

# High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

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## *Newsletter - March 2008*

### Diary

#### Forthcoming Events

- |                       |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| <b>4th March</b>      | - | <b>Beginners Course commences</b>                           |
| <b>28th March</b>     | - | <b>Monthly Meeting 'Is there a Best Bee?' - Terry Clare</b> |
| <b>25th April</b>     | - | <b>Monthly Meeting, Roger Patterson</b>                     |
| <b>26th April</b>     | - | <b>Woodworking Day</b>                                      |
| <b>21st-26th July</b> | - | <b>FIBKA Summer Course</b>                                  |

**Tuesday 4th March 19:30 Environment Centre.**  
2008 Beginners Course starts.

**Friday March 28th 19:30 Environment Centre.**  
Meeting: Talk by Terry Clare Is there a best bee?

**Friday 25th April 19:30 Environment Centre.**  
**Meeting:** Talk by Roger Patterson, who is a recent recruit to the BBKA Executive: Lets keep beekeeping simple.

**Saturday 26th April. PrincesRisboroughSchool: WoodWorking Day,** led by Scott Rutland. See last page

*Clive Hill*

#### Recent Event Reports

##### **Beginners Refresher Evening Tuesday 12th February**

Clive Winslow reports he had a good discussion session with a small group of people, all of whom were delighted they'd attended. They brushed up on know-how following the theme of Anticipating the Spring. Many thanks to Clive, for organising the event, which is another example of HWBKA's ongoing care of our newer beekeepers.

##### **Bucks BKA Seminar March 1st.**

We had an excellent turnout of 100 for the Seminar, which is a record. It was arranged this year by John Catton with support from the constituent Bucks Associations. HWBKA had special involvement on the Tea/Coffee and cakes front, where the 'Three Musketeers sorry, Beekeepers', Scott, Tim and Julian, all did sterling work: Clive and Karen Winslow were in charge of Signage, Meeting and Greeting and Admission Payments: I had a Stand about Bumblebees, and publicising the BBCT: Sylvia Chamberlin had a stand devoted to Bees in The Curriculum: Sheila Borwick had one about the BBKA exam suite: and Bob Hunter had a Bring and Buy Stand. The Lunchtime catering was done by Vera Hunter plus team. There was a Raffle, with many prizes, starting with a Kodak Digital Camera. All proceeds from the Raffle were dedicated to the BBKA / CB Dennis Bee Research Fund. All in all an excellent day: and four excellent lectures too!

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### Chairman's Chat

#### **Changing our Hon Sec.**

During this month Christine Hazell will relinquish her post as our Secretary after some three years in that role. I would like to thank Christine on behalf of our Members, Committee and myself, for the large amount of hard work she has put in for the Association during that time: and for her skilful re-jigging of the way we operate. Our new Secretary is to be Sheila Borwick, who many of you will know. Welcome Sheila, we look forward to working with you in our (to me at least!) Happy, Healthy and Active BKA.

#### **The Environment Centre Observation Hive**

The hive needed a spring maintenance session recently, to give them more space: but in the process there was a mishap. The queen became inundated with honey when the glazing panel was raised, and despite the attention of her Beekeepers and her followers, she succumbed. The colony has set too and raised an emergency Queen Cell - in February! It has given the Centre's Volunteers a whole new topic to talk to the visitors: and should be a 'hot topic' in a BFP article soon. Once the weather allows active beekeeping, the colony will be replaced and it will be possible to have a marked queen again.

#### **Swarms 2008**

Bill B-B has been busy penning a Newsletter Article about the HWBKA plans for Swarm Collection in the coming season. Please read this and be prepared to help with the tasks to help spread the workload. As part of our activities we plan to do some training sessions on Swarm Collection. Watch the Newsletter for further details.

