



# FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

President: Miss Margery Cooper

June 2010  
Number 643

General Secretary  
Martin Moore  
Tilehurst  
Reading  
01189677386  
07729620286

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

E-mail:- >berksbees@btinternet.com<  
Web: <http://www.berkshirebeekeepers.btik.com/>

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

## Future Events

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## THE APIARY in JUNE

The season started with colonies in Berkshire doing reasonably well considering the couple of bad springs and a hard winter. This is nothing new; it happened in the 1920's and occasionally, on a lesser scale since, however, the advent of Varroa has made things worse. Looking on the optimistic side, perhaps the 'survival of the fittest' will in the future stand us in good stead. Varroa may well have a lot to answer for, it is the vector for many of the hitherto harmless viruses to attack our bees, but do not let us be too quick to take the easy view and lay all the blame on this pest. The colonies that are left are reported to be in fine fettle and building up rapidly, so much so that many of us may be caught out not supering soon enough, perhaps with a late June gap.

Beekeeping weather did not start until well into May, resulting in a spate of swarming particularly where insufficient supers had been applied.

If you have a crop from oil seed rape, it should be extracted immediately. Rape honey will crystalize very quickly, when the only course is to melt it out, some beekeepers use unwired foundation so that the comb can be cut out easily.

There is normally a gap in the nectar flow in June, at this time swarming can be expected, this year's small swarms or casts could be next year's most profitable stocks! During any period when there is a dearth of incoming nectar, these swarms together with nuclei and poorly provisioned colonies, (through excess honey being harvested) should be fed.

Keep ahead of your bees and provide supers or breeding space, there may not be any nectar coming in, but if there is insufficient room to accommodate the bee population the pressure will be relieved by swarming

Triad

## Your Regional Bee Inspectors are: -

**Southern Region:** Nigel Semmence [nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk) Tel No: 01264 338694

The main website is: <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/public/Contacts/contacts.cfm>  
National Bee Unit, Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton, York. YO41 1 LZ  
01 904 462 510 <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk>

**South Eastern Region:** - Mr Alan Byham. Fax/Telephone number: 020 8571 6450

**The Free Apis-UK newsletter is available at:**

<http://www.beedata.com/apis-uk/newsletters09/apis-uk0909.pdf>

## Letter by e-mail

I am 74. My father kept bees - so I am fairly *au fait* with the procedures. My eldest son is trying to keep bees, He has just lost one colony - but is about to get another.

In the late 1940 /early 1950, the Varroa Mite was causing problems. These were alleviated (not cured!!) by something called Frow Mixture. This would probably now be banned under modern H&S regulations!!!

I am used to seeing (in the Reading area) honey bees with striped abdomens (Italian/Austrian crosses of one sort or another). This year they have, almost all, black abdomens. So there are still colonies in this area that are active.

The nectar/pollen bearing shrubs outside my ground-floor window are full of bees - honey, and bumble. The Bumble Bees do not seem to be affected by the Varroa Mite.

Can "they" not produce a strain of bee that has the honey bees' nectar gathering/storing facilities along with the Bummler's (apparent) resistance to Varroa?

Just interested. Peter Davies

We invite comments on this letter. Ed.

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## Wokingham & District Beekeepers Association

The meetings at the Club's apiary are being very well attended with up to 20 people present. As the season progresses, we are finding we can increase the number of hives by splitting colonies that have made queen cells but not swarmed. On two successive Sundays, we have made up a nucleus so that now we have four colonies (the weakest of the three colonies which came through the winter was united on April 11<sup>th</sup> so we were down to two colonies).

With a larger number of colonies, it gives more things to see and do for the members. The bees seem to be happy on the 14 x 12 inch brood frames that we have now adopted throughout the apiary. It certainly gives a strong colony a lot more space for the queen to lay in and hopefully, reduce the swarming instinct. Honey is coming in steadily so we are hopeful of a good crop

Derek Porter Hon. Sec. 0118 979 0326

[www.WDBKA.ik.com](http://www.WDBKA.ik.com)

# SOUTH CHILTERN BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

## Obituary

The Association has lost another long-time supporter, Donald (Don) Thomson. He passed away on April 25<sup>th</sup> at the age of 80. A member for about 20 years, he was a regular at our meetings. He had a knack for perceptive questions and real enjoyment of discussion at 'tea-break'. Don was a key member of South Chilterns BKA, serving as Chairman and President for many years: so his loss will be widely felt.

