



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

April 2007  
Number 608

Hon. Secretary:  
Jon. Davey  
107 Northcourt Avenue,  
Reading RG2 7HG  
Tel. 0118 975 0734.

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E-mail:- >berksbees@btinternet.com<

Hon. Editor  
R.F.Crocker  
25 Shiplake Bottom  
Peppard Common,  
Oxon RG9 5HH  
(0118 972 2315)

## Future Events

<b>Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2007</b>	<b>BBKA Spring Lecture &amp; Exhibition</b>	<b>Stoneleigh Park</b>
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## THE APIARY in APRIL

We've had a peculiar winter - but then, we say that every year. However, this year really has been different and we wonder about the state of our colonies when they have spent so much time out gathering pollen on the unusually warm winter days we have had. Have they worn themselves out, starved themselves to death or built up masses of stores and young bees and are raring to go?

The impulse is to be nosey and open up too early. When you do decide to have a look inside, make sure you do it in the middle of a nice calm spring day, and don't hang about too long.

We had one very wise piece of advice from one of our winter lecturers. He said it was a good idea to open up with one single objective in mind. Are you going to check for stores, or laying pattern, disease, drones, queen for instance. Carry out your check for one thing, shut up the hive (and make your notes). It means that you will have the hive open only for a short time, you will disturb the bees less and you will have focused more clearly on what you are looking for.

It is becoming more and more clear that it is healthier for bees to have fresh frames and comb to work with. Some beekeepers change all the combs in all of their hives every year. One very effective way of doing this is by the "shook swarm" method where you simply shake the entire colony into a new box with new frames and foundation. The advantage of doing this is speed. Once it's done, it's done. For some of us this is a bit dramatic and we find it easier to exchange old for new combs one or two at a time over a few weeks

The Association Day gathering at Stockcross was a great day out for those of us who attended. Gatherings like these are very valuable to new beekeepers as well as to those with a lot of experience. The exchange of ideas and the discussion of problems are probably as useful to us all as the talks themselves.

Triad

## From the Irish List

I am always coming across novice beekeepers claiming to have aggressive bees and finding, on inspection, that they are just very strong, its almost as if they pick up on a beginners nervousness, after all a colony at full strength is a pretty awesome sight.

I often find colonies kept in isolated places such as woodland, away from people and livestock, tend to get much more upset when disturbed than bees kept in fields of sheep, or in places where people walk past frequently,

I have in the past on several occasions "tamed" aggressive colonies by driving a "T" shaped support into the ground in front of the hive(s) and stapling a fertilizer bag to it to flap in the wind, I know it sounds daft but don't dismiss it until you've tried it, it's worked well for me in the past.

I have found bees that are first or second crosses off imported queens are often very aggressive and best re-queened but if they're otherwise good native stock I'd at least try the above things. One other point is that a queen carries sperm from a lot of drones, which doesn't get mixed up in the spermatheca, so sometimes a "nasty" colony can be "good as gold" next time you inspect it. Good luck, Pete

Peter Heywood Leyn Peninsula, North Wales

## **Giant Hornets- The Asian Killer**

Meet the Asian hornet, alias *Vespa velutina*, an accidental import from China. Since arriving in a shipment of Bonsai pottery in late 2004 into the Aquitaine Region of France it has spread rapidly over an entire region of southwestern France, a region hugely populated with British tourists.

Its body length is between 1.1 and 1.8 inches long and queens can reach 2¼ inches with a wingspan of 3 inches

A single hornet can kill as many as 40 honeybees per minute. After destroying a hive's defences, the hornets carry the larvae back to feed their own young. Stuart Hine of the Insect Information Service at the Natural History Museum said there is no doubt that these hornets are heading north and will probably find their way to Britain at some point. "Climate change certainly means they can cope with European summers. However, they would still have difficulty coping with our winter frosts"



A spokesman for the French National Bee Surveillance Unit said that the bee colony death rate during winter was now up to six in ten. "The arrival of these hornets has made the situation considerably worse," the spokesman added. "The future of our entire industry is at stake"

Culled from an article provided by Tim Selwyn

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**1 March 2007**

### **Mysterious phenomenon decimating honeybees in North America and Europe**

#### **British beekeepers await the new season with trepidation**

Northern European beekeepers, about to open their beehives for the first time this season, are braced to see how many of their honeybee colonies have survived the winter. An undiagnosed honeybee ailment is causing the deaths of thousands of honeybee colonies across the northern hemisphere and no-one knows the cause. The implications for agricultural pollination and production are huge.

Already this season beekeepers across 24 states in the USA are reporting heavy losses to a phenomenon being described as Colony Collapse Disorder. This follows a series of unexplained, but very severe, honeybee colony losses over the past few years in Poland, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Heavy losses in other countries are suspected to be going unreported.

