



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 March

. Cribbing from 'The Jobs To Do In The Apiary in March'* to be found in the rather useful 'Bee Craft 2012 Calendar' issued free in Bee Craft magazine this January, we can follow the usefully listed headings . Viz.

"Check Food Reserves and Feed Sugar Syrup if Necessary". Many of us will have some fondant in our hives by now, the late honey flow last season may mean hives have been light on stores if we harvested then. So our bees will probably need spring strength syrup, i.e. 1:1 cane sugar: water. If you use a 'quick feeder' it's a quick job the cut a disc of 'bubble wrap' with a suitable central hole to fit over the access port to float as a raft on top of the syrup. We need all the bees we can to get the colony up and running during these uncertain early spring weeks and bees dead, will be potentially serious losses to smaller colonies.

"Carry Out a Quick Inspection if Weather is Suitable". It should be possible to get to your bees on a mild day, it used to be said that 16 Celsius was the minimum temperature for a full inspection, however above say 12 C. you can certainly go inside the brood box, for a quick inspection, after removing an outer frame to make room, going for the frames which have most bees, usually the centre two or three, no need to search too for the queen, you'll want to see some brood in there, and a good active population of workers, down below on the floor there may be a noticeable quantity of debris, wax from uncapped stores, some dead bees etc.

The next point in our Bee Craft Calendar says " Clean the Hive Floor" (scrape with your hive tool and brush into a receptacle) "frame Fit an Open Mesh Floor". Its worthwhile having a close look at these scrapings, there may be varroa bodies to count after your oxalic trickle in January; bee's bodies sometimes give clues to the number of wing deformities etc. If your colony seems weak with little or no queen activity it's worthwhile obtaining some 'Apifeed Gold 'On the label you'll see instructions to apply as a 10 percent solution in sugar syrup directly onto seams of bees. This beekeeper has found this effective in stimulating colonies, and bringing the queen into lay.

"Monitor Natural Varroa Mite Drop and Plan Treatment if Required". In our examination of floor scrapings or if you've a mesh floor and varroa floor below then see 'Quick Inspection' If you are going to respond to a high varroa drop and corpses of deformed and wingless bees, act promptly, assess which treatment will be best for your colony, most use thymol. You will not want this still present in your hive in say June. 'The Exomite Apis' type systems use much lower levels of thymol as a crystal, finely divided in levulite powder which is negatively charged to adhere to the bees bodies, stimulating grooming. The powder comes with applicators to fit into the hive entrance; this may be a good alternative to the high thymol 'Apiguard' type products at this time of year.

The final three headings in the calendar for jobs to do in March, are, "Prepare Clean Brood Frames and Foundation for Replacement Of Old Combs". "Prepare Supers with Frames and Foundation, and a Queen Excluder". Prepare a Spare Hive with Frames and Foundation Ready for Swarm Control".

'Triad' will make some reconditions for April when rapid expansion will hopefully begin and here in the south, so will swarming. However, as 'The Bee Craft Calendar' recommends, now is the time to prepare!

*Taken from 'Starting Out With Bees' by John Williams. - A Bee Craft publication.

Berkshire Beekeepers actually own some shares in the excellent 'Bee Craft' monthly magazine, a winner of Beekeeping Publications medals at Apimondia and we heartily recommend all Berkshire beekeepers to consider subscribing

Triad

Try your hand at writing an "In the Apiary" contribution for any month, aim it for beekeepers in general and those who are fairly new to beekeeping and submit it to berksbees@btinternet.com

NBU ADVICE for OBTAINING BEES:

JOIN 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>.

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.

BKA Basic Assessment:

If you are fairly new to beekeeping, now is probably a good time to ask yourself how much you really know. Well, there is one very useful way to find out: have a go at the BKA Basic Assessment...

This is an opportunity to meet a beekeeping expert and to discuss your beekeeping. You meet at a pre-arranged apiary one day in the summer and over a selected working hive you spend about an hour talking about the various aspects of practical beekeeping that you have studied to prepare for the meeting. He will decide whether you are a responsible beekeeper or advise you how you can improve.

If you are interested, let me know and I will pass on to you the relevant information about the test.

Rosemary Bayliss - Berkshire Exam Secretary, Norbury, London Rd Bracknell RG42 4BS

Diseases:

Please make a special note of the second paragraph of the Wokingham contribution and look at BeeBase. Check it properly, for example, for Henley area you will find that Remenham, Henley on Thames is in the Wokingham Rural District. It is in every-ones interest to report any disease so that the source can be found. The attitude, "We do not want inspectors poking about, we will deal with it ourselves" is not helpful as the source of infection may well be with another beekeeper!

