



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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In The Apiary

In which we look for swarm cells, collect swarms, house them and make increase.

Writing this mid-way through a chilly April, I suspect many of us are pleased to see population build-up, but up to now with nothing much to motivate us. The bees have not been looking to re-produce, i.e. swarming from the hive, half the colony following the old queen, the remainder remaining with newly a capped queen cell. The swarm setting-off into what is now a relatively unfriendly environment, in the hope of a successful future.

A warm settled week and things will rapidly change! As good beekeepers we should do our utmost to give the bees a far better chance of a successful future, by providing, what for a honey-bee, is attractive housing.

Bees are attracted to "previously used" brood comb; obviously this should be comb you have removed from healthy brood. If you have removed old brood comb, this will give you some nice dark comb, attractive to the bees that seek-out sites for their new home. These should be in-place in a nucleus or spare hive in your apiary. Place these a few metres from your active colonies, as soon as possible. Bait hives are said to be more attractive if higher-up, so get a stand or suitable blocks under. Swarm attractants are available for purchase from the likes of Thornes for spraying or rubbing on the entrance.

You should, as good beekeepers, be opening your hives during May, June and July a minimum of every 9 days. Look for occupied swarm (queen) cells, evaluate, and remove unwanted queen cells. To make a nucleus take a frame with a queen cell, together with a frame of brood, bees, and stores, establish them in a nucleus or brood box with five frames. (You can enclose these between two dummy boards). It is useful to have equipment ready to use in this busy bee husbandry period. You may regret, if say, your biggest and best colony starts to try to out-pace your inspections and queen cell removals, they will probably succeed, isn't it better to make up a nucleus or two from such a good performer? If they do swarm on a fine day, when you are at work or out shopping, with your good bait hives, there is a very good chance they will go into there. This beekeeper has been around for a few years and is yet to experience a swarm getting into a bait-hive and then absconding a day or so later. Unfortunately, in modern times collected swarms seem frequently to disappear next day even though they apparently walked happily up a ramp into a pristine hive, entirely filled with new wood and foundation. Some beekeepers dump the swarm straight into the hive on top of the frames, better done in the evening

To remedy this, pin a section across the entrance, cut from a metal queen excluder, after they are all in, (be as sure as you can that this includes the queen!) Leave it there for 2-3 days only, see that they are engaging on foraging flights before removing, this should work for new equipment also.

When you return from a swarm call with what is destined to be a new colony for your apiary, don't attempt to hive-off the bees during the heat of the day, keep them wrapped in a cool place until evening, they'll be glad to enter a new hive then. Alternatively, my favourite way, in their cool place give them an aperture, they will not all fly-off, the queen is in there. Check down at the apiary in the evening, they will have chosen their own-home, one of your bait hives and there they will stay!

Obviously you may prefer to prevent your favorite colony from swarming if you can, methods using 'Snelgrove Boards' or Artificial Swarming are worth trying, your association library will have a copy of EB Wedmore 'A Manual Of Beekeeping' it's all in there. Also, make sure your bees have plenty of space. Major collections, e.g. from oil seed rape will quickly fill supers and convince the bees they can prepare to swarm as the colony is well provisioned for the 'stay-at-homes' keep pace with your bees during this period, remove and extract, add some supers with foundation to give the young wax-builders some work to do. Good increases to you!

Triad

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,

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: 01306 611 016

Wokingham and District Beekeepers' Association

Our first open session at the apiary took place on the 1st April, which was a warm and sunny day. We checked all six hives and found and marked the queens where necessary. All of our queens are now marked and clipped, which will make spotting them much easier, especially for our new beekeepers attending the Sunday afternoon apiary sessions. The stronger colonies were bringing in large amounts of nectar so extra supers were added.

Two of the hives are quite small and two were found to be suffering from chalk brood so they will be treated at the next inspection.

We have a field of oil seed rape on the other side of the hedge, which is starting to flower, so depending on your point of view this is either a blessing or a curse but hopefully it will result in a good early honey crop. It has also been a very good year for blackthorn (Sloe), as the hedges in the area are just a mass of white flowers.

On the 8th April the weather started reasonably warm but then turned quite cold mid-way through the inspections. The two hives suffering from chalk brood were treated with Mycostop and to avoid chilling the brood,

Nigel, who was Duty Beekeeper, decided to leave the two weakest hives alone and do a mini inspection on them, rather than a full check, which was done on the rest. As long as you know your bees and can see that they have enough space to store food and enough room for the queen to lay, then, if you are prepared to take the risk, you can just check the outer edges of the nest to see if there are any signs of swarm preparation. If all looks to be ok, then just check for similar signs at the other end of the nest and quickly close up. Large amounts of drone brood are also a sign of imminent swarming but at the moment there appeared to be just small amounts in each hive. Obviously if you have any concerns, then you need to recheck at the earliest opportunity when the weather is warmer.

