



**FEDERATION OF
BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS**
President: Miss Margery Cooper

**May 2005
Number 587**

Hon. Secretary:
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The Federation, its Council and its Officers cannot be held responsible for the views expressed in the Newsletter or possible errors.

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Future Events

21 st – 26 th August 2005	Apimondia Dublin	
29 th September	Federation Autumn Show & Talk	Dr Keith Lucas-Pollination & alpine flora

From the Federation General Secretary:-

Try to take the time during the coming months to attend your Association Apiary Meetings. Although you will be busy with your own bees it is useful to see others. Apiary meetings are useful to compare development, share experiences, and discuss problems and triumphs and just to catch up on old friends for a chat.

All local Association events need your support to survive. Don't forget you are welcome to attend either Reading, Slough, South Chilterns or Wokingham meetings by virtue of your own Association membership.

William Napper

In the Apiary - May 2005.

Hon. Ed. has asked me to stand in this month, handing me a poisoned chalice if ever there was one. These notes have to be written six weeks ahead of publish date. So here I go in the middle of March, trying to tell you what do to with your bees in May after the best bee-friendly winter I can remember. It also illustrates the need for some continuity (single author) in these notes.

Usually, when talking to a new beekeeper, I usually look for some gardening experience. He should already have learned that there is no point in doing anything until the weather is right, but to be prepared to do it as soon as it is. Losing a row of radishes to the frost is no tragedy, but losing a swarm means losing a honey crop.

The weather has just turned much better. After two days of shirtsleeves I reckoned that my bees (all apparently alive and bringing in pollen) could stand a quick floor scrape and look through the frames. Half of them were too weak to make much use of the sudden mass of plum flower that has just come out (with the queens only just starting back into lay). The other half were building up nicely.

So now I know which ones are going to swarm in May, and which need some help now. This year without help, none of them are likely to bring in a crop. Now that food is coming in what the weak colonies need is as much warmth as possible so I've brought the brood nest right to the back of the hive, reduced the number of frames down to those occupied plus one empty and one frame of stores.

I've taken the spare frames out of the hives or cleaning and re-foundationing and put a dummy board in front of the first frame to make a reasonably draught-proof brood nest. The strong hives can wait while I get together enough equipment for artificial swarming by the Pagden method.

So this brings us to May.

CHECK ALL WEAK HIVES FOR DISEASE! They can then be united on the best queen or, better still united (to give some strength) and requeened (to give some quality) using commercially available queens.

Artificial swarm strong hives by the Pagden method as soon as they show proper swarming queen cells. Alternatively, shake swarm strong hives as part of your IPM programme and as a swarm preventative measure.

Make the second Varroa count. Treat high-count hives with Apiguard, as soon as the rape honey is off and start drone culling. Try to get rid of as much drone brood as possible. But leave plenty in your BEST hive so as to increase the quality of those drones which do make it to mate with your virgin queens.

Watch your local rape crop and extract any honey that you get as soon as the fields begin to lose the all-over golden colour. A week later and you will have a large proportion of solid honey in the frames.

By the way, I'm sure that Hon. Ed. would be pleased to hear from anyone who can suggest what we could have done to keep our queens laying during that hideous cold spell in February and March. My radishes in the greenhouse came through quite well.

BBKA Basic Monthly Quiz...

BBKA Basic Exam:

At this time of the year, when we are heading for the start of the new season, it is essential that you should know what you're doing. The section we're completing in this edition on actual Beekeeping is vital to understanding what the various manipulations are for. So, check these last six;

The Candidate will be:

- 13 aware of the reasons for uniting bees and the precautions to be taken;
- 14 able to describe a method used to clear honeybees from supers;
- 15 able to describe the process of extracting honey and a method of straining and bottling of honey suitable for the small-scale beekeeper;
- 16 aware of the need for good hygiene in the handling of honey for human consumption;
- 17 aware of the legal requirements for the labeling and sale of honey;
- 18 able to give an elementary account of the harvesting of beeswax

Winter protection in former years

A February visit this year to The Lost Gardens of Heligan proved to be a bracing experience, with the early magnolias scorched and withered by frost. However, one of the more interesting sights in this historic Cornish garden proved to be a two-high row of bee boles. These recesses in the outer wall of the walled kitchen garden, designed for the over-wintering of straw skeps, are unusual in that they retain the outward swivelling wooden doors that once provided additional protection against the elements.



