

High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

Chairman: Clive Hill 01494 526557

President: Will Steynor 01494 881205

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

Treasurer: Edward West 01494 520874

Swarm Officer: Stewart Thorburn 07966 956477

Newsletter - June 2007

Diary

Forthcoming Events

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| 11th July | - | New Beekeepers Meeting + Learn of bees & Beekeeping |
| 11th August | - | Visit to John Hamer's Black Horse Apiary at Woking |
| 8th September | - | Ian Homer - Integrated Pest Management for Varroa Day |
| 28th September | - | AGM |
| 6th October | - | Presidents' Supper |

11th July New Beekeepers Meeting + Learn of bees & Beekeeping session

An evening reprise of how the beginners are getting on, problem solving suggestions etc. Although since we have been a bit 'at sixes and sevens' getting their colonies organised, we may need to hold a second of these enjoyable evenings in August. Anyway, on July 11th, at the other end of the room we hope that some 'bee interested' members of the public will come along to join me for an informal group to explore the theme of bees of various types, honey and what is involved with beekeeping. Over the last two years this has proved to be quite popular, and may well be a participant's first move towards becoming a beekeeper.

11th August Visit to John Hamer's Black Horse Apiary

This is John's Open Day. He has excellent displays of equipment, honey processing and all the common hive types. Andrew Gibb, our Speaker in May, who comes from Woking, was full of praise for this event. The outing is being collated by Sylvia Chamberlin, and we will share cars to get there. Watch the newsletter for further details and take a look at the website. www.blackhorseapiaries.org.uk/

8th September Ian Homer - Integrated Pest Management for Varroa Day

Ian is the CSL Bee Inspector for the Southern Region. He will be coaching us the techniques necessary for 'living with' Pyrethroid Resistant Varroa, instead of trying to stamp it out: so an essential day for all our members who are not yet up to speed on the techniques needed. There will be a Pub Lunch. Watch the Newsletter for further details.

28th September AGM

Our AGMs are always quite lively events and in recent years have been getting significantly shorter too! We will need to make small changes to our Constitution this year, to adjust our membership categories with those in the new BBKA Constitution. Watch the Newsletter for further details.

6th October Presidents' Supper

This informal evening (with an After Dinner Speaker not about bees!) will be held at Frieth Village Hall. Watch the Newsletter for further details.

Chairman's Chat

May Meeting

On May 25th, Andrew Gibb from Woking, the present author of the 'For Beginners' articles in Beecraft, gave us an excellent talk on the subject of 'Beekeeping with another Full Time Job'. As Tim Fountain will be telling you elsewhere, it all comes down to being organised in advance and taking a flexible attitude to using equipment. As usual, we extended the evening into a very useful Q&A session. Andrew quizzed us for topics we thought would be useful for him to talk about in his Beecraft Articles. There wasn't just a buzz of conversation during teabreak, but more of a happy roar! Perhaps part of the cause was that one of our past Chairmen, Jim Earley, had been having a clear out of beekeeping odds and ends. He had asked me to get them distributed for a small donation to association funds amongst our members, particularly the newer folk. This was done very successfully, with Ron White another former Chairman carrying out the distribution. A trusty old tinsplate smoker, which had no takers, will be used for our beekeeping display at The Environment Centre.

Bumblebees for The Environment Centre?

Quite a number of our 'Swarm Calls' turn out to be caused by bumblebee problems – a lot of the general public can't tell bumblebees from honeybees. From one of these calls I came to be in possession of a small colony of *Bombus lucorum*, so I brought them along to that meeting on May 25th. Their box has an internal Perspex crownboard, so they are quite secure. As usual, these bees caused quite a bit of interest amongst us beekeepers, most of whom have never before looked inside a bumblebee colony.

The bees were so popular that it decided me to ask The Environment Centre to consider the feasibility of installing such a re-homed colony there. It will be such a good educational tool for us alongside our main honeybee observation hive. I was received as though I was pushing at an open door! I expect a colony will be located at the Library Cupboard end of our Display Bench: but before this we have got to get over the hurdle of getting permission for, and then creating a new entrance

tunnel through the wall for them: and then finding the bees to stock it.

