



FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

President: Miss Margery Cooper

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Number 609

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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

18th-20th October 2007	The National Honey Show	www.honeyshow.co.uk
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THE APIARY in MAY

May is one of the months of the bee keeping season that tests the beekeeper's metal and draws on his or her dedication to the craft be it as a hobbyist, or of a semi or mainly commercial activity in which we commit our time and energy to thwart one of the primal urges of our ancient and highly evolved charges viz the honey bee in what the commercial bee farming entrepreneur John Burroughs in a recent talk to a Berkshire association described as "keeping the lid on the swarming situation"

By now we should be inspecting our brood boxes not less frequently than every nine days. We've to deal with queen cells, often referred to in May as 'swarm cells. Actually these are a valuable resource for the beekeeper. An uncapped queen cell from a docile and productive colony, with a nice fat white queen larva lying 'C shaped' in a pool of queen food containing the near mythical royal jelly, the 'philosopher's stone' of apian royalty is worth as much to the beekeeper as the pound sterling per milligramme that the said royal jelly is quoted in the pharmaceutical industry (supplied in hypodermic type graduated phials). However we won't be able to use the queen cell to start a new colony, improve a lagging or aggressive colony by removing queens and substituting if we don't search our brood boxes and take action will we? Like other life forms left on their own the beasts during breeding season will get 'too quiet' and the result! As beekeepers the result is a swarm to catch. OK not a disaster but your swarmed colonies will have a reduced population and lower potential as honey producers for the coming season.

Missed swarms or worse still ignoring swarms takes us onto a lower plain of beekeeping self-respect. Having recently removed 4 defunct colonies from behind the pre-formed concrete cladding slabs of a hall of residence at a local college. Not one of them viable, massive long combs, some robbed-out much left honey fermented honey, live with wax moth, carpet of dead and decaying bees (Varroasis?) combs fallen and melted because of the nearby central heating pipes coming into use in the winter. (the students complained of a stink from behind the partitions) No, letting swarms go doesn't bear thinking about.

As well dealing with swarm cells there are several other procedures, for example making sure the bees have enough space. The late George Butler in his courses at The Berkshire Agricultural College used to demonstrate using an empty super above the one that the bees were filling, when the comb started to be built-up an inch above the tops, scrape-off then add frames of foundation. This seemed a realistic way of keeping the young wax builders busy as the population increases rapidly which it should during the spring and preventing the bees feeling congested.

We have plenty of recommended methods published of moving the boxes of a colony around, to fool the bees into thinking they've swarmed, clipping queens wings to loose her when she exits with a swarm (they are then supposed to return to the hive!) but I would venture none of these or the complex multi entrance fitments that used to be available at quite a price will substitute for a well motivated self disciplined beekeeper's regular attention during spring and early summer.

Just as a final example as to the nature of the creature we are working with: Dr. Keith Lucas in a recent talk to a Berkshire Association told that as Lime-tree pollen is toxic in some seasons, though the nectar is prized by the honey bee and the beekeeper alike; honey bees carefully comb it back into their 'baskets' then ditch it before returning to the hive. Unfortunately Bombas and the like haven't learned to do this and bumble bees are frequently found moribund beneath flowering limes. And that honeybees learn as they forage for pollen at which pitch to emit their characteristic 'buzz' to release the pollen in a shower from the anthers of the species of blossom. Fool the honeybee? I think not!

Triad

Collapsing Colonies:

There is an opinion among some French beekeepers that the culprit could be the illegal use of Gaucho, while Gunther Latsch reported in "Der Spiegel" (22 March 2007) that Walter Haefeker and also Prof. Hans-Hinrich Kaatz speculated that the widespread practice of spraying wildflowers with herbicide and insecticide together with monoculture was a contributing factor possibly affecting the bees' immune systems. It is also stated that 'for unknown reasons, bee populations throughout Germany are disappearing -- something that is so far only harming beekeepers. But the situation is different in the United States, where bees are dying in such dramatic numbers that the economic consequences could soon be dire. No one knows what is causing the bees to perish, but some experts believe that the large-scale use of genetically modified plants in the US could be a factor reducing stamina and resistance to disease. Most of this is purely guesswork, however, work is being done on this. Because bees die in the field away from the hive there are no insects to analyse so at the moment the above can only be guesswork.

