



Mid Bucks Beekeepers Association February 2014 Newsletter



Apis mellifera caucasica

Seminars and Courses

Although the weather outside might not be conducive to beekeeping thoughts, it feels as though the season is already underway. Pick up any beekeeping journal and there are adverts for seminars, trade shows and of course the BBKA Spring Convention, all encouraging us to think about the year ahead and possibly spend some money on our hobby.

With all the national beekeeping events going on it has been hard to set a date for the 18th Bucks County Spring Seminar. This will be held on 8th March, starting at 10:00am in the Memorial Hall, Wendover. There will be three key speakers, various stands and of course a quiz! It would be nice to have a good turnout of MBBKA members. Full details are on our website, just follow the link on the MBBKA [homepage](#). Please pre-register so that the organisers can plan the scale of the event. Our Association is responsible this year for organising the teas and coffees, if you are able to help please email chairman@mbbka.org.uk.

March is turning out to be a busy month for training. Those members sitting BBKA Module examinations will be doing so on 22nd March, the MBBKA New Beekeepers Course commences on 10th March and the County BBKA General Husbandry training begins on 29th March.

The BBKA General Husbandry Certificate is awarded following the successful practical assessment of the beekeeper in his/her own environment by a BBKA Assessor. The assessment is aimed at beekeepers who have been keeping bees for several years and who manages 4 or more colonies. However the course is open to all members of the Bucks BKA whether or not they intend to sit the assessment. The course comprises a kick-off day on 29th March and a training weekend on 30/31st August run by Julian Routh a BBKA Assessor. Further information on the training can be found on our website under [education](#).

The BBKA Spring Convention at Harper Adams, Shropshire to a certain extent closes off the beekeeping spring seminar season with a full weekend programme from 4th - 6th April. For the first time the National Diploma in Beekeeping will be continuing the education programme at Harper Adams through to Monday 7th April with a couple of short courses. The BBKA has opened bookings for the seminars and workshops, the programme of events and how to book can be found [here](#).

February Meeting

Our Winter Speaker programme starts again this month with a talk from Dave Short of the Aylesbury Vale Barn Owl Nest Project. This is reportedly the largest project of its kind in the country. Please remember that due to building works at the Church of the Good Shepherd this month's meeting is being held at **Butlers Cross Village Hall**. Directions to the village hall can be found [here](#).

Winter Programme of Events

Wednesday 19th February
Aylesbury Vale Barn Owl Project
Dave Short
7:30pm Butlers Cross Village Hall

Saturday 8th March
Bucks County BKA Spring Seminar
10:00am Wendover Memorial Hall

Monday 10th March
2014 New Beekeepers Course
Coordinator Caroline Windley
7:30pm Church of the Good Shepherd

Wednesday 19th March
Toxic Honey
Pam Hunter
7:30pm Church of the Good Shepherd

4th-6th April
BBKA Spring Convention
Harper Adams

Wednesday 16th April
Honeybee Communication
John Hendrie
7:30pm Church of the Good Shepherd

Newsletter Contributions

This month the Newsletter has expanded to a third page thanks to an article written by one of our members Ken Gorman. Please take time to read the article.

If you feel you have an interesting topic or photo you would like to share with our membership please do not hesitate in contacting chairman@mbbka.org.uk.

Spring flights

A couple of weeks ago whilst checking the hives in my apiary for woodpecker damage as well as for signs of life in the colonies by examining under the hive for traces of wax cappings, I noticed a lot of bee activity at the entrance to one of my hives. In fact honeybees were returning from foraging trips with pollen.

It was barely warm enough for the bees to take cleansing flights let alone go foraging (sunny but less than 12°C). I had already noted for other reasons (good honey crop, colony docility and strong colony build up) that I would use that colony as a source for my queen rearing this season. Early foraging was the clincher.

The most likely source of the pollen, which is the honeybee source of protein, would have been snowdrops. It is hard to see honeybees foraging on snowdrops as they disappear into the floret.

