

High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

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Newsletter - May 2006

Diary

Forthcoming Events

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| 19th May | - | Running the London Marathon for a Beekeeping Charity - Bill Turnbull |
| 27th May - 2nd July | - | Small Worlds Exhibition at the Environment Centre |
| 15th July | - | Farm Tour, Barbeque and Hive Inspection |

Forthcoming Events

19th May (note: **THIRD FRIDAY** in month) Bill Turnbull
- Running the London Marathon for a Beekeeping Charity

15th July - Farm Tour, Barbeque and Hive Inspection.

This year our summer get-together will be based at Widmere Farm, Marlow where the farmer will take us on a tour of the farm to demonstrate:- the wild flower areas; the bumblebee research areas; his policy on headlands/plantation strips and his new crop management strategy. Beulah will come along also to conduct her examination of hives in the association apiary. Bob and Vera will provide us with another delicious barbeque, outside if the weather's good and in the farm barn otherwise.

All the details have yet to be finalised and will be published in later newsletters, however, this is an event that all the family will enjoy so do put the date in your diaries.

Christine

Recent Event Reports

Report on Meeting 31st March 2006.

Healthy Bees - Dr Beulah Cullen

Beulah is well known to members of HWBKA, and one of our Life Members. She is also a Bee Disease Expert and was for several years the Southern Region Bees Officer for DEFRA's CSL National Bee Unit. Beulah used a PowerPoint presentation for her talk and discussed matters with us as she went along. There was much participation from her audience!

Beulah started by reminding us of some basic principles; then took us through what she uses herself as ground rules for good beekeeping practice. These covered collecting swarms, carrying out disease checks, good hygiene, and Integrated Pest Management for Varroa control. In this report I attempt to summarise these themes.

Background. Among the Social Hymenoptera, the bumblebees and wasps have annual colonies which start a fresh nest every year. Because of this behaviour trait, they minimise nest infections – although the over-wintering queens are subject to large scale risk of attack by parasites. The nest use behaviour of wild honeybee colonies has been studied by Seeley. They tend to

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CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

What an odd year we are having! Here we are at the beginning of May and some of the colonies have barely developed. Fortunately the colonies which were choked with the abundant supplies of ivy honey last autumn have managed to survive on it, as long as supplies of water were readily available. The winter OSR is only now coming into flower, some four weeks later than normal. Unless we are very fortunate we are having to inspect colonies on chilly days when normally we would leave well alone. Nature has a way of always catching up so take care and be ready for the long awaited warm spell.

It was good to see such a strong representation of members at the Stoneleigh Convention. The 9.00am scrum around the trade halls was busier than ever this year - all those optimistic beekeepers! and the lecture programme was better than ever. I highlighted four lectures to attend but such were the attractions that I only made two of them.

On Thursday morning we had a sick Andrew Gibb phone in to say that he would not be able to speak to us that very evening. We are indebted to Will Steynor who stepped in and presented a very interesting and stimulating talk to us. Very many thanks to Will.

General

Wycombe Town Show

We have committed to attending the Wycombe Town Show on Friday 4th and Saturday 5th August. We are being provided with a marquee and will be putting on a comprehensive display of beekeeping. We will need a large number of helpers to keep it fully staffed for the two days. Please reserve the dates in your diary.

Regional Bee Inspector

Ian Homer, our Southern Area RBI will be with us on Friday 26th May as part of his three day tour of our adjacent Associations. His Apiary Tour will start with Bernard Wells at Merrie Hollow, Seymour Court Hill, Marlow Road at 10.00 am. It will move on to the apiary of Christin Hazell and Clive Hill near to

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Dennis James Pigram - August 1925 - April 2006

It is with regret that we announce the death of Dennis Pigram on April 8th 2006. Dennis was a constant and enthusiastic supporter of all activities of the High Wycombe & District Beekeepers Association for over 25 years. He was particularly kind and helpful to new beekeepers and gave encouragement and instruction at various Association classes as well as a number of public lectures.

