

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 01494 510327

Newsletter - November 2006

Diary

Forthcoming Events

- 24th November - Michael Badger - Beekeeping pot pourri - plus Xmas refreshments
26th January - Will Steynor - Queen Rearing on a Small Scale

24th November: Michael Badger, former BBKA President, will be coming down from Yorkshire to speak to us. His title is 'A Beekeeping Pot-Pourri'. Since this will be our last meeting before Christmas, Coffee Break time will become a Wine and Mince Pies event to celebrate.

3rd February 2007 Woodworking Day: As you will see, we have scheduled another DIY Hive Bit Making day into our Programme this winter. But what do people want to make? We anticipate a need for Varroa Floors, Deep Crown Boards (suitable for the application of Apiguard) and possibly Nucleus Boxes. Please let Christine Hazell, our secretary know your requirements before the end of December. Further details will be in the January Newsletter.

April 2007: This year's Theatre Outing will be in early April 2007. It will be to Sonning Mill, where we will see the Comedy Barefoot in the Park, by Neil Simon. Watch out for further details in the January Newsletter. Cost will be about £34 per head, including an excellent Dinner.

Clive Hill

Recent Event Reports

29th September Following the AGM, and in light of the occurrence of pyrethroid resistant varroa mites in our area, Dr Max Watkins of Vita-Europe was invited to speak to us about Apiguard: an alternative treatment from the producers of Apistan. Locally, varroa first appeared in 1994. Dr Watkins explained that resistance to a specific treatment might be expected to take about 12 years, which brings us to 2006.

Tests carried out locally during the summer indicated that resistant mites are now in the area. The Associations Marlow Apiary showed only 4% effectiveness using current treatments, or, put another way, almost all the mites survived. Results from other apiaries included 6% effectiveness at Emmet's Farm Little Marlow, 33% at Monkton Farm (Marlow Bypass), jumping to 80% upwards in apiaries around Flackwell Heath. Resistant mites are here, but would seem to be localised at the moment.

Dr. Watkins went on to describe how resistance to pyrethroids was affected in Europe by misuse of the treatments, and also the active ingredient in the treatment being obtained and used in home-made strips. Apistan has a consistent concentration, with the pyrethroid released at a steady rate, while these home-made versions had variable concentrations, which would be released over a much shorter time-span. Resistance was first seen in Sicily in 1981, and spread quickly owing to the movement of bees north for over-wintering. The path of resistant mites has

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Chairman's Chat

Spring in Autumn Have you also noticed a tendency for Spring bee flowers to come out again in Autumn? Over the last few years I've noticed dandelions and hawkweeds flowering again quite regularly; but this year even charlock is re-flowering. Off Winchbottom Lane, a field where the borage was harvested has gone quite yellow with charlock; and some of the shed borage seed has grown and is flowering too. Very pretty and good bee forage, as well. It must be a side effect of Global Warming.

Our 'Wanders Supporter' Returns It was good to see our recent Chairman, John Crick back amongst us last Friday, together with his wife Margaret. They've been out in Oz for six weeks on a wide-ranging holiday. That is why you had me supervising at our recent AGM. They said they were still partly in the wrong time zone. Lets hope we see the photos in due course.

October's talk also last Friday, Ian Homer our Regional Bees Officer, gave us a highly enjoyable and very thought provoking talk – Eureka Moments in Beekeeping. Ian came up especially from Dorset to visit us and it was a 4 hour journey! I am very disappointed that we only managed an audience of 21 people. Those members who didn't attend definitely missed out: so they should give themselves a sharp kick to acknowledge their omission! Those who were there picked up a lot of extremely useful ideas, some of which will perhaps be reported in the newsletter in due course.

Meeting pre-publicity perhaps the significant time gap between the circulation of our newsletter and our actual meetings is a bit to blame here. But with computer technology, there might be a solution for many of our members. Since a good many of us are now accessible by email, we will try using it to put out meeting reminders a few days before the talks. Unfortunately the cost and workload of doing this by traditional post is prohibitive. We suspect that a few of our members are able to receive emails, but don't receive the newsletter by this route. Make sure our secretary knows your email address, then we can send you the reminders – and hopefully the newsletter too.

