



South Chilterns Beekeepers Association

President: Ian Wootton

The March meeting will be on March 17th at 7.30pm at Woodcote Community Centre, Robin Dartington who will give a talk on keeping bees in a long hive.

Newsletter No.15 March 2004

Forthcoming events:

Bucks County Seminar – Wendover
6 March

Annual Dinner 10 March 2004

Honey Bee Viruses – Brenda Ball
12 Feb. (See January notes)

Spring Convention, Stoneleigh
24 April 2004

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In the Apiary: March.

More colonies die out due to starvation in March and April than at any other time of the year. Hives should be hefted once a week to check for rapid changes in weight. The books say that there should never be less than 10lbs reserve stores in the hive at any one time. If the colony is definitely on the light side, syrup can now be fed. Use a contact feeder so that the bees do not have to leave the confines of the brood box-- give them a gallon of thick syrup 2lbs sugar to one pint of water. Feed the syrup as hot as you can just bear to put your fingers in. If the stores in the hive are reasonable, a little stimulative feeding would not go amiss but with a weaker syrup, 1lb to a pint of water. Alternatively try the sugar bag method, which incidentally can be used any time during the winter. Take an unopened one-kilogram bag of sugar and totally immerse in water for two to three minutes and then allow it to drain. With a sharp knife cut a flap in the side, about two inches square to give the bees access and then place adjacent to the feedhole in the crown board and cover over with something to keep the warmth in. If the bees need the sugar they will take it down bit by bit.

At it this time of the year, when brood rearing is definitely under way, I am a firm believer in helping the bees conserve the heat they have generated. Not all bee keepers think this is necessary but my way is to use squares cut from old carpet under felt (not to the rubber backed variety) and put up one or two on the top of the Crown board. This it does help minimize is loss of heat from the cluster. I also reduce entrances now for the same reason.

It is at too early for an inspection of the brood box but not too early for a floor spring clean. Lift the hive gently away from the floor (easier with two people) slip in a clean spare floor or clean the existing floor and put the whole thing back together with a minimum of a disturbance.

If you were a wise forward-looking beekeeper you would have stashed away in the beehed brood combs solid with honey that you removed from the brood-box last season to relieve the congestion and also probably saved an early swarm by this a simple manoeuvre. These can be placed over the existing brood-box and the bees will empty them and take the honey down. No need to have a complete box full - three or four would do the trick.

On a good and flying day observe what is happening at the hive entrance. Foragers returning with large pollen loads almost invariably indicate that the colony has come through the winter fine, but still heft the hive to check for remaining stores. Colonies in the same apiary may show different levels of activity at the hive entrance. Mostly quite normal-don't forget, some strains of bee fly at a lower temperature and may be steaming away whilst others are still thinking about it.

Not too late to re-arrange and a move Hives within a your apiary. If you neglected to give your autumn Varroa treatment, than for goodness sake do it right now and the treatment should be completed before the first supers go on.

Finally a plea to keep yourself one step ahead of the bees. Start putting foundation into frames ready for when you need them, both brood frames and supers. It can be really embarrassing to have to hastily assemble frames with the swarm hanging from the tree!

George Butler

FROM THE SECRETARY:

The final winter meeting will be held on 17th March at 7.30pm at Woodcote Community Centre. The speaker will be Robin Dartington who will give an illustrated talk on keeping bees in "The Long Hive". The accommodation is said to be attractive and labour saving! Decide for yourself on March 17th.

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

Does anyone know of a possible site not too distant from Cholsey? If so, Bill Seivwright who has a potential neighbour problem is interested.

Brian Carter

JANUARY MEETING: -

At our meeting in January we welcomed back Julian Johnston whose talk was entitled 'a nomad amongst the bees'. Unfortunately I was out of the country and unable to be present, but I have been given details of Julian's talk.

Julian has travelled extensively following his interest in bee keeping. This was facilitated by an investment of £1 put into a machine at a service station which produced a printed card, which he circulated to foreign embassies. He challenged us to get cards printed and see where it takes us.

He said, in his experience bees are the same everywhere, it is only the beekeepers who differ and what they do with the bees. In the Gulf he had noticed that bees get stale on a single source nectar flow and it is common practice to move the Hives around so that they work better.

Our next meeting, the last of our winter meetings will be very thought provoking. Robin Dartington will talk about his brainchild, the "Dartington Hive" which is a variation on the long hive concept

George Butler. (Chairman)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:-

"Unfortunately I was'nt able to attend the A.G.M. last October, so couldn't get a picture of what was discussed. I did hear that some members were unhappy with the procedures at the meeting, particularly as the names of prospective new committee members having been proposed, were not given any consideration. I presume that there are minutes of the A.G.M. as in any organization. Perhaps a copy could be circulated to all members.

