

Hagley & Stourbridge, with Kidderminster & North East Worcestershire Beekeepers' Associations' Newsletter. Spring 2006



Friday & Saturday 21 & 22 April an all day event at Stoneleigh (Friday is the "Members' Day"). Save £4.00 by paying in advance (by 12.4.!). Details may be obtained in the BBKA News.

Friday 28 April 19:30, Celia DAVIS: "The Wild Bees and Wasps", Birmingham BKA, Dame-Elisabeth-Cadbury Hall, Selly Oak. This talk, certainly worth going to, will cover the life cycles and behaviour of the solitary and social wasps and bees. – Anyone interested in joining me for this one, get in touch (01384 352177)

Saturday 29 April County AGM staged by Hagley & Stourbridge commencing at **2.00pm** Free Church Hall, Hagley. The lecturer has visited us before, so we know we are in for a jolly afternoon: **Peter HAYWARD WITH** an illustrated talk, "**30 Brilliant Ideas for Beekeepers**", telling us of beekeeping-related inventions submitted to his Patent Office; some of them very sensible (you can still buy the things from Thorne's), some quite bizarre (you can't buy them anywhere).

Wednesday 3 May 19:30 Tony LITTLE: "Treating Varroa – A Sharp Shock", a talk on treatment with Oxalic Acid, at North Staffs BKA's venue in Newcastle. I shall be going – anyone interested in joining me, please get in touch (01384 352177)

Thursday 11 May to Sunday 14 May Spring Gardening Show, Three County Show Ground, Malvern. – Register as a steward, or sell you honey (at a good price!), and enjoy free entrance to the Show.

Saturday, 20 May, Kidderminster's Roving Apiary Meeting, details later. These are enjoyable events, sometimes they even come with a Bee Tea!

Apiary meetings for this current year are all held at the Branch Apiary, commencing at 6.30pm (excluding the first meeting that commences at 2.00pm). In the event of inclement weather meeting/meetings may have to be cancelled and moved to the next meeting date.

Sunday 30 April at 2.00pm

Thursday 25 May at 6.30pm

Tuesday 20 June at 6.30pm

Friday 12 May at 6.30pm

Wednesday 7 June at 6.30pm

Monday 3 July at 6.30pm

Saturday, 9 July, 14:00, Kidderminster's Out-Apiary Meeting at J.Lannin's and S.Limbrey's, catching up on last year's rained-out event ; similar to the Roving Apiary Meetings.

MEETINGS PAST

In our first winter meeting this year, on 11 **January**, Martin CRACKNELL (of Evesham Branch), John GOWAR (North-East) and Richard MURGATROYD (Kidderminster) told of their **Apimondia** experience last August. They all had the feeling that the organisation was poor (this having been the biggest event of this kind in Dublin since 1935!); e.g., abstracts for the lectures were often unavailable beforehand, so it was impossible to choose the ones you would like to hear. – Apimondia was, in fact, four separate conferences: on bee biology; pathology; equipment and technology; and therapy using bee products. – Martin had mainly been to the latter two and reported, amongst other things, on a modified-frame arrangement with plastic foundation for the production of section honey (from Denmark); on the floors made up from tubes for Varroa control (France); and on a hive with circular, rotating brood frames (Hungary), suppressing Varroa

development and swarming; on an improved method to obtain bee venom; on bee products used in medicine and healing. – John found many of the lectures delivered in poor English, and said that a number of leading bee scientists did not come to Apimondia, instead attending a conference in Russia on Social Insects, unfortunately timed to coincide. He reported on the little progress made towards treatment for the Small Hive Beetle (traps, with various attractants); on research on Varroa's reproduction in African and Africanised European bees; on an investigation comparing the antibiotics residues in honeys from different parts of the world; on Russian research that claims that bee venom treatment of alcoholics may revitalise that part of the brain which tells you to stop drinking. – Richard had made friends with Australian beekeepers who invited him to come to the Apimondia there in 2007, promising a better overall organisation of the event.

