

# High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

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## *Newsletter - October 2008*

### Diary

#### Forthcoming Events

- |                  |   |   |
|------------------|---|---|
| 11th October     | - | Presidents Evening - Frieth                                 |
| 30th Oct/1st Nov | - | National Honey Show   |
| 31st October     | - | Monthly Meeting- Clive de Bruyn- The Joys of Raising Queens |
| 28th November    | - | Monthly Meeting - Ian Gourlay - Beekeeping Past and Present |

#### 30th October – November 1st National Honey Show at Weybridge in Surrey

You will find further details at the National Honey Show Website <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk>

#### Recent Event Reports

##### 26th September - Andrew Collinson – Beekeeping and Food Safety

Andrew is an Environmental Health Officer(EHO) with Wycombe District Council, and talked to us about food safety and our legal responsibilities as producers of honey.

He started by saying that until 2002, there had been no great issues with honey, but following problems with imported Chinese products then, and the increase in consumer demand for healthy, local foods in general and ‘superfoods’ in particular, honey was now being monitored.

Andrew took a moment to tell us that animal products of Chinese origin, such as honey and milk products which are currently in the news, have been banned from import in to this country since the honey problems in 2002.

Andrew went on to say that honey is tested for chemical residues, such as those from varroa mite treatments, which may be found as a result of over-dosing. In fact, he had very recently been informed that a sample of honey from the area had shown up in a national test conducted by the Food Standards Agency, and that the local EHO’s were being brought in to assist with the investigation.

Beekeepers come under recently introduced EU regulations which require all food placed on the market, whether offered for sale OR given away free as samples, to be safe. The regulations also require traceability and product recall procedures to be in place. The keeping of records and use of batch numbers or lot marking on jars is part of this.

For the majority of us though, as producers of small quantities† for sale direct to consumers or local outlets, we are excluded from the detail of these regulations and we do not have to register as food producers. We are, however, encouraged to always follow good food safety principles.

A further document, The Honey Regulations, does still apply to us, and this specifies such things as what can actually be called “honey”.

When testing honey, the EHO’s and others such as the Food Standards Agency, look for such things as physical contamina-

*Continued on page 2 column 1*

### Chairman’s Chat

Thank you again for the honour of re-appointing me to the role of Chairman. Here is my digest of News for the October Newsletter.

#### The Dewey Caron Talk.

This was a highly successful evening, with beekeepers coming from many other associations to join us for the evening. Dewey gave a very interesting talk which explained the CCD scenario and explained the many facets of the search for what could be causing it. Colonies collapse over about three weeks, with a total loss of flying bees despite the presence of a good level of stores and brood. Post-collapse there is a characteristic time gap before the stores are robbed out, or wax moths invade. Dewey also gave us a good insight to US beekeeping. They have ‘Hobbyist’ beekeepers too: but also a significant number of ‘Industrial Scale Beekeepers’, whose needs and working practices lie completely outside our UK experiences. Thanks to Kenn Shearer’s hard work we were able to video the Talk and Q&A session and we hope to have it available on DVD soon for those members who were unable to be present. At the end of his Talk, Dewey gave us a copy of his excellent book *Honey Bee Biology and Beekeeping*. This is a real joy: succinct, thought provoking and excellently illustrated. Although it is obviously designed for the US Beekeeper, most of the information will be extremely relevant in the UK. Further copies should be available from Northern Bee Books at the forthcoming National Honey Show.

#### President’s Supper

The Supper will be going ahead. Will Steynor was taking the last bookings on AGM night. We will be hearing about the highly successful “Red Kite Re-introduction Programme” which should be absolutely fascinating – and nothing to do with Bees!

