Bull or Stag swarm. The August warm was a Wing swarm. He does not give a name for the third swarm, a second cast, but it was called a cote and in the midlands a spindle.

But the best name for a swarm I have come across is Sīgewif, an old English word translating roughly as Victory Women.

## The season so far

We are now in the middle of May. From inspections to date, Adrian Wilford, reckons the bees are about 2 to 3 weeks behind last year. The first swarms are just being reported. These will be colonies that were well advanced in by the end of April and then

switched to swarming mode when the weather turned at the beginning of May. Oil seed rape is half gone but there is little to show for it in many hives.

To date no disease problems have been identified locally.

## Equipment

RBKA has a few items of equipment that are available for members to borrow:

### **Honey extractor**

We have been given a small manual extractor and honey bucket suitable for use if you have only a few frames to extract

### **Honey grading glasses**

If you intend showing honey, these are essential to ensure that you enter your honey in the right class, light medium or dark, or else it will be rejected

### **Honey refractometer**

This measures the moisture content of honey and can be used to ensure that it is low enough for safe storage and sale

Please contact Rick Colman if you would like to borrow the extractor and Keith Hall for the other items.

# A Tale Of Lessons Learnt – Episode 3

## Reflections On Our First Year As Ryedale Beekeepers

As spring turned to early summer, we took off the first frames of honey which were only partly capped, heeding warnings that it must be extracted without delay to avoid granulation in the comb from oil seed rape. Despite concern at the potential messy nature of extracting, it proved easier than expected and in no time we had 40lb of honey filtered and sitting in a bucket. Doubt however started to grow in our minds. Had the honey been ripe enough? Had the bees been foraging on oil seed rape at all? Was the moisture content too high, risking fermentation?



Considered wisdom was that the moisture had to be below 20% but how to know? A hurried order was placed on eBay for a refractometer but this would take a month to arrive from China.

Doubts continued to grow until I convinced myself that the extracted honey must have too high a water content and was likely to ferment. The only route to address this, bar heating, was to organize a dehumidifier and spread out the honey in a hastily constructed small tent.

After 3 days of repeated stirring and emptying of water, the refractometer arrived, far earlier than expected. Although the calibration oil was spilt in transit, we found extra virgin olive oil could be used instead. Following this process, we anxiously checked the extracted dehumidified honey, finding it to have 17% water. The irony was that an untouched sample from the same extraction gave exactly the same reading. The whole dehumidifying process had been totally unnecessary.

**Lesson 8 - Don't overcomplicate things.**

Our final home goal resulted from discovering, during a practical RBKA session at our hives with the improvers group, that the Varroa level was much higher than we had believed. Keith demonstrated how to uncap drone brood revealing many mites. A quick check using the Beebase FERA web site calculator confirmed our worst fears. The Varroa level was critical and immediate treatment was recommended.

With a strong nectar flow on, we believed our only option was to use MAQS again, despite reservations from the previous year. The manufacturer's website was checked again and this time, increased ventilation was provided for the first few days. Bearding was less and fewer bees were found dead outside the hive.

Imagine our horror however when we opened the hives at the next opportunity to find no eggs, no Queens and 30 + capped Queen Cells in each hive. After initial shock and a degree of panic, we closed the hives and consulted the books again.



We decided to split both hives to create 4 colonies and leave only a single Queen Cell in each, to maximize the chances of successfully raising new virgin queens.

More kit was hastily ordered and another disturbed night ensued. The next day, I managed to discuss the disaster at one of the monthly RBKA meets where Adrian Wilford thought it likely the Queens had been balled

and killed by the workers. There was nothing to do but wait and hope for the best.

After nearly a year, the prospect of losing our bees was worrying to say the least. By chance, several days later, I was near the hives when I noticed the bees were much louder than normal and looked up to see my first (and no doubt not the last) swarm departing. Rushing to get suitable footwear, the swarm flew off and despite best efforts, was never seen again.



When we finally opened the hives, we found 2 with eggs, soon to be joined by a third but in this hive; we also found x4 hatched Queen Cells. In our anxiety and haste, we had failed to spot all the Queen Cells in one hive with the resultant loss of a swarm and one or two casts, greatly reducing the number of bees remaining.

*This is the final episode in a candid tale of lessons learnt. I know many have enjoyed reading it probably because, like me, it has reminded you of your own early mistakes.*  
*Thank you Ann and Bruce*

### **Lesson 9 - Shake all the bees off every frame when having to check for Queen Cells.**

As the days went by there were no signs of eggs in the 4<sup>th</sup> hive and in desperation, we gave it a precious frame of eggs and larvae from one of the remaining hives. No attempt was made to raise emergency Queen Cells and the eggs and larvae were left to perish. One week later, an inspection revealed multiple eggs in single cells, laid in a random

pattern. Keith confirmed we had laying workers leaving no choice but to empty the bees out some distance away and let nature take its course.

### **Lesson 10 - Beekeeping can be quite barbaric at times.**

Six weeks on, we have managed to take a hive up to the Moors and wait to see if, despite the setbacks and rain, we will harvest any heather honey this year. We thought about combining the 2 weaker colonies but having got an eke ready with newspaper, in the end we couldn't bring ourselves to kill a young queen that was just starting to build up a new colony. Clearly we have let sentimentality influence our decision-making but it has been an eventful first year during which we have invested a lot of emotion as well as time.

One year on, I can't help but reflect that if we had simply left the bees to get on with things, they might have fared rather better without our 'help'. You can read as many books as you like but at the end of the day, beekeeping is essentially a practical business

with no substitute for experience.