Dennis was a man with a tremendous sense of humour which frequently came to the fore on April 1st. Although he never admitted it, he undoubtedly was the author of the Irish Beekeepers Catalogue which appeared on one occasion. Reputed to be a new supplier, it contained a number of money saving offers including the Papier-mache Beehive and second hand beer barrels for the bulk storage of honey. The latter contained a warning that honey from this container might be slightly alcoholic. Nevertheless a most convincing publication and a number of beekeepers believed in its authenticity.

On another occasion while a student at the Intermediate Examination classes, the lecturer asked how to avoid a virgin queen from swarming. Quick as a flash Dennis said 'clip its wings of course.' The somewhat serious lecturer did not immediately appreciate the humour.

Dennis was an expert showman of all bee products and won many prizes at Local, County and National level. He was an expert, probably second to none, at casting wax sheets and moulding foundation, winning many prizes. He ran a candle rolling stall at the many Wycombe Shows and delighted the constant crowd round his stall while demonstrating this ability and talking to the attentive audience, especially the children, about wax production and beekeeping. His patter always included a joke or two accompanied by much laughter. He made sure the joke changed each year.

Dennis served for many many years on the Committee holding offices of Vice-Chairman, Education Officer, Sales Manager and was made a Life Member in the 2003/4 year. He will be sorely missed and remembered with much affection by the longer serving members. He leaves his wife Felice, and two sons Anthony and David.

Phil Wiggins

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swarm frequently, choose nest sites about 400 metres from the parent colony, about three metres from the ground, and with a nest chamber volume between 10 and 60 litres. Diseased colonies will die out and their combs will be destroyed by wax moths. With its normal two year colony life, much the same rate of colony turnover occurred with Skep style beekeeping, the methodology used for hundreds of years as the basis of honey production in the UK and much of Europe.

With the invention of the Moveable Frame Hive it became possible to keep a bee colony on the same brood frames for many years; and this style of beekeeping is common today. But by doing so, the bacterial (Foul Broods), fungal (Chalk Brood) and protozoan infections (Nosema) that can infest brood combs will build up. Beulah believes that chronic low level diseases in hives greatly reduce colony productivity, and can lead to weak colonies. Nosema, Chalk Brood, Sac Brood and even EFB can all be involved. Such a situation existed with AFB when the Bee Disease legislation was first introduced in the early 1940s. At that time AFB infected at least 10% of colonies; but since that time a protocol of selectively destroying AFB infected colonies has been applied in the UK. Major reductions in infection level have been achieved, so that the current level of infection is much less than 1% of colonies. Culling has thus had a large disease controlling effect with AFB. By comparison in the USA, where prophylactic control with antibiotics is allowed, AFB is endemic and resistant strains of the bacteria have become a problem.

Taking Swarms

Hive swarms onto foundation only. Do not feed for 24 – 48 hours and after comb drawing has started. This means the bees have to use up any honey that they have brought with them, so any infections carried in it will not be transferred to their new combs. NEVER feed commercial honey – it can contain disease organisms such as AFB.

Good Hygiene Practice

Become aware what healthy brood, larvae and cappings look like. Check the brood frames for disease. To check, shake the bees off and scan over the frame three times. First to see an overview to look for consistent laying pattern, healthy uncapped brood, drone laying queen symptoms etc. Second, look at the cappings: they should all be the same age and colour, and none should be sunken or perforated. Thirdly, look down the face of the comb to check for AFB scales on the lower front edges of the cells.

Beekeepers can make infections worse. Handle bees gently and avoid squashing them. Use disposable gloves, they will not harbour infections as leather ones will. A blow torch is essential equipment. You can use it to sterilize hive tools, and to clean and scorch all hive parts before re-use. NEVER use secondhand comb. Melt it down and scorch sterilize frames if you have to use them. Keep a check on the movement of frames and boxes. Beulah colour codes each frame, and the box they are in with a coloured drawing pin. The boxes are also identified. The boxes then stay with a particular hive, and the frames stay in that box. Equipment used in different apiaries is kept totally separate.

