

North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association Newsletter

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Calendar at-a-glance

Wednesday 17th November - Talk by Ged Marshall "A Day in the Life of a Bee Farmer"
 Wednesday 19th January - D.I.Y. "Questions & Answers" Evening
 Saturday 7th March - Buckinghamshire County Seminar in Wendover – all day.

Articles

A new editor – Andrew Beer

I take over the editorship of the newsletter with some trepidation, Libby being a difficult, if not impossible – act to follow. Indeed, the first thing I must do is thank Libby for the highly sophisticated and informative newsletter she has developed in her inimitable style, which we all, especially me, are going to miss. Thanks, Libby, very much, from all of us.



For the moment, I fear, there will be no more reports from Queenie’s Kitchen, and the like. However, I trust there will continue to be much in the newsletter to interest YOU and suggestions within it for the best health of your bees and YOU.

As I will be largely unknown, having been a member of the Association for less than three years, a brief introduction may help. I have been keeping bees since 1957 and in Stewkley from 1971, and I am just a small beekeeper in the sense that, whilst I have eight different apiaries, none has more than four colonies. I think I should confess that I am rather a dinosaurs as far as the

computer is concerned. Therefore why, pray, have I taken on the Newsletter? Good Question! To allay your fears, Christine Goodley, of Stewkley, who has helped me on countless projects in the past 14 years, is going to run the computer, with my wife Elizabeth in support, and then Daniel Clarke, a computer whizz kid, will polish things up before the Newsletter is posted into your hands or put out on the internet. Hopefully this will cover up those particular limitations of mine!

Can I please remind you that THIS IS YOUR NEWSLETTER ! It is probably the most important way in which we can keep in touch with you about anything the slightest bit "beesy" and never can that have been more important than at the current time with so many threats to the bee world and ever-changing and often conflicting solutions proposed. When I started what is properly called "Leave-alone beekeeping" , very often supers were put on hives in May, extracted when filled, bees given dollops of sugared water in September, and that was about it! How different today! We all risk being seriously left behind in the care of our bees unless we keep in touch with the experts' (of which your editor is definitely not one!) latest reckonings.

I cannot over-recommend that, if you do not already do so, you subscribe to **Beecraft**, or one of the other periodicals, and buy yourself (as Libby suggested) a copy of Claire and Adrian Waring's latest book "Get Started in Beekeeping". It is just over 100 pages long and I assure you that if you read it and apply their techniques (even if you forget everything else) you will keep your bees and produce your honey very well. Come to think of it isn't Christmas around the corner and life in the apiaries is quiet (but not in the workshop – see later) so what better time could there be to subscribe, buy, and indeed read!



I have already referred to the bee world threats and changing solutions and I cannot do better than refer you to November's Beecraft and the two separate articles about varroa controls - one by Ron Hoskins (the Swindon Bee and Conservation Project), the other by John Dews (Varroa: Do we Need a Radical New Approach?). I do not think it is necessary for lesser beekeepers (like me) to go into the minutiae of these articles so long as we realise that the "sands are constantly shifting" and we must be ready to change our ways.

List of NBBKA Members

Sticking my neck out, this Association, unlike some, does not send out to each member a list of members, with their postal and email addresses and telephone numbers. Unless we have your permission we are precluded generally under Data Protection legislation from doing so, and in my perspective, that puts us at a disadvantage for two particular reasons and maybe others. First - if there is an outbreak of foulbrood, it is vital to everyone that we can pass details of the members likely to be affected to relevant bee authorities. Secondly, it is a tremendous advantage if ,say, I propose to put three hives at Swanbourne, to know I won't be prejudicing some other beekeeper nearby.

I hope our Committee can consider this and suitable arrangements can be made for

the future. I appreciate that some will not want, say, their addresses circulated to other members - if so, name, telephone numbers and bee locations will suffice. Actions speak louder than words so here are my details for the list:

Name	Contact details	Apiary locations
Andrew Beer	1 Kings Street Stewkley Leighton Buzzard LU7 0YA Tel. 01525 240235 Mobile 07968 277 247 Email andrewbeer@tiscali.co.uk	Stewkley South Stewkley East Stewkley North Swanbourne Great Brickhill South Great Brickhill East Heath & Reach North Ledburn

If I did not want my address included (which I do), its omission would not stop contact with me when necessary.

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 20th October.

