



FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

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May 2008
Number 620

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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

Sunday July13 2008	Disease Recognition Day	Benson Village Hall
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THE APIARY in MAY

There were some moving moments at the beginning of April when Albert Spragg celebrated his 100th birthday. Berkshire Federation of Beekeepers presented him with a splendid metal trough planted with a lovely selection of plants. It has been placed on the terrace outside the dining room of his care home directly in front of his place at table so he will be able to see it easily.

It is a worthy tribute to a gentleman who has given so many beekeepers advice and help for so many years. He doesn't merely love bees - he actually understands them as well.

Ask Albert what you do in May and he will reply "Stop them from swarming". Sound advice. Think of a colony as a single unit instead of a mass of bees. It has only one way to reproduce: by dividing itself in half and swarming - and that leaves you with a severely weakened half a colony. In earlier times, beekeepers had to go along with this and manage it. Nowadays we understand better what is driving the bees and we are able to do something about it. Firstly the bees will be looking for space for building up stores for the journey. This is the moment you need your supers ready to deal with that. Then they will want to produce a new queen for the new colony they have in mind. We can take action by inspecting them every week or ten days to look for queen cells. We can remove them and destroy them or take them to form a nucleus.

This is a further bit of Albert's advice: "Make a nuke", he says. If the worst comes to the worst and half your bees do run off, if you've got a nucleus going you can quickly make up your loss of bees. It's easy enough to create one once you've got the box. All you need is a cell with a queen in it or some eggs (which must be under 3 days old), some frames of flying bees and some frames of brood.. They'll need a bit of feeding at first then Nature does the rest.

Now, fairly early in the season, is the best time to find and mark the queen, simply because the full colony has not yet been built up. It's difficult enough finding a queen on a frame with just a handful of bees - let alone one that's covered with them. The books suggest a kind of rotating inspection which takes in the edges of the frame first and works towards the centre. It seems to work sometimes if you've been quick enough to focus before she has scrambled out of sight to the darker underside of the frame. I suppose the best way to get practice and help is at our summer meetings. Never mind if everyone else has spotted her at once. Make sure you do get to see her yourself before she is marked.

It is tempting for a beginner to say he's only got one or two hives and he doesn't need to use anything other than a dab of white Tip-ex to mark a queen. But you aren't marking her just for that summer. In a year or two you will want to know how old that queen is and whether you should re-queen. This is where the annual rotation of marking colours is so useful. Here is how to remember which colour goes with each year: "Will You Rear Good Bees." The first letters of the saying are W = white, Y = yellow, R = red, G = green and B = blue. The cycle comes round every 5 years. This year it is red for 2008, green is 2009 and blue is 2010. The cycle starts again in 2011.

So, rear good bees and buy the markers. Apart from anything else they are designed for the job and they make less of a mess than Tip-ex.

Triad

One-Hundredth Anniversary – Bert Spragg

A presentation was made to Albert Spragg, on his 100th birthday, of a commemorative plaque from Wokingham Beekeepers Association and a bee friendly window box from the Federation of Berkshire Beekeepers Associations, for his dedication to beekeepers throughout the region.

Albert Spragg was born on April 1st 1908 to strict parents at Holly Green, Worcestershire. His parents took him out of the local school to start working as a gardener at age fourteen

Bert's first gardening job was in 1922 for two old ladies at Holly House, Holly Green, who owned about 2 acres. That was his first encounter with beekeeping. He found some skeps under a sheet of corrugated iron in a quiet corner of the garden, but there were no bees. Bees were



being decimated by the Isle of White disease at that time. Later he found 6 tall jars of candied honey in the stables; he was told it had gone bad and to bury them in the garden, which he did. He says had he known then it was simply granulated, and good food, he would have kept it. It would be some years later when Bert was re-introduced to bees.

