



THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

The Federation, its Council, and its Officers cannot be held responsible for the views expressed in the Newsletter or possible errors.

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Editors Corner

This month has been interesting with reports of good flow and extractors in great demand. But we are continually reminded that beekeeping is unpredictable and the write ups from Wokingham and South Chilterns certainly reflect this. There is unfortunately no In My Apiary piece this month, but there is an interesting peek into the ways of beekeeping in Chicago as reported by Max Vine from South Chilterns who had the good fortune recently to visit an apiary there.



I have had a couple of interesting discussions recently with people about ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*). The field behind my house (and my apiary) is neglected and for the past two years has been completely covered in a yellow canopy of what is regarded by many as a dangerous and toxic weed - poisonous to horses and sheep in particular. I wanted to know whether bees worked this flower and if there were any

inherent problems with the resulting honey if they did. Well, it seems that bees do work Ragwort and there are no problems with the honey. Although, it was mentioned to me that the honey can sometimes have a slightly bitter aftertaste. Thankfully, after a tasting of my honey with some of my fellow beekeepers, I am happy to report that it is quite delicious! As I have not had my honey tested for pollen content I can't be absolutely sure that there is a considerable amount of ragwort in it, but given the proximity to the field I think it likely that it does.

In the last couple of weeks the field has been cut and I am grateful for this as my concern was that it would be sprayed and this would not have been good for the bees. Whilst researching this topic I was given a link to an interesting website called www.ragwortfacts.com. There is a wealth of information here, and it helps to put the dangers of the plant into perspective. Although ragwort is indeed a toxic plant, it is one of many - and it seems that horses and sheep need to consume quite a lot before they are at serious risk. More importantly if animals who could be at risk are not living close to the source then control other than by chemicals is recommended. According to <http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/campaigns/Ragwort> "*At least 30 insect species (and 14 fungi species) are entirely reliant on Ragwort, and about a third of the insects are scarce or rare. Ragwort is also an important nectar source for hundreds of species of butterflies, bees, moths, flies and other invertebrates, helping to support populations in the UK countryside - which means that honeybees and all the other insect life that benefits from the plant are not threatened*". I wonder if any other Fed members have experience of ragwort from the honeybee perspective?

Sue Remenyi



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Visit to an Illinois Beekeeper

On the 30th July I visited Charenton Drake who lives North of Chicago, and has been keeping bees for 7 years. She studied botany at Cornell University, where she met Dr Roger Morris who researched the bee dance. She keeps Carnolian bees in 11 hives, 7 in an out-apiary and 4 in at home.

On a cloudy July day with unseasonably low air temperature of 17 degrees the bees were actively flying. The hives were Dadant with short lug frames and bottom bee space, and operating on a double brood box setup.

The hives have mesh floors and in the cold Mid-West winters are fitted with sheet foam insulation on three sides, and mouse guards. Charenton's winter setup is a double brood box with one super over a queen excluder. Winter survival was reported to be slightly better than in the UK.

With little farming in the vicinity, foraging is mainly over woodlands and gardens.

She shares the beekeeping with others and produces an average crop of 400 lbs of organic honey labelled "Charenton and the Bee Boys" with the minimum of intervention and her policy is generally to leave the bees to get on with it.

Varroa is not a major problem and no routine treatment is applied. Small hive beetle is trapped but numbers are generally small. Swarming is viewed as a natural phenomenon and swarms are either captured or allowed to find homes in local woodlands.

After viewing the bees we walked around her beautiful garden and down a hundred or so steps to the crystal clear water of Lake Michigan. It all seemed to be idyllic and very different from how we do things at home.

*Max Vine
Chairman of SCKBA*

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Reading Beekeepers Association

On Sunday 23rd June we assembled at Mike & Marion Dabbs Garden Apiary at Tilehurst.

Mike is famous in the Reading association for his large honey yields, manageable bees, willingness to tackle calls about feral colonies in difficult locations and Marion for her forbearance in having bee-hives outside the garden door to greet her every day: luckily she shares Mike's enthusiasm! Both are also active members of Reading Association's committee.

There have been some losses following the awful foraging and weather conditions in the 12 months up to the end of March, but Mike has 7 colonies in the garden plus one nuc which had been split from a seemingly over populous colony nearby. We looked at the nuc first.