We held a very successful AGM, at Rectory Cottages. Further details will appear in the AGM Minutes (being prepared by Nicola Smith in the absence of Liz Parsons). The following were some of the highlights:

- Our chairman, Bob Sibley, reported that the Association had had a good year with a substantial increase in membership.
- The beginners courses, theoretical and practical, had been very successful;
- The Association's apiaries were generally in good shape with some renewals and repairs to be carried out over winter. Consideration was being given to condensing or moving apiaries for the betterment of both members and bees. More details promised later.
- The current apiaries are managed by Bob Sibley and Chris Jay, both of whom have heavy day jobs. It is hoped that some of the younger, newer members will now become more involved.
- Daniel Clarke had overhauled the Association's website which is now of a very high standard. Thanks very much, Daniel.
- Ken Gorman was concerned, given the heavy expenditure on equipment, that this was listed and regularly audited. Whilst no losses had been suffered, this matter would be further considered after any apiary move had been made and got on its feet.

Committee and officers for this year are:

Name	Office
Bob Sibley	Chairman
Liz Parsons	Secretary
Andrew Fellbeck	Treasurer
Nicola Smith	Show secretary
Andrew Beer	Newsletter editor
Daniel Clarke	Webmaster
Bob Silbey & Chris Jay	Apiary managers

Libby Culshaw, Gunter Weber, Ed Roney, Richard Carder, Karen Dale	General members
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We are a growing and thriving Association. We need to spread the load if we are to do the job members clearly want. Can you help us in any way? Arrange a visit to your bees, find subjects and speakers for our events, the list is limitless. Just tell any one of the above.

After the AGM, James and William from Omlet talked about the BeeHaus, which, like the Darlington Hive, brings a fresh concept to beekeeping. It may appeal to the beekeeper with one or two colonies. Omlet has already sold over 1,000 BeeHouses this year. Several modifications have been made since the hive was first marketed, and more are apparently planned. It is difficult to make a judgement on it, while it is still being developed, and we suggest you see it in action before signing up for one.

Apiary Notes

Our bees should now be semi-clustered and semi-dormant. Queens will be going off lay, though research suggests that some lay throughout the winter, and on warm sunny days around midday bees will be making cleansing flights and perhaps bringing in some pollen but later, as darkness approaches, and temperatures fall, they will fall back into winter inertia. Clustered and semi-clustered bees at this time of the year suggest that all is well in the hive and the less bees are disturbed the better. Colonies not settling may indicate queenlessness, nosema, or that they are suffering from dysentery or other ailments. If appropriate, consider sending a sample (at least 30 bees; 200 for suspected poisoning) to the National Bee Unit. Sample bees should be killed by freezing in the deep freeze, then thawed, dried out on kitchen paper in a warm room, and posted to the NBU (but avoid plastic wrappings). In short, corpses must be fit for examination.

Our role in November and the three months ahead is to do everything in our power to help our bees through their winter struggles, and as their needs are paramount may I repeat advice offered in the last two newsletters:

- Ensure your hives are weather, mice, rat and other creature-proof. It is a good idea to have say a couple of spare roofs, because due to internal condensation the inside of a roof can become damp and mouldy and in such cases you can make an immediate swap.
- Mouse guards should be fitted if you are using them. This needs to be done after the risk of robbing is over, during the first of the cold weather, usually at the beginning of December. Personally, as I have previously explained, I keep entrance blocks in the narrow position all over winter, since I have found that if hives are positioned say 15 inches or so clear off the ground on shallow stands and the entrance is no more than a bee space or two, mice and rats cannot gain access. If you follow my plan however you will need to have either fitted wire floors (any undertrays removed) or placed quarter-inch wedges under cover boards to provide suitable ventilation. NB if you are fitting mouse guards, first drill holes in the guards to take drawing pins and use a magnet (available from some

equipment suppliers) to drive these home. If so you may discourage emerging bees from stinging you!

