



# THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

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July 2013

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## Editors Corner

What varied content we have in the newsletter this month – from dealing with poisoning reports to attendance at local events through to the bees of our associations starting to behave true to the season. I have been impressed with the increase in bee-friendly plant awareness in the local nurseries with labelling clearly indicating the bee-attracting flowers. A local nursery that I had not known of before was the venue for the SCBKA apiary meeting in June – Greenshoots is tucked away on the Reading to Nettlebed Road and is a horticultural therapy unit providing a safe environment where people are able to build or rebuild their skills, confidence and, where possible, move into full employment. In addition to the wide range of plants at very reasonable prices, the site has a lovely meadow in which the centre allows some beehives to be kept.

<http://www.waysandmeans.org.uk/greenshoots.php> .

*Sue Remenyi*



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## In My Apiary

### An inspector calls: June 2013

In the last newsletter's apiary visit report from South Chilterns there was mention of a possible poisoning incident. This month's In My Apiary explains how this was reported and happened next.

Following the suggestion that there were more dead bees outside the hives than there should have been for the time of year, samples of dead bees from two of the hives were sent by post to the National Bee Unit. This triggered two things: a letter with the results of the preliminary laboratory screen testing for known diseases; and a visit from the seasonal bee inspector, Julian Parker.

The NBU's letter explained the procedure to refer cases to the Defra Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme, managed for the Chemicals Regulation Directorate by Natural England. If the bee inspector considers there is a probable link between the death of the bees and exposure to pesticides, the case would be accepted into the scheme and pes-

ticide residue analysis carried out. In this case, the NBU had screen tested 10 bees and found no acarine or amoeba, but 8 of them had nosema.

Julian Parker came along about three weeks after the apiary meeting to do a very thorough inspection of all the hives, checking the brood very carefully for any signs that all might not be well.

He found sac brood (see photo below) and bald brood in one hive, and spent some time with a tweezers pulling out larvae to show us how one end had become pointed, like a worm, instead of the usual blunt round shape. Eventually the dead larva dries into the



characteristic "Chinese slipper" shape, but the bees had been efficient at clearing these out, leaving a rather pepper-pot brood appearance, so there weren't many dried "slippers" to see. It's useful to have seen sac brood in its earlier stages, and the tell-tale is a tiny perforation in the capping. The bald brood larvae seemed to be developing normally, and Julian's view is that the bees are not sealing these cells because the

parasite load may be high. This hive has a mesh floor, but no supports for an insert tray, so counting varroa drop is not done. It's also possible that the pepper-pot holes in the brood are a result of queen in-breeding, where diploid drones have been removed. These are male drone bees formed by an unfortunate genetic combination from fertilised eggs, which would normally have become female workers. Just to be sure, Julian also did a foul-brood test, which thankfully came out negative. This hive was bad-tempered, reinforcing the suggestion that re-queening would be a good idea!

Julian's knowledge was considerable and he spent a long time answering with enormous patience a great number of questions about all the hives in their various states. He also passed on a few tips and tricks to make handling the bees easier, such as clearing them gently away from the brood by touching them lightly with the back of his hand. Even the grumpy ones don't seem to mind this at all, reacting much more calmly than if they'd been shaken off. The whole experience was very positive and we're grateful to Julian for passing on his expertise so generously.

The final outcome is that no further action will be taken, as three weeks or so after the initial observation of dead bees, there is no clear evidence that poisoning might have occurred. Between the varroa and the nosema, the bald brood and the sac brood, the poor creatures have got their hands full anyway. They've all had another dose of Hive Clean, and we'll try to find something to help with the nosema. I understand Fumidil B is no longer produced, but would still be legal to use if any supplier out there had some that was still within its designated shelf-life.

*Meryl Toomey, SCBKA*

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## Reading Beekeepers at The Wolf Trust Open Day at Beenham

This very well attended open day on 27th May (Whit Monday) had lots of commercial & environment based exhibitors and also gave opportunities to interact with the wolves. Reading Beekeepers were there with their gazebo display.



