

# High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

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## Newsletter - May 2008

### Diary

#### Forthcoming Events

|                       |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| <b>30th May</b>       | - | <b>Question Night - Environment Centre</b>    |
| <b>9th July</b>       | - | <b>Introducing Bees - Environment Centre</b>  |
| <b>21st-26th July</b> | - | <b>FIBKA Summer Course</b>                    |
| <b>August</b>         | - | <b>BBQ</b>                                    |
| <b>11th September</b> | - | <b>Colony Collapse Disorder - Dewey Caron</b> |
| <b>26th September</b> | - | <b>AGM and Competitions</b>                   |

#### **30th May 7:30 pm, Environment Centre**

Beekeepers Evening with Bill B-B telling us about a recent visit to New Zealand Beekeepers.

Plus Swarm Training Videos / Photos Discussion etc, and perhaps – ‘Question Time’ too!

#### **9th July 7:30 pm, Environment Centre**

New Beekeepers Progress Tutorial

Plus for the general public ‘Introducing Bees, Beekeeping and Honey’

**August** BBQ at Bill & Eugenie B-B's place, Bledlow

Details to follow

#### **11th September**

We will be holding a Special Meeting, when Dewey Caron, visiting from the USA, will be speaking about the current status of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) Research, and also American Beekeeping methods.

**26th September** AGM + Frame Competition & Honey in Black Jar Competition

#### **Recent Event Reports**

##### **25th April 2008 Roger Patterson – Let's keep beekeeping simple.**

Roger started beekeeping in 1963, and at one point ran 130 hives.

After taking a 15 year break, he resumed beekeeping 7 years ago, and has come to the conclusion that the seasons are now 3 weeks longer than they were when he first started. He believes that the season is starting 10 days earlier and ending 10 days later than it used to, as his season used to end roughly the 8<sup>th</sup> of August, but now carries on well in to the 3<sup>rd</sup> week.

He has also noticed problems with queen mating in recent years, and he has experienced losses of 50% over this winter; his worst ever.

Roger bases his beekeeping practice on logic and observation, and being practically minded thinks that keeping things simple makes them more enjoyable.

Roger keeps native or near-native bees rather than any of the imported variety. His are not prolific and can be housed in a single National brood chamber on standard frames. He finds that the deep 14x12 frames are too heavy for him. His bees are

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### Chairman's Chat

#### **Winter Losses**

There has been talk of significant numbers of colonies lost over the winter 2007/8: and the cold prolonged spring can't have helped. Ian Homer our Bees Officer will welcome calls from any beekeeper who wants advice about winter losses, particularly unexplained losses. You can contact Ian on 01 308 482161, or mobile 07 778 846335: or by email [i.homer@csl.gov.uk](mailto:i.homer@csl.gov.uk)

It would be useful for HWBKA to have an overview of this matter for local use: and I know that the Mid Bucks association is trying to do the same. So, if you've lost colonies over winter, or before the spring got going, please let me know the underlying facts and figures.

E.g. N<sup>o</sup>. Colonies into winter, N<sup>o</sup>. Colonies successfully brought through, N<sup>o</sup>. Colonies lost. Suspected cause of loss. You can contact me on 01 494 526557. [clive\\_hill@talktalk.net](mailto:clive_hill@talktalk.net).

#### **Stoneleigh Bee Convention – 19th April**

Some 20 – 30 HWBKA Members & Beginners attended. We all had an extremely busy day, with much to see and do, people and organisations to meet; and those all important special beekeeping items to buy. There were two extra halls in use, so it was more spread-out and a little less congested than the last couple of years – but still crowded. Clive Winslow had arranged a mobile phone link for the beginners, so they could seek advice. This was Mary Dartnall's last year as Convention Organiser – what a great job she has done over the years. Several of us were delighted to meet and have a catch-up chat with our former member Anna Chambers, who now lives in Yorkshire. My thanks to those members who provided others with lifts to the Convention.

