



WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2009

BOB'S BIT

I had one of Ian Homer's Eureka moments last week, when I tried Thorne's oxalic acid treatment on my stock in the garden. The colony is quite strong, and sits on a screen floor open to the elements. I put in an insert, and found that the natural mite drop was 1-2 per day. Then I gave it the treatment, and two days later the floor was black with varroa, quite beyond counting. The drop continued in an exponential decline, and is still above 5 per day. Its efficacy was astounding, and reminded me of Lily the Pink's medicinal compound, a mythical substance whose powers are still praised in a song by players of Coarse Rugby.

Unfortunately, it is now too late in the year to apply, as it is harmful to brood. But remember it in the autumn when you are putting your bees to bed. September seems like a good time. It is quite important for everyone to treat at the same time, particularly at the Association site. Since everyone has got varroa, monitoring for mite drop is only for those of an enquiring mind, but when drone culling it is worth noting the number of mites per cell. Brenda Ball cites 1 to 3 mites as causing a 27% reduction in the protein content of the haemolymph, but with modest effect on the adult bee. But 4 to 6 mites results in 50% loss and a 68% shortening of life.

I have watched red pollen going into the hive, which is always a good sign. We had a speaker advise us to try pollen substitute if we want to build up a colony for an early crop such as rape. The essential ingredient is fat-free soya flour, probably available from health-food shops, yeast and honey, made up into patties and put on top of the brood combs.

I hope that water is also being taken in to dilute winter stores. With this current dry spell, it's important to provide water nearby, in a non-drowning container.

NEXT MEETING

7.30 p.m. TUESDAY March 10th
Itchen Abbas Village Hall

Bob Geary 'My Beekeeping Year'

Directions: Itchen Abbas is on the B3047 between Kings Worthy and New Alresford. When coming from Winchester the entrance to the Village Hall is on the left in the centre of the village, immediately after a sharp right-hand bend. If coming from Alresford, it is on your right after 'The Trout' Inn.

I used to put it out in a sunny location, as per the books, but my bees ignored it, preferring to suck it out of the moss around the pond.

Indoor Meeting -10th February **'Viticulture in Hyde'**

Report kindly provided by Ron Broadway

Julian Chisholm assisted by his wife Jo, arrived with a basket full of bottles of wine, and at his suggestion we had a tasting before he started talking.

He started by explaining that he wanted something to occupy him in his retirement and decided that he would like to start making wine. He managed to acquire allotments abutting the end of his garden on which to plant his vines. Thus Winchester Vineyard was formed in 1986 and recognised by Wessex Vineyard Association, part of a National Association for the promotion of the growing of vines in this country. He went to a large Vineyard in the South of England and obtained twenty eight cuttings of three or four different grapes, which were planted in his allotment and the developing canes tied into wires stretched across the

plot. After three years he had his first vintage, and in his own words 'it was disgusting'.

Originally they intended to be Organic, but this proved impractical so they now have to use some chemicals. He acquired more allotment space and has increased the number of vines to over eighty. He grows Seville Blanc for the white wine and Triomphe d'Alsace for red. He is experimenting with other varieties such as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and aims to make a wine with 12% alcohol content. For disease control they use Sulphur to control their biggest problem - mildew, and black plastic sheeting to control weeds, which still tend to grow through the holes where the vines are planted. They use a small amount of fertiliser, and manure about every three years. As the vines grow along the wires they need to have fleece available when severe frost is forecast and netting in late summer to protect the grapes from being decimated by the birds.

He explained that there is an eighteen month cycle of events starting early in the season with pruning and selecting the best canes to tie to the wires. This is followed by cutting out some of the buds so that there are not too many bunches, then there is weeding and spraying. The flowers are self pollinating, so bees do not take any part in fertilisation, which is wind blown and weather dependent. The canes grow very fast and then have to be cut back. By now the grapes are filling and tempting for the birds, so the vines are covered with netting before picking in September.

The wine making he does in the utility room. He said it can be a ghastly mess, but his wife is very tolerant.

He has a hand operated wine press to extract the grape juice into large plastic vessels, yeast is added and fermentation begins, sugar is added so that the alcohol content can be brought up to the 12% level as measured with a refractometer. This racking process has to be done twice. Finally the resultant wine is filtered and bottled. The red he has named Itchen Valley Red and the white Winchester White. His best year so far was 2006 when he bottled 180 bottles. He thinks Winchester is a very good place for vines and wine making. He has tried making sparkling wine but not with great success as yet. He obtained wine racks from visiting the Recycling Centre and also bottles which have to be cleaned, the labels removed, and bottles sterilised.

There was a very lively discussion at the end of the meeting and more tasting. Altogether a great fun evening was had by all.

FIRST APIARY MEETING OF 2009 Saturdays at 2.30 p.m.

At last we can start to anticipate the new season of apiary meetings. The first of the year is to be at the Association's apiary at Three Maids Hill, followed by tea with Hugh and Pat Loftin at 'Orchard House' in Lankhills Road, Winchester (directions in the next Newsletter).

NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK (NSW) at INTECH 10.00 am to 4.00 pm Saturday 7th March

Preparations are well in hand for WDBKA's participation in this event. In addition to posters, our stand will include an observation hive (newly acquired for the association), hives, accessories, bee products, candle making and microscopes for children to look at bee parts, mites and flower parts etc.

There will be speakers from RHS Wisley and Hilliers Arboretum to talk about pollination and bee friendly plants, and activities for younger children such as fingerprint bees and pipe cleaner bee modelling and making nest sites for red masonry bees out of bundles of canes. There will also be a balloon modeller making bees!

SOUTH HANTS SPRING CONVENTION. Wickham Community Centre. Sat. 21st March 10am until 4pm.

A full programme of lectures from Queen rearing to 'Trials and Tribulations of a Beekeeper'. Tickets and programme available from Pat Loftin (01962 861176), in advance £10 each or £12.50 on the day at the door, including lunch with a glass of wine, coffee and tea.

VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED FOR HBA COMMITTEE

A couple more members are needed for the HBA Committee, in particular someone to replace George Hand who has been one of our representatives for many years. Committee meetings are held once a quarter and last from 7.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. From June they will be held at Itchin Abbas Village Hall.

Contact Hugh Sykes on 02380 254521.