



THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

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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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The Apiary in February

It's mid-January and 14°C outside. The bees and I are a bit confused; we thought this was supposed to be winter? The bees are questioning; should we cluster or forage? With this activity in and out of the hive they may be consuming honey stores faster than normal. This should concern those of you who have not checked their colonies recently, remember, if the cluster is at the top of the frames, then there is insufficient stores, candy or fondant must be applied immediately.

Remember, there are three basic causes of winter loss: starvation, disease, and queenlessness. If proper autumn management was carried out (viable queen, adequate supply of winter stores, colonies maintained in a disease-free condition, treated for varroa and in well-constructed hives) then colonies should have no problem surviving the winter period. However, many beekeepers have had to feed an abnormal amount of syrup. Between a shortened nectar flow, a lot of swarming and lots of bees, many colonies were lighter than usual going into winter. On top of this, on mild days, bees have been foraging on the ivy. If this nectar is stored it will ferment and cause dysentery. Ivy was still in flower on Christmas day, indeed, it was reported that bees were bringing in yellow pollen on New Year's Day; this indicates that brood rearing is in progress.

Once February arrives, don't forget to re-check colonies for weight, if pollen is coming in, this is an indication that there is a viable queen. Colonies may be gearing up for the upcoming nectar flow with increasing populations; therefore supplies will be dwindling at an alarming rate. If you are concerned about your colony and temperatures are 12°C or above, it will allow a **quick** hive inspection. Even at this late date, if colonies are too weak or queenless, combine them with stronger ones, but make sure that they are indeed queenless. Small clusters rarely survive the winter. If a colony is light, apply candy or fondant; do not feed syrup at this time. Some colonies are expanding and in need of food, they are slowly migrating upwards into the supers. Depending on how many supers, the bees may be bumping their heads on the inner cover sooner than later. This gives them a feeling of being overcrowded. Therefore, once the nectar flow begins, they're "out the door"! By providing ample space above the cluster you may be able to deter them from swarming (or not), this can be tricky. Don't add too much space too early. Temperature will play an important role. We'll discuss swarming in more detail next month.

During these summerlike days, try to pull yourself inside and figure out what equipment you may need to purchase, build or repair in order to make nuclei from your existing colonies or to add supers before the spring bloom catches you off guard. It's amazing how quickly the season starts, so better to get prepared now than to scramble about while losing precious bees and forage.

Triad

Try your hand at writing an "In the Apiary" contribution for any month, aim it for beekeepers in general and those who are fairly new to beekeeping and submit it to berksbees@btinternet.com

BJA Basic Assessment:

If you are fairly new to beekeeping, now is probably a good time to ask yourself how much you really know. Well, there is one very useful way to find out: have a go at the BKA Basic Assessment...

This is an opportunity to meet a beekeeping expert and to discuss your beekeeping. You meet at a pre-arranged apiary one day in the summer and over a selected working hive you spend about an hour talking about the various aspects of practical beekeeping that you have studied to prepare for the meeting. He will decide whether you are a responsible beekeeper or advise you how you can improve.

If you are interested, let me know and I will pass on to you the relevant information about the test.

Rosemary Bayliss - Berkshire Exam Secretary, Norbury, London Rd Bracknell RG42 4BS

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, tel: 01264 338694.

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: 020 8571 6450.

Wokingham and District Beekeepers' Association

A total of 32 members and partners attended the club Christmas dinner at the Three Frogs on Monday 12th December. The outing was arranged by Peter Seagrove and everyone agreed it was a great evening with excellent food. Peter also provided the entertainment by reciting the "Song of the Queen". If anyone is interested the words can be found in A Book of Bees by Sue Hubbel or by doing a search on Google.

Our last meeting of the year was held on the 14th December with a talk by Nigel Semmence, Regional Bee Inspector for the Southern Region, followed by a raffle and festive nibbles to round off the evening.

The title of Nigel's talk was, not surprisingly, Pests and Diseases. He mentioned that there are only eight Regional Bee Inspectors for the whole country and his patch covers eight counties, supported in the summer by 5-8 Seasonal Bee Inspectors. Topics covered a wide range of subjects including good apiary practice, comb changing, healthy and unhealthy brood and of course pests. The slide show that accompanied his talk was excellent, with very clear and detailed photographs, which were very useful to the newer members amongst us who had never seen these problems in a hive. You can read about them but it is not the same as "seeing" and these photographs were first class close ups of problems we all hope to never encounter. Nigel also asked that people keep their BeeBase registrations up to date, as it makes it easier for them to keep us updated with alerts in our areas. For those members who do not have access to the web, they can provide their details by mail to the National Bee Unit. The Q & A session covered a wide range of subjects but eventually we called a halt as we were running out of time. Everyone agreed that it was a great presentation and our thanks go to Nigel for taking the time to come and see us.