I know with my Disabled Riding Group the A.G.M. minutes are circulated to everyone involved soon after the meeting. Is this something that could be done with S.C.B.K.A.? Can anyone have a look at the constitution that was first formed all those years ago?"

Marcella Skinner

The constitution is on the agenda for discussion at the February Committee meeting and will no doubt be reported on at the forthcoming monthly meeting. Any member is entitled to see the existing constitution; this subject will be raised at the meeting.

R.Crocker

FROM THE EDITOR

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Our Treasurer has reminded me that In common with others I have not renewed my Annual subscription – If you are “one of the others” please renew yours without delay (or ASAP).

EDUCATIONAL APIARY TOUR (Free, of course)

This year it is again proposed to organize an “Apiary Tour” with our Bees Officer. Until we have some idea of numbers, numbers of hives involved and days preferred we cannot organize a date or dates. Anyone interested in taking part, please contact the Editor or the Secretary.

DEVON BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION SUMMER CONFERENCE (FORMERLY SEALE-HAYNE WEEKEND)

The Devon Beekeepers biennial summer conference will be taking place this year on 17th & 18th July at the new and prestigious venue of Exeter University. Speakers of international renown will impart their knowledge on the theme of ‘Healthy Bees, Healthy People’. They will include Dr Otto Boecking, Germany, on the Status of Breeding Varroa Resistant Bees, Dr Rose Cooper from the University of Wales on the Research and Developments in Honey as a Healing Agent and Dr Anton Imdorf, Bee Research Institute, Switzerland on Alternative Treatments for Varroa Destructor. Accommodation is available on site and all rooms have en-suite facilities.

For further information and application form please contact Mrs Jane Ducker, Oak Cottage, Chapel Lane, Manaton, Devon, TQ13 9UA. Tel. 01647 221225

Extract from: Apis UK

EUROPEAN BEE PATHOLOGY GROUP FORMED

Writing in the IBRA journal Bee World, Norman Carreck of Rothamsted Research informs us of one of the lesser known announcements following the Apimondia in Slovenia last year was the formation of the European Bee Pathology Group with an initial steering committee of Brenda Ball (UK), Ingemar Fries (Sweden) and Wolfgang Ritter (Germany). The aim of the group is to draw together bee pathologists across Europe in order to improve communication and to better coordinate activities. <http://www.beedata.com/apis-uk/newsletters04/apis-uk0104.htm>

Note: - In a communication from Dr. J-D Charrierre of Switzerland I am informed that he, and Dr. Imdorf will be attending the first meeting of this group in Udine later this year.

BED and BREAKFAST

A directory of beekeepers that can provide bed and breakfast holidays is being prepared, If any member would like to be included go to: - <http://www.bbka.org.uk/holidays.php#> alternatively, those without web facilities can notify the Secretary or the Editor .

R.F.Crocker

Salmon with lime and honey

4 salmon steaks grated rind and juice of 1 lime 5 Tbsp sunflower oil
2 Tbsp orange juice 2 tsp honey green cardamom, crushed to extract seeds

Whisk together 3 tablespoons of oil, lime rind and juice, orange juice, honey and crushed cardamom seeds. Marinate the salmon in this mixture overnight. Take salmon out of marinade and brush with remaining oil. Grill, turning the steaks for about 8 minutes. Pour marinade into a saucepan and bring to boil. Serve salmon steaks with the warm sauce.

Linda Clarke

Local Honey Producers UK Database: - From time to time we are asked how to sell surplus honey. There is a National database of local honey suppliers. You can put your name on by going to <http://www.beedata.com/localhoney> or submit your details to the Secretary or the Editor – there is no charge for the service

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.

FREE to anyone interested! Selection of French concentrated essences to create authentic liqueurs like Benedictine and Chartreuse. Just add vodka or brandy. Ring Lynn Penfold on 01628 825718.

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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NATIONAL BEE UNIT - SOUTHERN REGION



Around and about the region *February 2004*

A common theme in articles in this issue of "Around and about the region" is the effect of weather on our bees. Whether global warming is a reality or not, there is plenty of evidence of the influence that unusual weather patterns are having on our bees and our beekeeping, from failed crops due to drought to the risk of starvation due to our bees being so active during the winter.

Once again, I hope that you will enjoy this newsletter and I look forward to seeing many of you during the coming season.

Ian Homer

Frequently asked questions.

Since last season I have managed to visit a number of associations and have been fascinated by the range of questions association members ask. There are three particularly common questions which arise.