Wokingham and District Beekeepers' Association

John Edwards opened the February meeting by thanking everyone who turned up to move the hives to the new location. They are still at DBARC but now on the other side of the field, on the concrete hard standing next to the donkey shed. The shed gives us onsite storage for hive parts and a much larger area for viewing and manipulating the hives.

Nigel Semmence, our Regional Bee Inspector had asked if we could encourage membership of BeeBase by mailing our members and asking permission to forward their details for registration. Approximately 50 people have responded but if anyone else would like to be included please let me know and I will forward on your behalf. Signing up to BeeBase as a Beekeeper will enable you to take advantage of the free services they offer. No charge is made for an apiary visit by a fully qualified Bee-inspector. The inspector will check for signs of disease or pests, and will provide you with help and advice on good husbandry, and how to tackle any potential problems they may find. All have extensive experience of managing colonies of bees and are keen apiarists themselves. They will always try and keep any disruption during a visit to an absolute minimum and provide you with up to date information and advice. You will also have access to all the latest information regarding disease and pest outbreaks and the results of various research projects and latest advisory information. Any data they store is subject to the Data Protection Act.

John had received some leaflets from Sherriff offering special discounts if you quote the number on the form (mainly clothing). If anyone is interested and did not manage to obtain a copy please let us know and I will send you one via email. John had also brought with him a sample of an insulation jacket for hives (to fit a national brood and super). The cost to us is £30 each + £3 p&p. The jacket is made from low density polyethylene, not polystyrene and can be fully recycled. It is easily assembled, reusable and removable and is water resistant and UV stable. It is also possible to order spare parts if needed.

We have received approximately 12 requests from people who would like to be added to our local swarm list. To make it easier to manage, the first person on the list will be contacted. If there is no answer or they are unable to respond at that time, they will drop to the bottom and John will contact the next person and so on down the list. Hopefully everyone who wants a swarm will get one.

Bob Loades had obtained some more frame rests, which hang on the side of the brood box and hold a couple of frames whilst you are manipulating the hive. They cost £6 a pair. If anyone is interested please speak to Bob.

Depending on the level of interest, the club has been looking at purchasing a microscope for use by its members. Please provide your name and email address to Alex Atherton if you would like to be involved. Once we have an idea of numbers we will know whether it is worth progressing further. It could be used for disease identification, bee dissection, pollen identification and general interest. Alex has kindly offered to host some training sessions (venue to be decided) which can either be general or can be tailored to specific areas depending on what people want.

Our guest speaker for February was Beulah Cullen on swarm control. Beulah has 30 years experience of keeping bees and was Regional Bee Inspector for 10 years until the early 2000's. As a new beekeeper, whose bees swarmed on the 6th April last year (the date is indelibly imprinted on my brain), I am keen to avoid a repeat performance. Most of the books cover the procedures for artificial swarms, so I will just mention some of the main highlights from Beulah's talk. It was also lovely to see the short film clip, showing a swarm walking into a hive.

Bees swarm to produce a new colony, so we will never stop our bees swarming but we can manage it so they do not cause problems, especially in urban areas. When the swarm first issues from the hive the bees will settle nearby, waiting for the scouts to tell them where to go. If you can get close enough you might see bees on the surface of the cluster doing a waggle dance as they decide their next move. It is also said that the queen is usually on the surface, so something to watch for. If you do see her, pop her in a queen cage as this will make it so much easier to hive the swarm.

Beulah mentioned the four main reasons for swarming - no place to lay, no place to store, lack of queen pheromone because the hive is too crowded so does not circulate and aged, damaged or diseased queen. Bees will also not swarm until they have plenty of drones.

It takes five weeks for a drone to become sexually mature, so if you see lots of drone cells you know they are making plans to go! They also start to prepare queen cups and put the queen on a diet so she is light enough to fly. Beulah also likes to mark her queens as it makes them easier to find when you want to perform an artificial swarm. However, for some of us who have never seen our queens, this is easier said than done.

Beulah was asked if supercedure cells were always in the centre of the frame but apparently that is not the case. It can be a supercedure cell but it can also be a swarm cell, so no easy answer. Breaking down all swarm cells will not stop the bees swarming and you won't have a week to think about your next move. As soon as you close down the hive they could find young larvae and make themselves another queen. Within three days they could have sealed a cell and gone, so you do need to check again that they have not made any emergency queen cells. Beulah then demonstrated the Pagden artificial swarm procedure with two mini hives. Beulah would leave one open queen cell with a nice larva and if you were brave you could leave two. For those of us who do not have the space, or the strength to move the hive around, Beulah recommended using a Snelgrove board instead. Seeing the procedure demonstrated made it much clearer than trying to work it out from instructions in a book and will be of great help in the coming months.

