

Beelines - February 2011

The Monthly Newsletter
of the Melksham and District
Beekeepers Association



**Another year beckons, snowdrop
nod their encouragement. Maybe
this year**

Photos: Chris Jackson. Bees on Sweet Box and Snowdrops.

Beelines is the monthly journal of the Melksham and District Beekeepers Association.

It is free to members, £1 to non-members.

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This newsletter is set in 12pt font, which reduces to about 6pt when printed in booklet form. If you need a larger print, let me know and I will email or post you a full-size copy.

These newsletters are now on the Wiltshire site at <http://bit.ly/asXnXL>

If you're reading this as a PDF, you will find that the weblinks are live.



From the editor

Pickwick
Corsham

23rd February 2011

Dear Colleagues,

I enter my third year of beekeeping in a state of optimism and humility. Optimism because every year is a new opportunity to do the things right that I did wrong last year, and humility because I realise that I know about 5% of what I need to know.

How long before the list of things that I know that I don't know is shorter than the list of things that I do know?

Perhaps a Tom Bartle, John Chamberlain or John Whitford could let me into the secret? Or perhaps the answer "30 years" would puncture my optimism?

My four hives have survived the freezing weather and (unlike last year) they have plenty of stores for the starvation month of March.

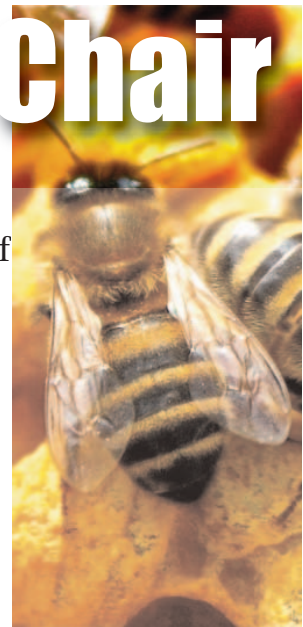
Most surprising is the topbar, which had a relatively small colony. Its open mesh floor extends the width of the colony - so it must have been truly freezing inside. I have made some comparative notes in an article later in the journal.

I hope you enjoy the crossword in the centre spread.

The future of the apiary at Lackham hangs in the balance - please read Ruth's "Chat from the Chair" on this subject.

Steve

Chat from the Chair



Hello beekeepers,

Greetings at the start of the bee season.

This is my first letter as chair of the branch. You may remember that I couldn't actively join the committee until after Christmas, because of prior commitments, so thank you to Andrew who stood in for me in that period.

I trust that not too many of us have lost colonies this winter. Contrary to received wisdom I have fed my bees throughout the winter - and so far they are still in the hive!

Our weather is so changeable that the bees can be out flying in a brief spell of sunshine—and then be unable to fly because of a sudden 2-3 days of pouring rain.

Apiary situation

Most of you will be aware that the branch is going through a rather difficult time. Our main concern is that Lackham College have given us notice to quit our apiary site. At first we were all appalled at this news and busily wondered what we could do to change the College's mind.

The committee has investigated the possibility of NOT moving but I'm afraid according to our contract Lackham College is entitled to ask us to move as long as due notice is given. At the moment we are considering several aspects of this situation. We are actively looking for other sites as well as wanting to discuss the situation with officials at Lackham. It has been difficult to locate anyone at Lackham who has the authority to discuss or act for the college in this matter.

I know moving the apiary is a great disappointment for many members who have worked so hard to develop and establish it. However we are trying to handle this matter as

sensibly as possible and I will keep you all informed of any new developments.

Courses

You will be pleased to know our beginners' course is fully subscribed and starts next month. For more experienced beekeepers a 'Train the Trainers' day course is to be held on 26th. March in Wootton Bassett. It should be a very interesting day.

Royal Bath and West Show

The Royal Bath and West show is in June. If you want to enter any of the classes you should register your class by 23rd March (if you are applying on paper) and by 30th March (if you apply on-line).

