

High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

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Newsletter - January 2008

Diary

Forthcoming Events

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| 25th January | - | Monthly Meeting "Encaustic Art" - June Hughes |
| 29th February | - | Monthly Meeting "Hives Save Lives" - Linda Whitby |
| 1st March | - | Bucks County Seminar |
| 4th March | - | Beginners Course Commences |
| 26th April | - | Woodworking Day |
| 21st-26th July | - | FIBKA Summer Course |

25th January - Encaustic Art - June Hughes

June Hughes, who is a Beeswax specialist, will be giving us a Talk and Demonstration of "Encaustic Art" - which is painting with melted beeswax. It is a very ancient Art Form, and was a technique used by the Ancient Egyptians to paint Mummies. This should be a fascinating evening, and an excellent start to our year's events.

29th February - Hives Save Lives - Linda Whitby

Linda Whitby, of Hives Save Lives - Africa is coming to give us a talk. Their vision is the alleviation of poverty in Africa. To this end they provide practical support in the form of hives, training and equipment, delivered directly to those who need it most.

1st March Bucks County Seminar. I thoroughly recommend this seminar to you. John Catton, the organiser has arranged an international quality range of speakers: and at the cost of £10 for the whole day, including an excellent Ploughman's Lunch it is tremendous value. Please book the event in your Diary. For further information, see the detailed programme in a separate article

HWBKA Beginners Course. This will be led by Clive Winslow. It will be held on Tuesday evenings at The Environment Centre. Dates :March 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th; & April 1st, 8th and 15th. Timed to finish just before Stoneleigh, which is on 19th and link with WoodWorking Day on 26th April.

Woodworking Day This will be on April 26th - just after Stoneleigh, so you can get advice on how to make up your purchases. Watch out for further details in the Newsletter.

FIBKA Summer Course.

For many years now, the Irish have been running an annual Summer Course at Gormanston near Dublin. This year it runs from 21st-26th July. The cost for course, accommodation and food is only 335 euros. Over the last year or two, there have been 'rave reviews' about the event in Beecraft and other Beekeeping Journals. Shelia Borwick one of our members has been recently. This year's Guest Lecturer is Dr Susan Cobey, the US Bee Breeding expert. If you would like to know more, give me a ring.

Clive Hill

Chairman's Chat

First, may I wish you all a very Happy New Year and a successful beekeeping season to come. Let's hope we'll all have a bumper harvest in 2008. This is the first newsletter since the beginning of November, so I have quite a number of items to mention.

The November Meeting. This was a rather special event. We started with the Bucks County BKA AGM, led by the President, our own John Crick. Highlights: Membership is up: Beulah Cullen replaced Richard Simpson as Secretary: John Catton has organized an excellent line-up of speakers for the coming Bucks Seminar on 1st March 2008. The AGM was followed by a fascinating slide show and talk about a Commercial Beekeepers Year, by Ged Marshall. Ged runs a Bee Farm based at Steeple Claydon in North Bucks. It is migratory beekeeping, with each hive being moved some 7 times a year. He aims each year to produce 10 tonnes of honey and 500 queens, a good proportion of which he sells. His beekeeping is based on National Deep brood chambers. He aims to control the genetics of his bees by replacing queens. It was a very lively evening shared with visitors from Chalfont BKS, North Bucks and also from Mid Bucks. Our thanks to Christine, who organized an excellent "Finger Buffet" and other refreshments: all of which were both well received and delicious. It was gratifying to see, hear and take part in the strong current of "getting to know other beekeepers" side of the evening.

The "Christmas Cracker" Clive Winslow, our Vice-Chairman, his wife Karen, and others organized a delightful "social evening" for us on December 14th. This new event in our calendar was well attended by a good number of members, partners and some offspring. Clive had organized a quiz, based on questions and objects; a Spot the Beekeepers Child' photo display; etc, which was won by Beulah Cullen. Vivienne Brown had some honey sampling and ranking for us to try; a Carob honey from Malta was judged best; and Bob Hunter had some 'guess which ones are honey' sample for us to decide. We also had a Collection for a Bees Abroad Appeal for cash to support a group of subsistence beekeepers in Malawi; and raised £37 which has now been sent on to them. All this, the good company, plenty of

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chatter and some delicious food; made for an excellent evening. Our thanks to Clive, Karen and the others for their hard work.