Peter Seagrave took the opportunity to welcome Jan Spicer to the group as a new member with a couple of years experience, welcome Jan.

Lorna Rivett has some notelets which she is selling, with profits going to the club. If anyone is interested they are £4.50 for 10, including envelopes. They show a beehive surrounded by greenery and flowers and are hand drawn. We would also like to congratulate Lorna on her 1st at the National Show in London for a house made entirely from wax.

Ian Atherton, one of our members is a geneticist and edits the magazine, Microbiology Today. The November issue includes a number of articles, which are very easy to read, on the latest research on bee microbiology. Ian had brought along a number of copies of the magazine, which he kindly offered free to members. Needless to say they were accepted with thanks. Every year one issue of the magazine is sent to all MP's and this year they have chosen the November issue, which is great news.

Our new Librarian, Robin West had brought along a selection of books from our library. He also asked that if anyone has any books they have forgotten to return, if they could please bring them to the next meeting it would be appreciated.

The raffle was supported by a large number of prizes and once this was drawn everyone tucked into our festive supper. It was a great way to round off the year.

Our first talk of 2012 was by Norman Hughes, on the topic of Queen Rearing in a Single Hive (based on the Jenter method). Norman had also brought a demonstration hive with him, which he used to great effect. He mentioned that the main characteristics he looks for, when choosing a donor hive, are docility, productivity and overwintering ability. Docility is obvious as soon as you open the hive but productivity is more difficult as you need to compare like for like. For example, if you have multiple hives in an apiary, try and ensure the layout does not encourage drifting, which will affect the honey production for individual hives and give a false picture. Norman also felt that if a hive goes into the winter with sufficient stores and does not make it through until spring without feeding, then you would not consider that for a donor hive in respect of productivity and overwintering ability. He also touched on the subject of inbreeding, which can be a problem in remote areas with not too many beekeepers but as the BBKA is now up to a membership of approximately 23,000, hopefully this is not a problem in well-populated locations. One useful tip was how you can gauge whether your bees might be suffering from inbreeding by inspecting the pattern of empty cells on a brood frame. If the queen lays diploid drone eggs (fertilised eggs with two identical sex genes) then the workers recognise these and remove them from the cells, so you end up with patchy brood. Norman showed an example where these were towards the top of the brood frame, on the outer edge of the nest.

Norman had also kindly provided leaflets that covered the whole process, from the equipment needed through to moving the sealed queen cells into the mating hive. A fascinating talk which ended with a lively Q and A session and a very funny explanation of how to find a drone congregation area, which involved a fishing rod or long cane, some queen pheromone and a feather. I now have my feather, courtesy of the local swans near my office, so will be giving this a try.

Spring will be here before we know it, so we are starting to plan the apiary rota for this year. If you can spare some time on a Sunday afternoon, to help the experienced beekeepers, then please get in touch. It does not matter whether you have been beekeeping for years or are a complete beginner, all offers are very welcome. Please also turn your mind to any topics you would like to hear at the winter meetings later this year. We will be looking for 4-5 speakers so any suggestions, as soon as possible, would be appreciated.

Lynn Janes. Hon. Sec. Mobile: 07721 338833

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South Chilterns Beekeepers' Association

We started our Christmas meeting with 'Beekeepers Question Time' with a varied assortment of questions which were put to the panel and some came as far as Egypt.

We had a raffle with lovely prizes which gave us some funds for some equipment for our association apiary.

The usual seasonal food and mulled wine was enjoyed and shared by all.

Thank you to all who helped and took part to make it a most enjoyable evening.

Linda Clarke

January meeting

At our January meeting our guest speaker was former Bee Inspector, Beulah Cullen who clearly has a vast experience of her subject - 'Recognising Disease'. She described the signs of healthy brood: a) Unsealed brood should be: C-shaped, glistening pearly white, and showing segmentation. b) Sealed brood comb should be: all the same colour, domed (not sunken or greasy), few empty cells, and with no perforations.

Major diseases are: American Foul Brood and European Foul Brood - Reportable to the local Bee Inspector.

Varroa

Chalk brood

Sac brood

AFB - is uncommon, and is caused by a spore-producing bacterium. Investigation of perforated capping with 'the match-stick test' draws out a light brown, toffee-like thread. With time the contents dry and shrink to the bottom of the cell. Tilting the frame to get light inside the cell shows the typical black shiny scale. The spores are very hardy and can survive for many years making this an extremely contagious disease. Bee Inspectors have no choice but to destroy the hive contents by fire and thoroughly sterilize the hive with a blowtorch.