Here we saw things going along happily; there were sealed brood, larvae and eggs laying flat in cells plus a sealed queen cell and one unsealed. Since the split had been made with a queen cell only 2 weeks before this caused some controversy amongst beekeepers. There would have been some eggs and tiny larvae in the frame Mike used as well as a queen cell but tiny larvae now? And 'flat' eggs! This should mean 2 days since laying, the two queen cells self evident, was there a queen in there? We couldn't find her! The nuc was only around five thousand bees. We eventually sited the two queen cells on opposite facing frames and closed up this enigma of a bee colony and opened-up the donor colony. This was indeed populous and Mike Blackburn our demonstrator found the queen. Eggs, larvae at all stages not much honey in-yet (the afore mentioned nuc had its feeder topped-up). Because of the excellent attendance and six more hives to open two demonstrators now proceeded with the help of new beekeepers to examine three hives each. All hives were looking good and populous with some honey going into frames above the excluder, but generally down on stores. Mike's bees seem to be the type that fill frames top to bottom with brood, a little patch of sealed honey on two outside frames but the remaining 9 frames chock-full with brood! Queens were seen in 4 hives and in the biggest chock-full colony opened by this demonstrator the queen was not of impressive size, but what a performer! Numerous deformed cups were seen, but very few swarm cells encountered. There was a demonstrator's voice to be heard above the humming of the bees calling upon Mike to install a feeder on a colony with many thousands of bees; imago and larvae but almost no stores to be seen!

This was a thoroughly useful session and the new bee keepers expressed their satisfaction at being able to participate in this intensive beekeeping. In addition to being a beekeeper, Mike is an excellent practical woodworker and mechanic and we were able to examine his own make of 'Swarm Safe' used to vacuum bees from feral nests and swarms in difficult locations without harm. These are not cheap to buy, but Mike has made his own fully functional version from vacuum cleaner elements, a suitable rheostat and a removable 'safe' installed in-line. Great stuff!

Our day at The Dabbs apiary ended with drinks, sandwiches and cakes prepared by Marion and devoured by hungry beekeepers under the gazebo. What a splendid session we had with thanks to Mike and Marion and all who attended.

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South Chilterns Beekeepers Association

A visit to Richard and Caroline's little apiary on 20th July proved most educational and thankfully the weather cooled down a little so we were not sweltering in our bee suits. After examining the bees everyone took themselves off for a wander round the garden followed by a sit down with tea, excellent cakes and some further advice from Reg. Just as people started to leave one of the hives swarmed into the top of a nearby tree (well out of ladder range) so not only did we all get some valuable advice on managing our colonies but were treated to a swarming!

Of the three hives present (all 14x 12 brood boxes) we only examined two, as the third hive of dark brown bees had thoughtlessly swarmed a week earlier on a very hot and sunny day. They had refused to be recaptured and despite having all been swept into a nucleus box, re-emerged and flew off within the hour!

The advice given was to leave the hive and re-examine after three weeks for the presence of eggs.



So the first hive to be examined housed a swarm of orangey-brown bees that had been collected about a mile away in early June. They had filled up the 14 x 12 brood box with eggs, larvae, brood and stores of pollen and capped honey. They had also been very busy and had filled up two supers. They had been examined two weeks earlier and had not created any queen cells up to this point. On this visit there were capped queen cells galore so as Richard and Caroline wanted another colony it was decided to create an artificial swarm.



Three frames of eggs, larvae and brood with capped queen cells were placed in a nucleus box and bees shaken into the box. The box was filled up with spare drawn brood frames and placed in its new location with the entrance blocked up with grass.

The queen was not seen. The remaining capped queen cells were removed from the frames in the hive and uncapped cells were left.

The advice was to examine both the nucleus and the hive again in three weeks for the presence of eggs

Hive two had been created by means of an artificial swarm of dark brown bees in 2012. Two weeks earlier, a number of capped queen cells had all been removed and one of the supers removed, extracted and refitted. On this visit, after the first 4 frames were examined it was decided not to go through any more because there were no eggs seen and two weeks earlier all capped queen cells had been removed. What we did see in the first 4 frames were lots of brood, some larvae, no eggs, no queen, two queen cells from which something had emerged and 4 capped queen cells. Two of those capped queen cells were left intact and the hive was shut up and the bees left to sort themselves out. About two hours later it swarmed!

The advice given was to re-examine after three weeks for the presence of eggs and in future to leave one capped queen cell rather than remove them all.

So all in all it was quite an action packed afternoon.

