



# 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.

November 2013

Number 682

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## Editors Corner

Despite the balmy start to October, this month heralds the beginning of Autumn for us and for our bees, with the foraging day getting ever shorter and the forage itself increasingly elusive. Much hope and talk is given to the late flow from Ivy and Himalayan Balsam, but no chances are taken that the bees will have to depend on ivy honey in the



depths of winter when it is likely to be too hard to manage. So, among my friends feeding is in full swing and the gossip is on the current price of sugar and the best place to buy. Don't be fooled into assuming that the large packs are always the cheapest – research has shown that a pack of 12x1Kg packs from a local cash and carry store worked out cheaper per kilo than the 5 kilo pack! Either way the investment is not large and we will surely reap the benefits in the spring when we emerge from winter with strong colonies.

This month has seen our associations having their AGMs, in many cases bringing new teams of officers to ensure their continued smooth running. The winter programme are also in full swing now and as reported in this newsletter a number of interesting talks and workshops have been enjoyed on diverse topics including Acarine and Nosema Disease Screening (a rather ghoulish affair going by the description below), Varroa and the effects of using small cell foundation and late summer apiary meetings rounding up the season.

It is good to see that some of you are making use of the calendar of events – even if it is to point out errors in the dates I provided last month. Apologies for this and so please note that the SCBKA talk on Acquiring immunity to the honey bee sting with Dr Burnett will be held on 20 November and not 10<sup>th</sup> as shown on the calendar and the SCBKA talk on The Birds and the Bees with Dr Michael Keith Lucas is on 19 February and not 11 February as scheduled.

You will see a small section in the newsletter below with items for sale. If any member of the Federation has second hand bee equipment that they would like to sell please consider using the Newsletter as a free advertising vehicle.

Finally, I was delighted to receive the Bee Craft magazine calendar for 2014 in the recent issue of the magazine. The photographs are without exception quite special. But you may not be aware that the beautiful Frog and Bee for September was taken by Federation Member and member of Slough and Windsor Beekeepers Association – Lorraine Godenzie. Congratulations are indeed in order!

*Sue Remenyi*

## **C WYNNE JONES**

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## **Letter to the Editor**

Dear Editor

The Federation newsletter purports to be the voice of the Federation. I read excellent articles about what is going on in all the Associations every month, but recently, seldom anything on the goings-on at the Federation. In April we heard that the new committee planned to re-invigorate the federation and 'have their proposals ready in 2 months'. 6 months have passed and I am wondering if there is anything further to report.

After narrowly avoiding closing down at the AGM, now is the time to keep members informed and build confidence in the Federation's future. If the summer has indeed passed with no activity, then maybe the Federation's days are over and we should reconsider the motion to terminate it.

We pay the Federation an annual fee, which has accumulated into a tidy sum of money. Is it wise to leave this money to waste away or should the Associations be allowed to put it to good use?

The one element, which goes from strength to strength is the Newsletter, which I thoroughly enjoy. Keep up the good work!

*Max Vine*

*Chairman SCBKA*

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## **For Sale**

The makings of 2 or 3 hives with queen excluders, glass quilts, etc. Nothing more than £5.00. We need the space so all must go. Contact Anne on 01491 574580 or [anne@orcharddene.com](mailto:anne@orcharddene.com), any time but not between November 8th to December 3rd.

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## **Obituary**

### **Marjorie Cooper 10/07/1928-03/09/2013**

Late president of The Federation of Berkshire Beekeepers Associations.

Ruth Marjorie Cooper passed away in her 86th year at Lyndhurst Care Home Goring on Thames on the 3rd of September. Long time president of Reading Beekeepers association in recent years she had not attended many meetings mainly because of failing eyesight. Marjorie did however attend the Federation AGM in November 2011 and officiated in her role as president and seemed in good spirits and enjoyed renewing acquaintances.

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## Report from Wokingham Beekeepers Association

Our AGM took place on the 13th October and the draft Minutes have been circulated separately to our members. The plan had been for Nigel Perkins and Garth Matthews to give an update on their queen rearing venture this summer but unfortunately Garth was delayed at work, so their talk will take place at a later date.

