

CHALFONTS BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY

Charity No. 1121231

www.chalfontsbeekeepers.co.uk

NEWSLETTER – July 2011

Editor: John Catton

Assistant: Richard Simpson

Towards better beekeeping

Passing the Basic Assessment is a milestone for those who have been keeping bees for a few years; it is a recognised BBKA qualification demonstrating you have a good grasp of the fundamentals of beekeeping and is the gateway to further study should you so wish. I'm delighted to record that a further six Chalfonts members have successfully completed their Basis Assessment: **Penny Benfield, Simon Blofeld, Meriet Duncan, Melvin Dunne, Keith Patton and Edward Townsend.** Congratulations to you all! Our thanks must, yet again, go to Pam Hunter for her time in assessing all the candidates.

Two meetings in July

Saturday 16th: Annual Family Afternoon.

Last year, Mike and Jill Leon kindly hosted a Family Day for the Society. We had a great time, going through a number of hives, watching Mike give a demonstration of extraction and enjoying a superb tea, whilst some of the children swam in their pool.

This is your invitation to do the same again this year. Mike and Jill will be opening their extensive and beautiful gardens to the Chalfonts Beekeepers, their partners and children, on **Saturday 16th July** for a similar event, starting at around **2.30pm with tea at 4.30pm.** The address is: **Wildacre, Bushfield Road, Bovington, HP3 0DR. Tel: 01442 833665.**

There will be ample parking in a field just past the house, which will be signposted for you. If you have navigated to the house, which is towards the end of Bushfield Road on the right, continue to the end and turn left along the track. The field is about a hundred metres down on the left.

If you are planning to come to look at some of the hives, could we request that you bring clean suits, wellingtons and gloves. As with any visit to beehives, hygiene is of the utmost importance.

If you have children who would like to come with you, even if they don't want to inspect hives, there is a lovely swimming pool close to the house. Please bring swimming gear and towels.

Tuesday 26th: Evening talk

This is the time of year when we start to see the fruits of our, or should I say our bees' labours.

You've extracted loads of honey and got a pile of wax you don't know what to do with. What next? You could sell the honey and / or use it to make biscuits and cakes and make wax candles, but how do you go about marketing them? Christine Stevens, a member of West Sussex Beekeepers, will explain all.

Christine has been keeping bees with her husband, John, for some 15 years. Until recently they kept up to 40 colonies, managing them for honey production as well as rearing new queens. Christine has successfully competed with honey and hive products, winning many awards including 'Best in Show'. She teaches beekeeping for Chichester Beekeepers, as well as lecturing to other beekeeping associations.

And, bearing in mind the showing season is almost upon us, remember the old adage, "If it's good enough to sell, it's good enough to show".

The meeting will be held on **Tuesday 26th July at 7:30pm** in our usual venue: **St. Joseph's, Austenwood Lane Chalfont St. Peter.**

Expert views

Beekeeping is tricky; ask four beekeepers a simple question and you'll get five answers!

The four beekeepers in question were Claire and Adrian Wearing, Julian Parker and Frank Rickett who made up a Panel of Experts, at our June meeting.

There was a broad range of topics covered; here are just some of the nuggets of wisdom dispensed.

- There's an old beekeeping maxim: "If in doubt, do nothing". The bees have been

looking after themselves for a lot longer than we have!

- Bees won't start filling supers until the brood box is full, so a double brood won't necessarily mean double the number of supers. But having a double brood could mean they have enough stores for winter, so won't need extra feed from the beekeeper.
- Big is *not* always best. It's how you manage your hive that counts. The largest crop of honey Adrian ever came across was from a beekeeper with 17 hives; the average yield per hive was 240lbs. The hive? WBCs.
- Something that always worries beginners is being unable to find the queen. The panel's advice was to picture her in your mind and look in dark parts of the hive for specific characteristics such as her long spidery legs or longer abdomen. This is easiest in spring when fewer bees are present. But don't worry unduly if you don't find her so long there is evidence she *is* there, eg: eggs in worker cells.
- Nectar flow depends on temperature and moisture rather than length or intensity of daylight. A good example is sedum, which is a good source of nectar if in a sunny position. It will flower in a shady position, but won't produce any nectar.
- When producing cut comb use either ½" starter strips or let the bees make their own clear, clean, chemical free wax. Remember we will be eating the wax as well as the honey!

PS...don't forget

It's often those who work quietly away in the background who get forgotten about. One such person is Robert Salczynski who, helped by Lynn Burford and Alan Cunningham, prepares our tea / coffee breaks each meeting. Thank you on behalf of the committee.

A school visit

(from Robert Salczynski)

Back in March I was invited to talk to the youngest pupils (Reception class) about beekeeping at Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary School in Chesham Bois. I took along the Society's Virtual hive, and showed the children what bees look like and how heavy the frames were.

I got them to find the queen, which they eventually managed, and try on a bee suit.

The children loved the visit:

- "It was fun to dress up as a beekeeper"



"It was really good being able to hold the bee things,"

- "I liked playing with the beehive and finding the queen"
- "I want to become a beekeeper when I am older."
- "It was really good to hold the bee things".



"It was fun dressing up as a beekeeper."

It's good to engage children whilst they are so young (Ed).