We are looking for stewards and demonstrators to take a short time slot at the show—either a morning or afternoon. I went to the show for the first time last year, and I would recommend anyone to go, and help staff our county display.

We look forward to an interesting programme during the coming months, and encourage you to use our library, which is available at each of our general meetings.

The new Year Book is now printed and if you have paid your subscription you should have received your copy.

Have a good and early honey flow, and see you at our next meeting.

Ruth

Living with a topbar hive

The editor and his beekeeping friend, branch member **Emma Sayer**, have been managing a topbar hive since a swarm was dropped in it last June.

Here are our experiences and opinions.

To summarise the summary, if you want honey, use conventional hives, if you love watching bees, try a topbar.



OMF under the topbar.

What's good?

The hive is on legs and so there is no bending over and so no "beekeeper's back".

The roof is hinged. No need to place frames on the ground.

The bees are very quiet on the bars - because lifting the bars is much gentler than prising out a frame in a conventional hive.

The entrances are holes drilled in the sides, so it's easy to put a cork in (or take it out) to restrict (enable) access.

The comb is beautiful.

The hive was simple and cheap to make, but even small errors in carpentry would result in bees leaking around the endstops.

Steve's verdict: not really worth the effort.

I prefer the other end of the scale - a polyhive. It's cheap, light, easy to manage, and all fits together to the millimetre.

What's bad?

Feeding is a pain. We have jammed a pack of apifonda in the floor, but it's far from ideal. You can put a feeder through the endstop, but we haven't managed to work that out.

The topbars must be perfectly straight or bees leak between the bars, and/or propolise them.

The bees didn't read the script and have made comb across several bars, which makes inspection virtually impossible.

We treated with Apiguard, bit dribbling oxalic acid is impossible. I guess one could treat with oxalic acid vapouriser, but it would be risky and not very effective.

We've not yet attempted honey extraction, but the thought of crushing that beautiful comb is troubling.

Emma's verdict: I warm to it because it's so natural. The bees can make comb to suit themselves, not dictated by the foundation.

But the unreliability of inspection is a serious downside.

I love watching them holding hands to make the comb!

Corsham bees

My thanks to new branch member **Peter Douglas** for this.

Honeybee vulnerability in recent years has shown us how dependent we are on pollinating insects for our food. This idea was inspired by Sustainable Bungay's Community Supported Bees Project (<http://bit.ly/h6uH0B>)

The health of honeybees is an important element of a sustainable community. We need to nurture bees and help them recover to a sustainable, naturally resilient population, so the Transcoco Food Group are setting up a community project to add more beehives to the Corsham Area, to be owned and run BY the community FOR the community. The project will be run along similar lines to community supported agriculture (CSA), where the members contribute to the purchase of hives, training and equipment and can be involved as much or as little as they want. Any beehive products can be distributed to members or sold at discounted rates to members.

This is a natural beekeeping project and not a commercial venture - honey, propolis and wax production is seen as a bonus rather than the prime motive for beekeeping.

Another aim of the project is to raise awareness of bees within the community with some simple ways in which to help bees, such as growing plants which encourage bees, and suggesting ways to provide shelter and water for bees in gardens.

Every gardener and allotment holder will benefit from the increased number of pollinators

We intend to install beehives in six locations this year in the Corsham Community Area and are discussing proposals about how will achieve this over the next month or so.

We are approaching the Co-operative Group,

Committee



Den and Jon



Martin and Andrew



Hazel and Joy



Patrick and Mary

Other committee members are: Ruth Woodhouse and Steve Summers.

which runs its own Plan Bee campaign to support bees and beekeeping (<http://bit.ly/hCUbdR>), to kick start the funding for this project. If you feel you have any ideas you wish to contribute about natural beekeeping, fundraising or anything else please get in touch with Phillip Padden or **Pete Douglas** via <http://www.transcoco.org.uk/food.php>, or come along to the next Transcoco Food Group meeting (held every second Tuesday of the month)

Cut out and keep for next Christmas

Sent in by **Chris Jackson**, for whom it obviously has some resonance.

