

Melksham Beekeepers Newsletter



October 2009

Chat from the Chair

Jerry Wickham

The Wiltshire County Honey Show and Annual General Meeting of the WBKA took place last Saturday. Thank you to everyone who attended and entered the show. There were a number of notable successes with prizes being awarded to Melksham members, with Chris Jackson once again winning the Methuen Cup for the most individual points. Sadly though, West Wiltshire Branch pipped us into second place this year for the branch with the most points. My congratulations go to West Wilts on an excellent performance.

We obviously had our honey show last month and the various cups and trophies will be awarded at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting, of our own branch, which takes place, at Broughton Gifford village hall, on Monday 26th October.

At this meeting Mary White our treasurer will, I know, be very pleased to receive your subscriptions for this coming year! Equally, at this meeting your outgoing committee will be tabling some club rules, which we would like to see ratified, by the wider membership, in order that they can complement the constitution of the branch. This meeting will also be an opportunity to provide a number of reports to you all on what the club has achieved and perhaps the likely direction in the future.

You may recall in the September edition of this newsletter, that a nomination form was included together with a resume of the roles and responsibilities of the officers and general committee members. What has been great is that we have received very many nominations for all of the officers and the eight committee members by the cut off date, in several instances from some 'new blood' within the branch. It therefore follows that a number of your existing committee have decided not to stand again and therefore have not been nominated. Whilst I will be thanking all of them on your behalf, I also want to put on record my thanks for the work completed by the committee over the last year against a backdrop of some challenging and difficult circumstances. I think the AGM will be interesting in that we have several nominations, in some cases for the same roles and there will be a real need to show democracy in action since we will need to put crosses in boxes! Whatever the outcome I am grateful for everyone who has been prepared to help.

I look forward to meeting you at the AGM and obviously throughout the rest of the year as our winter programme of events begins.

Monthly Meeting Programme

26th October Branch Annual General Meeting

30th November "A History of Wiltshire beekeeping" David Charles

December No meeting

Meetings are held at Broughton Gifford Village Hall on the last Monday of the month at 19:30.

The Vanishing of the Bees

Reviewed by Deborah Schneebeli Morrell

This film was directed by: Maryam Heinem and George Langworthy

The art and practice of beekeeping is one that has universal appeal. Luckily it is not just beekeepers that are worried about the plight of the honeybee or the fearsome predictions of losses and the subsequent effect on pollination and global food production [not just for man but for many other species]. Concern is widespread because the subject is so important. Bees are like the proverbial 'canary in the mine' - any threat to the well being of the honeybee is an early warning signal that the health of the planet is at stake.

This carefully structured film tells the story of how bees around the world are inexplicably deserting their hives often leaving behind stores, brood and most curiously, an abandoned queen.

The film slowly builds up the story of the problems that beekeepers and honeybees are facing. Quirky animated sections are used to explain how bees behave and why. There is some fascinating archive footage of agricultural practices in the past. The indiscriminate spraying of urban populations with DDT is quite horrifying to see but it is used to make the point that new pesticides have often been hailed as beneficial to man and crops before some time later being banned because of unacceptable risks to human health.

But most affecting are the interviews with beekeepers and bee researchers, mainly in America, but also in France and Germany - some are wonderfully eccentric.

The footage of 40,000 hives in America that have succumbed to colony collapse disorder (CCD) is tremendously shocking and the reports from the industrial scale bee farmers in the States are intensely tragic.

These men who transport their bees across state boundaries in order to earn a living from pollinating single crops [an unheard of practice here] are thoughtful men who are facing ruination. I was surprised to feel sympathy for them but this balanced film allowed us to see how much they cared for the bees. Their experiences have led them to consider what is to blame, to communicate the problems that they are facing, to lobby government and other agencies for research and to reach out to other affected beekeepers across the world.