Frame of Honey Competition

As I explained in the last few newsletters, we are holding a competition for 'Best Frame of Honey'. John Crick was selling marked 'Top Bars' (or empty frames) for an entry fee of £1 – and has had a very good uptake, with 21 participants. You have to make up the frame, and fit it with foundation, get their bees to draw and fill the frame – and make it look neat too! The participants are :Bob Hunter, Bo Dizon, Clive Hill, Sheila Borwick, Stewart Thorburn, Ed West, Scott Rutland, Lance Free, Bill Bendyshe-Brown, Phil Wiggins, Ron White, Simone Capell, Roy Martin, John Crick, Christine Hazell, Clive Winslow, Will Steynor, Tim Fountain, Raymond Chamberlin, Helen Raine, and David Rose

The competition part will be held at either our September AGM, or at the President's Supper, where the frames will be judged by our very own National Honey Judge, Vivienne Brown. A useful prize will be awarded. Good luck, and obliging bees to all participants.

HWBKA Website

The website continues to be an exceptionally good bridge to the wider world. There have been 343 different visitors who have come directly to our website so far (up from 239 the previous month). This doesn't include people who arrive indirectly, via BBKA. Keith Wood, who designed and manages it for us, says "that during May there were 1735 pages viewed on the site: and 811 actual visits. Popular pages are - types of bees (perhaps we should not rewrite this then?) and the contact us pages again. Photos, movies and downloads all seem popular again..."

Beginners Classes, Pollination, Taking Wing, Spreading the Load

I hear that the both the beginners and their Tutors are thoroughly enjoying their apiary work sessions. One beginner told me 'he had never been that close to bees before, and it was fascinating'. The tutor gave him such confidence through his knowledge of the ways of bees!

Recent Event Reports

25th May Andrew Gibb - Beekeeping and a full-time job

Andrew works as a civil engineer on projects for schools, hospitals, the MOD and other clients.

He has had a diverse beekeeping career which has included being a DEFRA disease inspector, BBKA examiner, guest lecturer at Gormanston and former Chairman of Surrey BKA. Currently he is a director of Bee Craft, and is writing the beginners pages this year.

As well as a hobby, he uses his beekeeping as a form of relaxation, and he shared his thoughts and methods with us.

He starts his beekeeping year in August by working out a plan for the next twelve months. His plan includes the number of colonies to keep (varies from 16 to 20), their location (currently in two out apiaries), disease management, swarm control, queen rearing, preparation of equipment and honey harvesting procedures.

He works on his own but always carries a mobile 'phone. Having started out with both National and WBC hives, he now runs Nationals exclusively to ensure that he always has the correct kit available. His bees are kept on brood-and-a-half, which is not an ideal method for beginners, but he finds deeper frames too heavy to work with, and he can lift up the half box for an initial check on queen cells hanging from the bottom of the frames, even though he admits that this is not foolproof! He

Once these practicals have been completed, we will be supplying them with bee colonies and a hive. Scott Rutland has been heavily involved here. He was 'just a beginner' not long ago, and his interest and confidence has grown enormously, so I think we can say we 'pollinated him' successfully! Thank you to Scott, Clive W, Phil W, Raymond and Sylvia, Christine, Bob Hunter, John Crick, and everyone else for their hard work here. The next stage is going to be provision of colonies. We have had several donations of bees to help here.

So, we are moving towards a low level of one to one contact, usually by phone, with advice and brief discussion of ideas and techniques. This sort of thing works best if those involved can break out beyond initial shyness, into an interaction based on a developing acquaintanceship and trust.

The Association is extremely fortunate in having a small base of key members who get called on to run and participate in events: but a good many of those key members are getting older, so it is time that we spread net somewhat wider. A small level of involvement is all that is likely to be needed to launch these newcomers: so how about helping with this challenge!

The buzzword for such two way contact is 'Mentoring'. The established person becomes a source of informal advice. It doesn't take up much time, and is extremely rewarding. It will give you opportunities to talk about the basic skills you have developed to the point of forgetting – but which you use all the time. The exciting, and fulfilling, thing is that you will be handing on your skills to the newcomer, and the future. And it is great fun too! Not only that, but it is a way of expanding your contacts and coming to realise how much know-how you have picked up,

How can you get involved? Obviously, by talking to Christine, or John, or myself, and making an offer. Secondly, we are likely to be approaching members who are based not too far from the beginner we are aiming to launch. If you are approached, please try to help.

Clive Hill

also changes one of the two brood boxes every year, as he uses both supers and the deeper boxes for honey, so he always has drawn combs of both sizes available.