#### **February Meeting.**

Linda Whitby came up from near Brighton to give us a very interesting Talk on the Charity Hive Save Lives Africa. Most of their work is in Uganda, where they are using beekeeping to help rural people to get a first step on the road to economic activity. They provide know-how, training and low cost loans (repayable interest free over 4 years) for equipment. They are already up to 1000 hives and have a small local staff. The Meeting voted to

*Continued on page 2 column 2*

### Oxalic acid Varroa Treatment Tutorial

Some 20 well wrapped beekeepers took part in the tutorial on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February, when Ian Homer (our Regional Bees Officer) came to our Marlow Apiary, to discuss and demonstrate the use of Oxalic Acid as a winter treatment for Varroa. It was a bright sunny day about 9°C, with the bees flying a little: but far from conventional beekeeping conditions! (Also unconventional was one senior member who turned up wearing amongst his beekeeping attire a Bow Tie: and he claimed it helped keep his neck warm. This was definitely a 1<sup>st</sup> in all my 30+ years of Beekeeping!)

The session was our new Apiary Manager, Kenn Shearer's first Apiary Event, and he came through with flying colours. We'd invited Mid Bucks Beekeepers to join us, and several of their members came along – which was very good. Ian treated one colony, using some 30ml of a 3% oxalic acid solution in sugar syrup. It is applied at about 5ml per inter-frame seam of bees, by dribbling the solution along the bees from a 30 ml syringe. This treatment is to be regarded much more as an emergency control measure than a routine one, because it will kill uncapped brood, and can damage the adult bees too. Oxalic acid is used in winter, ideally when the colony is brood free – or has minimal brood. Oxalic acid solution is hazardous firstly because it is an acid; and is toxic enough can kill you if you ingest enough. Wearing rubber gloves is essential: and no skin contact. Solutions in sugar syrup do not keep more than a few weeks, because with time the acid reacts with the sucrose. Ian provided instruction sheets which give details of how oxalic acid solutions can be used as part of our range of Varroa Control Techniques in IPM. Kenn had a Mite drop down of 3 mites in 3 days before the treatment, and 16 came down in a similar period after it: so it does work. The next stage is to see how the colony comes through to the spring.

Clive Hill

## Honey Jars for the 2008

Just a reminder about ordering your honey jars for the coming season which will be with us all too soon.

Please note:- In case you are uncertain about the number of your hives that have successfully come through the winter **I am extending the ordering cut off date to April 12th.**

Standard 1 lb Honey Jars with Metal lids .....  
£30.30 per gross

Standard 1 lb Honey Jars with Plastic lids .....  
£31.93 per gross

For further product availability see the February newsletter  
Phil Wiggins  
01628 482110 or philwiggins@tiscali.co.uk

### For Sale

National Hive Parts secondhand. Supers & Brood Boxes, 6" Roof & other things.

Also New Unused flat pack Polystyrene hive complete with feeder and instructions: a good opportunity to try a new type of hive.

Also honey jars unused, with metal or plastic tops.

Please ring Pat Field on 01 494 866411

adopt HSL as the Charity to which we would give our annual £100 donation. Further details will be given elsewhere.

### HWBKA Website

This time last year work was under way on the HWBKA website. We went live shortly afterwards and have now had 'Hits' from 967 separate visitors, plus those who get to us via the BBKA website - and this doesn't count return visits either. We've had very complementary remarks from website-knowledgeable folk regarding its contents and simplicity of use: and apparently if you search on Google for Bees, we come pretty high up the listings. So, many thanks to Keith Wood, who both designed and manages the website. If you've not looked at it yet, then go to [www.hwbka.co.uk](http://www.hwbka.co.uk)

### Come and help make the Beginners Classes extra special !

This year's all seven of the weekly classes are on Tuesdays, starting on 4<sup>th</sup> of March. As we go to press, we now have some 23 people booked onto the course, with more anticipated on the evening. In recent years we've given the students a much improved 'launch' by arranging for some of our existing beekeeper members to be on-hand at tea break (~8:30). The students get a great deal from this informal learning, and it makes them much more likely to take up our interest. From the 'old hands' side of the exchange, it is great fun to meet them, and you just have to chat and give them comments from your own 'real-life' perspective. We plan to do the same thing again this year, so please come along for half an hour, to meet, greet, and bee-chat with them. If the entrance door is shut, key in 7958 to open it. The dates are: March 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>; April & 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Later, you could get involved with helping, or just joining in, during the practical apiary work sessions.

