



THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

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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Editors Corner

When friends and family come to visit I am always asked 'How are the bees'? If my husband is not in earshot I can provide a lengthy monologue on the state of bees in winter and this invariably leads to a trudge down the garden to observe the hives. The advantage of this is that it provides the opportunity for a quick heft to check the weight and I can clear away any dead bees from the entrances. On one of these visits, on the Sunday before Christmas, we were delighted to see bees flying – it was a cool, but dry day, and there was a real buzz in the air.

I hope that you enjoyed the Festive period and if you were fortunate enough to receive some beekeeping related gifts, you won't have to wait too long now to put them into use. One of my gifts was a flat packed roof and stand. These have been on display with the other Christmas presents – but when I came into the room the other day a hammer and screwdriver had been placed alongside. I think this is a hint for me to get on with the job!

Our associations were busy in December as you will see from the write-ups and we have the second part of an occasional series of articles about beekeeping in Africa. Reg Hook has also provided an interesting reflection on the life of Harry Jessop.

Sue Remenyi

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Federation News

BBKA news update. A special delegates meeting (SDM) on 13th December 2014 was called by more than 10% of member associations as a result of one BBKA trustee (Ken Basterfield (KB)) accusing another one (Peter Sutcliffe (PS)) of lying. Over 800 pages of evidence and counter evidence were sent to the Federation and as chairman, it fell on me to wade through it all.

The agenda should have just been to investigate the allegations. However, against BBKA's own rules they added another item: to uphold the decision made by them to suspend KB as a trustee.

If anyone wants to see my meeting debrief and the official minutes (sent round to all four associations chairmen/secretaries), let me know. There is nothing to hide. But here is an overview.

Background : KB accused PS of lying about the education budget, in that there was no money to pay for work contracted out to KB's son, Dan Basterfield. This was linked to accusations about misuse of FERA funds paid specifically for this project work as well as other projects. KB has taken his accusations to the Charities Commission and legal action is planned by the Basterfields against BBKA.

In summary:

- Both the Basterfields and the BBKA trustees have mishandled this, showing once again that the skillsets needed to manage this "business" are sadly lacking within the current group of trustees.
- Many SDM delegates pointed out that BBKA was now far too big an organisation (annual income of nearly £1 Million) to continue without proper governance, policies and procedures. However, no assurances were given by the trustees that this would be done.
- The only assurance given was that allegations of misuse of FERA funds would be investigated, whether the outcome will be reported back to associations remains to be seen.
- The delegates finally managed to get KB and PS to agree to go to independent arbitration but unfortunately Doug Brown, trustee and chairman of the BBKA stated that BBKA would not pay for their legal costs. Both men then withdrew their support for arbitration. Why BBKA have refused to pay the legal cost for their trustees is a mystery given they are effectively unsalaried employees.
- The delegates voted not to endorse the trustees decision to suspend KB so he remains a trustee.

In conclusion, there is now disquiet within associations about BBKA being run for the benefit of the trustees rather than for the benefit of you and I, the individual members. The most worrying aspect of this is that there is no plan as to how BBKA will resolve this situation. The ADM on 10th January will prove interesting.

Caroline Bushell

Caroline Bushell, Federation Chair



John Belcher

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Sue Remenyi

Wokingham and District Beekeepers Association



W&DBKA went into December off the back of an incredibly successful and enjoyable day on 30th November when we held a stall at the Wokingham Winter Carnival.

This is the third year that we have attended this event under the initiative and leadership of our Vice Chairman, Lorna Rivett, who always puts in a huge effort to ensure that we have plenty of bee related goodies to sell. This year Lorna was assisted by Bob Loades who must have spent several

weeks making candles and Mary Gillan who made these lovely Reindeer out of wax.

Thanks to everyone else that attended to assist on the day and help us raise over £1,000 for club funds.

