



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

**February 2011  
Number 650**

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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**

Saturday 2 <sup>nd</sup> and Sun 3 <sup>rd</sup> APRIL Burchetts Green Open Day
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## **THE APIARY in FEBRUARY**

In early February, we sit peering out into the gloom, only enlivened by occasional visits to our hives, as recommended to ensure all is secure, and woodpeckers, badgers etc are not menacing our bees. A chicken wire or netting screening for woodpecker protection if you've got destructive ones in your area is pretty much essential. Badgers can be thwarted to some extent by strapping your hive together, preferably onto its stand.

We should have been active in January with oxalic acid treatment. According to "learned literature" an oxalic trickle can only work on varroa that are not already developing inside brood cells, i.e. those in a 'phoretic' state, hence trickling in early January as soon as it's about 10C, before the queen has made much of a start on laying and the colony is virtually brood-less. However if it's early February and you've not done your trickling, do go ahead, here's a recipe from the estimable Wally Shaw. Thornes and others sell a ready-made solution.

1 kg sugar  
1 litre of water (use distilled e.g. battery top-up, rain water etc)  
70 grammes oxalic acid dihydrate crystals (as supplied by Thornes & others).

Mix together well, until crystals are dissolved. Apply 5ml per seam of bees to maximum of 40 ml. Oxalic acid is naturally present in traces in both honey and pollen, bees can tolerate this stronger dose strictly once, never re-dose. It corrodes and kills varroa that's contacted with the solution and via their mouth parts when contacting treated bees for a short period.

If the water is cold when you mix the solution it will have a slight opalescence, bottle it off into well-labelled ex 'drinking water' bottles and stand on top of a radiator for a few hours before you take it to the hives, all will be clear and completely dissolved, keep it warm and apply it along each seam of bees. This time of year, cleansing flights take place when it's mild enough; the guard bees are particularly active so even if you go to observe, go fully protected with smoker going!

While you're out there, heft your hives, if you can lift one side or corner quite easily with say your weaker arm, there's a risk of starvation, the only thing you can do, is place some fondant (candy) above the escapes in the crown board and monitor each week. This was considered when this beekeeper started, an emergency measure. According to learned writers, this type of 'feeding' shouldn't be done when the colony is heavy with stores from last summer/autumn.

Below is a handy recipe for fondant from Edinburgh and Midlothian Beekeepers Association.

4 parts granulated sugar.  
1 part water.  
½ -1 teaspoon white vinegar\*.

Pour together in a saucepan and bring slowly to the boil stirring constantly, boil gently for 5 minutes. Check with a cookery thermometer and bring to 234F (113 C). Remove from heat and cool to 200F (93C) then stir down in a water bath. Pour into ex 'takeaway' plastic tubs or similar for application to the crown board. You will need to check the accuracy of your cookery thermometer, bring a pan of water to the boil and check, my quite expensive one is 3 degrees C low (replacing one from Morrisons that was 9 degrees low!) the temperature is critical to get a good malleable fondant, so I stop boiling at 110C. At 118 c the result is too hard at 120C you risk the interesting but annoying spectacle of your proposed fondant re-combining with it's water content to form 'granulated' again as you stir it down!

\*Mrs. Wedmore says the 'inversion' of the sugar by acidifying with vinegar; cream of tartar etc., is unnecessary and may be harmful to the bees. If you believe this leave-out the vinegar

At the end of the month, if it is mild and the bees are freely flying, you can commence feeding single strength syrup if the hives are thought to be light of stores, this is 1 part sugar dissolved in 1 part water. If a Miller or 'quick feeder' is used cut bubble-wrap to fit part of the surface so the bees can stand on it if they get into the reservoir, this avoids 'drowning'

When bees become active on mild February days, then it's time to give them some help in conserving hive heat, while their population remains small, Use your entrance block with a reduced aperture, say 2 inches, remove any matchsticks you may have beneath the crown board corners and use your quilt on top. End of February, if things are buzzing, you should become proactive in inspecting your bees and do your best to help them in the early build-up stage. Pollen is an essential nutrient for bees particularly for 'brood food'. Here in the Thames Valley we usually have good supplies of early pollen for the bees to collect, from various Willow, Salix, Hazel catkins and early crocus.

Ted Hooper (A Guide To Bees and Honey p.105-6) recommends feeding pollen substitute for early brood build up.

Here is a recipe; you can obtain everything at a good health food store.