Oxalic acid Varroa Treatment Demonstration. Ian Homer has kindly offered to demonstrate the use of Oxalic Acid as an emergency Varroa treatment for us. This will be on Sunday 17th February 2008. 2:00 pm at the Association's Marlow Apiary. Ian regards this treatment as a "last ditch tool" to be used when everything else has failed: but a vital tool in the beekeeper's IPM array of Varroa control techniques.

BBKA Basic Course Tutorials We will be holding tutorial sessions designed to prepare candidates for the BBKA "Basic" examination. These are to be run by Phil Wiggins, a former Chairman and Past-President of HWBKA. We are inviting members of other local BKAs to join in the classes. This is designed to be follow on education for (probably newish) beekeepers, who have already done a Beginners course and have at least one full year's practical experience: or who have significantly longer practical beekeeping experience. Please see Phil Wiggins' separate article elsewhere in the newsletter and contact Phil quickly. Group learning and discussion such as this is great fun; an excellent way of making new friends; and a very effective way of improving your effectiveness as a Beekeeper.

Beekeeping Equipment Supplies.

Thornes is holding another Winter Sale. It starts 9:00 on January 7th. Details can be found on page 16 of the January Beecraft, or on their website www.thorne.co.uk The range of items is limited, but includes second quality frames, utility cedar hive parts, veils, smokers, and some stainless steel extractors. Orders over £100 (except extractors) are carriage free. The sale lasts until 31st January but if these items could interest you, get on line as soon as possible on January 7th, since they will probably quickly sell out.

Our own Local Thornes Agent - John Parslow. John tells me that he keeps in routine stock National Supers, Roofs and Brood

Chambers: aiming to supply some items as Thornes 'Seconds' quality at good prices. He stocks some frames too, as seconds, DN4s (self spacing brood) and SN1 super frames. High quality Beeswax Foundation is also available. John can also get any other items from Thornes catalogue within a few days, if required; and Extractors at 10% discount. If you are interested, give John a ring at Bledlow, on 01 844 344948.

Honey Jar Bulk order. Phil Wiggins has offered to coordinate this joint purchase again for us. The order will be based on prepared packs (boxes) of jars. We expect to order 1 lb BS Squat Honey Jars, and Hexagonal 8oz or 12oz jars, all with gold lacquered lids. The pack size varies with jar size. 72 at 1lb, or 12oz; or 36 for 8oz. Further details will be in the February newsletter, so please get busy working out how many jars you will need.

Should we have another Theatre Trip? Would any of our Members be interested in another BKA group visit to see a play? For some years now we have had an annual visit to Sonning Mill Theatre; but the cost keeps going up. If we were to go to the play there in March, it would cost each couple £70+, but this includes car parking and a good meal. We would like some feedback before we start to organise anything. Please let me know if you would be interested. 01 494 526557. clive_hill@talktalk.net

Winter losses. Our recent speakers Ged Marshall and Pam Hunter said they expect colony losses are likely to be high this winter, due to poor mating of virgin queens in the prolonged dreadful weather last summer. John Parslow says they've already found around 20 colonies that have died out: so if it happens to some of your colonies, you won't be alone.

Do we have your email address? If Santa, or some other source has recently brought you into the world of email, please make sure our Secretary knows your email address, so we can send you newsletters and meeting reminders by this route.

Clive Hill

BUCKS COUNTY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION 12th ANNUAL SEMINAR

Saturday 1st March 2008 - 10:00am to 4:15pm
Wendover Memorial Hall,
Wharf Road, Wendover HP22 6HF

10:00 Meet for coffee and registration

10:30 Welcome by the County Chairman, John Catton

10:40 **Bees and Humans** - Professor Robert Pickard

11:40 **Caring for your back** - Kirsty McIntosh

12:40 **Awards presentation**

1:00 **Ploughman's lunch**

Time, also, to spend visiting the various exhibits and sales stands

2:00 **Bumblebee Ecology & An Introduction to The Bumblebee Conservation Trust** - Dr. Juliet Osborne

3:00 **Pollen analysis** - Dr. Michael Keith-Lucas

4:00 **Closing remarks**

Cost: £10 per person, to include refreshments and Ploughman's lunch

A location map can be sent on request.

