

# CHALFONTS BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY

Charity No. 1121231  
[www.chalfontsbeekeepers.co.uk](http://www.chalfontsbeekeepers.co.uk)

## NEWSLETTER – June 2011

Editor: John Catton

Assistant: Richard Simpson

### Winter loss survey update and a wonderful start to 2011

Since the last newsletter I have had a several more responses to our winter loss survey which marginally reducing overall losses to 13.6% (55 members reported losses of 30 hives, 220 down to 190). Our neighbouring club, Mid Bucks Beekeepers, conducted the same survey amongst their members; 43 reported 29 lost colonies (172 down to 143) that equates to a 16.8% loss. So 98 members from the two Societies lost 59 colonies – 15.1%. The most common reason for losses given by Mid Bucks members was weak colonies going into winter. We will now have to wait to see what the national survey conducted by the BBKA shows to see how we compare.

Whilst each of us will have to examine and learn from our losses, the colonies which did come through the winter produced copious amounts of honey from the spring flow, so unlike last year we should not be short of honey to sell from our stall at the various events we will be attending this summer

### Next Members Evening:

Tue 28<sup>th</sup> June  
Question Time

Not just one speaker this month, but three (or maybe four) experts!

Our Seasonal Bee Inspector, Julian Parker, will be joined by Frank Ricketts, Chairman of Mid Bucks Beekeepers and Clare Waring to answer any (bee related) questions and discuss/debate any issues you may have. Who is the possible fourth? Clare is the 'other half' to Adrian Waring, one of the most experienced and well known beekeepers in recent times. It will be a privilege to see him there.

The meeting will be held on **Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June at 7:30pm** in our usual venue: **St. Joseph's, Austenwood Lane Chalfont St. Peter.**

### Help! I need a new queen

Will Steynor, ex-president of High Wycombe Beekeepers, is a really practical bloke who makes and improvises a lot of his equipment *and*, as his talk to a packed house on 24<sup>th</sup> May demonstrated, he has worked out a system for raising (or should I say creating) queens that fits in with "weekend beekeeping". He makes his beekeeping pay for itself; remember queens and nucs are expensive!

After taking us through basic swarm control, finding a queen cell and making a nucleus colony, he embarked on a step by step guide to producing

a few queens, sufficient for the average hobbyist beekeeper.

Then, he took us through what can be a problematic process, introducing the queen to a queenless hive. For this he used one of his improvised pieces of equipment, a 1950s plastic hair curler in place of a conventional Butler cage! The workers have to eat their way through a plug of candy to release the queen from the hair curler, so of course Will makes the candy too, by mixing a small amount of granulated honey with a lot of icing sugar until the necessary consistency is reached.

Does this all work? Yes. He has just extracted his first honey of the season and got 300 lbs from 10 supers (although he uses Nationals, he puts just 10 frames in each super), this equates to 3 lbs of honey per super frame.

### My first encounter with honey bees

(from Kate Macnish)

Kate is one of our many enthusiastic beginners. Here is a second article from her, this time about the Beginners Course itself.

*"Looking back over the past 3 months, I am amazed at how much I have learned about bees and beekeeping. Let me rephrase that... I am amazed at how little I knew when I started!*

*When we have been, and continue to be, so dependent on the bee, how can it be that most of us know so little about these fascinating creatures to whom we owe so much?*

While it is not possible for me to keep bees in my own garden at the moment, our local Gardening Society has agreed to have a hive. So our Chairman, Chris, and I signed up for the Beekeeping Course. What an eye-opener! With over 40 people signing up, each of the Tuesday evening meetings has been well attended. The sessions were: an introduction to beekeeping, the bee colony; equipment (including a practical workshop making frames), the beekeeping year, pollination and plants, queen rearing and swarming, pests and diseases and the final session was on hive products.

Each of us has been given a mentor to help us through our first months of beekeeping and we have had our first Apiary sessions – hands-on working with our mentors' hives.

The theory learnt over the past 3 months is now to be put into practice. I never thought, when I decided to sign up for this course, that I would be having my first experience of wood-work, nor that I would be using a blow-torch – but I have discovered that, while there is an awful lot to beekeeping and bees in general and that there is a huge amount still to be discovered about bees, keeping a hive is not rocket science. Bees simply get on with collecting pollen, nectar, water, feeding their larvae and their queen, and making honey! It is up to the beekeeper to ensure that their environment is healthy and they have enough space within the hive to get on with their work. We must also ensure they have supplies of extra food when needed, and their hive is safe from mice, woodpeckers and wasps.