3 parts by weight defatted Soya flour.  
1 part skimmed milk powder.  
1 part brewers yeast, dried.  
Pinch of ascorbic acid (vitamin C)

In a recent talk to a Berkshire beekeepers association, Robin Dean, a research fellow at CAER at Reading University, described seeing liberal amounts of this sprinkled in front of bee hives in USA commercial beekeeping enterprises. Presumably, to try to build the 'five frames of brood' required by the apiarists employed by the massive grower's organizations for a hive supplied for pollination to 'get its ticket'.

We on a smaller scale will find it more convenient to apply pollen substitute as a 'patty' i.e. moisten the well mixed pollen substitute with just enough 2:1 sugar syrup or honey to enable you to form a firm patty with you hands, apply beneath the crown board on top of the frames, monitor the bees to see how they're taking it.

You will need to get-out the family mortar and pestle to grind the brewers yeast tablets, also crush-up a Vitamin. C tablet and add a pinch. The rate would be half a teaspoon to 1 kilo of mix.

As well as the nutritional factor the vitamin C is said to make the pollen substitute, more attractive to bees, anyone who has taken bee pollen as a food supplement will know that it's got a slightly acidic 'sherbety' taste.'

The above recipe is from Wikipedia which has some good entries on winter feed etc for honeybees, though mostly contributed by beekeepers in the USA, i.e. syrup feeds including 'corn syrup' plentiful in the US, hard to find over here.

Triad

**Read The Georgia Bee Letter**, particularly December from page nine.

<http://www.ent.uga.edu/bees/documents/GBLDec2010.pdf>

**The** following is a motion to be put before parliament regarding dangerous pesticides.

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=42282&SESSION=905>

## **GLOBAL BEE EMERGENCY -- ACT NOW!**

Sign the petition [http://www.avaaz.org/en/save\\_the\\_bees/96.php](http://www.avaaz.org/en/save_the_bees/96.php)

By Joining Beebase you can access beekeeping information and can ask for advice or help from the Bee Unit <http://www.beebase.csl.gov.uk/>

## **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

## **LEAVER MEMORIAL LECTURE ---- Newbury**

### **Research into viruses which affect bees - Guido Cordoni**

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011 at 7.30 pm

The Sutton Hall, Stockcross, near Newbury, Berkshire

Newbury Beekeepers' Association warmly invites you to the 29<sup>th</sup> annual Leaver Memorial Lecture, to be given by Guido Cordoni who is in the PhD programme at the University of Surrey. His work has included field studies on the spread of AFB in Italy and current research into the genetic characteristics of slow bee paralysis viruses.

The Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences is the second largest in the University of Surrey. Within this Faculty, the aims of the Microbial Sciences Division are to investigate host/pathogen interactions and bacterial antibiotic production and to utilise 21<sup>st</sup> century biology to help improve understanding of infectious diseases and, in doing so, develop new antimicrobial agents and vaccines to target them.

The lecture is free and all people in the region who are interested in bees are most welcome. We should therefore be very grateful if you would publicise the lecture amongst local beekeepers.

The lecture will be held at the Sutton Hall, Church Road, Stockcross. The postcode is RG20 8LN.

## Directions:-

- Stockcross is on the A4000 just off the A4 on the western edge of Newbury.
- If you are coming from the north or south, use the A34 and take the A4 exit towards Hungerford. However do not enter the A4 but, on the western roundabout, take the exit for the A4000 signposted to Wickham, Stockcross and RAF Welford.
- If you are coming from the east of Newbury, drive through Newbury on the A4 until you cross the A34 and then turn onto the A4000 signposted to Wickham, Stockcross and RAF Welford.
- When in the middle of Stockcross village, turn south onto Church Road. The Hall is on the right after about 100 yards. The Hall has some parking space but cars may be parked (considerately, please) along Church Road and Glebe Lane.



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## Wokingham & District Beekeepers Association

On December 8<sup>th</sup> the talk given by Terry Clare entitled 'Queen Rearing for the Small Beekeeper' was most informative and we learnt how to select the best bees from which to raise our own queens. He outlined the characteristics to look out for to ensure that the resulting queens give the best results. After a stimulating talk, several questions were raised from members and Mr Clare skilfully answered these. I hope that several of our members will try to raise some queens this year.

After the talk, we held a raffle to raise money for the Club's funds. Many prizes had been brought along, but the pair of ducks, which had a habit of returning year after year, did not put in an appearance, as the last person to win them liked them too much to part with them. A new single ceramic duck has replaced the pair and I was lucky (!) enough to win it. After the raffle, a fine spread of seasonal food was consumed.