EFB - is a more common bacterium which does not make spores. It produces slumped, white larvae which, with time turn coffee-coloured, then dark brown. Treatments: 1. if extensive - destroy the colony. 2. Shook swarm & destroy the old comb. 3. Antibiotic treatment with Oxytetracycline (no honey harvest allowed for 6 months). Beulah then showed us the Vita Foulbrood Test Kit for AFB and EFB (costing about £8 each) carried by the Bee Inspectors.

Varroa presence is recognised by: 1. Mites on larvae (easy to see), 2. Mites on adults, 3. Perforated brood caps, 4. Deformed wings on adults.

Chalk brood - The white mycelium of this fungus envelops and kills larvae. Uncap the cell and look for a round yellowish shape (like a fried egg). Often associated with low hive temperature e.g. in spring, or a weak colony. The bees throw out 'Chalk brood mummies' which are mostly black and hard.

Sac brood –is caused by a virus which prevents moulting. The skin (sac) is pointed and contains the watery remains of the larva. On uncapping the cell the larva looks like a 'Chinese slipper'. Chalk and Sac brood are both genetic diseases and so re-queening is recommended.

Wax moth - The Wax Moth larvae leave white trails through the brood. Tapping the frame brings the larvae to the surface when they can be caught and destroyed. The larvae burrow into the wood of the frame or hive to pupate. Treat by freezing the comb for 3 to 4 days or recycling and boiling the frames. Wax moth larvae often pupate under the wedge-bar.

Nosema - caused by Microsporidium, and needs a x400 microscope to see the 'rice-grain' shaped organisms in the bee's gut. Spores are fed to adult bees destroying the gut causing dysentery and halving their lifespan. During winter this can kill the colony.

Acarine (tracheal mites) - Less common. On dissecting adult bees at the spiracles you see discolouration of the trachea.

Failing Queen Symptoms:

1. Drones only in the brood indicate a Drone-laying queen (sperm exhausted).
2. Several eggs in one cell indicate Laying Workers. Probably the colony has been queenless for 5-6 weeks and is in terminal decline. The only life-saving action is to shake the bees onto the grass and allow the (old) foragers to enter other hives.

We were shown specimens of the mites, Tropilaelaps, with its pale body, making it difficult to spot and Small Hive Beetle, both of which we are unlikely to come across at present.

Finally our speaker recommended changing the brood comb annually by the 'Bailey Comb Change' or 'Shook-Swarm' methods. The old frames can be recycled, boiling to sterilise. A most interesting and instructive talk.

Max Vine

Two documents: Protection of combs from wax moth and The way of life of varroa are available on request from southchilterns.bees@btinternet.com

Our February meeting at Woodcote Village Hall is on Wednesday February 15th at 7.30pm

BREEDING BEE'S for HYGENIC BEHAVIOUR by Ron Hoskins

. Joanne Shanagher, Secretary. Tel: 01189 721067

<http://www.southchilternsbeekeepers.org.uk>

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Reading and District Beekeepers' Association

. December 2011 Meeting of Reading Beekeepers held at Caversham Heights Methodist Hall on 13th December welcomed Roger Patterson from Horsham as our guest speaker with his topic 'My Simplified Approach to Bee Improvement'. Roger has been a beekeeper and been raising queens for 45 years. His own colonies number around 20 at time of setting-up for over wintering but in earlier years has numbered up to 120! Roger advises how, with large numbers of colonies he's evolved his more 'simple' methods for bee improvement. Although now, a more modest keeper, Roger is still involved with 100 plus colonies, as over the past 10 years he's brought on the formerly low performing Horsham association apiary to in excess for 50 colonies of productive manageable bees, with monitored, good quality queens, drone assessment and support hives which donate queens, bees, larvae and stores etc. to others where needed and founded on careful assessment of the queens and their performance.

Roger's assessment of the results of introducing, what he refers to as 'exotic' queen bees, i.e. Italians, Carniolans N.Z. etc. into British apiaries, have proved over the medium term to be counterproductive, where good overall characteristics are concerned. Our British 'mongrels' after several generations of cross breeding have been in need of serious improvement.

Roger recommends a fairly ruthless approach to re-queening, with queens from his colonies, which for example have, good stores pattern in brood frames (wall-to-wall brood' will result in over wintering difficulties) good bee cover on all frames, particularly brood, colonies which can be managed and thrive on 'one brood box' configurations and says these are the correct characteristics for British honey bees. His work suggests a return to as near as possible to the original British black bee.

Motivated by the now familiar problems of queens superseding and ceasing to be productive egg layers in one or two seasons, Roger's colony assessments are keen on queen cell production in relation to existing egg production and seasonal timings of these, for example he does not allow queen cells in colonies needing improvement to complete development until there are ample drones flying. Using the punch method he raises queens continuously from good colonies and will use, with proper timing. Rogers assesses quietness on the comb, choosing colonies where the bees don't 'run-about' on the comb surface, this contributes to good manageable colonies. Roger looks for colonies that have evidence of wider foraging, looking at pollen colours for guidance. In building-up a bee colony for high summer Roger recommends a deep above the queen excluder for the oil-seed rape honey harvest, This drawn -out extracted deep comb is ideal to introduce into the brood-box of colonies being developed. Beekeeping groups should work together and share queens with good characteristics.