#### BBKA Bee Disease Research Petition + Whitehall March

The Environment Centre has been working really hard collecting signatures for the Petition. Thanks largely to their help we’ve now amassed 2005 signatures - and they are still coming in. When I checked just before the AGM, BBKA then had more than 90,000. The October edition of BBKA News says the campaign ends on October 31st followed by a Beekeepers March on Wednesday November 5th, to present the petition to the Government and then go to Parliament to lobby our MPs. At present no further details are available, but we will discuss how HWBKA can support the event at our coming committee meet-

*Continued on page 2 column 2*

*Continued from page 1 column 1*

tion of products, including chipped glass and the delightfully named 'drop-ins' which may occur whilst bottling, chemical contamination including residues from pesticides and rinsing or cleaning agents, cleanliness of equipment used and finally product labelling issues.

All containers used to sell honey must be labelled with certain information such as the product description, producer name, best before date, lot number, weight and potentially some other information. BBKA Advisory leaflet B10 can be obtained which gives more specific information on the requirements.

Discussions ensued regarding the sampling programs run by the EHO's and other agencies. Andrew was happy to consider that some members of HWBKA would be interested in taking part in a future honey survey.

Some interest was also expressed about the use of best before dates. These are more for quality issues, where products may deteriorate over time as chemical changes take place in the food. Where food safety is a potential issue, a Use By date would be required instead. A difference of opinion occurred regarding what best before date to use for honey. Some members of the audience were aware of a "20 months from bottling" requirement, but Andrew had not heard of this and suggested 18 months as reasonable. The BBKA leaflet suggests 2 years, but one supplier of labels suggests picking anything from 2 to 5 years. Out of curiosity, I have just searched for more information on this subject and am now more confused than ever. It may depend on what type of honey it is, how soon it might crystallise etc etc. Suffice to say that, it may sit in a bucket for a long, long time, but it appears that you only need worry about a date when you come to put it in a jar!

†Small quantities were described as selling in the order of 10-20 jars per week. Andrew suggested that anyone moving honey outside the county SHOULD be covered by the regulations.

*Tim Fountain*

### **11th September Dr Dewey Caron – Reducing colony stress in the Fall**

Dewey is a Professor at the University of Delaware USA and is on a tour of the UK which includes giving two lectures at the National Honey Show at the end of October.

Dewey began by describing the current situation of colony losses in both the UK & the US with the words "events are overtaking us".

He went on to illustrate the decline in bee stocks:-

In 2006, a survey in the US indicated that bee colonies were half the number that there had been in the 1940's.

Colony health has declined since the 1980's

Pollination needs will increase (Almonds alone require 1.2 million colonies)

In the UK, colony numbers have decline since WWII

Native pollinators are in 'trouble'

One-third of all colonies have been lost since last year, with figures in Wales even higher.

Normal colony loss used to be 5-10%, it is now running at 30% worldwide.

Dewey described two different beekeeping 'worlds', starting by using a picture of an 'Apiary' at his university. It exists for a couple of months only, and contains about 14,000 colonies, resting before moving on to other pollination duties.

In this commercial world, bees will be moved up to 3000km to start with, then work their way back to the university. They are treated like livestock, with quick-fix solutions needed – no time for Integrated Pest Management(IPM). The recipe appears to be feed, feed, feed – with poor quality corn syrup and pollen substitute. The bees are used for multi-plant pollination from

*Continued on page 3 column 1*

*Continued from page 1 column 2*

ing (Oct 6th). I anticipate a significant number of our members may wish to be involved, so we will circulate further details prior to, and at, our 31st October Meeting.

### **Subs Renewal Time**

If you haven't renewed already, may I suggest you take Beecraft, a truly excellent magazine. And if possible, make a personal donation towards Bee research. At the AGM we agreed to continue our 'suggested donation' at £5 per member. Now that the research funding campaign has gathered such momentum, the aggregate sum produced by such donations will make a really good communal donation to the research fund. On the renewal form you will also find a question about another publication, The Beekeepers Quarterly. This is another but very different journal, with a very international slant. I know that several members already have their own private subscriptions to BKQ. If we can gather together about 14 or more subscribers and take it via the association, we will be able to get a very significant price reduction.

### **Honey price Intelligence**

Emmetts farm at Little Marlow is selling both clear and set honey at £3.95/lb. The Times of October 3rd has an article about Callington Honey Fair in Cornwall, which came close to cancellation for the first time in it's 731 year history, because of an acute shortage of honey. The shortage has led to an increase to nearly £4 per lb. Cornish honey production this year is down about 80% largely due to the poor weather and the consequent need to summer feed colonies.