The talk by Norman Hughes on January 12<sup>th</sup> was extremely well attended with 38 members and 2 children present. Norman talked about how varroa arrived in the UK and how we have got to the present position with varroa resistant to some of the chemical treatments. He described current methods to combat the pest and seemed to favour talcum powder.

The important thing to remember, is to have a mesh floor to catch the mites so that they cannot get back onto the bees, as the talc does not kill them, but just makes them lose their grip on the bees. It has been shown that the mites can jump high enough to attach themselves to bees if a bee walks over a mite.

The next talk on February 9<sup>th</sup> will be on Research at Rothamsted by Pete Kennedy. This promises to be very interesting and it will tie in with the last talk of the programme in March, which will concern breeding disease resistant, bees. Do come along to both talks if you can.

The earlier start time of 7.30pm seems to be popular but if meetings finish earlier than they used to, why not take advantage of the bar which we can now enjoy whilst chatting to fellow members.

Derek Porter Hon. Sec. 0118 979 0326

<http://wokinghambeekeepers.moonfruit.com>

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

As usual, at this time of year, it has been a quiet couple of months for the Society.

The December meeting in Windsor included a viewing of the BBKA DVD about the honeybee and it was well worth seeing. Even our most experienced beekeepers found plenty to interest them and the photography is absolutely superb.

During January we do not have our usual Windsor meeting, but by the time you read this we will have held our first 2-day Beginners' Course and we trust that the participants will have benefited from all the work put in by members who have helped to run it. We will also have had our Annual Dinner, hopefully celebrating the success of the course!

February sees the recommencement of our monthly meetings in Windsor and we begin on February 8<sup>th</sup> with a talk on swarm control. The thought of bees swarming may feel like a distant concern, but all beekeepers know how easy it is to be caught unprepared when you are told that there is a swarm in your next-door neighbour's garden! Hopefully, after this month, we will be able to prevent this inconvenience and also have our colonies and honey harvest benefiting from our expertise!



In our own apiary we have fed the colonies and checked for any damage to the hives (hopefully not from woodpeckers as we made careful use of wire cages to protect them from this). Denis also checked the varroa count just before Christmas and happily it was extremely low. As it was the first time we had used Apilife Var, it is pleasing to see that it has obviously been successful in protecting the bees.

While we are on the subject of the Apiary, can I remind you that our fortnightly meetings begin again in March and full details of all our meetings can be found on our web-site, [www.britishbee.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead](http://www.britishbee.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead). I would also like to recommend to any members who have not explored our web-site, the fascinating and entertaining articles from Bernhard Schumann, who works very hard on our behalf, writing about varied aspects of bees and bee-keeping. We would also welcome any articles or comments from other members – please email [lizjuby@hotmail.com](mailto:lizjuby@hotmail.com) with any contributions.

I have also been asked to remind you that we are very keen to recruit new members to join us on the Committee to help with the running of the Society. We are particularly keen to hear from anyone who would consider helping in the role of Secretary, but members would also be warmly welcome to join us without any particular responsibility, if they would prefer to do that. If you are interested in volunteering (or in finding out more about what you might be volunteering for!) please contact Michael Sheasby, whose email address and phone number is at the end of the newsletter, or have a chat with him at the next meeting. I do hope we will see many of you there.

In case there is anyone who has not joined us before, the meeting begins at 8pm at All Saint's Parish Hall in Alexander Road, Windsor SL4 1HZ. The Church is on the corner of Frances and Alexandra Roads and there is a small car park on site. However, because of new parking restrictions around the hall, if the car park is full it is advisable to park in Bolton Avenue, just a short walk away, where they do not apply. This is the next but one exit from the nearby roundabout and just before the exit for the hospital.

All details of our meetings and the shows can also be found on the website [www.wherecanwego.com](http://www.wherecanwego.com). - click SL4 + gardens + nature ( boxes ).

Can I also take the opportunity to wish everyone all best wishes for 2011?

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

Chairman: Michael Sheasby Farnham Common (01753) 642656  
[michaelsheasby@lineone.net](mailto:michaelsheasby@lineone.net)

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## Reading & District Beekeepers' Association.

The first of two meetings to report were held at our usual venue of Caversham Heights Methodist Hall on 9<sup>th</sup> December. We were honoured and delighted to have Robin Dean as our guest speaker. Robin is a world-renowned scientist, a commercial beekeeper in his own right and a research fellow at The Centre For Agricultural Research (CAER) at Reading University.

