



THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

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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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THE APIARY in MAY

We have experienced the warmest April for many years resulting in a rapid build up of colonies. We are now finding colonies preparing to swarm and receiving reports of queen cells sealed in as little as six days, resulting in queens emerging days early as happened in the mid-1970s. These queens were often superseded later in the season.

A queen who has been mated emits a chemical scent known as a pheromone. The worker bees caress and feed her, and in doing so, some of this smell is transferred to them. This mechanism organises the colony and enables it to work as one unit. If she becomes inefficient due to her store of male sperm becoming exhausted, or some other misfortune befalls her, the workers will raise another queen provided that eggs or young larvae are available. If they can't produce a replacement after a period of time, some of the worker's ovaries will develop and they will be able to lay eggs. As these eggs have not been fertilised, they will evolve into drones, and the worker cells will be capped in a dome shape. The resulting drones will emerge not much bigger than a worker and will be useless. If the colony has reached this state, any queen that is introduced will be killed and the colony will perish.

To remedy such a problem, move the hive well away from its existing position and place a floorboard and an empty brood chamber on the old site. Take a frame out and shake all the bees onto the ground. Place this comb - now free of bees - into the brood chamber on the original site. Do this with all the frames; then fit the crown-board and roof and leave. The laying workers or faulty queen will remain on the ground whilst the foragers will find their way back to their old site. After a day or so they will accept a queen which you are now be able to introduce via a queen cage or a hair curler. Alternatively, you can unite it with another queen-right colony by placing it on top with a sheet of newspaper separating the two brood boxes.

If you have two hives on the same site, and you find that one is very populous and may swarm whilst the other is quite weak, try transposing them. This generally evens them up quite well.

Continue to fit empty supers ahead of requirement or when the previous one is about 2/3 full, and continue to check for swarming. You may be able to extract by the end of this month especially if your bees have been on oilseed rape. This honey granulates very rapidly and should be extracted as soon as possible. You may extract even if the comb is not fully capped. Give it a good hard shake and if no liquid comes out, it is fine to proceed.

Triad

NBU ADVICE for OBTAINING BEES: This leaflet was included with the April *BeeCraft*. If you do not subscribe to *BeeCraft*, Go to BeeBase.

By joining BeeBase you can access beekeeping information and ask for advice or help from the Bee Unit: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>.

Read The Georgia Bee Letter, particularly December from page nine:
<http://www.ent.uga.edu/bees/documents/GBLDec2010.pdf>.

GLOBAL BEE EMERGENCY -- ACT NOW!

Sign the petition at: http://www.avaaz.org/en/save_the_bees/96.php.

Your Regional Bee Inspectors are: -

Southern Region: Nigel Semmence at: nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk, tel: 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, tel:01 904 462 510, email: <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk> .

South Eastern Region: Mr Alan Byham, fax/tel: 020 8571 6450.

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Wokingham & District Beekeepers' Association

With the arrival of spring, we have now started the Sunday afternoon meetings at the club's apiary. Attendance for the first meeting was good and Peter Seagrave has prepared the following report.

We came through winter with no losses and all queens intact which, considering the weather, was a remarkable achievement by the bees. All five hives are in excellent condition thanks to the diligence of our treasurer, Neil Marshall, who visited the apiary on many occasions in deep winter to keep a look out for damaged, blown over or woodpecker drilled hives.

The bees are of excellent temperament, which is a good job as we are receiving 25 or more visitors every Sunday who come to the apiary to chat with other beekeepers and gain some hands-on experience. We have ten protective suites to loan to people who do not have a bee suite yet. For many of our new members this is the first time they have handled bees and this is a very "safe" environment in which to gain some confidence in beekeeping.

Sunday, 10th April, was a glorious spring day for beekeeping, with a temperature of 20 degrees. All the hives were gone through and there was not a sign of a queen cell anywhere. Varroa

seemed to be well controlled and with no signs of disease anywhere, we are off to a good start. The bees were in a good mood too, which always helps.

The apiary has not been moved to the new site yet (across the field outside the old donkey shed), but the site is ready to receive the bees. To move the bees this year, we would need to take them three miles away for a while so that they forget where they lived and then place them in the new site across the field where they will re-orientate themselves to their new home. The alternative is to wait until next winter when it's really cold and move the hives whilst the bees are in a tight cluster.