USES OF HONEY TO CURE THE HANGOVER

Friday, 24 December 2010 15:35

Written by Analia Manriquez

One of the pre-requisites of getting the party on during the festive season is to get drunk.

Though, there is a problem with getting a little too drunk.

Apparently, the next morning is not always a good one, a hammering headache, a dried up mouth, those are just a few things that make hungover mornings so miserable.

However, a recently conducted research by scientists at The Royal Society of Chemistry have stated that honey on toast is the best way to get rid of that feeling of a jackhammer drilling through your head.

The scientists involved in the study have explained that the natural sweetener is the best possible way to treat toxins in the body.

Apparently, honey happens to contain fructose, which helps in dissolving alcohol by breaking it into harmless byproducts.

Talking about the reason behind headaches and the giddiness, one of the researchers involved in the study, Dr. John Emsley of The Royal Society of Chemistry said that alcohol results in the happy feeling.

However, it is the byproduct of alcohol, acetaldehyde, which causes the hangover.

It is only after the breakdown of the toxic acetaldehyde that the hangover comes to an end.

The richness of potassium and sodium help in the body's capability to combat the alcoholic toxins.

Apart from the honey, another thing that helps with a hangover is milk, while clear alcoholic drinks like a gin also help reducing the intensity of hangovers.

History

Brian Wilson has researched the history of belief about bees.

Before “modern beekeeping”(up to the mid 1800’s) bee keepers and scientists were still under the “influence” of ancient philosophers, especially Aristotle.

Charles Butler (1560-1647) was the first to question these long held beliefs about bees.

He described the life of a bee in ways we understand today, but even he could get things wrong - he believed that the workers lay the eggs!

In the 18th century that European natural philosophers (today they would be called biologists) undertook the scientific study of bee colonies and began to understand the complex and hidden world of bee biology.

At this time they were able to use a microscope and dissection to understand the internal biology of honeybees.

French scientist Réaumur (1683-1757) was among the first to construct a glass-walled observation hive to better observe activities within hives.

He observed queens laying eggs in open cells, but still had no idea of how a queen was fertilized.

Nobody had ever witnessed the mating of a queen and drone and many theories held that queens were "self-fertile," while others believed that a vapor or "miasma" emanating from the drones fertilized queens without direct physical contact.

The Swiss Francois Huber (1750-1831) was the first to prove by observation and experiment that drones, outside the confines of hives, physically inseminate queens.

Websites

The new MBKA site, developed by **Patrick Anderson** is

<http://www.mk-bee-a.co.uk>.

Comments and suggestions to Patrick at anderso@btinternet.com

I have set up a blog where I put stuff in between Beelines issues.

melksham-beekeepers.blogspot.com/

For an apocalyptic view, see www.disasterinthemaking.com in which Dr HenkTennekes talks about his book on neonicotinoids.