Bert was married 3 times, or as he mischievously says - he re-queened twice! His first marriage was to local girl, Dorothy Orme, in 1937 and they had one daughter. To enable him to get married he moved to Lasborough near Tetbury on the Cotswolds as the Head Gardener, because this position came with a stone cottage. When war broke out he was promoted to Forman; they had to plough up 300 acres of sheep grazing land for wheat for the war effort. There were 3 men regularly working with Bert and they used to carry two and a quarter hundredweight of grain in sacks on their shoulders. When extra labour was needed Bert was allocated Land Girls and also Italian POWs from a nearby camp.

His wife was prone to ill health and died when she was 38, soon after they had moved to Filkins, Oxfordshire. Here Bert was Head Gardener for Sir William Goodenough, Chairman of Barclays Bank. On his very first day Her Ladyship announced, quite casually, that they had beehives and tending them would be Bert's responsibility. It was a case of learn quickly and Bert got most of his first steps in beekeeping from F S Stewart's "Beekeeping Practice"

Bert married for the second time to Filkins local, Anne Scriven, and continued to live happily at the Lodge, Filkins Hall, working for Sir William. But this was to be a tragic time: Anne died in hospital, after a routine operation; Bert's daughter was sent to Bristol, temporarily, to live with his brother John's family. Then, not that long after, Sir William fell from his horse whilst hunting and died several days later. It was not long before Her Ladyship summoned Bert to tell him she could no longer afford a gardener, even though his wage was just a few shillings above the farm labourers' rate £2 a week

Bert moved (without bees) to Long Ashton, Somerset, to be near to his daughter. By now bees were an established part of Bert's life: he went to classes on beekeeping at Clevedon and joined the small BKA there.

During the long years on his own Bert kept contact with Freda Hobbs, a dear friend of his second wife. Bert always was a very sprightly, charming and dapper man. In time, perhaps not surprisingly, Freda became Bert's third wife, but this time *she* asked *him* to marry her!

In 1962 Bert and Freda settled into a bungalow on London Road, Wokingham, and a new life began. For the first time Bert was not in a tied cottage and so was able to work as an independent gardener. He was much in demand. He soon became acquainted with Tom Carpenter and other keen beekeepers from Wokingham. Tom was 80 years old and the Association Apiarist but was looking to pass on his responsibilities to a younger man.

Bert's great friend, Frank Napper, was eminently qualified but he had 6 children and was too busy. He worked as the cowman at Mrs Vaughan Morgan's farm estate, Finchampstead (Bert is amused by the fact that his care home now is in that very house). Bert became Association Apiarist and thus started his long and loyal service to the Beekeepers of Wokingham.

At Burchetts Green he met George Hawthorne, Berkshire County Beekeeping Instructor. As Bert said, he learnt more in 10 minutes from George than he had been able to learn from reading and his own experience. George used to make skeps from straw that were strong enough to sit on. He would use a cow horn to push the wheat straw through and stripped bramble to make a twine to sew it together. Bert learned skep making from George, and used his own skeps to collect swarms around the district.

Bert, Frank Napper and George Hawthorne were very much involved in rebuilding the splendid Victorian octagonal Bee House in the grounds of Berkshire College of Agriculture, Burchetts Green.

Bert took the position of Association Apiarist very seriously. He organised regular beekeeping demonstrations on a Sunday morning and collected and sold the honey, which was always a major source of income to the Association.

Bert has held many positions on the Wokingham Beekeepers' Association committee. In 1986 he was appointed Honorary President - and still is today.

Bert is now living happily at Warren Lodge Care Home in Finchampstead, Berkshire. When asked the secret for living to 100, his advice is to work hard and have a little bit of honey on your cornflakes or toast every day.

We wish Bert a very happy centenary year.

Update

The DEFRA website is: - <http://beebase.csl.gov.uk/> look under public pages 'news and vacancies'

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

Reading and District members took advantage of the kind invitation from Wokingham and District Beekeepers to join the at St Paul's Hall Wokingham for a lecture by Dr. Max Watkins of Vita Europe on Wednesday 12th March. Vita Europe is an important entity for British beekeepers as marketers of such essentials in our fight against varroa and nosema Apiguard and Apistan. I think we all got a certain amount of satisfaction to learn that Vita Europe is British owned having been purchased from a multinational fine chemicals group by Dr Max and colleges who had belief in the future of apiary veterinary products. And that Vita Europe products are offered in many countries worldwide.