It was pleasing to note that there is still a lot of interest and concern among the general public with respect to the plight of the honeybee and we spent many happy hours on the day discussing all things bees and answering questions. We gave out many of our club leaflets with lots of people interested in attending our open apiary days in the spring, so let's hope we manage to generate some new members once the season gets going.



Our December meeting took place on the 10th and an enjoyable time was had by all, with many members bringing along nibbles and delicious homemade treats for us all to enjoy during the evening. A quiz had been organised by Bob and was very well received, although it made me realise just how little I actually know about honeybee morphology, so I will be talking to Garth Matthews in the New Year as I obviously need more training!

The usual raffle was held with many generous prizes donated and raised £82. For some 10 years now we have had a booby prize of two lovely bone china ducks. This year's lucky winner and caretaker of the ducks for the next 12 months was John Edwards. Take care of them John and make sure you bring them back safe and sound next year!

Whilst out walking on New Year's Eve I was pleased to see the first catkins on the willow trees which always gets me excited and looking forward to the new season. Let's hope it's a good one for all of us and for our bees!



Happy new year to all of you.

Neil Marshall –Treasurer, W&DBKA

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South Chilterns Beekeepers Association



South Chilterns welcomed several new members to our Christmas Special meeting in Woodcote on Wednesday 10th December. We started in true Christmas spirit with our 'Three Wise Men' answering questions on bees and beekeeping. 'No question is too basic to ask'. This generated some interesting two-way discussions on a range of subjects including behaviour, handling, hives and winterising bees. Thanks to Steve Radford, Reg Hook and Jemima Hume-Humphreys.

Thanks also to Bev and Simon, we enjoyed Christmas Fare with mince pies and mulled wine followed by drawing the raffle prizes, from which we raised £77. A perfect way to start our Christmas celebrations!

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 21 January at Woodcote Village Hall.



Reading and District Beekeepers Association

On 11th November 2014 Reading Beekeepers met at our usual venue for our Annual General Meeting followed by judging and awards for our third annual 'New Beekeepers Honey Show, which includes an 'open' section.

AGM concluded, elected officers and committee members for 2015 being:-

Chair.	J. Davey.
Secretary.	Andrew (Drew)Cuthbert.
Treasurer.	Michael Blackburn.
Membership Secretary	Katie Rennie.
Minutes Secretary.	Marion Dabbs.
Librarian.	Sue Abbot.
Webmaster.	Giles McLoughlin.
Swarm Coordinator s	Katie Rennie & J. Davey.
Education Officers	Hazel Blackburn & Jenny Morgan.
Meetings Organisers	Mike Dabbs & J. Davey. (summer & winter)

Committee Members:- Mike Dabbs, Hazel Blackburn, Tim Whitaker, Clark Hunter, Katie Rennie, David Chinn & Linda Rogerson.

BBKA Basic Assessment Certificates were displayed for Proficiency in Apiculture awarded to:- John Rogerson, Jim Gavin, Jenny Morgan & Matthew Mc Ternan. Congratulations to them.

Awards of Trophies for the annual Reading Beekeepers Honey Show (August Bank Holiday at The Swallowfield Show) Made to:-

Martin Moore.	The Reading Platen.
Jenny Morgan.	The William Main Cup.
Kirsten Lennard.	The Godfrey Nicholson Cup.
J. Davey.	The Reading & Maurice Dixon Cups.

The third Annual New Beekeepers' Honey Show. Judged by Senior Honey Judge Hazel Blackburn.

A very good number of entries and the results were :-

Claire O'Brien, for highest score.	The Hazel Blackburn Trophy.
Imke Wilson, for best 'taste' honey.	The Reading Horse brass.
Sian Morgan, best in show (all classes).	A beekeeping prize.



Open Section. Highest points shared between Valerie Taylor & J. Davey in cookery section and Linda Rogerson for some beautiful entries in the photography section*. The Apiaries Cup; shared.