Andrew has tried using castellated spacers, but has returned to narrow spacing in the brood box and wide in the supers which is what he was originally introduced to. He visits his hives once a week from Easter until the end of July, with the first thorough inspection roughly when it is warm enough and the horse chestnuts are in flower. Although he rears his own queens, he believes in using local queens rather than importing from further afield or abroad.

There is no oil-seed rape in his area of Surrey, so he only extracts honey once a year so as to avoid "domestic disruption". One time-saving practice that he has adopted is to leave about 40lb of honey on each hive for winter, so that he does not have to feed his bees after the harvest. The honey that he does extract is sold through local shops, and any wax that he reclaims is rendered down for exchange. His aim is for his hobby to be self-financing. Andrew takes great pleasure from talking to, and helping, other beekeepers. He started with 5-6 hives initially, and with other equipment sufficient to meet the scale of his operation. It is always possible to acquire larger or better as your scale increases. For inspections, he always recommends checking the entrance, and comparing colonies as ways of assessing the state of the

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hives. He uses no prophylactic treatments, only dealing with disease issues if they arise, rather than attempting to pre-empt any problems.

He follows a routine of regular comb change, and good apiary hygiene to limit disease by keeping gloves and tools clean, and preventing any potential issues of robbing by using cover cloths over open hives and removing all unwanted comb from the site. For swarm control he creates artificial swarms using the Pagden method, as he has found the demaree "too fiddly". The Pagden method involves moving the original brood box to one side. Putting the queen from that box on one frame of sealed brood in to a new brood box on the original site, with the original supers, making sure no queen cells are present.

Flying bees from the original box will fly back to the new box. After three days move the original box to the other side of the new box to siphon off more flying bees. This keeps the new box up to size for honey production and gives the impression of having swarmed. Queen cells will be produced in the original box, and the resulting queen can be kept, or used to requeen the new box to give a late boost to the colony for working a late flower crop. An artificial swarm does need enough of the right equipment in the right place at the right time, so it is necessary to keep some spares. As was pointed out during later questions however, spares at the start of a season tend to be full by the end of it!

Andrew follows a particular plan for his queen rearing. He breeds once a year from his own selected colony, aiming to requeen at the end of August or early September. He aims to requeen all his colonies every two years. He currently uses the Miller method of rearing, which involves careful management and calculation of days and tasks, as these have to fit around work commitments. The method is rigid and may involve working in the rain if that is the day a step in the process needs to be performed. Andrew marks his queens according to the recognised colour sequence, but does not clip wings. He is very careful to cull queens of aggressive colonies or "followers" as soon as he can.

Tim Fountain

At one point, Andrew described the worst sound in beekeeping as being the sound of an unwatched bucket of honey overflowing. This caused great amusement, and I would like to add the following contributions hopefully with a similar result.

From my 5-year old:-

Where do bees go when they are ill? Wasp-ital!

And courtesy of "1001 really stupid jokes":-

I smother my school dinner with honey.

I've done it all my life.

It makes the food taste funny.

But the peas stay on my knife.

Swarms & things

Buzzing about - Searching Bees, Swarming Bees, A Long Thin Colony

We've reached the time of year when bees seem to search for places that smell interesting to them. I think these bees must often be linked to swarms looking for a new home; or colonies about to swarm, searching around beforehand. They seem to be very attracted to places where they can detect the odour of beeswax, and have an exceedingly keen sense of smell.

I keep my wax foundation in the house, to keep it warm. It is in a box inside a roller door cupboard in our main bedroom. One morning last year we were awoken very early by the whine of a bee trapped behind the ventilation grid of our blocked off bedroom chimney. This has happened on other occasions too, and I am convinced that they come down the chimney in search of the source of the beeswax aroma. Anyway, I took the front off the grid and out flew a very dusty bee – straight to the still shut windows. A day or so later I got called to a house down the road that which was having bees come down the chimney into the lounge. With a small toddler, they were quite concerned. I puffed some smoke up the chimney, and all was quiet: but a day or so later I was called to collect a swarm that had formed in someone's front garden about 150m up the road.

Over the years we've had prospecting bees inside my bee shed many times – they've been back again yesterday, and we had what my wife describes as 'a shed full of bees' again. They fly in through a gap at the top of the door and rush over to find lumps of beeswax, or the odd spot of honey. Once satisfied they fly straight to the windows and most can't find a way out: but those that do, bring their sisters and numbers build up rapidly to 100 or more perhaps. On occasions like this you can open the door and walk in amongst them without any protective gear, and without any risk of being stung – but I guess you need a bit of know-how to have that level of confidence!