We had a lot of interest in all types of bees and the 'hands-on' wild combs, our 'virtual' hive with photographs of real hive frames on each of the frames, along with being able to magnify real (but dead) honey bees, wasps, queen bumble bee and queen hornet gave everyone a more realistic view of the differences between them and the life of the honey bee. It was particularly rewarding to see just how much youngsters were interested in learning about bees and also hearing that some of them have been taught about bees at school. We actually sold out of honey and had we realised how popular it was going to be, my colleague would have brought more! Our Chair-

man makes mead, which interested people were able to sample (over 18s only!). He had numerous people who wanted to make their own and he not only gave them the recipe, but also talked them through the whole process.

Although people from all over the country were present, RBKA is confident that they will have a number of new beekeepers as a result of this Open Day and there will be a lot more people 'doing their bit' to help all types of bees.

*Linda Rogerson, RBKA*

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## Wokingham & District Beekeepers Association

Our session at the Club apiary on the 9<sup>th</sup> June took place on a windy and overcast Sunday afternoon.

We have three new nucs which were busy making queens, so we concentrated on the full size hives. However, we immediately noticed that one of the nucs, which has a drop down door which can be sealed when being transported, was closed. We took the roof off and opened the door and stood well back as the bees poured out, not very happy. After a few minutes, when they had started to settle, we took a look inside. Fortunately all was well so they could not have been shut in for too long. We have now propped pieces of wood into the entrances of all the nucs, to stop this happening again.

Hive 1 – had eggs larvae and brood but the brood was quite pepper pot and there had been signs of chalk brood at the last inspection. We saw the queen but there were very few eggs and no queen cells. In the circumstances it was decided to carry out a shook

swarm and put the bees on fresh comb. Once new comb had been inserted and the queen placed back inside, we put another empty brood box (or super – whatever is handy) on top of the hive and shook the bees into this. It provides a funnel effect and allows the bees to walk into the brood box, rather than scatter over the top and down the sides. As there was no sign of the chalk brood seen at the last inspection, we saved some of the good frames of brood, with eggs and as insurance we made up a nucleus in the hope the bees will make a new queen. The rest of the old brood frames will be destroyed.

Hive 2 was in the process of making a new queen so we left it alone.

Hive 3 – no longer exists.

Hive 4 had previously made queen cells and these had been used to make up the nucs. The main hive had been left with two cells, one of which we were going to remove that afternoon leaving the best to hatch. By removing the second cell you remove the risk of the bees swarming when the first queen emerges. However, it turned out we only had one runty looking cell left, so we might have to recombine with one of the nucs if we end up queenless or with a poor queen. We left her with two supers as one was quite heavy.

Hive 5 contained the queen and sealed and unsealed cells. We made a nucleus from this hive and left the queen in the main brood box.

Hive 6 contained eggs, larvae and brood. We saw the queen but also sealed and unsealed queen cells. On this hive we carried out an artificial swarm. The hive was moved to one side and in its original location we put a new hive with undrawn comb and a frame containing the queen and brood. The flying bees will return to the hive with the queen, leaving the rest of the brood and non flying bees in the old hive with two queen cells. A week later the old hive will be moved to the other side of the hive containing the original queen and flying bees. All new flying bees from the original hive will then move into the closest hive, (the one with the original queen). This will boost the population of bees with the queen, so you are left with a productive honey producing unit. One queen cell will be removed from the original hive and a new queen allowed to develop.

We have all read about shook and artificial swarms but seeing it actually carried out makes it so much easier to understand.

### **Microscopy**



The last session of the current Microscopy course took place on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June. We were lucky enough to have Nigel Semmence, our Regional Bee Inspector, come along with live examples of EFB and AFB. Once we were all suitably attired with disposable aprons and gloves we were given the opportunity to examine the frames containing the foul brood. At first it was not easy to see the EFB but once Nigel pointed out the twisted larvae and other signs we knew what to look for. I expected to see a whole frame of damaged larvae but that is not always the case, so you need to be vigilant, as even one or two infected larvae means you have a problem. If there is a small amount of damage on a strong colony, then a shook swarm is an option but if it is a larger amount, depending on the size of the colony, it might need to be destroyed.