Getting to know your committee **30 second interview**

This month it's the turn of our President, and past Chairman and Secretary, John Catton. John is also currently President of the Bucks County Beekeepers' Association and has, for the past five years, organised the annual Bucks County Seminar.

Q: How long have you been keeping bees?

JC: About 27 years. Back then, in the 1980s, beekeeping was not nearly so widespread as it is now, indeed membership of the BBKA was declining.



Q: Why did you start beekeeping?

JC: I have always been a keen gardener and was fascinated by the part bees played in our ecosystem and simply wanted to know more. Coupled with the fact that my late mother-in-law kept bees near Tring during the war and I inherited her “Manual of Beekeeping” by E.B.Wedmore (first published in 1932)

Q: What type of hives do you use?

JC: As I keep bees for the pure enjoyment as opposed to producing loads of honey, I’ve always had WBCs.

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

JC: Currently we have just 1. I managed 4 some years back, but would now only want a couple at most.

Q: What’s your worst beekeeping purchase?

JC: Sections and their frames. Nothing wrong with the equipment, but bees are notoriously reluctant to fill them – it seems to be their storage place of last resort! And I never succeeded in producing any decent sections.

Q: Do you have a favorite beekeeping gadget?

JC: A blowtorch. It is multipurpose bit of kit used to cleanse the wood parts of my hive and light my smoker.

Q: What have been your best beekeeping moments?

JC: I know it’s corny, but it has to be extracting my first crop of honey. Followed by the simple pleasure from handling a totally calm colony.

Q: Where do you keep your bees?

JC: In my garden. Funnily enough the people we bought the house from, in 1979, had also kept bees in it.

Q: Do you have a favorite beekeeping book/ manual?

JC: When I started beekeeping we used Ted Hooper’s “Guide to Bees & Honey”. It was a bit intense, so I bought Ron Brown’s excellent “A Seasonal Guide” and have stuck with it ever since; it’s clear and concise. (Sadly Ron Brown died earlier this year)

Q: The next best thing to beekeeping?

JC: Pottering about tending my garden on a warm summer’s day. What could be lovelier than deadheading or weeding whilst listening to (and watching) the birds singing overhead and bees buzzing, working from plant to plant?

Seasonal thoughts - July

It all started out so well. Our damp mild spring, followed by several weeks of sunshine meant a good early nectar flow. Indeed several of our members extracted honey back in May. I even suggested in an earlier newsletter that we would all enjoy a good honey crop this year. But what a difference a dry spell can make coupled with the “June Gap”. We have had a very poor nectar flow recently, indeed a super I put on at the end of May has yet to be a quarter filled! I have even heard stories of bees consuming their stores.

Remember the final lines of the old ditty:

A swarm in July

Is not worth a fly

There are still reports of swarms coming in, so do keep a weather eye out for any signs of swarm preparation. As the rhyme suggests any swarms retrieved at this time of the year will not be productive for the beekeeper. By the time they have established themselves in their new hive the major nectar producing plants will have died back (if they haven’t done so already!).

Evidence of our changing weather patterns is apparent with a glance down the garden. Our “text books” tell me blackberry should be an excellent source of nectar in July, but as at mid July it is way past that stage with the fruit setting well. Likewise my lavenders and cranesbills are passed their best, though the rosebay willowherb is looking fantastic!

Rowan Garden Centre

Have you been to Rowan Garden Centre, the “new” garden centre in Gorelands Lane, not far from the Open Air Museum? They are building up their plant collection and have a great café – a branch of Seasons of Old Amersham.

Well, on Saturday 10th July they held a Rose Day and invited us to be there with our stall.

It was great to see so many (new) volunteers manning the stall. My picture shows Cleo and George Pendred behind a smart new honey display stand, kindly made by Graham Burford.



Wyvale garden Centre

I'm delighted to see that Wyvale is championing the cause of the hard-working honey bees and bumblebees - vital for our crops to succeed and our countryside to maintain its character. They are holding a Bee and Butterfly fortnight from 16th to 31st July. The aim is to highlight which plants are best for attracting bees and butterflies to your garden, and of course to save the Planet with a series of talks and demonstrations.

Did you spot them in BBKA News?

Those members with sharp eyes may have noticed one of our members, Desmond Oswald, on the front of June's BBKA News, It was taken when he visited the Spring Convention at Stoneleigh back in April. He went with our Secretary, Gordon Cutting, who is also in the picture, wearing a red top, but is obscured by another visitor.

Theft of Society shed

Sad to report but before it could be erected in our new Society Apiary site at Flexmore Farm (Bottrell's Lane, Chalfont St. Giles), our brand new

shed was stolen. The thieves broke in one night using bolt cutters and took the shed away presumably on a low-loader.

A replacement shed has been ordered.

If anecdotal evidence is to be believed, thefts of beekeeping equipment seem to be on the increase this year, so branding it is a sensible option

**Protect your equipment
.....brand it.**

**Contact Society member,
Chris Rolf on 01494 672243**

He can make 2-3 initial brands to order.

For Sale

**Mated Queens (in "hair roller" cage)
£25 each**

**Contact: Gordon Cutting on
07809 108397**

Dates for your diary

Those marked * are events in which we participate.

Saturday 16th July

Annual Family Day at Mike Leon's.

Full details sent in e-mail.

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.**