As well as some illustrations of the effects of varroa and nosema, secondary infections were outlined, small hive beetle and measures taken to control this particularly in the USA where Max had recently been and some illustrations of the very large scale of the American beekeeping industry were seen where pollination of crops and fruit are of prime importance and honey comes second. Illuminating it was to hear that in the USA and other countries medicines applied to food producing creatures are haphazardly controlled and the anti varroa measures taken in America in the main would hardly be recommended in the UK and EC.

Colony Collapse Disorder was naturally on many people's minds and Max wasn't able to give any definitive answers but described the variable symptoms of this dangerous problem. There was an American beekeeper in the audience who indicated that recently in the US the feeding of corn syrup to bees was blamed for CCD! Obviously we've a way to go as beekeepers to finding –out the realities of the causes and how to treat. This was a very excellent and thought provoking talk. With thanks to Wokingham beekeepers and Reading members who attended.

Also, on Friday 14th March, Reading Beekeepers travelled to Hampstead Norreys for Newbury Beekeepers Leaver Lecture by Dr. Stuart Reynolds who is Professor of Biology at The University of Bath the subject being the DNA of the honeybee. Honeybees have a fascinating social structure and an advanced society. Despite having brains that are five orders of magnitude smaller than human beings they are able to accomplish a complex organization with such behaviour as the famous 'waggle dance'. Dr Reynolds with others is an expert on the recently established honeybee genome. Reading members who attended reported an absorbing and enlightening lecture. With very many thanks to Newbury beekeepers for their invitation.

Reading Beekeepers May meeting is on Sunday 11th May at Mapledurham commencing at Cross Lanes Apple Farm with Cyril McCombe and Michael Blackburn. Starts at 11.30 sharp. I'm looking forward to spring air, apple blossom and the mellifluous sound of honeybees, see you there. As usual contact Michael or Jon. for directions.

Secretary: Mr. R. Kiff, Tel. 0118 966 5358

WOKINGHAM & DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Firstly, my apologies for the absence of a contribution in the last issue but the deadline came up quicker than usual. On February 13th we welcomed Beulah Cullen back once again for a talk entitled 'How Doth the Busy Little Bee'. It covered the ways in which bees find sources of nectar and pollen and how they deal with collecting them and transferring them to other bees in the hive. The talk was most interesting and illustrated with some very good slides. On March 12th, Dr Max Watkins, a co-founder and Director of Vita Europe Ltd, gave us a talk on current varroa treatments and research into other methods of control. The firm also make AFB diagnosis kits and also a special product to add to feed in the spring to help the bees build up, and another product for autumn feeding to help the bees through the winter. His talk was very interesting and he provided a lot of free samples and literature for members to take away. This talk brought our winter programme to a close. If anyone has any topics they would like to be included in the next programme, please let me know. We will be arranging the rota for the apiary visits through the summer. If you would like your apiary to be included in the rota, please get in touch

Secretary: Derek Porter Tel: 0118 979 0326

SLOUGH AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY

Incorporating Windsor, Maidenhead and adjoining communities.

Our February meeting was well attended and we had a fascinating talk and presentation by Dr Beulah Cullen on the subject of changing comb. We heard how the natural inclination of bees is to start a new nest with new comb and after many millions of years coping perfectly well in this manner, it is a lesson to us to try to emulate this state of affairs as much as possible. Particularly bearing in mind that now there are various reasons health wise that this is a good thing. It helps to eliminate any disease that is not clinically evident yet and it will help to reduce the varroa mite population if the shook swarm method is used. This was described in detail, along with the alternative Bailey comb change method.

Another advantage of clean comb and boxes is that it makes it much more pleasant to manipulate the hive during inspections. There was a lot of information given about the ever-increasing resistant varroa mite population that is now much in evidence near us, and how we should be checking on a regular basis to monitor fall rates etc. There was also a lengthy discussion on the experiences of some local beekeepers, who may have had casualties caused by the new strain of nosema. Results of tests were still pending. Our sincere thanks go to Beulah for yet another very interesting evening and to everyone who attended for making the effort to come along to hear the timely advice and tips.

