



# Southampton & District Bee Keepers Association

## January 2009

*Foragings*

## Newsletter

### Contact Details

Editor: Mark Simmons

Telephone: [023] 8032 7686

Email: [newsletter@southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk)

Web: <http://southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk/>

### Contributors this month

Diane Burrows

Tony Mabey

Andy Willis

### Dates for the Diary

~~~~~

#### **Tuesday, January 6th 09.00**

<http://www.thorne.co.uk/>

#### **January Sale starts**

Visit the Thornes website and see what bargains they have for us this year. Normally this is a good time to purchase your foundation if you don't have any wax to exchange.

~~~~~

#### **Saturday, January 10th 14.00**

Waterloo Arms, Waterloo Road, Shirley

#### **Crisis in Pollination**

**Talk/Slide show by Robin Dean**

Listen to Robin talk about the current crisis in pollination, and see what we can do to help out.

~~~~~

#### **Saturday, January 10th**

<http://www.britishbee.org.uk/>

#### **Spring Convention tickets go on sale**

Details for obtaining your ticket for the Spring Convention are available on the BBKA website. Book early to register for limited places on workshops.

~~~~~

#### *For interest*

The BBC are running a short series on insect swarms the first episode is airing on Sunday 4th January 21.00

## PESTS & DISEASE

In line with the CSL guidelines the Varroa count for January

Level and Control Required	Average Mite Drop per Day	Proportion of Infested Drone Pupae
Low No Action	2 or less	
Medium Plan Action		
High Take Action	More than 2	

### Varroa Update

Those of you who have checked your natural Varroa mite drops for December have confirmed the early reports of increased mite drops, indicating high levels of infestation. Those of you who have treated with oxalic acid are also reporting 'startling' numbers of mites killed.

This is good news, as Varroa killed now will not be invading and damaging the first few brood cycles which will start some time this month when the queens resume laying.

The oxalic acid treatment is not an instant kill for the Varroa but acts over several days after application (as the sugar solution containing the acid is distributed

from bee to bee within the winter cluster, eventually giving all the bees a very thin coating all over their bodies)

The important thing to remember when using oxalic acid is to compare the natural daily mite drop before the treatment with the natural daily mite drop two weeks or so after treatment. This will indicate how effective the treatment was. You are aiming to achieve 2 or less natural mite drops per day for January. If having treated with oxalic acid the numbers of mites are still high, then be prepared to lose the colony or do a shook swarm, if they survive, at the end of March, early April.

**DO NOT REPEAT THE TREATMENT.**

If you haven't treated with oxalic acid, there is still time if you need to treat. Those hives of mine treated with Apiguard in September/October are still showing very low levels of Varroa and will not require the oxalic acid treatment. You will need to check your own hives as recommended last month to know for sure.

This really is your last chance of getting Varroa under control and of having strong colonies that will make honey in the coming season as the oxalic acid needs to be used when the colony is broodless.

### HBA Handbook

*The Committee*

At the last HBA Delegate meeting it was reported that there is a requirement for 150 full binders and 600 updates for the HBA handbook in 2009. Is this the best method of disseminating the information contained?

A trial of a computerised version of Beetalk has been used in December, though the intention is to carry on producing only paper copies of the handbooks and updates.

A suggestion has been made to the HBA Secretary that the default publication method of these documents should be via the HBA website as electronic PDF files, giving members the

option to access them electronically and, if required, to print their own copies. A secondary option was also put forward, to offer paper copies on request to those who really feel the need to have one, and don't have access to the internet either directly or through local libraries etc. While accepting that a reduced print run would incur some additional cost per copy, it was felt that savings should still be possible.

S&DBKA would be at pains to point out that we do not intend to detract from the value of the information, or the hard work of the HBA Editor, but merely to simplify the update and

distribution process and reduce expenditure.

The HBA Secretary has asked that we canvass our members on this. We can assume that the S&DBKA members currently without internet/email access would still prefer to receive a paper copy, but if there are any other members who feel the same way please email our [Secretary](#) with your views. Unless feeling is strongly against this, we will make a recommendation on behalf of the Association to move to electronic copies of the handbook and updates.

