THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

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May 2013

Number 676

General Secretary:
Martin Moore
Tilehurst
Reading
0118 967 7386
07729 620 286

E-mail: berksbees@btinternet.com

Web: http://www.berkshirebeekeepers.btck.co.uk/

Newsletter Editor:
Sue Remenyi
Curtis Farm
Kidmore End
RG4 9AY
0118 972 3699

Editors Corner

As the saying goes, April Showers Bring May Flowers – and that certainly seems to be the case in our region right now. My bees are clearly loving the calm warm weather and they are frantically back and forth to the hive with heavily laden pollen sacks. The rape is on the edge of blooming and for those of us with those bright yellow fields within our bees reach, the rush is surely about to start.

Since the last newsletter there has probably been more national media coverage of bees and beekeeping that than ever before, all centred around the controversial vote on whether to ban the use of neonicotinoid pesticides. The BBKA released a statement last week and a copy of this is appended to the end of the newsletter.

The contents of the newsletter this month are varied. As a result of the change in publication date we held over some of the association contributions from April and so you will find a fascinating piece from Wokingham and District describing the talk given by Andy Willis at their last Winter meeting on working with bees wax. The last guest speaker at South Chilterns was Norman Hughes who gave a presentation on Queen rearing the Jenter way. In addition to a discussion on the whys and wherefores of the method we have included a day by day outline of how to do it!

We are changing the *In The Apiary* section of the newsletter a little to *In My Apiary.* We would like to thank the long serving contributors – anonymously referred to as *Triad*, for the many months of topical pieces that they have provided. But as the Triad had become a *Duo*, I felt that it would be a good idea to open this section of the newsletter up to other contributions that look at members experiences with their apiaries at different times of the year. I am sure that the „duo" will continue to be part of these contributions too. This month"s contribution has come from Caroline Bushall from South Chilterns who, I know, was not alone in losing a colony over the winter and she shares her lessons learnt from this experience.

The summer meetings have started and we look forward to hearing stories from you all about honey flows and overflowing supplies of honey.

Sue Remenyi

In My Apiary

Now is the Winter of my Discontent- said the bees!

Bill Turnbull may have written the manual of Bad Beekeeping and founded the BB‟s club, but I have the dubious honour of creating my own chapter as well as joining his club!

Sadly one of my hives did not make it through the winter. In early March upon not seeing any activity I opened up the hive to be greeted with a pile of dead bees on top of the brood frames, a number with their heads stuck inside cells and the remainder dead on the floor. It seemed they had died of starvation despite having been fed with Ambrosia and the frames being full of heavy syrup stores. I hadn‟t spotted the tell-tale signs of diarrhoea because I didn‟t recognise the brown stains all over the inside the brood box. I just saw dead bees.

After listening to a Vita salesperson at the BBKA convention explain that if one‟s bees had Nosema, it would be pretty evident, I thought another look at the “dead hive” might be worthwhile. And there it was staring at me defiantly. The proverbial had literally hit the fan (or in this case the fanning of rather a lot of bees)! It was everywhere inside the brood box: on the underside of the crown board, on the top bars of the frames, on the sides of the brood box and on some frames.

After some internet research which turned up a very good tutorial on Nosema from the Honey Bee Research Lab. at Florida University (Nosema guide, University of Florida), I checked the photos of my dead bees and found quite a few had K wings (where the forewing and hindwing become unhooked) – see photo of bee. I also remember seeing bees wandering around on the ground before the hive ceased to be.

It had been predicted that this colony might not survive the winter because it had superceded in mid October, implying there was a virgin queen, This might have been alright if we had an early spring and she was able to be mated early……

I thought these bees were well prepared for winter: the varroa floor was out and the crown board had a two inch thick insulation block on top of it. They had been fed heavy sugar syrup in September and all the brood frames were full of capped stores before the ivy flowered. Despite over half the frames still being full of stores, the middle frames (where the bees were living) were looking empty so Ambrosia was fed to them in January and February, which they were eating, but then suddenly there was no activity in March.