The Apiary meetings got under way on Sunday, the 30th March, when the weather was good enough to open them up and give them the once over. Only a couple of hives gave cause for concern, one of which had gone into winter under strength, having failed to make much headway after re-queening at the end of last season. The other appeared to have a drone-layer, so will be dealt with as necessary at the next meeting if so. The Dartington was steaming ahead well, so things are looking hopeful there for this year. Another two were given supers as they were quite strong and in need of them already.

The meetings will continue in May on the 11th and 25th and in June on the 8th and 22nd, all starting at 2.30pm. The apiary is based in Fulmer and directions can be obtained from the numbers below or any other member of the committee shown on your programme.

The Society will be attending the Sunningdale Carnival again this year, on Bank Holiday Monday the 26th May. Michael would like to hear from anyone who could help to 'man' the stall during the day. It is a large and popular carnival and we shall be using the new 'virtual' hive recently purchased from the BBKA. Even in the appalling weather of last year, a similar idea generated a lot of interest, so please give him a call if you would be able to spare even a couple of hours. We are looking to have as many volunteers as possible to help out with the various activities planned.

Finally, the website www.wherecanwego.com now contains details of our regular meetings. Just put in SL4 and check the 'free of charge to all' box before searching.

Newsletter items: - Joy Dodson Burnham (01628) 664091
Secretary: Michael Sheasby Farnham Common (01753) 642656

SOUTH CHILTERN BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Our last indoor meeting of the 2007-08-winter season

Update on the varroa front Max Watkins – Research and Development Director, Vita (Europe) Ltd

Vita (Europe) Ltd is a small British company with a prominent place in the market for products promoting bee health, and a significant ongoing investment in research and development. Amongst their products are the widely used Apistan and Apiguard. Max gave an interesting and very useful presentation, nicely balancing general advice about hive health with helpful information about his company's products for beekeepers.

The emphasis of Max's talk was on good husbandry, using as an initial example *Nosema apis*. This is a single celled, spore forming, microscopic organism, and during the time of year he was speaking of, its effects can become very apparent by the visible signs of the dysentery which is one of the symptoms left by the bees during early season cleansing flights. The increase in comb cleaning behaviour in spring also contributes by causing the increased uptake of *Nosema* spores by the bees. As well as dysentery, other consequences include increased winter losses, a slow spring build-up or spring dwindling, secondary infections, cessation of royal jelly production, reduced honey yield, impaired bee digestion and protein storage, reduced worker and queen life spans, and an increase in occurrences of supersedure. The only proven treatment is Fumagillin, which is also used as a prophylactic, but good husbandry to reduce stress factors and ensure good nutrition is very important too in trying to prevent its incidence.

The prescription for good husbandry and healthy bees which he outlined included knowing what healthy brood and bees look like, regular re-queening, regular comb replacement (especially old, black combs), familiarity with pest and disease monitoring and treatments and good nutrition. Bees, he told us, need a balanced diet, just like humans. This must include proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and water. Good husbandry includes proper nutrition management by regular checks on the pollen and honey stores in the hive. Incoming carbohydrates (from a good honey flow) stimulate hygienic behaviour and an increase in pollen collection. Amongst the other tips offered was that the most effective tip for controlling small hive beetle yet discovered was to keep guinea fowl in the apiary amongst the hives!

In answer to questions, Max talked about colony collapse disorder, and expressed his opinion that it was not new and could be seen at previous points in history and around the world. He also advised us on the use of Vita products, particularly Apiguard for varroa control.