Please pay on the door, but **please book beforehand with....**

John Catton tel: 01494 726616

e-mail: richard.catton1@ntlworld.com

THANK YOU

It is not unusual to hear 2007 being described as a bad beekeeping year. As far as I am concerned it has been a disastrous year. In March I had leukaemia strike and affect my spine. As a result I have not been able to do any practical beekeeping for the year. This is when you discover your friends and I found everyone more than willing to help me out. The colonies have been examined, moved, sold, the honey has been extracted, the colony requeened, prepared for winter and the one remaining hive moved into my garden. All of the work carried out by willing helpers and I can only say a very genuine thank you to you all for what you have done for me. I hope that be next spring I will be able to get back into action.

I wish you all a very happy New Year and forward preparation for the bumper year we are expecting in 2008 .

John Crick

Recent Event Reports

30th November - Ged Marshall – A year in the life of a commercial beekeeper

Ged started with bees in the late 80's, and started Oakfield Honey Farm in Steeple Claydon, North Bucks in 1994.

He now runs approximately 300 hives, 200 nucs and rears queens for sale and for replacements.

He aims to produce about 10 tonnes of honey each year. 20% is bottled for shops or local sale, and the remainder is sold in bulk to packers. More now is sold to other beekeepers rather than to supermarkets.

He moves his hives up to 7 times in a year, starting with pollinating spring fruit trees in Kent, Oil Seed Rape and borage wherever he can find them, and ending with the heather in Derbyshire or even further.

Winter pests he has trouble with include woodpeckers, with worse attacks coming after a long cold spell. The holes can lead to further problems as entry points for rats, mice or voles. He doesn't use mouse guards, but has very narrow entrances on all his hives.

At other times, hornets are becoming a growing problem, especially in mating nucs.

If after snow or frost there is a patch melting on top of a hive, this is a good indicator of warmth from brood rearing. Beware of the bees using their stores to do this though. When hefting hives to check for stores, it is easier to gauge when there are similar hives to compare against.

Ged has a philosophy of "making money by not spending it". He does minimal autumn feeding, choosing to feed in the spring if/when needed. He feeds baker's fondant as it is easy, and can be taken off again if it is not eaten. His crown boards have off-set holes so that one should always be above the cluster.

Later spring feeding can be by filling an empty super frame with a slice of fondant and hanging it among drawn empty combs in a super placed on the hive. The bees will eat it, and then fill the frame with wax and honey. He adopts this method when sending his bees to Kent for pollination.

There was a lot of good pollen around in the autumn of 2007 which is very important for early brood rearing. He over-winters his hives facing south, near good sources of spring pollen. He doesn't use artificial pollen anymore.

The Pussy Willow builds up bees fantastically. Experience suggests that any hive that is alive when Ged hears his 1st Cuckoo should survive the summer.

The hives he takes to Kent will have 5 good frames of bees by the end of March. He loads them in the afternoon and drives them to be off-loaded by 7am. He has "good bees" so doesn't need to seal them in.

They spend time amongst plums, cherries, pears and then apples. He does not get much honey from these unless there is oil-seed rape nearby. This is also a good source of pollen for the brood. Oil-seed rape is a major crop for Ged. He aims to get half his honey crop by mid-June, or it will be a miserable year! He has filled 9 supers on a hive from winter OSR followed by spring OSR, but he finds that this only granulates on weak or swarmed hives, otherwise it stays liquid.

He gets most honey from very strong colonies, and he has various methods of swarm control to help deal with them.

With the high numbers of hives he keeps, he checks the strongest hive in the apiary, and if no signs of swarming he assumes the weaker colonies are fine.

He doesn't clip his queens, but gives them plenty of space; leaving an extra super above the open crown board. If it is below, then they will just fill the middle of all the supers. If it is above, then they will move in to it only when they need to.

He also uses bait hives with an empty frame sandwiched between two old "good" drawn frames in the middle. These are placed at the highest point locally. Be quick though or the swarm will fill the empty space!