AFB was slightly easier to spot, as we could see the sunken cell cappings and, in some cases, perforations to one side of the cap. When we opened the cells you could see they were dark and sludgy. Unfortunately, as the





frames had been kept in a freezer we could not perform the rope test, as the larvae had broken down but it was immediately obvious, once we uncapped the cells, that there was a problem. Nigel explained that a matchstick, when placed inside an AFB cell and pulled out gently, should rope out to about an inch. If you practice with honey it will give you a good idea of what to expect.

AFB Spores are very resistant to extremes of heat and cold, and to many disinfectants and remain viable for many years.

The control method for AFB is simple in the UK: **all infected colonies are compulsorily destroyed**. The first stage is to destroy the adult bees and brood combs. The bees and frames are then burnt and the hives and any appliances are sterilised by scorching with a blow lamp. If these measures need to be taken the Bee Inspector will provide the necessary information.

As a reminder, the main indicators for each foul brood are as follows:

EFB – infected colonies may show some or all the signs below:

- Erratic or uneven brood pattern
- Twisted larvae with creamy-white guts visible through the body wall
- Melted down, yellowy white larvae
- An unpleasant sour odour
- Loosely-attached brown scales

Unlike AFB, the remains of the larvae that die from EFB do not rope when drawn out with a matchstick.

AFB

- Uneven or 'Pepper-pot' brood pattern
- Sunken, greasy or perforated, darkened cell cappings
- Roping, sticky larval remains when drawn out with a matchstick
- Dark "scales", which are difficult to remove from cells

If you have any doubts immediately call your Seasonal Bee Inspector, who will be happy to come and check. If you can, make the entrance to the hive smaller but don't close it altogether, as you want all the flying bees to get back into the hive but you want to keep out strangers who may take the spores back to their own hive.

Vigilance is key. If you buy in bees make sure they come from good stock and are disease free and ensure that all your equipment is scrupulously keen. Many of the outbreaks are caused by beekeepers themselves, so it is down to us to try to keep these diseases under control.

### **Bee Safari with Julian Parker**



June has been a busy month as we also had our Bee Safari on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Julian Parker, our local Seasonal Bee Inspector had kindly offered to visit a number of member apiaries and check on the condition, health and disease status of their bees. The numbers and locations changed, as many hives were in the process of producing new queens but we ended up with six sites to visit at the final count.

We started at 10.00 am with the Club apiary and finished at around 6.00 pm at Katie and Simon Holmes' site where two queens were marked and a third nearly lost as she took to the wing as the marker pen came out!

At Colin Gregory's house, one of the hives we opened had a virgin queen which we spotted and marked. We then found a sealed queen cell in the same hive and as an-

other hive was queenless, it was decided to try and “pull the queen” and run her into the Q- hive. As most of us had never seen this done we watched as the cell was uncapped but unfortunately the queen was dead. When a queen is ready to hatch, the bees remove the wax from the bottom of the queen cell and just leave a very thin membrane over the end. If you spot this then you know the queen is ready to emerge and you can gently help her out. We hope we will get a chance to see this done on another occasion.

We did find some small signs of chalk and sac brood on our tour but according to Julian, nothing to really worry about. Overall, our bees are ok, despite the fact that everyone seems to be coping with swarms at the moment.



A couple of hints and tips from Julian. If you want to inspect a frame but don't want to shake the bees, then gently brush the back of your hand over the bees and they will move out of the way. Much easier than trying to use your palm.

If you are using Thymol or similar for your autumn treatment, try not to leave it until September as there is no guarantee the weather will be warm enough. It is better to start early August, when you can hopefully guarantee the right temperatures. You might miss out on a few frames of honey but the main flow is over by then and you will catch more mites by starting when the weather is warmer, which should mean healthier, stronger bees going into winter.

Our thanks to Julian for what must have been a very tiring and long day. We only had to watch and learn whilst he did all the work, so it was very much appreciated and greatly enjoyed by everyone who attended.

It was a great way for experienced and new beekeepers alike to glean a huge amount of information and catch up on the latest news from DEFRA. If we can persuade Julian to run another one next year, even if he doesn't visit your hives, it is well worth attending to tap into his wealth of knowledge. We were also fortunate with the weather! Thanks also to everyone who provided refreshments en route.