My conclusion is that a combination of the late onset of spring, a virgin queen and Nosema probably led to the demise of that colony.

So now I have treated my other two neighbouring hives (no diarrhoea and healthy evidence of eggs, larvae and brood) with fumagillin B mixed into some heavy sugar syrup administered in a contact feeder- just to be on the safe side. My final task will be to fumigate the infected hive with acetic acid.

Mr Turnbull – make way for an addendum to your book! Next chapter Apiguard Apoplexy….

Caroline Bushall, SCBKA

Reading Beekeepers at Bean Pole Day

Once again, RBKA was kindly invited to attend „Bean Pole Day'. Held on 20th April at Caversham Court Gardens, this event is inspired by National Bean Pole Week and is run by the local Econet community group of conservation volunteers. It is not only aimed at promoting locally grown woodland products, but also encourages wildlife friendly gardening. This year, the emphasis was on the importance of bees. To this end stalls not only included RBKA, providing information about the plight of bees, how the public can help bees and beekeeping, but also Reading Friends of the Earth, who promoted their „BeeCause" campaign. Stalls selling plants made a point of highlighting

those that are 'bee friendly. The weather was glorious and the turn out was very good. A big thank you to Mike Dabbs, John & Linda Rogerson, Martin Moore and Lin Jenkins for helping to make it a successful day.

Wokingham & District Beekeepers Association

13th March 2013

Nigel Perkins opened the meeting by announcing that we will hold informal get togethers, over the summer season, on the second Wednesday evening of every month, at the Two Poplars, Finchampstead Road, Wokingham. Start time 7.30 pm and everyone is welcome.

If anyone has a couple of hours they can spare, to help check the apiary bees at the weekends over the summer, please let Nigel know, as we still have a few slots we need to fill.

We then welcomed Andy Willis who had kindly agreed to come and talk to us about purifying and maximising our wax crop. Andy started beekeeping by accident. He applied for a job as a gardener and when he was being shown round he saw some hives in the orchard and asked who looked after them and was told you! That was 22 years ago. He ended up with a large number of hives and consequently a significant amount of wax.

Andy only uses household equipment to prepare his wax. He has no specialist equipment so, as long as you have the time and patience, you too can achieve similar results.

Andy likes to keep different types of wax separate and stores like with like. He had brought some examples with him which included cappings, which are the best quality, bags of wild comb, old brood comb, super comb and propolised comb. As you can imagine some were a lovely clean yellow and some almost black with dirt. Wax degrades in air and will take on a white bloom; the larger the area the more oxidisation. Bees hate old foundation so that is a good reason to keep it in the dark and well wrapped. However, before storage Andy puts the wax in the freezer, in a bag for 24 hours, to kill off any wax moth larvae, otherwise you could find your valuable wax, including the bag, has been decimated.

As part of his integrated pest management routine, Andy changes his brood comb regularly and is a great fan of shook swarms. He does this when the colony is looking like it wants to swarm but only earlier in the year. He also puts one shallow frame in each brood box to allow the bees to make drone comb on the bottom. He slices this off, freezes it and then puts it in a solar wax melter.

His entire recycled comb is put through a steamer which again helps with disease. On average he will recover 1½lbs of wax from a National brood box. One advantage of having the bees on fresh comb is that your honey will be sparkling as dirt is minimal. He removes his cappings with a bread knife and then freezes them. When removed from the freezer they are kept in the dark (as mentioned above) so they do not fade in the

daylight and retain their fragrance. If you are entering your wax in competition you will be marked down if it has faded and if the judges have two identical wax items to judge, the fragrant one will come out on top. At one time, when candles were being made for churches, it was believed they should be white, so the wax was bleached and it is thought this is where the name “bleachfield” came from.

When you have enough wax to purify you will need to collect some clean rainwater. You can take it from your water butt but make sure you tie a filter over the downpipe and keep a lid on the butt. This way it will be clear and not a muddy or green colour. Andy uses a heavy le creuset casserole dish, which cost a small fortune but is very good to use as it heats up slowly, which is better for the wax. However, any non stick or glazed enamel pan can be used.

