



South Chilterns Beekeepers Association

President: Ian Wootton

The first meeting in 2004 will be held on Wednesday 14th January at 7.30pm at Woodcote Community Centre (please note that this is the second Wednesday in the month)

Newsletter No.13 January 2004

Forthcoming events:

Annual Dinner 10th March 2004

Honey Bee Viruses – Brenda Ball
8th Feb. (See Secretary's notes)

Spring Convention, Stoneleigh
24th April 2004

Hon. Secretary:
Brian Carter,
Eastfield,
Potkilm Lane,
Goring Heath, RG8 7SR
01491 680226

Hon. Editor
Ron Crocker
25 Shiplake Bottom,
Peppard Common,
Henley on Thames
RG9 5HH
0118 972 2315

Association E-mail:
southchilterns.bees@btinternet.com

Regional Bee Inspectors:
Ian Homer
Tel No: 01308 482161
e-mail: i.homer@csl.gov.uk

In the Apiary: January.

There is not a lot one can do in the apiary this month. The golden rule is do not disturb your bees at all unless it is a matter of life or death of the colony. Any movement of the hive should be done very gently and I say this because now is a good time to re-arrange your apiary should you wish. Hives can be shuffled around with safety because after a period of confinement the bees will re-orient themselves after their first cleansing flights.

Poor ventilation and therefore excessive condensation in the hive have been the downfall of colonies in the past. For my own bees I always incline the hive some 5° to the front, thus any water in the hive can run out. I use glass quilts in the summer, these of course, should be replaced with crown boards for the winter. A full width entrance (with mouse guard in place) will ensure a good circulation of air. Bees can withstand anything our UK climate can throw at them but they cannot deal with damp conditions in the hive.

The books say that the Queen begins her egg laying activities for the coming season on the shortest day. No one in their right minds would think of looking into the brood box to verify this but I recall a few years ago, in mid January, one of my hives had been up-ended by sheep. After it had been exposed to the elements for some days. I put things back together, sure enough there were the beginnings of a brood nest, sealed and open brood, with the bees doing their best to keep it warm. I would have liked to say that the colony survived but unfortunately it didn't make it through the winter.

On 16th February I will again be running my intermediate course at Burchett's Green College of Agriculture. I will be covering small-scale queen breeding; easy to follow swarm control; and packaging honey for sale amongst other topics. For further details given me a call on 01189832735.

Finally, may I wish all members a happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

George Butler

FROM THE SECRETARY:

The first meeting in 2004 will be held on Wednesday 14th January at 7.30pm at Woodcote Community Centre (please note that this is the second Wednesday in the month)

The speaker will be Julian Johnston who will recall his varied experiences in supporting beekeeping. The talk will be based loosely on his book "Nomad amongst the Bees". The meeting was originally scheduled for November but Julian was travelling at the time (no doubt to collect more information for his talk).

South Chilterns BKA has received invitations from the Reading BKA to attend their annual dinner and to a lecture.

The Reading BKA annual dinner will be held at The Maltsters, Rotherfield Greys on 23rd January 2004. Contact Hazel Blackburn on (0118) 947 9450/5451

The Flood Memorial Lecture is at Caversham Heights Methodist Church at 7.30 pm on Thursday 12th February. **Dr. Brenda Ball** will give a highly important talk on Varroa and pest management. With the increase in pyrethroid resistant Varroa pockets in the south you won't want to miss it!

Apiary site: An apiary site is available at Fawley, for details please contact the Editor or myself

Brian Carter

NOVEMBER MEETING:

Because Julian Johnston, our listed speaker for this meeting, was out of the country, Ian Wootton took his place at short notice.

Ian spoke of some applications of science, particularly genetics, to our practice of beekeeping. In particular he described how the inheritance of genes in farm animals enables selective breeding to establish desirable characteristics and how these are fixed by judicious inbreeding.

There is a natural tendency for beekeepers to try the same techniques to improve bees. Unfortunately it is not so easy with bees. Firstly there is the problem of controlled matings - unlike farm animals, queen bees mate on the wing with a number of free-range drones so that it is difficult or impossible to select the male partner (apart from artificial insemination).

