

High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

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Newsletter - July 2008

Diary

Forthcoming Events

9th July	-	Introducing Bees - Environment Centre
21st-26th July	-	FIBKA Summer Course
17th August	-	BBQ
11th September	-	Colony Collapse Disorder - Dewey Caron
26th September	-	AGM and Competitions

9th July 7:30 pm, Environment Centre

New Beekeepers Progress Tutorial

Plus for the general public 'Introducing Bees, Beekeeping and Honey'

Sunday 17th August 1 - 5pm. BBQ at Bill & Eugenie's Smallholding "Brambles" at Skittle Green, near Bledlow.

Come and dine with excellent company, and see Bill & Eugenie's version of 'The Good Life'. Cost £12 per head, with wine extra. Bill has lined up an excellent menu, which will be prepared by professional 'BBQer'. Please bring a folding chair. Our Secretary, Sheila Borwick is now taking bookings for this event. Directions will be in the August newsletter.

Thursday 11th September

We will be holding a special meeting, when Dewey Caron, visiting from the USA, will be speaking about "Preparing for the Fall" which will allow him to cover the current status of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) research, and also american beekeeping methods. We will also be inviting beekeepers from other local associations to come to this most important meeting, and places will be limited to 100. Please book your place with our secretary.

Friday 26th September AGM + Frame & Honey Competitions

Honey Extractor for Hire

The Association has a small stainless steel tangential honey extractor and a settling tank plus strainer.

It is available for loan to members (£10 rental on collection).

To arrange collection call: Julian Parker 01494 714460

This equipment is more than adequate for anyone with only a few hives. It saves new beekeepers the expense of purchasing a costly extractor in the first couple of seasons: so giving time to get used to extracting before deciding what type of extractor best suits their needs, before making a purchase.

Chairman's Chat

Update: AFB / EFB Bee Disease outbreaks near High Wycombe.

Ian Homer, our NBU Regional Bees Officer has not found any further cases in our area – despite extensive searching. He says that this year he is seeing a significant increase in sporadic EFB cases, and much more Sacbrood than ever before. Please continue to be vigilant and do contact him if you suspect you might have AFB/EFB diseases. You can leave a message on 01 308 482161, or by email at : i.homer@csl.gov.uk Further information is available from : <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/>

Don't forget Ian's **Bee Disease Recognition Day** at Benson on Sunday 13th July. You need to contact Ian if you want to attend. The advert for it was attached last month. Here you will be able to see real disease comb specimens etc under special controlled conditions. Ian has already got 70 people booked, and is hoping to get 80. Having been on this type of course in the past, I can guarantee you a really useful and interesting!

Swarms – our new Mobile No 07527 798659

Bill B-B, our Swarm Officer tells me there have been few swarms so far this year, and some of them have absconded before they could be collected. This level is way below what happened last year. As usual we have had many calls that turned out to be about solitary bees and bumblebees. We are aiming to use the swarms as start-up colonies for our beginners, but at the current rate, there may not even be enough for this, let alone the existing beekeepers who want to add to their colonies. Those who want a swarm must let Bill know. They will go on a list on a 'first come first served' basis.

Beginners Course

The Tutor, Clive Winslow, tells us that nearly all the apiary sessions have now been done: but there are several laggards with whom it has been difficult to make arrangements. Clive intends to hold one further 'Sweep-up' training session to try to reach completion. Several of the beginners have now got their first colonies, although the low number of swarms is hampering this. Priority is being given to those who already have hives awaiting bees. Many thanks to Clive and his team for all the hard work they have put in.

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The next Beginners Group Meeting will be on Wed 9th July, 7:30 at The Environment Centre, when the theme will be a 'Progress & Problems' review session.