Fill your pan with your rainwater and if your wax has a lot of honey adhering to it, soak for several hours. Don't forget about it and leave it for a long time otherwise it will start to develop mould. Empty the pan and refill with fresh rainwater. Put your wax back in and heat it very slowly – do not stir. Put the lid on and let it come to no more than 80ºC. If you let it boil it will degrade and darken. As soon as the wax melts turn off the heat and leave the lid on, letting it rest for 5-10 minutes in the residual heat. Do not stir. You will end up with a thick mucky crust like porridge or rice pudding. Take a sieve and an old spoon and pull the crust to one side. Slide the sieve under the crust and leave for a couple of minutes. Do not let the crust set.

When ready make sure your work surface is covered in kitchen towel and greaseproof paper. The greaseproof will allow any spilt wax to be lifted off easily and remelted. When ready lift out the sieve with the crust inside and tip on to the paper towel. Leave the wax to cool and set in the pan. You will end up with a wax disc. Once you have a few like these you will realise that they are probably all different colours. The discs are then left to air dry. Many will have a dirty underside so Andy uses either a knife or a hive tool to scrape back to cleanish wax. The scrapings are put into a nylon stocking inside a solar wax melter to recover as much wax as possible. Store your discs in the dark until you are ready for the next stage.

The discs, which are now quite hard, are put in a plastic bag on the floor and hit with a hammer. This breaks them into manageable chunks ready for the next filter. Andy uses a bain marie, plus a funnel sieve lined with filter cloths, which are actually made from an old flannelette bed sheet. The bain marie goes into the bottom of the oven and the sieve is hung from the top shelf of the oven using hooks. Obviously you need to get the top shelf as high as possible. Put your pieces of wax in the sieve and let the oven heat to no more than 80ºC. It is advisable to check your oven temperature with a thermometer before you start, as the oven controls will not be that accurate. The wax will melt slowly and filter through into the top part of the bain marie. If for any reason it does not melt, then increase the heat but only very slightly. If the cloth gets too dirty, remove and replace as the wax will start to puddle and will not go through.

Andy keeps track of how many filters each block of wax has gone through and uses different types of takeaway containers as they give a different shape, so it is easy to tell by feel. Containers with flat basis mean “first” so have had one filter and can be used to make your own foundation but not candles. Those with ridges have had more than one filter.

The next filter is through a double cloth. If you are making candles the wax needs to be absolutely clean, otherwise the candle burns unevenly and you get soot and a crust on top, which can break off and fall on to the surface causing a fire hazard. Keep filtering your wax until there is little or no discolouration on the filter. The rubbish is attracted to the brushed cotton so you get a much better filter than if you used a smooth material.

To get 1lb of clean wax for candles from cappings, you need to have harvested about 100lbs of honey! You also need to pre dip your wicks. Apparently wicks have an up and down side. You can tell by the braiding. If it points up that is the right way.However, moulded candles are made upside down so the wicks also need to go in upside down. If they are put in incorrectly the candles do not burn properly.

The dipping container Andy uses holds 10lb of beeswax so he does not make dipped candles that often. One notable exception was the candles he made, at the request of the BBKA, which were presented to the Queen at her Jubilee last year.

Dirty filter cloths make great firelighters but to save waste Andy found a way to clean the cloths so they could be used multiple times. He puts a number of them in a pot of rainwater and heats gently, again to no more than 80ºC. He mashes them with a potato masher for about 5 minutes and this helps to squeeze the wax from the fabric. The mixture is then left to cool so the wax can separate out.

To stop the fabric floating to the top and contaminating the melted wax, Andy devised his own piece of equipment to hold the cloth down. He uses bamboo skewers, about six of them, tied together about 2" from the top so you end up with a round small cage into which you can insert a small but weighty round stone nestled in the gap. The frame, which looks similar to an old fashioned tent, is then inserted in the pan. The wax, when it sets, is lifted out attached to his frame and the cloths are then separate at the bottom. You can recover quite a lot of wax this way and if you then boil the cloths with washing soda and powder they will come out pristine white and can be reused multiple times.