Avoid drifting by careful placement of hives within an apiary. Avoid robbing: diseased colonies will be weak and so liable to robbing; and that robbing will spread the disease.

Brood Frame Replacement. Beulah is convinced that we should not over-winter a colony twice on the same set of brood combs. Changing three combs a year in a brood chamber (the standard methodology) is too slow. It is better to make a complete change. This can best be done in the spring by giving the colony a new brood box of foundation and feeding generously, so the combs will be quickly drawn. Alternatively you can use the 'Shook Swarm' technique as used in the modern type of EFB treatment, or IPM Varroa control. The advantages of new comb are: - fewer pathogens. It removes wax moth eggs and larvae.

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The frames will contain more worker cells and fewer drone cells, so the queen is more productive. It is easy to see eggs. It gives the wax builder bees work to do. It delays swarming. The colony builds up fast on new combs. The frames will be a pleasure to handle and not glued down by propolis! Disease free colonies can get significantly bigger honey crops.

Beulah uses a solar extractor to harvest the wax and honey from the old combs, or burns them. She uses the recovered honey to make feed for the bees, having first blended it 1:1 with water and brought the mixture to the boil to kill any yeast or bee disease organisms left in it. The diluted honey is fed using a rapid feeder of the contact, or tank type. This way she is using recovered honey to feed the bees that are drawing comb from foundation.

Varroa Control. Pyrethroid resistant mites are now getting closer. They have been found in Hertfordshire and in West London. It is important to check the post-treatment varroa drop down rate of colonies. If the mites have become resistant you will be able to see continuing mite drop after varroicide has been withdrawn. The economic threshold of mites in a colony is 1000. At more than this population the effects on the colony quickly become significant. To achieve varroa level control without use of chemicals, you can use a screen floor and use drone trapping. The Shook Swarm Technique is also a good approach, because the main mite population will be left behind in the old brood combs, which are scrapped. This also fits in with brood frame replacement for disease reduction, as above. Many thanks to Beulah for yet another stimulating talk.

Clive Hill

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

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

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the Wycombe Ski Slope (remains of) at 10.45 am and proceed to The Harrow P.H. in Hughenden Valley at approx. 12.45. Our final call will be at the Association Apiary at Hughenden Manor when we expect to start at 2.00 pm. Please let Clive Hill know if you intend to join in and Clive will give you detailed instructions on how to find us. At all times on the day you can contact us on tel: 07767 863107

Spare Hives & Equipment

Our large group of beginners are currently attending the practical sessions and many of them are raring to go. Will anyone who wishes to sell off surplus hives or equipment please contact John Crick with details.

Where are they now?

Over the years most of us enjoyed a trip to Thornes of Windsor in the days when we could have a good chat and receive advice from Matthew Allen. We wondered where he was these days and our super sleuth Stewart Thorburn located him. Matt's reply said "Hi - I am in America working with bees on almond pollination. It is approaching 5.00am, the start of my working day here... earliest business meeting I had to attend in California was 4.00am" If anyone would like to join him for some experience we can pass on his address!

Jo Schup was active with us for several years until she moved to Shropshire but I met up with her at Stoneleigh and she sent her regards to all her friends in High Wycombe.

Publicity

Keep an eagle eye open in the Freetime section of the Bucks Free Press. Over the next two weeks we have been promised some publicity on bees. My thanks to the members who contributed articles for them. We nervously await their efforts at rewriting the facts.

Your committee have been examining the possibility of us having our own Website. At our last committee meeting Stewart Thorburn, by profession he is a funeral director, told us that he would be getting advice from one of his clients!! Is this a case of Divine Assistance?