One of the directors, Maryam Heinen has a background in investigative journalism so it was not surprising that she pursued her story with a forensic intensity, the interviews with Marla Spivak an entomologist from Minnesota University [who believes it is better to breed the bee to resist varroa rather than use miticides] and Maryann Frazier from Penn State University were particularly shocking. They had found an astonishing number of chemicals in bees, brood, honey, wax and propolis. They both said that because the problem of CCD was complex and there were so many elements to investigate and all these factors could be interacting, it was going to be very difficult to isolate an exact cause.

The effects of varroa were explained and the associated viruses that attack an already weakened bee, but all researchers think that this is not enough to explain CCD.

The film is rather long but it would be difficult to edit any part of it. Each subject was equally fascinating; the audience loved the interview with the wise and gentle biodynamic beekeeper that made such a cogent case against modern farming methods.

It is only in the final section that the hard-hitting case against pesticides is revealed.

Its big message was that bees have been around for 5 million years, the problems that they are facing in the last few years are most probably caused by man, CCD itself is only a symptom of some fundamental problem with agriculture and intensive farming. This relatively recent method where huge tracts of land are devoted to single crops has a negative effect on biodiversity. These crops are sprayed with a cocktail of agro-chemicals and one group, the more recently introduced neonicotinoid pesticides are attracting a great deal of concern, not just from beekeepers but from scientists and environmentalists. It is thought

that this group of chemicals disrupt the nervous system of the bee along with the ability to navigate. Some researchers are concerned that it also affects reproduction. Unfortunately Bayer, the manufacturer of these new pesticides did not respond to the invitation to be interviewed for the film.

Most beekeepers are aware of the current debate and controversy concerning this group of chemicals. Some European countries, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia have banned them whilst we discover that America and Britain will not. [The Co-op, however, which has sponsored this film, has banned the use of these chemicals on their farms and will not sell any fresh produce where neonicotinoids have been used.]

Many beekeepers have an innate sense that something is not right with their bees. Having to wait for scientists to gather all the complicated threads of research together to find a definitive answer to the question of CCD is painful and worrying.

This film has the potential to add urgency to this research and to disseminate information clearly to a wide audience in order that many more people can lobby our respective governments to treat this awful problem with the seriousness that it deserves.

It is difficult to do justice to this compelling film, it aims to tackle a far-reaching global issue, and it covers agriculture, politics, ecology, science and economics. I strongly recommend that you go and see it. It is a hugely important film on a subject that we cannot ignore.

For further information:

<http://www.co-operative.coop/ethicsinaction/takeaction/planbee/>

<http://vanishingbees.co.uk/>

MBKA Honey Show Report

Den Matthews

Having been the Steward to the Judge in 2008 and also at this year's show, I thought it might be useful to pen my observations of the judging. I understand that the Judge's critique for this year was somewhat curtailed due to time constraints, so members might appreciate some feedback from an 'observer'.

Honey Classes 1-3 & 5 Run Honey.

In both 2008 and 2009 the main reasons for discounting exhibits were: foreign matter, granulation, underfilled jars, scum and bubbles within the honey. A few exhibits did not meet the viscosity criteria (possibly due to 'last minute' warming prior to the show according to the 2009 judge). Other factors were condensation/foreign matter on the inside of lids.

The grading of honey into light, medium and dark produced some interest and this year's judge decided to use her own grading glasses to discern any doubt. It was then realised that the judge's grading glasses were a marked tonal difference to those used by the branch. After some discussion it was agreed to use MBKA's grading glasses for consistency.

An ill-fitting lid on a jar of light run was overlooked possibly in favour of its contents.

Class 4 Soft Set Honey.

Honey contained foreign matter. Some exhibits were too mobile in consistency.

Class 6 Chunk Honey.

Some jars contained granulation, honeycombs did not meet the required length ie top to bottom of jar. It was noted that all chunk honey was in the correct orientation – cells inclined towards the top of the jar.

Class 7 Section Comb Honey.

No entries in 2009.

Class 8 Cut Comb.

No comment.

Class 9 Frame for Extraction.

No comment.

Classes 10 & 11 Mead Sweet & Dry.

