

High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

Chairman: John Crick 01494521557

President: Ron White 01494712640

Secretary: Christine Hazell 01494 531599 chazecamber@yahoo.co.uk

Treasurer: Edward West 01494520874

Swarm Officer: Stewart Thorburn 01494510327

Newsletter - January 2006

Diary

Forthcoming Events

- | | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| 15th January | - | Display Material Workshop |
| 27th January | - | Swarm Prevention and Control - Margaret Thomas |
| 4th February | - | Woodworking Day |
| 15th February | - | 'Introduction to Beekeeping' course starts |
| 4th March | - | Bucks County BKA Seminar |

Sunday Jan 15th between 10.0am and 4.0pm

Help and ideas needed at our workshop making educational display materials for shows and the school visiting team. Please bring sandwiches, drinks provided.

Upstairs at the Environment centre.

Are there any knitters who could make some more larvae for the model comb in their own time? (We have some larvae but need more.)

More information from Sylvia 01494 522082 or email sylvia.chamberlin@zen.co.uk

27th January Meeting

PLEASE NOTE: There will be a 'mini AGM' at 7.30. PROMPT followed by at 7.45 - Margaret Thomas 'Swarm Prevention and Control'

4th February Woodworking Day

A total of 20 members have signed up for the woodworking day at Holmer Green School. Members have opted to make/start making various items however there will be an emphasis on varroa floorboards. If any other members now wish to join in on the day, please contact me - we can still squeeze in a few more. I will be sending information direct to all who've signed up.

Christine

Saturday 4th March 2006 10.0am to 4.0pm

BUCKS COUNTY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL SEMINAR

Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Road, Wendover

10.00 Meet for coffee and registration

10.30 Welcome

Ralph Andrew Memorial Lecture

10.40 **Honey Quality Issues** Peter Martin. Chairman of the Honey International Packers Association.

11.40 Short Break

11.50 Three inspiring young beekeepers.

'Dancing with bees' Gill Sentinella talks about making her film.

Our first two years in beekeeping

Chad Cryer and Ceri Collingborne from Dorset

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

May I wish you all a very Happy New Year and as you sit by the fireside and contemplate the new beekeeping year I hope that you will concentrate your thought on the bumper harvest that you will be expecting in 2006. Don't forget to order sufficient jars so that you are fully prepared.

For those of you who are thinking of purchasing new equipment, remember that the Thornes January Sale is an opportunity to purchase 'seconds' at reduced prices. Either refer to the Thornes web site or contact our local stockist John Parslow on 01844 344948.

I would remind you that the new 'Introduction to Beekeeping' course starts on Weds 15th February. If you know of anyone who might be interested, please let me have the details and I will send on particulars.

John Crick

1.00 **Ploughman's lunch** with time to chat.

Sales of New and Second hand equipment,

Buy your Christmas gifts

Meet Ceri Collingborne the World Honey Queen

Gill Sentinella's short film - Dancing with bees

And more

2.15. **A Rational Approach to queen breeding in the UK**

Phillip Denwood. Editor of 'Bee hnpovement' the B1BBA magazine.

3.15 Forum: A time for questions and discussion with our speakers.

4.00. Closing remarks

We extend a welcome to all who are interested in beekeeping.

Cost:- £10 including Ploughman's lunch, coffee etc.

Pay on the door but please book beforehand.

Telephone Sylvia Chamberlin on 01494 522082, or email sylvia.chamberlin@zen.co.uk A map is available on request.

Recent Event Reports

HWBKA - Meeting 28th October 2005

Current Bee Research at Rothamsted Research.

Talk by Norman Carreck.

Norman Carreck had originally been booked to give this talk in the Spring of 2006; but it was brought forward at a couple of days notice when the booked speaker (Bill Turnbull) had to back out due to an unforeseen TV rehearsal.

Despite the short notice, Norman gave us an excellent talk and vividly described several areas of research. He worked from a PowerPoint presentation; and used many photos and graphs to illustrate his themes. We had a very good turnout of members attending the talk. A significant proportion of these were relatively new beekeepers. All seemed very engaged, interested and impressed with the range of activities described.

