



BURTON and District BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION



The Heather Moor Experience *Hamish Low*

Like most aspects of beekeeping there are variations in the advice given regarding preparation of your bees for the heather moor, but two things are non-negotiable in the pursuit of a decent return of this very special honey.

Firstly, the hive must be absolutely bursting with bees and secondly, you need a young queen, justification of the latter will be dealt with below. In a previous article that I wrote a couple of years ago I stated that the first year I took bees to the moor I was totally ignorant of the preparation required and ended up with four half pound jars of honey from my two hives.

In addition to the need for a large forager army, the arrangement of frames in the brood box is also critical to maximising the honey crop, the strategy deployed ensuring the incoming nectar is forced into the super. The textbook arrangement of frames in the brood box, assuming an 11-frame box is as follows:

1. sealed stores
2. eggs
3. eggs and larvae
4. larvae and sealed brood
5. sealed and emerging brood
6. sealed and emerging brood
7. sealed and emerging brood
8. larvae and sealed brood
9. eggs and larvae
10. eggs
11. sealed stores.

The closer you get to this arrangement in the hives to take to the moor, the

greater your return will be. The two frames of sealed stores are there to feed the forager army if the weather turns nasty on the moor for an extended period. To date I have not placed frames of sealed stores in the flanks of the brood box as above, having judged that sufficient reserves were present around the tops of the brood frames in the centre of the box. Instead, I have moved the frames of eggs to positions 1 and 11 and arranged the others as close to the prescribed guidance as possible.

So why do you need a young queen? More than likely an old queen will stop laying when the colony arrives on the moor and as brood emerges space becomes available in the brood box, which the bees use rather than your supers for nectar storage. I should have mentioned above that in addition to the four half pound jars I got the first year I ended up with very heavy brood boxes!

If nature hasn't delivered you colonies bursting with bees and young queens, a process of uniting weaker colonies needs to be executed to achieve the requirements detailed above. I had to adopt this strategy this year due to poor queen mating in late spring. It is also common practice for a nucleus colony to be added to a colony to achieve the desired size of forager army. Many publications advise removal of the queen excluder claiming that the queen will not lay in the super and if you leave it on it only serves as a "honey excluder". I must admit I have never removed the queen excluder, but I always use wired excluders to minimise the obstruction in the path to the super.



Heather honey makes wonderful cut comb

If we now move up into the super, this also needs some discussion. My personal preference is to maximise the crop of cut-comb honey. As far as honey goes, a block of cut-comb heather honey is as good as it gets. It also delivers the maximum financial reward, an eight ounce piece selling at £10, the same price as a one pound jar of heather honey, and it also negates the need to process the honey for sale in jars.

This of course requires the use of thin, unwired foundation. It is used by many heather beekeepers, but different approaches are adopted. Those who live close to the moor deliver the hives and apply sugar feed to facilitate rapid drawing out of the comb. This needs to be done with care because the last thing you want is too much feed and sugar contamination of the honey. Daily inspections are required to remove the feed at the right time.

As I live fifty miles from the moor, this is not an option for me, so for the last three seasons I have added a super with new unwired foundation the day before I set off for the moor and left the bees to get on with it. If everything else is right, the size of colony, the heather nectar flow and the weather, this works a treat. I usually leave them alone for a week or so and then revisit the moor to see how they are doing. Two years ago on this visit, I found that both my colonies had drawn out the wax, filled the frames with capped honey and had started to draw comb above the crownboard.



Heather honey is thixotropic which means it does not flow unless stirred.

This required a trip back home to make up another two supers with unwired foundation and then back north to add them to the hives three hours after the initial discovery. The feeling of “oh b.....” lost out to the glee at seeing their rapid progress!

In addition to the detailed preparation discussed above, timing is vital to achieve such success. The farmer rings me about a week or so before the flow commences. He has a well-trained eye for this. I agree with him the date that I will deliver my two hives and this allows me to work backwards to start the preparation.

A few weeks before this I have decided which colonies to take on “holiday” to the Peak District. So “Moor Day minus 2” I fit a clearer board below the supers full of blossom honey, usually three or four in number. “Moor Day minus 1” I remove the supers and set aside the clearer board full of bees. This makes it a bit easier to carry out the final brood frame rearrangement in line with that discussed above. Once completed, I add the queen excluder and the super full of wireless foundation then shake the bees from the clearer board into the super, add the crownboard and roof and

finally secure everything in place with hive straps.

That evening when the flying bees are in, I block up the entrance and my son and I place them in my trailer ready for the trip north the following morning. The summer weather can influence to a small degree the timing of the nectar flow, but give or take a few days, it usually starts in the first week of August and is over at the end of the month. I usually remove the supers the day before I bring the hives home so as not to incur any damage to the frames of honey on the journey back home. I should say the road up to the farm is a bit of a challenge.

A few words on the processing: Heather honey is thixotropic (jelly-like) and cannot be spun from the frames like blossom honey. Instead it must be pressed from the frames in a honey or fruit press. Blocks are cut from the frames and added to a heather press bag (available from Thorne). The bag is added to the press and you turn the handle and wait for the magic to begin.

Finally, I hope I haven't scared anyone away from having a try at the heather honey. It may seem complicated and hard work, but I am sure with some of this basic knowledge your first attempt will be better than mine and the reward is well worth the effort.