For the meeting on **14 February** we had **Dr. Max WATKINS**, of **Vita Europe**, giving an excellent talk to an audience boosted to 42 by visitors from neighbouring associations, about the history of the small company and their work: they do little research themselves, but identify promising areas of research and development and then work together with/employ research institutes all over the world (mostly in universities), in developing products to control a range of bee diseases including wax moth, the foulbroods and chalkbrood; the aim being commercial production and marketing of these remedies. He considers himself lucky if one out of eight research projects end in success, i.e. with commercial production and marketing of the remedy; and one or two are near completion, he thinks. – So far, the most successful and well-known is, of course, **Apiguard**, at the moment the only approved product for Varroa control known to deal with pyrethroid-resistant mites. It seems to either kill the mite, or not; therefore the mites cannot breed strains tolerant of the treatment, as they can with the pyrethroids (*Apistan* and *Bayvarol*), where some more resilient individuals are only stunned by low-dose exposure and survive to reproduce, thus breeding a resistant strain. – Many of us have used Apiguard themselves and can confirm its easy application and good efficacy (averaging 93% Europe-wide) if applied correctly and at the right time of the season, i.e., while the temperatures are high enough, with a daily maximum above 15C. [Condensed from Phil DAWSON's notes]

Wednesday 1 March saw a good turn-out for our **Annual Dinner** at *The Whittington*: a very pleasant evening excellent food and service.

Sunday, 5 March Annual Apiary Clean-up. – Another meeting which I was unable to attend. A heart felt thanks to all of you who did turn up. Driving past the site it is obvious that some members came prepared to rebuild the steps. I haven't climbed those steps yet but they look most impressive from the road. Thanks again to all involved. *Alan Bishop*.

In March, we did not have our own winter meeting. In its place, a few of our members joined Ludlow's Beekeepers on 9 March. David KEMP, Regional Bee Inspector of the North-Eastern Region, who had worked with BROTHER ADAM at Buckfast Abbey for ten years in the 1960s and 70s, gave a lively talk with numerous slides, not only painting a vivid picture of Brother Adam's practical approach to beekeeping, his great attention to every detail and of his deep understanding of the bee colony's needs, that led him to design the type of hive used at Buckfast, his highly efficient management system, his extracting facilities and his maintenance workshops; but also of Brother Adam as a person, and what it was like to work with him, for him, under him.

Saturday 11 March saw Kidderminster's Spring Workshop, when members talked about last year's season and the preparations for this year. David Mills reported on the removal of a bees nest from the roof of the ancient Church in Chaddesley Corbett. Alternative treatments for Varroa were discussed.

A Thank You.

Well here we are, another spring has rolled round again and the new bee keeping year is beginning. At this time of the year I keep asking myself did I feed enough; have they survived the winter; have the mouse guards worked; have the woodpeckers been busy? Answers to these thoughts will soon be available to us. With this Newsletter the program for the year is published. Please put all meetings inside and out in your diaries to remind you of the meetings. My thanks to all members who supported the Club last year, with special thanks to Committee Members who put in considerable work and telephone calls on our behalf.

May I express a big "Thank You" for the super hamper of goodies I received at the Christmas Social? Eric and I appreciated this parcel and thoroughly enjoyed its contents. My best wishes for 2006 Season. June Wilson (Chair).

An Apology and a Big Thank You.

On re-reading the last Newsletter I discovered that there were still many errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling in spite of the computer's brain. I regret that this was liable to make reading the notes much more difficult for you. I hope that this time to commit fewer of these sins! Now the nice bit. Completely unbeknown to myself I was presented at the Christmas social event with a book token for WH Smith. Somebody clearly knows my habits at least as well as I know them! When my health is better I shall be able to enjoy browsing and buying a book / books with the token. A big Thank you to you all for having thought of this idea (a perfect gift in my case). Alan Bishop (Apiary Manager).