“The situation is very serious, but no-one yet understands the cause of these widespread honeybee colony deaths,” explained Dr Max Watkins, Technical Director of Vita (Europe) Ltd, the largest honeybee health company in the world, and member of a European scientific working group on honeybee losses. “Alleged causes range from harmful pesticides and increased solar radiation through ozone thinning, to falling queen fertility and use of unauthorised bee treatments. We really don’t know the answer – several causes may be at work and the only common factor known so far is that many honeybee colonies are dying. The phenomenon is alarming especially because agricultural pollination and therefore crop production levels are threatened.”

“It’s a real mystery,” continued Max Watkins. “We need beekeepers to report their losses and examine and analyse their colonies thoroughly. In the USA it has been difficult to obtain adequate samples and sufficient detailed reports. From records that are available, however, it is noticeable that many beekeepers have been using unauthorised treatments for varroa mites, a honeybee parasite. I’m sure that this is not the complete explanation, but it may be a significant contributory factor.”

The symptoms of the colony deaths are varying across Europe and North America and the losses generally come to light between late summer and early spring. In the USA this winter, colonies have dwindled as the older bees have died leaving behind the queen and young workers not yet ready to forage for pollen and nectar and insufficient in number to maintain the colony. In the UK past year, there were a few but significant examples of what became termed the Marie Celeste phenomenon – colonies simply disappearing from hives leaving no bees for post-mortem analysis.

<http://www.vita-europe.co.uk/en>

## **NOTES FROM NEWBURY**

### **Top bar hives**

Several people asked questions at the December meeting when Neil Rowe mentioned top-bar hives. If you’re interested, there is information on the “[beesfordevelopment.org](http://beesfordevelopment.org)” web site, with a different view on the Georgia State University site “<http://www2.gsu.edu/~biojdsx/main.htm>”, and there is a real one at Rushall Farm in Bradfield “[rushallfarm.org.uk](http://rushallfarm.org.uk)”. This hive was brought home recently from a field trip in Uganda for one of the trusts which supports Rushall Farm.

### **Learning about beekeeping**

An intermediate-level practical course is being offered via Newbury College. It is due to run this year for ten Saturday afternoons from May and will probably be held in a member’s own apiary. The course already has several intended students and may become over-subscribed soon. If you’re interested and want to sign on, it’s listed under “Beekeepers-Practical-Intermediate” on the Newbury College web site.

### **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

## **SOUTH CHILTERN BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION**

What a jolly evening we all had on 21st February, taking part in Linda's Quiz. There was very keen competition between three teams and a certain amount of "listening in" not to say "cheating" was apparent. Unforgivable, of course, was arguing with the Question Master or should I say Mistress and a little of this did occur! Luckily we had a firm lady in charge and she quickly dealt with queries as to whether she meant "when the egg was laid or when it was hatched". There were a few clever clogs among us who knew all about "bacillus larvae" and "spores" and kept it carefully to their team.

It goes without saying (although I shall! that I was on the team awarded a "First" but then I have to admit that we had Reg Hook with us.

Many, many thanks, Linda, for your hard work in setting the quiz and for the delicious shortbread bees and hives.

Viola Crowe.

Following the BBKA Convention at Stoneleigh Park on April 21<sup>st</sup> we have the President's day on April 28<sup>th</sup> in Viv and Steve Moll's apiary at Magnolia House Sotwell Street Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Map ref: 586 908

Secretary: Phil Westwood – Tel: 07771 874284

E-mail: >southchilterns.bees@btinternet.com<

## **READING and DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION**

Reporting on the Reading and District Beekeepers meeting on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> February is not possible without a reference to the snowfall at the time. Our Speaker John Burroughs having to travel from Central Oxfordshire, where snow was quite thick unfortunately had to cancel but happily his talk was re-scheduled to 8<sup>th</sup> March.

In John's absence Reading beekeepers held an impromptu seminar. Cyril McCombe displayed an early full-page illustration of an English apiary in a wonderful 17<sup>th</sup> Century book of Aesop's Fables. This shows the straw skeps on shelves on the wall of the farmhouse. Sheltered by the thatched eaves. A bear is seen robbing the hives and getting well stung in the muzzle for his gluttony. Aesop's moral (somewhat paraphrased) is 'take enough for your needs when plundering your foes, if you go too far they will unite against you and you will suffer'. This is a marvellous book Cyril has; published at the beginning of the restoration period; every fable is accompanied by a full-page engraving. Improving books were still obviously still popular for the family and that the original owners treasured it is obvious from the fine condition of this nearly 350-year-old volume.

Michael Blackburn brought along a mesh covered stoutly built wooden frame on four legs, which approximates to the floor plan of a beehive. This is sold in garden centres for feeding garden birds with seed etc at about £7.99 A Thornes mesh floor including vat is over twice this price, some extra batons attached to the side would make it fit a national. Hive There was some discussion as to further modifications as the bees would have to step-down when entering. However in this month's issue of Bee Craft making mesh floors is featured, you have considerable woodworking to do and have to sacrifice a solid-floor! In this case the designer adds a wood moulding across the entrance for the bees to hop-over; maybe having to step-down is not such a problem!