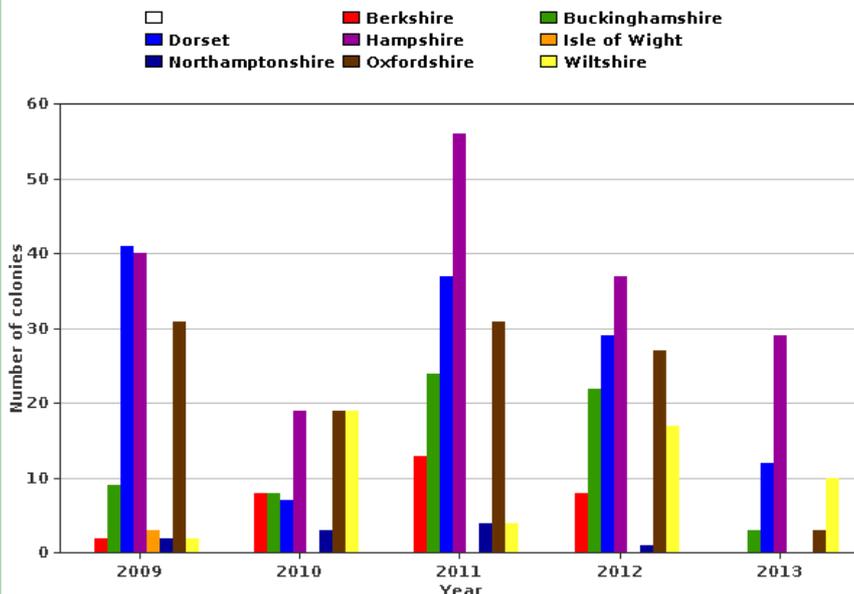
Looking further around the garden there were other early sources of pollen. Aconites open up on sunny days and the bed of flowers is a buzz with bees. I am lucky enough to have some native hellebores, the flowers are more green than colourful but that does not seem to bother the bees; the mahonia and winter jasmine are just about finished but on a good day still attract the bees; but the biggest surprise is the hazel catkins which are already open and offering pollen to the honeybees.



Clockwise from top left; snowdrop with bee, aconites, jasmine, mahonia, hazel catkins and hellebores.

National Bee Unit Southern Region Update

The NBU have published an update covering the 2013 season. Below is a graphic from the report showing the distribution of EFB amongst the counties of Southern region. A full copy of the update can be found on our website on the [Bees Health](#) page. Also in the update is some further info on the Bee Health Advisors initiative. Congratulations to Julian Parker on becoming the Regional Bee Inspector for the South East Region, meaning there is a vacancy for a Seasonal Bee Inspector for our area.



Equipment and Bees for Sale

Diane Oldfield is selling two colonies of bees, if you are interested please contact Diane at dmoldfield@yahoo.co.uk

Ken Gorman is taking provisional orders for strong, overwintered colonies, for collection in April; not suitable for new beginners. They all look in good fettle at the moment. 2013 marked queens-full brood chamber colonies on good comb; B.S. DN5 (self-spacing) frames: price £165. Also, 5 frame nuclei; 2014 marked queens; available late May/early June: £140. The bees are bred from German, Carnica stock, forming large, easily handled colonies. Collected from Milton Keynes, for transfer into your equipment; can also be supplied in sound, used, cedar, National equipment. For more details: email: special@kennethgorman.plus.com

If you have any **second hand** equipment that you would like to sell at the Annual Seminar please contact chairman@mbbka.org.uk

Wintering bees in England by Ken Gorman

I have worked with bees since the season of 1947, initially under the tutelage of my primary school teacher and buying my first nucleus in the spring of 1949, at age twelve. Apart from three years spent in the RAF, I have kept bees ever since and for the last thirty two years, as a sideline business.

In the late forties and early fifties, sugar was on ration, but beekeepers could apply for an allocation of sugar from the local Ministry of Food office. Ten pounds per colony could be obtained for autumn feeding and five pounds per colony for the spring. Following one exceptionally harsh winter a second allocation of five pounds per colony was negotiated with the Government.

Armed with the Ministry certificate one proceeded to a high street store to pay for and obtain the delivery.

The first winter: The nucleus duly built up into a full sized colony on a brood and a super, (brood and a half); a common hive configuration at that time. The colony was already well provisioned, but I fed the ten pounds of sugar as thick syrup, wrapped the whole hive in roofing felt and prepared to face the winter. The feeding was complete by mid-September and the last inspection had been conducted early in that month. Beekeepers then wouldn't have dreamt of interfering with their colonies during the winter months. Should they have been concerned about lack of stores as the winter progressed, nothing could be done to retrieve the situation, until one was able to draw the spring ration, hence, the need to put them into winter well provisioned.