#### **BBKA “Honey Bee Health at Risk!” campaign**

The campaign was launched on Sat 19th April, to coincide with the BBKA Spring Convention. It started with an interview with the BBKA President, Tim Lovett, on the To-day programme that morning. Since then there has been much further publicity and support for the campaign. Locally, I was interviewed on BBC 3 Counties Radio (Bucks, Beds, Herts) on the following

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generally frugal with stores, and for only the first time has had to feed in spring this year. They are not susceptible to nosema apis or acarine. They produce a "typical" frame which has a good brood patch, pollen completely round the brood, and honey stores in both top corners.

His experience of "mongrel" bees is that they can be very variable, and can produce variable queens. Drones will vary in colour too, and he will aim to breed from a colony that has a consistent colour of drone.

He suggests not using queens from "running" bees.

Hive stacks will vary in an apiary, but he tries to get consistent hives with similar production. He can obtain a maximum of five supers from a single hive.

He likes to use a brood chamber as one super if possible because this can then be extracted and used as new brood comb the following year. Be certain that you can extract from brood frames with your existing equipment though.

He uses open mesh floors, but finds that bought ones are too weak and so makes his own, cheaper and better.

He nails the bottom bar of his frames from the side, rather than up from the bottom, so they do not get pulled out when lifting, but nails the top wedge horizontally in to the top bar, as we are "told" to do, so that the nail points do not protrude. He also suggests not using the "lost head" nails generally supplied with supers and brood chambers but use wire nails instead, as they make for easier dismantling for repair.

Roger prefers castellated spacers as they are fixed in, easy to clean and don't get propolised. He dislikes metal or plastics ends and thinks that the Hoffman self-spacing frames use more wood and still get propolised.

When siting hives, he believes that direction doesn't matter, but controlling hive temperature does! He keeps his hives in squares of 16. He looks for a site that is dry and has free-flowing air, avoiding a frost pocket or a sun-trap. Shaded woodland is ideal, where there is good access and room to work. Cut back any thorns as they will easily damage veils. Hives should be stable and at the right height. His stands are simple planks on blocks.

Roger believes that bee suits are fine for beginners, but that others should be able to work without "full" protection. He uses a veil only, and no gloves, although he recognises that others may want to avoid stings and keep their hands clean.

On inspection, he puts the queen excluder and first frame at the front of the hive.

Be careful not to 'roll' the bees, and look on the dark side of the frame first for the queen.

He recommends getting a good hive tool, with a thin end. He uses the nail-puller type and paints them so that they show up in the grass; yellow is good.

When in use, push the tool straight in, without wagging, as this damages the box edges. He also smokes his bees as he opens the hive, to keep the bees down.

He always uses a smoker: keep it handy, keep it alight and keep it upright.

Fuels are many and varied including corrugated card, hay dry grass, wood chip, sacking, "touchwood" (dead twigs), egg boxes and fir cones.

Avoid distorting unframed queen excluders by removing from corner to corner.

Roger marks his queens using the end of a match dipped in paint, and clips half of one wing.

For queen rearing, he favours the "cell punch" method: use a metal tube to cut out a selected cell with larva, and then a piece of dowel to push it back to the end of the tube. Add this tube to a rack as in the Jenter system, and store them in a queen-less colony.

Monday. These went out in programmes from Milton Keynes and Luton. I've heard of many other reports on TV, Radio and in Newspapers. HWBKA President Will Steynor had letter in The Times 24th April. In essence BBKA is trying to get £8m extra funding for Bee Research over four years – a paltry sum in government expenditure terms, but Lord Rooker at DEFRA, the relevant government minister has said no funds are available. You can see further details of the campaign in BBKA News April edition, or on the BBKA website, where there is a 'Toolkit' of posters, letter drafts & other campaign material in the members area. Two of these items are attached to this newsletter. We ask members to participate in the campaign. Frances Alexander at our base, The Environment Centre is collecting signatures in support, using the BBKA petition form, and already has a good number. The matter of 'Funds for Beekeeping Research' was discussed at our AGM last September. Now BBKA is has got the campaign organized, and has research topics that need support, we will send them a sizeable donation.