Don was 12 years old, during the war, when he was struck with bee-fever. This was whilst living with his war-widowed mother in an 18-century cottage in the west of Scotland. In the roof space of the attic was a gentle colony of "black" bees; the coming and goings of which he was able to observe through a nearby window. Every two years a swarm would cluster on the lime trees in their garden and a local bee-man would be called in. One year he said to Don's mother "time for you to get started" so he did, with an inherited WBC hive. From that time on, Don kept bees and one of his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday presents was a Smith hive.

Don's father had worked for Anglo-Iran Oil and as Don grew up, the family lived in several countries. After his father died, he was sent to boarding school, which initially he hated: but where he enjoyed sport, including Rugby. Following this, he took an Engineering degree and developed an interest in Rock Climbing, which led to meeting Chris Bonnington and climbing the Old Man of Hoy. After qualifying, he did National Service in the Navy, serving as a commissioned Engineer Officer on HMS Vanguard, Britain's last Battleship. After the Navy, he joined BP, as an Engineer, working in increasingly senior managerial roles in Aden, Iran, Kent, and finally Scotland. His engineer's enquiring and analytical attitude to situations was very evident - even for medical issues such as heart surgery,



In 1958, Don married Beverley and moved to Kent – the bees were transported strapped to the roof rack of a mini! He joined Sevenoaks BKA and attended beekeeping classes in Tonbridge organised by the CBI, Donald Hendrie, and his son John. The lecturers were nationally known beekeepers and included sessions of disease by Leslie Bailey and Brenda Ball from Rothamsted. Over the years, Don passed all the BBKA's qualifications except Microscopy – which eluded him. In 2008, he was presented with the BBKA 50 Year Award, with which he was delighted.

While Don was working for BP and following his time in Kent, he had to spend several years abroad. On his return he found the 5 gentle colonies he left behind was now just one: and it was foul-tempered! Work then took him to Aberdeen – with the bees, of course, transported on the roof of another mini! There the CBI was the notable Bernhard Mobus, assisted by a youthful Matthew Allen, who were pioneers in improving the bee-stocks of NE Scotland. Don joined BIBBA, attending their conferences and absorbing the experiences of Albert Knight. He also restocked and expanded his colonies with the near-native (black) bee.

When early retirement called, Don moved 600 miles south to Henley-on-Thames. This time his 4 colonies of bees travelled in a trailer behind an Austin Princess. He entered into the beekeeping fraternity, joining various local Societies, including SCBKA and HWBKA, taking part in Honey Shows etc. Age eventually took its toll and he gave up practical beekeeping in 2005, but continued to attend meetings and conferences.

Besides bees, rugby and Engineering, two other big themes in Don's life were 'Messing around in Boats' and maintaining a close knit family. Sailing and boating followed from his time in the Navy. He did much sailing in Aden, then Kent: and won races round the Isle of Sheppey: and he introduced his family to boating. Access to the Thames was surely instrumental in choosing to retire to Henley. Don's experience of losing his father at an early age, followed by boarding school became strong drivers for him to be a 'family man'. He has successfully inoculated his children and grandchildren with his love of boats, but so far, none of them have taken up beekeeping.

The funeral service was at Henley Parish Church on 5<sup>th</sup> May. There was a massive turnout, with Beekeepers present from several different Associations. His children and grandchildren took part, helping us to understand and celebrate a long life, filled with interests, kindness, friendship, and fun.

The service was followed by refreshments and much animated chatter at the Phyllis Court Club in Henley, where he and his wife have been members for years. In a lovely touch, Beverley had arranged for a TV 'slide show' with photos from many stages and aspects of Don's life. It allowed us to glimpse his breadth of interests and his great joy in family, boats, and bees. Beverley and the family were delighted with the large attendance and support they've received at this sad time.