### **AGM + Talk + Honey Judging**

The new Association Year got underway with a three topic meeting and good attendance – around the 30 mark. We had a short Talk on Food Safety with respect to beekeeping, our AGM, and then the judging of our 'Frame of Honey' and 'Honey in Black Jar' competitions.

**Short Talk** on "Food Safety and Legal responsibilities" by Andrew Collinson the Divisional Environmental Health Officer for Wycombe District Council. The key points covered were that if we sell, or even give away honey there is a legal requirement to have an effective lot numbering system in place to ensure product traceability. We also must be careful to avoid any chemical contamination – such as could occur with varroa treatment residues, or from equipment cleaning materials. Since honey is effectively a self-sterile food, and as "the direct supply, by the producer, of small quantities of primary products to the final consumer or to local retail establishments directly supplying the final consumer" "is exempt from the detail within EU regulations (EC Reg 852/2004) and the need to register" most of us beekeepers fall outside the detailed requirements that apply to other foodstuffs. But Environmental Health professionals would "urge anyone handling food to follow good food safety principles, i.e. make sure food is handled hygienically". Andrew explained that food sampling and analysis is carried out by the Food standards Agency: and that they are currently investigating a case of potentially harmful chemical residues with a honey supplier within Bucks. Andrew also said that the FSA tends to carry out 'project work' to allow them to understand foodstuff issues: and that it sought to work cooperatively with food suppliers. We told him that HWBKA would be most interested interacting with any forthcoming project work on honey.

The business of receiving reports and electing a new Committee for the coming year went smoothly. During the AGM we amended the constitution to allow a president to have a maximum time in office of 4 years. As a result we were able to re-elect Will Steynor for what will be his third year as president.

*Continued on page 3 column 2*

*Continued from page 2 column 1*

February onwards and are then expected to produce honey at the end of the season. They have no 'downtime'.

That said, bees in the UK show similar issues to those in the US. In recent years there have been many episodes of high colony losses, and these have been attributed to many things: Spain in 1999 'hive desertion syndrome' where *Nosema* was suspected. France through the 90's where pesticides were the suspect, and recently in Germany where some seed treatments have now been banned.

A chart showed similar periods in the UK when losses increased:- 1905 – 1919 Isle of White Disease (Accarine/*Nosema*/Genetics/viruses & starvation depending on the expert)

2007 Marie Celeste Syndrome in the east of Scotland

One-third or more of colonies lost in areas of the UK

BUT the links to Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) in the US were denied.

CCD symptoms include the abrupt loss of the adult bees without any accumulation of dead bees, a small cluster remain with the queen. Brood, pollen and honey may all be present, and robbing or scavenger attack (wax moth or hive beetle in the US) are delayed.

Dewey reported that he had seen these symptoms in many hives that he had inspected, but believed that these symptoms were not being seen in the UK.

He highlighted a list of possible causes, including diseases, pesticides and environmental stressors.

He indicated the number and variety of fungicides, herbicides and pesticides found in US pollen samples in 2007. The highest figures were for a hive beetle product that we don't have in the UK, and for the active ingredient in Apistan which we do, or at least did before resistant mites. These chemicals also showed up in the brood nest wax that was tested.

Another possible issue was the reduction in, and make-up of, the genetic base of the domesticated honey bee. Apparently, bees have fewer genes devoted to removing chemicals, fewer devoted to immunity and more devoted to learning, navigation and smelling. They fight infection using socialism genes – cleaning and learning as a colony, rather than as individuals. There are very few queen breeders in the US.

Could a new disease or virus be the issue?

Samples have shown high levels of varroa in CCD colonies. Bees examined show the wing muscles to be in a poor state and the bees 'kidneys' to be damaged, all pointing to virus'. There has also been evidence of fungal conditions and bacteria in the brood.