We then had the opportunity to admire and hold one of the beautiful candles he had made for the Queen along with some prize winning wax shapes, dipped candles and various other wax shapes including some wax Christmas decorations. There were also wax blocks which had been filtered either once or multiple times, so we could see the difference. Some had a stronger fragrance than others but all smelt beautiful, except for one which Andy brought along to show us what bleached wax looked like. It had no smell at all.

When showing wax the judges go first for colour and then fragrance. Andy is based near the New Forest and he finds his most fragrant beeswax comes from bees that have been on lime, heather or ivy. The colour of your beeswax will be influenced by the pollen collected by the bees.

In response to a question from the floor Andy confirmed that you can overcook your wax in a solar extractor as you have no control over the temperature. He only uses it for brood or propolised wax. He also covers everything with greaseproof paper when he is working in the kitchen. If you spill wax it does not stick to the greaseproof so is very easy to scrape up. To make it easier to remove shapes from moulds, spray with silicone lubricant which is available from most beekeeping suppliers.

The following books were recommended if anyone wants to try for themselves. There is also information on the BBKA website.

Wax for Show by F Pudmore

How to make beeswax candles by Clara Furness

Andy gave us a very entertaining, lively and informative talk which was much appreciated by all our members. I tried to make sure I captured all the essential instructions but if your candles are not quite as perfect as Andy"s please don"t blame me!

After a short break we held a quick EGM to cover business items which had rolled over from previous meetings.

We then took the opportunity to say goodbye to Alex and Ian Atherton who are relocating to Devon. Both Alex and Ian have been stalwarts of the club over the last few years and Alex has worked tirelessly to make the Club apiary what it is today. They have also both spent a considerable amount of time and effort in helping to set up and run the club microscopy group. Without their efforts we would not be where we are today and we will miss their company, laughter and enthusiasm. We hope that they will come back to visit us occasionally as we would love to see them. As a small token of our appreciation, Neil presented them with a beautiful copper smoker which was engraved "To Alex and Ian Atherton, with thanks and good wishes – March 2013".

Garth Matthews had recently attended the new Berkshire Training Committee meeting. All attendees agreed to work together for the betterment of all the organisations, so watch future newsletters for details of any shared activities, including workshops.

On the 9th November the BIBBA Conference (Bee improvement and Bee Breeders Association) will be held in Bracknell and the Wokingham Society will host the day. The venue is the Bracknell Leisure Centre and the cost is likely to be in the region of £20. Further details over the coming months but please make a note in your diary. This event will be of interest to anyone who would like to improve their bees.

Honey Show dates for Weybridge this year are 24th – 26th October.

The raffle this month raised £55 towards club funds. Thanks to everyone who has contributed prizes and bought tickets.

South Chilterns Beekeepers Association - 20th March 2013

Queen rearing the Jenter way, Norman Hughes

Norman is a past chairman of the BBKA, and with 30 years" experience of beekeeping in Hampshire is well qualified to advise us on this method of queen-rearing. The programme came about twenty years ago as a means to attract more members to make use of the Basingstoke association apiary, and to influence the quality of queens available.

He started with a quotation from Vince Cook: "strains of honey-bees that can be left alone to produce enormous honey crops in any area, climatic and floral conditions *do not exist*". Norman has developed this sentiment into: "strains of honey-bees that can be left alone to develop all the characteristics we would like *don't and never will exist*" and so we need a selective process by which queens are produced whose attributes are considered to be an improvement.

Norman continued his talk with a caution to impress upon us why we should be raising queens in a systematic way, recording carefully the history and location of the donor colonies. The danger of in-breeding is significant, owing to the low numbers of bees.

During the second world war, BBKA membership was at its highest, probably owing to the drive for food production and the extra sugar rations allowed to beekeepers! Post-war numbers plummeted, made worse by the advent of oilseed rape crops in the 60s which caused the honey to set like concrete. The spread of Varroa in the 90s wiped out feral colonies, and by the year 2000 the BBKA membership was only 9,000 strong. The BBKA started to produce a syllabus to help societies run courses, which has helped the membership to swell to 20,000 today, but this is still not enough. The average number of colonies per keeper is 5, which means we only have about 100,000 colonies in the UK. To put this in perspective, in California three-quarters of a million colonies are used to pollinate the almond crop alone. So we have an inherent in-breeding problem, with too many drones being related to each other and not enough varieties of drones in the congregation areas.