Amongst his suggestions were to apply it in late afternoon or evening as the bees return, outside or between honey flows. If any crystals are left after the recommended period, stir them with a hive tool and spread on a piece of cardboard on top of the frames. Only use half a tray for nucs and small colonies, and a quarter of a tray for very small colonies, and then only if a heavy mite fall is seen in the summer. Apiguard, as with Apistan, produces no detectable residues in honey but it also has a zero withdrawal period for honey after treatment ends, and a 'multi-site action', so the development of resistance is unlikely. Its active ingredient, Thymol, also increases hygienic behaviour and reduces chalk brood. Other products his company produce include American and European foulbrood test kits and B401, or Certan. This is a bacterial product which is 100% effective at preventing wax moth infestation but, he said, fiddly to use.

New products 'in the pipeline' from Vita include alternative varroacides (two look promising, but about £1.5 million is required for testing one of them), a pollen substitute, stimulatory feed, a Nosema treatment, more diagnostic kits, pheromones and wax moth treatments and traps. Any treatments used in hives must be registered as veterinary products, and this can take a long time and tens of thousands of pounds, as the company must demonstrate the efficacy and best mode of use, the extent of residues and details of the toxicology.

This was an interesting, informative and very useful presentation, not just for the helpful information about products we all use, but because Max didn't try claim that his company's products were a complete solution on their own. He emphasised throughout that the most important factor in ensuring healthy, productive bees is proper care from a knowledgeable and skilled beekeeper.

The next meeting will be the President's Day at John Hall's apiary, Chalkhouse Green Farm, Kidmore End, Reading, RG4 9AN (map ref. 716 783). **SATURDAY 24th MAY** 2.30 pm. As well as an apiary inspection at this rare breeds farm not visited by the SCBKA before, our President, Don Thompson, will be talking on 'This and that and all that matters'

Secretary:- Phil Westwood

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

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 8PN. Telephone: - (0118) 947 9450/5451

For Sale:- Over-wintered 5 frame nuc's, 2007 Buckfast queens,

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842321 for a quotation. Beeswax
exchanged.

2-----5

2-----2



NATIONAL BEE UNIT - SOUTHERN REGION

Around and about the region

Spring 2008

Following a very difficult beekeeping year in 2007, it has also been a difficult winter. This was largely because of a computer software upgrade which the Central Science Laboratory IT department required all of the Regional Bee Inspectors to have. This gave me a substantial increase in the available space on my computer as a result of the inadvertent loss of much information gleaned over the last 5 years. In addition to the loss of around 2000+ picture files, all of my e-mails up to mid December and all of my collected e-mail addresses disappeared.

In the past I have tried to send copies of this newsletter to each association secretary and newsletter editor plus a number of other correspondents however, some previous recipients of this newsletter may not now receive a copy - it is difficult to make an apology to people who are unable to see it, but my apologies anyway. **Even if you are an association which does not usually circulate Around and About to its members, please do so this time and I would encourage all bee keepers in the Region to send me their e-mail address together with details of the association they belong to and their office in that association (if they hold one).**

PLEASE GIVE THIS COPY THE MAXIMUM CIRCULATION THAT YOU CAN.

2008 must be a better year than 2007 was - already we are seeing evidence of a more normal spring than last year so maybe summer will also revert to type.

Ian Homer

Current Topics

Different People

Once again, we have some changes in personnel in the region. After one season with us, Pete Kennedy has moved on to a full time post with Rothamstead and we have two new members of the team. They are Rupert Coutts who will be covering the majority of South Hampshire and the Isle of Wight whilst Mark White will be inspecting in the South of Wiltshire and the North of Hampshire.

Margaret Holland will continue to cover Northamptonshire, North Bucks and the Northern parts of Oxfordshire. David Packham will cover the majority of Dorset and Robert Carpenter Turner will be covering North Wiltshire, East Berkshire and South West Oxfordshire. I myself will be inspecting the South East part of Oxfordshire, East Berkshire and South Bucks. This probably all sounds most confusing to you (it does to me) but if you are in any doubt as to who to call - call me and I will make sure that your call is properly dealt with. The map on Page 2 shows these territories; I've also provided a listing by association but there will

inevitably be some degree of overlap as members sometimes live some distance from their home association.