Firstly, how can we combat the effects of woodpeckers on our hives? (Draping hives with a fine mesh plastic fruit netting seems to be an effective solution).

Secondly, why is wax moth such a problem these days and what can we do about it? (The withdrawal of PBD from the market has removed the chief weapon most beekeepers used). There are other techniques such as freezing combs but another very effective control method is to remove all wax moth larvae from the hive each time the colony is inspected).

But, without any shadow of doubt, the most frequently asked question is "What are we going to do about resistant varroa mites?"

The answer to this last question can be as complex as you want it to be but, put simply, it is essential that you have a clear understanding of what is happening in your colonies.

The very minimum you need to do is:

1. Monitor your hives, assess the extent of varroa infestation and test for resistance.
2. If your mite population warrants control measures try to adopt alternatives to your previous control measures.
3. Apply these control measures.
4. Monitor your hives to assess the impact of the control measures.

Most importantly, this needs to be a continuous process because, whilst **you** may have effectively controlled mite numbers to an acceptable level, you cannot control re-infestation from any other colonies in your neighbourhood. No longer can varroa control be a once (or perhaps twice) a year activity.

There are a number of one day workshops and apiary workshops planned to take place over the coming months. These will provide opportunities to discuss alternative control methods as well as how to assess the mite population in your colonies and determine treatment thresholds. The concepts of Integrated Pest Management are not new but many beekeepers are benefiting from the opportunity to discuss the practical application of the control methods and techniques which these events offer.

If there is not an event planned for your area and you feel one should be arranged, then do please contact me.

New Honey Regulations.

Most of you will know that new Honey Regulations recently came into effect but, it is clear from the number of times I have been asked about them, that many beekeepers are concerned that they don't know the exact implications of them.

There are web sites available from which you can obtain copies of the regulations (www.hmso.gov.uk) and guidance notes on their interpretation (www.foodstandards.gov.uk).

Perhaps the most useful advice will be that obtained from those who have the responsibility for enforcing the regulations – the Trading Standards Department of your local County Council. Hampshire County have produced an excellent leaflet which sets out exactly what is required – this can be accessed at www.hants.gov.uk/regulatory/busadvice/honey/html

Failure of autumn sown rape.

Can you remember back to last summer and autumn? If you can you will recall just how

dry it was. Whether it constituted a drought or not I'm not sure, but in many areas of the region it was so dry that much of the autumn sown rape crop failed to germinate. The problem was extensively covered on TV and radio but, as far

as I am aware, every story failed to note the significance to the bee community. A number of farmers attempted to re-drill but, I gather, that was not altogether successful and there is a real prospect of the early rape crop being rather patchy in many areas.

This won't present a problem unless your bees are reliant on early rape but I know that, for some beekeepers in the region, rape is a major source of both nectar and pollen. If you are affected by this, it may be as well to keep a

careful eye on your bees as shortfalls of either nectar or pollen could seriously affect the development of your colonies. Where necessary, feed them to overcome the nectar shortage and to assist brood development.

The winter rains have, to some extent, redressed the situation and it is probable that spring sown crops will germinate well. Providing we get a near average, or better, spring and summer then there should be reasonable flows from these crops.

Honey Survey.

Thank you to everyone who responded to the request for information on honey yields and honey prices. Responses are still coming in (it's not too late to send further responses) but the initial analysis shows that a 454gm (1lb) jar of honey, on average throughout the region, is selling direct at around £2.62 with the wholesale price typically being around £1.90. Cut comb honey is retailing at around £2.50 for 227 gm (8oz) for both blossom and heather, whilst heather honey in the jar is, typically, retailing at just under £4 for a 454gm jar. There are significant variations around the region with the price apparently being closely linked to tourism (the more tourists the higher the price). In several parts of the region, a 454gm jar of blossom honey regularly sells at £3.00

Average yields during 2003 varied between 13kg and 55kg per colony (28lbs to 120 lbs) with the mean value being just under 30kg (65lbs) per colony. Highest yielding colonies were reported as producing a mean of 49kg (103lbs) within a range of 27kg to 90 kg (60lbs to 200lbs).

SOUTHERN REGION ASSOCIATIONS DAY – APRIL 25th 2004

Association Secretary's are already aware of this event but, alas, not everyone will be able to attend. The large number of associations within Southern Region means numbers have to be restricted to two delegates from each association. For those lucky enough to attend, the day promises to be an interesting mix of news from the National Bee Unit and discussion between associations. The programme is still being finalised but is expected to include presentations on:

- current research activity at the National Bee Unit
- the roles and responsibilities of NBU
- a discussion on the role of Disease Liaison Contacts
- an insight into some of the odd and interesting things which bee inspectors find as they go about their work.