Norman is the Apiculturist in the Plant and Invertebrate Ecology (PIE) group at Rothamsted Research. He has a wide ranging knowledge of bees and is one of the small number of bee scientists in the UK. His job involves managing colonies so that bees are available as needed bees for experimental work into pollination Ecology, and Bee Diseases. Norman has visited HWBKA to give talks on several previous occasions.

The Talk started with a brief general introduction to Rothamsted. It is the oldest agricultural research laboratory in the world, being established in 1843. The organisation is based at Harpenden in Hertfordshire, where the estate and family Manor House of John Bennet Lawes became the base for agricultural research. Lawes began to question what made plants grow; and by following research ideas that interested him began to work up early artificial fertilisers. At that time it was known that ground up bones could be a good fertiliser in some places, but not in others. Lawes hit on the idea of treating the bones with acid, and because of the soluble phosphate s that were formed, this made them much more generally useful as a fertiliser. A Fertiliser Factory was established to exploit these findings; and the profits of the fertiliser factory were used to help pay for private agricultural research. Lawes became the 'ideas man' and his assistant, James Henry Gilbert was a methodical scientist. The agricultural crop research work they started has continued to this day; with one experiment on fertiliser use continuing unchanged since that time.

Rothamsted Research is now a major world centre for Crop research with work being carried out in a large modern Laboratory block, and out in the fields of a large estate. Other local landowners also allow some research work on nearby farms. Funding is provided from the Agricultural Research Council, BBSRC, DEFRA and Agricultural Levy Boards. DEFRA commissions Bee research, and Rothamsted then plans out how to do the work.

By 1922 it was realised that bees and pollination could be vital factors in crop productivity and so Bee Research was started, using staff recruited from Cambridge University. Their work on bees has been continuous since 1923 and current expertise is founded on pioneering work by a number of eminent Rothamsted bee scientists, such as John Free, Colin Butler and Brenda Ball. They have carried out pioneering work on Bee diseases, achieving pollination effectiveness and bee and other insect pheromones. The Pollination Ecology Group investigates the interaction between bees, crops and the agricultural environment. Research work often involves cooperative work with University specialists elsewhere in the UK. Bumblebees are studied, as well as honeybees.

Facilities for work with Bees

Norman explained the need for simplification in bee hives used for research purposes. They use one box and frame size and no queen excluders. They need to be able to work with bees at any time of year, so have a special Bee Flight Room for pollination and disease epidemiology. They have devised an 'artificial flower' machine for use in this flight room. It enables them to check and measure foraging activities in the flight room. This dispenses sugar solution to foragers. In fieldwork they use large cages out in the crop area they are studying. They also have an Observation Hive Room for following activities within the hive. They often use bee and bumblebee colonies positioned in spaced arrays out in the fields, and frequently use colour marking to see which colonies are working where.

Pollination and Bee Forage experiments

They use so-called Isogenic clover strains with identifiably different leaf marks to study 'gene-flow' due to pollination. These strains were developed by a plant breeding research establishment in Wales. By growing plants from the seed produced in experiments then using DNA checks they can study questions such as how far does the pollen go? Thus research background from many years experimental work has recently been put to wide use in understanding the agronomic implications of GM crops. In such gene-flow studies they use bees in enclosed cages, or follow marked bees out in the field. Flowers can be covered in bags until ready for use, then allowed to be pollinated, and then covered again to prevent pollination.

They have also worked on 'organic' type techniques to allow non-chemical control of pests. Thus Pollen beetles, which are often seen in the spring on yellow washing, live deep in the flowers and can be difficult to get at and control. They have found it is possible to use an outer ring of a sacrificial crop, such as Turnip rape as a way of protecting a more valuable crop further into the field. This is called a Trap Crop. Pest control by using entomological pathogenic fungi. has also been studied. Such work involves devising ways of obtaining controlled dispensing of fungal spores.

Bee Conservation work

Due to modern agricultural methods, with huge areas under crops, minimal need for hedgerows and situations of enormous booms of nectar, followed by prolonged near total absence of suitable bee forage; present day farming has had significant effects on the viability of insect pollinators. Several of our bumblebee species are either endangered, scarce or in trouble. Rothamsted have carried out projects to investigate the possibility of growing special mixtures of flowering annual plant species, to provide nectar sources to cover the gaps in field crop availability. Low value field areas such as Headlands and some versions of set-aside could be used for such planting.