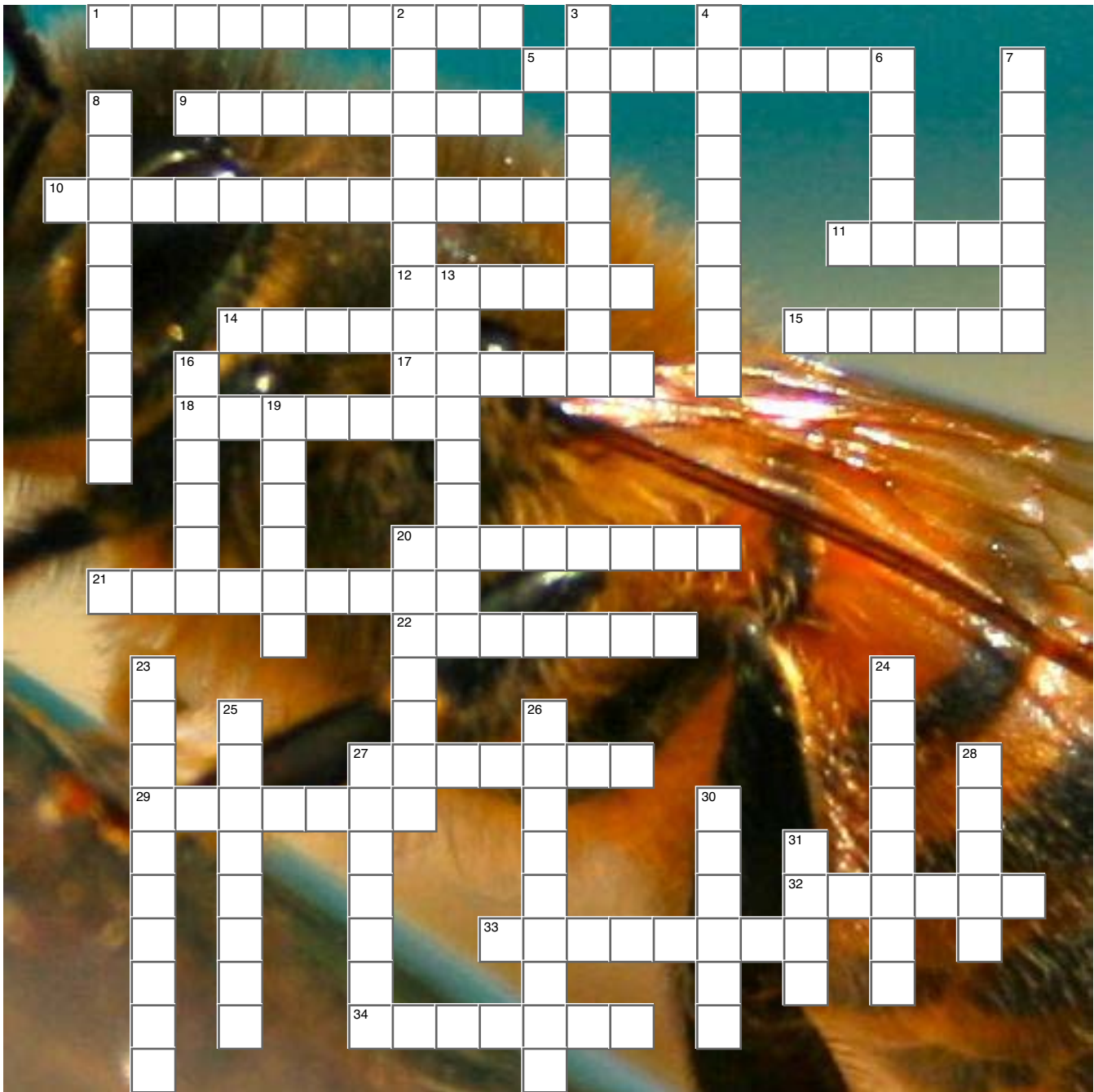
Membership

As at 23rd February, **Mary White** reports the following numbers:

Full members:	83
Associate members:	26
Life members:	1
Junior members:	1
Partner members:	5

Making a total membership of 116

Crossword



Beelines doesn't run to prizes, but you can get a warm feeling from the admiration of your fellows by submitting a correct answer to the editor. I will publish the names of all entrants, and the answers, in the next edition.

All answers are bee-related. Some clues are cryptic, some are straight.