Beulah finished with a Q & A session and a number of hints and tips, some of which are highlighted below.

- Giving your bees plenty of room will not always stop them swarming.
- Young queens are less likely to swarm but there is no guarantee, as it has been noticed that even one year old queens are swarming – maybe due to varroa or treatments but no one really knows.
- Use a lightweight but strong box to catch your swarm as it can be very heavy.
- Do not feed an unknown swarm for the first 48 hours, so they use the honey in their crop to build wax, rather than store it. This helps to limit the transfer of any disease they might be carrying.
- Put a queen excluder under the brood box after you hive the swarm but above the floor so she cannot abscond. Remember to remove when she starts laying and make sure she is above it before you put it in.

Our thanks go to Beulah for a very entertaining and informative talk which covered aspects of bee behaviour that were new to many of us.

Lynn Janes. Hon. Sec. Mobile: 07721 338833

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South Chilterns Beekeepers' Association

Breeding Bees for Hygienic Behaviour by Ron Hoskins

Ron has been a Beekeeper since 1943, and has dedicated a vast amount of his time breeding Varroa tolerant bees.

In 2001 Ron and his colleagues at Swindon Honeybee Conservation Group (SHCG) took the decision to stop the use of chemicals to control the Varroa mite.

Ron described the journey taken and compelling evidence that most chemicals being used at the time, and still in use, were the major cause of queen failure due to their adverse effect on the viability of drone semen.

Initially in 2001 colonies dwindled, however it became apparent remaining colonies were able to deal with the mite. By daily analysis of debris from the hives floor, mites were collected and examined for damage (hygienic behaviour by the bees). In 2007 they found baby mites and larval bee antennae on the floors, showing capped cells containing the larval bee had been removed and destroyed, as they were never going to be of use whilst infected by the baby mite. Within two years Ron had examined more than 50,000 mites for signs of hygienic behaviour.

This continued research at SHCG has proven that the queen breeding programme is working and providing a genetic answer to the Varroa mites. Ron and the team have begun distributing their colonies within the Swindon area by initiating an 'Adopt a hive sponsorship' programme.

What we can do – well Ron explained that too:

- 1) Keep good records, with detailed Varroa record-keeping
- 2) Do not kill drones – chemicals already affecting drones so we need as many as possible
- 3) Use inspection floors
- 4) Look closely at your hive floor debris (powerful hand lens or dissecting microscope) for signs of hygienic bees

As Ron says “your bees may already be hygienic – you just do not know it”

For more information on Ron and the teams work please visit www.swindonbee.org.uk



Alan Johnson

Next meeting: March 21st 7.30pm at Woodcote Village Hall. Adrian Waring discusses: What is the best bee for Britain?

. Joanne Shanagher, Secretary. Tel: 01189 721067

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

Pangbourne plan to eradicate oak processionary moth

Plans are in place to eradicate a toxic caterpillar from West Berkshire following an outbreak last year.

The oak processionary moth (OPM), which hatches in July and August, was discovered in Pangbourne.

The Forestry Commission will survey an extended area around the original infested site in March and tree spraying will begin in April.

OPM hairs contain a toxin that can cause itchy skin rashes as well as eye and throat irritations. The caterpillar also causes damage to oak trees.

Property owners will still be responsible for treating infected trees either with Deltamethrin or a biological control method as "The objective is to eradicate it completely," West Berkshire said. In its caterpillar stage, the OPM has about 60,000 hairs.

Hairs that fall to the ground can be active for up to five years.

It is thought the moths were brought into the UK on trees imported from Europe for a landscape project.

A population then established itself in the West London area in 2006. The species was discovered in Pangbourne in 2010.

If you think you have bees which are in close proximity to Pangbourne and you want to find out more about this subject then please contact Martin Moore who is liaising with the various authorities:

Martin Moore Berkshire Secretary
0772 9620286

Reading and District Beekeepers' Association

On Tuesday 14th February, at Caversham Heights Methodist Hall, we welcomed Tom Breeze who works with Dr Simon Potts at Reading University. Tom has just completed his doctorate exams and gave us very up to-date news about 'The Decline in the Provision of Pollination Services' and 'The Status and Trends of European Pollinators' Project. At The R.U. Tom is in the team headed by Simon Potts and includes Alyson Bailey & Kevin Balcombe. The situation globally with wild plants, which includes the important red clover are mainly reliant on beneficial pollination, as are one third of food and other commercial crops. There is perceived to be a serious decline in insect pollination, believed to be worth 153 billion pounds sterling globally, each year.