Wokingham & District Beekeepers Association

On probably one of the hottest afternoons of the year, when most sensible people were relaxing in the shade, five members and seven visitors arrived at the apiary to check the hives. To save time the hives were split between Lorna and Neil, so this made it easier for our visitors to see what was going on.

Hive 0 was originally an artificial swarm. We found the queen and marked her. They had six frames of eggs, larvae and brood and four of stores. There were no supers on this hive but they still had room to expand.

Hive 1 – had seven frames of eggs, larvae and brood and four of food. They also had two supers so had room to move their stores if necessary. They were a feisty bunch so after we had seen the queen (already marked) we shut them up quickly.

Hive 2 – had five frames of eggs, larvae and brood and three of stores. Queen not seen. They also had two supers available.

Hive 4 - Queen cells found and as no queen seen was seen, we left two queen cells and closed up. They had two supers so were ok for stores.

Hive 5 - 8 frames of eggs, larvae and brood, but didn't see queen. This hive has 2 supers so is ok for stores

Hive 6 – Six frames of eggs, larvae and brood, two of stores and two undrawn. We also found the queen and marked her. They already had two supers which were filling up fast, so we gave them a third for additional space.



This left us with the three nucs made earlier in the summer, one of which started to vacate the hive as we watched! We quickly made up a full size hive and scooped the beard of bees into the new box and then carefully checked the frames for the queen and any queen cells. Fortunately there were no queen cells or cups but we did manage to find the queen and mark her.

Of the two remaining nucs, one queen had only recently started laying so we quickly marked her and then closed them up. The third nuc now had brood over four frames but still had space as they had not yet drawn the final frame but we will need to watch them carefully.

Three nucs, all in exactly the same size boxes but all developing at different rates.

We were glad to quickly put all our gear away and go home to a long cool drink. We were also very grateful to Neil and Lorna for running the session. We could duck into the shade of the donkey shed when it got too much but they were out in the sun for the whole two hours.



John Belcher

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No report this month.

Obituary – Reg Harper 1921-2013

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Reg Harper on Saturday 21st July at the age of 92 years. Reg was Reading Beekeepers' oldest member keeping bees until about 10 years ago, but still kept in touch with Reading Assoc. and received the Berks Newsletter. He started beekeeping in his late fifties (1970) following beekeeping courses at evening classes and the Berks. Agricultural College at Burchetts Green. He kept bees in the garden at home and kept two out-apiaries, one of which is still operated by a Reading member. Reg produced plenty of honey selling through local retail outlets, and on his retirement from beekeeping passed his best one onto myself. We always admired his show honey and beeswax exhibited at the "Reading Show" and of course the "Berkshire County Show" particularly his dipped candles and wax blocks always winning cups and prizes. Reg was always enthusiastic in promoting beekeeping and went to primary schools to pass on his knowledge.

Every year Janet and Reg had a stall at the "Water Fest" selling honey and beeswax and encouraging new members to join the Assoc. Reg was one of the most active members of Reading Assoc. helping at shows and demonstrating at apiary meetings. He was of course chairman for about ten years until ill health made him cut down on his activities.

Reg was a fascinating personality and had stories to tell about his war years. The one that I shall never forget was his escape from "Dunkirk" in 1940 when not being able to board a boat because of the long queues of men waiting, decided to swim out to sea trusting that one of the smaller boats would take him on, which proved successful. However this boat was blown up, and he was rescued for the second time by a bigger vessel, which brought him back to England.

What a character – He will be sadly missed and our thoughts go to Janet his wife, sons, daughter and grandchildren.

Hazel and Michael Blackburn

Reading Beekeepers Honey Show at The Swallowfield Show

Sunday 25th & Monday 26th August 2013.

Our honey show is held in the produce tent and the schedule is attached in Appendix 1. It can also be obtained with full details at www.swallowfieldshow.co.uk.

Entries should be submitted by Wednesday 21st August and staged on Saturday 24th afternoon before 9-00 PM or latest by 9.30AM Sunday 25th.

The honey show secretary is available to help you jondavey.foodnet@virgin.net Tel 0118 975 0734. Cash prices for top three in each class. Go-on have a go! Open to all .



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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/

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.

NBU Advice for Obtaining Bees:

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

Your Regional Bee Inspectors are:

Southern Region: Nigel Semmence at: nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk,

The main website is: <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/public/Contacts/contacts.cfm>
National Bee Unit, Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton, York YO41 1 LZ, tel: 01 904 462 510, email: <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk> .

