



WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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NEWSLETTER - MAY 2009

BOB's BIT

Having a low opinion of media reporting in general, I was pleasantly surprised by the BBC4 program "Who killed the Honey Bee?" last Thursday. The mass trucking of hives to the almond orchards of California was astounding, as was the scale of losses among the beekeepers. The examination of possible causes was excellent, with close-up views of our old enemy the varroa. But at the end, there was no verdict, only the usual suspects.

The opening apiary meeting took place in good weather and members, both old and new, were able to look through several colonies. I was able to find and mark a queen, assisted by onlookers who handed me the marking cage and marker while I kept an eye on Her Majesty. Try this single-handed, and by the time you have everything in hand she has run through a hole in the comb and taken refuge on the dark side. A note to beginners: do not put a spiked marking cage in your pocket.

While the colonies on the hill were of modest size, with no rape within sight, my garden hive had ten frames of brood, thanks to a sheltered situation with lots of flowers. There were eggs in queen cups, but these had no royal jelly, and the cups were not polished, so swarming is not imminent, but cannot be far off. I put on a second super, and got a spare hive ready with foundation and a big frame feeder. Now it will be weekly checks until proper queen cells appear.

There must be swarms about, a lady left a message that she had bees "everywhere" but never called back, so we will never know if it was

NEXT APIARY MEETING

SATURDAY 16th MAY
2.30 p.m.
With Robin Leonard at River House,
Northington

really a swarm or some solitary bees emerging from holes in her lawn.

APIARY MEETING -17th April **Three Maids Hill**

We were blessed with a beautiful warm and sunny day and an excellent turnout of twenty-two members and associates, including three new members – Andrew Norton, Sam Hughes and Ian Gray.

Bob supervised the inspections as described in his 'Bit' at the start of this Newsletter, and we saw

the devastation caused by mice that he commented on in his April 'Bit', resulting from the lack of a mouse guard. We also saw several guilty mice escaping!

In due course we adjourned to Pat and Hugh Loftin's lovely garden for an excellent tea in the sunshine on the terrace – very many thanks Pat and Hugh.



A perfect start to the new season of Apiary meetings.

WINTER LOSSES

Thirty responses have been received to the recent e-mail survey of members' colony over-wintering experiences. This compares with the twenty three returns received last year. It reflects the increase in Association membership during the year and also an increase in the number of members now using e-mail. Many thanks are due to all who replied.

The responses covered a total of 94 colonies at the start of the winter, compared with 103 going into the previous winter. This reduction was presumably due to the effect of the poor 2008 summer and the high losses during the 2007/08 winter. It is also reflected in a fall in the average number of colonies per member at the start of the winter. That was 3.1 this year compared with 4.5 the year before. A number of members who had had many colonies the year before had either been unable fully to replace their losses, or had decided in any event to reduce their numbers.

Of the 94 colonies that started the winter, 26 (27.7%) failed for various reasons. Although this is still high, it compares favourably with the 36% losses last year, in spite of generally poor queen mating performance last summer and the more severe winter this year. Perhaps this reflects, among other things, extra efforts to ensure colonies were well supplied with food right through the winter right into April.

WINCHESTER MILL, BREAD AND HONEY WEEK. 23rd to 31st May

Tim Ellison has this event well in hand. It will take place between 23rd May and 1st June, and National Trust volunteers will be on hand throughout that time. They will be milling flour, baking bread, and hosting the visitors.

There will be a static display by WDBKA of beekeeping and collecting honey. On Monday 25th May and Tuesday 26th May, some of our members will be providing support talking informally to the visitors about beekeeping and demonstrating beeswax candle making, 'pipe-cleaner' bees, activity sheets, and live bees in our observation hive. The static display will include posters, a short film on DVD, beekeeping equipment (hive, smoker, suit, etc.) and honey extraction equipment.

This is a good opportunity to promote beekeeping and our association, and promises to be an entertaining day out.

MEON VALLEY AUCTION

Saturday 2nd May 1.00 pm. Greatham Village Hall. Beekeeping equipment, stocks of bees, beekeeping books. Refreshments available.

This event provides an excellent opportunity to obtain beekeeping equipment, often at bargain prices. This year WDBKA is selling several sets of Langstroth equipment kindly donated to us by Emily Windsor-Aubrey, who is giving up beekeeping (for health reasons). She is continuing as an Associate Member, and hopes to get to meetings from time to time.