Beekeeping Education

Our education theme is being expanded this year. We are repeating our highly successful Beginners Course and already have a good number of candidates booked for the course. It starts on March 7th and is being organised by John Crick with Christine Hazell. After that beginners course has finished, we will be

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been tracked across mainland Europe, but the resistant mites in the UK, however, are not the same strain as the European mites, so our resistance has evolved separately, although it may have been for similar reasons.

Dr. Watkins talked about the need to vary the approach to varroa control in future. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) involves using a number of methods of control, which on their own may be less effective than the pyrethroid treatments were, but used together can have a similar result without risking future resistance to these new treatments.

Where Apistan and Bayvarol are pyrethroid-based and work as a nerve-agent within the mites, Apiguard is Thymol-based, and works by breaking down the cell walls within the mite so there is no potential for pyrethroid resistant mites to have any cross-resistance to Apiguard.

Like Apistan, Apiguard is best used after the honey harvest, while the temperature is above 15°C. It is a 2-dose treatment of water-based gel. For a full hive, a 50g dose is placed on a card or in a shallow foil tray above the brood, or between two brood boxes if brood-and-a-half. The treatment works through the hive as the bees remove the gel from the outside, which is why the tray must be shallow. Vapours from the gel are heavier than air, so an open mesh floor must be sealed or have the varroa tray inserted or the vapours will just fall through. After two weeks, any remaining gel from the foil tray should be tipped on to a card and spread no wider than a 10cm circle to control the vapour release. The second dose/tray should be added at this time only, even if the first dose/tray has been cleared before the two weeks is up. This second dose should be left in the hive for a further 2-4 weeks, giving a maximum 6 week treatment time.

An alternative course is to put a half-dose in the hive in October, and leave over-winter until hive activity restarts in February or March depending on season.

Apiguard is 92% to 95% effective. It is possible to mop up the remaining mites using other treatments such as oxalic acid.

Apiguard is highly effective against resistant mites and has no effect on brood or adults if used **at the correct dose**. The queen may stop laying for a short time if the treatment is used in the spring, and bees have been known to leave the hive in hot conditions which is why a half-dose is recommended where temperatures regularly exceed 25°C. In the UK, however, there should be no effect on colony development.

Apiguard is available in 50g trays or 3kg tubs, but should be considered as only one of a number of varroa treatments which are best used in rotation. It is a certified Organic treatment, which also shows up to 70% control of chalk brood, is effective against tracheal mite (acarine) and there is anecdotal evidence regarding effectiveness against foul brood and nosema. N.B. As an aside, a 'dose' of Thymol in the winter feed of syrup also seems to control nosema - R.O.B. Manley/Clive Hill.

Finally, Dr. Watkins also listed a number of other areas that Vita-Europe have products available or in development for, including future varroa controls like Vitasol, E/AFB bio-controls and field detection kits, pheromones, nosema and waxmoth treatment and stimulatory feeds.

According to the Vita-Europe website, where pyrethroids are no longer used, resistance in subsequent mite generations has been seen to fall. With this in mind, in a few years it may well be possible to use Apistan again as one of the treatments in rotation. Watch this space.

I would urge you to follow the manufacturer's instructions should you choose to use Apiguard in your own hives and although it is possible to buy thymol crystals for other uses, it would not be advisable to attempt home medication against varroa using thymol. More information on Apiguard can be found at www.vita-europe.co.uk.

Tim Fountain

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holding tutorial sessions to help candidates prepare for the BBKA Basic Exam: with Clive Winslow as the tutor. In addition to this, a small group of us will start Tutorial sessions for the BBKA Module 1 (Honeybee Management) in November. If you would like to join this group, contact me by November 6th. In later years we hope to have small groups to study for some of the other intermediate modules.

A wish fulfilled and problem identified In my last 'Chat' I was provocative, and asked "Can anyone spare a Laptop Computer?" Within hours of the Newsletter coming out, HWBKA member David Sparkes was on the phone offering me one. He is the IT manager of a London based company which regularly replaces its PC equipment, and likes passing the old ones on to Charities. Thanks to David's hard work, and his company's generosity, I've already taken delivery of a laptop, and used it to run last week's meeting and this week's committee meeting. I've even learnt how to link it up to a PC projector too - all this at no expense to the association!