Bee boles at the Lost Gardens of Heligan

Protecting skeps from the ravages of frost, snow and wind is nothing new and the use of bee shelters can be traced back to the Thirteenth Century, or even earlier. Beekeepers in many countries have overwintered their hives in bee shelters. These commonly take the form of a long shelf, raised above the ground sufficient to accommodate a row of straw skeps, protected by a tiled or thatched roof. Over 65 such surviving shelters have been recorded in the UK and Ireland. William Charles Cotton, in 1842, cautioned against setting too many stalls on such a shelf, Because "in

winter it may cause the bees to fight; for hereby they have access, by foot, to one-another's houses, which they may sometimes mistake for their own".

However, the use of bee boles appears to have been a particularly British approach to overwintering. Of the 640-odd sets in Britain and Ireland, one of the earliest examples is to be found in Abergavenny Castle in Gwent, perhaps dating back to the 1400's. Bee boles tend to be found in regions characterised by high rainfall and windy conditions, where winter protection was essential for straw hives. The examples in Scotland appear to be more capacious, probably because it was necessary to stuff bracken or straw around the skeps for additional insulation.

On some occasions, simple bee boles were deemed too commonplace for the residence of a gentleman and more imposing designs were built in the form of alcoves in the Gothic or other architectural fashions of the day.

Apparently, it was not until the late Eighteenth Century that walk-in bee-houses were introduced. Some early windowless examples had the equivalent of bee boles set into their interior walls.

For those readers interested in researching bee boles and other winter structures, the International Bee Research Association commenced recording their remains in 1952, in a list entitled "Register of bee boles, bee houses and other bee shelters".
Mac McCombe

Letter to the Editor

Thanks for your April Newsletter. A good article about imported queens.

The Tenerife apiary photo made me laugh. My own apiary is on a slope at the bottom of a hill - but this!!

I reckon the beekeeper must roll the logs down the mountain.

By the time the logs are at the bottom the bees will have been cleared from the combs, whilst simultaneously the honey has been neatly spun out to the sides of the logs.

All done and ready for bottling. Easy.

If you ever hear how it's really done, do let your readers know!

Trust all is well with you,

Marion Malcher (Twickenham)

It would be nice to have comments from our own members!

BORIS JOHNSON M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 3AA

T.J Selwyn Esq
5 Franklin Close
Chalgrove
Oxford
OX44 7RG

22nd February 2005

Dear Mr Selwyn,

Bee Programme

Thank you for your letter about your concern as a beekeeper for many years.

I sympathise with your views and opposition to these cuts in government spending and will take this up with the Minister.

As soon as I have a response I will write again.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

BORIS JOHNSON M.P.

The Reply comes from DEFRA (the victims of the proposed cuts?)

From Correspondence Section

Dear Mr Johnson

Thank you for your letter of 22 February to Alun Michael on behalf of Mr T J Selwyn about the Bee Health Programme.

Your letter is being dealt with at present and a full reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Kate Hedges Correspondence Section

Your Regional Bee Inspectors are: -

Southern Region: - Mr. Ian Homer.

Fax/Telephone number: 01308 482 161

South Eastern Region: - Mr. Alan Byham

Fax/Telephone number: 020 8571 6450

READING and DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

On 4th March Reading and District beekeepers Association travelled to Upper Bucklebury for the Newbury and District's annual Leaver Lecture, given by Dr. Chris O'Toole an executive of The Oxford bee Company on the subject of the red mason bee.

Reading and District members made a very good attendance: many thanks to you all for coming. Many readers may have one of the nesting boxes for this small bee from our good friend Mat Allan, much missed at Thornes of Windsor when he joined Oxford Bee Co., which is described as a spin-off from Oxford University and their range of similar boxes for other beneficial insects such as ladybirds, and bumble-bees are admirable. Dr O'Toole compared the red mason bee's performance in pollination to the honeybee which carefully grooms attached pollen back to the basket on her hind legs to return these as stores for the hive. The mason bee having a few individual larvae only which are secreted in series in beetle bored wood or hogweed stems required pollen only (moistened with a little nectar) to provide a food pellet for her brood from egg to imago. She collects the pollen on the underside of her abdomen and is more or less smothered and is a highly effective pollinator with the habit of visiting small and large sources at high speed. If we have flowers in our gardens apparently we will have 'mason bees' though. Despite having about 5 cells filled with brood each season in this writer's 'Oxford Bee nest box' I can't say I've ever had a positive sighting of this small fast moving bee! Chris showed us some commercial scale boxes and as a comparison a ten acre tree-fruit plantation would require something about the size of a large suitcase of mason bees brood 'timed to emerge' in the orchard, whereas a beekeeper providing honey bee hives for pollination purpose would probably recommend one hive per acre. Many questions and answers on this interesting subject and with again a good result for Reading Association attendees in the raffle kindly provided by our hosts we had a very worthwhile visit to Newbury Beekeepers.