How do we detect in-breeding? It‟s visible on the brood combs as breaks in the brood, a proportion of empty cells where diploid drones have been ejected by the workers. To explain what a diploid drone is, we need a quick lesson in genetics. The queen has two genetic factors (alleles) which define sex, one inherited from her mother and one from her father. The drone only has one, received from mother as he has no father, having been produced from an unfertilised egg. The next generation, produced from one queen who has mated with several different drones, inherits a number of possible combinations of these alleles; combinations of two different alleles makes a female, but one combination is possible where the two alleles are the same. This inadvertently makes a male, despite the fact that it came from a *fertilised* egg, and this is a diploid drone. Housekeeper bees remove it from the worker brood cell, and the more holes like this, the more in-breeding has taken place. If a daughter queen cross-breeds with drones of the original queen, the possible combinations mean one in four of the offspring will be diploid – 25% of the brood cells will be emptied; a grand-daughter queen in the same situation results in one in two of the offspring being diploid – 50% of the cells have been emptied. This looks different from pepper-pot brood caused by disease, as the empty cells are very clean. This is why we need as much genetic variety as possible to maintain the health of the honey-bee population. Drones are freely admitted into any colony, and have been tracked travelling up to 20 miles to congregation areas for mating.

These congregation areas seem magical, and Norman told us about the joys of attending the summer courses at Gormanston, County Meath in Ireland, where the congregation area is known and demonstrable, above the rugby pitches. Mating only occurs in such a precisely defined spot, where the drones congregate between 2pm and 4pm on a warm afternoon, and thus form the total available gene pool. Apparently, all that‟s needed to find the edges of this area is to fasten a feather with a drop of queen substance on it to the end of a fishing rod, and hold it aloft. Inside an area about 200 yards in diameter, the drones swoop after the feather with amazing speed and agility. Outside the area, drones are not remotely interested in it. Norman was keen to encourage us to go and find likely grassy spots to test out, and find out exactly where our local congregation areas are.

So we are aiming to produce queens whose attributes are considered to be an improvement. How do we judge this?

Any beekeeper can readily discern desirable characteristics by simple observation every time the hives are opened. For example, the desire not to get stung means looking for docility. Productivity is measurable and recordable; given queens of similar age in hives subject to the same management regime, kept healthy and given enough space, it‟s possible to count how many supers are filled. Wintering ability is also obvious, and given that the beekeeper prepares all the hives well, may be strain-dependent (although Norman did point out that he‟s never lost a colony over winter in 30 years, so losing one is your fault, not theirs).

So having chosen our best queen to breed from, a queen-rearing system needs four things:

- a queenright donor colony
- a queenless cell-raising colony
- a means of safely transferring larvae of the correct age between colonies
- a queen-mating nucleus

Using standard brood boxes, an eke (or super) and feeder, and three pieces of specialised equipment, Norman demonstrated for us the cell transfer cage system (formerly called Jenter after the man who invented the transfer cage) which can be done in a single colony. It‟s a step-by-step process with precise timings that can be planned in ad-

vance in the diary, and it overcomes the problems of safe transfer and correct larval age, as grafting by hand requires Reg Hook-level skill and experience.

What was easy to demonstrate by moving frames and boxes about is a lot harder to describe in words, but even if you can"t quite grasp it intuitively, following these steps will lead to success. Norman"s success rate is usually about 17 viable queen cells from an initial set of 24 larvae.

Jenter"s plastic transfer cage box is a section of mock "comb" with a stoppered entrance on one side, and little removable cups in the cell bottoms; the box is set into the top centre of a frame. The cell-raiser frame has a row of cup-holders under the top bar, and a second bar for another set halfway up the frame. The third piece of specialised kit needed is an isolating floor unit, modified to allow removal of the floor and with two entrance blocks: one standard-size for when the floor is in position, and one extra high for when the floor is out. Norman demonstrated using a home-made one, where the floor could be slid out of the frame around it, rather like an insert under a mesh floor.