Although some fruits, legumes etc. can attain partial wind pollination, there are serious quality and nutritional (vitamins etc.) deficiencies without insect pollination which is described by Tom as 'hugely important'. In the UK some 20 per cent of food crops where the data is in hand are calculated as relying on insect pollination, obviously cereals being 'grasses' are wind pollinated. The value in the UK each year is 430 million sterling for 2007, in 2009, this figure will be 510 million, important UK crops requiring insects are oil seed rape, apples and field beans which are potentially capable on replacing soya bean in the vitally important animal feedstuffs industry as the protein and other nutritional content is similar. Tom described some startling statistics, if pollination by insects failed; consumers would have to pay annually, an additional 460 million sterling at the 'farm gate' far more at the supermarket! Generally, statistics show that insect pollination can be valued at 2.7 billion in the UK per annum. If general hand pollination were undertaken in the UK, which is happening in some regions now in China, the cost here would be 1.8 billion pounds sterling.

Dr. Potts' R.U. team describe the honeybee as 'the super pollination generalists'. A problem is that viable honeybee populations in beehives have declined in number by 50 per cent since 1985; factors for this include 20 per cent losses over winters, in conjunction of course with the arrival of the varroa mite, wild bee colonies, which probably provide half of the honeybees on crops 50 years ago. Virtually none left. Tom had statistical maps to show us, 80-90percent of Europe has had a decline in pollination services provided by honeybee since 1985, the northern European countries of which UK is the worst with the biggest deficit in pollination services against requirement. A wide-ranging discussion in Tom's presentation as to the reasons for decline included the pests and diseases unfortunately, rather well known to beekeepers in the 21st century.

From Tom's statistics, it appears that food and feed crops requiring insect pollination are maintaining yields since 1985, this is put down to more intensive agriculture and new higher yielding varieties. Other pollinators e.g. bumble, solitary bees, hover flies were also referred to as being vital to reversing the dangerous trend. Tom has recently been impressed by a recent paper from the USA, where colony collapse of honeybees and population decline of other species is most problematic. Honey bees if unaffected by chemical pesticides can usually recover and continue to build populations after disease and natural pest incidents, likewise, can recover healthy from accidental chemical pesticide contamination, but after pesticides affect a colony, diseases and pests are a disaster, i.e. the insect's immunity is lost, and probably so will be the population!

This was a very wide-ranging presentation and discussion of matters that are of great importance to all. Reading beekeepers were privileged to be able to learn something about it. Tom said he would like to try to attend some of our beekeeping meetings. He will be very welcome!

March event at Reading Beekeepers. This will be our fourth Annual Reading Bee Day. Held at Trench Green Hall, Mapledurham on Saturday 17th March. Open to the public, of particular benefit to people newly interested in beekeeping; from 10-30-4-30. Displays, tastings, presentations by Ron Hoskins the nationally known rearer of 'clean queen bees' and by Caroline Carvill on honey & beeswax in cosmetics. See our web-site www.rbka.org.com

.Jon Davey

Reading Beekeeper's Beginners Beekeeping Course: completed its 6-week schedule on Monday 13th February. This was held at Denefield School and was very successful with 98 percent attendance from those who booked for the course; our tutor Rob Nicklas from Didcot will be holding a two-week addition, i.e. Practical Aspects of Beekeeping mid-end March. Planned for the same venue. Further details from Michael Blackburn. See two attached Photos.



Reading & District Beekeepers Annual Festive Dinner: Held again this year at Caversham Heath Golf Club on 20th January. The club gives us their undivided attention, we have the excellent dining, and bar facilities to ourselves, we had a good attendance from Reading Beekeepers Association members

www.rbka.org.uk



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. In February, we again ran our Beginners course over two consecutive Saturdays. It was very well attended, despite the best efforts of the weather! It was very encouraging to see so many new beekeepers wanting to learn about the hobby - and judging from the feedback, it was made all the more enjoyable by our enthusiastic and knowledgeable tutors: Tony Wolstenhome and Clive Winslow. We will be arranging some practical sessions as a follow-up in the spring to give the participants some hands-on experience to complement the theory.

Our February meeting was on Tuesday 21st, at which Norman Hughes from Basingstoke demonstrated his method of Queen rearing from a single hive. More details to come in next month's newsletter.

We are looking forward to Nigel Semmence (our Regional Bee Inspector) coming to talk to us on 13th March 'Bee Health' - this is an important subject for all of us so I look forward to seeing a good turnout from SW&M Beekeepers!

Secretary SWM BKS: Neil Coxhead

www.britishbee.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead

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.

Advertisement entries, to be received by the Advertisement Manager in advance of the 20th of every month. Rates: 2 Lines for £1.00; Commercial rates: £1.00 per line. Please make cheques payable to FBBKA. To be sent to the Advertisement Manager: Mr Jon Davey, 107 Northcourt Avenue, Reading RG2 7HG. Tel: 0118 975 0734.

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