Instead we had a Q & A on the highs and lows of beekeeping this summer. Wasps have been a real problem for quite a few people and hornets are appearing in greater numbers. It has also been feast or famine for the honey harvest. The good weather came too late for some people and their bees collected enough honey to tick over but not enough to store.

On Saturday 12th October Garth Matthews hosted a free Acarine and Nosema Disease Screening Workshop. There were seven of us in attendance from the Reading and Wokingham BKA's. Garth also very kindly provided the venue and cakes for those of us with a sweet tooth.

The weather was quite kind so we all managed to collect our bees that morning. Not having done this before, I following Nigel and Garth's instructions and placed jam jars over the feed holes of both my hives and the bees obliged by flying up. You require 30 bees per and they should ideally be older forager bees. You can use the same bees for both tests if you carry out the Acarine test first. We killed the bees quickly using ethyl acetate.

For the acarine test the bee is pinned, on its back, to a sloping block with a double needle. Both points of the needle should pass through the thorax between the second and third pair of legs. Once held firmly in place the head and first pair of legs are removed with forceps. There are various ways of doing this so whatever works best for you. There is a real knack to doing it well as I ended up removing everything with the head, which is not the idea! The aim is to be left with the end of the thorax exposed under the microscope. You then very carefully remove the collar. The trachea in a healthy bee should appear pearly white. If it is infected it will show brown or black discolouration. Bees that are infected have disjointed wings and crawl in front of the hive as they are unable to fly.

The Nosema test is easier to carry out. Once your Acarine test is complete, the abdomen of 30 bees are put into a mortar and mashed up with a drop of distilled water. Depending on the number of infected bees you find within your sample, it will give you a good idea of the infection level in your colony as a whole. When we carried out a similar exercise earlier in the year the resulting liquid was a pale brown colour but this time it was golden yellow as the bees are feeding up ready for winter and their stomachs were full of pollen. Some of the liquid is then placed on a slide and viewed under a microscope. Nosema looks like small grains of rice. However, this time, instead of a fairly clear slide where it would have been easy to pick out the spores, it was packed with pollen. There was so much pollen in even a tiny sample it was difficult to work out if Nosema was present. Fortunately Garth could link his microscope to a laptop and he projected the slides on to the wall which made it easier to view.

After having undertaken all the tests we were glad to find that all our colonies appear to be OK. We also saved the wings of our bees for a Morphometry workshop that Garth is hoping to run some time in the future.

As well as helping us check our findings, Garth also spent time showing two of our number how to calibrate and use a microscope for pollen analysis. They also then managed to fit in some Acarine and Nosema testing on Garth's samples which was of great help, as Garth was so busy helping everyone else he didn't have time to check his own.

It was a very full and enjoyable day for everyone who attended, as Garth invested a great deal of time and effort into making sure we all knew what we were doing and stepping in

to help where needed. Garth's work commitments mean he is now spending a considerable amount of time travelling during the week, so giving up one day of his weekend was very much appreciated by us all.

Our November meeting takes place on the 13th and is the Club's annual Honey Show. We hope as many members as possible will take part. As a reminder the classes are as follows:

- Best Honey in Show
- Best Granulated Honey in Show
- Best Wax in Show (any shape or form)
- Best Honey Bake in Show (any bake as long as it contains honey)
- A bottle of Mead
- Photography (beekeeping theme, any size photo but must be printed, either b&w or colour). If we have enough good quality photos submitted, we will look at getting calendars made, which we can sell on behalf of Club funds. If you plan to submit an entry, please keep an electronic copy as well and if selected, this will be used for the calendar.

*Lynne Janes*



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## South Chilterns Beekeepers Association

Following a short AGM meeting and the election of officers, John White took us through the story so far on the trial he and Caroline Knight have been running to see if varroa can be reduced through the use of small cell foundation. Their lovely Buckfast Queen Cleopatra was performing delightfully, but charting the varroa count showed her colony was under severe pressure from varroa, despite the host of treatments they had tried over the seasons. John and Caroline are trying to establish whether changing the size of honeycomb cells back to the slightly smaller size that bees naturally build has the effect of reducing the varroa burden. This has been mooted as one possible solution to the varroa problem and they set out to find out if it works, and if so, why.