A study in the UK in 2007 by the National Bee Unit discovered the majority of colonies 'lost' in the winter suffered from Deformed Wing Virus, a symptom of poor varroa control. *Nosema ceranea* or *apis* were present in summer losses, along with a selection of other virus'.

For completeness, Dewey listed another short list of possibles with Parasitic Mite Syndrome the most likely. This seems to point towards infestation by accarine.

Where to next?

Samples are being collected, and money has now been made available in the US for analysis.

What to do next?

Dewey recommends:-

Feed Fumagillin/Fumidol-B - *Nosema* control. Not every year, but this year.

Control varroa – Increase ventilation by using open mesh floors and bringing hives more in to the open. Dust frames with icing sugar at every inspection to force cleaning actions that remove mites. Drone brood culling.

*Continued on page 4 column 1*

*Continued from page 2 column 2*

I was re-elected as chairman for my third (and final) year of office, Clive Winslow as vice chairman and also training organizer. Sheila Borwick continues as secretary and Ed West as treasurer. Phil Wiggins will act as apiary manager but intends to train up a replacement during the year. Bill Bendyshe-Brown has agreed to be swarm officer for a further year, continuing to build on the successful methodology he has devised since he took over the role a year ago. Julian Parker remains as programme secretary, Katy Hart as librarian, Scott Rutland has a wide-ranging role which centres on Events. Kenn Shearer continues as our circulation list manager and will soon add newsletter compiler to his role. Your new committee has one new face, Heidi Brodrick. Keith Wood will continue as an 'Outworker' running our website. Unfortunately our secretary, Sheila Borwick, was unable to attend the meeting, since she had a prior engagement – singing in Venice! I've since heard her visit went well and was a memorable experience.

### **Frame and Honey Competitions**

This was the last part of the AGM evening. Vivienne Brown donned her judges white coat and hat and gave us a commentary as she judged the entries. She explained what she was looking for and why she was making decisions. There was a class of 7 entries for Black Jar and 7 (out of an original uptake of 18) for the Frame. The audience asked many questions and greatly enjoyed the event, especially when it was found out that one person was disqualified for entering a frame with a signed top bar from the 2007 contest in mistake!

**Results:** Will Steynor won Best Looking Frame - Well filled, best colour, best looking evenness of cappings and best flavour. John Crick was second. Bob Hunter won Best Filled Frame. In the Jar competition, one jar, with a white lid was eliminated immediately - as being too thin, and with a tang of fermentation to it - but with a comment that there were going to be a lot like that this year (So that was my entry eliminated!) and another was also rejected as too thin. Two jars were selected as being of high quality, so it came down to a choice on taste. The winner was Christine Hazell, with second new member Chrissie Stratfield. After the judging those interested were able to examine and taste all the entries.

During discussion at the end, we decided to continue this Competitive activity and increase the classes next year to four. These being:- Best Frame. Best Frame of signed Top Bar. Best Honey in black jar - aroma, viscosity and flavour. Best honey in a clear jar – full judging.

### **Training**

Our Beekeeper Training plans for the 2008/9 year are yet to be finalised, but it will be based at The Environment Centre. It will include 'An Introduction to Beekeeping' course: and hopefully training for the BBKA Basic exam – perhaps more. I hope to be able to give you further details next month.

### **About BUCKS COUNTY AGM**

All HWBKA members are also members of the Bucks County Beekeepers Association, which is the link through which we become members of BBKA. The County AGM is hosted each year at one of its constituent Associations, and is an occasion for us to cooperate with and meet each other, as we do at the County Seminar in Wendover each March. The 2007 AGM was in High Wycombe, and the 2008 one is being hosted by the North Bucks Association. One key event that will follow from the meeting will be that the Mid Bucks BKA will re-join the Bucks association, and so BBKA - which is an occasion for great pleasure. Please let Sheila Borwick, our Secretary know if you wish to attend the meeting. This will allow us to send an input of the numbers required for the buffet meal: also organise transport, where because of the distance involved we are likely to travel up as a group.