Justus, our Secretary, has arranged a very varied selection of talks on matters that relate directly to our keeping of bees. Unfortunately, I have been unable to attend these and so I have no direct knowledge of content the lectures. Justus has some written material but there is nothing to beat a personal presence at these times.

Work for the early part of the year.

Members should be well aware of the Integrated Pest Management that is being advocated as the only practical solution to the control of Varroa. To do this the floorboard must be a wire/plastic screen so that any dislodged mites will fall through the holes into

the grass below provided there is a space of a minimum of four inches the mites are unable to climb back in again. (The newer type of floorboard using pipe rather than screens will not be mentioned in this article). Members unable to make or assemble their own screens can buy them ready-made (probably at a good discount) from the Stoneleigh Show in April. There will be no need to replace the floor screen with a new one giving time to clean the old one properly. If the mesh is stainless steel then a good brushing with a wire brush will remove any rubbish that the bees have not removed for themselves from the surface of the mesh. The branches are probably going to order chemical treatments for Varroa in bulk, thus reducing the cost to each member. More details on pricing when they become available.

This first examination is the ideal time to sort out the poor from the good combs in the brood box. Aim to replace all of the combs over a two/three year time interval. Remove the worst combs that do not contain any brood, but at this time of year do not split the nest for fear of chilling the brood. Place the comb to be discarded behind a division board at one end of the brood box. To make sure that the bees will remove any stores the cell cappings can be damaged with your hive tool, but beware of robbing. (Keep the entrance narrow at this stage: the bees are unable to come up through the mesh as the gaps are too narrow). If the weather at this time of year is reasonable, then add a sheet of foundation on either side of the brood nest, but NOT between the combs of the brood nest.

This is also an ideal time to supplement your autumn feeding with candy if you are at all concerned at the availability of food to the bees. Syrup may be used, but must be fed to the bees via a direct feeder. All that means is that an empty coffee tin should have a few little holes tapped into the lid with the point of a nail, then filled with syrup and inverted over the feed hole in the crown board. The bees will come directly to the syrup and take what they need. If the weather is too cold they will ignore it temporarily. Recipes for candy are to be found in most of the bee keeping books but beware as it is a messy and potentially dangerous job as the syrup needs to be boiled down to candy. It is possible to buy candy from the bakers ready made but of course at a price. Once made the candy needs to be divided into roughly pound or half-pound

blocks, wrapped in cling film and then placed directly over the cluster. If the cling film is cut with your hive tool in one or two places it makes it easier for the bees to reach the candy.

To stimulate the queen to lay more rapidly, (weather permitting), a pollen supplement is by far the most effective means. Again recipes for artificial pollen may be obtained from the bee keeping books. Beware though as this artificial pollen will give the bees diarrhoea. Those little brown blobs, of which the housewife complains covering her washing at this time of year, become big brown blobs! Study the flight path of the bees and if necessary this approach will have to be abandoned except when it is not washing day!

Under the above circumstances extra comb will need to be added IN ADVANCE OF THE NEED FOR EXTRA SPACE. There is little point in stimulating the queen to lay if you do not provide her with sufficient space to lay. Should you be wishing to increase your numbers this year, an extra brood box may be added above the first but without a queen excluder being placed between them once the first box is nicely stocked with bees. This gives the queen access to both brood boxes. The position of each box can be reversed at any time. When you are ready to increase your numbers one of the boxes, (without the queen), may be split into two or three nuclei. The bees may be allowed to raise their own queens but bear in mind that there must be drones flying before these procedures are commenced. The alternative is to buy in the number of queens you require. From reputable dealers, such queens should give at least one or two years of good work. There is always a great demand for bought queens at this time of year as many beekeepers wish to make up their winter losses. It is necessary therefore to place your orders as soon as you possibly can. The Branch Apiary has bought in queens from such a source and has generally been very pleased with the results.

