

# North Bucks Bee Keepers' Association

## Newsletter February 2014

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### Calendar at-a-glance

8 <sup>th</sup> March	Bucks spring convention, Wendover (note date change)
4 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> April	BBKA Spring Convention, Harper Adams College
11 <sup>th</sup> October	Bucks county autumn gathering, Aylesbury

### *Beekeeping on Pitcairn Island – by Cynthia Smith*



I am a member of NBBKA but last October my husband, Pete, and I left the UK to start, what would be for him, a 12 month posting to Pitcairn Island. I will be accompanying him for the UK winter months but will return to the UK for our beekeeping season.

Pitcairn Island is in the middle of the South Pacific Ocean half way between New Zealand and Chile. This British Overseas Territory is only 2 square miles in area with a population of 42 adults and 8 children.

There is no airport or landing strip and getting to the island is usually by air to Papeete, French Polynesia then an internal flight to Mangareva on the Gambier archipelago where you pick up the cargo ship.

This ship started its journey from Auckland, New Zealand and collects passengers bound for Pitcairn from Mangareva. The journey from Mangareva to Pitcairn takes 2 days

depending on the size and depth of the waves. Of course you can always go by cruise liner or charter a yacht!

Due to its isolation Pitcairn's bee population is disease free. The only thing that bee keepers here have to worry about is wax moth and the damage caused by paper wasps. However, the bees that are on the island now were imported from New Zealand. Back in the 1970s the bee population on Pitcairn was decimated due to nuclear fallout from the testing in the Pacific and the use of pesticides on the island.

In 1978 the Pitcairn bee keepers contacted Murray Reid, who was head of the New Zealand beekeepers' Association, for help in re-stocking their bee population. At that time New Zealand's bees were disease free. In September 1978, 2 colonies of bees from the Waikato area in North Island, New Zealand were sent by cargo ship to Pitcairn. The bees were in a single brood chamber with a feeder inside and they were kept cool by spraying the container with water. The journey took one week but thankfully both colonies survived.

Now there are approximately 200 hives on the island looked after by 7 bee keepers, pesticides are no longer used and due to the island's isolation the honey is considered one of the purest in the world.

The honey season is from August to April and the bee keepers all belong to a co-operative. The best honey flow is from August to November when the bees feast on mango, avocado, macadamia and roseapple. The honey is extracted manually and bottling and labelling is a community affair. The island is currently waiting for certification from EU but mostly they sell the honey to passing cruise ships and under licence to New Zealand. The wax is either re-cycled into foundation or sold to passing yachtsmen for waxing ropes and rigging.



### ***Book review - Piers Moore Ede***

HONEY AND DUST: TRAVELS IN SEARCH OF SWEETNESS is Piers Moore Ede's salvation. After being injured in a hit-and-run, the author travels to an organic farm in Italy to recuperate and here he meets a beekeeper. Moore Ede's quest for the world's most wonderful honeys takes him to places including Lebanon, Nepal and Sri Lanka in this beautiful, bittersweet book.

*Thanks to Libby Culshaw for the review*

### ***Event Report – Margaret Holland seminar***

Members of NBBKA were treated to a fun and educational talk from ex seasonal bee inspector Margaret Holland at the end of January. The focus was on disease and pests, with a novel way of breaking the ice, encouraging discussion and introducing the topics of discussion: two tables of objects were laid out for inspection by the guests, half labelled with numbers and half with letters. The challenge was to pair up the items, which was not as easy as it sounds when multiple pairings could be valid. For example, a tray of varroa mites could have been put with a sticky inspection board, a photo of infested drone pupae, a jar of methylated spirits, a drone uncapping fork, etc. The correct pairings were revealed and discussion of the concept they represented ensued. The correct partner for the varroa mites was the meths, and Margaret showed a technique for separating mites from debris for the purpose of counting them.

Thanks to Margaret for an interesting evening.

### ***Forthcoming events***

**Bucks spring seminar.** Wendover Memorial Hall, 8<sup>th</sup> March. Note: This is a date-change from 1<sup>st</sup> March because of the Bee Trade holding a spring sale at Stoneleigh on 1<sup>st</sup> March. As usual, a marvellous programme is being planned – the seminar provides a national class of speakers expert on their subjects on your doorstep, and if you are really interested in your bees it is unmissable if you possibly can.

**BBKA Spring Convention,** Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April – Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> April at Harper Adams College near Wellington, Shropshire. NB: It is understood that although the Bee Trade will be at Stoneleigh on 1<sup>st</sup> March, there will be limited trade representation at Harper Adams, too.

**Bucks Authum Gathering.** Venue will be the Church of the Good Shepherd, Aylesbury, on 11<sup>th</sup> October. Hosted by Mid-Bucks. This will be another first-class day out and is again unmissable!

## Regular Columns

### *February Apiary Notes from Andrew Beer*

The winter so far has been very mild. This probably means that queens have continued laying. This in turn means that stores will be running down swiftly, although a colony fed well in September ought to have enough food until at least March. Sufficient food does not, however, mean the food is where the cluster is, and the ever-present risk is that really cold conditions may set in and the colony may find itself surrounded by a dearth of food and die. This is why I feed fondant from December 1st; others leave a super of honey above the brood chamber with no queen excluder: a situation which will have to be reversed in spring, unless the super is left so as to put a colony on to 1½ (one brood chamber and one super).

Partly because I use the larger Commercial brood chamber and partly because 1½ extends inspection times, queen searches and so on, I never use more than one chamber – for brood and the queen. And a reminder: if you use an empty eke above brood box with cover board above that, you can easily have a sneak look to see that the cluster is close to food whenever you want, preferably in a cold spell when bees will hardly notice your visit. It will do no harm. R.O.B. Manley advocates the practice.

Solid floors (if you use them) will need replacing by cleaned sterilised ones during February. Do it on a “close to freezing day”. Moves: Move whole hive sideways including floor. Put clean floor in its place. Break propolis seal between dirty floor and brood box. Lift brood box and upper parts of hive and place on new floor. If you use mesh floors, lift brood chamber sideways, brush floor clear of debris and replace: easier with two pairs of hands. Jobs done!

When you do your 'sneak' inspections the cluster should be, well, clustered! Leave undisturbed further. It is a sign all is well. If colony is rushing all over the combs, the problem could be dysentery or nosema, and make a note to do a more detailed inspection when bees are out flying and take things from there. If the colony is dead, try to identify the cause and take advice. Subject to that, cut out comb and burn debris and dead bees and sterilise all for re-use.

Following my recent note about the Bucks County Spring Seminar in Wendover Memorial Hall on Saturday 8th March, do try to get there. Always an excellent day out and a chance to meet fellow beekeepers around the county – and beyond. Bookings need to be made by 28th February. Hope to see you there.

Regards,  
Andrew Beer