To give new beekeepers more chance of handling the bees, particularly if they have not yet got some of their own bees, we will make some changes to the way we conduct the meetings. We hope these changes will increase the involvement of everyone who attends the meetings.

Derek Porter, Hon. Sec. Tel: 0118 979 0326

<http://wokinghambeekeepers.moonfruit.com>

Reading & District Beekeepers' Association.

Sunday, 17th April. Reading beekeepers, including a good number of new members and 'inductees', assembled at Mike Dabb's garden apiary in Long Lane, Tilehurst. Mike has four colonies in splendid new beehives, two of which house swarms collected by Mike fairly late last season. Mike believes these were casts following virgin queens and, although Mike saw some worker brood late last season and there are worker populations in both colonies, the current situation is that both of these are drone laying only. Our demonstrator, Mike Blackburn, suggested that as the populations and occupied cells are not numerous, dropping a swarm into these would be effective. The colony and swarm could then be given a syrup or rosewater spray. Alternatively, he could try shaking the bees off away from the hive to drop out the old queens (not found on this inspection) or laying workers, and introducing a queen cell. There are 14 inch deep frames on these two hives, so uniting them in their original boxes could be a bit problematic!

On then to Mike's two productive hives. Hive number three had a good population building up, with plenty of stores and worker brood. The queen was found and she looked good and heavy. We did find two queen cups close together and one appeared to be occupied. We left these in and Mike marked the frame with blue and will monitor them. Mike would also put a super on in the next few days, and although there were frames at the edges in the deep box not fully drawn out, these are 14 inch frames again, and no doubt the bees would more readily put stores into shallow frames immediately above the brood area.

Now for the big hive! This is on a double brood, luckily in conventional ten inch frames, plus a shallow on top without an excluder. It was populous and healthy looking. Our demonstrator removed the top shallow and deep together while we worked the bottom box. There was brood in quantity and sufficient drone brood to allow us to rake-out a small patch for examination: no varroa found. We did, however, find three queen cells close together and occupied with larvae in pools of queen food. We quickly commenced to check frames on the second deep and luckily found the queen on the first frame as she had been marked. Ensuring she remained in place, her frame was moved to deep box one and the queen cell frame into deep box two. Mike produced a floor, roof and crown board, and set up deep box two as hive number five. An excluder was placed on top of deep box one with the shallow on top, so now the configuration is hive four with a good active queen and one super, and new hive five with occupied queen cells. As hive five is heavy with brood, Mike would add a shallow in the next few days. Good, yes? Well, we thought so!

Beekeepers then relaxed with some excellent sandwiches, cake, tea and coffee provided by Mrs. Dabbs. The beekeepers and inductees felt that this had been a thoroughly interesting and productive first meeting of the Reading Beekeeper's summer programme. With thanks to Mr. and Mrs Mike Dabbs and all who attended and demonstrated.

15th May is our next meeting, at 11.30am sharp, at Cross Lanes Apple Farm near Mapledurham, courtesy of Mike and Hazel Blackburn whose bees provide pollination on this excellent and well-known local fruit farm. This will be an ideal opportunity for members to see something of the beekeeper's role in a commercial fruit growing environment. Don't miss it!

Martin Moore, Secretary. Tel: 0118 9677386

www.rbka.org.uk

South Chilterns Beekeepers' Association

16th March 2011 was the last of the winter meetings. Roger Patterson (with Meg the dog) gave an interesting talk on **Queen Performance Issues**.

As Roger has been raising his own queens since 1963, he's noticed that whereas he used to expect a 90 per cent success rate in raising a mated queen from a queen cell, the success rate in recent years has dropped dramatically. This is irrespective of the way in which queens are raised, and as it's also happening to imported queens, similar problems are being experienced elsewhere in the world. This is a new phenomenon, not yet written about in books and with few journal references, so many people are not yet aware of the scale of the problem, or even that it exists at all. It's important that, as beekeeping has become so much tougher, we all get up to speed very quickly with these changes.

Symptoms are several and varied and are the sorts of things that can occur naturally, but are now increasing in frequency. Using examples from his own teaching apiaries, photographs and diaries of hive checks and nuclei over the last few years, Roger illustrated each of these problems.

Queen cells appear good, but no laying queen results

Roger has been seeing evidence of queens with deformed wings that cannot be due to Deformed Wing Virus, as they are not in the cell long enough for the virus to have developed; queens with deformed abdomens; and dead or decomposed larvae at all different stages of development.