*Linda's photos would grace the cover of Bee Craft & BBKA news in our opinion & copies can be seen here. They were taken at Linda & John's apiary during this season.

December Meeting: Here is a brief preview of our illustrated talk by Dr. Michael Keith Lucas held on December 9th. Pollen Identification and Honey Origin.



Dr Keith Lucas recently retired as a professor at Reading University but maintains a lab at Whiteknights where pollen is expertly analysed for forensics for several police forces. Michael's illustrated talk gave attendees what must be must be information second to none on the unique properties of pollen it's virtual indestructibility over millennia and how it's visual presence (via scanning electron microscope) and protein signature in honey and in forensic and foodstuffs situations can tell the scientist all. Watch-out origin fakers and other wrong doers! Full report from Reading BKA on this session to follow in February issue of our newsletter. However attached is a photo of our festive trolley well appreciated by all who attended the cordial is warm but non-alcoholic (we do meet in a Methodist Church!)

January Meeting. On Tuesday 13th at our usual venue starting at 7-30 PM prompt for a talk on beekeeping by Steve Moll. Our good friend Steve from South Chilterns has expanded his number of colonies to several hundred hives on several apiaries. So beekeepers wanting to become successful and grow their hobby to substantial levels don't miss this!



Slough Windsor and Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society



The December meeting held on Tuesday 9th was a very timely talk on the subject of winter control of varroa mite, given by Hasan Mohammad Al-Toufailia, a PhD student from the Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects (LASI) based at the University of Sussex.

Oxalic acid is widely used to treat honey bee colonies against the Varroa mite. It can be applied in several different ways; two methods, dribbling and spraying, make use of an oxalic acid and sucrose solution whilst a third method, sublimation, vaporizes solid oxalic acid crystals. The study aims to identify which method is the most effective and which dose is best, both in terms of Varroa mortality and low honey bee mortality.



Oxalic acid application methods.

Clockwise from top left: Dribbling, Spraying, Sublimation by inserting the heater into the hive entrance and the Sublimation treatment. Photos: Hasan Al Tofailia.

Hasan aimed to determine the efficacy of oxalic acid applied when hives are broodless and determine the most appropriate dose and method of application. He shared with us the results of his study over two years.

Hasan's preliminary conclusions indicate that sublimation is the most effective method using lower doses of oxalic acid. However dribbling is almost as effective when the DERA recommended dose is used. Spraying can be the most damaging method.

He emphasised that, prior to treatment, we should check that the colony is broodless. He recommends opening the caps of any small patches of brood cells to ensure that the treatment reaches all parts.

Hasan has also studied the use of drone trapping as a chemical free method to kill Varroa mites. Varroa mites prefer to breed in drone cells, so a small number of drone brood cells may contain the same number of Varroa mites as a much greater amount of worker brood cells. He has been involved in carrying out studies to determine the efficacy of drone trapping early in the spring, when the first drones are being reared.

The summary results so far suggest that an oxalic acid treatment administered between mid-December and mid-January can result in a 97% Varroa mite kill and drone trapping in spring can achieve a 46% kill which may result in lower varroa mite populations later in the season.

Hasan's talk was fascinating and left the members seriously considering the purchase of the sublimation equipment for the Society.

Effect of brood rearing on the efficacy of oxalic acid treatment against Varroa mites, and does sublimation of oxalic acid affect the brood inside the sealed cells.

Hasan Al Toufailya, Luciano Scandian, Francis Ratnieks

Oxalic acid cannot penetrate honey bee brood cells, so mites contained inside cells are unaffected. For this reason it is recommended that treatment occurs during the broodless period in the winter when all mites are phoretic on adult bees and thus easily controlled. But are British colonies really broodless throughout the winter? We have thus monitored brood levels in UK colonies in autumn and winter to determine the best times to apply oxalic acid solution.

Estimating the number of Varroa mites in hygienic and non hygienic colonies and monitoring how they build up through one year between two periods of oxalic acid treatment.