John Crick

Phil's May Quiz

1. Varroa mites have been shown to cause deformed bees, when mite levels are high within a colony. Please describe the appearance of these deformed bees. (1 point)
2. During the winter varroa mites move from bee to bee. (True or False)
3. Ethyl Oleate, a primer pheromone, is involved in the regulation of house bees becoming foragers. (True or False)
4. Colonies adjust their pollen foraging effort in accordance with the pollen need in the hive. (True or False)
5. Protein nutritional needs is involved in assisting foragers to determine pollen levels within the hive. (True or False)
6. As the pollen needs increase within the hive, the number of foragers performing the waggle dances significantly increases. (True or False)
7. Describe two situations that result in cloudy honey. (2 points)
8. The perception of profitability of a nectar is dependent upon the actual richness of the nectar reward (e.g. sugar concentration, volume) and previous foraging experiences. (True or False)
9. Nectar secretion normally occurs around the clock during flowering. (True or False)
10. The average size of a nectar load carried by a forager is :-
A. 20 mg B. 60 mg C. 50 mg D. 30 mg E. 40 mg
11. The average size of the pollen load carried by a forager is:
A. 5 mg B. 15 mg C. 25 mg D. 10 mg E. 20 mg
12. When a forager returns to the hive, how does she convey the quality of a nectar source to other members of the colony so most of the colony's nectar comes from the richest source? (2points)

Seasonal Tips and Reminders - May 2006

A few weeks ago I installed a bee 'water source' in my apiary. I never bothered before, because there were plenty of wet spots around the old farm buildings, and the bees were welcomed. But over the last few months the place has been turned into a smart new 'Business Centre', so I thought it best to try to anticipate problems with the 'neighbours' by providing an in-apiary water source. I've used a deep plastic tray, part filled with gravel and with a few large stones in the middle. It holds about eight litres of water and is placed to the side of the apiary off the direct flight path. The bees found it within minutes, and my word its popular! There are bees taking up water most of the time, and I'm having to re-fill it every few days. This is a sign of a nectar dearth and the need to liquefy stored honey.

May should be a time for beekeeping with good strong brood chambers, a colony that's foraging hard, and copious pollen coming back to feed a large brood nest. Most years these days there is a spring nectar flow strong enough to give us some stored honey: but that obviously depends on colony strength, useable weather and accessible forage. This cold Spring has held back so much bee forage that hopefully we could even get a really strong nectar flow, with a super or two of honey from it. On the pollen front, expect to see greenish pollen coming in from oilseed rape or trees like sycamore; also brick red pollen from horse chestnut.

Assuming you are a 'traditional style beekeeper, when your colony has brood on at least five frames remove two or three of the old frames not yet in use for brood, and replace them with frames of foundation. Put these towards the sides of the brood nest. They will be drawn-out quickly at this time of year. Make sure the colony still has sufficient stores (at the tops of frames, and on the outer combs). If the weather is still clamped down, and the colony is low on stored honey, it is OK to feed some sugar syrup: but not enough for the bees to store it in the supers. Even in May, in prolonged poor weather, the balance of foragers to brood can be too one-sided - then the bees can't bring nectar back as fast as they use it.

A very different procedure to the above is to make the bees draw a whole brood box of new comb. See my report on Beulah Cullen's recent talk on 'Healthy Bees' elsewhere in this Newsletter for further details.

A strong colony should be given one or more supers as soon as it needs them. Adding supers needs to be timed carefully. When you add a super you make a significant difference to the contained airspace within a hive. You don't want to give the bees too much hive volume to keep warm - it can easily hold them back in a cold or wet spring. Supers function as honey storage space, but also as rest space for the large number of foragers that should now be present in the colony: so supers reduce the crowding and congestion of bees that promote swarming. An interesting way round this dilemma of when to put the super on, is to put it on, but do so over a sheet of newspaper. When the bees need the

space they'll chew through the paper and gain access. The idea was publicised by Beulah when she was a Bees Officer, and has been widely found to be a useful and effective technique.