David Packham 01392 881253	Robert Carpenter Turner 01672 852265	Mark White 01747 822832
West Dorset Dorchester & Weymouth Shaftesbury & Gillingham Blandford & Sturminster Newton Sherborne East Dorset	Melksham Kennet Swindon Vale & Downland Newbury Oxford (part)	Salisbury West Wilts Basingstoke Andover Winchester Petersfield Fleet

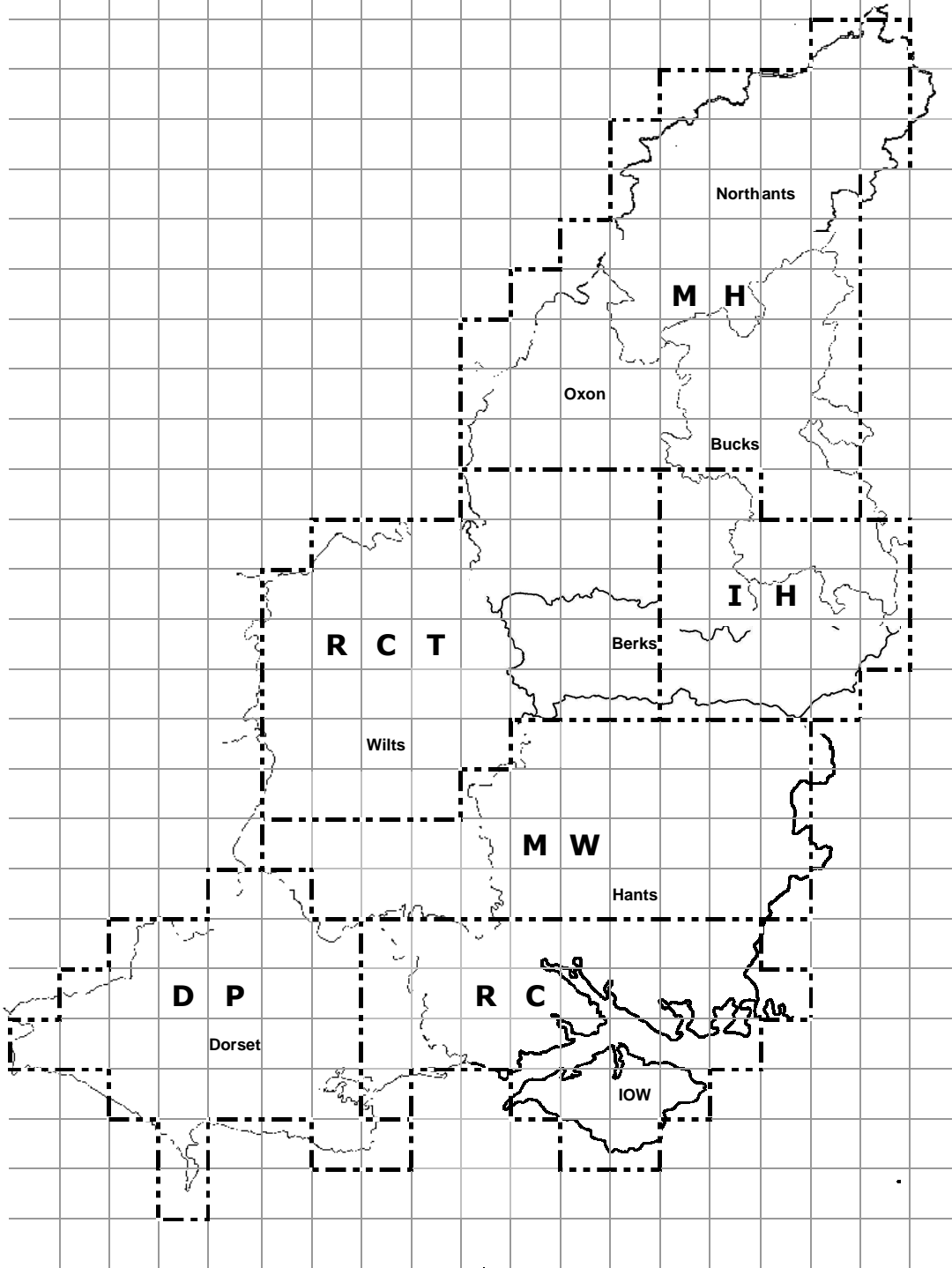
Ian Homer 01308 482161	Margaret Holland 01327 857328	Rupert Coutts 01202 383076
Slough Wokingham Reading South Chilterns	Northants Buckingham North Bucks Mid Bucks	Bournemouth & Dorset South New Forest Southampton Fareham