There is a further snag. Recent research in Germany and the US has shown that the sex of each individual bee is fixed by a single gene called the complementary sex determinant which exists in 19 variants (alleles). Queens and worker bees being diploid have two copies of this gene; drones being haploid only have a single copy. The sex rule is that a bee with two different alleles is female, otherwise male. Thus a laying queen must necessarily have two different alleles while a drone is always male. The snag comes if there is close inbreeding so that a drone mates with a queen carrying the same allele as the drone, a situation that is bound to happen if a virgin queen mates with her brother, i.e. a drone from an egg laid by her mother. In this case, half of the worker brood laid by this queen will develop as pigmy drones in worker cells and will be destroyed by the bees, resulting in a crippled colony.

Many of the proposals to establish isolated mating apiaries are thus flawed as it is clear that drones from a number of colonies must be available to avoid close inbreeding; at the same time, they must all be of the desirable strain. Successful bee improvement schemes have all been on a scale which allows this, and it is difficult to see how this can be achieved in the UK.

This précis of the evenings lecture was kindly supplied by Ian and our thanks go to him for standing in at very short notice. We have arranged for Julian Johnston to talk to us on January 14th when hopefully he will have returned from South Africa.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY: - ANNUAL DINNER. This will take place on Wednesday 10th March 2004, Venue and cost to be notified later.

George Butler (Chairman)

Beekeeping Associations in South Oxfordshire/Chilterns:

When I came to Berkshire as C.B.I. on October 3rd 1953, I soon became involved with the various Associations within the Berkshire Federation; I also became aware though not involved with the South Oxfordshire branch of the Oxfordshire B.K.A. The Secretary lived at Checkendon; He had a military rank I believe, Captain or Major (it was only eight years after the war). I was told he was a "Bee Farmer", the impression I had was "not in a big way", perhaps forty or fifty stocks.

Within a couple of years he moved to the Chesham area supposedly to increase his activities – but I never heard of him again. On his departure no one could be found to take office (familiar?) the branch was disbanded, some of the members transferred to Reading. The funds were divided equally between Oxon County BKA and Reading BKA.

By the '70's Reading Association had grown to over 160 members so that there was a "ground swell" that an association should be formed (or re-formed) in the South Chilterns area. George Knights, Berks Federation Secretary and Eric Morris, Reading Chairman at the time, were the chief instigators. I was responsible for Oxon as well as Berks at that time consequently I was involved as well. Therefore, South Chilterns B.K.A. came into being and has remained healthy and viable ever since in spite of one or two occasions when it was difficult to fill certain offices (again familiar?).

During this period some members and myself have contributed to National and International beekeeping journals. The rest is history as they say, the most notable event being the Associations decision to withdraw from the BBKA, this, it was regretted, involved withdrawal from the Berkshire Federation.

George Hawthorne

HORNETS: -

As well as watching hornets trying to attack bees entering one or two of my hives at my apiary in the Chilterns, I witnessed at least ten to a dozen hornets hunting bees working the ivy covering a twenty foot wall and suddenly darting in and capturing one, I hope they do not become a menace.

Now wasps! The first question I was asked by the landlord of one of my apiaries was "where are all the wasps", he was right; they have been conspicuous by their absence. Last year I killed fifty-six queen wasps in one apiary alone, this year a total of two. Nevertheless, we, as beekeepers, can very well do without them.





This summer, while in the vicinity I visited the motor museum at Caistor Castle near Great Yarmouth (well worth a visit) and in the grounds of the castle I came across a large gap in a wall where in days gone by, skeps of bees were wintered in the cavities (bee boles) provided. There are none there now. "Interesting".

Reg. Hook.

Informative web addresses:- Virtual Beekeeping Gallery : bees, honey, equipment, journals, market, associations, companies, classified ads, forums, tools, events, institutes, laboratories, museums, personalized advice, databases, links, etc. <http://www.beekeeping.com/>

Try it. – It will occupy you for many hours; we have their "Treatise of Apitherapy" in our library. The Editor has ordered "All about Bees" and will report on it.

A happy New Year and full supers to all.

Newsletter deadline: 10th of the month for inclusion in the next Newsletter

Advertisements: - Small advertisements free to members. Traders £1 per issue (up to 5 lines) additional lines 20p per line. Cheques to be made payable to South Chilterns B.K.A. and forwarded to the Editor.

Wanted: - For a group of beekeepers. Small, motorized stainless steel honey extractor to take all sizes of frames. Details to the Editor

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