Colony Health. If any of your colonies have been slow to build-up, it could well be due to a dearth of pollen over the recent weeks - there have been periods with little pollen forage available. Check the drone brood for mite infestation. Use a varroa screen floor to monitor the mite drop rate. Consider treating the colony with Apistan only if it is essential; and read the manufacturers leaflet. Hopefully mite levels will again be low in the apiary this spring: and hopefully we will get another year or more before the mites become resistant to these control agents. After that we'll have to move to Integrated Pest Control to maintain mite populations at manageable levels. If you are thinking of buying, or making, some new floorboards, choose open mesh floors: they will soon be an essential part of varroa control.

When you check the brood chamber, keep your eye out for the queen. With a small brood nest you're much more likely to see her, so it could be a good time to mark the queen; and perhaps clip her wings too - to help with swarm control. If you want to follow the recommended queen marking colour code, she should be marked Blue (for 2005). This year's colour will be White. Once marked, she'll be much easier to spot when you go through the brood chamber.

When the weather has really warmed-up, start regular 7 - 10 day inspections. When you examine a colony, build up an overview of the size and state of the brood nest. It should be expanding fast in mid-May, then stabilising in June. Check for the queen, eggs, brood of all stages, but huge areas of capped brood; and hopefully no queen cells. Observe, but don't worry about queen cell cups - unless they have eggs in. Use a decapping fork to check drone brood for the level of Varroa mites. The MAFF pamphlet "Managing Varroa" gives really excellent accessible guidance. Weather stressed colonies could also show signs of brood disease, particularly EFB. (Discoloured larvae, in unusual positions in the cells - under the weather, and with stomach-ache!) EFB is of course a legally notifiable disease, if you are suspicious, you **MUST** inform our Bees Officer immediately.

Cutting out queen cells will give you a day or two of breathing space on swarming, but it's not a real method of swarm control. You'll do better to take a nucleus colony, or an artificial swarm. Consult the standard beekeeping manuals for detailed advice - Ted Hooper, Clive de Bruyn and Ron Brown are all excellent. So are the many articles in Beecraft.

Meanwhile, try to smell the aroma from the evaporating nectar as the bees fan at the hive entrance, and see if you can work out the flower sources they've used. And don't forget to sit beside the hive to watch, and simply relax with the bees.

Clive Hill

FOR SALE

Dummy Frame kits. Three for BS Deep @ £2.50 each:
Three for 16 x 10 @ £3.00 each.
One Trolley Board @ £7.50.
Two 16 x 10 Nuc box kits @ £15.00 each.

Clive Hill : 01 494 526557

Life in the 1500's

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach on to the food, causing death from lead poisoning. This happened most frequently with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Phil Wiggins

Answers to Phil's May Quiz

1. Bee deformity includes malformed appendages (without a leg, crumpled/vestigial wings) shortened abdomens and overall reduction in size.

2. True. Within the winter cluster varroa mites transfer often from bee to bee and from dead bees to living bees.

3. True. Forager bees feed it to house bees keeping them from maturing.

4. True. The pollen need of a colony is closely correlated with relative amounts of laval brood and stored pollen in the hive providing a modest buffer against fluctuations but still ensuring sufficient space for nectar.

5. True. It is believed that when a colony has ample pollen reserves, nurse bees will feed more protein based brood food to adult bees (pollen foragers) than when the colony is in need of pollen. Thus, under low pollen need conditions, protein is widely dispersed throughout the colony inhibiting pollen foraging.

6. False. Only a small percentage of pollen foragers perform waggle dances, which does not significantly differ between times of low and high pollen need.

7. Nectar from different sources contains differing amounts of proteins. When moisture is removed to ripen honey, this concentrates the protein and in high enough density is viewed as cloudiness. Minute bubbles incorporated in the honey during extraction as well as granulation can cause a cloudy appearance.