The so-called Tubingen Mixture of 12 different plant species was devised for such purposes in Germany, and there was shown to be very effective. However, when tried in the UK they found that the flowering periods coincided with those of the major UK arable flowering crops, so not covering the inter-crop gaps. They have worked up a suitable mix for UK use. This consists of Phacelia, Borage, Cornflower, Buckwheat, Mallow. All are annuals. The mix is designed to give a continuum of available nectar and pollen.

EU Farming Subsidies have now gone and the Scheme is getting underway. There are no longer production subsidies for any crop. It is thought that most farmers will sign up for the Entry Level version of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This will oblige them to provide facilities for wildlife. These can be

known as 'beetle banks' etc. They will have options on planting Pollen and Nectar mixture, or Grass and Wildflower mixture with designed to give successional flowering for different types of insects. Planting at the rate of 0.5 hectares per 10 hectares of land. These will act as wildlife refuges and food provision areas. It is hoped that Non-Rotational set-aside will predominate over Rotational Set-aside, since this will give more options of perennial plants.

'The Big Bee Project'

Norman has used this Project Name too describe experiments outlined about a year or so ago in BBKA News. In conjunction with ecology scientists at Southampton University and Geographers at Newcastle University, Rothamsted are carrying out research work that will allow them to monitor the presence and relative population of two different types of bumblebee in different types of landscape. The bees have been chosen as representative of tongue length groups. They aim to find the landscape and forage conditions that allow the bees to thrive. The bees are:-*Bombus lapidarius* – medium length tongue, and *Bombus pascuorum* – long tongue. These are being used as representing bee types dependent on very different types of flower. (The factors include depth of flower and type of flower pollination mechanisms.)

Experimental work is being carried out at several widely different locations in the UK. In each location the insect environment of the landscape is being checked and plotted on maps. They map every hedgerow, the grassland, the woodland present etc. in 1km radius of the research plots. Satellite images are then used to allow the data to be scaled up over much larger zones (hundreds of square kilometres).

Once the landscape data has been assessed and the level of current bumblebee species and available forage that are present have been logged, the scientists will be monitoring the effect of planting some additional forage. The effect of having artificial plots of forage of four sizes is being checked. They will be monitoring the effect of available forage on colony size and reproductive success. The plots will be of 0.0, 0.25, 0.50, and 1.00 hectare areas. In the southeast of England the locations being studied are at Rothamsted, at Woburn in Bedfordshire and near Marlow in Bucks. The new forage areas will be separated by 1.0km to obviate bees moving between and exploiting more than one plot.

To monitor the success of the bees in each locality they will collect 60 bees of each species, foraging in the seeded areas. They will then remove the foot from one middle leg and use it for DNA analysis. The bee, which will not be harmed will then be released to continue foraging. The results will then be examined to see how many bees are sisters, and how many are not. From this data you can calculate how many separate bee colonies are present.

The experiments are planned to continue for several years. Once they have established the baseline effects, they hope to check the effect of artificially augmenting the bee population by introducing extra colonies.

It is hoped that data generated by the project can be used as the basis for 'mathematical modelling' experiments, to allow calculation of bee populations in terms of geographical areas. This is where the satellite photos and geographers come in!

Harmonic Radar

Rothamsted Research has worked for some years with Radar research specialists from the group known as Malvern Radar.

Special study techniques have been worked up to allow the foraging activities of flying insects to be observed. Conventional Radar has been used for tracking insects, such as Locust Swarms, travelling at height. But when you try to use conventional radar to track insects flying close to the ground the insect the radar 'echo' from the insect gets lost in a multitude of reflections from the ground. This problem can be largely overcome by using what is called Harmonic Radar. For this you use a radar beam from a powerful source dish to sweep over the landscape, and then use a second larger dish to seek out radar reflections from special devices called Transponders, which can be glued onto an insect's thorax. Transponders are very light, so do not cause the bee to be over-loaded, but may cause some hindrance of access into flowers. They absorb the energy of the source illumination, and then re-emit it at a frequency which is half the wavelength of the original beam. This is called 'a harmonic' of the original wavelength. In this way you can remove the effects of ground clutter except that the signal is lost if the bee flies behind a hedge. You measure the distance and direction of the insect's flight. (Distance + Direction are combined to give what are called Vectors.)