They may of course, not take up the recommendation!

# Confessions of a blue ribbon winner

Part 2 by Andy Willis

The following year the last exhibit to be thought about was the display class. I had a rough idea what I wanted to put in i.e., a full range of light and dark honeys; some wax and some bee forage (I had spotted some good holly and snow berries, ivy was in flower and so was the early Mahonia). The exhibit must not exceed 60cm x 60cm. Other years we had used a wooden edged hexagonal mirror as the base as this was just the right size and brought light/reflection into the display. Mark and I had been trying to come up with suitable titles and then fit the display around that. (The previous year we had come up with a beekeepers Christmas: Past and present) and had gained first prize, so we felt we had a standard to achieve.

At the back of my mind I had wondered how I could possibly use a wonderful 'bee sculpture' that Wendy's 'bees from the Ark' had made on the upper surface of a crown board I had lent her.

Then with a flash of inspiration I took a tape measure to the crown board and measured it, 'hey presto' it fitted perfectly as a base to the display. It was now nearly midnight, all other exhibits packed and ready for the show (only the scones to be made at dawn!)

The crown board was placed on the table and we started to place/arrange the honey on our 4 sided base. Still no title decided upon. Then like a flash of inspiration (twice in one night!) the four

sides became the four seasons, representing the beekeepers year. The sides were labelled spring, summer, autumn and winter. Over the next hour we were trying things in different positions and running out into the garden in the dark to collect a sprig of ripe blackberries, ivy flowers from the playing field opposite and scrabbling about all over the house for small items with reference to the time of year e.g. a wrist band from Stoneleigh, hatched queen cell from my first successful graft, Apiguard tray, photo of a bee on a flower, beeswax Christmas tree decorations. Before we knew it our display was ready. Mark took a digital photo so we could replicate it at the show later that morning as it was now 2.30am. Yet another late night with last minute prep. Mark Thought our display was too busy with lots of small items but the title "A busy year!", spring, summer, autumn and winter did fit, with the wild comb being the hub of the whole thing. The final arrangement was "thrown together" in about half an hour.

Again, much to our amazement our last minute display show item was awarded the Blue Ribbon. Nobody we spoke to could ever remember the display class ever winning the blue ribbon. Indeed it has caused something of a controversy, as in the rules, published in the Hampshire handbook, the Blue Ribbon is awarded for best in classes 1 - 26 and 36 - 37 only. The display

class being one of the classes not listed. As a result, the Reverend Francis Capener (National Honey Show Senior Judge) was asked for his opinion as to whether this unscheduled award was right, his response was unequivocal, the Blue Ribbon award should go to the best exhibit in the whole show whatever the class - so long as it has some connection with bees!

You would think this would be the end of the matter - but NO! Now there is a call for the HBA council to agree changes to the rules so that the Blue Ribbon can be awarded to any class in the show, ensuring that the honey show judges are fully aware of the published rules and regulations. Who would ever have thought that one last minute exhibit could have caused so much controversy.



The Blue Ribbon winner - 2008

The morale of the story is that if you don't enter you can't win a prize, but even an exhibit prepared at the last minute if based on a good idea can gain a top award (and be quite a talking point calling for the rule book to be rewritten!).

## 2008 Roundup

By Andy Willis

**Honey Crops.** Overall it was a poor to average year, honey crop wise. There were fewer swarms and while the early honeys had good density with a low water content of 17% or less, the main crop honeys all had a higher water content. I have heard reliable reports of 22% water content of some fully capped honey, possibly white clover honey. This will probably lead to fermentation of any stores of

honey by next summer, if beekeepers haven't sold out by then.

**Varroa.** After vigorously implementing integrated pest management, Varroa levels were kept quite low through the season (with only a few exceptions). Apiguard applications, where needed, (as indicated by high daily mite drops) have proved very successful, probably aided by most queens going

off lay and there being little or no sealed brood for the Varroa to hide and reproduce in. Unfortunately by the end of November, Varroa levels were peaking in untreated hives (that had previously been low) and emergency oxalic acid treatment were applied in December. Early reports indicate that this has been very successful in getting the Varroa numbers back down to very low levels.