Decisions by any judge are subjective when determining awards in which taste is involved. In one of the classes I was invited to taste the exhibits that had been placed first, second, third and commended. My taste buds agreed with first place but I thought the 'commended' merited a second placing. However it's the judge's decision.

Classes 12 & 13 Beeswax polish, Cream.

Exhibits were tested by applying a sample on to a piece of wood in order to assess the degree of effort required in the application.

Class 14 Beeswax Plain Mould.

Exhibits were examined for aroma, density and imperfections. Some unfortunately discounted due to incorrect weight.

Classes 15 & 16 Wax Candles.

Dipped, cast, decorative – subjective decision by judge.

Class 17 Six Bee Products.

Subjective decision taking into account presentation of containers and labelling.

Class 18 Six Honey Biscuits.

Nil comment.

Class 19 Six Honey Sweets (own recipe)

The judge remarked that it would be useful to display the contents of the honey sweets.

Class 20 Honey Fruit cake.

Exhibits measured for correct diameter and examined for even distribution of fruit prior to tasting.

Classes 21 – 23 Photography.

Exhibits that were discounted were found to be non-compliant with the required size(s) and / or framed I hope that the above observations are informative taking cognisance of the advice offered by Chris Jackson to potential show exhibitors.

My final observation is to remark on the efficient way that the Show Secretary and her Assistant (both in 2008 & 2009) organised the entries, recorded the decisions of the judge, placed the awards and helped with the re-packaging and tidying up of the entries post judging.

MBKA 2009 Honey Show results

Held on Monday 28th September 2009 at Broughton Gifford Village Hall.
 Judge Mrs Suzie Perkins, Steward Mr Den Matthews, Secretary Mrs Debbie Tilley

CLASS	No of entries	FIRST (3 points)	SECOND (2 points)	THIRD (1 point)	HIGHLY COMMENDED
1. LIGHT RUN HONEY	11	MARY WHITE	PETER MORGAN	DEN MATTHEWS	CHRIS JACKSON
2. MEDIUM RUN HONEY	15	CHRIS RAWLINGS	PETER MORGAN	DEBORAH SCHNEEBELI	LAMBERT COURTH
3. DARK RUN HONEY	4	CHRIS JACKSON	CHRIS RAWLINGS	ROGER TILLEY	
4. SOFT SET HONEY	10	CHRIS JACKSON	MARK FIFE	BOB NEEDS	
5. NOVICE HONEY	2	NOT AWARDED	DEN MATTHEWS	JAMES FARRELL	
6. CHUNK HONEY	5	DEBORAH SCHNEEBELI	MIKE HALE	NOT AWARDED	
7. 1 LB SECTION	NIL				
8. CUT COMB 7 - 9 OZ	3	CHRIS JACKSON	NOT AWARDED	NOT AWARDED	
9. FRAME FOR EXTRACTION	1	NOT AWARDED	NOT AWARDED	NOT AWARDED	
10. BOTTLE OF DRY MEAD	4	CHRIS JACKSON	JON NEWSAM	PHILIP BROWN	BOB NEEDS
11. BOTTLE OF SWEET MEAD	4	CHRIS JACKSON	JON NEWSAM	BOB NEEDS	
12. BEESWAX POLISH	4	CHRIS JACKSON	MIKE HALE	BOB NEEDS	CHRIS RAWLINGS
13. FURNITURE CREAM	2	BOB NEEDS	CHRIS JACKSON		
14. BEESWAX BLOCK 7 - 9 OZ	5	CHRIS JACKSON	DEBORAH SCHNEEBELI	MIKE HALE	
15. PAIR OF CANDLES	4	CHRIS JACKSON	CHRIS RAWLINGS	BOB NEEDS	
16. CANDLE IN SURROUND	3	CHRIS JACKSON	CHRIS RAWLINGS	MAVIS WHITFORD	
17. 6 BEE PRODUCTS	2	CHRIS JACKSON	CHRIS RAWLINGS		
18. SIX HONEY BISCUITS	10	MIKE HALE	ROGER TILLEY	BOB NEEDS	CHRIS RAWLINGS
19. SIX HONEY SWEETS	10	ROGER TILLEY	CHRIS JACKSON	PHILIP BROWN	PETE COLEGATE
20. HONEY FRUIT CAKE	15	MIKE HALE	CHRIS RAWLINGS	PHILIP BROWN	CHRIS JACKSON
21. PHOTO BEES	8	DEBORAH SCHNEEBELI	ANNE ROWBERRY	KAY WAKEFIELD	SHONA WILLIAMS
22. PHOTO BEEKEEPERS	9	ANNE ROWBERRY	CHRIS RAWLINGS	PHILIP BROWN	CHRIS JACKSON
23. PHOTO HIVES	9	CHRIS JACKSON	ANNE ROWBERRY	PHILIP BROWN	SHONA WILLIAMS
TOTAL NUMBER OF ENTRIES	140				