Clive Hill

## **SPRING MEETING**

The first apiary meeting of 2010 was at Ipsden Heath with Reg Hook demonstrating spring management .

As Simon, in common with many other beekeepers, had lost his bees, two of the association colonies were brought in for the demonstration, both colonies appeared to be healthy, but backward for the time of year, apparently this is general this year.

Our thanks go to our hosts, Simon and Francesca Wetton, who had catered very well for us.

Secretary: - Joanne Shanagher. 01189 721067

<http://www.southchilternsbeekeepers.org.uk/>

### **C WYNNE JONES**

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## **SLOUGH, WINDSOR, AND MAIDENHEAD BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY**

With the active bee-keeping year well in place, we are meeting every two weeks at the Apiary, for regular checks for our hives. Despite some distinctly chilly Sunday afternoons, there has still been a good attendance. We are particularly grateful to the experienced bee-keepers, who regularly give up their afternoon to attend – not only do our bees get well looked after, but also new and less-experienced members have a valuable opportunity to see experts at work. Regular attendance also means we can see the results of decisions made earlier in the season – one of the best learning experiences!

There is also the opportunity to follow the story of our hives on our web-site – each week a short update is placed on the Apiary pages, so it is possible to read the continuing story, if you have been unable to attend. We have had some exciting meetings involving shook swarms, re-queening and chalk brood, about which Jim Cooper has written a fascinating article. For those without internet access, I can assure you that all is now well. We have also successfully relocated the colonies from our Dartington into a national hive (for teaching and BBKA assessment reasons) and the hive has been sold to a new beekeeper. The other colonies are all surviving and have started bringing in honey.



The society had a stand at the Berkshire College of Agriculture on their open weekend, and I think everyone who attended thoroughly enjoyed the day. The College has expanded the event in a most impressive way and it was interesting to see how many members of the public were interested in our bees (even virtual, as they were!). School children have obviously been discussing them in school and one little girl was extremely pleased to talk to us as she had a project on bees to finish the following week!

While on the subject of the College, those new or aspiring beekeepers who have not taken the introductory course on beekeeping theory are urged to book early for the autumn course (tel. 01628 824444) as this course gets filled very quickly.

Can I also take the opportunity of the newsletter to point out that all the dates of the apiary meetings are listed on the 'Meetings' page of the web-site, as I know it is easy to forget which Sundays are relevant if you miss one or two.

Also. Joy has kindly made the record pages, which we use at the Apiary, available to all members. It is on an excel spread sheet and will be available on the web site (when I can work out how to do it!) Meanwhile, if you would like a copy, please email me and I will send it to you.

While you are there, there is also a fascinating on-going blog from Bernhard Schumann, giving the adventures and events in his Apiary, with stunning photos to illustrate the articles. These can be found, with other interesting bee-related writing, on the Articles pages. We would really love any contributions from you, if you have interesting experiences or points of discussion. Please email them to Liz Juby ([lizjuby@hotmail.com](mailto:lizjuby@hotmail.com)) for inclusion.

We are now linked directly from the BBKA web site and in fact can now even be reached through Google!

Can I remind you that there will be no more evening meetings in Windsor until September, but our fortnightly visits to the apiary continue on Sunday afternoons at 2.30pm. For details on how to find the Apiary, please contact our secretary, Maureen Williams on 01753 643604 or e-mail [swarm.bees@o2.co.uk](mailto:swarm.bees@o2.co.uk). The June dates are Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

All details of our meetings can also be found on our web-site, [www.britishbee.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead](http://www.britishbee.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead) and on the website [www.wherecanwego.com](http://www.wherecanwego.com). - click SL4 + gardens + nature ( boxes )

Newsletter items: Liz Juby, Windsor (01753) 859382 [lizjuby@hotmail.com](mailto:lizjuby@hotmail.com)

Chairman: Michael Sheasby Farnham Common (01753) 642656

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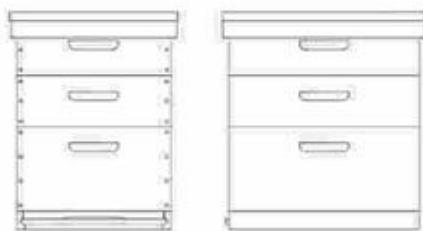
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## READING & DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION.