David also spotted that the email version of our October newsletter, which included an interesting photograph of Terry Kelly's, was an enormous file size. (It took about 50 minutes for me to download it using dial-up.) David has suggested an easy way round this problem, so perhaps we could be moving to an illustrated newsletter in the future.

HWBKA Honey Cookery Books - REMINDER NOTICE At our recent committee meeting we reviewed this topic. We decided that the remaining stock of these books will be held under the control of our Treasurer at The Environment Centre. Will all members who still hold any **unsold** copies of this book contact our Treasurer ASAP, so that this matter can be resolved. Money to cover any books that they have sold must also be sent directly to the Treasurer.

Help Wanted As soon as we can manage it, and later, we need a little extra help in up-dating our display work-top area at The Environment Centre. Different mind-sets on how to approach this important education area will be much appreciated. If you can spare a little time and would like to help, please ring Sylvia Chamberlin, or myself to learn more.

Rothamsted Research Open Days This was an outstanding success, with some 11,000 members of the public attending. Posters about an enormous range of research areas were presented; and the scientific staff working on them were at hand, very ready to discuss any queries. There is a large article about the Open Days in the November Beecraft, but it makes little attempt to give a flavour of the technical details. From the PIE Group (which is where the Bee work is now carried out) Juliet Osborn, Andrew Martin and Norman Carreck were on hand: although Norman was just visiting, since unfortunately his position as Apiarist has now been ended and he has been made redundant. However, Norman has circulated details where he may be contacted in the future. Andrew Martin, PIE's bumblebee experimentalist has taken on running their (just 15) honeybee colonies; and will soon be attending a Beekeeping Course! All this is a far cry from the days of Free & Butler and Queen Substance research: but there is still masses of other interesting research work going on at Rothamsted.

National Honey Show

This was again a good day out, well up to it's recent standards, and Show Entries were a little up too. I was lucky to attend a talk by Kim Flottum, from the USA, on pheromones. One of his slides was attention grabbing and memorable. A description of how we humans would find the inside of a bee colony "Its dark as night, over 33°C, right about 100% Humidity, and chock full of odours - honey, pollen, bees, pheromones, pesticides, propo-

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lis, wax, This is what its like.” And like that all the time: a very different world to our own experiences.

Official Policy on Varroa Control Also at the National, Tim Lovett, BBKA Chairman gave a very interesting talk. This showed that BBKA has been working very hard for us all, negotiating successfully with the VMD about Varroa Control Treatments and Hive Cleansers. The November edition of Beecraft carries a holding statement (back inside page) and further details will come out in the next edition of BBKA News. A BBKA leaflet is forecast to be issued in February. We are all now legally bound to record details of any such materials applied to hives

Committee Matters

Finances & Subs We have just held the first meeting of the new committee. Financially we have a good level of reserves, but a significant number of laggards still need to pay their subs and are being chased up by our Treasurer. If you don't renew your Sub you will miss out badly because you won't be eligible for the BBKA 3rd party insurance cover, or BDI cover on diseased colonies.

HWBKA Website.

Websites are already known to be very effective as a way of attracting potential new members. BBKA sends on some enquires netted by their own website to the Bucks County BKA Secretary; and both Mid Bucks and Chalfont Beekeepers already have their own Websites. Some months ago Stewart Thorburn, normally known as our Swarm Officer, was charged with the task of assessing the practicability of HWBKA having it's own Website. Stewart gave us an overview of his findings and we have now charged Stewart and Keith Wood, one of our new Committee Members who is an IT specialist to come up with detailed proposals. We will keep you informed of progress. Library. Stan Grierson, our new librarian will shortly be assessing the present state of our Library and optimizing it's use of the new cupboard space.

That is all for now. I hope to meet you all at the coming November meeting. If not, then have a Happy Christmas and I will look forward to chatting to you in the New Year.