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## **South Chilterns Beekeepers Association**

SCBKA Apiary visit, Greenshoots Nursery 8th June 2013



Ian Howard's apiary was the venue for June's apiary visit. The weather for the visit was lovely and sunny, with the preceding few weeks being equally good, providing ample forage for the bees. At the apiary two colonies were over wintered but unfortunately in the spring one colony didn't have a viable queen so this left one strong colony by the end of April. The remaining colony was expanding very fast during May and had 3 supers added during that month including one with small strips of foundation to let the bees

build out the comb for themselves. This they did in a couple of weeks and by the apiary visit it was almost completely built out and had significant stores (see photo above). The half moon shape with no honey is because the super was put next to the brood chamber and that is why the bees have drawn out drone brood cells. If it had been put above the next super they would have filled it.

During May, queen cups started to appear in the brood box and on the 25th of May full queen cells were seen with larvae at the bottom. This hive did not have a marked queen as she has proved to be elusive, so a normal artificial swarm was a problem, as finding the queen was proving impossible. However to achieve an artificial swarm, a shook swarm was used with the queen and all the bees being moved down into a new brood box with new foundation and a queen excluder placed across this and then the original brood box positioned back on top, followed by the supers. The hive was left overnight and the next day after the nursery bees had moved back up to the original brood box it was removed and placed to one side on a new floor. This was then fed to ensure there was sufficient supplies and left for a week. The following week it was moved to the other side of the original hive completing the artificial swarm.

It was a week later that the apiary visit took place.

Hive one, (Original queen on new foundation.)

On opening the crown board it was clear from the number of bees present that another super was required as all the frames were covered in bees. It was hoped that this elusive queen would be found and marked by Reg but as per her usual behaviour she was nowhere to be seen. However, there was brood at all stages present and half of the brood box frames which was a 14"x12" were built out showing that after two weeks of the artificial swarm she was laying very well and the colony was very strong. It's hoped that in a week or two when the rape seed has gone over it will provide a good honey crop.

Hive two (Original brood box with queen cells)

At best it was hoped that there was a virgin queen in hive two, however on a very quick inspection of a couple of frames an almost sealed queen cell was spotted. It was decided that the best policy was to close up quickly and not disturb further. However, there were a lot of bees in the brood box so it was felt that there was a risk of a further swarm from this hive. To alleviate the congestion a super was added later in the day. An inspection unfortunately wasn't possible during the following week and on Friday a swarm was spotted in a tree in the orchard. This was put into a third hive and the swarmed colony inspected. On the first look through a good queen cell was selected and the 3 other queen cells found knocked down. Just to be careful a second look through of the hive was carried out and another 2 queen cells were found hiding under the bees! So hopefully this colony will have one queen hatch out and be OK now, but you can never be sure, so a nuke box was prepared just in case another swarm appears. On reflection and discussion with Reg on the first inspection only one queen cell should have been selected to try and stop it swarming.

The day was concluded with a question and answer session hosted by Reg and a short presentation from Paul from the Greenshoots Plant Nursery explaining the great work that the charity does with horticultural therapy for disabled students of all ages - they also sell plants so do call in sometime.

*Ian Howard*





## John Belcher

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## Reading Beekeepers Association

19<sup>th</sup> May and a fine day at last with temperatures in the rarefied heights for this spring of 20 Celsius! Reading beekeepers assembled at Bob & Karen Challis's home apiary at Emmer Green. This is a very special place with a riding school & substantial acreage.

Early arrivals were in time to see a swarm circling around a tall willow tree: Bob informed us that it appeared to have come from hive number 1 (working left to right) Bob was bringing out his ladder as the swarm appeared to settle but it then took-off again and into a patch of briar rose in the same field, this was only 11.00 AM so it was considered "best left until it's certainly staying" and we got-on with our inspection.

All of Bob's hives face the house in the back garden and are an impressive sight on stands on the well trimmed grass with a rail fence behind with space to work the hives, horse blankets are hung on the rails, Bob believes in wrapping-up his hives in chilly weather, he only lost one colony from seven in March during those late frosts & snow.

Working across the six hives good colony strength and well kept equipment was seen, a honey flow was apparent in most hives, thanks to the oil seed rape in the field next door. New beekeepers were able to assist and queens were found in two of the colonies as well as good queen activity, brood and eggs in all. Bob and Karen have actually extracted their first super of new season's honey; oilseed rape honey should be extracted very promptly before granulation, and have bottled 20lb. A number of queen cells were found and two beekeepers took advantage of these and collected three queen cells for their own apiaries.