Continued ....

**Feeding.** This year has required more feeding of the bees than I have ever before seen. As the spring was cold, stimulative feeding was required by most hives. Shook swarms were obviously fed heavily. New colonies from caught swarms required extra feeding to draw out comb as the main honey flow was intermittent and the main source for our area, the blackberry and sweet chestnut failed to yield at all.

The main honey flow stopped early in our area (the week of the New Forest Show) and then for most, there was the need for emergency feeding as once the honey crop was harvested there was nothing coming into the hives during August and September. Au-

turn feeding for winter also started early as the ivy failed to yield until the start of October (late for our area)

**Disease.** The Southampton area escaped this year, but Hampshire is awash with cases of EFB. Vigilance and early detection is key to keeping it under control along with improved apiary and hive hygiene.

**Overall** it was a rewarding year, but did require extra work and effort for the honey we did get. Our immediate area (Southampton) yielded honey when most other areas had nothing at all. Our bees on the whole were healthy though there was an increase in chalk brood. Queen problems still abound with hives

going queen less, new queens not being accepted, not mating or just disappearing once they have started to lay. Queens going off lay due to lack of pollen and poor weather has also been common and has caused concern as not as many winter bees have been produced as we would expect.

The good news is that increased publicity has led to a general awareness of some of the problems we beekeepers are facing. A world honey shortage has meant that we can get a good price for our honey. There is also a whole new flush of keen new people wanting to start beekeeping. Good luck and best wishes for 2009 as we push onwards and upwards.

## *Food Hygiene Course*

HBA have organised another food hygiene course to run on 5th March. Cost is £40 and there are limited number of places available. Closing date for applications is 15th February 2009  
If interested contact [Graham Watson](#), Education Secretary for More Information

## *Signs of Spring*

*By Andy Willis*

Yes, I know we've only just had Christmas and the new years resolutions are still to be acted upon, But signs of a good spring are already there if you know where and what to look for.

2008 whilst not the best year for our bees was a very good growing year for most plants. Trees and plants that like it cool and moist e.g., Willow, Hazel, Maple and Sycamore all grew very well and have 'set' extra flower buds. The earliest of these to flower are the Hazel. The immature grey/brown catkins were visible as soon as the leaves fell in late autumn, if you looked closely. Now they are starting to expand and the earliest have turned into the familiar yellow-green 'lamb's tails' in the hedge rows, making them more conspicuous.

These catkins are festooning the branches more than I can remember for a long time. Bees will collect pollen from these 'wind pollinated' hazels, but they do struggle as the pollen is very small grained and light, making collec-

tion and carriage back to the hive difficult. The important thing is that this is a sign of things to come.

The other group of plants that have 'set' extra flower buds is members of the prunus family that flower early. This is because their early blossom and immature fruit was all damaged and aborted in April '08 by frost and snow. As a result these early cherries and plums didn't exhaust themselves fruiting. The energy saved by not fruiting has been put into extra 'fruit buds, which are still dormant at the moment, but just waiting for warmer weather to bust into flower. Early pears were also affected by last year's poor spring and have also set extra flower buds as a result.

The cold, dry winter weather we experienced in December and into the New Year will also help. This is because most of these plants already mentioned need a period of cold/chilling to break dormancy. (800 - 1200 hours below 7°C (45°F) though this can vary from tree to tree even within the same species).

Trees that require fewer hours chilling to break dormancy are the 'early varieties' to come into flower. These were already breaking dormancy before Christmas this year due to the cold weather in November and December. If the weather continues cold (against all predictions) then all the plants will break dormancy at once giving a huge spring abundance of blossom (but not giving our bees a chance to build up)

If however, the long term forecasters are right, January and February are due to be milder than average. This will result in an early and protracted flowering of these early bee forage plants, stimulating colony development and early expansion. (This is better for a spring honey crop, but can also result in early swarming)

So as you can see the weather we had all moaned about last summer may result in an extra good flowering this spring - here's hoping for a bumper honey crop in 2009.