Our May meeting is at 11.30 sharp at Cross Lanes Apple farm, Mapledurham on Sunday 15th, where we will have the great privilege of seeing Cyril Mc Combe's hives there, this is an idyllic Thames Valley location for an apiary, please don't miss-it. If you require directions please phone Jon on 0118 975 0734 or Michael on 0118 947 9450.

Secretary: Mr. R. Kiff, 114 Silverdale Road, Earley, Reading RG6 7LU Tel. 0118 966 5358

SLOUGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY

Incorporating Windsor, Maidenhead and adjoining communities.

The meeting in March was well attended for an extremely informative evening by our BDI, Ian Homer. We heard about various methods of swarm control in order to endeavour to keep our hives at full strength all summer. He also spent some time on the subject of the newer methods for controlling varroa, now that resistance to the strip treatments is being experienced over a larger area of the country. We heard how we all need to be diligent in monitoring our hives with regard to both swarming and diseases so that we can continue to be successful beekeepers. Our thanks go to Ian for his timely advice and to everyone who made the effort to come along.

The summer programme of apiary visits has now commenced. The first visit in mid-March was on a mild enough day to have a quick look inside. Two were quite weak, with only 1 or 2 frames of bees and are not expected to thrive. However, the others are strong and interestingly enough these were all colonies overwintered on open mesh floors this year. During April it is intended to change the brood comb on all colonies by the shook swarm method and we will report on the success of this operation at a later date.

Please do make an effort to attend the apiary visits this year. There is much to be gained from them in the practical sense and there is always a very useful exchange of ideas and experiences, so the learning curve on the newer methods of control being put into use will be easier as a result. If you have not been to our apiary yet, Jim Cooper - our apiary supervisor - will be able to give directions. His number is 01628 783228: or call one of the numbers below.

The dates for May are the 8th and 22nd and in June the 5th and 19th: All commencing at 3pm.

The labelling machine for members' use, which stamps the required "Best Before End" date and "Lot Number" onto a separate label for your honey jars, can be obtained from the first number below, if you wish to borrow it.

I have been asked to remind members to note in their diaries that last summer's successful Supper will be repeated again this year on Saturday, 13th August at Maidenhead Rowing Club. Further details will follow nearer the time.

Newsletter items: Joy Dodson Burnham (01628) 664091

Secretary: Michael Sheasby Farnham Common (01753) 642656

SOUTH CHILTERN BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

March Meeting: -

Harry Peace was our speaker for the March meeting. We enjoyed an evening of videos which were actually made by Harry. The first was "Bee Keeping Year" One Man and his Bees, which gave some very good ideas to follow, but trial and error was his motto. Impressive Queen cells were made by drilling wine corks as moulds for dipped wax on a dowel, these were dipped and set three times and then the queen cups were put on to a frame. Hard to explain but a simple idea.

We also saw "Back to Thatch" which showed the process of removing modern tiles from an old cottage and re-thatching the roof to bring it back to its original state.

'Windmills' was the subject of the third video, and a very personal video of Harry's daughter and her amazing courage at carriage racing although she is blind. A very brave lady.

Our May apiary meeting will be on Saturday 14th May at Marcella's, with Ian Wootton demonstrating transfer of queen cells to nuke boxes. This is also our Plant Sale day so please bring along your donations. OS map ref:682 809

Secretary: Annette Cleaver (01491) 642021

Newsletter "Deadline": - - Contributions, this includes **E-mails**, to arrive with the Editor by the **FIRST POST** (Around 10.00am) on the First of the Month for the Following Month

To enable the Advertisement Manager to place adverts with the Editor for the 1st of the month deadline; adverts should be sent well before this time.

ADVERTISEMENT ENTRIES: - 2 Lines for £1.00. Commercial, £1.00 per line together with your cheque made payable to FBBKA. To be sent to the Advertisement Manager: - Mr. Michael Blackburn, M.B. Photography, 41 Prospect Street, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8JV. Telephone: - (0118) 947 9450/5451

Honey for sale - Berkshire / Oxfordshire honey in 34 lb containers at £1-40 lb - 0118 9479 450

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BEEKEEPING EQUIPMENT SALE.

Brood boxes, Supers, Floors, Queen excluders, commercial, national & smith. Stainless steel electric extractors. Easy melting tray (thermostat controlled) Stainless steel honey tanks (various sizes) One strain away. Lots of clean frames & foundation wax. One sterilising tank. All boxes and floors have been sterilised and ready for use. Prices 25% list prices (Thornes catalogue) Ring Leavey. 0118 9663795

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