- Protect your hives, where necessary, against woodpeckers. Three of my seven apiaries have recently been attacked so hives there get protection. With the others, I take a chance. NB The trouble is that many "woodpecker-free years" go past and then, when least expected, woodpeckers plunder with abundance. The best protection is small-hole wire netting but old flapping agricultural sacks secured to roofs by bricks or plastic netting may be sufficient to deter the enemy.
- Keep hefting! If a hive feels light, then you need to do something about it AT ONCE WHATEVER THE WEATHER – PROVIDED THAT WHATEVER YOU DO, YOU DO NOT DISTURB YOUR COLONY OF BEES. Some of the strains of bees e.g. Italians, get through stores faster than others so don't chide yourself if a "greedy" colony runs short. October has been very warm this year so colonies may be getting unduly lighter. What can you do? Put candy fondant packs over the feed holes closest to the cluster. But there is an even better way of ensuring that bees get their feed, without disturbance, because if you have followed my earlier advice of placing an eke immediately over the brood combs and a cover board above (not below) that, you can then simply lift the cover board (bees will not "propolise" it down because of distance from brood) and place feeder face down directly over inert bees. Scrapings of honey from extractor and honey tank, carefully stored in those otherwise recyclable plastic tray containers from supermarkets, also provide suitable feeders. Liquid sugar feed, if offered, may be ignored by bees or if taken may cause dysentery so should be avoided.
- Periodic inspections: try to get to your bees fortnightly between now and mid-March and immediately after gales or heavy snowfalls. You never know what you may find. One of my hives, was in successive years, knocked over in cattle stampedes, and only yesterday an escaped pig was found ready to tip it over!
- Second varroa treatment: the National Bee Unit recommends an oxalic treatment in December but views differ. Personally, I follow the NBU's advice to the letter. It is dangerous stuff so be very careful. The cost of treatment is cheap but it will probably be worthwhile to double up with neighbouring beekeepers as each bottle will cover many hives.
- What else? It is time for reflection and the following thoughts spring to mind:
 - Looking through other members' hives I have been surprised to find deep and super chambers containing one, two, three or even four different types of frames, which is just building up problems with combs and the like, for the future. Personally, I use Hoffman Commercial deep frames and Manley frames in supers. The choice is yours! There is no such thing as the perfect hive or indeed frame pattern. Whatever you do, be consistent. Order any necessary frames in the January sales and have them made up for use in early April before Spring build-up.
 - The application of Apiguard varroa treatment requires an eke or spacer above the wood frames. A cheap way of achieving that is to fix one-inch square sections of wood to one side of clearer boards and turn boards over and use the wider spacing whilst treating for varroa

(with feed holes blocked). Varroa treatment also requires open wire mesh floors to be sealed during treatment – sheets of plywood or the like placed under the floor will do the trick.

- In the workshop: now is the time to clean, repair and when necessary, replace, equipment. I am now cleaning floors, roofs, cover boards and other hive parts not in current use in a hot water/soda crystals mix. I am overhauling/reviewing combs. Misshapen, darkened and otherwise defective combs get the chop! I just cut out the wax (pulling the wire out first makes the job much easier). Frames are then sterilised in my Thorne Easi-steam but any water-boiling vessel will do. Some people simply throw away all old frames and start afresh. Do that if you wish and if your pocket allows but I find that with careful maintenance frames last for years if you replace parts when necessary. If you find a frame has become loose at the shoulders, carefully prise out retaining pins (put a Stanley knife blade under the pinheads – it works!), put Evostik exterior glue in the joints and re-assemble. NB Never glue the bottom bars. Wax is then boiled down; I use a steam extractor but there are other options (please refer to “the books”).

I, like many other beekeepers, put the residue sludge onto the compost heap, but don't attempt that if you are either a beginner or unable to detect foulbrood; instead burn the lot to cinders.

Future Events

Ged Marshall: A Day in the Life of a Bee Farmer

Ged is one of the foremost beekeepers in the UK. I guarantee now that if you come to Ged's talk you will come away with at least a couple of tips to help you on your beekeeping way. I must admit a personal interest. I have been buying Ged's queens since 1998 and they have transformed my beekeeping – mind you, it needed it! **17th November 2010.**

DIY Questions and Answers Evening

Some of the Association's experts will be on hand with tips and suggestions from which we can all learn. Come along with your own questions. Indeed, come along with anything which might be useful to you or other members. Remember that where beekeeping is involved no question is ever stupid, and if we have nothing to learn then it is time to give up! **19th January 2011.**

Buckinghamshire County Seminar

These all-day seminars unfailingly attract some of the foremost authorities in the UK including scientific, medical and academic. The 2011 seminar clearly will be no exception, I believe members of no less than ten County Associations attended this year's seminar which was a virtual sell-out. Early booking is advised and let North Bucks dominate with its presence! Note the date now and we will provide more details in the New Year. **7th March 2011.**

Do you have a topic you want covered? Just let one of the committee know.

Next Month

This will be published in January. Please, please can I have material for it! Give me details of meetings, beekeeping devices, indeed anything of interest about bees. Copy should be forwarded before 1st January 2011 to me as follows:

By post: 1 Kings Street, Stewkley, Leighton Buzzard, Beds LU7 0YA

By email: to both andrewbeer@tiscali.co.uk and cgoodley@btinternet.com

May I take this early opportunity to wish you the very best of Christmases and New Years and may your supers be full in 2011!

Best regards

Andrew Beer