Clive Hill

Rolling beeswax candles

Thursday November 9th 7.30 – 9.00pm
at the Environment Centre

This short course is aimed at training people who want to use candle rolling as a creative activity for children.

As rolling candles does not require heating and melting wax it is a risk free activity suitable for all ages. It is appropriate to do it just before Christmas as the candles can be used for decoration or given for presents.

You will be shown what equipment is needed and how it should be prepared. There will be templates for cutting the wax and you will learn the basic method. All VERY easy.

Information on where the wax, wick etc can be bought, and a rough idea of cost will be provided. We may also play around with multicolour designs.

If some people are keen to extend this to pouring and dipping candles further sessions might be arranged.

This event has been set up at the request of youth leaders but HWBKA members are welcome. It would be good to have people to do this with children at shows.

Sylvia Chamberlin

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Extraordinary General Meeting

At the start of our meeting (7:45 pm) on 26th January 2007 we intend to hold a short EGM, to make some minor modifications to our Constitution. Here are the background details.

1. At our recent AGM our Treasurer and Independent Examiner announced that they wished to change the Association's Financial Year from the current "1st July until the following year's 30th June" to "1st September until August 31st of the following year". This was to position the consequent financial review generating workload at a more suitable time period. There was no objection to this being done: however according to our constitution, insufficient notice of this change had been given. The AGM accordingly agreed that the matter would be deferred to a specially convened EGM at a later date.

2. Your Committee has since decided to recommend that we make another small change to the constitution. The association is a Registered Charity and the Charities Commission needs to know who the Trustees of HWBKA are. At present our constitution states that the whole of our executive committee are the trustees. We propose that we change this section of the constitution, so that for the purposes of the Charities Commission the Trustees are limited to the Chairman, Hon Secretary, and Treasurer.

Clive Hill Chairman

Well I'll Bee

John Crick has drawn our attention to two articles, one in the Tasmanian Mercury of 17th October the other from the Daily Telegraph of 26th October demonstrating that bees are important in ways we don't normally consider. Not only have bees developed a sophisticated communication and social system while having only a tiny brain but their ability to navigate with accuracy is now being studied with a view to copying their system in new weapon systems and planetary exploration

Please Note

The e-mail address for the newsletter has changed.
It is now

hwbka.newsletter@ucheldir.co.uk

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@ucheldir.co.uk

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Seasonal Tips and Reminders

November 2006

Key Tasks this month:

1. Fit Mouseguards.
2. Ensure hive positioned to drain forward.
3. Ensure hive secured against winds.
4. If necessary, instal armour plating to keep Woodpeckers off.
5. Check hive weight by 'Hefting'.

As the Association doesn't have a December newsletter, these notes are designed to cover the routine maintenance jobs necessary for November, December and early January.

So far we have had a mild and unchallenging autumn, with little to speak of in terms of rain or strong winds, and no frost yet. A good proportion of the leaves still seem to be hanging on the trees, and there are still those lovely autumn colours: and pretty much at the time of year you'd expect. Although our honeybees will still be flying on mild days, colonies will now have started to form winter clusters - loose clusters, but a definite change. In the Nov./Dec./Jan. time period we are interested in, hives ought to be heavy with stores: you'll find them very heavy to "heft".

Where can the queen get to ?

If you leave a tank feeder on the hive, put a queen excluder underneath it. Here is why

In the autumn of 2002 I left a tank feeder (Ashforth / Miller) on the top of a hive because the bees had built wild comb in the syrup compartment. They had filled it with ivy honey; and it had gone solid. So I left the feeder on, thinking that the cluster could use the honey over the winter, and save me the messy job of cleaning it up. And they did too, but when I tried to remove the feeder in the spring, to my horror, I found the queen was up there. There was brood in the wild comb; and nearly all of it was drones! Ever tried finding the queen amongst fixed in position wild comb? It was at that point I realised I should have left the feeder on over a queen excluder!

Ensuring good Ventilation and Drainage. Securing against the wind.

Make sure the hive ventilation and drainage systems are working. You're aiming to prevent dampness accumulating in the hive over winter, because it is wet conditions that kill colonies, not cold. I use and recommend the "through ventilation" wintering ideas recommended by Manley in his book *Beekeeping in Britain*. They've worked well for me over a good many years.

