



# Mid Bucks Beekeepers Association February 2017 Newsletter



Aconites are a great source of early pollen. Their flowers close up at night.

## MBBKA Schools Visits

Each year Vanessa Rickett coordinates visits to local primary schools by members of our Association. The visits are during the summer term and generally form part of students studies on mini beasts. A typical visit involves a 20-30 minute talk about bees to a whole year group at a school. This is followed by students, in small groups, learning about the environment the honey bee inhabits as well as the resulting products. We set up three stands including an observation hive with live bees, products of the hive and flowers with information boards to introduce the concept of pollination.

There are some schools that ask us back year after year and each year the number of schools visited increases. Vanessa is already receiving enquiries for this year.

The visits take place during the week, usually in the morning following assembly. To be involved in one of the visits is extremely rewarding and the reception from the teachers is always welcoming.

Going on your first visit can be a little daunting as you may feel that your knowledge is not up to scratch. Once you get into the swing of the event you realise as a beekeeper you know more than you might think. This is supported by an enthusiastic audience who are always keen to taste the honey on offer and play with the wax.

It is an experience that every beekeeper should have at least once in their life.

If you have half a day to spare and you would like to be involved please contact Vanessa at [var@fairholme.me.uk](mailto:var@fairholme.me.uk), she will appreciate your support.

In the same vein, if you know of a school that might be interested in a visit please point them to our website [www.mbbka.org.uk/schools.html](http://www.mbbka.org.uk/schools.html).



## Bee Tradex

If you are interested in purchasing new equipment/supplies for the coming beekeeping season, the [Bee Tradex](#) at Stoneleigh on 4th March may be worth a visit. All the major suppliers will be there.

## Wax and Candlesmaking Workshop

On Sunday 26th February, run by Chalfont BKA. I have previously attended this workshop and cannot recommend it enough. For more information contact Helen Cave at [helencave1@googlemail.com](mailto:helencave1@googlemail.com)

## April Meeting, Short Lectures

At our meeting on 22nd April we plan to have a series of short lectures by members of our Association. Each lecture will be for 10 minutes followed by 5 minutes of questions.

We have a couple of slots still available, if you are interested in giving a short lecture on a beekeeping topic please contact me at [chairman@mbbka.org.uk](mailto:chairman@mbbka.org.uk).

## Programme of Events

**15th February 2017**

**The World of Insects**

John Tyler

7:30pm

Church of the Good Shepherd

**20th February 2017**

**New Beekeepers Course Starts**

Church of the Good Shepherd

**26th February 2017**

**Wax and Candlesmaking Workshop**

**4th March 2017**

**[Bee Tradex](#)**

Stoneleigh

**15th March 2017**

**Tree Bumblebees**

Clive Hill

7:30pm

Church of the Good Shepherd

**7th-9th April 2017**

**BBKA Spring Convention**

Harper Adams University

**19th April 2017**

**Short Lectures**

Church of the Good Shepherd

## Winter/Spring Feeding of Honey Bee Colony

Each year more colonies die from starvation than the winter weather and this year will be no exception. The adjacent picture shows a colony that is alive following the recent cold snap.

The telltale signs that the colony is OK are the dead bees to the front and the fresh wax bits below the hive. The dead bees mean that the colony has been housekeeping and clearing out some the bees that have not survived the winter. The wax shavings indicate that the colony is consuming stores.

At this time of the year no matter the weight from hefting the hive I feed the colony fondant. This particular colony still has winter stores in supers below the brood box but nevertheless in the last week has consumed a kilogram of fondant. The fondant is applied in clear freezer trays inverted over the crown board hole which is above the cluster. Note that the second hole is covered to help retain heat and moisture within the hive.

The heat and moisture from the cluster liquefies the fondant enabling the bees to metabolise the watered down fondant. The condensation can clearly be seen in the image which has two tubs of fondant. In this case some of the fondant has escaped and is flowing across the crown board.

The image of the hive entrance again gives evidence of house-keeping but also shows a streak of faeces. Following the recent spells of freezing weather this is not too much of a concern since sometimes bees evacuate prematurely as they leave the hive on a cleansing flight. The cluster in this colony is a little small so it will need keeping an eye on.

In the coming days the weather is due to become warmer which will mean the bees will start to fly, initially on cleansing flights then in search of water, so now is a good time to prepare any water feeders. Water foraging starts early in the morning and bees can be encouraged to use a particular water source by topping it up with warm water.

As we move into March feeding will change from Fondant to sugar syrup and possibly pollen substitute. The National Bee Unit has a good paper on pollen substitute that can be found [here](#). The NBU discourages the use of pollen supplement due to the risk of spreading disease. The time for moving to liquid feed all depends upon the outside temperature, if bees are out foraging on a regular basis for pollen and there are plants in flower such as Crocus and Hellebore then sugar syrup should be fine as a feed.

The sugar syrup should be a 1:1 mix of sugar to water and fed initially via a contact feeder. According to Ted Hooper, there is nothing better than giving bees a warm sugar feed in the Spring to encourage the colony to start to expand.

At the same time, supers that are still on the hive from the winter can be removed and the colony encouraged to expand within the brood box in preparation for the Spring comb change.

A good rule of thumb is that if in doubt don't change anything, but at all times make sure the bees are feeding.

If food is accessible the bees will consume it, if for instance you try to feed the colony syrup in a rapid feeder and the bees do not take it something is wrong. Either it is too cold for the bees to climb out of the cluster to the feed or the colony is too weak. In the Spring if the colony is not consuming food it will not be too