### **April Meeting**

It doesn't happen very often that I miss a meeting – just a few times in some 34 years of membership, but unfortunately I was down in the New Forest, so unable to be present. Clive Winslow, our Vice Chairman ran the meeting. Roger Patterson came up from Sussex and spoke on the topic of 'Let's keep beekeeping simple'. Roger had told us he tries to keep his beekeeping effective, without the use of gimmicky 'must-have' fashion items. Roger is an active member of the BBKA Discussion Forum, and has stimulated much debate in beekeeping circles about queen rearing effectiveness & queen laying quality. See Tim Fountain's report on the meeting for further information.

### **Woodworking Day**

We had to call off this event due to poor uptake. If enough support can be gathered, we may re-stage it in a few weeks time. Watch the Newsletter.

### **Beginners Course**

The formal sessions are now completed and apiary sessions are now getting underway. We hope to convert a good proportion of the 32 course members into new beekeepers.

### **Honey Jar Bulk Purchase**

Many thanks to Phil Wiggins for organising the bulk purchase again for us. If you've ordered jars, don't forget to collect them on the allotted day. Take your cheque with you – payment on collection!

### **Swarms 2008**

Bill B-B has now had local paper articles published in the Bucks Herald. The Bucks Free Press is also due to print a similar article. We will be using our May meeting to give training to our members about swarm collection methods, using videos, photos, discussion etc. Bill has already started to get calls from the public, but so far these have tended to be about solitary bees, which tend to nest in 'bee villages'.

The contact number for swarm matters is mobile No 07527 798659. If you want to have a swarm, ring Bill and tell him. Bill will want to know: Where you live, your telephone (home and mobile) numbers; and whether you will need mentoring.

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

The hive has just been re-stocked: and the queen has been marked – which will make it much easier to explain what goes on in the hive to the public. Frances Alexander plans to do

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If using these in a queen-right colony, the tubes and cells need to be protected, perhaps with a foil wrap.

He uses bait hives to attract swarms, with one or two old combs and an old brood chamber. Use a restricted entrance, and consider using a solid floor as his experience on this is that mesh floors do not attract as many swarms. Check activity at the hive, as bees may visit up to a week before swarming.

His method of swarm control is:

Cut out all queen cells and add a super. Do this once only.

If the bees persist, remove the queen and cut out all sealed and older unsealed queen cells.

Seven days later, remove any emergency queen cells and leave one good cell.

Leave the hive for 3 weeks.

Roger uses a home-made 'vortex'-type clearer board ( a 'maze' of channels to let the bees out but confuse them if they try to get back in) which is very effective. For a "bee brush" he uses a whispy twig stripped of leaves: easy and effective.

Clean hive parts in cold weather as it is easier.

He uses drone comb in supers as they do not get filled with pollen and they are easier to extract. Use half a sheet (or less) and let the bees do the rest.

When feeding, make sure the feed slot is across the frames, as this gives better bee access than if along the frames.

Roger uses a contact feeder made from a coffee tin with holes punched in the lid.

He creates his own honey labels on computer as they are easy to do and easy to change.

If storing honey in buckets, filter the honey and then line the bucket with a plastic bag. Tie up to exclude the air, as the seal on the bucket lid may not be air-tight.

Keep records! His example can be seen at [WWW.WGBKA.ORG.UK](http://WWW.WGBKA.ORG.UK)

Roger managed to explain all this in one evening, but I still can't work out how we managed to find any questions to ask him!

*Tim Fountain*

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another article about bees for the BFP - and ask people to pop in to sign the BBKA petition, too. Assuming we can find a suitable Bumblebee colony to re-home, we will repeat last year's great success by having an observation bumblebee colony there as well.

### 'Frame of Honey' Competition – 2008. Run honey too?

We've had more than 18 entries to the competition so far, so already have a really good uptake. See John Crick's article about it in the April Newsletter, for further information. John has also suggested we could consider holding a 'blacked-out jar of honey' Competition too. Your Committee is to investigate how to do this – starting with producing the necessary jars! Vivienne Brown has volunteered to judge the two competitions, which will be held at our AGM on 26th September.