### Stoneleigh Bee Convention

Don't forget to send off and buy your ticket in advance. This Convention is a wonderful day out – and if you've not been before, will greatly expand your beekeeping horizons. See BBKA News, Beecraft, or the BBKA website [www.britishbeekeepers.com](http://www.britishbeekeepers.com) for further details.

### March Meeting

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, we have Terry Clare coming to talk to us on the question of "Is there a best bee?" Terry is former Chairman of BIBBA, the Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association, and an excellent lecturer. Another meeting that you shouldn't miss!

### 'Frame of Honey' Competition – 2008

In the past, HWBKA had an Annual Honey Show, which was an important part of Wycombe Show. But with the demise of that, and the Town Show which followed for a couple of years, came the demise of the Honey Show. As a consequence, we are losing the necessary skills of preparing and exhibiting honey: and such skills are a close fit with honey preparation for sale. We are not alone in such changes, because they are quite widespread over the country.

Bucks CountyBKA, of which we are a part, wish to encourage Showing to counter the skills losses. Last year we introduced a small competition for 'Best Frame of Honey' and got an uptake of 20 people, not all of whose bees obliged to fill the frames. So, we will repeat this venture in 2008. To this end, John Crick has volunteered again to sell authenticated 'Top Bars' at our March, April and May Meetings. If you use a non-standard frame type, you can use bring one of your own Top Bars along to get it authenticated. Entry is £1. One frame per person. Members are invited to use these authenticated Top Bars to make up a super frame, and then get their bees to draw it and fill with honey. The competition will be held probably at our September meeting, as last year: and a useful prize will be awarded. Come on, all you recent recruits, see if you can win!!

Clive Hill

# Seasonal Tips and Reminders March 2008

Watch Alighting board for hive debris.

Look out for Pollen & water collection.

Once weather set warm, remove MG & adjust entrance.

Check Varroa Floor Mesh clear.

Put tray in & for 3 – 5 day period.

Calculate Varroa Daily Drop Rate.

Get organized for comb replacement when spring really arrives. There has been a fair bit of bee flight activity in the last few weeks, but we've had warm days spaced out with cold ones. So, I doubt if the bees have been able to fly productively, except for water gathering. So we're just into March with little bee forage – perhaps about right under 'Traditional' seasonal timing. The Hazel catkins and Crocuses seem to be about over; there are many Snowdrops, Daffodils and Prunus trees in flower: but more of all still to come. Ground water appears good, but without saturation. Perhaps we can hope for a steady build up and a good spring honeyflow!

Once the weather opens up, the bees will get active, flying for parts of most days. Look to see pollen being taken in - a sign of brood rearing actively underway and that the colony is queen right. The early bee forage will be Wild Cherry Plum (looks like Blackthorn, but flowers significantly earlier - and some bushes out already) then Pussy Willow (Sallow) catkins, which bees love. Male Sallow catkins give fluffy golden pollen and female ones can give useful quantities of early nectar. At ground level the Lesser Celandines and wild Violets will then also start to flower freely. All these will be followed by Blackthorn and eventually Wild Cherry, then other spring forage – much of it tree flowers.

Apart from pollen, the other hive necessity at this season is water, used to liquefy stored honey. Foragers collect this from damp grass, pond margins and puddles. You can provide your own source - like wet peat from a growbag- but if it's placed too near the hive, don't be surprised if the little blighters forsake it for another "tasty" source at a distance which they can communicate more accurately. A bee returning with a load of water will have its legs dangling down in flight.

Inside the hive, another sign of brood rearing is that the crown board above the centre of the cluster will feel decidedly warm. The bees will be very active inside the hive too, but they'll cluster tightly to save heat if the weather goes cold. If a cold snap is prolonged, expect to see white pupal remains at the hive entrance for a few days. These will be from brood that perished from exposure to cold at the edges of the nest, when the cluster contracted tightly to maintain blood heat at the centre.

