

CHALFONTS BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY

Charity No. 1121231
www.chalfontsbeekeepers.co.uk

NEWSLETTER – May 2011

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Winter losses, results so far

A big thank-you to all who have responded to our annual winter loss survey. As at 3rd May we'd had 52 replies showing losses of 14%. This is above the 7% to 10% we used to expect in an "average" year, but a big improvement on last year when members reported losses of 17.2% and on 2008/09 when it was 15.4%.

It may have passed you by, but 3rd to 9th May was the 13th National Honey Week organised by the (Commercial) Honey Association. One website promoting this event talks about the dramatic loss of bees especially in China, but has a cautiously encouraging comment from Brian Ripley, Chairman of the BBKA "The situation isn't quite this extreme in the UK, but we can't be complacent. Winter is always a hard time for bees; three years ago more than one in three of the UK's honey bees died. The situation is improving, our bees are getting healthier, but they are still not out of intensive care yet."

The most common reason cited for our losses was starvation. This often occurs in spring when winter stores run out through a combination of poor weather and an increase in the hive population. This winter was different; in many cases our bees were simply unable to reach the stores because of the exceptionally cold weather.

I hope to have a fuller report next month to include the other three county associations.

Next Members Evening:

Tue 24th May

Help! I need a new queen

Our speaker this month is Will Steynor. Will is a member, and past President, of High Wycombe Beekeepers. He is an inventive, pragmatic beekeeper who makes his bees pay their way - he last spoke to us some years ago on this very topic. This time he will be explaining how he creates new queens in keeping with his beekeeping philosophy.

The meeting will be held on **Tuesday 24th May, at 7:30pm** in our usual venue: **St. Joseph's, Austenwood Lane Chalfont St. Peter.**

Society Trading – please note:

As you know, until the position is filled, Bill Fisher is Acting Trading Secretary and can be contacted on: **07973 626464** for bee equipment at a discounted price. Like us all he is a busy person and not always at home.

So could members please 'phone Bill before going to his home to: a) ensure he has in stock the item/s you want and b) you don't have a wasted trip!

A complete list of the equipment Bill holds, or can obtain, on behalf of the Society is on our website.

Extractors

The Society has 3 extractors available for loan to members. They are held by John Catton. Currently all are being used – it promises to be wonderful year for honey!

Please note: any member wishing to borrow one **during June please contact Bill Fisher.**

Basic Assessment Sat 4th & Sun 5th June

The BBKA Basic Assessment is a straightforward short-ish practical assessment to demonstrate you have a basic understanding of the craft of beekeeper.

Mary Chris is delighted that **Pam Hunter** has agreed to be the assessor for us on **Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th June**. Pam is an extremely experienced and nationally known beekeeper, a member of the BBKA Executive, serves on the BBKA Education and Husbandry Committee and the BBKA Product and Promotions Committee.

So, if you have kept bees for more than a year and would like the reassurance that you are on course to be a competent beekeeper, please **contact Mary Chris now on 07746 560280 or at: holycrosssamson@yahoo.com**

BBKA swarm survey

The new General Secretary of the BBKA, Jane Moseley, has written to all Association Secretaries asking for their help in a national survey. She asks that each association gather data on how many swarms each association has to deal with:

- Number of calls or sightings of swarms.
- Number of swarms successfully captured.
- Number of swarms known to be destroyed.

“The resultant information will provide a very useful new measure of the work you do and the problems facing the honeybee”.

Could all members please make notes under the above headings between the 1st May and 31st July.

We will remind members in July’s newsletter and ask for your results to be sent in during August.

Thank you.

My first encounter with bees

(from Kate Macnish)

Kate is one of our many enthusiastic beginners and has kindly written about her first apiary experience. “We had the best first apiary session we could have wished for – not only did we have the guidance and expertise of our mentor, Mary Chris, we had the additional benefit of the guidance and expertise of Deborah who had been called in to assist Mary Chris with such a large group. In total there were 11 of us – the majority of whom had obeyed the ultimatum from Mary Chris: no bee suits, no apiary session! Booted and suited we gathered on the hottest day of the year so far and split into two groups. The day was perfect – Easter Saturday was unseasonably warm and sunny – the bees were in good mood and we were able to spend almost an hour at the hives. I was with Deborah’s group and, having lit the smokers and checked our suits were done up properly, we went to work on one of Mary Chris’ hives. We took it in turns to lift up the frames one by one to try and spot the queen – as we each studied our frame, we were able to see eggs in some of the cells, and larvae in others, so although we didn’t see the queen, at least we knew she had been there and active within the last 5 days.