On day 9, a cell is capped, and just before it closes a female varroa mite nips into the cell. She lays an egg every day, starting with a son and then producing daughters. By the time of the bee's emergence, the son and daughters have mated and bred too. Theoretically, a smaller cell slightly reduces the time a bee spends developing in the sealed cell, and hence reduces the time available for breeding of the varroa mites. The Asian honey-

bee, *Apis cerana*, spends the same amount of time as an egg as our *Apis mellifera*, but subsequent stages are all one day shorter.

John and Caroline spent a lot of time researching this issue and came up with a list of research papers on the topic. When sorting out whether the conclusion of each upheld or disputed the theory, there were slightly more negative results, but they still feel that despite the scientific evidence, it does appear to work.

Home-made foundation was a non-starter, so the next stage was to source some small cell foundation - easier said than done. Standard foundation is imprinted with the base of cells that measure 5.4mm across, and small cells measure 4.9mm. They scoured the world for the right size and tried some Chinese plastic foundation; it seemed tiny, so they checked. It's too difficult to get an accurate measurement of a single cell, so the technique is to measure a row of 10, and divide the answer by 10. The Chinese stuff was 4.1mm, and after some puzzlement they realised that in China, the cells are measured diagonally! The US was also tried, but at last they found some Swedish small-cell foundation made of wax rather than plastic.

The plan was to use the colony of one of Queen Cleo's daughters, Queen Selene, for the trial, and for maximum versatility Caroline and John use two national supers as a brood box. Following Dave Cushman's example, each frame was fitted with two narrow starter strips cut from the precious foundation, one at the top and a second one lower down the frame. They had drilled tiny holes in the side bars of the frame halfway down and threaded a reinforcing wire across them. The bees started to draw the top strip and build the comb downwards, but as the comb grew, the cells were starting to revert to a larger size. Once the second strip was encountered, it had the effect of a reset button, and the bees were encouraged to go back to the smaller size to complete the frame.

The bees in Queen Selene's experimental hive were visibly smaller than Cleo's other daughter, Queen Nefertiti's control hive bees sited next door, in the same conditions and with the same management regime. Between May and September this year, the varroa count was indeed lower, but compared with all of the other hives in the apiary, the count was squarely in the centre of the data spread. As this is not sufficiently conclusive, the next stage of the experiment will be to try it out next year on the two worst colonies in the apiary. We are very grateful to Caroline and John for their diligence and rigour in carrying out the small-cell trial and sharing the results, and we look forward with great interest to the follow-up presentation next year...

And the really clever bit is that Caroline and John used standard size foundation in the supers, so the honey crop was not reduced by the use of smaller cells!

*Meryl Toomey*

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## Reading Beekeepers Association:

On Sunday 14th September Reading Beekeepers assembled in Shurlock Row with our host Ron Blower. It has been three seasons since our last visit to Ron's apiary and it was extremely gratifying to see the good bee husbandry Ron employs and how well established his apiary is now in his good sized field using Smiths equipment with some hive elements crafted by Ron himself. Ron has had a good amount of honey from four hives and has Apiguard in place. During this visit he considered uniting the other three hives for the winter as at least two had recently displayed no queen activity for a period. Starting our inspection of the 7 hives with the 'strong four' we observed good looking brood pattern, small larvae and eggs were seen. The brood frames had good looking circular pattern with stores at the tops, and this is often a sign that the bees will over-winter well. Queens were found in two hives. Ron has had a lot of wasp activity this season and has made-up a number of wasp traps using 2l plastic table water bottles with the top cut off and inverted inside to form a 'non-return funnel'. He sinks these partly in the ground a couple of metres in front of the hives and bates them with honey water. Ron reports drowning many hundreds of wasps, although bees may also be attracted to the frenzy with which the big 'V Gemanicus' wasps dive-in. Jam mixed with water may also be used as bait.

We had a very good attendance including new members offspring, early and mid teens and even a toddler. The smaller-ones, amply (if loosely) clad in bee suits and gloves, seemed to enjoy mixing with Ron's friendly bees immensely; good for them! Too many of our future generations may only see anything that flies and buzzes as a threat or inconvenience if it disturbs their computer session or comes near them on their rare visits outdoors.



