

Raising your own...

Encouraging our members to raise their own queens is something the club has felt strongly about for a while and so this was the year we decided to push on with it.

Unfortunately, we could not legislate for the ongoing Covid situation and discovering that the decking in the apiary was unsafe for large groups, but we decided to carry on with our queen rearing plans.

Zoom came to the rescue in terms of the theory side. With the club in the great position of having Dave Rayner, Master Beekeeper, in their ranks. We were able to call upon him to deliver an informative and entertaining session which everyone found useful and interesting.

Theory is all well good but hands on is what was needed and so the practical side was planned. Due to COVID and the state of the apiary we could only open this up to a handful of members.

The lack of numbers that could attend the practical session was disappointing, but the idea is that those attending will then be able to cascade the skill down to more groups next year and we can run more sessions.



Dave Heaton and Dave Rayner had prepared the colonies and they were primed ready to go. So, last Tuesday our in group of intrepid beekeepers Jeff, Viv, Anne and Gwen arrived at the apiary. Books about queen rearing can sometimes come across as something akin to black magic or some Jedi mind trick! Maybe that is why so many beekeepers are put off?

I will refrain from referring to the two Daves as Obi wan Kenobi and Yoda, but it was time. Lights, camera, action, and Dave Rayner carefully explained and demonstrated how to graft.



With steady hands, head torches lit, glasses and magnifying lenses at the ready and concentration levels through the roof, our little group searched for the perfect larvae. They got to grips with the grafting tool to scoop them out of the cell and oh the tension! as they finally transferred the little larvae to the cups.

Even the slow procession down to the apiary to pass the frames to Dave H, so he could insert into the cell raiser colony was tense! But it was great to watch how enthusiastic and eager to learn the group was. Time will tell how successful they were, but they all did amazingly well, learnt a new skill and it has hopefully encouraged them to give it a go in future.

We will keep you updated with the progress in the coming weeks, but fingers crossed for some lovely mated local new queens.

Week 4 – Well the queen rearing group certainly had a busy evening. There were 3 Nucs already in use from the previous weeks and another 6 queen cells to house!

They started with 2 hives 3 weeks ago. The ‘breeder’ hive and ‘finisher’ hives have now been split and a queen cell put in each. They have populated an apidea with bees and a queen cell. They have also populated 3 more Nucs with bees and a queen cell each. A very busy evening for Dave directing operations but I think all in all, a very successful first foray into club queen rearing.



Raising our own queens is something we should all be trying. Not only does it mean raising locally bred queens better suited for our conditions but in the long-term selecting our best queens from our own colonies will increase the quality of your stock... So, give it a go, it is more fun than just passing your credit card details to a supplier!

Encouraging queen rearing amongst club members is something we aim to continue supporting. Hopefully, we can get more members raising their own queens.