Hasan Al Toufailya, Luciano Scandian, Francis Ratnieks

Hygienic behaviour is a natural defence against brood diseases in honey bees. Adult bees of two weeks of age perform this behaviour by removing dead, sick or damaged brood from cells thereby reducing the spread of infections. We have been determining the correlation between the number of mites and hygiene over a period of one year, and determine how much mite populations build up. We found that hygienic colonies removed significantly more pupae infested with one mite per cell than the non-hygienic colonies but not all mites were removed.

More details of Sussex University's work on integrated varroa management can be found at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/lasi/sussexplan/varroamites>

The talk was followed by our Christmas 'Pot Luck Supper' when members enjoyed tucking into a variety of food brought along for all to share.



Winter Meetings 2014

Our winter meetings are held at All Saints Parish Hall, Alexandra Road, Windsor SL4 1HZ. The meetings are usually scheduled on the second Tuesday of the month beginning at 8 pm and refreshments are available.

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday 13th January when we can hear Nigel Semmence, our Regional Bee Inspector, talk on the subject of 'Bee Diseases and current hot topics'.

General information and details of all our meetings and can be found on our excellent website: <http://swmbks.weebly.com/meetings.html>.

Remembering Harry Jessop

We have lost a long-standing member of our Federation who died on 17 November 2014. Harry was born at Swyncombe where he lived much of his life. He worked on the farm for a good many years before moving to Roke, still doing farm work for which he was most experienced. He had a great love of the countryside and wildlife and used to help his grandfather who was a beekeeper. One day while walking back from school he spotted a swarm in a hedge, which was promptly put in a sack and thrown over his shoulder, taken home and hived. And so started his beekeeping career.

Over the years he became very experienced and was always willing to help anyone. He was an active member of the Association and served on the committee for a good many years. We did beekeeping together at many shows and exhibitions, particularly the Woodcote Rally, the

Henley Show and Ploughing Match. He also helped John Vickery, who was a foul brood officer for many years, and he could spot a queen as well as diseases from a distance.

I Remember him telling me that when his wife got stung he said to her “it will cure your rheumatism” and when his boys knocked a hive over playing football, his wife, Pat, whilst sorting it out got stung badly around the head. Harry’s response to this was “well, that’s your booster!”. He was a great character.

There were over 100 people at his funeral and most returned to Wallingford for a get together and very nice spread. So I will finish by giving him the highest accolade in the Oxfordshire County dialect, which he knew so well, “Ee were a good un”. He would appreciate that. We will miss you Harry.

Reg Hook

Beekeeping in Africa – Part 2

We published the first part of Felipe Salbany’s beekeeping antics in Africa back in August – here the story continues....

After a less than auspicious introduction to African bees, I soon found myself with an ever-increasing number of hives. This increase coincided with my parents purchasing a wonderful house in a suburb called Marlborough on the then outskirts of Harare. The house had 2.5 acres of land and the bees benefitted from being close to unspoilt African countryside and developing suburbia. Although developed, the houses had big gardens which were immaculately maintained and watered providing an almost continuous supply of foraging for bees. On top of this,



most African cities, and especially Harare benefitted from a vast planting exercise carried out at the turn of the 20th century that resulted in thousands of non-native species, the most prominent of these being the flowering trees; Jacaranda; Flamboyant and Eucalyptus. The millions of colourful nectar filled flowers produced by these trees make the bees go into a frenzy of activity. The Jacaranda is such a prolific source of nectar that the bees will even work the blue carpet of flowers that covers the ground following a rainstorm.