High Wycombe
Chalfonts

Oxford (part)

Portsmouth
Romsey
Avon Valley

SOUTHERN REGION
Showing 2008 boundaries



Meon Valley
Meridian
Isle of Wight

An Inspector Calls!

In the past, the bee inspector has called for all manner of reasons. Maybe the beekeeper has called him or her out because of some suspected disease or to deal with disease which has already been identified. After disease has been dealt with on a site, there is always a follow up inspection a short time later to establish whether there has been any reoccurrence. We always carry out a priority inspection the following season at apiaries where there was disease the previous year and we also try to visit as many new beekeepers as we can to introduce the bee health inspection service and to help them with any disease related issues which they may have.

For many associations we carry out apiary tours (or "bee safaris") which are always interesting with disease sometimes turning up unexpectedly.

Whilst this is usually a shock to the beekeeper it has the great advantage of allowing all of the beekeepers present to see disease first hand. For some, this will be the only time they see foul brood in their lives whilst others, in the past, have taken their newly found knowledge home to their own apiary and have been able to identify disease there.

All of these types of inspections will continue this year but, with The Regulators Compliance Code becoming law on April 6th 2008 inspections now have to be carried out on an "assessed risk" basis and this will preclude the "routine" inspections which were commonplace in the past. However, please do not let this deter you. If you have any reason to believe that a notifiable condition may exist in any of your colonies, do not hesitate to call the bee health inspectorate.

Emergencies

Fortunately, emergencies in beekeeping terms are very rare but, as anyone who was involved in the initial varroa search in 1992 or the resistant mite search in 2001 will know, they do happen. With this in mind, each of the National Bee Unit regions has already carried out one emergency exercise aimed at assessing our capability to respond in the event of the discovery of one of the exotic pests.

Southern Region tested its procedures in the Devizes area with the help of Melksham Beekeepers Association members in 2007 and, on the whole, our procedures were pretty robust; with a few amendments, we are confident that we will cope if small hive beetle is found in the coming years. However, there are two areas where the help of beekeepers will be invaluable.

Firstly, to deal with any emergency it will be necessary to know where bees are located. Whilst we have a good deal of knowledge recorded in Beebase (the National Beekeeping Database at beebase.csl.gov.uk) the location of any given apiary will only ever be as accurate as the most recent inspection or other information which the beekeeper may have recorded. Individuals and associations can make a major contribution here: individual beekeepers can record their apiary details directly into Beebase whilst associations can maintain records of where their members hives are located for use only in an emergency.

Secondly, experience of other emergencies tells us that local resource centres are the most effective methods of managing an emergency. With this in mind, if there is a suitable location in your area which could go into our contingency planning list, then please do let me know. Typically we are looking at village halls or similar establishments with several rooms available (one to act as a local control centre and one as a staff meeting and briefing room. Ideally locations would have easy access and parking for up to 20 cars and good communications facilities including telephone, broadband connection or wi-fi access and reasonably good mobile phone reception. I realise that this is quite a tall order but please do let me know if you think your local hall might be suitable, and if you are able to provide contact details, that would help even more.

Sentinel Monitoring for SHB

None of us know when Small Hive Beetle will reach these shores but the general feeling is that it will get here at sometime in the coming years. Many believe that it will arrive via a port or airport though others can see many other possible routes (such as importation on the soils of potted plants or furtive importation by beekeepers of bees or queens).

By far the most important aspect of controlling it when it arrives is to have the earliest possible detection of its presence. With this in mind, we are looking for several dozen beekeepers around the region who will act as sentinel monitors. This will involve placing a detection trap on the floor of one or more hives, regularly monitoring them and maintaining records of the results. Again, please contact me if you think you can help.