Hive number one (see the swarm) was also opened and the best sealed queen cell was reserved with a second uncapped but occupied queen cell configured on the facing comb opposite. The bees were docile, very plentiful and a credit to their keepers! Bob being a skilled woodworker and using spare timber from his roofing business has constructed hives of his own design and make, very robust, padded insulated roofs, deeps and supers and all to take standard National type frames. Our demonstrator Mike Blackburn was happy to work with them - his only slight criticism being the larger than usual clearance between deep frames and floor where the bees tended to build some lumpy wild comb. It was OK though, as these being drone we were able to rake-out and found no signs of varroa on several rakings. New members were able to see a varroa however as one mite turned-up on the glove of one of the assistants.

As mentioned this is a very special place and beekeepers were able to relax afterwards under the ranch style veranda of Bob & Karen's home and view the scene of the hives, fields and woods beyond and enjoy some delicious sandwiches, cakes and drinks very kindly prepared by Karen. With very many thanks to Karen & Bob for a first class apiary visit.



Pictures showing the busy scene at Karen & Bob's.



July meeting is on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July starting at 11.00 AM at Tim & Hilary Whitakers garden apiary in Mapledurham village. Beautiful garden, bees in WBC hives. Details to follow regarding directions, parking etc.



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## Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead Bee Keepers Association

### Open Farm Sunday

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June was Open Farm Sunday and members of SWMBKA manned a stand at Rowley Farm, Wexham. The farm is a mixed dairy and arable farm and there was plenty to see and learn about current farming practices. The event is a popular draw for families and the recently born Jersey calves were irresistible for the little ones whilst the tractor rides and milking parlour were of interest to everyone. There was a good selection of stands to visit including a chance to make your own butter.

On the SWMBKA stand the show boards and the virtual hive attracted lots of attention and prompted questions from young and old alike. By the end of the day we had at least two definite new contacts and several others expressed an interest and took the society details for future contact. There were also good sales of honey from the society's nearby apiary.

The whole event was an excellent opportunity to raise bee awareness and dispel some myths for the general public and the team worked well to make it an enjoyable and productive day all round.

Joy Dodson and Ted Franke were ready and waiting for the visitors:



### **Apiary Meetings**

During the summer months and the busy time for beekeepers meetings continue at the Society apiary in Wexham on a fortnightly basis and each meeting provides an opportunity for the members, new-bees and old hands alike, to share knowledge and experience. Each visit throws up a new set of challenges as the hives are opened and inspected. The Apiary Blog on the newly revamped Society website ([www.swmbks.weebly.com](http://www.swmbks.weebly.com)) ensures that everyone can keep up to date with the latest developments whilst the forum pages allow anyone to add their comments to any on-going debate.

*Lorraine Godenzie*

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### **Association websites**

All four Federation member association websites have a lot of information – some of which may only be relevant to that association, but there is also quite a bit that is useful to us all. Here are the links for your reference:

Reading & District Beekeepers Association: <http://www.rbka.org.uk/>

South Chilterns Beekeepers' Association: <http://www.scbka.org>

Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society: <http://swmbks.weebly.com/>

Wokingham and District Beekeepers Association: [www.wokinghambeekeepers.org.uk/](http://www.wokinghambeekeepers.org.uk/)

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### **Useful Links, Advice and Information**

<http://www.apinews.com/> This website is a mine of information from around the world. You can subscribe to their newsletter.

<http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/newhome.html> This website has a lot of really useful information for the beekeeper.

<http://www.beekeepingforum.co.uk/> This is a portal for all things beekeeping.

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### **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](mailto: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: 01904 462 510, email: <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk> .

**South Eastern Region:** Mr Alan Byham, fax/tel: 01306 611 016

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**Letters to the Editor** are always welcome as long as they are signed. Anonymous letters and letters not in English will not be published. The Editor reserves the right to withhold names.

**Contributions**, including emails, to arrive with the Editor by the 20th of the month for publication by the 7<sup>th</sup> of 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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