Roger gave us a very comprehensive and well-illustrated talk. His activities include being a B.D.I. adviser to The BBKA, an adviser to Orkneys beekeepers (very good) and to The Isle Of Man (not so good!). Roger's book on his approaches to beekeeping is due to be completed and published, a must for any beekeeping library when it comes out.

With very many thanks to Roger and all who attended and provided mince pies and other goodies for this our 'Christmas meeting'.

Our January 2012 meeting on Tuesday 10th we were very pleased to welcome Scott Rutland who is the current chairman of High Wycombe Beekeepers Association who gave us an illustrated talk and description of his 2010-2011 season entitled 'A Year In The Life Of Me and My Bees' On his 4 acre field on which Scott has commenced to fatten some lambs for the freezer, 25 colonies were united in Autumn 2010 to 18. Scott also has other apiaries in the mixed horticulture in the Chilterns around Wycombe. He has pollination opportunities for example, with oil seed rape. And good mixed forage including some heather. At the time of this report he had some dozen or so hives on his two-farm site. One of his 'out' apiaries that autumn, had received a 'guest colony' which on examination was suspected of having EFB. Prompt attention paid off, and subsequent inspections at the end of the period gave Scott the 'all-clear' on his own colonies on that site.

Scott recommends shook-swarm techniques on a third of his hives each year so every 3 years new wood and wax is in the brood boxes. He's prepared to sacrifice some brood in doing this and maintains this is a key method in disease control. With Scott's very excellent record over his relatively short time as a beekeeper (8 years) it's difficult to argue with his approach. Scott is a queen breeder using The Jenter System. He uses his four acre site as a teaching apiary for Wycombe Beekeepers- lucky them! 'Raiser hives' are used ex the 'Jenter cups' and one each of ripe queen cells in mating nuclei with a pint or so of workers.

Scott progressed through his beekeeping year with excellent illustration on screen. The high percentage of newer beekeepers in his audience will have gained considerable insight into just what is needed to make real progress and towards some rapid returns from keeping bees: Scott uses his extra queens which he breeds for his best performers and calm temperament colonies and sells these.

Bees are overwintered and given bakers fondant early in the year, prior to that frames of good liquid honey from late summer harvest are given to 'lighter' colonies. Wycombe beekeepers are lucky in having a well-established local bakery contact for the fondant.

After a March 'quick inspection' his main opening up of his hives with his association's newer beekeepers present is in April. Anti varroa measures include oxalic trickle on 22nd/23rd December and thymol based product in the autumn.

Scott showed us some excellent photos of swarms from last season and has a considerable number of bait hives around the area, not just in his own field but elsewhere in his region, these he prefers to be quite high-up and again this pays-off for him.

Spring extraction is by end of May, and later, a second extraction from the high summer flow. Then into autumn well hefted and united.

Very many thanks to Scott for his tremendous talk; we would be wise to follow his examples!

The February meeting is at the usual venue on Tuesday 14th February starting at 7-30. This will be a very interesting one! Our speaker will be PHD student Tom Breeze, who works with Dr Simon Potts at Reading University, on "The Decline in the Provision of Pollination Services" and "The Honeybee in Status and Trends of European Pollination". These are some of the most important items to concern world agriculture so don't miss it!

.Jon Davey

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Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society

At our January meeting, Pam Hunter gave a most stimulating talk entitled 'Is Natural always Nice?' during which she explored the meaning of words such as 'natural' and 'organic', and the use of organic compounds and natural products throughout history (mostly as poisons!). Particular focus was given to the use and potential misuse of organic compounds for the treatment of bee diseases (oxalic acid, thymol) and the use of natural products to promote bee health.

Our Annual dinner in January at Stirrups Country House Hotel was well attended and was enjoyed by all.

Our next winter meeting will be on Tuesday 21st February. The speaker will be Norman Hughes from Basingstoke and his subject is "Queen rearing". This is queen rearing with a difference and hopefully will lead to practical queen rearing at our apiary in May. Norman will bring all the required kit to demonstrate his method, and every attendee will receive a hand-out.

We are also looking forward to Nigel Semmence (our Regional Bee Inspector) who will be talking to us on 'Bee Health' at our meeting on 13th March. Details will be sent out closer to the time.

Secretary SWM BKS: Neil Coxhead

www.britishbee.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead

Well worth looking at: <http://www.co-operative.coop/planbee>

Watch bees online at: <http://www.sysonby.com/beecam>

Contributions, including emails, to arrive with the Editor by the 20th of the month for 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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