The three hives for possible uniting came next, these were found to be unexpectedly populous, the queens in all three having obviously started laying again, brood and eggs and at least one queen were seen. Although there might have been a case for uniting two colonies our demonstrator Michael Blackburn, in consultation with Ron considered this unnecessary as obviously the mild autumn and availability of forage meant that pollen loads were coming into all the hives, which had allowed these colonies to build-up and subject to hefting and feeding if necessary – and with Ron's good husbandry - should do well over winter. Ron's honey stocks are gratifyingly ample and he has sales outlets nearby. Hazel Blackburn had joined us by then and refreshments were forthcoming. A very excellent opportunity for our newer member to see bee colonies looking 'as they should' in autumn in this our last meeting of our summer programme. With thanks to Ronald Blower and all who attended and participated.

Our next meeting is on Tuesday 12th November at Caversham Heights Methodist Hall starting at 7-30 sharp and will include our AGM. We will be grateful for a full attendance as new committee members and 'officers' of our association will have to be nominated and voted-for. We are always looking for volunteers to serve.

Holders of our honey show trophies please bring these along as new winners will be receiving these.

The AGM and presentations will only take about 30-40 minutes after which we have two important items viz. Our association's senior judge who officiates at shows all over the UK will demonstrate beeswax preparation for show classes and show class honeys. Then Hazel will judge entries for 'The Hazel Blackburn Trophy' This year we are expanding the schedule as below:-

1. Clear Honey, 1 jar any colour.
2. Granulated Honey 1 jar.
3. 3 blocks of beeswax about 1 oz
4. A beeswax candle any type.
5. A honey Cake and/or biscuits.
6. A photograph connected to beekeeping.

We are also expanding the range of beekeepers who may enter i.e. Open to beekeepers up to their 4th season whether or not they have won or been placed in any honey show class. Also open to beekeepers of any period of experience who hitherto have not been placed first, second or third and any honey show classes.

Recipes for honey cake & biscuits will be circulated shortly by your secretary. Do please participate!

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*Advert*

## Slough Windsor and Maidenhead Beekeepers

October 6th brought the last of the meetings at the association apiary. It was time to do the final check on the stores in the hives before adding the mouse guards and fitting the woodpecker protection. Now we cross our fingers and leave the rest up to the bees, hoping that they have enough stores and bees to see them through to Spring 2014.

### Winter Meetings 2013

On October 8th we held the 69th Annual Honey Show for SW&M BKA. There were 14 classes with something for everyone from beginners to old hands. This year there were 18 entrants with 58 entries and a whole array of cups to be won.



In previous years all classes were judged in front of the audience but this year there was a change to the format. The visiting judge, Mr Nick Grey from the Chalfonts Beekeeping Society, started with the Novice class and talked the audience through the judging process to help the newcomers to understand what makes a winning show entry.

His comments were of interest to the more experienced too when he shared some tricks needed for entries to meet the standards set by the National Honey Show.

Whilst Nick judged the other classes the audience had the chance to taste and vote for the in the Honey for Flavour class; the anonymous entries were sampled, sucked and savoured and elicited many comments on the wide variety of different flavours produced in the area. The Show ended with the announcement of the final results and presentation of the cups. There was a clear overall winner in Jim Cooper who will be polishing up no less than four of the awarded cups over the coming year for his prize winning entries:

- Maidenhead Presidents Cup awarded for the most points in the honey classes
- Slough Apis Cup for the best exhibit in the show
- Slough Tweedie Cup for the winner of the Beeswax class
- Slough Grey Cup for the most points in the Slough show

Congratulations to Jim whose entry in the Dark Honey class won him the 'Best Exhibit in Show' cup – it was a particularly dark jar of honey which the judge thought could be attributed to honeydew.

More congratulations are due to Anita Moores who won the Maidenhead Novices Cup for her first honey entry and also the Maidenhead Goblet for the best first time exhibitor.

Other cups were awarded to:

- Hilary du Cane - Maidenhead TJ Cox Challenge Cup for something made with honey
- Joy Dodson – Slough Cox Cup for the best honey cake
- Lorraine Godenzie – Maidenhead Vince Haverley Cup for photography

The new format provided a very interesting event and we are very grateful to Joy Dodson and Mandy Burgess for their hard work in preparing and organising the Honey Show. We were grateful for Nick Grey's judging and also many thanks to all of the entrants, whose efforts made the evening a valuable experience.