I would not have had the confidence to start keeping bees without having attended this course and, now that the 9 sessions have been completed, I realize what a mess I would have made of it had I tried! We have got our bee suits and gloves; we are about to purchase a National Hive, and then the bees themselves. It's an exciting prospect and we are grateful to everyone at Chalfont Beekeepers' Society for their encouragement, hospitality and excellent teaching skills."

Kate, we are delighted you enjoyed the course - Ed

## Getting to know your committee 30 second interview

This month the sixth committee member to be interviewed is our Webmaster, Derek Atkinson. Derek is also a Bucks County Beekeepers' Association committee member for which he has built and maintains the County website. This is an important month for Derek; he is getting married on 28<sup>th</sup> June to Min Morgan. Derek and Min, have a great day; we do understand why you will be missing the "Question Time" evening meeting.



**Left,**  
Our  
Committee  
Member,  
Derek  
Atkinson.

**Below**  
Min on her  
Dragon's  
Breath stall



**Q:** How long have you been keeping bees?

**DA:** This is my third year and most successful to date.

**Q:** Why did you start beekeeping?

**DA:** I had noticed the lack of bees in my garden, but hadn't thought much more about it. Then a cast appeared on the ground in a field in the nearby stables where we kept our horse. Mike Leon collected them, explained all about the club and the beginners' sessions and three of us signed up as a team, but only I completed the course. My main interest is providing the bees with a home and t.l.c to allow them to survive; if it also pays for the kit I have bought that's great!

**Q:** What type of hives to you use?

**DA:** I started with a WBC, moved to Nationals, but since buying a Dartington I am converting all my Nationals to 14x12 as the joys of inspecting 'brood and a half' was too much for me. I now manage our bees with my wife-to-be, Min Morgan, who also makes beeswax candles and sells them under the name of Dragon's Breath.

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

**DA:** Currently we have 5, four Nationals and the Dartington. Our plans are to keep at this number for main hives, and raise a few nucs as part of our queen rearing experiments.

**Q:** What's your worst beekeeping purchase?

**DA:** A bee brush; I now use the nearest bit of privet I can find. Privet can be burnt, in the nearby smoker, which solves the risk of spreading disease. Bee brushes are almost impossible to clean.

**Q:** Do you have a favourite beekeeping gadget?

**DA:** A table saw. I bought it to help complete my house extension project but am now finding a use for it in making hive components.

**Q:** What have been your best beekeeping moments?

**DA:** Spinning the first load of honey, catching my first swarm and re-homing it (yes, it was from my own hives), joining the committee and chatting to members of the public about bees on the club stall at fetes.

**Q:** Where do you keep your bees?

**DA:** In my garden in the Pednor valley just outside Chesham. It's an area of low intensity agriculture and close enough for the bees to cover the whole town. Over the hill opposite my house is the Great Hundridge Estate, which is in the process of gaining Soil Association Organic status, so think field beans and clover!

**Q:** Do you have favourite beekeeping book/manual?

**DA:** Google is my favorite resource, and then reading all the various sites it brings up. I find I learn a lot about the topic I searched for - and lots about other subjects, as I get distracted!

**Q:** The next best thing to beekeeping?

**DA:** Normally I'd say running and cycling but since breaking my ankle at the start of this year they are having to wait.

## **The apiary in June**

So, being June we are in the June gap, right? Well it should be shouldn't it, but this season has been forward by 1-3 weeks, depending on where you are, so actually the June gap started in mid May, or earlier. Hives may well now be losing weight as stores are consumed to develop an expanding brood nest. If you took off the spring crop, watch out for starvation. It is important to include an assessment of stores during your swarm control inspections.

As a starving colony will, by definition, have insufficient resources to feed both adults bees and raise larvae, it will throw out brood and the queen will lay less. That's hardly conducive to maximizing foraging strength when the main flow begins.

When will the gap end and the flow begin? Normally the main flow might last for about a month from late June to late July. This year it is likely to be earlier. However, several good nectar plants only yield significantly when there is sufficient water at the roots, and during warm weather; clover is a good example. At present (May 30<sup>th</sup>), we have neither condition. Who can

tell me whether all will come good? One thing is certain: if your bees have swarmed, your colonies won't be in a condition to take much advantage of anything there is, and secondly, if you haven't got your supers on in time you won't be able to capture it if it comes. For the best cut-comb 'the main flow' is the time to be making it. So, be vigilant and be ready.