### Obituary

It is with sadness that we report the passing of Cyril McCombe (known to us all as "Mac"). He died on Tuesday 25th May after an 18 month illness at the grand age of 82years.

"Mac" was a Reading BKA member for many years and was awarded his 50 years BBKA beekeeping certificate three years ago. He is remembered for his bee apiary at the fruit orchard at Mapledurham where he entertained the Reading beekeeping members for many years opening up his hives for an apiary meeting in early summer. A number of our members benefited from his swarms in Caversham Heights.

Most of his life was connected with the "Foundry" industry and he was a regular writer for industrial journals until quite recently, also submitting the occasional article to the Federation Newsletter, the last being the history of "Bee Boles" together with photographs.

He will be sadly missed, particularly for his "dry sense of humour"...

- Michael Blackburn

### APRIL MEETING

On 16th April, we had a good attendance at Ronald Blowers home apiary at Shurlock Row. As well as established beekeepers newer members, some still awaiting their bee colonies were present and a group who anticipate becoming beekeepers shortly for their first hands-on experience of beekeeping. It was good to be able to meet under Ronald's hospitality with fine weather in the beautiful location of 'The Old House' for this our first meeting of our summer programme.

Ronald has five colonies in Smiths equipment, well-spaced out, and has made some considerable efforts during early spring, to get the configuration of his hive to his satisfaction, with evidence of active queens in all five hives, after he had some worries when he examined his bees early-season.

Hive 1. On brood and a half with excluder and super fitted, good amount of brood in deep and shallow, and honey in some frames in the super, nice, if a little slim, queen seen. Raked-out some drone cells, no varroa visible.

Hive 2, having a bit of reputation, left until last.

Hive 3. Colony almost lost during winter, brood and half, but now has 6 frames in shallow with brood; interesting configuration of brood, block of brood in half of frames both sides and honey, presumably, from Ron's feeding being broken into by bees on other half of frames. The shallow is configured on bottom and the deep which had been full of mouldy pollen and rock-hard ivy honey above, There was signs of queen activity now and several poor frames removed and replaced, Ron will continue to monitor.

Hive 4. Again, brood and half with excluder and super, good brood pattern, eggs and larvae in both deep and shallow, nothing in super yet.

Hive 5 Shallow below deep as this was appropriate for where the bees were earlier, but now bees have moved-up with sealed brood and lots of eggs and larvae in the deep, so the hive was re-configured with deep below. All looked good with a fast building population, nice plump queen seen.

Back to hive 2. The most challenging! Strong population, very good brood pattern. Bees rather 'aerial' compared to other colonies, but also proved to be reasonably good tempered. Some drone raked-out and just one or two developing varroa found. Ron has treated his colonies with oxalic acid in the winter, and it seems to be paying dividends. An 'Old Housed Specialty, was seen by those who could keep-up with her swift movements, as large vigorous queen, orange and khaki coloured, a veritable 'rumex queen'!

With our new people present, this was an ideal meeting with the high standard Ronald sets with his beekeeping and equipment, the channels for the frames are clean and greased, the frames cleaned-off with new floor on some hives, hand made by the owner, it made the inspection a pleasure and was an excellent example to us all.

With many thanks to Ronald and all who attended.

### **June meeting.**

By the kind courtesy of Caroline and Jeremy Gilmore at 11.30 AM on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June. The location is their home apiary at 'The Rose Garden', Thames Street, Sonning on Thames. RG4 6UR. Please be prompt. Anyone requiring directions please contact Jon. or Caroline & Jeremy (944 0337).

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

[www.rbka.org.uk](http://www.rbka.org.uk)

**See:** <http://beebase.csl.gov.uk/pdfs/fbleaflet.pdf>

**Well worth looking at,** <http://www.co-operative.coop/planbee>

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**Varroa jacobsoni** (Varroa destructor). Early research, updated.

**Contributions**, this includes **E-mails**, to arrive with the Editor by the **FIRST POST** (Around 10.00am) on the twentieth of the Month for the Following Month, Contributions received after this will be held over for a later month.

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