The bees were bringing in copious amounts of pollen and many were also well dusted with yellow all over their bodies, this can be a sign that bees are working the rape, especially if you cannot see the field from your hives. Not a problem in our case.

It was even colder on the 15th April although the sun did appear intermittently. Duty Beekeeper for the next two weeks is Neil. We managed to see all the queens, and all hives appear to be increasing, although some more than others. One hive, in addition to suffering from a small amount of chalk brood, was also showing signs of a few bees with wing blight (caused by varroa) so this colony will be monitored carefully.

Because of the cold weather, the plants are not giving nectar (including the rape in the field adjacent to our apiary) so the bees had enough stores to keep them going but were not adding to their supplies, which is disappointing. We need much warmer weather for the flow to start but looking at the weather forecast, it will not happen this week.

Two of our members had their bees swarm over the last couple of days. One swarm landed high up in a tree and the other about 6' high on some trellis right next to the hive. I helped with the "easy" one on the trellis.

We had a nucleus box, which we thought would be ideal. Not too large and with a round entrance that would be easy to defend. We took off the lid and dropped as many bees as possible inside and put the lid back on. We were left with a cluster of bees on the face of the hive but by this time it was evening, so hoped we had managed to catch the queen and thought they would go inside over night as it was quite chilly. The following day more bees were clustered on the outside than inside and the same on Sunday. On speaking to Peter Segrave, he confirmed that this was not normal behaviour and kindly came to have a look.

His view was that the entrance hole was fine for a nucleus but was too small for a swarm. The box was moved to one side and another nucleus box, this time with a wider slit entrance was put in its place. The bees and frames were then moved to the new box and the crown board placed over the hive but not completely, so you could see what was going on inside. There was also a large group of bees on the ground in front of the hive. Immediately the bees started fanning on the top of the frames so the lid was put in place. A stick was used to form a ladder from the ground to the entrance and very quickly all the other bees walked in. Much easier when you know how!

Lynn Janes. Hon. Sec. Mobile: 07721 338833

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Reading and District Beekeepers' Association

We are continuing to receive positive feedback from our 3rd Annual Open Day at Trench Green and we have increased our membership accordingly. It was pleasing to receive continued support from Suttons Seeds, who have their origins in Reading. Once again, they generously donated bee-friendly flower seeds, which were given to all visitors - something for the bees and other pollinators to look forward to!

Reading Beekeepers at the BCA.

On Saturday 21st & Sunday 22nd we were at The Berkshire College of Agriculture open days and on the Saturday we had a good number of beekeepers looking after The Federation of Berkshire Beekeepers Association Stand.

Despite some pessimistic weather forecasts, visitor numbers were good on our stand, anyone who approached was promptly attended to by a Reading beekeeper to discuss, answer questions, and offer a taste of mead and a honey biscuit. Everyone had a good time; shelter under our canvas was provided during the occasional squall of rain! Honey sales were gratifyingly better than expected.



Sunday 22nd was the first meeting of our summer season at the garden apiary of Mike & Marion Dabbs in Tilehurst. We had a very good attendance, in excess of twenty-five, new beekeepers and newly interested people were in the majority. However, in The Dabbs Apiary there was virtually a hive each! Guided by Mike, we selected a busy looking nucleus from a last summer swarm. We found a big population of good-tempered dark bees, needing now a full size hive. A neat looking dark queen was found, nice brood pattern, a couple of play-cups but none occupied.

Mike had collected a swarm in the garden in the last days, we took a quick look and they seemed well established on new wood and wax, the mesh floor had come unpinned so they preferred to fly in through the back of the hive rather than the entrance, but Mike will speedily fix it.

There were some casualties on the ground but given the sudden drops in temperature in last days accompanied by rain and hailstorms that is not surprising. Mike had an idea which colony the swarm had emanated from, but two beekeepers had a quick look there, others were opening a second nucleus (populous and two occupied queen cells) and found the marked queen, so not from there then! Our biggest operation was a large colony on double brood with a rapidly filling super, honey starting to be capped. I think Mike said 'Buckfast bees'. Very good brood pattern throughout, some small larvae and some ready for capping. In the bottom box, there were a number of cups; three had queen larvae in pools of royal jelly.

The top box was very interesting. Brood a plenty and no less than ten capped queen cells found. However, there was a big population of bees given the double brood accommodation and the amount of brood, no eggs and no queen seen; we thought that this might be the source of Mike's swarm. Two capped queen cells left-in, the rest and the cups were dealt with, and new beekeepers were given good opportunity to manipulate frames, handle queen cells and examine contents, see a very few varroa raked from some drone etc.