Using Harmonic Radar you can watch insects flying to a feeder station and then start searching; and so work out their food searching strategy. The observed activities can then be compared with a range of mathematical model strategy. To carry out some experiments you need a very large flat space – such as can be found at some Airfields. RAF Whyton has been used. The area is so big that experiments involving a bee flight time of some 12 minutes can be carried out. Observations show that bees fly an extremely good straight line, and can make allowance for the 'drifting' effect of cross winds. If you establish a feeding station, allow the bees to become familiar with it; and then move it: you can then watch their search strategy as they attempt to re-find the feeder.

Bee Pathology Research

Early research on the Foul Broods was carried out at Rothamsted. In the 1970s they began to look at the effects of *Varroa* on bee colonies located elsewhere in Europe. This research led to the realisation that colony damage was not equivalent to the number of mites present in a colony; and that the mites could act as infection spreaders (vectors) of virus diseases. So that the virus was present as a secondary infection.

A range of different virus diseases of honeybees were then identified. This was done by a combination of electron microscopy to see the size and shape of the virus particles, and relating this to the clinical symptoms of the infection. Later identification by anti-serums was developed. Acute Paralysis Virus (APV) was found to cause rapid colony collapse. Another virus spread by *varroa* is Deformed Wing Virus (DWV). This virus is now almost universally present in UK hives; so that 95% of *varroa* mites carry (and so spread) Deformed Wing Virus. By deliberately infecting otherwise 'clean bees' then watching their activities in flight cages, they have been able to work how old the bees are when they die. The relative virulence of the various viruses can be compared. Bees infected with lower levels of virus have a markedly shorter life. All bees badly infected with Deformed Wing Virus die within 48 hours. Bees infected as adults have a normal life, but act as a reservoir of infection for new mites. The Old Bee / New Bee balance within a hive can easily be tipped by Deformed Wing Virus. The work has led to the conclusion that as few as 1000 mites within a bee colony will cause it to have colony strength and health problems; and be liable to rapid demise

Research links have been established with bee scientists in New Zealand; where a very virulent disease called Kashmir Bee

Virus (KBV) can be found. Research has shown that after artificial infection with KBV, that infection greatly outlasts the bees that were infected. This is called virus persistence. KBV was not thought to be present in the UK, but last year it was detected in bee samples from two different places in England (in the NW, and the NE).

Varroa Control by means of Fungi.

Some years ago Rothamsted Research started a project to investigate the possibility of using pathogenic fungi to control Varroa mites. A range of fungi were first tested for mite pathogenicity. Successful isolates were then screened for pathogenicity to honeybees. Then they had to work up methodology for applying fungal spores to dose bee colonies. Rothamsted scientists have given lectures on this topic on several occasions: one of them being by Brenda Ball at HWBKA in January 2002. The current status of the work is that they know fungal control of Varroa mites can be achieved, and that the fungal organism chosen will not be harmful to honeybees. This project is now scheduled to end at Rothamsted in early February 2006, but further development work is to be carried out at Warwick Horticultural Research Institute. BBKA has announced that this work will be given some financial input from its BDI funds. Before a product can be launched it must be Registered to allow it to be used in the marketplace.

Members might like to know that it is likely that there will be an Open Day at Rothamsted in the autumn of 2006.

During questions it became apparent that the level of Bee Research at Rothamsted is under threat of reduction by a 10% funding cut. Funding tends to run on the basis of Three Year Long projects. As a consequence there can be difficulties with maintaining long term research following a particular theme. Changes in accounting practices are causing major problems in the design of research work. It may only cost £12,000 per annum to employ a research student, but this gets charged as £88,000 for project costing.

At the time he spoke to us, Norman was unsure if his role would continue. Brenda Ball, their Virus expert is taking early retirement and Bee Disease research will cease there. If we want to help minimise the cuts by providing political pressure for the support of Bee Research, it would be helpful to stick to specific

examples. For example by writing to DEFRA, pointing out that the increasing resistance of Varroa Mites to chemical control is a significant problem. Since the few chemicals registered have now begun to stop working. R&D work on Fungal Control for Varroa would allow mite levels to be controlled without chemicals, so would not be subject to the development of resistance; and must be treated as a priority case.