Long experience led Norman to declare the best start date for queen-rearing is the first Bank Holiday in May, as the main activities will then fall outside of office hours for working beekeepers, and all will be done before swarming time.The transfer cage frame should be put in the chosen hive a couple of weeks in advance for it to acquire the hive scent, and the bees will build comb around it, making it secure. The other essential advance job is to find and mark the queen, so that she"s easy to find when you need to.

The final note from Norman is the observation that beekeeping is not the province of a reclusive loner, it is a team sport. The more people involved in it together, the more ideas are generated and the more fun it is, so we should get everyone together to start a systematic queen-rearing programme and contribute towards the genetic improvement of our native bee stocks.

Cell transfer cage queen-rearing system using a single colony

Day 1:

Find the queen; you"re going to put her to run free on the transfer cage frame. Move the remaining brood frames from the original brood box to a spare one. Put the transfer cage and queen in the middle of the original brood box, with a frame of stores and pollen either side, and fill up the box with either foundation or drawn comb. Turn it around so that the entrance faces the opposite direction, with a reduced entrance block, and put the queen excluder on top. Put the isolating floor on top of this *with the floor taken out* and the higher entrance block in place, facing in the original direction; this new upper entrance is on the opposite side from the lower entrance at the back. Stack the spare brood box with its remaining frames on top, and fill up the three gaps with spares of foundation or drawn comb. Add a crown board, then a super or eke with a full contact or rapid feeder, and close up. The feeder encourages the queen to continue laying in the bottom box, and it"s important to keep it topped up throughout the whole operation. Flying bees returning to the hive land on the front and crawl up to the new entrance of the top box.

Day 2:

Rest!

Day 3:

At 7pm open the hive, find the queen and confine her in the cell transfer cage, top up the feeder and close up the hive.

Day 4:

At 7am (yes, 7 in the morning), open up and check the queen has laid eggs in the transfer cage, which you can see by holding it up to the light. Assuming she has obliged, release her from the cage to run free again (in the bottom box under the queen excluder).You know the precise age of these eggs as she has only had 12 hours in which to lay them. Top up the feeder and close up.

Day 5:

Rest day

Day 6:

At midday, replace the insert into the isolating floor unit, swapping the higher entrance block for the standard one. The upper brood box is now separated from the bottom one and so has become queenless. Just check that there are no queen cells or young larvae present in this top box, as they must have no chance of making a queen of their own. Feed and close up. The bottom box is now queenright, the top box is queenless and there is an even distribution of workers.

Day 7:

At midday, open the hive and get out the cell transfer cage frame from the bottom box. The cups now contain larvae of exactly the right age, and without touching the larvae at all you can take out the cups and place them in the cup-holders of the cell raiser frame and put it in the centre of the top brood box. These bees are queenless and will be desperate to raise new queens. Feed them and close up.

Day 8:

At midday, just 24 hours later, take the isolating floor insert out, to restore full contact between the top and bottom boxes. Don"t be tempted to leave it in longer as it will make it more difficult for them to reunite, and removing it won"t stop the development of the queen cells - even with a queen present down below under the queen excluder.

Days 9-13:

Rest days

Day 14:

Ask all the prospective new beekeepers to turn up at the apiary at 4pm with their mating nucleus boxes ready. Find the queen and keep her safe, just to make sure she doesn"t accidentally get put in a nuc. The queen cells on the raiser frame are now capped; transfer each one to its new home, add some young bees, and let the new owners take them carefully away to get on with emerging and mating in their new locations. If there are not enough takers, queen cells can remain in situ for a maximum of a further 7 days. Norman always puts hair-roller cages over sealed queen cells just in case the first emergent virgin queen tries to kill all the others. Of course, don"t give the last queen cell away; break down the upper brood box, give it a new normal floor, and its own queen cell.