Across

1. Disinfects comb, or put it on your chips (7,4)
5. As Britain will be when Elizabeth passes away (9)
9. Varroa treatment from Bayer (8)
10. For clearly better honey (13)
11. Think dark thoughts about the young (5)
12. Calms bees, but not welcome indoors (6)
14. Sounds mighty tiresome, this pest. (6)
15. Sounds like you would have time to treat varroa with this. (6)
17. Not so dusty this feeder. (6)
18. Recessive or dominant? (7)
20. Aphids' contribution (8)
21. Take it for a spin (9)
22. Pollen substitute (7)
27. Eats comb (3,4)

Down

2. 16 or 32? (10)
3. Perused about direction, make a new queen (9)
4. Very quiet in inca gun mix-up (9)
6. Great! Lovely! Full of honey! (5)
7. Treatment for noseema (7)
8. Direction grovels about artificial swarm method (9)
13. Supplier in deepest Gloucestershire (9)
16. A relative and another, I hear, for this hive. (6)
19. Bees, but not yet (6)
20. An actor and a type of frame. (7)
23. What the Windsors have on their birthdays? (5,5)
24. Hardwork, this larva job (8)
25. Panda of one mixed up. (8)

Apiary report

Den Matthews says “it seems we may have lost three colonies over the recent couple of weeks-to be confirmed at a later date.”

Photo: Den Matthews.

Den and Chris Jackson at a rather dank apiary using a goose feather to brush out dead bees.



Book review

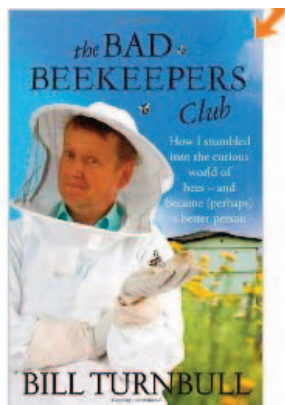
Review by **Karen Cubberley**.

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Sphere (20 May 2010)

ISBN-10: 1847443982

ISBN-13: 978-1847443984



I was keen to read this and managed to persuade the other half to buy it from Amazon (£7.89).

It has been this year's favourite Christmas present.

I laughed all the way through, often out loud, and found it difficult to put down.

Turnbull has produced a funny, thought-provoking and informative book which is a good read for non-beekeepers and hilarious for those of us who can empathise with the problems a novice beekeeper faces.

This charming book introduces the world of the hive and the complexities of the bee colony in an amusing and informative way.

He includes a basic guide to beekeeping; including listing parts of the hive, the different types of bees that make up the colony, the equipment needed, how to remove and extract honey, etc.

He also traces the history of beekeeping through the ages and underlines the impact and the importance of these insects in the production of our food.

One in every three tablespoons of food derives directly from the pollinating process of the honey bee but colonies are collapsing at an accelerating rate with significant, and potentially disastrous, environmental consequences. The beekeeper (bad or otherwise) has an important role to play in ensuring their survival.

As a new beekeeper myself, I found the accounts of Turnbull's mishaps and triumphs in the world of beekeeping hilarious and oddly comforting.

Despite his mistakes (accidentally squashing a queen, for instance) and the innumerable stings, his enthusiasm and love of bees shines through.

"From the moment you lift the lid off the hive and peer inside, you are entering another world, and leaving your own."

Fascinating and extremely funny, this book is both a brilliant introduction to the world of beekeeping and an engaging read for everyone.

Thoroughly recommended.



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Agent for BBWear Beesuits

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Small Ads

Three WBC hives (still) for sale. Two are available now, the third will be ready late Spring 2011. Condition varies from almost new to rather old. Reason for sale: moving to polyhives. Contact the editor (details on Page 2).

All types of beekeeping equipment, all conditions, all prices. Contact **Tom Bartle** on 01225 891670. (Worth a visit to Tom's Aladin's Cave of equipment: Ed.)

Anna and Pat Kelly have lost their bees during the winter and need to be up and running for the coming season.

If anybody has a small nucleus of bees that they do not want, or are splitting up their bees, please let us know.

Many thanks

Anna and Pat Kelly

01249 650633

Wanted: mentor to help me raise queens this year. Corsham. Please apply to the Editor (details on page 2). Thanks in advance.

Small ads are free to members.

From the internet

Trevor Guley passed me a link to the NFU website.

<http://bit.ly/ghHrio>

Scientists may be able to halt global honey bee losses by forcing the deadly Varroa mite, lethal in the freezing weather, to self destruct.

