

National Conversion?

By Don Honey, Newbury and District BKA

The William Broughton Carr (WBC) hive can be a lifeline for National hive users!



National and WBC side by side.

The chilly truth

Unless you've been living on another planet, you would have heard that there is the real problem of our honey bees dying of cold over the winter months. I have read this message in a wide range of publications but thankfully have never experienced colony loss over the winter myself. Is it because I keep my bees in William Broughton Carr (WBC) hives? I must say that it was a fluke that I use this type of hive, because I was just one of the many naive people in this country who think that the iconic WBC is what all UK beekeepers keep their bees in. And also, by fluke, I was told by a dear beekeeping friend that perhaps I had more between the ears than some beekeepers he knew, and so left me to embark on researching what I needed unaided. I never joined a beekeeping association, but just scanned the world wide web and found a well-known beekeeping supplier to sell me all I needed. And because some fifty years earlier I had passed my "O" Level Art, I chose the WBC hive because it was the prettiest. What more could there be to this new hobby? On reflection, I am not too proud to say that I would not recommend my route to anyone wishing to become a beekeeper. However, in doing it my way, I was not inhibited or persuaded to choose any other type of

hive and only have myself to blame. I don't know the percentage of beekeepers that use the WBC, but I am pretty certain that it isn't in double figures. And even to this day I realise that MANY commentators give the WBC short shrift. I must also add that my views are based on me being a "Hobby Beekeeper" whose interests are not purely on honey yield.

Time to convert

So assuming that you are one of the vast majority of beekeepers who, for whatever reason, chose the National hive to keep your bees in, there is a chance for redemption! Despite what is said about beekeepers being tight when it comes to buying equipment, and loving the thought of making do, and also coming up with ingenious solutions to problems, I am pretty certain that most of them want the best for their bees. So having lashed out hundred of pounds for your National brood and super boxes, the last thing you want to do is throw them away because some bloke called Don Honey thinks the WBC is the best thing since sliced bread. Well there is a solution. Your National bits and bobs can be used alongside the WBC, ensuring you get the many benefits this will bring to your bees with reduced costs and disruption. So how is this done?

The changeover

This might seem odd, but the dear friend and beekeeper who I mentioned earlier uses National hives! I had no idea of this all those years ago, but we are still talking and thankfully he agreed to me using one of his hives to do my little experiment on. I obviously had a spare set of everything WBC, because any serious beekeeper will tell you that it is foolhardy not to have. With my WBC floor, three lifts and a roof (approx cost £200) and his National brood and super boxes we joined forces, so to speak. So the idea was to use my WBC floor, place my friend's National brood and super boxes on it, and then drop over my WBC lifts and roof. If there is one problem, then it might be the floor lathe, but it is a simple item to remove, that is, if you have one in the first place.



Wooden floor lathe will need to be removed.

So what other issues did we find? Surprisingly none, and we were working without the aid of any bees of course. But there is no reason why you couldn't



have worked with an active colony. This is borne out by the practice used by Tony Jefferson and his 50 hives as mentioned in the June issue of BBKA News.

Timing

The beauty of this manipulation is that it can be done at any time of the active beekeeping season. And because you will only be placing the existing brood and super boxes on a new WBC floor, the chances are the bees will hardly know you've done anything. Simply move the complete National to one side, position the WBC floor in the original National site, and then return the National brood and super on it. At this point, depending on your confidence, you could either leave the bees to settle down for a day or so using the National roof, or carry on by putting the WBC lifts and roof on. As we know, the bees use various techniques to work out where their home is located, so those that are out and about while you make the changeover will only be confused for a moment or two. They will soon get used to having a nice new home to be proud of, as will you. You may encounter a few issues if you already have some form of ugly hive stand for the National to sit on, but as this will only change the vertical height of the hive entrance, it is very unlikely to deter the bees for more than a minute or two. I have found bees to be very adaptable and cope very well with me tweaking the angle and position of my hives.

The gains

No longer will you have to protect your hives from woodpeckers. No longer will you worry quite so much about your bees dying of the cold in the winter months. No longer will you worry quite so much about your bees getting too hot in the summer months. No longer will you be worried about mice invasion because the castellated entrance blocks act as a mouse guard. In fact the entrance blocks can give you a wide range of access options not available to National users. And clearly you will no longer be ashamed of how your hive looks.