Drones in worker cells

Variable amounts of drone eggs are laid in worker cells, ranging from an odd few to 100 per cent, resulting in total failure. When a queen runs out of sperm naturally she switches from all worker eggs to all drone eggs within a few days, but in these cases no normal supersedure cells are being built. Queens may start well with problems developing later, and the problem can easily be confused with laying workers.

Early supersedure

Whereas a prolific queen, like an Italian or Carniolan, normally lives for two to three years, and non-prolific bees will supersede after four to five years, queens are no longer living this long. Natural supersedure occurs in autumn when the bees realise that the queen won't last the winter, and the old and new queens can stay together, but this is happening more frequently early in the summer. With photographs, Roger showed how these supersedure cells - one, two or occasionally three - can be somewhere unusual on the frame where traditional books say they shouldn't

be, such as on the edge of the frame rather than the face, or beyond the food where there is no other brood. Puzzlingly, they can even turn up before the first brood is sealed, so the bees don't even yet know the queen's quality. There seems to be no obvious problem with the brood, but the old queen rarely lives long. Two years ago when there were many swarms, they had all had a supersedure cell hidden somewhere, and cells even turned up when mated queens from mini-nuclei were transferred to a new colony.

Disappearing queens

Laying suddenly stops. If a queen disappears say, for example, she was damaged at the last inspection, the bees will normally start an emergency cell within 12 hours. These are made by converting an existing larva of the right age and are often in the centre of the frame, with the existing cell pulled out and then extending down. But there also can be no emergency cells, as if the queen stopped laying, but hung around long enough to prevent their being triggered. Yet Roger's experience shows that the timing is rarely right for this to be the result of the queen getting lost or killed during manipulation. In his examples, around 150lb of honey might already have been produced before her disappearance. She may be laying perfectly, then suddenly stop – native bees often reduce laying if the nectar source dries up. If she hasn't disappeared but starts laying again, there is usually a very high proportion of drone brood in the worker cells.

Other strange colony behaviour

- In recent years there has been an increase of cases of one emergency cell turning up despite the queen laying well.
- Queenright colonies have both swarms and emergency cells, which shouldn't happen at the same time, showing apparently contradictory pheromones. Test combs of young brood from another colony normally used to check if the hive is queenright simply don't work.
- Three queens, mother and two daughters, all remain in the colony together.
- Queens take longer than usual to come into lay even when the weather is good, taking up to six weeks instead of the normal three.
- Small swarms with a fertile queen.
- Swarm queens quickly disappear, fail or are superseded, evidenced by half a dozen emergency cells turning up just five to six weeks after hiving the swarm.

What might be causing poor queen performance?

This could be a long-term problem and we need much more funding for research to find this out, but Roger speculates on the possibilities:

- Inbreeding;
- diseases, viruses; yet monitoring of nosema and varroa in Roger's own apiaries suggest these are low level and unlikely to be the cause, and nosema is present in tissue samples from 20 years ago;
- pyrethrum residues in wax from past varroa treatment or unregistered chemical residues in wax from other countries;
- chemical / neonicotinoid levels building up in queens as bees return to hive with sub-lethal doses;

- endocrine disruptor chemicals such as HRT building up in the environment / water courses, perhaps from use of treated sewage products as fertilisers;
- poor nutrition of queens and larvae, variation in royal jelly provision;
- poor drone viability, perhaps related to nutrition or chemicals;
- pheromone blocking by other chemical compounds;
- nectar and pollen not moved later in the day fast enough to leave the queen sufficient empty cells;
- hygienic behaviour, as if bees might deliberately take out parasitised cells;
- mobile telephone masts, which appear to have no nearby insect life.

What should we be doing about it?

Roger's recommendation is to recognise that these problems are increasing and look very carefully at your own hives, keeping an open mind. Practise good management, making sure you understand what healthy brood looks like and what should be happening so that you can report and discuss problems with others.

Keep basic records, clip and mark the queen so you can be sure of recognising the same one, and inspect regularly at seven or 14 day intervals. Be vigilant - be sure to shake the bees off the frames for a really good look and check every comb for eggs and queen cells, including combs where there seems to be only food. If you've got a good queen, don't follow the current book advice and replace her every two years for the sake of it, keep her as long as possible.