We would like to thank everyone for their support; David who introduced us to this fascinating world and has regularly kept in touch to ensure we, or more to the point our bees, continue to thrive; Joe for giving up his time to deliver

the evening lecture program and Keith for his informative practical sessions and willingness to provide help and support during this steep learning curve. Now as the whole cycle starts over again, we can reflect on the highs and lows of our first year. No doubt we'll face a whole host of new challenges next year but hopefully next time around, we'll be responsible for fewer of them.

### **Lesson 11 - We still have a lot to learn !**

Anne & Bruce Nelson

## **RBKA 2015 Basic beekeeping Course**

The 2015 basic beekeeping course run by Rhona Sutherland attracted 16 participants and also some aspiring younger beekeepers. As this edition of Wax Lyrical goes to press, we are introducing the participants to bees

through practical sessions and helping those who feel ready to acquire their own bees.

Our thanks to Rhona Sutherland for running the course and John for administrative support (not least making the tea).

## BBKA ARK Project



Newer beekeepers can build up their knowledge in different ways. Basic beekeeping courses are a good start and mentoring by experienced beekeepers is often the next step. Books are readily available but with so much material available on line, both articles and videos, resources are seemingly unlimited.

It has often been said that there are as many different ways to do things as there are beekeepers so how can sound practice be differentiated from the wacky

extremes that are sometimes promoted by enthusiasts?

This is where BBKA can help. For those who are keen to learn and there are both theoretical routes with exams leading to beekeeping qualifications up to Master Beekeeper or practical husbandry qualifications based on assessment. Others may be keen to learn but the thought of exams or even assessments will put them off.

BBKA ARK project can help anyone who wants to learn in a structured way.

### **BBKA ARK Project**

*ARK is derived from the checklists of competencies produced for the Course in a Case (CiC) material, one for each CiC. It allows beekeepers to see the fundamental skills they will need and to monitor their own progress towards them. There is an initial set of resources available through links for each skill (or element) and we expect to add more resources in due course. They include documents, videos and guidance notes from the BBKA and selected external agencies such as the NBU. In addition, when a new training course is listed ARK has the ability to send out notification emails to each user with matching preferences set in their profile. If your association is offering training please make sure that your courses are listed. I am especially keen to see courses for Improvers added to the list. Historically it has proved difficult to make beekeepers aware of the opportunities in adjoining associations let alone nationally. This need no longer be the case and Improver courses can attract wider interest. To add a course use the 'Submit a course or event' button at the bottom of the ARK homepage and complete the form. It is not necessary to login to do so.*

To access ARK please follow this link:- [ARK homepage](#)

*On first visit please use the 'Signin' button at the top left. You will need your BBKA website Members Area login and password and you will need to have a valid email address in your BBKA Members profile. You will be asked to create your own password for ARK. On subsequent visits you can log directly in to ARK using 'Login' at the top right of the screen using this password.*

*ARK has been created to support a range of devices including laptops, smart phones and tablets using standard browsers such as Google Chrome. The 'Help' buttons on each page will lead you through the features available.*

## Reports of recent meetings

### Joint meeting with Ryenats

#### Moths of N Yorkshire

17 Feb 2015

Dr Robert Wood, moth recorder for North Yorkshire, talked about the different species that might be seen locally and when to look for them. If you want to identify a moth seen locally, try:

See <http://www.yorkshiremoths.info/>

His photos showed that when seen closely, a rather plain insect can look fantastic.



He also tackled the basic question of how to tell a moth from a butterfly, and it is not simply that one flies in daytime and the other at night!

### Joint Meeting with Malton BKA

#### Exotic Threats to Bees

11 March 2015

Ivor Flatman, Regional Bee Inspector for Yorkshire, talked about the threat posed to honeybees by Small Hive beetle and Asian Hornet and measure being taken to prevent them entering Great Britain.



*Small hive beetle*

The committee is concerned that few of our members have attended meetings at Malton in the last 2 or 3 years. We propose to continue with the joint meetings for now and hope to see more support in future.

### Hive husbandry

14 April 2015

There was strong turnout of members to hear Mike Rowbottom from Harrogate give a follow up to his presentation on early spring management in April 2014.

Mike started by answering a question posed after his talk last year - should you leave 1 queen cell or 2 in a colony raising a new queen. He suggested it depends on whether you find the risk of a cast swarm more acceptable than the risk of no queen at all.



*Finding the Queen*

### Apiary Meeting at Cropton

10 May 2015

Demonstrator Jack Wilford

Jack described and demonstrated his method of queen rearing in a queenright colony using dry grafted larvae to an enthusiastic audience of 10 members.



He showed how colony temper and brood pattern influenced the selection of a breeder queen. Then with a comb of eggs and larvae demonstrated the dry grafting technique emphasising the right age of larvae of minute size. This proved challenging on the eyesight of those who tried it for themselves. Jack also demonstrated clipping of a queen.

# Ryedale Beekeepers Association

## Dates for your diary

### Please note the revised dates for the June and July meetings

14:00 13 June 2015 <b>SATURDAY</b>	Barry Wilton Middlemiss Apiary Church Farm Scawton YO7 2HG	Use of nuclei/ queens and drones
14:00# 11 July 2015 <b>SATURDAY</b> Picnic from 13:00	Adrian Wilford's apiary South Field View Cropton YO18 8HL	Beekeeping on double brood box
14:00 9 August 2015 <b>SUNDAY</b>	Keith Hall's apiary Bilsdale Directions to follow by email	Heather honey production
8 September 2015 <b>TUESDAY</b> 19:00	Wombledon Village Hall	Hive products

# This meeting will be preceded by a communal picnic to which all your family are invited. Please bring a plate of food to share. Coffee, tea and soft drinks will be provided.

## Officers

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