BBKA Honeybee Health at Risk Campaign

BBKA's Campaign is going very well. They are already up to the 36,000 signatures mark and HWBKA has around 500 more to add to that. The petition remains open until the Autumn, and will then be handed to the Government. Locally The Environment Centre has been very active in gathering signatures on petition pages. I've taken a look at where these E.C. visitors come, and it is astonishing: all round the HW area and neighbouring counties, with outliers in Northants, Yorks, Hants, Kent, Dorset, Scotland, France, New Zealand and the USA. You can find out more by looking at the BBKA website : <http://www.britishbee.org.uk> BBKA are now asking that we give edge to the campaign by individualized letters to our MPs: and that Associations send in financial contributions to bolster the Research Fund itself. HWBKA's direct contribution will be decided at our Committee Meeting on Monday 7th July. Bucks County BKA has already supplied £100, which will be used in funding the Campaign itself.

Honey Prices Observed

The local going rate for honey in shops is now £3.50 per lb +/- 25p, with direct sales at £3 or above. Your quality product **must** be well presented and **labeled** as required by law. All of this takes time, care and know-how. Please don't under-rate your product.

Marlow Apiary

Phil Wiggins and the team which is managing the apiary have achieved much progress. A little spring honey has been taken and much of this is being shared amongst the team members. Our sincere thanks to Phil and the team for their hard work!

Local Events

Tim Fountain and family (at Seer Green) and Scott Rutland and family (at Holmer Green) have both run highly successful Bee Stands at local events in the last month. There was also extra help from Chalfont BKS; and Sylvia Chamberlin's Candle Rolling know-how and equipment; and bumblebee material from BBCT. There was significant public interest at both events: and widespread understanding and support for the BBKA Bee Re-

search Campaign. Scott got some campaign material from BBKA and in addition was really impressed with the extra support he obtained from the **National Insect Week** organisation. Honey sold out at both events at £3.50 per lb. Our thanks to those involved for all their hard work !

Colony Losses

In an earlier newsletter, I asked for data about colony wintering losses. I've had few reports so far, but from what has come in, it is clear there has been significant variation. Some beekeepers lost no colonies, others had significant losses. We lost 33% (2 ex 6) at the Association's Marlow apiary. There appears to be a local 'bad-spot' in the Hampden / Whiteleaf areas. In one apiary there, 83% of the colonies (5 out of 6) died out.

New Bucks County BKA 'Yearbook'

The much postponed 'Yearbook' is now published – the last edition being 2005/6. We have copies for each member and will be distributing these shortly. It carries a wealth of useful information, including membership lists with addresses for members of the constituent Bucks Associations, North Bucks, Chalfonts and HWBKA. Mid Bucks data will be in the next edition after they have re-joined the BBKA fold in the autumn.

The Environment Centre Bees

Our honeybee observation hive has built up rapidly and is now so strong it is likely to swarm soon. Then we will lose our marked queen, and it will be much more problematic to show the public who is 'Mum'. But also more like the average real hive with an un-marked queen! The bumblebee colony is still going, but has now passed its numbers peak. A useful learning point has been that *Bombus hypnorum* is rather dowdy, and with fairly low bee numbers. When we re-stock the nest in future, I shall try to use a species that has larger numbers, and has obvious colour stripes: since they will then be much more obvious to visitors.

Run honey in a Black Jar and 'Frame of Honey' Competition – 2008

Don't forget to put your marked competition frames into a strong colony, to get it filled. Vivienne Brown, our Honey Judge, has given me outline details of the black jars we will need for the Run Honey. Please keep some of your fresh honey back for this competition. Further details will be in the August Newsletter.

Clive Hill

URGENT : Bulk Purchase of Apiguard

The association is organising a 'BULK BUY' of Apiguard, and we expect to achieve around £16 per box – a significant reduction. But, if we are to do this, it is essential we MOVE SWIFTLY !

The cut-off deadline for orders will be 22:00 on Monday 14th July. Having placed an order, you MUST pay for the product - NO CANCELLATIONS allowed! Payment must be made on collection / delivery, by Cheques made payable to HWBKA, or cash. We will tell you about the collection / handover arrangements when we've received delivery, but expect the Apiguard to be available by the end of July.