Everyone enjoyed Marion's excellent refreshments and cake, and then a thunderclap with rain ended the days hive examinations. The Dabbs apiary really is a fascinating place all bees are housed with top class new equipment, much of make by Mike himself, bees healthy looking and good tempered with nectar and pollen now coming in fast. You could spend two days enjoying beekeeping there! With very many thanks to Mike & Marion and to all for the good turnout.

May Meeting: - Michael Blackburn's apiary at Cross Lanes Apple Farm, Mapledurham. 11-30 start. This is a beautiful spot where Michael's bees are 'pollinators in residence', an ideal opportunity for newer beekeepers to see this vital role which our honeybees play in the food chain. There should be blossom on the apple trees so do not miss an ideal beekeeping day in an optimum environment.

Jon Davey

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Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society

We had to make a last minute change of speaker for our April meeting on Swarm Management, when Clive was unavoidably detained on a film set (the glamorous life of the beekeeper, eh?!).

Fortunately Dennis Way was able to step in and give a brilliant talk on artificial swarm techniques, after which there was a useful Q&A session. Our next talk will be 'Plants and Bees' by Dr David Aston on Tuesday 15th May. This will be our final winter meeting until we start our new programme in September.

Our apiary meetings are now taking place on a weekly basis, weather permitting! As always, details of all our meetings, topical articles and much more are on our website at: <http://www.bbka.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead>

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South Chilterns Beekeepers' Association

Unfortunately, due to the ill-advised change of the cut-off date to 20th of the month, it is impossible for South Chilterns to meet the deadline this month.

Next meeting: To be advised.



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From Roke Marsh to Rowse in 90 years ----- Continued.

By kind permission of Peter Clarke

“Stands the church clock at ten to three? And is there honey still for tea?”

Both companies had similar developments, almost in parallel, and continued to be predominately as beekeepers until the late 1960's. During this time 'Chiltern Honey Farm', the Manley side of the two enterprises, and where Laurie Keys was later employed, grew to a size of about eight to ten men running about 2000 hives located between the Chiltern Hills and the Berkshire Downs. Some of the local sites were in Clacks Lane, Ipsden, and the fruit orchards on the other side of Didcot. Each apiary contained about a dozen or more hives depending on the amount of potential nectar available for the bees. At the peak, in the early 1960's, they collected 80 tonnes of honey from their bees in one particularly good season. In other years that would drop to perhaps five tonnes, depending on the weather. That's an awful lot of honey from little insects who take 60 flights to fill a thimble –full!

In spring time their bees were taken on a lorry down to the Kent orchards to pollinate the fruit. After the bees were all back in their hives the night before the trip, the 'doors' would be closed and the hives loaded on to the back of the lorry. Arriving in the Kent fruit fields the next day the doors of the hives were opened and the bees started work on the fruit blossom. This was a very productive exercise because they were paid by the fruit farmer to pollinate his orchards and they also collected very good 'blossom' honey which they could sell into the bargain.

The main honey flow of the season came from a variety of English flowers and agricultural crops during May and again in July. The period in between is known as the 'June gap' because normally it's not such a good period for collecting honey. The position of most of apiaries would be 'negotiated' with the local farmers and the hives moved around to take advantage of the best honey producing crops. The 'rent,' paid for the privilege of putting hives on the edge of the farmer's field, was a dozen jars of honey at the end of the season.

It was important for the farmer to keep the beekeepers informed of crop spraying so that the bees could be moved, or shut in the hive, during the process. This was generally a good time in which to collect honey during that period from wild flowers, trees such as horse chestnut and lime, and crops such as borage of which the later produces a mild light coloured honey and stays liquid for a long time before crystallising. It wasn't till a few years later that vast areas of oil seed rape appeared, which produces a prolific amount of honey but is not a particularly nice flavour, and crystallises very quickly.

At the end of the season the hives might be moved to the New Forest, or perhaps the West Country, to collect heather honey during August/ September. Heather honey is a strong flavoured dark honey and commands a premium price but is not everyone's favourite.

So the summer months were hectic with every hive having to be checked every ten days or so for the condition of the bees, whether there was still a healthy queen in place and that she was laying thousands of eggs every day.

Queen Bee

It was physically hard work lifting heavy hives on and off of the lorry then driving on to the next apiary. In a good spell of weather each hive could produce over a hundred pounds of honey (in weight) in a matter of days which all had to be manhandled on to vehicles. Winter jobs were, firstly, the extraction of honey from the frames where it was pumped into large drums then, when that was complete, the honey had to be filtered and bottled. It was generally a sticky business and attracted swarms of bees and wasps much to the annoyance of the neighbours.

