



# WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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## NEWSLETTER - APRIL 2009

### BOB'S BIT

It was Red Nose Day last Friday, but it was Red Face Day on Saturday. I went up to the apiary to see that everyone was well fed, and finding one to be light, I took a look inside. The colony had been wrecked by a wee timorous beastie, and worse, it was my own fault. The entrance block cum mouse guard was in the cupboard at home, and further to twist the knife, the notes from my last visit in the autumn said "put mouse guard on G5". It was a lovely strong colony, literally eaten out of house and home. I shall burn my Basic Certificate and take up knitting.

As I regularly take my spring holiday at this time, I can look back at the state of the crops in former years. Sometimes I have run round and supered everyone at this time, the rape flower being imminent. But this year I don't even know where there is any rape sown, let alone flowering. So I have to conclude that this is a late spring, with little but pollen coming in. So we must continue to guard against starvation, hefting our hives weekly. A jar of weak syrup with a perforated lid is enough to test if the bees are hungry. If they don't want it they won't take it down. This is where those "entrance" feeders would be handy, no disturbance or prizing apart of reluctant hive parts.

The latest view on the Great Disappearing Bees Mystery is that it's all overblown, and the almond growers of California are not, after all, staring ruin in the face. DEFRA, while avoiding the expression "colony collapse disorder" make it their first priority to contact all beekeepers to get them to use the diagnostic facilities provided by their inspectors. As our regional inspector has to cover eight counties, he will need to be something of a superman. So if a man wearing his Y-fronts outside his trousers should appear in your apiary, it's only our Man From The Ministry.

**APIARY MEETING**  
**2.30 p.m. SATURDAY April 18th**  
**Association Apiary @ Three Maids Hill**

*Tea with Hugh and Pat Loftin at 'Orchard House' in Lankhills Road, Winchester. Directions on the day.*

### INDOOR MEETING -10<sup>th</sup> March Bob Geary's Beekeeping Year

Report kindly provided by Robin Leonard

A good number of members and visitors assembled to hear Bob talk about his beekeeping year. In early spring, the sight of a few bees bringing pollen back to the hive indicated that the queen was laying and brood was being reared. Too cold to open the hive, but time to finish off the winter jobs - cleaning Queen excluders (an electric heat gun recommended) and removing solid ivy honey from reusable brood frames (soak in a vat of water to dissolve, and complete by washing out with the garden hose).

Bob keeps most of his bees in the Association out apiary, and he listed out the kit he takes there on his visits, to meet any eventuality. From hive tool, smoker and matches to the esoteric - icing sugar, liquid paraffin and French chalk. Each had a purpose, which Bob explained. Not forgetting a notebook and pen, to record the inspection and list any special needs for the next visit.

Once the weather was warm, the hives could be opened for inspection, and Bob showed pictures of

some problems that might be found - a laying worker, chalk brood, and the large hole in a brood frame made by an over-wintering mouse. He makes a practice of uncapping a small area of drone brood, to look for varroa mites and assess if treatment is required.

Being known as a beekeeper, Bob gets called out to many swarms, and he recalled one in the grounds of Winchester College. Another, in Eastleigh, had stayed high in an oak tree in the open air, and produced several large combs, but had not survived the winter.

Autumn calls for mouse-guards on the hives, and Bob has found that plasterers' expanded metal strip fits the bill. He prefers a frame feeder for the sugar syrup, which is nearer the brood nest than other feeders, and can be topped up through a funnel.

With the bees prepared for winter, Bob enjoined us all to have a go at the Hampshire Honey Show, and entertained us with tales of successes and failures at the show bench.

## **NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK (NSW) at INTECH Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March**



*The chairman shows a Varroa mite under one of the many Intech microscopes, to a young visitor.*

Together with the Intech team (who were dressed in black and yellow bee fancy dress) WDBKA provided a comprehensive display of beekeeping equipment, information, honey and microscopy, and bees in our new observation hive. Twelve members, to whom many thanks are due, 'manned' our display in shifts of four throughout the day. They were kept constantly busy talking beekeeping to a steady stream of interested parents, children and schoolteachers. The day was a great success and valuable contacts were made that may lead to beekeeping mentoring arrangements with schools, and perhaps a few new members.