If any member wants to join in with this bulk buy: please contact Sheila Borwick, our Secretary, using the email or telephone details at the front of the Newsletter.

NOTES

Varroa mites in the HW area are resistant to pyrethroid acaricides (Apistan & Bayvarol). The Association recommends members to use IPM methodology to control mite levels; then treating when mite levels are high enough to need it. You should use a

Thymol based treatment, because the mites are NOT resistant to this material. 'Apiguard' produced by Vita (Europe) Ltd, is a thymol gel, supplied in small aluminium trays, packed in boxes of 10 trays. A box is sufficient for treating 5 colonies, and the gel if stored properly has a shelf life exceeding 2010. Thornes list price (including VAT) for 'Apiguard' is £22.99 per box.

We will buy from a UK based supplier.

If you are too slow off the mark to be included in the bulk-buy, then Apiguard will still be available via Thornes local agent, John Parslow: but this will be at Thornes list price. John is quite happy that HWBKA should organise it's own bulk buy.

To treat a colony using 'Apiguard' you place an opened tray of the gel in your hive, leave it for 10 days; then repeat the treatment with a second tray. Treatment must start in early August, both to protect the then developing winter bees from Varroa attack; and also to obtain the necessary ambient temperature during the treatment period. To prevent tainting by the strong odour of Thymol that will occur during treatment, your honey crop must be removed first.

Clive Hill

Seasonal Tips and Reminders July 2008

Poor weather Starvation, Summer Nectar Flow Colony Maintenance & Varroa control Back Care - Lifting & Carrying, Storing Supers, Selecting Honey for Extraction, Honey Extraction know-how

The weather over the last few weeks has been rather mixed, but nectar has been coming into my colonies quite well. So, weather permitting, we should all get a decent summer honey crop this year. There was a small 'June Gap' in flower availability, but the bramble came into flower in quite early June, so ending the gap. My bees certainly ate quite a bit of the spring honey; and other beekeepers have told me the same story. If we do get a prolonged wet spell, watch colonies don't starve waiting for the nectar flow to start!

Forage. The brambles (pale grey-green pollen load colour) should be flowering strongly until later this month: and on warm days white clover (brownish-yellow) and lime (pale mid-chrome yellow) will be being worked, and finally the willowherb (darker grey green) too. These done, it's dribs and drabs coming in until the ivy flowers in the autumn. This 'main flow' usually lasts through July, then tails off rapidly in early August.

Colony Size + Varroa. Bee colonies normally anticipate the natural flower availability cycles by making a significant reduction in the size of their brood nest in advance of this time. At peak honey flow there is then a large number of foragers, with not much brood to look after. This is ideal for highly effective honey storing, but in such conditions the Varroa mites now present in our colonies will have a magnified effect on the developing bees - a given number of mites is a higher proportion of a smaller brood nest. So we need to get the Varroicidal treatment into the brood chambers to anticipate the potential damage. **Action. Check the daily mite drop rate: then put the Apiguard varroicidal trays into your bee colonies as soon as practicable in August, once the honey supers have been removed.**

Colony maintenance. But what about other colony maintenance during July? From the mid-month you should be able to cease those regular 7 - 10 day swarm control inspections for queen cells. But keep an eye on the colonies still, particularly with regard to hive space for both the bees, and nectar storage. I've found this year that the bees have tended to store honey in the central combs of a super, and underuse the outer ones: so I've been moving the outer frames inwards, and the inner ones to the outside: and I hope this will give me better filled supers. My own time for removal and extracting honey would nowadays be the first week of August: but this is for colonies at the Flackwell Heath ridge. If your bees are in the Marlow area, you could expect to work to a 2 - 3 weeks earlier timing. A good visual indicator would be when the 'Old Man's Beard' (wild Clematis) starts to flower.

Nowadays I wait about a week after the end of the main summer nectar flow, then check to see if the honey is capped. When all's well, I remove brace comb from between the supers, to make carrying them home in the car much cleaner. Then, to clear the bees, I put the full supers on the hive over a clearer board for 1 - 3 days (at least two Porter escapes, or even better one of the plastic tunnel be-escape traps) and a (nearly?) empty super beneath to take the bees.