During the first seven years of beekeeping, I don't recall losing a single colony during the winter.

Off ration: When sugar came off ration in the mid-fifties, thousands of so-called beekeepers gave up beekeeping. Ah! Evidently not all of the sugar had been given to the bees; these deserters were called the sugar beekeepers.

I set up two out apiaries, one on the sidings at Arnos Grove underground station and another at the Grammar School which I attended in Southgate, North London. I remember carting syrup from home to hives, by bicycle, in two quart beer bottles. They were in a shopping bag, hanging from my handlebars. During one of these trips, without warning, I found myself flat on my back in the road right outside Southgate underground station; a beer bottle neck had intruded into the front wheel spokes and, in a flash, over the handlebars I had gone. Fortunately, there weren't many cars on the roads then.

Ready for the whole winter: Wintering bees nowadays seems such a fraught procedure. Anxiety intrudes, quite early into the season, regarding the level of stores in colonies. What should be the quiet part of the beekeeping year now sees higher levels of beekeeper activity.

Part of the problem can be trying to send colonies into the winter on a single British Standard brood chamber. It is nearly impossible to squeeze the necessary, minimum, forty five pounds of stores into such a space. Another aspect arises from the easy access to cane sugar, Ambrosia, Belgosuc, baker's fondant and other propriety feeds. There is the temptation to meddle, thinking that there is a shortage of food problem, when probably there isn't. Once feeding with fondant commences, it must be kept up for the remainder of the winter, as the cluster of bees will have been drawn up to the feed and are now reliant upon it. The bees have to use moisture from their own bodies to liquefy the crystals-a considerable stress for them.

Reassurance: confidence.: I keep winter losses below an average of five per cent. Last winter, my several losses were due to queen failure. Here are my recommendations for winter stores.

Winter on more than a single B.S. brood chamber.

Know the weight of stores in the colony, both before and after feeding. This can be achieved by conducting a final inspection in late August, or early September, counting up the stores as each frame is checked. A full B.S. brood frame holds four to five pounds of stores; a full super frame, two to three pounds. Then feed to make up the required weight of stores.

Or know the weight of an unoccupied hive: floor, boxes, crownboard, roof and combs. Add on five to ten pounds for the bees and brood, depending on colony size. Weigh the occupied hive prior to feeding, using a spring balance. Lift each side in turn and add the two figures together. Now feed, until the colony weight is at least forty five to fifty pounds above the "empty" weight. Recheck with a final weighing.

Begin feeding in the second half of August and complete the process; by mid-September. Worries gone. Feeding after the middle of September can lead to stores being left uncapped with the danger of fermentation, which will give rise to dysentery.

The so-called hefting of colonies is not an accurate way of checking colony weights during winter. With experience, it is possible to detect a colony which is losing weight too fast. It will certainly pick out colonies which are still heavy.

In the last several years I have used a manufactured syrup which has already been inverted; Ambrosia or Belgosuc. This is fed to the bees using contact feeders; the inverted bucket type. I add a supplement, VITA GOLD or VITA GREEN which helps with nosema control. It saves time, also fuel heating water. The bees can store it straight into the combs and get it sealed. It's not cheap, but pays dividends in the long run. Don't use rapid feeders; the bees wear themselves out running up and down, falling into the syrup, jostling against one another in the pell-mell rush to take the syrup down.

This winter: 2013/2014: The winter so far has been mild. Daisies are flowering on road verges; tree and shrub buds are swelling. I have been check weighing colonies in various apiaries, beginning with at the end of September. All of the colonies were reweighed at the end of November: the average loss in weight in those two months was 3.2 lbs. There were wide variations, with colonies in the Milton Keynes urban area showing gains in weight, due to nectar being harvested from the ivy. A further check in mid-January showed an average loss in weight for all colonies, for the whole period, of only 4.5 lbs. Several colonies showed weight loss above ten pounds and will need watching as spring approaches. There is no sign of dysentery.

When spring arrives: I do have supplies of Ambrosia fondant and a new product-Candipolline Gold, (a fondant containing real, but sterilised pollen), vitamins and mineral salts. Colonies will thus be stimulated into expanding their activities, ready for early spring flowers.