Many thanks to Norman for providing us with an excellent talk about the wide range of bee research activities at Rothamsted.

Clive Hill

13th November - Hughenden Apiary Clear-up Day

I arrived at the Hughenden Apiary on a cold drizzly morning with one of my daughters and her friend ready to flex our muscles and assist Bob with hedge/grass/scrub cutting. The walk from the car park to the apiary was down an overgrown path which we all squeezed through with brambles and hedge catching on clothing.

Bob sealed up the hives, and Sarah, Michelle and myself set to with loppers on seedlings/ bramble/ hanging branches. Unfortunately, Bob got me into hot water early on when he said to lop down a small tree next to a hive - I was going with gusto when Ron asked me what on earth I was doing - it was a maple he'd wanted to keep - now lopsided and with the top cut off - Ooops. Bo, Ed, Lance and Scott then turned up with some 'boys toys' and started making swift and efficient work with petrol hedge trimmers and strimmers. We women weren't to be outdone though and Michelle showed her prowess with a sythe and deftly dealt with a large patch of bramble.

The sun came out and some of the bees found escape routes however they were decidedly good natured about all the noise and activity and just went about their business.

In just over an hour the brambles and overgrown hedges/grass were cut back leaving the paths and hives clear. The walk back to the carpark was bramble free and some of us then took a lovely walk around the estate footpaths and over towards Downley.

Bob sends his thanks to all those who helped.

The next winter work party for the Association will be on Sunday January 15th making items for the school visiting programme.

Christine

BDI SPONSORS WORK TO BEAT VARROA

BDI are pleased to announce that it has agreed to provide financial support for the next three years to the work being carried out at Rothamsted Research in conjunction with Warwick Horticulture Research International. This is to help develop the work on the use of an entomopathogenic fungus as a biological control agent for Varroa Destructor.

BDI hopes that Defra and other potential funders will see our support as demonstrating that beekeepers are prepared to contribute towards this important work. It would be a great achievement if eventually this work leads to the destruction of varroa rather than varroa destroying our bees.

The Directors of BDI are working towards achieving Bdi's objectives to improve Education, Research, Bee Health and provide a compensation scheme. These were set out when the scheme was first set up by the beekeeping associations in the 1930s.

This agreement fits very comfortably with our objectives to improve bee health and we look forward to seeing the work come to fruition.

Bernard Diaper BDI President

YOU HAVE A SAY IN BBKA DECISIONS

through the Annual Delegates Meeting

This will take place on 14th January at the National Beekeeping Centre.

There will be full reports on the work of the executive committee etc. The Bucks delegate at this meeting is John Catton (Chalfont) the new Chairman of Bucks County BKA and he is empowered to vote on our behalf in the election of new members of the executive and on the propositions made by the counties. You will find these propositions in your December BBKA news. Please read them and if you have any strong feelings please let me or your representatives know about them before Jan 6th when the County executive committee meet, and make their recommendations as to how John should vote.

The proposed new constitution is available in the members area of the BBKA website and I do have more information about the propositions which I can send by e-mail.

Opinions and questions to the Bucks County BKA secretary
*Sylvia Chamberlin 01494 522082 or
email:sylvia.chamberlin@zen.co.uk*

That Was The Year That Was

Although reality TV shows such as Wife Swap, Big Brother and The X Factor fill me with dread (they thrust people from obscurity to, well, obscurity in a matter of days, weeks or, in the most painful of cases, months), I do believe that TV is an important asset for getting the beekeeping message 'out there'. David Attenborough brought the fascination of life in miniature to our screens in the excellent series 'Life in the Undergrowth' and other celebrities such as Bill Turnbull and Hugh Fernley-Whitingshall brought bees to the forefront with their public acclamations of beekeeping. Even Jamie Oliver held up some buzzing frames over a hive in one of his adverts for that well-known supermarket. Long may this continue, and build up our already increasing membership.