What is our own bee unit doing about the problem? They are well aware of these losses and are monitoring the situation closely, go to their website, (look under public pages 'news and vacancies') <http://beebase.csl.gov.uk/>

Beekeepers who have concerns about unusually high colony losses in their apiaries or indeed, any unexplained losses should contact their local inspector. Scientists and inspectors at the National Bee Unit are monitoring the situation closely.

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

SLOUGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY

In March, our meeting hosted a talk by Ed Pilling from the Syngenta Research Centre at Jealotts Hill. It was an extremely interesting talk, which gave us an insight into the lengths that they have to go to in order to ensure that bees and other beneficial insects are not affected by new products, before they are released for distribution to the end-user. The measures that are taken include restricting a hive of bees to a tunnel which has been treated and then assessing any detrimental effects after given periods. This can show the effects on adult bees and how fast the product will degrade to a safe level, e.g. evening applications being safe for bees to forage on the next morning etc.

There are many further studies done which give results on all stages of bee development from larvae through to adult and can monitor any changes to hive behaviour.

Any beekeeper suspecting an incident of bee poisoning should normally notify the CSL and then analysis of the dead bees can trace the product back to the manufacturer. Because of the high level of testing done nowadays, Mr Pilling was pleased to report that no incidents of poisoning had been reported on their products for some years, which was very re-assuring for us. Provided that farmers and gardeners use the products as per instructions, in particular not mixing products as a shortcut, then no harm will be done.

He then went into some detail on the Buzz Project 2004, the aim of which was to test theories for encouraging bio-diversity on farms, particularly where natural habitats had been lost due to intensive farming. The results then prompted Operation Bumblebee which has an aim to involve 1000 farms across the country in developing field margins around crops and other areas as natural habitat for Bumblebees and other, often as endangered, species of beneficial insect. The talk was well received by all those present and we would like to thank Mr Pilling for coming along to give us such an informative evening. It is good to know that our bees are being protected from potential hazards in this way.

The first apiary visit of the summer programme took place on a cold and windy March Sunday, so it was just a case of removing the woodpecker cages and re-arranging the shed to accommodate them – after freeing up the lock that had gone a bit rusty over the winter! The hives were hefted and it was noted which needed to be given some extra food to help them on their way.

The May visits will be led by Don on the 13th and Michael on the 27th. If you have not been to our apiary in Fulmer before, you can call either of the numbers below for directions. There are still a couple of vacancies for a reserve name through the season and so volunteers are sought to fill these, please see the leader at the apiary if you feel able to take on the role of leader in an emergency. We hope that our new beekeepers will continue to be supported by the more experienced members, so do come along and share your experiences with everyone. We all have something to learn from one another. The June meetings continue on the 10th with myself and on the 24th with Jim.

And finally, with the summer upon us, our thoughts turn to the Summer Supper Evening, this year booked for the 21st July at Maidenhead Rowing Club. Further details of menu etc will follow, but please mark your calendars now and reserve a slot for this very pleasant evening; we hope to see all the regulars along with as many new faces as can make it.

Newsletter items: Joy Dodson Burnham (01628) 664091

Secretary: Michael Sheasby Farnham Common (01753) 642656

SOUTH CHILTERN BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Charles Fryett, who spoke to the SCBKA on 22nd March, is another commercial beekeeper who originally turned to beekeeping for summer work and never stopped. Charles is a New Zealander, currently living in the UK and working 25 National hives, but he hopes to build his company, Ridgeway Apiaries, into a semi-commercial operation of 150.

He comes from a family of beekeepers in the North Island of New Zealand, and in 1993 started working for a company that managed up to five thousand hives in the summer. Their output was as much as 100 to 200 tons of honey a year; 10 to 20% heather honey (half NZ's output) 20% clover, 30 to 50% bush honey and the rest mixed pasture.

This required four full time beekeepers, two to four part-timers in the season, one full and two part-timers to extract, one in the office and the boss. The picture he presented of the commercial beekeeper's life was one we have heard before, of long hours and hard physical work.

The management of the bees was on a very intensive basis, with colonies split in the spring using a division board; five frames of brood and a queen cell went on one side and the old queen and the workers with three frames on the other. Heavy feeding when required, and the exchange of brood between hives, kept populations high and even - minimum hive strengths are set by contract for the important pollination business.