*Clive Hill*

Continued from page 3 column 1

Do not reuse hive parts straight away. Allow them to air in sunlight for a few weeks.

Change brood frames after a maximum of three years to reduce infections.

Feed good sugar syrup and pollen in times of dearth. Use collected pollen or soya substitute that has been expelled using a non-chemical process.

*Tim Fountain*

### **30th May – Bill Bendyshe-Brown – Beekeeping in New Zealand and Australia**

This report is a little late, but an interesting addition to Dewey's talk.

Bill reported on a recent trip to Australia and New Zealand, and a visit that he had arranged to Hamilton Research Centre in New Zealand, where they are looking at varroa tolerant bees.

He showed the spread of varroa from Japan and Russia in the 60's to the UK in 1992, North Island NZ in 2000 and South Island in 2006. Australia and Tasmania are still varroa-free.

It is believed that bees in Russia may now be showing signs of varroa tolerance. Varroa replicate only in hives, with mites entering uncapped cells and laying eggs at intervals once the cell is capped.

Tolerant pupae seem to exclude varroa from within their cocoon, so the mites cannot feed and reproduce.

The research centre are attempting to replicate this by selective breeding. Cells with and without adult varroa are counted and a % tolerance calculated.

Drones from 'resistant' hives are used for artificial insemination.

65 queens were used, and their hives showed tolerance of between 0% and 36% in the first year, rising to between 20% and 65% in the second year and 75%-80% in the third year.

50 queenless colonies were taken to a remote island and given resistant queens.

Drones from these hives were retained until the hives resistance was calculated, and then drones from resistant hives were allowed out to breed. Subsequently, non-resistant queens and drones were removed, and only breeding from resistant stock allowed to take place. The aim being to recreate self-sufficient colonies. Bill reported an ongoing success rate of about 70%.

Development into fungal controls of varroa, with the aim to make the varroa sterile, are ongoing.

*Tim Fountain*

## **Bucks County Beekeepers' Association**

Registered Charity No. 297335

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of Bucks County Beekeepers' Association will take place on Wednesday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at 7.30pm at Rectory Cottages, Church Green Road, Bletchley, MK3 6BJ.

Agenda

- 1 Apologies for absence
  - 2 President's Address
  - 3 Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting, (Attached)
  - 4 Matters arising from the minutes
  - 5 Secretary's Report (on actions of Executive)
  - 6 Treasurer's Report, inc. Subscriptions for 2009/10
  - 7 Reports from the three Local Associations: Chalfonts, High Wycombe, and North Bucks. (The AGM year runs from September 2007 to August 2008, so Mid Bucks is not included this year).
  - 8 Chairman's Remarks
  - 9 Election of Officers and Executive Members
- Chairman  
Secretary  
Treasurer  
Auditor
- Two other members of the Executive Committee are elected at the A.G.M. and two delegates from each of the four local associations are chosen locally.
- 10 Programme for 2009 – Seminar, Basic workshops, Honey Show
  - 11 Awards
  - 12 Any Other Business
  - 13 Date and Venue for next meeting

The AGM will be followed by a buffet and a talk by Peter Tomkins, of Rothamsted, entitled:-  
**“Sixty Years Man and Bee”**

*Beulah Cullen  
Hon. Sec*

## **Seasonal Tips and Reminders October 2008**

### **Visit the NHS**

### **Ivy Honey**

### **Varroa mite level check**

### **Wax moth control**

### **Anti-robbing measures**

### **Mouseguards**

October is the beginning of the winter beekeeping period: the end of season 2008, and maybe some early preparation for 2009. It can be a lovely idle month for the beekeeper. Still reasonably warm, some evening daylight, but soon perhaps overnight frosts. The bees are still quite active, bringing in late pollen and nectar.