Meryl Toomey

Reading Beekeepers Association

April 2013

On a rather un-spring like Saturday 23rd March Reading & District Beekeepers Association celebrated the start of spring and the „Summer Programme" with our „Annual Beekeeping Day", re-located this year from Trench Green to Caversham Heights Methodist Hall, open to the public with free entry. Reading Beekeepers are very pleased to report a good attendance (despite the snow) and there were many sections to explore including beekeeping techniques, hive and frame construction, microscopy, honey and mead tasting, as well as a children"s activity area, Thorne"s Agent John Belcher had a display showing the latest hive cleaning and anti varroa preparations, and

videos showing evidence of varroa infestations. Meanwhile, Mrs. Clark Hunter (his better half) demonstrated some beautiful work of coloured beeswax decorated eggs in the Ukrainian „pysanky" style. Lin Jenkins ran a profitable tombola with member"s donated prizes. Honey was on-sale to our visitors.

Refreshments and comestibles were provided by Reading Beekeepers and two cakes were donated by Costco Wholesale (Reading). These were well appreciated by visitors and participants.

Our Guest speakers were Dr.Sarah Robb, Rob Nicklass and Richard Pettifer. Sarah demonstrated how to make honey and beeswax toiletries and soaps and she gave us samples to try. Rob gave a taster talk about beekeeping for people considering taking up the craft. Richard is a beekeeper and a career meteorologist who has spent many years with the UK Met. Office. He gave a talk about changes in weather patterns and the effect this is having on flora and the bees.

All the talks and demonstrations were very well attended with lively questions and answers sessions. With very many thanks to our speakers and our enthusiastic participants who all pulled together to make this a successful day & to our sponsors; Suttons, for once again supplying visitors with packets of Seeds, The Range (Caversham, Reading) for donating all the pens, pencils & crayons for our Children"s Activites Area and to Messers Costco (Reading) for Cakes and Children"s prizes.

South Chilterns BKA Apiary Visit – Watlington

21 April 2013

Reg Hook was demonstrator for the first apiary meeting of the season, and began by opening no. 8, a Commercial hive which housed a colony that had been collected as a swarm from a tree the year before, and had stayed there long enough to build four or five sizeable wild brace combs. It had been placed in a cardboard box at first, and moved gradually into a 14x12 brood box, and thence into a Commercial, with 16x10 frames. It"s still a small colony, but Reg said he thought the bees seemed bigger, and they had probably superceded the old queen, who was marked and clipped. The super on it had been donated from stores in the apiary shed to keep them going over winter, and had had fondant on the frame tops, now mostly all eaten, with a cloth over it to keep them warm. They had also been supplied with some pollen substitute because of the bad winter. The super had a small but expanding patch of brood, and there was the queen sitting quietly in the middle of it. That never happens to me. She is unmarked, proving Reg right – a new queen, probably superceded since last autumn. The stores

left in the super were crystallised, but the brood box contained liquid honey which must have been collected this spring. The super was swapped around and placed underneath the brood box to encourage her to go up into the brood box to lay. This hive will be left alone now for at least two weeks.

The next hive opened was no 6, a Smith with two brood boxes and a super; this hive‟s former colony had died, but a swarm that took up residence is doing well. They had finished most of half a bag of ambrosia fondant. Reg lifted off the super and top brood box in one go to look at the bottom brood box first. The combs in this one are old, so the additional brood box is there for a Bailey comb change, to encourage them to make new combs. There was a lot of pollen, fresh nectar, brood in all stages and drone brood, and there was the queen with the remnants of her mark on frame 3. Holding the frame over the super, Reg let the queen drop off into it, and shook the rest of the bees into it too. Now that she was in the super and top brood box stack, a queen excluder could go on between the two brood boxes (remembering that a Smith is a top bee-space hive, and turning it the correct way up). The top brood box also had brood in all stages, and now the queen is trapped in it by the queen excluder underneath and can no longer lay in the dirty old combs below. The brood in the bottom box will hatch out over the next three weeks, and after that the box can be removed and the frames rendered down to reclaim the wax. The super had plenty of food, so the remnants of the fondant were removed. The combs in the super are also old, and are the next in line for changing.