Become a drone rearer in case fertility is a problem, with one frame of drone brood in every colony. Roger feels that uncapping drone brood is a better varroa test than the drop test. Varroa-damaged drone pupae might emerge as less- or non-fertile.

Check around the hive for a radius of 10-15 feet for a golf-ball sized cluster of bees when mating is due in case of a deformed wing queen.

Don't buy imported queens. Aim for double your needs when raising queens to allow for losses and make them emerge into cages so that poor ones can be culled. Keep extra colonies so that you have spare queens available.

And Roger's last words – if you don't think it's happening to you, you're not looking hard enough!

But above all, be positive!

Meryle Toomey

Joanne Shanagher, Secretary. Tel: 01189 721067

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

Slough, Windsor, and Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society

It has been a very happy start to our new active beekeeping year. As I write this, there have been two meetings at the apiary and all is well there. During the first inspection, even though the weather only allowed a fairly quick inspection to be done on each hive by Dennis, the 17 or so attendees, who were mostly newcomers, were able to witness a variety of manipulations, including the finding and marking of two very elusive queens of last year! All hives had come through the winter quite strongly after the fairly mediocre performance last year, and were all given a super, which were well on the way to being filled by the second meeting, when a second was given to each.

The second Sunday was beautiful though, which gave all the new beekeepers time to open the hives, handle the frames themselves and carry out a close inspection – for some of them, the first time handling real bees. Luckily, the colonies behaved beautifully and they were amazed at how quiet and peaceful the bees were. We did point out that it is not always like that!

Apiary meetings have been held weekly throughout April, but will continue fortnightly. Dates are in the Meetings section of our website and there is a regular brief update of the apiary in the apiary pages.

Following on from our successful beginners' course, we were fortunate to be offered the facilities of Clive's Beaconsfield apiary to give some of our complete beginners an opportunity to handle bees in small groups. The first two planned meetings in March had to be cancelled at short notice because of the cold and windy weather on each day. However, the third was a huge success, when nine of them were able to work on the hives under the supervision of the tutors. These hives had been left for us to do the first inspection and again we saw a variety of conditions after the winter. Some were very strong and on the point of swarming, whereas others were much further behind, one or two owing to drone-laying queens and another that had some suspect brood. All had been fed on Ambrosia syrup last year and had adequate stores left over. The next meeting there is planned for the beginning of May, when we shall see what the result has been of the swarm controls and uniting of the hives that Clive and Lee were intending to do after our visit.

Two further visits are planned in lieu of the ones cancelled, plus further ones later in the season to cover the preparations required for winter, so our sincere thanks go to Clive for giving us these opportunities. We shall be contacting our newer members again when the dates are confirmed.

We also held our last Windsor meeting and, because of difficulties with a speaker, the format was changed from that planned. However, it was a very successful change – members were divided into two groups, beginners and more experienced, with some of the most experienced members holding an informal question and answer format, which quickly became an animated discussion.

The beginners had the opportunity to ask basic questions about where to place the hives, early days with their colony and the usual concerns such as controlling varroa. Varroa also became a subject of conversation with the more experienced members, but also problems ranging from two queens in one hive to no queens but three queen cells in another. Those doing the questioning were delighted with the help they received and everyone else learnt a huge amount! There were also, of course, a wide range of bee-keeping stories, including how to smuggle colonies on to land where there was no permission to keep bees – and even an admission of telling a little white lie from one of our most trustworthy members! Discussions and helpful advice continued throughout the refreshments and everyone went home having had an enjoyable, entertaining and educational evening. The perfect end to the winter meetings for this season!

Our winter meeting will resume on Tuesday, 13th September, with our Annual Review of the Year. It will be held, as usual, at All Saint's Parish Church Hall in Alexander Road, Windsor SL4 1HZ. Our apiary meetings, at the site about a mile north of Wexham Park Hospital, will continue

fortnightly throughout the summer. For details about meetings, please see the website. For information on how to find the apiary, please contact our secretary, Maureen Williams on 01753 643604 or swarm.bees@o2.co.uk.

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

Newsletter items: Liz Juby, tel: 01753 859382

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

Watch bees online at: <http://www.sysonby.com/beecam>.

Contributions, including emails, to arrive with the Editor by the 20th of the month for the following month. Contributions received after this will be held over for a later month.

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