

Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

Hon. Secretary
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FORAGINGS

Feb 2007

Dates for your Diary –

Date & time	Venue	Topic/details	Speaker/Apiary Manager
Sat 17 Mar – 14.00	Waterloo Arms	”Beekeeping & the Future”	Alan Johnson
Sun 25 Mar – 14.00	Chilworth Out Apiary	“Spring Inspection”	Richard Kimish
Sat 31 Mar– 10.30	Sir Harold Hillier’s	Expedition, lunch & afternoon tea.	Andy Willis
Sun 01 Apr – 14.00	Broadlands Out Apiary	“Spring Inspection”	Andy Willis

Other events:-

National Bee Unit – Southern Region Association Day Sunday 25 February 2007 at The Sutton Hall, Church Road, Stockcross, Newbury, Berks 10.30 – 16.00. Lectures are:- An Inspectors View – Alan Byham, Alternative Varroa Treatments, their efficiency & legality – Richard Ball, Anything But Honey – Robin Dean, A Needle in a Haystack – Ian Homer. Please let your Secretary know if you wish to attend or contact i.homer@csl.gov.uk (Ian Homer). Teas & coffee will be provided but you will need to take your own lunch.

South Hants Spring Beekeeping Convention Saturday 10 March 2007 at Wickham Community Centre 09.30 for 10.00 until 16.00. Tickets £10.00 in advance of £12.50 on the door, ploughman’s lunch included. Tickets available from Secretary or email dave@allan.eu.com Lectures:- Re-introduction of the British Black Bee – Terry Clare, Beekeeping Pure & Simple – Golly Sturt, Raising Queens – John Furzey & Beekeepers Question Time from panel of speakers.

Meridian Beekeepers Open Lecture 17 April 2007 at Marwell Education Center – Professor Thomas D Seeley “Forest Bees & Varroa Mites. Meeting starts at 19.15 for 19.30, a charge of £3.00 per head for non-Meridian members. Please let me know if you wish to attend to give them an idea of numbers to cater for.

Late winter/early spring – Andy Willis

This is the time of year that most beekeepers refer to as the ‘off season’, a time to sit back and relax!

In reality it can be make or break as far as beekeeping is concerned. Many hives throughout the country don’t make it through the winter or do so in such a weak state that they take all of the next season to recover and need a lot of TLC.

Bees don’t die of cold; they die of damp or starvation. If your colonies were strong last autumn then the abundant ivy and good weather should mean they won’t starve in a hurry and ample stores are in the hives. If your colonies weren’t strong then hopefully you will have fed a minimum of 14lb of sugar dissolved in 7 pints of water by gentle heating, to each colony. This is normally completed by November, thus giving your bees time to ripen the syrup.

An experienced beekeeper will ‘lift’ a hive to estimate how much stores are left in a colony during the winter. If it feels light than an emergency feed of candy/fondant can be given (no Syrup). A spring feed of syrup can be given in a mild winter at the end of February but not before. Spring or stimulative feeding normally starts in March in good weather, this syrup is thinner than the autumn feed being made with 1lb sugar to 1 pint of water – again heating to make sure it’s well dissolved. This feeding is best done with a contact feeder rather than a rapid feeder. The idea being to give a long slow feed, to stimulate the Queen into laying more eggs, over a sustained period. The time I start is governed by nature, and 2 indicators I use are good supplies of fresh pollen coming into the hive and the spring flowers coming out e.g. prunus species, early willow, etc.

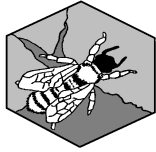
The availability of pollen is very important as the bees need this to manufacture brood food, and fresh pollen is much better than the old preserved pollen in the hive or any man-made substitute.

This winter is very different from most as it’s so mild. The first ‘spring’ flowers came out in the first week of Jan in my garden. I now have hazel, daffodils, hellebores, mimosa (acacia bailyana ‘purpurea’), sarcococca (Christmas box), Japanese quince, lonicera fragrantissima (winter flowering shrubby honeysuckle) and winter heathers all well out. This is a full 4 weeks ahead of normal and 8 weeks ahead of last year! And it’s only the middle of January.

The bees are flying well on dry days and have battled against the strong winds to work these early flowers.