Lifting & Carrying. Full supers are extremely heavy, so 'Mind Your Back!' Watch how you *lift* supers, how you *carry* them, and *how far* you carry them. Thornes in Windsor sell 'back support belts' which could buy if your back is a little suspect, or you find lifting difficult. Alternatively, you could work on the 'little & often' principle, by moving individual frames one at a time: but if you opt for this, prepare to get sticky! For further advice swot up by reading the six excellent articles "Bee kind to your back" by Sarah Weaver in Beecraft, March - August 2002.

I try to bring the full supers home as soon as possible after putting on the clearer boards - no more than a couple of days. That way the honey stays warm, and is then much more fluid to extract. The operations of taking the full supers off, and putting wet extracted supers back, should be done **in the evening:** then the colonies have an overnight period to return to an un-excited state of behaviour.

What to do with Supers. There are two contrasting techniques for what to do with the supers after extracting. 1. To put them back on the bees. 2. To store them honey wet. If you choose the former, give *all* the colonies in the apiary wet supers to clean, or a small feed. This puts them all at a similar state of alert and excitement and reduces the risk of robbing. I would then leave the wet supers on the colonies for a few days, then clear them down again, and remove them for storage. BUT, the alternative methodology is to extract the supers and store them honey-wet, without putting them back on the hive. This has the reputation of being a much better method for controlling Wax Moth; and is now my standard routine. It works well; although the honey absorbs moisture and will ferment and drip a bit. In the Bee Shed, a few drips don't cause many problems - and are soon cleaned up by visiting ants. The supers are stacked on Trolley Boards, covered by a plywood square, and then strapped together, so they can easily be moved. It took me years to get to this methodology.

Decapping. Most of the 'old hand' beekeepers will uncapping frames using an uncapping knife, but there are other techniques that might be worth considering. I've been told by lots of people that hot air paint stripping guns are excellent for de-capping combs: the cappings pop-melt instantly: it makes a sticky process much cleaner, and won't harm the honey. However, each time I've tried it, I've found I got hot liquid beeswax blown about a bit, which is very messy. Another technique some people use is a spiky 'uncapping roller', but I have found this significantly slower than an uncapping knife, and very messy. It would probably work well with Heather honey though.

Extracting time. Once home, my supers are stacked on trolley boards which have castors at the corners. It makes moving them around much easier! I have at least one board for full supers and another for extracted ones. Process the supers as soon as you have brought them back from the hives. Even a few degrees temperature drop makes for a large increase in honey viscosity. The colder the thicker it is (more viscous) and so more honey gets left in the combs after extracting. You're supposed only to extract capped honey: but a small proportion of very viscous uncapped honey shouldn't cause problems. Test uncapped honey by shaking the combs. Unripe honey will be low viscosity and fall easily from the comb: Ripe, viscous honey will stay put.

Extracted honey will filter much faster while it's still warm, so do this stage of the operation as soon after extracting as possible. Put the honey into a ripener for a day or two, to allow air bubbles to clear. Rape honey should be put into buckets to granulate, and then re-melted later. In jars rape honey sets very hard, and usually has bad frosting. Honey for sale has to look appetising, as well as taste good. Such customer requirements **must** be met! Finally, don't forget to put some honey to one side for Honey Shows, like the Bucks classes at the National Honey Show: or our own 'Black Jar' class at our AGM evening. The more entries the better! Plenty of members will willingly give some guidance if you're new to this.

That's all for this month. I hope you get a honey crop!*Clive Hill*
NB. These notes try to cover the likely activities for each month. I produce them by modification from the previous year's material and adjust that as necessary to cope with weather and beekeeping changes. Since the subject matter can overlap with the next month, useful back-information is readily available in the Downloads section (then Downloads) of our website: www.hwbka.co.uk