Obedient and Docile Bees

My first year as a Seasonal Bee Inspector (SBI) set me wondering why there seem to be so many beekeepers who seldom, if ever, look below the queen excluder. I came to the conclusion that the reason is often apprehension and fear as to how their bees will react. This trepidation need not be so, for by carefully selecting the most docile of your stocks, new queens can be bred and eventually a quiet and more easily handled colony will become the norm in your apiary.

To me the most interesting aspect of beekeeping is watching the bees themselves. Taking a comb out and just seeing what is going on without a pack of kamikaze bees trying to get into my veil, down my boots, or following me back half a mile to my car, getting inside with me - so that I have to drive off wearing my bee suit and then have to stop, perhaps twice, to encourage them to go back to mother. On my appointment as a SBI I was most surprised to find just how many fierce, ferocious and angry bees I encountered. Few beekeepers had the really docile bees that I was used to and a large proportion of my inspections were carried out with bees that really did not want me there at all. Was I wearing the wrong pheromone!

All of my beekeeping training and experience had been in London where having docile bees was the rule unless you wanted to experience complaints and threats of litigation. Neighbours soon let you know if you have unpleasant bees and this seems to be the rule in urban areas.

Beekeeping is so much more enjoyable if you have the sort of bees that can, on some days be managed without gloves, the kind you can show

your children, and teach while those not involved in the lesson do not have to be five miles away! I kept bees on my roof when living in London and there were a couple of ladies who like to sun bathe on the roof next door. I warned them that I wanted to open my colonies, "Oh don't worry" they said "the bees never worry us." So I did my beekeeping and the bikini clad ladies watched from a distance of 10 feet. .

So my plea is to encourage you to breed docile bees. I know you will enjoy your beekeeping more than ever and become better beekeepers if your colonies are easier to handle. It will make life easier for the inspectors if the brood box has been looked into during the last year, and, maybe, a few of the old and broken combs have been replaced. Maybe even the colony has been shook swarmed - new brood comb is a great way to do your hive cleaning - it helps to remove varroa and best of all lessen the chance of disease. Now if that were only the norm!

So as I enter another season as an SBI, with tongue in cheek I might just award an OBE (Obedient Bees Evolving) to the beekeeper whose bees are the most docile and friendliest I meet during my inspections. My good wishes and thanks to all the great beekeepers I met last year - I have learnt from you all. Thanks for the hospitality, to all those who have helped me inspect their bees and introduced me to those who were new to the inspectorate and not on Bee Base.

Robert Carpenter Turner
Seasonal Bee Inspector

2008 Southern Region Disease Recognition Day

Make a note in your diary now, Sunday July 13th 2008
Benson Village Hall, Oxfordshire
1000 to 1630

An opportunity for everyone to polish up their disease recognition skills

Not every beekeeper gets the opportunity to see European or American Foul Brood first hand, and many who have experienced it forget what the signs and symptoms look like if they haven't seen it for a while. For this reason, we have offered disease recognition days to individual associations over the past few years. Now, for the first time, we are offering this event on a region wide basis to any beekeeper who wishes to attend. The entire day is free with tea and coffee provided but we do ask that you bring your own packed lunch. Anyone who is familiar with Southern Region Associations Day will recognise the form.

Recent Associations Days have attracted comments such as

"I can guarantee that you wont find better quality speakers at a free event anywhere"

"a most worthwhile day"

"this is an event not to be missed in the future".

During the day we will cover:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guidance on maintenance of hygiene in the apiary and in the hive• Identification guidance for European Foul Brood• Identification Guidance for American Foul Brood | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comparison of similar looking conditions eg. EFB, Parasitic mite syndrome, Chalk brood• Adult bee disease• A fun quiz - with prizes• Varroa management• Exotic pests |
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In order that we are properly able to manage the numbers attending, attendance is strictly by prior registration, either by e-mail or by post.

I would like to attend Southern Region Disease Recognition Day on Sunday July 13th 2008

Name: -----

Address: -----

Phone No: -----

e-mail address (if applicable): -----

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