Hives were constantly moved to the nectar sources and pollination jobs - hard work when using all full depth Langstroths. Moving took place mostly at night, with hives loaded, unsealed, under a cover. The bees which emerged under the cover were left to find a hive for themselves at the destination, and with so many lost they overwhelm the guards and can get into any hive. In the winter the splits are re-united, leaving the two queens to sort themselves out.

All hives were pine, dipped for 10 minutes in paraffin wax at 120°C. These last about 10 years, as opposed to about 20 for cedar, but are stronger to withstand constant loading and unloading (and cheaper). Feeding was with two frame internal feeders stuffed with paraffin wax soaked bracken. NZ beekeepers are lucky in having no woodpeckers to contend with.

All this moving and manipulation takes a great deal of planning and preparation to have the right number of hives at the right strength at the right place at the right time. Charles' message was that preparation is the way to good crops, for hobbyists as well as commercial beekeepers.

Our May meeting will be at Lychgate, Peppard Lane, Henley on Thames, (this is at the junction with Manor Road), on Saturday 19th courtesy of New Member, Jemima Hume-Humphreys.

Marcella – The Queen Bee:

About a third of our membership attended the Memorial Service for Marcella Skinner. The charity, 'Wyfold Riding For the Disabled' of which Marcella was a co-founder was well represented; in total 475 people from all over the world filled the church, evidence of the high regard in which she was held. Tributes were given by Pippa Hughes for Wyfold Riding For the Disabled and John Hall, a family friend and now a member of our Association. Marcella did a great deal for our Association; mostly behind the scenes and for some time she distributed the Newsletter missing only the times when she was in hospital.



Secretary: Phil Westwood – Tel: 07771 874284

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

WOKINGHAM & DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

No Contribution this month

Secretary: Derek Porter Tel: 0118 979 0326

READING and DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

On 8th March Reading and District Beekeepers joined by welcome guests from nearby associations assembled on the occasion of our 'Flood Memorial Lecture'.

Our speaker was the commercial bee farmer John Burroughs who is based in North Oxfordshire and sells retail honies at Blenheim Palace, many outlets attractive to the burgeoning tourists industry in the Cotswolds etc. John started at a young age, son of a farmer where hives were desirable for orchard pollination he placed a number of hives on the Exmoor heather these included sections and all were immaculately filled, the results of his endeavours enabled him to buy his first car: a good second-hand Austin Mini! This left us speculating how many frames of honey we'd have to sell these days to achieve an equivalent 'young man's dream'! Thoroughly hooked on beekeeping John later went full time when an opportunity arose and he had some money available and instead of looking for another job: took he plunge.

A very good talk covering very many aspects of beekeeping, the talk was thrown open to the floor throughout and had us all totally absorbed. We even had a very reasoned likely explanation for the 'vanishing bee' problem a much-discussed topic emanating from America from one of the audience of antipodean origins. A massive meeting for us all who attended.

On 16th April on the occasion of the Newbury and District Beekeepers association 'Leaver Lecture'. A good number of Reading members travelled to Stockcross to hear Newbury's lecture by Doctor Keith-Lucas. Recently retired as professor of plant Science at Reading University Dr. Keith Lucas spends much time with the forces of law and order and with archaeology as a consultant on pollen in pathology. There is a pollen rain falling on us all whether we are a cadaver lying out in the woods or when in ancient times covered-over and now fossilized and the pollen of plants now classifiable only by their indestructible pollen grain shapes, being long extinct. The amazing facts of the structures of pollen grains were described and they are unique to the plant species and their strategies of reproduction and virtually every pollen grain ever shed by a plant or collected by a foraging insect is probably still somewhere in the environment and can be found and identified by expert techniques. This was lecture that it was a privilege to attend and we thank Newbury for welcoming us.

May meeting: At 11.30 on Sunday May 20th Reading member Julia Crosthwaite has cordially invited us to her out-apiary at Hare Hatch. This is only a few minutes from Reading, for details how to get there please contact Julia on 0118 987 1336 or Jon. on 0118 975 0734.

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

Newsletter "Deadline": - - Contributions, this includes **E-mails**, to arrive with the Editor by the **FIRSTPOST** (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, The Studio, 1 Grove Hill, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8PM. Telephone: - (0118) 947 9450/5451

For Sale - National Hive together with six national supers, also other items of bee-keeping equipment. Tel - Harry Robinson - 0118 9341497

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