Towards the end of the session, we heard a cry go up from the other group, with Mary Chris delighted to have found their hive’s queen bee.

If we had been nervous about encountering bees for the first time at such close quarters, we were all relieved to find ourselves learning how to handle the bee-laden frames without annoying the bees, how and when to use the smoker, how to ensure the frames went back leaving the bees sufficient

space to work, and for me one of the achievements of the day was learning how to use a blow torch!

The hour went by very quickly and we finished our apiary session with refreshing ice-cold J2Os while we talked over our various experiences and anticipated our next steps towards becoming beekeepers for real. Thank you Mary Chris and Deborah for a very informative and interesting afternoon’s practical session”.

Is the end of the varroa mite in sight?

Dr. Alan Bowman, from the University of Aberdeen, came and spoke to us in April about his research into the *varroa* mite and possible ways of destroying it. It was an interesting talk, but to learn that we are still some way off a *varroa* solution was disappointing, especially following all the publicity his work generated at the end of last year (see January 2011 newsletter for details),

Alan is not a beekeeper. I liked this as it meant he had an open mind and brought no preconceived ideas into his work. His area of expertise is ticks. He is currently working on sea lice - a big problem for salmon farmers.

Alan highlighted three big problems:

- The fact that the mite is now resistant to the pyrethroid chemical controls.
- The fact that the *varroa* mite is, in evolutionary terms, closely related to our honeybee, implying that any targeted control could also destroy the bees!
- The cost of research work to find a solution would outweigh any return a pharmaceutical company would make on sales of the resultant control medication. Too small a market.

But he ended on an upbeat note:

- Suggesting that *varroa* control would be achieved by medication given with winter feed (as with *nosema*).
- All interested parties are encouraged with the work so far and he is in negotiations with various companies to fund the final bits of necessary research.
- All being well, he anticipated we beekeepers could be treating our bees in about 5 years time.

Getting to know your committee

30 second interview

This month the fifth committee member to be interviewed is our Membership Secretary, Sue Carter. Sue is also Membership Secretary of Bucks County Beekeepers’ Association.

Q: How long have you been keeping bees?

SC: Since 2003, but I have to admit, it only seems like yesterday I was doing the beginners course.

SC: A bee brush – it soon got sticky and I find the nearest plant with long leaves on it more than adequate and more hygienic.



Sue Carter (right) receives award at the Bucks County Honey Show 2010

Q: Do you have a favorite beekeeping gadget?

SC: Like Mike Leon, my hive tool. It was the first beekeeping item I bought. When I was still doing the beginners course, I went to the Spring convention at Stoneleigh and was totally overwhelmed by how much was there – but I did buy my hive tool and I will be very sad if I lose it!

Q: What have been your best beekeeping moments?

SC: Seeing capped honey in the supers, winning the honey cake competition and being on the committee, it is good to be able to give something back to the society.

Q: Why did you start beekeeping?

SC: I was watching bees on the flowers in the garden one day and thought: “beekeeping would be an interesting hobby”, but I didn’t do anything about it. Then one day Dave, my husband, came home and told me about this really interesting little shop he’d seen, next to where his company kept their archives near Windsor - that was everything and anything to do with beekeeping. He’d found Thornes, and my interest in beekeeping was reborn, and this time I did something about it!

Q: What type of hives do you use?

SC: Up until this year, my answer would have been Nationals, but last year, I had such a strong colony, that I needed a double brood – it was such a nightmare going through so many frames, I have converted to the bigger brood boxes of Commercial hives this year.

Q: How many hives do you have and how many do you want?

SC: I have one and a nucleus in my garden at home and help Bill Fisher with his apiary. I travel a lot on business and find managing more than 2-3 colonies on my own too much to fit in. Ultimately I’d like 6-8 colonies.

Q: What’s your worst beekeeping purchase?

Q: Where do you keep your bees?

SC: I’m a classic “bees at the bottom of the garden” person

Q: Do you have favorite beekeeping book / manual?

SC: I’ve just bought myself some microscopes, so currently Dades’s Anatomy and Dissection of the Honeybee, but Tautz’s The Buzz about Bees is a close second.

Q: The next best thing to beekeeping?

SC: It would have to be cookery – or photography – or travel.