*Clive Hill*

## Words of Wisdom

Giving evidence to the Food, Environmental and Rural Affairs Select Committee last week, Helen Ghosh the Permanent Secretary (top civil servant) at DEFRA said

**"Varroa is not rampant" . . . . .  
.. "the Bee Unit is not focussing on it"**

(You can hear it for yourself at [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) and go to Farming to-day this week)

It is so reassuring to know that your fate is in the hands of people with a deep understanding of your problems

*Terence Kelly*

## Not all news is bad

The Telegraph magazine 'Stella' reports that The National Trust shop at Killerton in Devon is selling local honey for £5 per pound.

The 'One Show' on BBC TV a few weeks ago featured a small jar of honey said to cost £60

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

**John Parslow**  
Bailiffs Cottage, Bledlow, Aylesbury

Tel: 01844 344948

Send contributions to

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

The 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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# Seasonal Tips and Reminders May 2008

Keep providing water

Hive Records

Regular Inspections for Swarm control

Monitor & Control Varroa by IPM

Use supers to reduce hive crowding

Brood Comb replacement ?

I'm writing this on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, following a March and April which have tended to be cold for much flower production and bee foraging. In some colonies, if stores have been limited, this weather will also have been challenging for bee colony development – or at least held them back. I think we must be some 4 – 6 weeks later in plant development / flowering than we were in 2007, all thanks to the protracted cold weather: but don't forget that spring 2007 was exceptionally early.

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. To get a honey crop you need good colony strength, useable weather and accessible forage. Today it looks as though the weather has warmed up: and if this continues, we could get a major spring nectar flow in the next few days ... and then you can expect honey supers to fill remarkably quickly.

The bee 'water source' gravel tray in my apiary has continued to be used during this spring, but activity will lessen when there is a nectar flow. In the spring, bees collect water especially to use for the liquefaction of stored honey, so they can use it as food: but they can also use water for hive cooling. When water changes state, from liquid to vapour, a significant amount of heat energy is needed. Physicists call this the 'Latent Heat of Evaporation'. In hot weather, bees use this latent heat energy demand to bring about a significant cooling effect for their hive. So, nectar is not only a carbohydrate food for bees and the source of the honey crop; but also a source of water.

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 colony is low on stored honey, it is OK to feed some sugar syrup: but not enough for the bees to store it in 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. This is called a 'Bailey Comb Change' and will result in a much healthier colony, because the bee equivalent of 'our minor ailments' disappear with the old combs; but there can be brood loss, and that has to be recovered from. For details, look at our newsletter for May 2006. You can find this on our website in the downloads section, under archives. Whichever way, you do it, take care to dispose of the old combs quickly and hygienically.

A strong colony should be given supers as soon as it needs them. The addition of 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 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 Cullen when she was a Bees Officer, and has been widely found to be a useful and effective technique.

**Varroa Control** Use the really accessible guidance given in the Defra Leaflet 'Managing Varroa' to guide your Integrated Pest Management (IPM) process. You can find one on-line at Beebase. (<http://beebase.csl.gov.uk>) When you are inspecting a colony, make it a routine to check the drone brood for mite infestation. And at intervals throughout the coming season, put the check-board under the varroa screen floor for a few days, to monitor the daily mite drop rate. Once this baseline has been established, you can start varroa control by drone comb trapping. Do this either by putting a shallow super frame into the brood nest, and letting the bees build drone comb beneath it: or by putting a specially adapted brood frame into the colony. This frame has just half the top half of the frame of normal foundation. The wax is supported by a bar of wood across the frame; and another can be fixed across at the bottom of the frame. The bees will make drone comb in the lower half of this frame: and the queen will lay it up with drone brood. As Varroa preferentially select drone larvae for their longer pupation time, if you cut out and destroy this drone comb AFTER it has been capped, but BEFORE it has emerged, then the mite population can be significantly reduced. Repeat the procedure several times over the summer for maximum effectiveness. NEVER let the drones from this comb emerge, or you will be artificially increasing the Varroa mite level.

**Inspections** Monitor the colony by regular 7 - 10 day inspections; and make notes each time. 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. 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", so if you are suspicious, you **MUST** inform our Bees Officer immediately.

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, 2007 queens should be marked yellow, and 2008 queens marked red. Once marked, she'll be much easier to spot when you go through the brood chamber.

