

A County Queen Breeding Programme

Yorkshire Beekeepers Association (Y.B.K.A.) want to establish a county wide queen breeding programme to provide queens and nucs 'in house' for all new beekeepers, for expansion of an existing apiary and for replacement of poor stock. These queens will be bred from existing stocks that have a good pedigree; Bees that are well suited to the area and that have the qualities that we all desire: Calm; Healthy; Non-swarming; Productive; vigorous; Hardy; Varroa resistant.

We aim to reduce the import of bees into the area. Though many of these bees have admirable qualities the first and second hybrid generations, produced through matings with local drones, are too often aggressive angry bees that are not a pleasure to keep nor a pleasure to have near where you live. Yorkshire is a large county and we have a very large gene-pool on which to draw. While local groups may produce inbred colonies which lack hybrid vigour we can ensure that enough cross-breeding occurs to keep the qualities we want in our wider population of bees.

All of the twenty three district association will be encouraged to run a queen breeding programme either as individual districts or as cooperative groups., We hope that teaching queen rearing to recently new beekeepers will help develop the skill base needed for good beekeeping: Swarm management (and good relationships with neighbours), keeping healthy bees, developing record keeping skills, increasing honey production, working with others and increased personal satisfaction.

In order to facilitate the Y.B.K.A. General Purposes committee have initiated a development programme which will be rolled-out over the next two years:-

- Stage 1 Raising the Issues
Running a weekend Queen Rearing course for representatives from each district association and encouraging cascade training from this
Opening discussions with members as to how they would like to see the programme develop

- Stage 2 Meeting interested groups who wish to participate in the scheme
Arranging bulk purchasing of equipment
Identifying the first five groups to start and helping with the purchase of equipment
Arranging central record keeping for breeding programme
Establishing a county wide record of swarm collections made
Assessing the genetic diversity of the Yorkshire bee population

- Stage 3 Queen breeding groups active across the county
Colony selection to be a priority
Drone colony selection
Queen distribution, at reasonable prices, to replace less desirable individuals
Assessment of progress

- Stage 4 Future planning Development Meeting
New groups to be trained by existing breeders
Further expert input from guest lecturers

Stage one has progressed well. Having had excellent reports on course held at the National Bee Headquarters, and because of his excellent reputation and publications Y.B.K.A. invited Clive de Bruyn, NDB to deliver a queen rearing weekend course for Y.B.K.A. members. This course was held at the Y.B.K.A. Pavilion at the Great Yorkshire Show showground.

This excellent weekend was very well attended by members of several district associations, many of whom had some experience of queen rearing but including some recent beekeepers new to the idea.

It was a packed practical weekend with tasks spaced out to give a real experience of each aspect of queen rearing by grafting. The need to set up starter colonies with a particular mix of bees was fully explained as were the processes of using mating nucs, mini-nucs and grafting itself. It is interesting to see just how many of us reached for our glasses in order to be able to see larvae young enough to be grafted - I needed a magnifying glass.

Attendees had a good time working together with just a touch of competition between the groups - it was fun to watch experienced beekeepers role-playing actions before having to perform them in front of their peers. I was impressed that everybody wanted to do things as well as they could even though Clive's 10 week course was being condensed into two days.

Clive himself was a very interesting course leader interspersing detailed beekeeping knowledge with tales from his many years of working with our little friends. His many hints and tips on how to increase your chances of successful grafting were well received and everybody present recognised that we were talking to a man who knew what he was talking about because he really had done it and done it again and again.

The photographs show a few of the course members carrying out various tasks on the day. At the end of the course the YBKA executive committee stressed their commitment to developing queen rearing in Yorkshire with a view to setting up a chain of breeders using a large genepool to produce good quality Yorkshire bees - gentle, non-swarming, disease resistant and good producers.

We are now completing stage one and getting into stage two. Yorkshire has many great beekeepers and a lot of expertise in queen breeding and we want to ensure that these members have a very positive opportunity to contribute to our programme. A first step is to publish in our monthly newsletter some of the work of John Dews. We want to get all of our best brains to contribute. This could be an exciting development.