The essay competition title at the National Honey Show (NHS) 2005 was 'A Strategy to Increase the Number of Beekeepers' and it was won by Mr B Ripley. His essay can be read on the NHS web site for those of you who are electronically minded <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/results.shtml>. It holds some excellent examples of ideas that he actually pursued with his club – and they worked (if you're interested and have nothing better to do, mine came fourth and is also on the web site). The honey classes at the NHS saw fewer entries from High Wycombe and more wins from a newly enthused handful of entrants from our neighbouring Chalfonts Beekeepers Society. Come on Wycombe – if these newcomers can do it, so can we - let's get our cups back in 2006!

Other events in 2005 included Stoneleigh in the Spring with an interesting address from the BBKA president Glyn Davies about young people taking up beekeeping – he asked how to attract them and, more importantly, how to keep them. And the answers? Unfortunately Glyn didn't supply them, but the NHS essay has some good suggestions.

Summer 2005 saw the Rye Park once again became home to the annual Wycombe Show. It has changed much since being taken over by the Bucks Free Press and, in my humble opinion, has not benefited from it. Gone are the intriguing displays of farm animals and pets, of cake stalls, and open air stalls of people demonstrating their strange and unusual crafts (sometimes you just had to ask 'Why ...?'). They have been replaced instead with fast food fry-ups, bouncy castles and fair ground rides – a combination that does little to settle my stomach. I must admit, however that I did enjoy the (small) craft tent and a chance to try archery (I wasn't very good). We beekeepers were conspicuous by our absence and I do think that a stall selling honey and other edibles such as honey cakes would go down very well.

A major event on the worldwide beekeeping calendar, Apimondia took place just over the water in Dublin and saw the very first crowning of a World Honey Queen. Young ladies from around the world were tested on their bee knowledge and each spoke to an audience on the subject of beekeeping. Much to some gentlemen beekeepers' disappointment the ladies were not forced to parade in swimwear and offer talks on how they would achieve World Peace (although some did manage to allude to it in their talks). At the end of the conference our very own Miss England Ceri Collingborne became the first World Honey Queen. Well done Ceri.

One of Ceri's jobs was to publicise the already much publicised issue of Government cuts to bee health. The petitions and letters that have bombarded politicians this year must have worked as they recently announced that proposed cuts would not take place. At least not yet. For those of us who have not been involved in these petitions and claim to have no interest in politics, beware – politics takes a strong and continued interest in you.

Varroa is endemic in the UK and in 2005 CSL brought out an updated Managing Varroa leaflet. Clearly laid out and detailed it is a must for all beekeepers. Small hive beetle looks like the new threat on the horizon as our climate changes and the pests march ever northwards. Spring was cold and dry, then warm and wet. At first the plants were too cold to produce nectar, then the bees chose not to fly in the rain. A poor start to the year. Some clever member needs to invent miniature umbrellas and warm winter woollies for the little ladies. Or perhaps we should all move to a warmer climate. Having said that, Autumn was remarkably mild. My bees were our foraging on something in the middle of December and Autumn was left waiting up until Winter crept in late without so much as an apology. With such abundant late forage our queens will have laid for longer and produced bigger clusters going into the winter. It will be prudent for us to check this large cluster has sufficient stores early in the year, and to monitor them for early swarming. As for the weather for 2006 your guess is as good as mine. All I can say for sure is that we are bound to have some.

That was the year that was and here we are one year on, one year older and hopefully somewhat wiser. Successful at beekeeping or otherwise, it would be good to think that we have all learnt something new. High Wycombe beekeepers have seen new faces join the club and members taking exams to expand their knowledge. Add to that several new committee members and 2006 promises to be a very exciting year.

Anna Chambers

Equipment wanted for Kenyan Beekeepers

I am travelling to visit a beekeeper in Kenya later this month. I leave on 28th January to visit Rev Peter Otengo who I met at Apimondia last summer. In his village he has founded a self-help group so that people in the village are able to earn money for their families. Part of this is teaching them beekeeping and the production of hive products for sale. I would like to take old bee suits or other lightweight and not too valuable items with me. If you have any spare please call me and I will arrange to collect them from you.

Thank you.

Anna 01494 44 28 62

Trip to Mexico

Bees Abroad have released details of their next holiday trip to visit

'The Bees and Culture of the Maya'

in Yucatan, Mexico. Margaret and I were in the party which went off in January 2005 and I can thoroughly recommend it. You will hear more about it at our February meeting but you will need to make a booking now if you wish to go on 6-19 April 2006.

