



THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

The Federation, its Council, and its Officers cannot be held responsible for the views expressed in the Newsletter or possible errors.

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Editor's Corner

Despite the terrible weather we have had in June, the oil seed rape flowers came and went and hopefully many of you had a reasonable honey crop. I had one particularly productive hive, but as this was a strong colony with lots of bees I have had to follow through with a good dose of sugar syrup to keep the girls going whilst we wait for the next flow, hopefully in July. I'm not very good with this exercise – I always seem to make such a mess so if anyone has any suggestions for elegantly transporting 5 litres of 2:1 sugar syrup from the preserving pan in the kitchen to the contact feeder on the hive please do share!



Following on from last month when I was recommending the exhibitions in Oxford, I see that the 'Hive' exhibit from the British Pavilion at the 2015 Milan Expo opened on 18 June in Kew Gardens. It is to stay there until November 2017. The installation is made from thousands of pieces of aluminium which create a lattice effect and is fitted with hundreds of LED lights that glow and fade as a unique soundtrack hums and buzzes around you. These multi-sensory elements of the Hive are in fact responding to the real-time activity of bees in a beehive behind the scenes at Kew. The sound and light intensity within the space changes as the energy levels in the real beehive surge, giving visitors an insight into life inside a bee colony.

It is clear from the Association contributions this month that everyone is very busy and apiary visiting and teaching sessions are going well.

Sue Remenyi

C. Wynne Jones
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In My Apiary



As it got closer to October 2015 and the end of my 4th year of beekeeping, I was doing my last inspection to ensure that my colonies had enough stores to last them over the winter. As I closed them up I reflected on what a great four years it has been since I first took to the plunge in to being a beekeeper and the fateful day when my first colony arrived. It was a split taken from another member who had decided to retire from beekeeping. As I put my suit on, even though I had been on an introduction course and been to the club meetings to gain practical experience, I had feelings of both excitement and anxiety.

When Mike Dabbs (who had brought the bees) asked if I was going to put "them" in, I thought to myself "Those 'dirty' frames are going in my crisp new bee hive?". I am sure Mike thought I was a more confident about what I was doing than actually was when he said "Do you have any thinner gloves than those big leather ones you have on?". I went to my shed and swapped my gauntlets for my neoprene palmed gardening gloves. I manoeuvred the nuc close to my pristine hive (which is in a cornered off area in my garden) and took the lid off. I called over to Mike "Do I need to smoke them?" and a quick response from Mike "No, they will be fine".

As I lifted the first frame out of the nuc I was mesmerised by the sheer number of bees on the frame, I started to lower it in to my hive when it happened. I had never been stung by a bee before. I looked down at this poor bee with its sting stuck in the back of my glove... In my head I shouted "What! The bee has stung me through the back of my glove? Are you telling me the back of these gloves give me no protection whatsoever?!" Another bee stung the back of my hand, and then a bee stung the back of my other hand, then another and another. I quickly (and painfully!) put the remaining frames in to my hive and with each frame I received more and more stings.



I closed the hive up and quickly walked away. I pulled my gloves off to see what 30 something stings to each hand looked like, Mike asked if I had been stung, to which I responded "Only a couple of times." I needed to keep a brave face for my 4 year old daughter, who had put on her bee costume especially for the bees arrival. As I looked down I could that see my hands were bright red and already starting to swell. At this point I realised that beekeeping was not something to take to lightly but as a keeper of bees I had a responsi-

bility to ensure my safety and the safety of others that visit our garden.

Spring Arrives

I am sure I am not alone, but I have always found that as spring get closer I get a feeling of trepidation and impatience with the temptation to crack open the propolis seals as soon as it starts to get warmer. Knowing it can do more harm than good I try to refrain until the temperature is right.

So on a warm ish Saturday in the middle of March I knocked on the first and second hive brood boxes and heard the reassuring noise of the bees buzzing inside, however when I knocked on the third there was no sound. I lifted the roof and the fondant had hardly been touched. I looked through the holes in the crown board and I couldn't see any bees. I decided to go in and as I opened it up I had a sinking feeling. I started to lift out frames and even though there were still frames full of stores the hive was empty except for a small cluster of around a hundred bees on one of the outer most frames. A frame which had no stores left. As I pulled out the frame the small cluster of bees were dead with their heads buried in cells. This had happened despite the presence of sealed stores no more than 15cm away. I cleared up the dead bees and found the queen right in the centre. I blowtorched the hive and stored it away. This had been my first colony and this was the first colony I had lost since starting to keep bees. I questioned whether it was my fault, could I have done anything different to have saved them.

Over the last four years I felt like I had gotten to know my bees, the smell of their hive and the buzz they made. I could tell if they were calm or grumpy. We had been through so much, brood in the super after I forgot to put the queen excluder back in place, comb on the crown board after I forgot to put an empty frame back in after an inspection, swarming into my neighbours garden after a missed queen cell (you can see a theme here), collected, absconded, and caught again, chalk brood, bald brood, and of course my first honey crop (I still have the first jar).