The blood-sucking Varroa is the biggest killer of honey bees world-wide, having developed resistance to beekeepers' medication.

It is particularly destructive in winter as depleted colonies do not have enough bees huddling together to keep warm.

Now researchers from the Government's National Bee Unit and Aberdeen University have worked out how to 'silence' natural functions in the mites' genes to make them self destruct.

Dr Alan Bowman from the University of Aberdeen said:

"Introducing harmless genetic material encourages the mites' own immune response to prevent their genes from expressing natural functions.

"This could make

them self destruct. The beauty of this approach is that it is really specific and targets the mites without harming the bees or, indeed, any other animal."

Environment Minister Lord Henley said:

"Bees are essential to putting food on our table and worth £200m to Britain every year through pollinating our crops. This excellent work by UK scientists will keep our hives healthy and bees buzzing."

The process uses the Nobel Prize-winning theory 'RNA interference', which controls the flow of genetic information.

So far the 'silencing' has worked with a neutral Varroa gene, which has no significant effect on the mite. Scientists now need to target a gene with the specific characteristics that are perfect to force the Varroa to self destruct.

Tests by other scientists have shown the treatment

can be added to hives in bee feed. The bees move it into food for their young, where the Varroa hides.

Recipes

Hazel Simons

sent me these two recipes from a book lent to her by **Maryann Corson**.

Mead is made by fermenting a mixture of honey and water, while metheglin is a mead flavoured with spices or herbs.

Mead

Although mead is made from two simple components, great care is needed during its preparation to produce a first-class wine.

Mildly flavoured honey such as clover or lime are ideal, although heather honey may be used for full-flavoured, sweet meads.

Clean rain water or soft tap water are preferable to hard water.

The honey water mixture can be prepared by one of two methods:

(a) boil the water in an aluminium or enamelled pan and allow to cool to 120 degrees farenheit (i.e. just too warm to hold the hand in comfortably).

Add the honey, previously warmed to the same temperature, and stir until dissolved.

Cool and add the mead yeast culture;

or

(b) heat the mixture of honey and water in an aluminium or enamelled pan until it dissolves and just bring to the boil.

Cool it and filter through clean flannel or a jelly bag until it is clear.

When cool add the culture of mead yeast.

It is not necessary or desirable to boil the honey water for 4 lengthy periods.

Metheglin

16lb honey, 3 gallons water, 1 blade of mace, half an ounce of cinnamon, 4 cloves, quarter ounce of root ginger and mead yeast.

Gently simmer the water and spices together for one hour, then strain while still warm on to the honey.

Stir the mixture vigorously and when cool add the yeast.

Pour into a clean jar, keeping any surplus in a small bottle for topping up later on.

Stand the container in a warm room and soon froth will begin to form as fermentation starts.

Add more honey-water from the bottle to keep the container full and when froth ceases to form, clean the outside of the jar and insert an air lock.

When fermentation finally ceases, remove the jar to a cold room and keep it there for two to three week.

Syphon off the mead with a clean rubber tube without disturbing the yeast deposit.

Pour the mead into a clean jar or cask until it is full.

Insert a cork and carefully wax over the top with beeswax.

Store for six months and again syphon off the liquid, bottle, cork, wire and store the bottles on their sides for at least six months.

Readers letters

New branch member **Christopher Brooks** writes about why he wants to keep bees.

Why do I want to become a beekeeper!

That is a question often asked of me when I tell people that I have joined the Melksham & District Beekeepers Association.

I guess for some the thought of keeping bees is frightening and for others it is a natural thing, but for me, well I am not sure yet.

I moved to Wiltshire in 1969 when my dad was in the RAF (Rudloe) and apart from a few excursions over the years I have more or less lived here all my life.

I am an engineer by trade and enjoy many past times including landscape photography, archaeology, antiquarianism (ask me if you don't know), old British Motorcycles, Rugby (watching) and occasional scuba diving.