Many beekeepers around Europe have been having trouble in securing a well-mated young queen. You are aware, I am sure, that the Varroa mite prefers to progress through its life cycle in drone brood. This may kill the drone but there are usually plenty of "spares". What cannot be seen is the loss of body mass in the drones as the mites have eaten some of the

drone's food. Each drone is able to produce one increment of sperm in its lifetime. It is impossible for the drones to modify any of its sperm once formed. Therefore, to be safe, mating of drones and queens should take place where it is unlikely that the sperm is of poor quality. It seems that it is necessary to go to the Mediterranean in order to ensure the above conditions. Buying in queens goes a long way to give the conditions that we require. (We may be able to raise our own queens this year but we must wait and see).

Before the brood box becomes congested with bees supers must be added above an excluder placed on the brood box. Further supers should be added beneath the first one again in advance of requirements. You may be lucky and end up with a spring nectar flow/crop. Even if you do not have this luck the presence of so many bees should aid any queen raising you may wish to do for yourself. The major nectar producer in this country for the spring is the inevitable rape again. This honey tends to set very quickly (not always) and can therefore make extraction well nigh impossible. To avoid this problem as far as you can, remove the combs as soon as the cells are capped and extract the honey ASAP. By warming the honey it will flow more readily from the ripening tank into the jars. Beware though not to overheat the honey thus caramelising it and spoiling the honey. This is one of the many problems that are often encountered when dealing with honey samples. Now that all our honey has to be labelled with batch numbers it is relatively easy for Weights and Measures Officers to trace all the other pots in that sample.

The state of health of bee colonies in this country.

There is no doubt that bee diseases are going to plague us for many years to come. Many of these have been around for a long time and both quack and scientific methods have been proposed to cure them. The EC (in its infinite wisdom) has banned most if not all of the quack remedies. That is not to say that these are no longer being practised however! In this article we shall attempt to stick to the scientific solutions rather than any other.

Of the minor diseases Nosema, Amoeba and Acarine are still with us but no longer seem to worry beekeepers as they used to do. Of

much greater importance are AFB (American Foul Brood) and EFB (European Foul Brood). The American and European refer to where the original research was done so as not to blame either country. AFB is an unusual infection in that it will inevitably progress to the death of the colony. EFB on the other hand seems to be a "Will o the Wisp" type of infection which can be present at one moment and apparently absent at another. Severe infections will of course kill the colony but usually not. DEFRA has been and is doing much work to devise a field test for its own officers to aid the diagnosis of EFB. Work continues without a satisfactory positive result so far. Perhaps now the fact that many of its officers are not to be thrown on the scrap heap may speed the work.

We have talked and we shall talk many times in the future of treatments to control Varroa (but not to eliminate - that is definitely a step too far at the moment). The pest is found in the Far East and has been there for at least one and a quarter million years, and is not a natural indigenous pest of these islands and Western Europe, so therefore our bees have no natural defences. We have to aid the bees in removing the irritant pest. This was the whole point of the lectures in the early winter season.

As if that was not bad enough we can look forward to another whole raft of infestations. Last year we had a talk on the Small Hive Beetle that frightened us all to death. Unfortunately the SHB is equipped to survive winters which we normally have. Treatments for this are somewhat primitive.

South America's problem Killer Bees were thought to be unable to cross into North America because of the winter temperature drop, but this has been found to be inaccurate in recent times. Presumably through natural breeding a strain of Killer Bee has developed which can survive this drop in temperature. If it can do that there is no problem to its establishing a foothold in this country. Admittedly the temper of the bees has improved somewhat but there is still ample room for further improvement. It only requires one mated queen to be smuggled into the country by some idiot to start the problem in progress. Even without chemical treatments, the level of infestation of these problems can be kept low by normal apiary management.

It is probably too complicated to go into viral conditions but there are certainly many of these to consider. Dr Brenda Ball, thrown on the scrapheap by Rothampstead, has done sterling work with viruses but all that has now come to an end.