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

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

Contributions, including emails, to arrive with the Editor by the 20th of the month for publication by the 7th of the following month. Contributions received after this 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.

Appendix 1: Schedule for Reading Honey Show.

SECTION 'P' HONEY

Judge – Mrs M Johnson

IMPORTANT NOTE: JUDGING TO START AT 9.30am

All items shown to be produced by exhibitor except for 10, 11 & 12 where non home produced honey may be used. Open to all who wish to enter.

- H1) 2 x 1 lb jars of light Honey
- H2) 2 x 1 lb jars of medium or dark Honey
- H3) 2 x 1 lb jars of Naturally Granulated or Soft Set Honey
- H4) 2 x 1 lb jars of Honey, labelled for sale. (Honey may be any colour, clear, granulated or soft set. All honey to be labelled with exhibitors own labels including name)
- H5) Novice class. A 1 lb jar of Honey, any type, any colour
- H6) 5 x 1oz blocks of beeswax
- H7) A pair of beeswax candles, produced by any method except 'rolling', uncoloured, one candle to be lit by judge
- H8) 2 x 1 lb jars of chunk honey
- H9) 1 plastic white tub of cut comb honey minimum 6oz
- H10) Glamorgan Honey Fruit Cake
Ingredients: 225g Self raising flour, ½ tsp. baking powder, pinch of salt, 125g butter, 225g honey, 2 eggs, 125g sultanas, 125g raisins, 50g candied peel, 50g candied cherries, ½ tsp. freshly ground nutmeg, milk as required.
Method: Preheat oven to 175°C, gas mark 4, grease & line a 20cm round cake tin. Cream the butter and honey together. Add the eggs alternately with the flour, salt, baking powder and nutmeg. Add the dried fruits, peel and cherries, beat lightly to ensure ingredients bind well together. If the mixture is too stiff add a little milk. Pour into the prepared cake tin and bake for 1¼ - 1½ hours until well risen and evenly browned. Remove from tin and cool on a wire rack. Display on a plate or board, protected with clear film.
- H11) Honey Biscuits
Ingredients - 4oz butter, 6oz plain flour, large tablespoon of clear honey, tablespoon of milk, 3oz white granulated sugar, tsp bicarbonate of soda.
Method:- Warm honey and milk together and allow to cool, add bicarbonate of soda and beat with a fork until frothy, cream the butter and sugar, add the frothy mixture and then the sieved flour. Roll into small balls about 4cms in diameter and arrange on a greased baking tray, allow space for spreading while cooking, press lightly with a fork. Bake at 180°C, gas mark 4, in a preheated oven for about 10 minutes until golden. Leave to cool until cold. Display on a plate or board protected with clear film.
- H12) Honey, ginger, grapefruit Marmalade
Ingredients- 4 large yellow grapefruit, 200g honey, 300g preserving sugar, 40g grated fresh ginger.
Method – Grate zest of 1 grapefruit and blanch in boiling water for 3 minutes, put in bowl of cold water and set aside. Remove rind from the grapefruit by quartering and pressing flesh from peel with thumbs, i.e. without losing juice, discard peels. In a

preserving pan or heavy saucepan mix together honey and sugar then heat gently without stirring until sugar is dissolved. Add drained zest and ginger, then break-up fruit quarters over the pan and add. Simmer gently for about 2 - 2½ hours, stir occasionally making sure sugar is not burning, mixture should thicken and set with a cold plate test. Pour into hot sterilized jars. Lid while hot. Display 1 x 1lb jar

H13) 'BEE FODDER' a display in a small vase or oasis of not less than 5 types of flowering plant (wild and cultivated) which are a favoured source of nectar or pollen for foraging bees. Species displayed to be listed by common name on a card with the exhibit.

Judges will mark on assortment, quality and decorative effect.

The list below is for guidance (late summer/early autumn flowering)

Blackberry	Heathers (Wild ericas and	Mustard
Berberis	caluna only)	Oak
Balsam	Ivy	Oilseed rape
Birds foot trefoil	Knapweed	Poppy (field)
Broom	Loosestrife	Runner bean
Clover (white)	Lucerne	Sea lavender
Comfrey	Lavatera	Thistle
Dandelion	Lavender	Thyme
Dewberry	Mahonia	Viper's bugloss
Eucalyptus	Marjoram	Veronica
Field bean	Melilot (sweet clover)	White Bryony
Gorse	Michaelmas daisy	Wild strawberry
	Mint	

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