



# WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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## NEWSLETTER - MAY 2010

### BOB's BIT

The current election riots which have disturbed the good citizens of Winchester had me musing about the decision-making process in my hives. How do they go about making leadership decisions, or major strategic plans like swarming?

The trigger points for swarming are reasonably well understood. If the queen neglects her PR, and fails to distribute her pheromone to all-corners, then disaffection will soon arise, while a total loss will start a panic, with "queen lost" headlines and a hurried search for eggs or very young larvae. If the queen is just failing, do factions gather in corners to test the support for a "velvet revolution" - a supersedure? Anyone looking for a PhD subject need look no further.

Anyone who was at the opening meeting would have noted how small the colonies were, with scattered brood patterns. My records show that the queens were in their third year, so a hands-off supersedure would be the ideal solution. The gap in brood production will not matter as far as the spring flow is concerned, only today's adults can go harvesting. However the colony that I keep in the garden, as a few members saw, is a very different matter. It was "glove-free", with seven frames of well-ordered brood. Does this mean that the association site is just too inhospitable for over-wintering? I propose to breed from them next week.

I make no secret of the fact that I am no fan of the National hive, which -in its usual form- is just too small a brood box, resulting in expedients like "brood-and-a-half" which gives you twice as many frames to inspect. I have been told that inspection is easy, as any queen cells will be built on the underside of the upper box. Bob Manley reviewed a book in which a lady beekeeper stated that bees swarm on Sundays, between 12 and 2 pm. He wrote "I wish I had her

**APIARY MEETING**  
**Saturday May 8th at 2.30 p.m.**  
**At Clarissa Lodge's Apiary**

**Directions:** <Available to members only>.

faith". Also lacking faith, my answer is the 14x12 brood frame.

### APIARY MEETING Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April

Contrary to forecasts earlier in the week, the day turned out to be sunny and warm with a gentle breeze. Perfect for 40 members and prospective members to enjoy the first meeting of the season at Three Maids Hill. Bob Geary orchestrated the event and with Hugh Sykes, Alfred Witham and Ron Broadway supervised the inspection of colonies.

As many new and prospective beekeepers who wished were given their first hands on experience of being 'up close and personal' with the bees, which were all very well behaved.

The day was also perfect for tea and biscuits in the garden at Bob and Ros's house, where the array of biscuits came in generous cake shaped sizes! Very many thanks Ros.

Hugh Sykes demonstrated various items of equipment available for hire through the Association, including extractors, honey press, uncapping trays and a hive/frames steam cleaner.



*A group comprising mostly new members watching the equipment demonstration.*

## WDBKA WINTER LOSSES

	07/08	08/09	09/10
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	24	31	36
<b>TOTAL COLONIES</b>	103	94	97
<b>TOTAL LOSSES</b>	37	26	30
<b>% COLONY LOSSES</b>	36	28	31

Many thanks to everyone for their prompt responses to the simple e-mailed question. The table summarises the results and compares them with the two preceding years. 31 % leaves a lot of room for improvement and it would be facile simply to blame it on the hard winter. At least 9 losses involved woodpeckers, mice or rats - but they are still losses, so must be included. Perhaps we should set a target for future winters.

The survey deliberately avoided seeking individual's assessments of causes of losses because few if any, of us have either the expertise or the equipment to be able reliably to determine the true causes of death. Also, there are too many uncontrolled variables that could be contributing factors, e.g. weather, situation of hive, design and configuration of hive, general health of bees, numerical strength of colonies, strain of bees, stores provided, disease treatments applied etc, etc. In view of this, it would be misleading simply to aggregate people's best guesses at the reason(s) for their losses, even when these might appear to be obvious.

## BREAD AND HONEY

City Mill, 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> May

Following the great success of this event last year, WDBKA is supporting the National Trust Bread and Honey event at the City Mill in Winchester again this year. We will be providing an unmanned static display of equipment and posters during the preceding week, and manned demonstrations of equipment, the observation hive, video and candle rolling on the three days of the holiday weekend.

We urgently need volunteers to do shifts on stand duty during the 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> May. Will people who can spare time to help with this during those days please contact Ron Broadway **as soon as possible** with an indication of the day(s) and time(s) for which they would be available. His contact details are:

Tel. 01962 865680

e-mail: [Ronald.broadway@btinternet.com](mailto:Ronald.broadway@btinternet.com)

## SWARMS

If you need a swarm please contact the duty Swarm Co-ordinator on 0701 775 8191 or 0701 775 8192, or by e-mail to: [swarm@winchesterbeekeepers.org.uk](mailto:swarm@winchesterbeekeepers.org.uk) Swarm allocation is on a first come first served basis. You will be notified when your turn comes.

## PRESIDENT OFF WITH BEES



*Ron (in the front seat) about to take off to inspect the local drone congregation areas!*

The fine spring weather at last enabled Ron Broadway to collect the first prize he won in the raffle at the Christmas supper – a flight in a glider at the Lasham Gliding Centre.