**Pollination.** The hidden benefits of bee mediated pollination in agriculture, in short: 'What we didn't know about pollination'. What is usually just thought-off as basically transfer of pollen from anther to stigma by bees to most beekeepers is obviously a full practical scientific study of great importance to all of us. The cost of pollination is rapidly increasing; Robin illustrated this with reference to the highly important California almond crop where the cost per colony has increased to the grower, to about £200, an increase from about 4 to 20%. Studies by Robin and his team have demonstrated that tree fruits which are not promptly pollinated by insects may partially self, or wind pollinate, there is a high proportion of losses (referred to in apple orchards as 'June drop') and fruit that can be picked will be irregular in size and maturity rates, and with reduced calcium levels making the keeping quality poor.

Some alarming pictures of Chinese labour hand pollinating orchards in China where insect pollination has failed were shown. Pollination costs in the UK have apparently increased from 5 to 18% with growers in intensive fruit production areas paying £180 per hive, a few years ago it was £45! Considerable numbers of bumble bee colonies are now being supplied to growers from specialist companies in the Netherlands, these are more suited to tunnel propagation of soft fruits and because they are effective at releasing pollen showers with the right vibration (buzz) frequency are essential pollinators of glasshouse tomatoes, but the dominance of honeybee colonies in the field of commercial pollination to quote Robin, "is not going to change anytime soon". Because of their greater weight causing blossom damage, and tendency to bite through flowers to get at the nectaries without actually contacting anther and stigma, bumbles can produce higher numbers of less than 'grade A fruits. Robin advises that tree fruit growers in Europe will break even at 90% grade A, be happy at 95%. and at 85% make a thumping loss! Robin also works with the species of solitary bees that are suitable for commercial pollination.

In Robin's field of agriculture, the way forward is seen as care for the whole plant and the requirement that it would have to be healthy and productive throughout its growth and maturation, referred-to as "canopy management". We hope we as beekeepers can support Robin's effort with good strong colonies of honeybees. Robin confirmed that because of varroa and now the increasing menace of nosema ceranae, honeybees have to now be considered as a domesticated animal in most of the world. The talk continued with references to soft fruit, oilseed rape, the control of varroa, with a particularly good tip about using icing sugar on newly hived swarms and with a questions and answers session. A most illuminating and important talk from Robin for which Reading Beekeepers are extremely grateful. Mince pies and mulled wines were also enjoyed.

The January meeting on 13th at the Methodist Hall also gave us real top-notch avant-garde information about where beekeeping is going in our fight against varroa from Ron Hoskings from Wiltshire. Ron has been working on breeding "Hygienic Bees" that groom varroa mites from the bees and open cells and remove varroa infested developing bees, biting the mites and damaging them and discarding varroa nymphs from cells. He has just received another £6000 research grant from BBKA to buy equipment so that another 20 beekeepers can help with the research. Ron and his co-workers in "The Swindon Honey Bee Conservation Group" hope to be able to pass-on their strain of bees to other beekeepers and to try to spread his work out from its Swindon centre and is offering nuclei with equipment and techniques along with his "Adopt a Hive" sponsorship programme.

With his 67 years of beekeeping experience, Ron has been able to see past the 'chemical' approach to controlling varroa and with forward thinking scientists in the USA is linking recent problems with poor queen performance, i.e. supercedure of queens less than 1 year old, frequent swarming etc., with the active ingredients in products like 'Bayvarol' and Apistan' causing loss of fertility in drones, also drone populations are low, not helped of course by beekeepers culling and sacrificing drone cells as a part of our combined approach to reducing varroa in our hives. What we buy as foundation or recycle in our hives that have been in contact with these 'pyrethroids' and contain them will continue to have adverse effects, for this reason Ron's approach is 'chemical free'.

Ron uses wax only from his own chemical free bees, using a top bar technique with a strip of plastic foundation, working with his swarms to get as much drawn comb as possible. Ron has numerous mating nuclei at Swindon in his excellent site, and raises queens and tests their performance for the grooming and cleansing trait. From good performing colonies he raises queens, he has established to his satisfaction that this is a genetic trait rather than a learned skill. Ron is an expert queen producer and artificial inseminator. Queens are evaluated by painstaking, daily examination of his varroa floors for mite drop, assessing damaged and bitten mites and also bee-larval antenna fragments, and varroa nymphs from bee's opening cells and dragging-out infested nearly developed imago bees.