*WDBKA's new nucleus observation hive in action at Intech,,with Margaret Rittman and Robin Leonard providing guidance to some potential new beekeepers.*

## **SOUTH HANTS SPRING CONVENTION. Wickham Community Centre. Sat. 21<sup>st</sup> March**

Yet again, Fareham & District, Portsmouth & District and Meon Valley BKA, put on an excellent South Hampshire Spring Convention at Wickham.. The first talk, by Terry Clare President of BIBBA - 'A Practical Approach to Queen Rearing for the Small Beekeeper', showed us how we may all, in time, improve the quality of our bee stocks. No specialist equipment is needed, the techniques being based on variations of artificial swarms. Key to each of the three methods he described is the ruthless culling of badly performing queens. He favoured either the 'Demaree' method or 'Shepherd Swarm Board', over simple artificial swarming, and described each method in detail. The latter two techniques can be started in early May, when there are plenty of strong drones, and kept running all season.

In addition to providing some mind-boggling statistics on bee behaviour, Dr Beulah Cullen gave us a electron microscopic view of how bees work. That is, exactly how they use the minutely detailed features of different parts of their anatomy to perform their various tasks. These included antennae cleaning, cell building and the science of their dancing. She described how the perfect hexagon of the comb is achieved and how its vibration characteristics are

'tuned' by the addition of propolis to the rims of the cells and by making, or leaving, holes in the comb. The vibrations from dances are transmitted and sensed through the bees' feet and are vital for communicating the required information in the darkness of the hive.

Dr Michael Keith-Lucas presented a fascinating paper on the geological history of pollination. In particular how various plant types had evolved over the millennia to enable them to be pollinated more efficiently. In the late Jurassic period, all plant life was wind pollinated. This is a very wasteful method in which about 50,000 pollen grains are dispersed **per sq cm**. In that period there was no nectar and no colour, only white. Today a wide range of methods are used by plants involving a huge variety of insects, birds and even bats, each attracted by specific combinations of colour, smell and flower shape.

Andy Willis, a horticulturalist by training, described how he became a beekeeper in Lincolnshire by 'happenstance'. He gave an informative and pragmatic account of his approach to beekeeping and some of his more unusual swarm collecting experiences.

The day overall was very well organised. An abundance of tea, coffee, biscuits and cake were variously provided on arrival and during the morning and afternoon breaks. And the 'Ploughmans' lunch was more than adequate, including apple crumble cake and ice cream for pudding – 'to die for!'

## **WINCHESTER MILL, BREAD AND HONEY WEEK. 23<sup>rd</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> May**

WDBKA has been asked to participate in a "Bread and Honey Week" event at the Winchester City Mill National Trust property [1].

The event will take place between 23<sup>rd</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> June, and National Trust volunteers will be on hand throughout that time. They will be milling flour, baking bread, and hosting the visitors. During that time there will also be a static display by WDBKA of beekeeping and collecting honey.

On Monday 25th May and Tuesday 26th May, we would like some local beekeepers to be at the Winchester City Mill to talk to the public and

supervise the observation hive. There will also be some bee-related activities for the visitors.

Please can you spare two hours between 11am and 5 pm, on Monday or Tuesday (25/26 May) at Winchester City Mill, or can you provide some equipment to put into the static display?

This is a good opportunity to promote beekeeping and our association, and promises to be an entertaining day out. You don't have to be an expert. Please contact Tim Ellison, tel. 01962 869828, with your availability over those two days, and he will coordinate the schedule to ensure we are well represented.

(Volunteers' car parking fees will be reimbursed)

[1] <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-winchestercitymill>

## **MEON VALLEY BKA ANNUAL AUCTION Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1.00 pm. Greatham Village Hall.**

Beekeeping equipment, stocks of bees, beekeeping books. Refreshments available.

Items for including in the sale now welcome. The first 300 lots will be accepted. Deliveries of lots for sale to be made on the morning between 8.30 am and 11.30 am. Catalogues printed 12<sup>th</sup> April, available at the event or from James Laybourne, Highfield Cottage, Ashton, Bishops Waltham, SO32 1FQ. Send 50p and SAE. Tel. 01489 892853. Email: jamesdeb12@tiscali.co.uk.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

A number of subscriptions have not yet been renewed and are overdue. Please be aware that if you have not renewed yours by 8<sup>th</sup> April your membership will be deemed to have lapsed. You will then no longer be covered by bee insurance and will not receive 'Hampshire Bee Talk', 'BBKA News' or the WDBKA Newsletter.