This will be complemented by an open forum where topical or contentious issues can aired and discussed. The aim is for it to be a social opportunity for members of the various associations to meet and compare notes.

What ever happened to winter?

As I write this, on January 21st, my bees are actively flying and bringing in pollen – they have been for the last 4 weeks! I can't say what hap-

pened whilst I was away on holiday but during the times when I have been here, there has never, since October, been a period longer than four days when the home bees weren't out flying at some time or other!

What then should I read into all of this activity?

Well, firstly we can conclude that it has been a relatively mild winter and that at least some of our bees are prepared to pop out for a few minutes. It is one thing for the odd bee or two to take a cleansing flight but a rather different proposition when they are out to work – for that is exactly what they have been doing – collecting water and pollen.

If the bees are collecting pollen, then there is a need for it within the hive to feed young brood. That in turn means that stores are being consumed (for there is nothing yielding nectar in January in this locality) and, of course, that is why water is being collected – to dilute the stored honey.

So, if stores are being consumed fairly quickly, will they last until there is a significant nectar flow? This is where you must judge the status of each colony carefully to decide whether to feed or not. How heavy is each hive and how much stores remain? At what rate are the stores being consumed? What is the source

Preparing for the season

This is the time when many of us will be planning our activities for the coming season. For many beekeepers the practice of replacing several combs in each hive with brand new foundation will be routine – one which they have carried out for many years. This has long been recommended as the most effective method of, progressively, replacing each comb in the hive to avoid the combs becoming old and dark and, potentially, harbouring disease.

There are several aspects of this practice which, if considered for a few minutes, tend to minimise the benefit which can be achieved. Firstly, unless the combs are marked with the year they were changed, it may be difficult to identify which combs were replaced even as recently as last year. Secondly, since only two or three combs are replaced, the colony continues to contain old comb and so could still be harbouring disease.

of the earliest nectar flow in your locality and when do you expect it to start this year?

These are all questions you can be addressing right now – the beekeeping season need not be restricted to the months of April – September. And if you decide to supplement a colony's winter stores, you have a good reason for an early look inside each colony without doing any harm to the colony.

Take what you may have been told, or read, about the risks of chilling bees with a pinch of salt, the risks are negligible (brood is more at risk from very hot weather than it ever is from cold). Supplementary winter feed is best provided in the form of fondant or candy wrapped in a polythene bag with a hole in the underside for the bees to gain access and then placed above a feed hole on the crown board.

It's a strange paradox that a milder winter can be seen as, potentially, more problematic for our bees than a more severe one. Perhaps we should all go back to the old country ways and be more like our bees. After all, they work according to the weather rather than according to the calendar!

Bailey Comb Change

Here however is an alternative approach. Instead of changing, say, one third of the frames in each colony in any given year, consider instead, changing all of the frames in one third of your colonies. The practice is known as the Bailey Comb Change and has the significant benefit of removing all of the old combs at one time.

You will need to place a second brood box containing the frames with the new comb above the original brood box and, subject to timing, you may need to feed the colony with a winter strength sugar solution. Once some of the new foundation has been drawn, find the queen and place her on this new foundation. Place a queen excluder between the two brood boxes to prevent the queen going back down into the bottom box.

Unless there is a strong nectar flow, continue feeding to encourage the bees to draw the new foundation. Remove the bottom brood box when, after three weeks, all of the brood has hatched out. At this point you can either destroy the old comb or render it down to recover the wax.

This procedure can be carried out anytime between March and June – the earlier the better as the colony will have longer to build up before the peak summer flow. But do make sure that there is sufficient feed available to get the new comb drawn out.

Shook Swarms

Another approach, which also allows all of the brood frames to be changed simultaneously, is to use a “shook swarm”. To use this technique, first move the colony to one side and place a new floor board where the colony was originally. Place a queen excluder (wire, not zinc) directly onto the floor board and then place

a spare brood box with new foundation onto the queen excluder.

Now carefully examine the colony to find the queen and put her into a match box for safe keeping. Frame by frame, shake all of the bees from the existing brood box into the new one and once they are all in, run the queen into the new brood box. This can now be reassembled and a winter strength feed applied. Again, the amount and duration of feeding will be determined by timing and nectar flow.

Once the queen is proven to be laying, remove the queen excluder from underneath the brood box and re-assemble the hive as normal.

This is a technique which is increasingly used as part of the disease control procedures following cases of European Foul Brood. Beekeepers whose bees have been “shook swarmed” will often tell you that those colonies had, by the end of the season, out performed those that were not!

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