8. True. The assessment of the floral source is not based wholly on the absolute profitability but varies with the immediate past experience of the foragers. Bees are more attracted to flowers that have higher nectar rewards after they have had foraging experience of lower nectar reward. This will be reflected in their successful recruitment in the hive (Dances) Yet, the reverse experience is more pronounced. If the bees have been foraging on high reward flowers, they are even less likely to be attracted to flowers with lower rewards, and they will not recruit other foragers to these flowers.

9. False. Flowers do not secrete nectar when the plant's primary pollinators are not present. From the flower's perspective it would be counter-productive to provide nectar to animals that do not perform the task of pollination.

10. E. 40.rag

11. B. 15 mg

12. The foraging force is recruited to the richest source of nectar by the intensity of the dance which is influenced by factors affecting the profitability of the food source, such as sugar concentration, nectar abundance, ease of obtaining the nectar and distance from the hive. Each bee integrates these factors to arrive at an overall energetic profitability of the floral patch it is visiting.

Number Of Points Correct - maximum 14 points

12 - 14 Excellent, 8 - 11 Good, 5-7 Fair

SWARMS

Would you like to help with the collection of swarms in the Wycombe area?.

If so, would you call me

on 07966956477

or email me at

stewartthorburn@btinternet.com

Last year we had 40 calls for swarms and another 40 for bumble bees or wasps. Would you like a swarm or maybe a bumble bee nest?. If so please contact me, the more help the better. I am available to help collect but I'm not in the market for swarms this year. please don't forget, many hands make light work!!!!

Stewart Thorburn

Erratum

Nick Withers was incorrectly described in our April edition as the new SBI for Oxfordshire.

The SBI for Oxfordshire is (as last year)
Margaret Holland.

As far as we know Nick Withers will be continuing to inspect in his regular territory in Surrey.

Terry

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

Send them (preferably unfolded) to:

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

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

hwbka.newsletter@tiscali.co.uk

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Small Worlds Exhibition at the Environment Centre

Saturday 27th May to Sunday 2nd July

This is an extension of the educational work being done by members of HWBKA in raising awareness of bees in our environment. We are now including studies of a range of other common invertebrates to highlight the diverse lifestyles of such creatures. We plan for wood lice, ants, snails, wasps, worms, greenfly, ladybirds, butterflies, varroa mites and all types of bee to feature in the displays.

We are busy setting up live displays: a wormery, a formicarium, a woodlouse vivarium and a snail vivarium have already been started. The observation hive has been restocked and is back in its old venue upstairs.

This is an enormous undertaking for us and **we do need help** in setting up etc. Clive Hill has already offered to cover bumble bees and solitary bees.

Things you might do are:-

- make a revamped display on honeybees for upstairs to go with the observation hive.
- research and take on a different invertebrate: spider, beetle, millipede etc
- help do the laminating of the display material
- keep your eyes open for specimens: dead invertebrates, live caterpillars and active greenfly.
- help man the exhibitions particularly the observation hive and bee sections.
- other ideas?

During the school holiday week (May 27th to June 4th) we would like to have the exhibition

open on Tuesday, Wednesday Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from 11.00am to 4.00pm. One or two Environment centre volunteers will be there but we do need more help to man the whole exhibition.

Needed are people to come for half days to talk about the bees in the observation hive and their value as pollinators.

Ring 01494 522082 or email sylvia.chamberlin @zen.co.uk with your ideas and offers of help.

School Visiting

The phone has started ringing. "Hello this is Mrs Green". "Do you remember me?" "You brought the bees to our school last year and the children enjoyed it so much, I do hope you can come again."

The school visiting season is upon us. Bob already has a booking. The Environment centre have had three requests for schools to come there to see the bees. All more fun for our school visiting team.

It is fun, talking about bees to a receptive crowd of young people is a really rewarding experience. It is not difficult. We have plenty of teaching aids available. The bees in the observation hive immediately grab the children's interest and we now have the short film/DVD "Dancing with bees" to show clearly what bees do.

It would be good if more of our members could join in this experience. Please ask John Crick or myself if you would like to join a visit to a school to find out what it is like and see the resources we have available.

Sylvia Chamberlin