With thanks to those who braved the weather and turned-out.

April Meeting: We are turning things on their head this year; traditionally our first meeting of our summer programme of the season is to Peter Kimber at Caversham Heights. However Mr. and Mrs. Kimber are moving house, luckily staying within our region, so we look forward to catching up with them later in the summer. Therefore please enter in your diaries an earlier than usual 'Chairman's Meeting' at Jon. Davey's garden apiary at 107 Northcourt Avenue Reading RG2 7HG at 11.30 on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April. The Chairman reports that he had a quick look into the brood boxes on a mild day this week and two colonies have signs of queen activity and two have clean-out cells ready to receive eggs so hopefully there will be something worth seeing by mid-April. Do come you will be very welcome.

## Obituary

**Geoff Fowler:** Reading Beekeepers Association has lost a great friend in Geoff Fowler who passed away on February 4<sup>th</sup> after a fall, aged 89 years. I have known Geoff for about 40 years and have always looked on him as a friend. He was a stalwart of the Association, as Secretary from 1947 for 16 years and then as Chairman and Hon. President. He was always ready to encourage and help new beekeepers with advice and equipment. He continued to attend meetings after he had given up beekeeping whenever he was able.

Apart from his beekeeping he was also a very skilful artist and had painted a picture in oils of the Burchetts Green Beehouse, which he had helped to renovate. He gave the framed picture to George Hawthorne, the then CBI. He will be greatly missed.



Margery Cooper

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

## SLOUGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY

Our February meeting was attended by a 'select few' - what happened to everyone? We know that another meeting clashed with ours, so that explained some absences. However, our BDI Ian Homer, on the subject of 'Bee Behaviour', treated those that were there, to a lively and knowledgeable talk and presentation. This covered all aspects of bee behaviour within and 'without' the hive and even to the responsibilities of the beekeeper in providing safe and secure equipment for their bees, since that will always influence the way our bees work. An interesting discussion ensued regarding 'drone congregation' areas, seldom seen but apparently very different to a swarm, so you would know if you saw one. Ian also brought along copies of the updated CSL/DEFRA book on Foul brood diseases, which contains the latest information on recognition and control of these. Extra copies are available for members; if you do not receive one through the post, please contact Michael as below. We would like to thank Ian very much for making a long and arduous journey on a not very pleasant night in order to speak to us.

The last meeting on our winter schedule will be on the 10<sup>th</sup> April, starting at 8pm, so we hope that you will join us at the All Saints Parish Hall, on the corner of Frances and Alexandra Roads, Windsor, SL4 1HZ, when our former BDI Beulah Cullen will be talking to us on 'Bee anatomy and its practical implications for beekeepers'. We always enjoy an entertaining and informative evening with Beulah, so would encourage everyone that can, to attend.

There will be hard copies of the full 2007 Programme available at these meetings, as will our library, along with any surplus books left for sale.

The apiary inspections are now under way, continuing on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> at our apiary in Fulmer. If you have not been there before, you can call either of the numbers below for directions. We are following the format introduced last year and hope that all beekeepers that are able to attend, will come along to offer their help and advice to those just starting out. This year, the responsibility of leading the meeting will be shared amongst those who have volunteered so far. Don Church will lead the April 1<sup>st</sup> visit, Dennis Way the 15<sup>th</sup> and Michael Sheasby on the 29<sup>th</sup>. In May, it will be Don again on the 13<sup>th</sup> and Michael on the 27<sup>th</sup>. There are one or two vacancies for reserve names, so volunteers are still sought, please see the leader at the apiary.

Finally, as mentioned previously, there may still be spaces available for Stoneleigh on the 21<sup>st</sup> April (NOT 27<sup>th</sup> - I need new glasses!), so please contact the numbers below for further information.

Newsletter items: Joy Dodson Burnham (01628) 664091

Secretary: Michael Sheasby Farnham Common (01753) 642656

## WOKINGHAM & DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

On 14<sup>th</sup> February, Andrew Gibb came to give us a talk entitled 'Beekeeping and Doing another Full-time Job'. Aided by some excellent photographs, he gave a most interesting account of how he manages up to 10 colonies whilst still working a full time week. By rigorous adherence to carrying out inspections at the weekends even if the weather is not good, he is able to maximize yields, control swarming and even raise his own queens. It was most encouraging for those of us who have little spare time to see how adequate planning can cut down on wasted time and still produce good results.

Our next meeting will be the last for this programme and it will be about encaustic art by Jane Hughes. We have been entertained by June before and I hope to be able to report that the attendance was good.

If there are any topics you would like to have talks about, please let me know, as the committee will soon be putting a new programme together.

Secretary: Derek Porter Tel: 0118 979 0326

**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

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Mr. Michael Blackburn, M.B. Photography, The Studio, 1 Grove Hill, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8PM. Telephone: - (0118) 947 9450/5451

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