I kept reading on social media about people collecting swarms and posting pictures. I would look longingly at the empty hive. Then, I got a message from a friend that there was a swarm her neighbour's garden. Excitedly I messaged her neighbour to say I was a beekeeper and could collect them. By the time they had gotten home from work the swarm had moved on. After a couple more weeks staring at my empty hive, being called to bumble bees and wasps and seeing other people online collecting swarms I got a message from the same lady as before to say she had another swarm in her garden! I grabbed my stuff and headed round.

The swarm was in several clusters, about 15 foot up in a tree above the fence between her and her neighbour's house. Fortunately they had some ladders and, with a little persuasion and sweating (from both her husband and I), the swarm was collected safely into my skep. I left the bees to settle for an hour, (in her neighbour's garden!) then I packed them up and rehomed them into my empty hive.

After a week I checked in on the swarm and there were no eggs. I suspected that it was a cast swarm so there was either a virgin queen or no queen. I left it alone for a further 2 weeks. When I inspected them, to my delight, there were eggs! I was so excited I called to my daughter and she came running to see. We worked through the frames and found the queen and marked her.

2016 is going to be a tough year for my colonies, but I got my buzz back about beekeeping.

*Matt Mc Ternan,
Reading Beekeepers' Association*

Did you Know ...



Wire fences booby-trapped with beehives are being built in five African countries to prevent elephants from raiding farms, while also providing local people with honey. 'Beehive fences' are now being erected in Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda by UK charity Save the Elephant.

The project is a collaboration between Save the Elephants, the University of Oxford and the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, and is looking at how to use the African bush elephants' instinctive avoidance of African honey bees to avoid crop losses.

Hives are hung every 30 feet and linked together. If an elephant touches one of the hives or the interconnecting wires, the beehives all along the fence swing and release the stinging insects. Read ore from <http://www.scidev.net/global/agriculture/news/bee-booby-traps-defend-african-farms-from-elephants.html>

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BEE FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Reading and District Beekeepers Association

Sunday 19th June at Reading Beekeepers Club Apiary. Beekeeper in Charge; Clark Hunter who gave us such a valuable session at his home apiary in June.



As with several apiaries in our area the Feb-Mar period had not been kind to our association's bees and we were left with one (lucky strong looking) colony at the club apiary. Hard work by Clark, Mike Dabbs, Jen Morgan & Keith McCall, have partly restored the situation colony wise with some of the swarms we have had and as a result hives 1 & 2 are recently hived swarms, hive 3 is the over-wintered colony & hive 4 is housing a recent swarm. The objectives for our club apiary include giving our new members a chance to get hands-on experi-

ence and Clark & co. hold a weekly early evening session as well as full association meetings. We had a good turn-out including some family members in small bee suits, members new & not so new!

Hive 1. For a recent swarm on mainly foundation this colony had done well. Eight plus frames well drawn in the brood box with plenty of brood in all stages in good round pattern with stores at corners of frames, tiny larvae seen, although no eggs or queen spotted. Several new beekeepers having no bees yet were able to remove and examine frames under the guidance of Mike Dabbs our demonstrator and we felt confident there was an active queen present. Above the excluder the

super was light but drawing-out in progress & some honey going-in. A 'quick feeder' was installed above the crown board.



Hive 2. This swarm had produced a number of queen cells within 2 weeks of being hived and may be a 'swarmy' strain. All but one were removed (but passed-on). A heavy super was taken-off to examine the brood, and we discovered honey going into the brood frames in quantity! Most frames drawn-out. The retained queen cell, exited, large and undamaged was located. Only 4 frames in the middle not being used for stores, fairly populous no pollen coming-in, but some in cells towards centre. No queen or queen activity

found. She maybe an unmated or newly mated queen but we couldn't find her. Super above excluder, exclusively honey in quantity, capped or part capped. If no queen activity in a week Clark & the team will look to introduction of a frame or patch of eggs/tiny larvae or a suitable queen cell if available.

Hive 3. Big WBC, well populated, eggs and larvae on several brood frames, good pattern, no occupied cups. Clark was able to show our beekeepers the marked & clipped queen. Super nearly full up with capped honey. Top colony! Supering will be required.

Hive 4. Recent swarm in a WBC. Again well established. All new foundation, most brood frames having been drawn-out, plenty of brood in all stages, good patterns with stores above & at sides. Eggs seen and the queen found. Good sized population one occupied cup found although no queen food around the larvae which looked at least 5 days old, so we removed-it. Clark cages his queens when he finds them and re-inserts when examination finishes. Above excluder foundation was being drawn-out and there was some uncapped honey.



The club apiary is progressing well now thanks to the efforts made and three good looking colonies plus one 'enigma'. No doubt on our next visit we'll find-out more. A very good session thanks to Clark & all who attended. After beekeeping we were treated to some excellent sandwiches, drinks etc courtesy of Clark & Irenya.

Other June activities. 10th. Reading Beekeeping pavilions on Kennet Side for 'Water fest' and in Town Hall square for 'Green Fest'. Very busy, lots of interest from the public & very good honey sales.