Once the weather is consistently warm enough for the winter cluster to break, and for the bees to be fully mobile within the hive, remove the mouse guard. Assuming you winter colonies on a full width entrance behind the guarded, reduce this to smaller dimensions, say 8 x 1 cm, that the bees can guard: or you could put the entrance block in.

Now, to Varroa control and monitoring. If you have wintered the colony on a solid floor, replace it with a Varroa Screen Floor. Remember that we now have pyrethroid resistant mites these in our area, so Varroa control can no longer be by using Bayvarol or Apistan and we have to use Integrated Pest Manage-

ment (IPM) routine instead. This means drone comb removal, thymol based treatments etc. A Varroa screen floor must therefore now be the norm: and such floors should be left open as standard, without the mite catching tray/board in position. Check that the mesh is clear of debris, clean then replace back it if necessary. Do a Mite Dropdown Check, by putting the catching board in position beneath the mesh for 3 – 5 days. Then count the number of mites that have fallen. Divide this number by the number of days the board was in position, to get the 'Daily Mite Dropdown' count. You then need to compare this daily dropdown figure against the chart in the DEFRA 'Managing Varroa' booklet to work out what the full mite level in your colony is: and the various IPM treatment options available to you. This booklet is designated PB10859; and it explains the necessary technical background. You can also get the information at: <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/public/BeeDiseases/indexVarr oa.cfm>

Late February, March and early April can be a time of heavy stores consumption. Check your hives for weight (heft them) if they feel light and there's no nectar flow, be prepared to feed close to the cluster. Use a patty of baker's fondant, supermarket ready made icing sugar, or even a bag of wetted sugar placed over the feed hole. Cut a slit in the side of the packet, put water in to fill the voids between the sugar grains, and then place the bag in position - slit towards the cluster. Cover with an empty ice cream container. If it's a real starvation emergency, sprinkle some syrup over the bees first, to start the revival - then feed as above.

Now, to disease control. If you're concerned about brown splodges of bee faeces over the hive front, check for Nosema and look up the treatment routine in your bee guidebook. If there seem to be many crawling bees, consider the presence of Acarine, or a virus disease.

Finally, a "planning matter" to think about. It's time to start planning your "old brood comb replacement policy" because you'll soon be able to start replacing them. You can do this a few frames at a time, or do an Artificial Swarm procedure as part of the IPM Varroa Control. Either way, you might be interested in understanding this theme better, so here's some useful background information: in February 2002, we had Malcolm Blake talking to us about Comb Quality and the Queen's worker cell needs at peak season. It was an excellent thought provoking talk. You can find my report of it in our Website in the Downloads area, under 'Best of Seminars'. Here is it's direct address: <http://www.hwbka.co.uk/Downloads/Best%20of/files/Bee%20Honeycomb%20Quality.doc>

*Clive Hill*

## HONEY JAR LABELS

Your labels printed to your own design or photo

Printed in four colours by a commercial printer

Price depends on how many ordered to print  
but would range from 4p each down to 2p each

If anyone is interested in sharing  
a print run with me

please contact , Ron White  
on 01494 712640 for more details.

# Flat pack Construction Day

This year's woodworking day will be held at Princes Risborough Secondary School,  
Merton Road, Princes Risborough, Bucks. HP27 0DT

**On Saturday 26th April (the weekend after Stoneleigh)  
9am till 4pm**

Bring along with you,

**Packed lunch,**

**What you would like to build.**

## **Tools and materials**

(Hammer, nails, glue, screws, screwdriver, etc).  
There will be limited tools available at the venue

**No electric power tools are allowed**

For Beginners, Help and advice are on hand.

Hot and cold Refreshments will be provided.

There will be a small charge of £5.00 per person to cover the cost of the hire of the venue.

If you are interested in purchasing flat pack varroa floors and nuc boxes please let  
Scott know by 21<sup>st</sup> March Latest.