Grandchildren

It was by pure coincidence that a fellow association member in March asked me about a small worry she had with her hive. I remember going to a meeting at her apiary a few years back and knew she used Nationals, so it was a bit odd her

asking me for advice, particularly as everyone knows I only have eyes for WBCs. Apparently her grandchildren had visited her lovely cottage and were very keen to see her bees. However, they were so disappointed when they saw the "Boxes" that she immediately opted to convert! So if nothing else, convert to WBCs for the sake of the grandchildren. She was clearly worried about her bees not having enough stores and had given them fondant to see them through the cold spell. This seems to be the normal thinking when you use Nationals.



National / WBC combo in action with Lift Tabletop.

Well we had a quick look and not surprising to me, they had barely taken any and the colony was brimming with the most pleasant of bees I have come across. There was certainly more than enough stores, so perhaps the introduction of this cavity wall hive was paying dividends.

Other benefits

There is no doubt that with the WBC you will encounter slightly more work when inspecting your bees, because sometimes you will have to remove the lifts before you can get access to the brood box. But if you are like me and go armed with all manner of tools, potions, gadgets etc. then the lifts, with the addition of a suitable table top, will prove to be the perfect accessory in the apiary. The design of the WBC hive does not allow for them to be put in a row on a stand like so many of the National "boxes" are, thank goodness. As a single entity, you will be able to access both sides and the back of the WBC hive, thus not having to stretch the full width of boxes to extract frames. And because of this, you will certainly be using the "cold" way of frame layout. Why anyone would use the "warm" or as I have heard it called "wrong" way defeats me. At this point, I suspect that some readers will wonder what I am talking about when I mention, cold,



Nationals sided by side

warm and wrong ways. Suffice to say it is a minefield which I will leave for another day and let you google it! Another benefit of the WBC is that it comes with castellated entrance blocks. It really is a very simple operation to change the hive entrance from fully closed, to one bee space, to any number of bee spaces. This can be very useful if you want to temporarily close up or restrict access if there is a potential for robbing, or to increase ventilation when the bees find the weather a bit too hot. And on that note, not all Nationals, to my knowledge, have a landing board where the bees can all line up and fan cool air into the hive. That really is a wonderful sight to behold. They can also use the landing board to turn on the pheromones or whatever the smell is they produce to guide other hive members home. How sweet.

Compatibility

Although the National brood and super boxes are a different size to the WBC, the frames are identical. The difference will be in the number of frames used in each. Personally I use ten frames and a dummy board in the brood box. Some beekeepers find this restricts the colony from expanding and talk of using brood and a half, or double brood box to increase numbers. This also is a minefield that raises other issues. With more than one brood box there is always a chance of misplacing or harming the queen while the boxes are being moved. I believe that a well-managed colony can survive and flourish throughout the year on ten frames and yield a good honey crop. As for the super, I use eleven frames per box. This, generally speaking, ensures I get nine good frames to choose from per super that I then use in my nine-frame extractor. Once you've "converted" I'm pretty sure it won't be long before you also swap to using WBC brood and super boxes with your existing frames. A bonus to this will be that you should have all the components for setting up a bait hive, albeit National.

Iconic beekeeping

If beekeeping is to become more popular and appealing to a wider market, then surely promoting the WBC, that is the iconic look to the hobby, should be encouraged. You don't have to be old and have a beard to be a beekeeper.

And by all means paint them white, pink, striped, if that is what you want, and encourage an accessories industry to embellish the WBC. Just so long as the message is clear..."give our bees the best possible chance to survive our ever-changing environment". And while we do this our bees will continue to do what they have been doing for thousands of years, pollinating our plants and giving us honey, not to mention allowing us to witness the many wonders of the bees' world.

Spot the difference

Thanks to my dear beekeeping friend Tim and his turkey Talula, I was able to produce these two comparison photos while we were investigating this project. I'm pretty certain he's not for changing, but we are still talking. So much so that we are thinking about doing a bit of joint research to compare hive temperatures between both types. In the meantime I hope readers might have a bit of fun and see how many differences you can spot? No prizes I'm afraid. Answers on page ??

More info about bees available via www.honeydesign.co.uk/bees.html

***Is it time for you and your bees to change?
Remember WBC -
What Bees Crave.***



Spot the difference?



Answers: 1 hive 2 Gauntlet 3 Magazine 4 Pens 5 Brush 6 Turkey 7 Jar 8 Smoker