Summary of points awarded

CHRIS JACKSON	37	BOB NEEDS	8	JON NEWSAM	4	MARK FIFE	2
CHRIS RAWLINGS	15	ANNE ROWBERRY	7	PETER MORGAN	4	KAY WAKEFIELD	1
MIKE HALE	11	ROGER TILLEY	6	MARY WHITE	3	JAMES FARRELL	1
DEBORAH SCHNEEBELI	9	PHILIP BROWN	5	DEN MATTHEWS	3	MAVIS WHITFORD	1

BBKA BLUE RIBBON AWARDED TO CHRIS JACKSON FOR CLASS 17. SIX BEE PRODUCTS

BBKA CERTIFICATE OF MERIT AWARDED TO DEN MATTHEWS FOR CLASS 5. NOVICE HONEY

TOTAL NUMBER OF EXHIBITORS = 25

MBKA Branch Rules

to be ratified at the AGM on 27th October 2009

Apiary

- Hives to be kept in reasonable structural condition.
- Good practise of beekeeping and disease control to be applied in the use of the Branch apiary.
- The loan of apiary equipment is by agreement with the Branch Committee and must be returned in good condition
- Equipment used in the upkeep/maintenance of the apiary is to be operated by members who are competent in such use.
- Temporary accommodation of member(s) bee stocks in cases of dire emergencies may be permissible by arrangement with the Branch Committee.
- Paying particular attention to the requirements of the Defra plan 'Healthy Bees – Protecting and improving the health of honeybees in England and Wales'.

Committee

- Length of service of MBKA officers and Committee members shall be for a maximum of three years unless the posts cannot be filled during Annual General Meetings.
- A copy of the minutes of Branch Committee meetings to be available at MBKA meetings and published on the WBKA website.
- Where possible the Committee shall provide support to external groups having an interest in beekeeping and to be effected in accordance with Defra plan – 'Healthy Bees'.
- Membership fees shall be decided by the Committee taking into consideration aspects which support the promoting of healthy beekeeping.
- The Committee shall approve of out-of-pocket expenses incurred by any Committee official or Committee member in the pursuance of MBKA activities.
- The Committee shall have responsibility for the compulsory termination of MBKA membership of any member or associate member who commits a serious breach of MBKA rules. The Committee shall give notice in writing of such action to the member/associate member concerned, giving reasons for membership termination and provide an opportunity for the member concerned to present their case should he/she desire.

Members

- Branch membership fee to be paid within one month of the start of the club's financial year. Non-payment of fee will result in cessation of membership.
- Must be aware of their responsibilities as individual beekeepers in respect of registration on BeeBase and other requirements of Defra plan – 'Healthy Bees'.
- Must be aware of the MBKA's policy as a Branch to treat all people equally irrespective of race, ethnic origin, sex, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, creed, disability, age or political belief.
- Contravention of any MBKA rules, bringing the club into disrepute, acting in a disrespectful manner to fellow members will result in membership withdrawal as deemed by the Committee and ratified by a general meeting.