Assuming that your hive has a normal solid floor, first raise the back of the hive floor, and then chock it up with a 1 to 2 cm thick wooden block at either side. Make sure the floor is tilted forwards a little, to allow any liquid water to run freely out of the hive. Next, remove the roof and loosen the crownboard. Put a few pieces of broken matchstick between the crownboard and the top edges of the broodchamber. Aim to leave a 2 mm air gap between the crownboard and the hive body at the back and along part of the sides. The bees will propolise it in position, leaving a small air gap and this will allow gentle air movement through the hive. Next, replace the roof, and if necessary weight it down, to prevent it blowing off in strong winds. Make sure the hive (and if necessary the Hive Stand) won't rock about either. In a very windy location you could use a Hive Strap if necessary to secure hive to stand, and roof to hive.

If you are already using a Varroa Mesh Floor as standard practice, I would again tilt the hive forwards slightly, as above: but I'd leave the crownboard fully attached. You need to be certain that there will be a modicum, of air movement within the body

of the hive, not a 'howling gale', since this will hold the bees back once the brood nest gets established, later in the winter.

Keeping out Mice - fitting Mouse Guards.

Remove any entrance blocks from a National or Commercial Hive, to give a full aperture entrance. Then fix a metal mouse guard (zinc or aluminium) completely across the entrance. Use 3 or 4 large drawing pins to hold it in place. Push the pins through the metal, into the woodwork, and fully home. It needs to be secure against strong winds! For WBCs I'd use a pair of scissors to cut the mouseguard so it fits in the entrance slide way in place of the wooden slides; then, to keep mice out, bung-up any gaps behind it (at the ends) that are 3/8 inch (9mm) or more where it fits into the slide way. Put a mouse guard on even if your hive is on rails well above the ground. In the winter of 2000, mice got into an un-protected hive of mine on hive rails with the entrance at my knee height. It held the colony back for months the following year!

Making sure that Woodpeckers can't get a foot / beak hold.

Although my bees are close to a large wood, with plenty of Green Woodpeckers, I've never had the hives attacked. At the Association's Hughenden apiary and our former one at Widmer End, hives have been raided each year - often wrecked! Our Apiary Managers have found that wrapping hives in thick polythene sheet (builder's damp-proof membrane), stapled into position, is an effective preventative. You can even slit the sheeting into strips, so they blow in the wind. As an alternative, I've heard it is effective to enclose the hive in wire mesh, spaced off the hive surface to prevent the birds getting a foothold.

After all these chores, you can settle down and enjoy a period of beekeeping peace and quiet for a few weeks. However, do take a look at your hives on mild days. I've seen my own colonies flying well on both Boxing Day and New Years Day in the past. Finally, here are some ideas for bee-books you might ask Santa to put aside.

1. *The Honeybee Inside Out* by Celia Davis. Celia writes regularly in *Beecraft*. This is an excellent up to date book about the structure and function of the honeybee. Priced at £22.50 it will be an ideal buy for a beekeeper who is embarking on the BBKA examination modules.

2. *The Humble Bee Its life-history and how to domesticate it.* By FWL Sladen.

ISBN number 0 9510242 3X This is the 1989 re-print of the Edwardian classic book on bumblebees. It a hardback and costs £14.95 from Logaston Press. Yes, I know its not about honeybees, but it is such a wonderful read that you won't be able to put it down! Quite a number of the species names have changed since it was written, but the changes are listed in all the up to date bumble books, so that is not really a problem.

3. *Field Guide to the BUMBLEBEES of Great Britain & Ireland* By Mike Edwards & Martin Jenner.

ISBN number 0-9549713-0-2. £10 This pocket-sized book is an up to date mine of information on Bumblebees. It covers everything from identification using the bees' colour band patterns, details on their habitat requirements, their distribution, conservation and fodder plant needs. Each species is shown in wonderful colour photos. You ought to be able to get this off the shelf in Waterstones (Ottakars) bookshop in the town.

That's all for now, talk to you again in the New Year. Happy Christmas.

Clive Hill.