Honey labelling.

On the 26th April Nick Grey led the final in-door Beginners session and talked about Products of the Hive – the most obvious one being honey!

You may give away a lot of your honey but if you sell it, no matter what the outlet, you must label it in accordance with current honey labelling regulations. Whilst you can choose any picture / graphic to best promote *your* honey, the wording on it (location of hives, weight, lot numbers, your details along with font sizes etc) must conform to these regulations.

One of the most important requirements Nick highlighted was the font size used for the various weights we sell honey in:

Jar size	Font size
Exceeding 1kg	6mm
200g to 1kg *	4mm *
50g to 200g	3mm
under 50g	2mm

* This covers 1lb, ½lb and 12oz sized jars.

But don't worry unduly, help is at hand. The simplest way to get your labels is through Thornes, who will advise you on all the requirements or, if you wish to produce them yourself, go to the BBKA website to read a summary of the regulations:

www.britishbee.org.uk/articles/honey_labels.php

During the evening we held a mock Honey Show with Sue Carter and Vicky Hinds as our judges. Both Sue and Vicky commented on the high standard, but out of the 16 entries they had to pick one winner...and congratulations go to Sally Williams! So this should mean we will have a record number of entries at the Society's Honey Show on 3rd September!



The apiary in May

Beekeepers seem to be discussing two topics at the moment. The first is summed up in this picture:



Bill Fisher and Richard Archdeacon reassembling Richard's WBC hive after carrying out swarm control

Bill Fisher and Sue Carter were helping Richard, after his wife got stung by a bee (nowhere near the hive, in their house in fact) and had a nasty reaction. The idea was to prevent them swarming, as he was concerned they might go around stinging others! So one colony has become three by creating two additional nuc's using queen cells from the hive.

The other topic is how much nectar the bees are bringing in so early in the year. All three of the Society's extractors are out now – a good two months earlier than last year! One tip here, if your hives are near oilseed rape fields be prepared to extract as soon as the fields return to green. The bees are taking full advantage of flowers that are blooming weeks earlier than normal after the hottest April on record. And flowers, which the books tell us to look out now, have long since bloomed, three local examples being dandelions, hawthorn and bluebells.

May's *BBKA News* has excellent articles on artificial swarming (p7), although the distance recommended for relocating your original hive seems excessive at 10m. Most authorities refer to distances of 3ft-10ft, so don't give up if your apiary wont stretch to 33ft. It also reviews what is happening in our hives right now (p 9 – 11)

Chalfont St.Giles Open Gardens

Those new to the Society may not be aware that we take our stall to various local events during the course of each year. The first one this year, as part of the Chalfont St. Giles Open Garden Day, was at Flexmore Farm run by Stephen and Vicky Hinds (Dartington devotees) on 8th May.

It is the role of our newest committee member, Debbie Campbell, to liaise with the various groups mounting the events and ensure we have enough support to man the stall. If you do have some time spare and would like to help at a future event please do **contact Debbie on 01753 883326**. I'm pleased there was plenty of help at Flexmore Farm, so thank you. I would reiterate that it is good fun and, with beginners in mind, it's amazing how much you will learn by just talking to members of the public.

One other point, with the huge amount of honey being, and destined to be, extracted such events provide a ready outlet from which to sell *your* honey.

Dates for your diary

Those marked * are events in which we participate.

Tuesday 24th May

Help! I need a new queen. A talk by Will Steynor, past President of Wycombe Beekeepers.

Saturday 11th June

* **Little Chalfont Village Day**

Saturday 25th June

* **Feast of St. Peter, Gold Hill, Chalfont St. Peter.**

Tuesday 28th June

Question Time. Your chance to quiz experienced practitioners with your beekeeping problems.

Saturday 16th July

Annual Family Day at Mike Leon's.

Full details in newsletter nearer the date.

Sunday 17th July

* **Chenies Manor Plant and Garden Fair**

Tuesday 26th July

Sales and marketing of hive products.

Christine Stevens will explain how to promote the fruits of your labours.

August

No meeting

Saturday 3rd September

Chalfonts Beekeepers Honey Show, part of our local Chalfont St.Giles Country Show.

Saturday 24th September

Bucks County Honey Show.

Memorial Hall, Wendover

Unless otherwise stated all our monthly meetings and the Beginners course are held at: **St. Joseph's, Austenwood Lane, Chalfont St. Peter, SL9 8RY** and start at **7:30pm**