Obviously growing up, living and working in such a rural county has made me come to appreciate it a great deal (especially when I have to visit London on occasions) but it has also made me recognise the decimation to much of our wildlife over the forty or so years I have been here.

As well as other animals, birds and insects, bees have taken a big hit on this front too with reports

from around the world showing the devastation of many bee colonies for various reasons.

To me (as it should be to everyone) the conservation of bees is just as, if not more, important as any of these.

Therefore, as somebody who is a keen wildlife conservationist, this has led me to the decision to look into keeping a hive or two of my own.

So far I do not own any equipment and I have never experienced a hive of bees close up, but I have recently signed up for the basic beekeeping course which starts in March and to which I am very much looking forward to.

Once I have completed the course I will know if I am happy handling bees without running around waving my hands in the air, screaming like a demented banshee.

But whatever happens I shall retain my knowledge and interest in bees and help where I can but most of all I shall have an appreciation of the knowledge and dedication all beekeepers have in ensuring the ongoing procreation of bees all around the world.

Egyptian beeks

Thanks again to **Brian Wilson** for his research.

Were the hives moved around?

When there were few blossoming flowers, the hives were probably kept close to home to prevent theft and moved close to the sources of nectar during the flowering season.

Sometimes the hives were transported to higher lying land, to prevent them from being destroyed in the annual Nile flood.

During the 18th Century BC (some 3,700 years ago) records show that nomadic apiarists, living by the Nile, loaded their hives onto boats, shipped them upriver in autumn or early spring, and then followed the flowering of the plants northwards.

Note the shaved head of the beekeeper

Beekeepers' protective measures – get a shave!

Ancient Egyptian bees were more aggressive than the placid Italian bee, which has become the dominant variety in modern times.

Aristophanes of Byzantium, the head of the library at Alexandria around 200 BC (2,200 years ago) claimed, that the beekeepers approached the hives with shaven heads, as the bees reacted very violently to the smell of perfumed oil applied to the hair.

Nothing really changes – as we know not to work with bees if you wear strong perfume!

Apiarists are never shown using protective gear and relied on smoke blown into the hives to keep the bees peaceful.



Tomb of Pabasa (600 BC – circa 3,700 years ago) Photo courtesy Kenneth Stein.



The standing beekeeper produces smoke, while the one kneeling removes the combs from the back of the clay hive after breaking the mud sealing. (Photograph from Abd el Wahab, The apiculture in Egypt, 2008)

Meetings are held at Broughton Gifford village hall on the last Monday of the month except when this is a Bank Holiday when meetings will be one week earlier. Meetings start at 7.30pm, apiary visits start at 6.30pm

Diary

March	23 Royal Bath and West		Last day for entries (by post)
	26 Wootten Bassett	All day	Train the trainers
	29 Branch meeting (Note: Tuesday!)	19:30	Ron Hoskins: developing bees that are varroa-resistant. Always interesting - Ron does NOT treat his bees for varroa.
April	30 Royal Bath and West		Last day for entries (online)
	25 Branch meeting	19:30	Chris Rawlings. Making soap and wax polish and other things to do with your wax.
	30 Chichester		Sussex BKA Auction (see blog for details.)
May	30 Branch meeting	19:30	Silent Auction

SPRAY LIAISON

You will be pleased to know that the county is setting up a system so that information about farm spraying of insecticides may be quickly passed from farmers to our beekeepers.

Terry Cooke has been appointed as county spray liaison contact, and each branch has at least one person to receive the information from Terry and pass it on to us.

Our branch liaison contact is **Derek Morrison** (01225 869277 D_Morrison5@hotmail.co.uk)

When you get warning of imminent spraying you would be advised to keep your bees in hive for a full 24hours.

It is best if you can block the hive entrance the evening before the spray date and then unblock the hive entrance the following morning.

Sufficient warning must be given. By law it is 24hrs, but it would be much better for beekeepers to have at least 48hours warning time, so that outlying hives can be reached.