

# BeeMail

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Send your news to: [beemail@bee-craft.com](mailto:beemail@bee-craft.com)

Editor: Chris Richmond

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## Cast ne'er a clout till May be out

WHAT a difference a weather front makes! When I started collating news for this edition of *BeeMail* Britain was still in the grip of wintry weather – naturally, it was May Bank Holiday. As you read this we have been enjoying near record temperatures and the hawthorn blossom (the 'May' of the old adage) is well and truly out.

The warmer weather has also brought out the beekeepers. On a

recent visit to Thorne's in Windsor I was told that limited stock was due to a flood of customers that morning. Yet only a week earlier, with the May still in bud, I had rescued a battered and very sorry-looking swarm, suffering from plummeting temperatures and beaten by rain and hail.

'What were you thinking?', I demanded as I tipped the bedraggled bees into a brood box (where they have made a stirring recovery), 'Didn't you know it's a Bank Holiday?!'

Chris Richmond

# Bee losses lower despite harsh winter

**BRITISH beekeepers are breathing a collective sigh of relief as a new study showed a slight improvement in winter survival rates, despite heavy snows in.**

Figures released by the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) show losses at an average of 17 per cent – around one in six colonies – down from 19 per cent last year and 30 per cent during the winter of 2007-8, which followed an exceptionally wet summer.

But there was a marked regional variation, with beekeepers in the north of England and Scotland reporting losses of more than a quarter of colonies while those in the balmy south-west suffered only 12.8 per cent losses.

BBKA President Martin Smith said the figures offered some encouragement but stressed they were still worse than the 'acceptable' level of 7-10 per cent.

However, Mr Smith said while losses were still painful for individual beekeepers overall

## Colony losses offset by new beekeepers

the number of colonies had doubled over the past three years, due largely to publicity over the threat to bees attracting new blood – membership of the BBKA has grown by 20 per cent over the past year to 17,500.

'The public has responded magnificently to the plight of the honeybee', Mr Smith said. 'It's not just beekeepers who can help bees to recover. Everyone can play their part by continuing to plant bee-friendly plants, fruits and vegetables to provide desperately needed forage, or by joining the BBKA's **Adopt a Beehive** scheme.'

The news was less encouraging in the **United States**, however, where winter losses were reported to have risen again this year.

Federal agencies met in San Francisco recently, with regulators from California and Canada to discuss the problem.

While Mr Smith put losses in Britain down to bad weather, poor nutrition and habitat loss, the San Francisco conference has again pointed to pesticides as a contributing factor.

A recent study in the scientific journal *PLoS* (Public Library of Science) *One* found 121 types of pesticides within 887 wax, pollen, bee and hive samples, and about three out of five pollen and wax samples from 23 states contained at least one systemic pesticide.

● The BBKA has denied stories in the **national press** that it is weaning itself off sponsorship deals with agri-chemical companies including Bayer CropScience and Syngenta.

In a statement, BBKA President Martin Smith said: 'The BBKA policy [approved at the

charity's ADM in January] of endorsing the safe use of certain products (synthetic pyrethroids) remains unchanged.

'The BBKA engages actively with the companies with a view to maximising good stewardship of pesticides. It does not endorse any neonicotinoid pesticides... and has lobbied the Chemicals Regulatory Directorate for an urgent review of the regulatory criteria for pesticides to ensure that possible sub-lethal effects are detected and reported when applying for approvals or at review of approvals.'

'The BBKA has no plans to endorse additional products.'

## Nosema/virus blend 'may cause CCD'

A 'perfect storm' of a group of pathogens including the microsporidian *Nosema ceranae* and a family of viruses may be working together to cause colony collapse disorder (CCD), according to research in America.

Scientists from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) were due to **report** their results to the American Society for Microbiology in San Diego on May 25.

'There might be a synergism between two very different pathogens', says Jay Evans of the USDA Agricultural Research Service. 'When they show up together there is a significant correlation with colony decline.'

Evans' team examined bees from both healthy and declining colonies.

They found a slightly higher incidence of the pathogen *N. ceranae* in sick colonies, but it was not statistically significant until they began pairing it with other pathogens.

'The presence of that fungus and two or three RNA viruses from the *Dicistroviridae* family is a pretty strong predictor of collapse,' says Evans. The discovery chimes with research in Spain that also blamed *N. ceranae*.

It seems the nosema weakens the bees, allowing the other viruses to gain ground. In colonies with higher nosema numbers virus levels were found to be two or three times greater than healthy colonies.

## Pied Pipers lead the swarm

First there were 'heater bees' (see *BeeMail* No. 24) now scientists believe a 'small oligarchy' of **piping bees** signal the colony when they are ready to swarm.

The researchers reveal their findings in the journal *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*.

● Scientists using an imaging technology called **X-ray computerised tomography** have devised a new way to peer into a hive, without disturbing the insects inside.

This reveals how many bees are inside, and gives clues as to what they are doing.

## Beekeeper stung to death

A beekeeper who survived the Falklands War was stung to death by his own bees.

**Christopher Weaver**, 56, was attacked as he tended his bees on an allotment in Coalville, Leicestershire, on April 12. He was not wearing any protective clothing.

## Apis rides again on Vespa

Italian bees rode into fashionable **Milan** in style as a swarm settled on a Vespa moped.

Meanwhile, in Minnesota, US, a truck carrying 7,000 hives was involved in a fatal four-vehicle smash.

## Oxford backs a winner

Britain's new Prime Minister, David Cameron, is already a president.

Although not a beekeeper, Mr Cameron accepted an invitation to be Honorary President of **Oxfordshire Beekeepers' Association** when he was a humble MP.

## Small Hive Beetle: Hawaii export ban

QUEEN exports from **Hawaii** have been suspended by US authorities after several cases of **Small Hive Beetle** were confirmed.

While the European Commission is still considering action, Fera's National Bee Unit says it has checked all known imports of bees from the Pacific island state and has so far found no sign of infestation.

However, the NBU, based in York, is urging caution to all importers of queens and stressed the importance of registering on **BeeBase**.

If you find anything suspect please get in touch with your local bee inspector or the NBU main office at York immediately.

## Ted Hooper dies

Tributes have been paid to Ted Hooper MBE NDB, who died on March 19, aged 91.

He is best known as the author of the beekeepers' bible **Guide to Bees and Honey**.

Full obituaries appear on the **BBKA** website, the **Times** newspaper and the May issue of **Bee Craft**.

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