For honey extraction he uses a flail uncapper over a melting box. He has two 42 frame extractors rather than one larger one, so that if one breaks down he can still carry on.

Honey is filtered in to a milk bulk tank surrounded by a heating element, and then in to buckets.

The line diagram Ged showed us for his system was very clean and simple. He then showed us a photograph of the actual room which looked totally different!

Granulated honey is cut out to melt, leaving a trace of wax for the bees to build on. Ged maintains that he hasn't bought any super foundation for 12 years.

Ged replaces queens according to a number of rules:-

If they have swarmed

If they are a swarm

If they are low yielding or aggressive

If they have been through more than two full seasons.

Queens are generally replaced in August or possibly later when there are no drones. If he has to replace one earlier in the season this can be done either as a straight swap with a queen from the same strain, or, if from a different strain the new queen is introduced via a nuc.

Tim Fountain

**For All Your Beekeeping
Equipment and Supplies**
contact our local Thornes agent

John Parslow
Bailiffs Cottage, Bledlow, Aylesbury
Tel: 01844 344948

Send contributions to

newsletter@hwbka.co.uk

The website can be visited at

www.hwbka.co.uk

If for any reason your copy of the Newsletter doesn't arrive do remember that it can be obtained from the website very soon after publication

usually around the 5th of the month

Seasonal Tips and Reminders January 2008

Ensure hives wind secure & draining forward.

Check hive weight by 'Hefting'.

Look for hive Debris – a sign of recent colony activity.

Check entrances clear & varroa floor debris can drop out.

Any signs of flight activity?

If needed, move hives within the apiary – if non-flying weather will continue.

Happy New Year ! May your beekeeping in 2008 be enjoyable and productive, your supers full, the honey easily extracted and flavoursome; and the bees docile but now lets get back to the real world!

In the dead of winter you don't expect bees to be very active, but some flight activity will be seen on mild days; and particularly

BBKA Basic Assessment Course

The High Wycombe Beekeepers Association will be running the above course during 2008 for all those beekeepers having a minimum of 1 full years beekeeping experience or have attended a practical beekeeping course.

The course is very comprehensive and provides a good insight into all aspects of the craft likely to be experienced by a beekeeper, providing you with a really worthwhile foundation from which to progress in your beekeeping skills.

The course covers the following sections:-

- * Manipulation of the honeybee colony
- * Equipment
- * Natural history of the honeybee
- * Practical beekeeping
- * Disease, poisoning and pests
- * Practical lessons in the Apiary - dates depend on the weather
- * A verbal examination will also be conducted at the apiary site and will take place in May. Although not absolutely mandatory it is strongly encouraged and is essential if you wish to study further by taking the BBKA Modules.

The examination takes approximately 1 hour. 30 minutes will be spent by the Examiner observing your practical work in opening a colony followed by 30 minutes of straightforward questions on the subjects covered in the tutorials.

If you look at page 13 in the last BBKA News, there is an article about the practical work in the apiary giving you a very good idea what is involved. If you have a computer then enter www.bbka.org.uk, click on 'Examinations Board' and scroll down to the 'Basic Assessment' and click. This will give you a detailed copy of the syllabus.

A series of tutorials will be given at the Environment Centre on the following dates and it is important that you attend these. February 5th, 12th, 19th, and 26th. March 4th, 11th, 18th, and 25th. April 1st, and 8th. If for any reason the class feel further revision is necessary, then this will be accommodated.

The Basic Assessment Examination will take place in May - dates dependant on the weather and availability of the Examiner.

If you are interested in enrolling or have any aspects you would like to discuss please advise me on philwiggins@tiscali.co.uk Or telephone me on 01628 482110.

The closing date for entrants is 25th January 2008

Phil Wiggins

in the mid-day sunshine. (My hives were flying on the 28th Dec.) Hives facing into the sun will fly the strongest and such winter flights will occur at air temperatures of 8°C (46°F) 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 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 it 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

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 4th of the month. Send them (preferably unfolded) to:

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

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

newsletter@hwbka.co.uk

Website: www.hwbka.co.uk

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