One year bees were persistent over several days, so I put a comb in a nucleus box, and put it on the roof: and a small swarm

arrived! On another occasion they seemed very interested in the morning, but stopped quickly after lunch. Then the phone rang, and it was our then Secretary, asking me to go down to some Sheltered Flats about 400m away as the bee flies. Bees had just taken up residence in somebody's bin cupboard: and were causing much concern. So, like Sir Galahad, I went to the rescue and found that a small swarm had occupied a polythene carrier bag which had some furniture polisher's equipment in it. That was an easy one to collect!

In late May this year, I received a call from a firm of Solicitors down in the Town Centre. A swarm was hanging down beside one of their windows. They had put into Google 'Bees + High Wycombe' and been shown the HWBKA website – and then contacted both our Swarm Officer, Stewart Thorburn and myself. As the matter needed to be cleared up in office hours, I agreed with Stewart that I would go down to sort out the problem - and found this amusing (for the beekeeper) and quite complex situation:-

A financial firm had had the problem originally when a swarm was in flight, the previous day. The solicitors next door had called a pest control company's man to sort out the 'wasp problem' when the bees had clustered. He had identified the insects as honeybees, not wasps, and had refused to kill them. I was asked to climb out of a window, then walk out on the flat roof of the solicitor's office and peer down at the swarm, which was hanging down in front of a window. So far, so good: but the bees were inaccessible from there, so I walked round to the pub just round the corner, in who's garden the bees were hanging. The polish barmaid was very helpful – she had an uncle in Poland who was a beekeeper, but she didn't want to come too close to the bees. However, it was an easy matter to take the swarm, from that garden, by brushing them into a skep. Later

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that evening I was able to go back and collect them and they ended up being hived the next day as a starter colony for one of our beginners.

When I saw where the bees were located, it was obvious they had come from a wild colony living in the cavity wall of the solicitor's office, so I took one of their legal guys round to meet the non-paying tenants – squatter bees. The colony had an entrance into the wall where a builder's scaffold pole had been fixed in the wall as it was built, but the hole had not been re-pointed when the scaffold was removed. When you peered into the entrance, you could see honeycomb inside the cavity wall. There was another similar hole about 5m away, in the wall

just above the swarm, so I puffed quite a lot of smoke in there, to discourage those bees from taking up residence. To my amazement, when you stopped puffing smoke in, a good plume of it came out of the hole towards me! I assume because the bees resident in the cavity were fanning it away from themselves! Two other interesting facts: there was a greater wax moth sitting on the wall, waiting to creep in to the resident colony; and there was a large hornet stopping by every now and again to harvest a bee to eat. To take this scenario towards a more sensible future, I have been able to make arrangements for Roy Martin, one of our members, in WDC's Environmental Services Pest Control Operation to talk to the Solicitors about their bee tenants.

Clive Hill

Seasonal Tips and Reminders June 2007

June Gap Starvation
Selecting Honey for Extraction
Honey Extraction ideas
Colony Maintenance & IPM
Summer Nectar Flow

This May we've had a right mixture of weather again: quite a bit of cold, a bit of warm and quite a bit of wet. The different plant flowering periods knitted together to give a prolonged spring nectar flow: but the doubts have been if the temperature was OK, and the bee numbers were high enough for productive foraging.

I think it makes three years in succession now that the Horse Chestnut trees have been in flower for nearly the whole month. We've seen some of their 'brick red' pollen being taken into the observation hive at our base in The Environment Centre. The bees have of course been eating their new honey during the colder and wetter spells; but if your colonies didn't swarm, there could still have been a good nectar surplus to be converted to stored honey.