Most of the employees came from Benson and around. The Winterbournes, the Hazel brothers, Earnest Sandford, and Paul Deakin, all worked as beekeepers. Harry Wickens was probably the most expert beekeeper. He lived in Crowmarsh Gifford and Laurie once went out with him to see his bees. They drove down to the fruit orchards near Rowstock. Approaching the apiary Harry said 'These bees will be quite calm today, so he didn't bother to put on his gloves and protective kit.

It was my first experience of bees at close quarters. The next apiary wasn't so friendly – apparently the bees were hungry- so gloves and visors were donned. Both of us were attacked quite viciously. Harry was an excellent beekeeper who knew instinctively the mood of his bees. He gets a mention in 'Honey Farming' written by ROB Manley and published by Northern Bee Books, still regarded today as the essential book for commercial beekeepers. Harry spent the last years of his working life rearing queen bees at Nuffield – an essential part of productive beekeeping.

Laurie Keys continues: "Several spin-offs came from beekeeping in Benson. Vivian's Honey, still in the West Country, has its origins in Manleys. Swallows Honey in Witney, and Laurie Keys own business, Honeysuckle Foods in Wallingford. If you go down to Dorset and buy a jar of local honey, the chances are it will be Robert Field's honey. Robert's father, Oliver Field, took over the Chiltern Honey Farm bees in the early 1970's, continuing to run them in this area for a few years and then moving to Dorset and the New Forest.

Back in the fifties and sixties commercial farming of English honey was a fairly reliable occupation. But the urban development of the countryside, the digging up hedgerows, the use of pesticides, and a series of poor summers all led to the decline in English honey production. R.O.B. Manley was nearing retirement, which he eventually took and lived in Chapel Lane, but not before being joined in the company by his nephew, John Manley, who was instrumental in the next phase of development. Both Chiltern Honey Farm and Rowse began to import honey from abroad, where there were large crops of good honey, such as Acacia and Clover. These honeys were available as a single floral source in commercial quantities and were competitively priced. This was something we could not do in the quantities required in the UK. This period, early 1970's, coincided with the development and growth of the supermarket and the requirement for their own brand. When

Laurie joined the company in 1970, Chiltern Honey Farm was supplying Sainsburys and Boots , with their own brand honey and similarly Rowse had secured the Tesco and Waitrose accounts. The supermarkets grew dramatically over the next few years and the honey companies with them." Chiltern Honey Farm moved from Honey Farm to a new purpose built factory in Berinsfield.

After a takeover of Ratcliffe Bros of Bingley, the company changed its name to Manley Ratcliffe Ltd. Rowse managed to hang on longer in Ewelme but eventually made a similar move to Wallingford. These firms became two of the major players in the world in terms of importing and packing honey. Today, in 2009, Rowse buys 50 types of honey from 22 countries, packing about 12000 tonnes, sells maple syrup and a collection of other sweet "goodies". This results in the large range of delicious honeys and dessert sauces that you find on our supermarket shelves today.

Honey is also an important ingredient in many other foods by giving them a healthy image. As a result, supplying honey in bulk to other food manufacturers has become a large part of the business.

Now Stuart Bailey takes over. "I am indebted to Laurie for it was he, as Managing Director of Manley Ratcliffe in 1983, who recruited me 26 years ago as Production Director Designate and where I progressed to being Commercial Director. When Manley Ratcliffe closed down in 1992, Richard Rowse and Colin Wright invited myself and several colleagues to join Rowse Honey.

We successfully developed the business; Brian Butcher became Operations Director and I was Managing Director for 11 years and now Chairman after the sale of the company to Wellness Foods in 2006.

Today Rowse Honey employs 160 staff, has a turnover of over £50m p.a. and Rowse is the UK's favourite brand of honey, with a 40% share (three times the size of Gales, our nearest competitor) and so is a success story for local business."

Somehow the expertise required to make a consistently good quality product seems to be confined to the people in and around Benson! Lorraine Passey, with Davina Peedle both hail from Benson!

Tailpiece

"Stands the church clock at ten to three? And is there honey still for tea?"

I said in Part One I would return to this famous extract from Rupert Brooke's poem. The simple fact is that it may well not be English honey for tea. The English beekeeper is beset with the varroa parasite and all kinds of afflictions these days. Garry, our fantastic village butcher, normally sells honey, but can't at present get it from his local Watlington source. So perhaps a visit to Pet-tits or any local supermarket would secure a good Rowse product instead. One we can all be proud of in Benson and around!

But an even later Tailpiece! (March 2012)

It gives me tremendous pleasure to report that my good friend Max Vine has now taken up bee-keeping. Starting last year, he tells me this month there is plenty of activity in the hives. *So home grown honey is now back to Preston Crowmarsh.* I'm sure a lot of ghosts are clapping in delight!

End

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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