Contact me for preliminary details or Claire Waring for the brochure. Claire is on Tel: 01933 650297 or claire@backlane.demon.co.uk

John Crick

Seasonal Tips and Reminders. January 2006

Let me start by wishing readers a Happy New Year. May your beekeeping be enjoyable and productive in 2006.

In the dead of winter you don't expect bees to be very active, but some flight activity will be seen on mild days in the mid-day sunshine. Hives facing into the sun will fly the strongest and such winter flights will occur at air temperatures of 8 degrees C (46F) or above. At the end of a cold spell, when the bees haven't been out for a few days, you'll see them flying slowly, and often backwards, as they leave the hive. They then move away from it with increasing arcs, to the left and right. These are re-orientation flights, in which the bee re-learns the point in 3D space where the hive entrance is located.

Flights at this time of year are mainly for "cleansing" but if the ground is warm, bees will also bring back water. Single walled hives react more quickly to warmer temperatures, and bright sunshine helps. In my hives I have top beespace, and use pieces of clear Perspex as Crownboards. (There's a sheet of expanded polystyrene board directly over the Perspex, to keep the heat in, and minimise condensation.) It's easy to look through the Perspex into the top of the broodnest, so in winter visits, you see the tightness and position of the cluster, it's mobility within the hive, and how dry the hive is - all without disturbing the colony. In early January the clusters tend to be tight and deep - and located towards the front of the brood chamber.

Expect to see crumbs of cappings and the odd dead bee at hive entrances. Piles of dead or crawling bees indicate a problem - Acarine, or a Virus infection. Brown streaks of bee faeces over the hive front indicates dysentery caused by fermenting stores, or a bad attack of Nosema. Be

careful the entrance isn't blocked by accumulated dead bees. This can happen easily in WBCs. If necessary remove the mouseguard, rake the entrance clear with a hive tool, or thin twig and then replace it again. If you do this, expect some angry bees to emerge, to send you packing!

If you need to make adjustments of those awkward distances of a few feet, or yards, to the position of a hive in your apiary; or make a local move of the whole apiary; then this can be done with minimal fuss at this time of year. The bees will re-orientate when next they leave the hive, so you can ignore the 'less than 3 feet, or more than 3 miles' rule. Carry out the move in cold weather, when there has been no flight activity, and when the cold spell is due to continue. Beware the hives will be very heavy, so such operations are best carried out by two people working together. For small moves, take great care to move the hive very gently, so the winter cluster suffers minimal disturbance. If any bumping about might occur, block the hive entrance with a foam insert before you start; since even in the dead of winter an angry scout bee will whiz out to repel you! Remove the entrance block when all have had time settle down again. (Dusk is a good time for this.) Then don't forget to replace the mouseguard afterwards.

Other than that, there's little practical beekeeping to do. Just occasional apiary visits to check the hives are secure, draining to the front - to shed rain and condensation; and have plenty of stores. (Heft them - they should weigh 15 - 25 kg or more.) If the hives are very light, and in desperate circumstances, you can feed with candy, or baker's fondant, directly over the feed hole.

Clive Hill

TELEPHONE SURVEY

At the end of 2005 I undertook a telephone survey and have analysed the findings. These will be discussed by the committee and the findings and any subsequent follow-up/ plans will be published at a later date.

It appears to have been a useful exercise in identifying what members want from their involvement in the Association, what we appear to be doing well and meets members needs, and what issues may need further attention.

Christine

Speakers for the next Winter Programme

In the spring I'll be preparing to book speakers for the the winter 2006/7 programme. I want to canvass members preferences before the list is finalised, so, if you are aware of any good speakers or have preferences for topics and activities, please let me have your ideas. Contact me on 01494 531599/ chazecamber@yahoo.co.uk

Items for publication will be accepted as hard copies (typed, printed or handwritten) as long as they are totally legible. Normally the closing time for material will be 7am on the 1st of the month

Send them (preferably unfolded) to:

Newsletter, 22 Claremont Gardens, Marlow, SL7 1BS.

E-mails (**without attachments**) can be sent to:

hwbka.newsletter@tiscali.co.uk

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