In the early 80’s, the weather was very predictable with the rains arriving in late September/early October when the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone arrived over Zimbabwe for the summer months. The days were clear, sunny and warm but at around 1pm each day the skies would darken and the heavens would open and we would have these incredible rain showers. The African rain would pour from the sky like a waterfall soaking the land and everything on it for around 30minutes to an hour. Afterwards, as if by magic, the skies would clear and the strong sun would come out again and steam would rise from the hot ground making it sometimes impossible to see and bringing with it a sweet fresh smell that made both plants and animals thrive. The winters were dry with clear skies and regular drops below freezing at night time (due to the altitude), however by 10am it was usually above 20C and although sometimes colder the hives still produced honey, pretty much like they do here in an average English summer.

During this time, I had 6 to 8 hives (depending on swarms, splits) and everything was quite easy. Quite easy that was, until I had to crop honey. From the end of July, I would start replacing frames, uniting colonies and providing space for expansion. I would start extracting honey in October to capture the Jacaranda honey and one strong hive could fill 4 supers (drawn out) in 2 to 3 weeks! Things became a bit crazy when I had 6 hives and 15 to 20 supers to crop every 4 weeks.

This would normally not be much of a problem but we have to remember that people rarely opened “domestic” hives during the day due to the temperament of these African bees and so it was subsequently impossible to crop hives whilst the sun was up and the bees were flying around. I would start at dusk and quickly clear each super by hand, place it on a trolley and move on to the next hive. I did not have sufficient equipment to replace these with other supers

and so my only option would be to extract throughout the night and replace the empty supers before daybreak. During the time I was extracting the poor bees would be hanging outside the hive with nowhere to go and so my time for completing this job was very restricted.

The hot Zimbabwean nights would make this back breaking, sweaty and messy work with honey flying everywhere in my attempt to complete this task within the allotted time given me by the sleeping bees. During these initial years I had so much honey that we did not need sugar at home. My excess honey ensured we were never without sweeteners in our lives and my mother was able to make cake after cake substituting the sugar for delicious honey. Our friends and friends of friends were able to benefit from my continual supply. I had so much that I experimented with making mead, honey bread and ended up selling it by the bucket load to the local cooperative.

By the mid 80's things started to change, the drought arrived and this lasted approximately 7 years. There were fewer swarms and the veld (savannah) dried up, water was so scarce that the bees would converge on water as if it was honey (making the area around the pool particularly attractive to the bees when we swam and splashed the decking). We had a well at home and I would see bees going down the well! We were quite fortunate in that there was a large diplomatic community around us and this meant borehole irrigated gardens for the bees, so although honey yield decreased I still had more than we get here in England.

By now, not only was I more confident and comfortable with the bees and beginning to understand the nuances of swarming, seasonal effects on bees, brood production etc. but I was also on the National Cycling Team and so I had to use my time more carefully. With the drought, it was vital to try to have bees at strength in August to benefit from the Jacaranda flow. I would sometimes feed the bees with syrup infused with a herb, lavender, borage or a citrus, say orange which would result in the bees visiting areas of that particular scent (a method used in the former Soviet Union to encourage bees to visit particular crops). We also planted alfalfa as a supplement for the bees but ultimately it came down to colony strength. Swarms had decreased significantly so I would divide hives and then unite again in August, which was a bit tedious. I experimented with putting two queens in one hive! I moved two hives side by side and placed glass covered in twigs by the front entrance so the bees would orient themselves to their new location, which I had placed under a huge pine in a corner of the garden. I was a bit late in starting this and had both hives on 4 supers by the time I was to combine them. I opened one hive, placed newspaper with loads of flour to top, took the other supers off the second hive and placed them over the newspaper with the brood box on top. This "tower" was spectacular! Bees flew in and out of both entrances and after about 3 days I started to see white bees. They had chewed through the newspaper. There was no fighting and it was something to behold for 2 colonies of foul tempered African bees cohabiting. I opened the hive up once, carefully keeping the top brood box separate, removed and replaced 3 supers or so and let them continue for a while until one terrible day.....