Where to put these supers? That seems a question with only one, fairly obvious answer: on top. But there are alternatives. Sometimes bees can be reluctant to go into fresh space, especially if there is still space elsewhere. It might help if the new super goes directly over the QX for a few days while they become habituated to going into it and start drawing wax. Leave it in this position too long and it will be filled with honey and pollen. Pollen will ruin it for show, or cut comb, so remember not to leave it that long before it goes above the earlier super. Alternatively place a drawn comb into the centre of the new super with some fresh honey, as a tempter.

Finally beware the chimney effect. This demonstrates the bees' propensity to work up a central column ignoring the outer flanks. If the outer super frames are being neglected you can switch the outers and inners, or turn them through 180 degrees to encourage complete filling and capping. Of course, you would never dream of switching around brood combs and disturbing the integrity of the nest (i.e. 'spreading the brood') unless you like living dangerously, but in the supers it is sometimes advantageous.

Bear in mind the water that has to be evaporated during a strong flow. Extra room is always an advantage, but as the flow tails off, consolidate, in order to avoid many unfinished frames.

The main sources to look out for: bramble is a long-contributing, ubiquitous source and good indicator species for the main flow.

## **Topical tip from an old beekeeper** **(And Honorary Member of our Society)**

I bumped into Karl Showler the other day. Our longer-serving members will remember him as our joint founder, with Alex Warden, before he moved to the Welsh borders. He was our President in the mid 1980s. Others will know him through his monthly articles in *BeeCraft*. Regrettably he had to give up beekeeping a short time ago through failing eyesight, but still mentors beginners.

Inevitably talk got around to practical beekeeping and one tip he gave me was: never have more than two supers on your hive at any one time.

There are several good practical reasons:

- a) You will have to extract several times during the season meaning you will get differing honeys each time.
- b) If your colonies are near oilseed rape, early extracting will ensure the honey does not crystallise in the cells.
- c) You won't end up with a bad back reaching up to and lifting off the full top super from a stack 5 / 6 high.

### **BBKA Website**

The new BBKA website was launched on 25th May, [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk). Have a look and see what you think. It is certainly brighter, has a broader scope and perhaps more technological possibilities, though I'm the wrong person to ask about that. The work is still ongoing to give it a final polish. For instance, one area I struggled with was to find the latest fees, application forms and closing dates for the BBKA Examinations. In the end, I located the information by entering 'examinations' in the search box, which was itself partially obscured by another tab. So let's say, "a promising start".

### **A versatile woman**

Many of us subscribe to *BeeCraft* so will know the name Claire Waring, as she is its editor. You will also recall from P1 that she is coming to join our Panel of Experts.

Well, I learned the other day that she is also an alpaca aficionado and Secretary of The British Alpaca Society.

### **BeeCraft fights back**

Will *BeeCraft* survive in its current format? This is the key question exercising its board members now that BBKA has introduced its all-colour monthly BBKA News.

What do you think? For those who subscribe please complete and return the questionnaire delivered to you in the May edition to let them know what sort of magazine you would like.

*BeeCraft* circulation is currently just under 7,000 with an estimated 20% going to non-BBKA members (who obviously don't get BBKA News). It has refreshed its contents, brought in some new contributors as well as increasing its content to 48 pages. A couple of thoughts: do you want to read two magazines with similar content? And, are you happy, to quote Andrew Gibb, *BeeCraft Ltd's* Chairman, that part of your BBKA subscription

goes into the production of a competing magazine, when it could be better spent on practical education and research into bee diseases?

### **Chalfonts Honey Show**

This will be the tenth year we have held our Honey Show in conjunction with our local community at the Chalfont St. Giles Show. The theme this year is "Down on the farm" and the Show Schedule for this year's event, on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, is now out.

Our Honey Show schedule can be found on page 63. Please read it and put aside your "best" honey in preparation for entering.

Looking ahead, our July speaker could be a big help to you. Christine Stevens is talking about the selling and marketing of hive products and, as the old saying goes, 'if it's good enough to sell it's good enough to show.'

### **Dates for your diary**

Those marked \* are events in which we participate.

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June

\* **Little Chalfont Village Day**

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June

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

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June

**Question Time.** Your chance to quiz experienced beekeepers with your problems.

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July

**Annual Family Day at Mike Leon's**

Full details in newsletter nearer the date.

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July

\* **Chenies Manor Plant and Garden Fair**

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July

**Sales and Marketing of Hive Products** Christine Stevens will explain how to promote the fruits of your labours.

August

**No meeting**

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September

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

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> 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**