

Bee Breeding Practices at Leeds Beekeepers Association (LBKA)

LBKA decided to embark on a bee breeding program in 2007 following a shortage of bees. This was due in part to the ravages of varroa but mainly to the large influx of new bee keepers and subsequent increase in demand for bees. The stock to form the basis of the bee breeding and queen rearing was sought from our members, particularly those who had long established apiaries of bees with desirable qualities of docility and productivity.

One was chosen from a member with over 30 years ' experience of selective breeding. For years he had successively reared queens by grafting from the previous years "best" colonies. Neighbouring bee keepers had been given queens to maintain drone populations of the correct type, thus ensuring that the vicinity is swamped with the selected drone types. He encourages drone production by fitting over 10% of brood combs with drone foundation.

Supers are rarely used, brood boxes of foundation are added when space is needed since 40 five frame nucs need 200 brood frames to be produced annually.

Queens commonly have access to 3 brood boxes to encourage bee production. Combs which become filled with stores are removed for later use in nucs and replaced with foundation. All the surplus honey produced in the apiary is left with the bees to encourage rapid, healthy spring build-up.

He now has a bank of 30 - 40 such colonies from which to rear the LBKA supplied Nucs. This is a significant number of colonies which means that the gene pool stays large and prevents inbreeding (with its resulting problems)

The Nucs are removed from the mating apiary to the association apiary at Temple Newsam until the beginners, assisted by experienced mentors, are sufficiently competent and confident to take them home.

Over the last 4 years we have provided beginners with over 150 Nucs. In this way, bees with desirable traits have been spread, randomly, around the Leeds area thus improving the gene pool. As well as Nucs we now produce queens (from the same supplier) which are sold at our shop, at subsidised prices, to members to improve their stocks.

David Haigh, LBKA Member
18th January 2012