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.

Forthcoming meetings:

- 7th November\* - Annual General Meeting
- 10th December - Candle Making followed by Christmas Supper

\* marks changes to usual date and time

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

The advertisement is for Bee Magic Ltd. and features a list of beekeeping protective gear with prices. On the left is a full-body bee suit, and on the right is a hooded jacket. The text is as follows:

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## ***For your diary***

**7th November:** Slough Windsor & Maidenhead BKA AGM

**13th November:** Wokingham BKA Club Honey Show.

**19<sup>th</sup> November:** "Bee Improvement for All". A whole days learning how to improve your bees 2013 at Bracknell, Berkshire. In conjunction with Wokingham and District BKA. Further information available from <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/beeimprovementforallday.html>

**20 November:** SCBKA Acquiring immunity to the honey bee sting with Dr Burnett

**10th December:** Slough Windsor & Maidenhead BKA Candle Making followed by Christmas Supper

**11th December:** Reading BKA Question Time, followed by Christmas nibbles

**11 December:** SCBKA Christmas special with Beekeepers' question time

**8th January:** Reading BKA Ron Hoskins talking about hygienic bees

**15 January:** SCBKA Honey Show

**19 February:** SCBKA The Birds and the Bees with Dr Michael Keith Lucas

**13th February:** Reading BKA Roger Patterson on "Bee Improvement"

**8<sup>th</sup> March:** Beekeeping for Beginners Day at Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association

**12th March:** Reading BKA Bee Diseases. Nigel Semmence giving us an update on diseases, the Asian hornet and any other relevant hot topics.

**19 March 2014:** SCBKA The Decline of England's Bees with Dr Thomas Breeze

**29 March 2014:** SCBKA Skep Making

### ***Beekeeping for Beginners Day***

A one day course will take place on Saturday March 8th 2014 to provide information for people who think they may like to take up beekeeping. This is an annual event, now in its ninth year, run by the Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association.

The event is useful for those who may have had a long term interest, but aren't sure if beekeeping is for them or not. All the information needed to become a beekeeper will be given in the presentation. There are follow-up sessions at the well equipped Wisborough Green teaching apiary for those who think they will be able to manage and wish to go further. This provides the opportunity to learn and achieve competence on someone else's facilities under supervision before buying bees and equipment. The course is also suitable for those who may have just started beekeeping, but have had little or no guidance.

The presentation will be by very experienced beekeepers with others available during break times to provide advice and information.

The Wisborough Green BKA covers a wide area with members in West Sussex and South Surrey, but for those a bit further afield details of surrounding Associations will be available on the day.

Further information for beekeepers and non-beekeepers can be found on the Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association website [www.wgbka.org.uk](http://www.wgbka.org.uk) where you can find further details of the Beginners Day on the Events page. Contact Roger Patterson 01403 790637 or 07976 306492, [roger-patterson@btconnect.com](mailto:roger-patterson@btconnect.com) for course details, or Gordon Allan 01798 343470, [petworthgordon@btopenworld.com](mailto:petworthgordon@btopenworld.com) to book.

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## ***Association websites***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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### ***NBU Advice for Obtaining Bees:***

**Join Beebase** - By joining BeeBase you can access beekeeping information and ask for advice or help from the Bee Unit: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>.

#### **Your Regional Bee Inspectors are:**

**Southern Region:** Nigel Semmence at: [nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk),

The main website is: <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/public/Contacts/contacts.cfm>

National Bee Unit, Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton, York YO41 1 LZ, tel: 01 904 462 510, email: <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk> .

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

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**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 7<sup>th</sup> of the following month. Contributions received after this will be held over for a later month.

**Advertisement entries**, to be received by the Advertisement Manager in advance of the 20th of every month. Rates: 2 Lines for £1.00; Commercial rates: £1.00 per line. Please make cheques payable to FBBKA. To be sent to the Advertisement Manager: Mr Jon Davey, 107 Northcourt Avenue, Reading RG2 7HG. Tel: 0118 975 0734.

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