In early June it's common to get a nectar dearth, due to a lack of flowers that bees can work. It's known as the "June gap" and can cause a sudden risk of starvation even at the height of summer. In such circumstances, a small emergency feed of syrup will save the colony and be used by the bees as food, not stored. But if your bees have been busy and there's lots of honey, then what's to be done? That depends on if there is oilseed rape honey in the hive, which because it is a high glucose nectar, carries the risk of honey setting in the combs. If you're sure there's no rape, you can leave it on and give yourself the luxury of a single honey extracting session probably in August. But a decision like this carries penalties: you'll need to have plenty of supers to put on the hive; and perhaps a small ladder to reach the top, to get the supers off. Then you will get plenty of high level arm and back exercise, and so your back is at significant risk when lifting supers to do your hive inspections in the meantime. (In 2002, Beecraft carried an excellent series of articles on wise lifting and back care for beekeepers – so look there for further information.) In the past I've taken the leave-honey-on option, but it's not enjoyable to get the top supers off full of honey when they're six foot or more up in the air, and you're standing on a milk crate or two, to reach them!

If you do need to extract to make some empty super space, or get rape honey off before it sets; you **MUST** check that removing this honey won't leave the bees at risk of starvation in the weather clamps down and they can't forage; or that no forage is available. If all is well, then put the full supers on the hive over

a clearer board (with at least two Porter escapes, or one of the modern plastic grid tunnel bee escapes in it) and with an empty super beneath to take the bees.

Bring the full supers home as soon as possible, say no more than a couple of days and preferably less, so the honey stays warm. Then extract while the honey is still warm. Preferably do it in a warm room too. My own honey extracting is done in a south facing conservatory, where it quite easily gets up to 30°C on a sunny day. You have to have the windows shut of course to keep the bees out – so I sweat quite a bit; but the honey is much easier to process. Even a few degrees temperature difference makes a huge difference in honey viscosity, the colder the thicker – with more honey left in the combs after extracting, even after a longer spin time.

You're supposed only to extract capped honey: but a small proportion of properly viscous uncapped honey shouldn't cause problems. (Test uncapped honey by shaking the combs. Unripe honey has low viscosity and fall easily from the comb. Ripe, viscous honey will stay put.) If the moisture content is higher than 20%, fermentation is a certainty. Between 18 and 20% it's likely. The moisture content can be measured easily with a refractometer, or less accurately with a hydrometer; but these are expensive luxury for a beginner. Put rape honey into buckets to granulate, then re-melt it later. In jars it sets very hard, and usually has bad frosting. Honey for sale must look appetising, not scruffy.

Put the empty supers back in the evening to reduce excitement in the colonies, and to feed them a little too. Make sure the colony has sufficient stores after removing the honey crop: transient nectar dearths can cause starvation.

And so, to colony maintenance during June. Much like May really, regular 7 - 10 day inspections. In early June the brood nest should still be expanding, but will soon tail off. Keep your eye out for the queen, eggs, brood of all stages, and huge areas of capped brood. Look for brood disease, and queen cells. Also check for the level of Varroa mites: either by using a decapping fork to check drone brood; or much better, put the check board in position beneath the mesh floor for a few days, and check the daily mite drop rate. On the IPM front, cut out the 'sacrificial drone comb' each time you go through a hive until the end of June.

If you do take a swarm, treat it for varroa as soon as you hive it, while the mites have no brood cells to hide in. Now that we have

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Pyrethroid Resistant Varroa mites, this will now mean that you install it in a box with an open mesh floor, then dust the bees with icing sugar dust using a sugar dredger (like an oversize pepper pot). The dust dislodges the mites, so the new brood has a lower level of mite infestation.

Later in the month, make sure the bees have plenty of space (2 - 3 supers) to store the main summer nectar flow. In my experience this usually fits well with the month of July, but with our

earlier summers, it could start at the end of June. This nectar flow tends to be from Lime trees, Brambles, and Rosebay Willowherb. Once it starts, a strong colony can fill a super in a few days, then they'll run out of cluster space inside the hive on a wet day, and have to make hive space by hanging outside, perhaps in the rain. Such over-crowding tends to make colonies swarm too!

Finally, don't forget to make a little time to sit beside the hive: relax, listen, watch and wonder.

Clive Hill

A man was driving down the road and ran out of petrol.

Just at that moment, a bee flew in his window. The bee said, "What seems to be the problem"?

"I'm out of petrol."

The bee told the man to wait right there and flew away. Minutes later, the man watched as an entire swarm of bees flew to his car and into his petrol tank. After a few minutes, the bees flew out.

"Try it now," said one bee.

The man turned the ignition key and the car started right up.

"Wow!" the man exclaimed. "What did you put in my petrol tank"?

BP said the bee!

Stewart Thorburn

Heard from Radio 4

The collective noun for that pretty little bird

A **charm** of goldfinches

How apt

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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