Why is heather honey so expensive? Part of the answer is detailed above, but also a study done a few years ago showed that there was a similar presence of powerful antioxidants called phenolic compounds in Irish heather honey as in manuka honey. These compounds may well be important for health and well-being. §

For Sale

Brian Burton has 15 National wooden supers for £15 – £30 each, 5 brood boxes for £35 each, 100 wooden assembled frames, both super and brood box sized, with or without fresh comb. A stainless steel 9–frame radial extractor, hand cranked or electric motor, £150, feeders, crownboards and roofs. If you wish to take advantage of this offer you can contact Brian on 07792 747537.

Jennifer Hillerby also would like to sell two top bar hives (see photo) plus other equipment: smoker, brush, hive tools, feeders, books, queen marker, nucleus box, large child jacket blue with

fencing hood £15, adult male suit, medium with fencing hat £25. 12 litre honey bucket, plastic with tap, uncapping roller and fork, SS double filter. £25. Hive plus tools £50. Hive and poly Nuc box £50. Jennifer's phone number is 07541 357683. B79 8TL



Spring 2023 Convention

**SCIENTIFIC UPDATES – PRACTICAL WORKSHOPS
TRADE SHOW (SATURDAY) – SOCIALISING**

Friday 21 – Sunday 23 April 2023

**Harper Adams University
Shropshire TF10 8NB**

Bookings open 30 January. www.bbka.org.uk

STOP PRESS

The honey we have extracted from our bees at our training apiary, which has now been bottled, will be on sale in the reception area of the RSPCA next to the training apiary. We have agreed to donate £2 per jar from each sale to the RSPCA.

The November's meeting on the 21st November will be our popular cooking night. A few of our members will demonstrate various dishes containing honey. The good part about this meeting is that at the end of the night we all get a chance to taste the dishes that have been made.

Items available to buy from the association shop:

HIVE PARTS:

National Super Flat Pack	£21.45
National Brood Flat Pack	£26.40
14" X 12" Brood Flat Pack	£38.50
4" Roof Flat Pack	£39.60
Crownboard	£14.85
Framed Wire Queen Excluder	£19.80
Mesh Floor	£32.50
Sloping Hive Stand	£29.70
Plastic Narrow Ends 100	£7.15
Nucleus Hive	£91.13
Flat Pack Hive with Stand and one Super	£235
10 Space Castellations (pair)	£3.78
11 Space Castellations (pair)	£3.78
Steel Frame Runners	£1.76
Budget Floor	£12.00

FRAMES & WAX:

SN4 Super Frames 10 Pack 10 PACK	£11.00
SN4 Super Frames 50 pack	£36.30
DN4 Brood Frames 10 PACK	£11.00
DN4 Brood Frames 50 PACK	£36.30
14 X 12 Brood Frames 10 PACK	£17.86
Super Wax Foundation 10 PACK	£8.80
Brood Wax Foundation 10 PACK	£12.65
14 X 12 Brood Wax Foundation 10 PACK	£19.80
National Dummy Board - Plastic	£8.25
National Dummy Board - Wood	£7.70

QUEEN MARKING:

Crown of Thorns	£6.60
Queen Clip	£4.95
Marker Pens - assorted colours	£5.50
Bee Brush	£4.40

FEEDERS & FEEDING:

English Feeder	£10.45
Rapid Feeder	£4.95
Nuc Feeder	£6.60
Small Miller Type Feeder	£1.10
Feeder Eke	£7.70

HONEY & WAX EXTRACTING:

Stainless Steel Double Strainer	£23.10
Straining Cloth	£3.85
30 lb Plastic Bucket	£3.85
Bain Marie	£15.40
Nylon Honey Bucket Valve	£9.35
30 lb Plastic Tap Bucket	£16.50

GENERAL BEEKEEPING:

Smoker	£39.38
Hive Straps	£7.15
Hive Tool	£7.70
Pin Hammer	£3.85
Bee Disease ID Charts	£7.15
Frame Nails 500 g	£3.16
Pollen ID Charts	£7.15

The Association Shop

Please contact Dave to ask for the shop to open on a Saturday morning 11 am to 12 noon. The shop is fully stocked with all of the regular items you may need.

All our stock is from Thorne's and our prices are very competitive. We can also take BACS payments.

The apiary site and shop is located at the Hillfield Animal Shelter, Hillfield Lane, Stretton, Staffordshire, DE13 0BN §

Dave's email : dave.coates32@gmail.com

Phone number : 01283 713603

Who's Who

<i>vacancy</i>	Club Secretary		
Mychajlo (Mish) Schumskij	Membership Secretary	<i>mish_schumo@yahoo.co.uk</i>	
Bob Hurd	President	<i>pat90bob@gmail.com</i>	
David Coates	Chair	<i>dave.coates32@gmail.com</i>	01283 713603
Suzanne King	Education and Training Officer Honey Show Secretary	<i>suzanne.king21@btinternet.com</i>	
Nick Allsopp	Treasurer	<i>nick_colby@hotmail.com</i>	
Jane Ratcliffe	Librarian		
Hamish Low	Asian Hornet Team (AHT) leader	<i>hamish51151@gmail.com</i>	

Committee Members

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Sarah Winfield			
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Trustees	Bob Hurd David Coates Sam Hampton S King R Matkin Hamish Low	Volunteers	C Ring P Yates R Wykes R Harrison I McMillen
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