Cutting out queen cells will give you a day or two of breathing space on swarming, but it's not a 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.

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. You can also 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.

I'll be talking about honey crop removal etc in the notes for June. And finally, don't forget to sit beside the hive; to watch, and relax with the gentle bee sounds.

*Clive Hill*

# Honey Bee Health at Risk!

## An Economic and Ecological Disaster in the making!

Honey bees don't just produce honey but play a vital role in pollinating plants for food and other crops, making a substantial contribution of £165 million per annum to agricultural output. They also have an important environmental role, being responsible for pollinating wild plants which produce seeds and fruits on which birds and wild animals depend. Honey bees can become sick and colonies die-out. In recent years, bees have come under ever greater threat from pests and diseases which we don't fully understand or against which the treatments available are ineffective. Increased beekeeping research is thus essential if we are to find answers and be able to protect our bees and the benefits they bring to everyone.

The Government has refused to increase the paltry £200,000 it currently puts into bee health research despite acknowledging the fact that if we don't act we may lose our honey bees and their massive contribution to agriculture and the environment. There are virtually no wild honey bees left due to the effects of the parasitic varroa mite and the viruses it carries, and for which to date, there is no cure.

Beekeepers are now the sole guardians of the honey bee population in the UK. The British Bee Keepers Association is campaigning to get the Government to change its mind and increase research funding, so that we can protect our honey bees, before it's too late.

### The Facts:

- Honey bees contribute £165 million pa to the agricultural economy
- The Government spends just £200,000 pa on bee health research
- The varroa mite is destroying bee colonies and is resistant to most approved medications
- Foul brood diseases are ever present and require constant monitoring and control
- New exotic threats such as the small hive beetle are expected in the UK anytime.
- Colony Collapse Disorder responsible for massive losses in the USA may emerge here
- We don't know enough about bee disease control and the medicines available are inadequate



### What do we want:

- The Government to invest just £1.6 million pa in research to help find solutions

### What can you do:

- ✓ Sign the BBKA Public Petition
- ✓ Get your friends to sign the Petition (Copies from BBKA)
- ✓ Write to your MP (MP's Name - House of Commons, London SW1AA 0AA)
- ✓ Write to Defra (Lord Rooker, Minister for Sustainable Farming & Food, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London S0W1P 3JR)

## Save our Bees - Increase Bee Health Research!

Published by the British Beekeepers Association, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2LG  
Tel 024 7669 6679

## 2008 Southern Region Disease Recognition Day

Make a note in your diary now, Sunday July 13<sup>th</sup> 2008

Benson Village Hall, Oxfordshire

1000 to 1630

An opportunity for everyone to polish up their disease recognition skills

Not every beekeeper gets the opportunity to see European or American Foul Brood first hand, and many who have experienced it forget what the signs and symptoms look like if they haven't seen it for a while. For this reason, we have offered disease recognition days to individual associations over the past few years. Now, for the first time, we are offering this event on a region wide basis to any beekeeper who wishes to attend. The entire day is free with tea and coffee provided but we do ask that you bring your own packed lunch. Anyone who is familiar with Southern Region Associations Day will recognise the form.

Recent Associations Days have attracted comments such as

*"I can guarantee that you wont find better quality speakers at a free event anywhere"*

*"a most worthwhile day"*

*"this is an event not to be missed in the future".*

During the day we will cover:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Guidance on maintenance of hygiene in the apiary and in the hive</li><li>• Identification guidance for European Foul Brood</li><li>• Identification Guidance for American Foul Brood</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparison of similar looking conditions eg. EFB, Parasitic mite syndrome, Chalk brood</li><li>• Adult bee diseases</li><li>• A fun quiz - with prizes</li><li>• Varroa management</li><li>• Exotic pests</li></ul> |
|--|---|

In order that we are properly able to manage the numbers attending, attendance is strictly by prior registration, either by e-mail or by post.

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I would like to attend Southern Region Disease Recognition Day on Sunday July 13th 2008

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail address (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

No of delegates:

Names .....  
of.....  
Delegates .....

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