**The remaining Bee Forage** This year, with one exception, the autumn flowers have been tailing off quickly. There is still a little willowherb, some white clover, some himalayan balsam, and a few hawkweed flowers on the verges. These, and garden flowers such as golden rod, michaelmas daisies etc, the bees will work avidly. But in most localities around Wycombe there will

have been a good nectar flow from ivy flowers. My own bees have filled their brood chambers from it. You will notice a characteristic strong odour coming from the hives as the bees ripen the nectar, or when you open the hive. Ivy has a very long flowering period (at least a month, possibly two months) and the blossoms are worked by many types of insects, including hover flies, wasps and honeybees. You'll see patches of set ivy honey in the brood chamber, or super: but it sets so quickly, and so hard, you'll have to melt the combs to obtain it. Ivy honey is a dingy off-white colour and must have an extremely high glucose content to set so fast. In autumn 2004 there was discussion about ivy honey in Beecraft. Despite its strong flavour, it can be incorporated into a table honey blend to give a palatable product; although will need to dilute it well with other honey and store it for a few months before it is palatable enough to use. The classic flowering period was the month of October, and perhaps into November: but global warming is having a big effect on this flowering period. This year ivy started yielding in mid August:

and looks likely to continue until at least mid-October. ivy berries result from the pollination activity and these will be consumed over the coming winter by woodpigeons, other birds and perhaps squirrels. The leaves of low growing ivy plants are frequently browsed by deer – so the plant is involved in a wide number of ecological interactions.

#### **Apiguard and Getting ready for Winter**

You need to be getting each colony ready for its period of winter quiescence. Remove the Apiguard tray(s) one month after the second one was put into the colony. Record this date. Clean off the varroa check tray, then re-insert it for one week: then remove it and count the mites that have dropped down. Then calculate and record the daily mite drop figure for the colony. Now leave the check tray out for the rest of the winter. Stay with a reduced hive entrance to help the bees keep the last wasp marauders out. (robber bees too!)

Heft each hive, or check hive weights, to anticipate stores shortages in early spring: but it's really too late for much feeding now. Then get the feeders off. Take a last chance to unite disease free weak colonies before the winter. Get your mouse guards looked out, and install them in late October or during November. I chanced having no guard a few winters ago, and left mouseguards off. Guess what happened ... a mouse moved into the weakest colony: so they are important!

**Super storage and Wax Moth control** Store empty supers so they are safe from wax-moth attack. The traditional way was to use PDB crystals (paradichlorobenzene) in the super stack, but because of concern about 'residues' that can transfer from wax into honey, PDB use has been **banned**. As "organic" type control mechanisms, you could spray the combs with the Certan wax moth control preparation (now available under the name of B 401 from Vita); or even put each super in a deep freeze for a

couple of days. This will kill any eggs, or caterpillars, but afterwards you'll need to wrap the supers carefully to prevent any stray moths getting in. A few years back the chairman of Co. Mayo Beekeepers in Ireland, told me that he got good control just by storing supers in a stack with a sheet of newspaper and strong polythene sheet between each of them. He had 50 supers, and plenty of practice at over-winter storage in a mild and wet winter climate – which should be ideal for wax moths.

**NHS - a beekeeping day out** The National Honey Show (Oct 30th – 1st Nov) is always well worth a visit. If you're new to the craft you'll be amazed at competitive honey etc. displays. The venue has changed this year and it is being held at St George's College, Weybridge, Surrey KT15 2QS: which is quite easily accessible from the M25. The NHS lecture programme is always first class. The show is also a good opportunity to see Thorne's equipment range: but most of the other suppliers won't be there – so it is much less useful than the Stoneleigh Spring Convention if you want to compare equipment. But you can buy a huge range of beekeeping books (new, and out of print) from the specialist stalls; or talk to some of the more specialised beekeeping societies, or meet and talk to the NBU folk, Bees for Development etc.

**Can you give me some feedback?** I've been writing this column for nine years now. It's composed using a PC, so I'm able to re-cycle much basic information/structure from past material; however, as no season matches, I re-shape the column each issue. I'd love some more 'customer feedback'. If any reader wants a subject brought in, or discussed, please let me know. You can ring, or leave a message for me on 01 494 526557, or email me at [clive\\_hill@talktalk.net](mailto:clive_hill@talktalk.net)

That's all for now. Talk to you again next month.

*Clive Hill*