I remember hearing a thud outside in the garden and I looked up from whatever I was doing inside the house. There was nothing unusual for a minute or so but then pandemonium broke out. Dogs howled, voices shouted, the soldiers (we had military protection for political reasons) ran inside the house and I heard chickens squawking. I rushed outside to be met by a few bees, but in my heart I knew what had happened. I looked across the garden towards the pine tree where I saw a cloud of bees increasing in size by the second and engulfing everything. There was a pile of hive bits in a neat line on the ground; I later found out that although I had protected the wooden stand on the outside from ants, the termites had eaten the inside of the stand legs and these had collapsed. I put on my bee suit and rushed out in the middle of the day to put things back together. It was mayhem. In no time at all I was covered in bees and they started to come through my suit. I could hear the chaos all around me and no matter what I did the bees kept coming. I managed to put various bits back together and recreate a few towers but not a single hive. I was covered from head to toe in bees, and as everyone knows, "where there is a will there is a way" and bees had found various ways into and under my veil and bee suit. I then ran followed by hundreds of thousands of angry buzzing bees who were out to get me. My only option was to dive into the swimming pool. I will never forget being underwater, getting my boots off, my veil pressed against my face, and looking up and seeing bees buzzing over the water and an increasing layer of bees on the water. I swam underwater to the

opposite side of the pool, jumped out and ran inside. I had to think fast as things had not really settled down so I put on my spare kit, turned the borehole on, and took the sprinkler and directed the jet at the hive site. This certainly worked and an hour later there were bees milling around the different hive entrances. I put the hives back together as two hives and later discovered that the two queens survived this calamity.

I had to apologise to everyone in the neighbourhood, as well as provide copious amounts of honey, mead and wax to all the neighbours. Not only had the bees people, dogs and all other animals in the area, the domestic animals that had not been able to find refuge had been attacked and many killed. This applied to chickens that the domestic workers kept in the surrounding properties. The poor birds were covered in bees, some still with bees buzzing between their feathers, but the worst was the sight of their heads where they had been stung incessantly. I had to pay compensation to enable all the chickens to be replaced. I did have the police over but luckily, they did not know much about beekeeping, let alone what had been an experiment, and were not too concerned as long as I paid for damages.

The drought and the changing weather patterns definitely made for interesting beekeeping but the other thing that started to happen was that the suburbs were developing and growing in size. This resulted in increased irrigation and therefore year round foraging for the bees. However much of the natural foraging was being lost due to the changing weather patterns, and on top of that, the Jacarandas and Flamboyants that had been planted so long ago by the colonial settlers were nearing the end of their natural 100 year lives and had not been replaced, so keeping bees changed tremendously. I hear that some beekeepers now use ultraviolet headlamps to work the hives at night how things have changed!



Felipe Salbany, SCBKA

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Did you know

When a colony of honeybees grows to about 4,000 members, it triggers an important first stage in its reproductive cycle: the building of that special type of comb used for rearing drones. A team of experts from the Department of Neurobiology and Behaviour at Cornell University, led by Michael Smith, studied what starts the reproductive cycle of honeybee colonies and came to this conclusion. The results are published in Springer's journal *Naturwissenschaften - The Science of Nature*. Significantly, they are not yet sure how the bees know that they have reached 4,000 workers and further research is not being undertaken!

Reference: Smith, M. L. et al. (2014). A critical number of workers in a honey bee colony triggers investment in reproduction. *Naturwissenschaften - The Science of Nature*. DOI 10.1007/s00114-014-1215-x .

For your Diary

Date	Topic	Event Host	Contact
13 January	Bee Diseases and current hot topics – Nigel Semmence	Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead	http://swmbks.weebly.com/
13 January	Large-scale beekeeping – Steve Moll	Reading	http://www.rbka.org.uuk

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/

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.

<http://www.bbka.org.uk/> The British Beekeepers Association.

<http://hymenopteragenome.org/beebase/> Beebase is a comprehensive data source for the bee research community.

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

Contributions 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 7th of the following month. Contributions received after this may be held over for a later month.

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