Ron's team is really on to something at Swindon and many established entomological scientist, the BBKA and skilled beekeepers believe in what they are doing. Throughout Ron's talk, lavishly illustrated with some wonderful photography of his site, the activities including amazing photomicroscopy of an adult varroa, of which we were lucky enough to obtain a copy, wildlife nearby, drone providing semen, insemination of a queen etc. Ron's knowledge, respect and affection for honeybees and all life forms was very apparent, we wish him every success and will try to keep in contact.

There is a web site [www.swindonhoneybeeconservation.org.uk](http://www.swindonhoneybeeconservation.org.uk)

The February meeting at the Methodist Hall is on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> at 7-30 sharp. Our talk is on "The Bees and Beekeepers of Trinidad and Tobago" from David Charles from Somerset. It's going to be another excellent one. See you there!

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

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

## **SOUTH CHILTERN BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION**

SCBKA Meeting at Woodcote Village Hall November 17th 2010

A talk by June Hughes entitled "Encaustic Art"

The definition of Encaustic is "A method of painting using pigments with beeswax fixed onto the surface by heat"

Encaustic art is over 2000 years old. Evidence of encaustic art has been found in caves and Roman villas. It is thought that melted coloured wax was applied to walls with a knife or piece of wood.

Today coloured wax sticks are melted onto the hot sole plate of a travel iron and then applied to glossy paper in a series of strokes. Fine detail can be achieved with a soldering iron or the point of the iron. The wax sticks are approx 2cm x1cm x 1cm and can be purchased in a variety of colours. They cost about £1.25 each.

June became interested in encaustic art after seeing Michael Young doing a demonstration at the Spring Convention in 1997.



She demonstrated the technique by melting a few blobs of the blue and white wax sticks onto the sole of the iron. She then making several passes of the iron onto the top edge of the glossy card and as if by magic a sky with clouds appeared. After wiping the iron clean, green and brown wax was applied and again magically a landscape appeared. Shrubs in the foreground were made by dabbing the iron onto the edge of the card. Lakes were made by wiping an area with a tissue.

She also used rubber stencils to produce trees and the head of a 6" nail covered in white wax became a full moon. Stunning!

After a few more demonstrations she asked for volunteers to have a try. It soon became obvious that it was more difficult than June had made it appear!

A thoroughly enjoyable talk by an enthusiastic speaker.

Dave Moss

## **December Meeting**

### **Christmas meeting**

As usual this was focused around mulled wine, good food and the opportunity to socialise with other members.

In addition, was the first edition of SC 'question of beekeeping'. Members were invited to send in their questions which were then answered by the panel. It was fascinating to hear the varied responses to the question 'who or what influenced you to start beekeeping?' Reasons ranged from the wish to avoid rheumatics to being inspired by an observation hive as a small boy.

More technical questions were asked such as how and when to re queen a 'grumpy' colony or what causes drones to develop with white heads and one eye.

The panel left the audience with a tip resulting from their own beekeeping experiences.

The raffle was popular, raising money towards association funds.

## **South Chilterns how have an Apiary!**

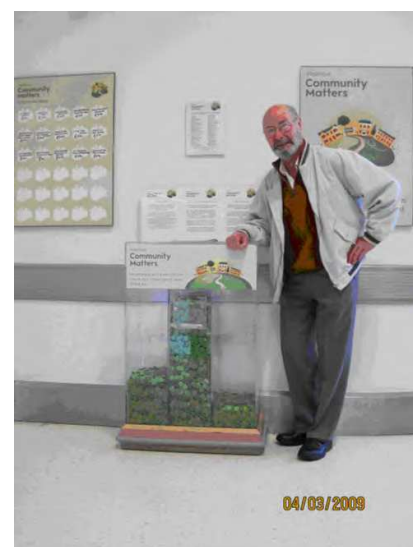
After much searching a suitable site has been found.

Acquiring the site coincided with a grant from Wallingford Waitrose who donated almost half of the cost of a shed in which to store necessary equipment on site.

Buffalo delivered the shed in sections on Friday afternoon; it was erected by the following Sunday morning thanks to a willing group of helpers.

The following week the snow came!

The association bees have been relocated and a programme is being planned so that members have an opportunity to extend their beekeeping skills and experience. We would like to thank Waitrose for the donation and the Wallingford customers who demonstrated their commitment and support for honeybees with their 'green tokens'!





## THE FEBRUARY MEETING

Is on Wednesday February 16 **POLLEN IN FORENSIC SCIENCE** By Dr Michael Keith-Lucas  
BeeCraft books will be available for purchase at a discount, pamphlets and old editions of Beecraft will also be available.

Secretary: – Joanne Shanagher. 01189 721067

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

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

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