Most of my hives are extra strong as the queens continued to lay right through the autumn (and probably haven’t stopped so far this winter). This probably means that swarming will be early this year. The earliest swarm I have ever had was in the first week of April, with the new queen being mated and starting to lay in the first days of May. This could be equalled or even beaten this year. So now is a good time to check over your empty supers and boxes, giving them a good clean with the hive tool followed by a gentle scorching with a blow torch to sterilise all internal parts, paying particular attention to corners and joints filled with propolis. If you have purchased new boxes/hives now is a good time to assemble them and get frames ready before the season starts. Don’t fit foundation yet, leave this till the last minute as exposure to air out of the sealed packs tends to make it less attractive to the bees, and then they are more reluctant to draw out comb on it.

All this preparation will hopefully mean you won’t get caught out.



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Now is also a good time to make your plans on how to prevent swarming or indeed cope if they do!, attend those winter lectures, read those bee books, clean and filter that wax you've been meaning to do since your harvest last year. Check over your honey for signs of fermentation, warm and melt down that set honey in the storage bucket and jar it up to sell, wash and dry your hat and veil/suit (Tip: use washing soda with your normal detergent as it helps dissolve propolis).

Don't forget to check the out-apiary after storms to make sure hives are still secure on their stands and roofs are still in place. Woodpeckers can sometimes attack hives in winter (it is a learned behaviour). I once had two large holes made by these birds, in the side walls of supers stored on top of the crown board, on a hive at nursing – the worst damage was done, however, by the family of mice that moved in and chewed all the drawn comb turning it into a mouse des-res luxury penthouse flat, with “under paw central heating” supplied by the bees winter cluster, below!

Here are some 'good signs' to look out for in the apiary in winter –

- Bees flying on mild days
- Pollen coming in on mild days (Queen has started to lay)
- Gradual appearance of sawdust like wax fragments in front of the entrance or directly under a varroa mesh floor (stores being slowly consumed by winter cluster)
- Frost and snow (if we should get any!) first starts to thaw in the middle of the hive roof
- Heavy hive – but slowly getting lighter as winter progresses.

So as you can see there is plenty to do in this 'off season', and making the most of any 'spare time' now will make things easier later on when the bees are more active and are requiring more of our time.

Predicting honey flows is a tricky thing but an early long spring has resulted in good honey flows in the past. The heavy winter rains have topped up water tables in the ground from which the trees and deep rooted plants can draw upon later in the summer. So the potential for 2007 is to be much better for us beekeepers here in the south.

This winter so far is very similar to the winter we had in 1989-90 (just before I started keeping bees) April was very cold with frost and snow but the early fruit trees had already flowered and been pollinated in the March, so the hot summer which followed ripened those fruits well. The mid flowering apples all got frosted but the late flowering ones still in bud but showing some colour went in to suspended animation and then opened in May. I do remember a local beekeeper (near to Houghton Lodge in the Test Valley), getting 5 and 7 supers from the two colonies of bees in his garden that year. This is where keeping records comes in handy, so if there are any beekeepers reading this that have records of honey yields for the year 1990, it would be interesting to see if they too had good crops of honey.

Health Issues and beekeeping – a cautionary tale – Andy Willis

Generally speaking, beekeeping is a healthy pass-time, though many of you will have discovered, particularly last summer, it can get rather hot and sweaty at times in a bees suit, and if you are fortunate enough to get a good crop of honey, those supers, when full can also be very heavy. By taking it easy, this exercise and fresh air is considered generally good for us all.

However, sometimes things go wrong, and it is then that we need the help of our GP to get well again. It was on such an occasion last year, when having been diagnosed with high blood pressure that I went to see my doctor for tablets, to help with this condition.

While reading the small print of the leaflet which came with the pills, I discovered that if I should be stung by an insect, while taking this medication, I should 'seek immediate medical attention'.

My curiosity aroused, I enquired through a hospital pharmacy about this, as being a beekeeper, I do get stung, and more frequently than most of 'Joe public' non-beekeepers. I was told that the new super efficient and economic blood pressure tablets, which the government wanted to replace the old beta-blockers with, had an unusual and not well known side effect. This was caused by the way that they work. They basically work by dilating the blood vessels of the body making it easier for the blood to flow around the body and thus reducing the pressure. This dilating action causes stings to have a much greater potency and effect and so increases the chances of going into anaphylactic shock! As all of these new drugs work in the same way, they all potentially can result in the same thing, but not all apparently mention it on their leaflets. The old beta blockers, however, work in a different manner, and don't have this particular undesirable side effect for us beekeepers.

Once I had discussed these facts with my GP, who was also not aware of these problems, nor for some strange reason knew I was a beekeeper and had been for the past 16 years! I was immediately put onto beta blockers and all was well.

The morale of the story is; make sure your GP knows you are a beekeeper (give them a jar of honey on your next visit) and do read all the small print on your medication and do seek further advice about it from a pharmacy.