18th June. Our secretary Philip House and wife Anna very kindly invited us to his home & garden for a 'Meet the Mentors' barbeque. Much beekeeping talk with good food and wine, Philips splendid sons did the barbecuing for us with stalwart assistance from young master Paterson plus good things from Anna's kitchen.

July's meeting will be at the invitation of Mike & Marion Dabbs at their garden apiary in Long Lane Tilehurst. Set for Sunday 31st. Look out for reminders from our secretary.

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Urban Beekeeping (or our Frank up the pole)



While other Reading Beekeepers were setting up for Green Fest & River Fest in Reading on Saturday 11th June. Frank Decmar was retrieving a swarm up on the security camera & entry gate mast at The Brunel Retail Centre. Observed by a Reading member who was in Maplans at the time & snapped by Mrs Matt MC Tiernan* who happened to be driving by. Last week our Frank collected a swarm spread on a trunk of the tree on the Oxford Road side of The Butts Centre, just outside The Golden Temple (All day Chinese buffet eat as much as you like for £10) No snaps come to light yet! Frank wishes the swarms were a bit more weighty & pendulous! (*Husband Matt in the Reading Beekeepers presence at Green Fest.)

BIBBA

The Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) would like to inform you about a free newsletter that they are making available to anyone interested in improving their bees. You can read a copy – which is called BIBBA Humm from the link below. There is a link from this page to subscribe to future issues.

<http://us8.campaign-archive2.com/?u=539749ff0ecfb725b841f2421&id=0169c1dfc9&e=680a88ff6c>

Slough Windsor and Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society

Our Apiary

In June, there were two summer apiary meetings, which provided excellent learning opportunities for some newer members. We have several new members who are currently studying beekeeping at Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA) and time at the Society's apiary provides a useful adjunct to their studies.

There may have only been a fortnight between the two meetings in June but even experienced beekeepers can still be surprised at how quickly the status of a colony can change.

A review of the first meeting on 9th June showed two colonies each with a good quantity of healthy brood, evident in all stages. The queen had been found in one colony and her fading colour marking given a refresh, which would help us spot her more easily on the next examination. We did not find any queen cups or cells and everything in the hive was 'hunky dory', so extra supers were added where needed.

Two weeks later on 26th June, we opened up and examined the same two colonies and this time found the bees making plans to leave home.

One colony had been busy making queen cells and we tracked down nine in total, positioned both on the edge and in the middle of frames. Although we could not find the queen, we were able to see day old eggs and given the quantity of bees in the hive, the experienced beekeepers thought that no swarm had left yet.

Urgent action was needed and a decision was taken to split the colony to give them more room and execute an artificial swarm.

The other colony demonstrated that it was in a similar frame of mind and was building queen cells, although none had been sealed yet. We decided to do an artificial swarm using the 'Pagden' method. This time we were able to find the nicely marked queen, separate her out and pop her in a new brood box with lots of space and nurse bees to look after her.

The second apiary visit of the month took much longer than anticipated but provided the novice beekeepers with a chance to see the decision-making process in action and take part in the implementation of one of the possible methods of swarm prevention.

These two meetings were a reminder to us all about how quickly the situation in a hive can change and therefore just how essential it is to monitor regularly and also to have spare equipment ready to be able to deal with any eventuality as it arises.

websites

All four Federation member association websites have a lot of information – some of which may only be relevant to that association, but there is also quite a bit that is useful to us all. Here are the links for your reference:

Reading & District Beekeepers Association: <http://www.rbka.org.uk/>

South Chilterns Beekeepers' Association: <http://www.scbka.org>

Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society: <http://swmbks.weebly.com/>

Wokingham and District Beekeepers Association: www.wokinghambeekeepers.org.uk/

Useful Links, Advice and Information

<http://www.apinews.com/> This website is a mine of information from around the world. You can subscribe to their newsletter.

<http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/newhome.html> This website has a lot of really useful information for the beekeeper.

<http://www.beekeepingforum.co.uk/> This is a portal for all things beekeeping.

<http://www.bbka.org.uk/> The British Beekeepers Association.

<http://hymenoptergenome.org/beebase/> Beebase is a comprehensive data source for the bee research community.

<http://www.lapisonline.it/index.php/en/l-apis-excerpt> A long standing Italian publication which now has an English section.

NBU Advice for Obtaining Bees:

Join Beebase - By joining BeeBase you can access beekeeping information and ask for advice or help from the Bee Unit: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>.

Your Regional Bee Inspector is:

Southern Region: Julian Parker at: julian.parker@fera.gsi.gov.uk,

The main website is: <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/public/Contacts/contacts.cfm>

National Bee Unit, Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton, York YO41 1 LZ, tel: 01 904 462 510, email: <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk> .

South Eastern Region: Mr Alan Byham, fax/tel: 01306 611 016

Contributions to the Editor are always welcome as long as they are signed. Anonymous letters and letters not in English will not be published. The Editor reserves the right to withhold names.

Contributions, including emails, to arrive with the Editor by the 20th of the month for publication by the 7th of the following month. Contributions received after this may be held over for a later month.

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