For more information and to reserve a place

Please contact Scott Rutland on

[scott@srutland.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:scott@srutland.freeserve.co.uk)

01494717032

07748788241

The HWBKA website can be visited at

[www.hwbka.co.uk](http://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

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](mailto:newsletter@hwbka.co.uk)

Website: [www.hwbka.co.uk](http://www.hwbka.co.uk)

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## Swarm Control

# Mid Bucks

I would just like to start by saying a big thank you to Felice Pigram and Stuart Thorburn for their magnificent efforts over the past years as swarm officers for our Association. I have learned a lot from them both in my new role on taking over as swarm officer for 2008.

**So What's Happening in 2008?** I wanted to let you know what is planned for the coming year so that we can at least try and avoid what happened to Stewart last year when he had to contend with over 50 swarms in one 'terrible' day last June! We have sat down as a Committee and drawn up a boundary of where we will take responsibility for any swarm notification. This is it!



I am making contact with the other Associations outside our boundary to determine who their swarm officers are so that if we do get notified of a swarm in their area we can pass the details to them.

**Contact.** I have purchased a mobile telephone for the Association so that any outside agency can contact the swarm officer at any time. For your information the telephone number is:

**07527 798659**

The telephone will stay with whoever is acting as swarm officer at all times.

I have let Wycombe District Council know of this number and will, in April, be contacting Thames Valley Police, The Fire Authority, Bucks Free Press and Bucks Herald, and SDK the local contractor to many of our local councils who manage pest control. In addition I will be writing an article for both Bucks Free Press and Bucks Herald so that, hopefully, the public will know the difference between a swarm, a wasp's nest or bumble bee nest!

**Swarm Management.** If you want a swarm can you please let me know soonest either through the above number or by email at [bill\\_bendyshe\\_brown@compuserve.com](mailto:bill_bendyshe_brown@compuserve.com) . Please let me know:

- where you live
- your telephone number (preferably your mobile number)
- your email address (you will see why shortly)
- and whether you want mentoring when collecting the swarm so that we can send you out with an experienced hand!

I will maintain a list of those wanting a swarm on a 'first come first served' basis. However, your part of the contract is to turn out for a swarm when contacted. We had many occasions last year where people just kept turning down a request to collect a swarm. We have agreed in Committee that if anybody turns down the opportunity to collect a swarm twice they will be moved to the bottom of the list. We have so many people waiting (20 already!) that it is unfair on others when one person just does not turn out.

**Further Plans.** We plan to record the location of all swarms reported and collected (not necessarily the same!) on a database and plot where the concentration of swarms occur. This will help in our planning for future years. In addition, I will provide everybody who wants a swarm with a letter (by email) to hand to the person (owner) from whom they are collecting the swarm. This will give details of differences between bees, wasps and bumble bees with the aim of educating the public. In addition it will limit our liability by stating that we are assisting the 'owner' of the swarm and will not accept any responsibility for any damage occurring in the collection process. Finally, it will also offer the 'owner' an opportunity to make a small donation to HWBKA to help affray our costs.

**And Finally.** I have volunteered to act as swarm officer for 2008 and Scott Rutland has kindly agreed to act as my deputy in times of my absence. The HWBKA mobile telephone will be with one of us at all times! As you know, beekeepers should not attempt to enter the fabric of a building and neither Scott nor I will ever ring anyone if that is the case. However, if you do find that the swarm is in the building when you arrive please do let us know immediately. Stewart has told me that over the years he has learned that the Pest Control companies in the Yellow Pages (those with a freephone number) charge a fortune. However, we have found two chaps, one over at Chalfont St. Peters and the other at Naphill, who are one man band Pest Control Officers, are very bee friendly and their charges are very modest. They won't destroy bees unless they have to. A bonus! So I will use them when needs must.

This just leaves me to say that I wish you all an excellent beekeeping and swarm happy year ahead. Remember, please do let me know soonest whether you want a swarm. There will be plenty to go around!!

Bill Bendyshe-Brown