The last hive to be inspected on the day was no 4 (P1), a National with a brood and a half containing a colony which had been troublesome last season. They had developed laying workers which had been turfed out, but wouldn‟t accept a new queen. So the next new queen provided for them was given the protection of a cage for three days, and this time they didn‟t kill her. Most of the fondant on the super - which didn‟t have a full complement of frames - had been eaten and off the super came in order to inspect the brood box. This was healthy with fresh nectar, pollen and a good brood pattern, prompting Reg to tell them “well done my lovelies”. It‟s important to talk to your bees. We didn‟t see the queen, but she‟s obviously there somewhere and the hive is healthy and expanding well. There are a few frames missing from the brood box, but it has castellations to space the frames, and they are too far apart, leaving a gap between them that‟s a bit too big. The castellations in the super do have the correct spacing, which means that the frames in the two boxes are not quite correctly vertically aligned one above the other as they should be. Reg then demonstrated the use of “Reg‟s wedge” – a most useful gadget when working alone, as it makes it easier to put the boxes back together without squashing lots of bees. It‟s a small block of wood, only a couple of inches across, with a short length of dowel set off-centre on one side. The block is placed on the edge of the box with the stem downwards on the outside of the hive as a chock, and the next box is lowered onto the opposite edge and the chock. This leaves a gap on three sides, and gives you the opportunity to pick up the smoker and chase the bees away from the remaining edges before sliding the block out. The super was replaced in this fashion and the 8 frames it contained positioned in the centre; more frames will be added at each end later.

All three hives were very docile and well-behaved, and the apiary has a lovely setting. Once the bluebells come out in the woods it will be even better, and later in the year the wild flower meadow nearby will give them lots to collect. Many thanks to Peter for the use of a fabulous site.

No more hives were opened and the temperature was dropping, but there was still time for some excellent cake, and another demonstration from Reg. He asked us all to heft the Commercial brood box he‟d brought, and it was very heavy indeed, apparently about 60lbs and certainly heavier than I could lift. But the colony had died, despite

having a huge weight of food available; it was crystallised honey, probably from ivy, and couldn"t be used by the bees. The lesson is not to trust hefting alone, and to add fondant if there"s any doubt; the cost of the fondant is trivial in comparison to the cost of losing a colony. This is a very rare occurrence for Reg, and as he doesn"t like the taste of ivy honey, he is not going to make any attempt to recover it; he plans to bury all the combs rather than throw them in the bin, to ensure they are kept well out of the way of any passing foragers.

Many thanks to Reg for giving us the benefit of his extensive experience, and once again making us learn something new.

Useful Links, Advice and Information

Video on how to use Vita Apiguard (all pack sizes)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RGSp3VEeAg

Interesting article on how Honey suffers after bad year for bees by Hannah Briggs on the BBC Food website.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/0/19585638

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

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 7th of the month for publication by the 20th of that 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.

The British Beekeepers' Association

BBKA – supporting bees and beekeepers

BBKA STATEMENT

Following the decision taken by the EU Commission on Monday 30 April, to impose restrictions on the use of three neonicotinoid pesticides, the BBKA continues to work hard to ensure that the interests of honey bees are a high priority.

It is important that we gain a full understanding of the precise details of the restrictions, their implications and proposed mechanisms by which the Member States, including the UK and its devolved administrations, will implement the proposed restrictions.

We are currently organising meetings with a number of key relevant organisations in order to better understand the ramifications of the recent vote and we will update our members in due course.

We remain concerned about the impact of the restrictions on our honey bees. We expect the European Commission to ensure that Member States put measures in place which take into account the impact of these restrictions and any resultant changes in agricultural practice or use of pesticides and which must be proven to be safe for honey bees.

Dr David Aston NDB

Chair BBKA Trustees

Registered address: The National Beekeeping Centre, National Agriculture Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2LG
Telephone: 024 7669 6679 · Fax: 024 7669 0682 · E-mail: bbka@britishbeekeepers.com · Website: www.britishbee.org.uk