On a brighter note though it has been recorded that contamination of honey samples by antibiotics has declined markedly. It would almost seem that the point of origin of the honey makes little difference to the honey in this instance. Beekeepers obtain these chemicals (perhaps by the black market) and use them rather indiscriminately. I am sure that the same thing happens in this country but on a much lesser scale. The use of antibiotics is strictly controlled by DEFRA employees. As with everything else we shall learn to manage each new infestation or disease as it comes along. This is not the death-blow to beekeeping as it may be first thought but it is a nasty jolt to our complacency. If they are your bees and you handle them properly you will still be able to put a pot of healthy honey on the tea-time table.

To this end please do not forget to check through all of your equipment before you need it. There is never enough time to do these little fussy jobs once the season gets underway

News from the National Bee Unit

Many of us will remember **Robin HALL**, our Regional Inspector for the Western Region, who has visited our apiaries and given us winter talks in the past. He has been unwell all last season, taking medical retirement last autumn. Therefore, **Dave SUTTON**, one of his Seasonal Inspectors, has been deputising in his post from early last year and is going to do so until the budget and staffing issues at NBU are resolved. – Surely, we all wish Robin well and thank him for his efforts amongst the beekeeping community during the years that he held the position.

From April this year, the NBU is going to be moved within DEFRA from the Potatoes and Horticultural to the Plant Health Division, but will remain at the Central Science Laboratory in York. – This move should have no impact on the way our apiaries are visited and inspected by NBU's officers.

With the latest beekeeping-related legislation, enacted by Parliament in March, the presences of *Aethina tumida* (Small Hive

Beetle) and of Tropilaeaps (parasitic mite) have become **Statutory Notifiable Diseases**. – At the same time, *Varroa destructor* has lost this status (which it has, de facto, years ago when beekeepers started monitoring and treating for it without the involvement of the NBU and its inspectors). Despite this, the inspectors will still be monitoring for pyrethroid-resistant mites.

However, as the **Resistant Mites** are closing in on our area (they have been identified in the Market Drayton region two years ago; near Wem last year; near Sutton Coldfield and Stratford-upon-Avon in the autumn), NBU encourages you to sacrifice some 300 bees to do your own testing as well, so that you know when to call it a day for treating your colonies with Bayvarol or Apistan, and to move on to alternative treatments and seriously practising Integrated Pest Management. The inspectors have test kits available to give to anyone who asks for them. – There is now concern that some of the colony losses in our region during the last season and over the winter may have been due to colonies still being treated with the strips when dangerously large numbers in the mite populations were already resistant. This trend will spread, inevitably and rapidly, over the next few seasons. – Still, while it lasts and you may still use the strips safely, do not help the resistance to evolve more rapidly by leaving those strips in your colonies beyond the specified six weeks! *Justus Klaar*.

Exomite Apis

Many of you will remember our November meeting last year when Clive NEWITT told us about **Exomite Apis** and its application as an alternative to the strips in Varroa treatment. The Branch is going to purchase Exomite Apis, and we will certainly try the product in the Branch Apiary. Please **ring Justus soon** (01384 352177) to give an indication if you are interested, so that we can place a **bulk order** for which Clive promised us a good price reduction.

E-mail

Please tell Justus (justusklaar@yahoo.co.uk, tel. 01384 352177) if you are prepared to accept Newsletters and other communication from the Branch as e-mail. This would reduce the cost and or effort for the mail shots. – Thank you.

Loose sugar (not suitable for human consumption, but fine for the bees) at approximately half the normal retail price. Contact Justus 01384 352177

HONEY JARS

Orders being taken for honey jars and plastic lids. Get ready for the OSR. Price dependant on demand, but as cheap as possible! Contact Nick 01562 882145

We are sorry to have to announce the death of our new member, **Anne Dawson** on Friday 22 March. We send our heartfelt condolences to her husband Phil at this sad time.