

# Oxfordshire Beekeepers Association



## Editorial June 2019

May has a particularly 'swarmy' month for bees; indeed the Editor, never having collected a swarm, has himself collected 3 swarms in the space of 2 weeks. This also means that there should be swarms available for new beekeepers. The Committee recently decided that only those incapable of collecting their own swarms, perhaps due to disability, could be put in contact with OBKA swarm collectors (there is a form for this on the website); however we have also been advertising 'swarms available' in the 'Classifieds' section of the Member's area, so we do seem to have a confused policy on this. Personally I don't see why we cannot connect anyone who has collected a swarm with anyone who wants one; the idea that a beginner who wants a swarm to start their beekeeping should have the knowledge and confidence (and time, if working full-time) to collect one seems a tad unrealistic to me.

The month of June is sometimes referred to as the "June gap" as there can be very little food for colonies. However with modern agricultural methods, new crops and the increase in urban bee keeping the June gap may not necessarily exist for many beekeepers. The colonies are now large with plenty of brood to maintain.

Beekeepers may wish to monitor their colony food levels closely, particularly in any splits,

nucleus colonies or colonies where the entire spring honey crop was removed. Feed can be prepared from refined white sugar and water mixed at a 2:1 ratio or one of the proprietary ready mixed syrups available from Beekeeping equipment suppliers. More information about mixing up sugar can be found in the Best Practice [Guidelines no. 7 found on BeeBase](#):

In some areas of the UK the blackberry, lime and clover is now out and colonies are starting to bring in an excess crop. It is also important not to feed unnecessarily and risk adulterating honey with sugar syrup.

In this month's newsletter there is a review of the Apiary visit to Heather Horner's apiary and a great story about when Dawn Gosling went to collect two colonies. There are the normal adverts, all of which are already on the website. Most months we struggle somewhat for content and as Editor I do wonder what Member's think of the newsletter and indeed what they want from the newsletter. Indeed is it even needed when everything on the newsletter can appear (and mostly does appear) on the website? Please let me have your views.

Gary Thomas,  
Editor and Webmaster  
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Contents	Page
Visit to Heather Horner's apiary	2
Bees have Arrived!	3
Classifieds	4
Events and Contacts	6

## OBKA Apiary Visit - Heather Horner 18th May 2019

**T**wenty OBKA members attended an apiary day on 18 May hosted by Heather Horner. Heather's apiary is situated in a delightful wildlife garden and has space for around six full sized colonies as well as several nucs. Heather explained her approach to bee-keeping, preferring natural methods where possible, based on the principle that the bees know best. Despite significant experience, Heather also explained that she is willing to admit mistakes and hoped that the session would be a learning opportunity for all.

The visit comprised three hive inspections.

The first colony was very strong and showed signs of swarming. This colony was split into two five frame nucs, with the old queen in one on the nucs and queen cells in the other. The original colony was left with a couple of unsealed queen cells after first checking that there were larvae present. The second nuc had four queen cells, leaving the bees to select which will be queen. The nucs were provided with plenty of bees and a food frame and then sealed up.

The second colony, which was also strong, was converted to National brood-and-a-half and supplied with an extra super. This colony should give a good honey crop, especially as Heather is surrounded by fields of OSR as well as woods and hedgerows.



The third colony was quite small and Heather was in the process of replacing the old brood chamber combs. Unfortunately the bees had a different plan and had constructed some wonderful brace comb on the crown board (see accompanying photo). This was removed and



Heather invited opinions as what to do next. In fact she had already decided to combine this colony with a small colony that had recently become queenless. This colony, unlike the others, was quite feisty. The colonies were combined using the newspaper method. Other than the feisty queenless colony Heather's bees were very gentle and healthy and a pleasure to work with.

After the hive inspection we examined Heather's meticulously kept records, discussed her approach to varroa management, and concluded with tea and cakes which included an excellent Bakewell Tart.

OBKA would like to thank Heather and Keith for their hospitality, on what was an enjoyable and instructive afternoon, and Elly Pattullo for organising the event. *Richard Stansfield*

**Update two days later**

The nucs seem to be settling in, as is the strong colony now brood-and-a-half with three supers. The small colony uniting has gone smoothly: I have now removed the newspaper and put the united brood(less) box below the original overwintered colony, in hopes of encouraging them to move onto clean comb, and I have today put Porter bees escape between the bees and the old brood box with wild comb, so I can finally remove the old brood frames. I will then recycle the frames by scraping clean and boiling in washing soda before inserting new foundation.

However, the one colony that we did not open because I thought it was awaiting a new queen mating has swarmed today – 30ft up a hawthorn tree, inaccessible despite an attempt at harvest wobbling on a stepladder with long-handled pruners. Ah well, I consider I am repopulating the wild bee population, which is where this particular line came from a couple of seasons ago. *Heather Horner*



## Bees have arrived - Dawn Gosling

**O**n Saturday my son and I drove to Gloucester to collect two colonies and some empty hives. Unfortunately, as one of the hives was not sealed, we had to leave it behind but we took a National complete with bees. We felt sure the hive was secure, covered it in an old duvet cover and duct tape and tied it to the van. We were told to drive carefully to avoid squashing the queen. My firefighter son drove us home to Banbury. He drove, as only well trained emergency drivers can, smoothly and slowly and even my glasses on the dashboard did not move when he took the roundabouts.

All was well until one mile from the M40 exit to Banbury when my son said, "Mum there's a bee in the cab." We decided, after much deliberation, that it had flown in while we were loading up. "It might have flown in from outside," I professed, and received a look that said, "Think that one through mother." Half mile to the M40 exit my son exclaimed, "Mum! There's another bee in the cab!" I let that one out of the window - sorry little fella.

"What if they have all got out?" asked my son. "No, they'll be fine," I replied.

On arrival, my son opened the van and out swarmed thousands of bees. "Oh, dear," I said as he gently closed the door. "I have bee-suits inside the house. Ah, ...I have left my keys in your car at the hire garage." I popped next door to get the spare key from my neighbours but they were out!!!

Meanwhile, a family was walking up the hill towards the van....

My son took a ladder, and in true fireman fashion, got into my house through the bedroom window. We found the bee-suit and he tried to sort out the escaping bees.



"Do you know a beekeeper?" he asked. "Loads," I replied, "but only one close by and I don't know him well."

"Just knock on his door ask if he can help."

I walked up to his house, knocked on door, but there was no one in. Meanwhile, the family walked past the van and made some unwelcome comments about the bees. This was clearly not working and we now had a few thousand unhappy bees.

"Can you phone someone Mum?"

"The ones I know are at a meeting today."

I tried the beekeeper we got the bees from - no reply.

"OK I'm calling the local beekeepers association."

After some truly patient and calming advice my son asked me to make sure he was well covered as the beekeeper said that, as long as they can't sting, you will be fine. So I dressed him and covered exposed areas with duct tape. My son appeared to be getting rather nervous....

All I remembered from Paul's course at this time was, "Don't let the bees know you are frightened," and I imparted this to my son. He cuddled me and walked towards his doom.....

"Mum, they've gone back into the hive."

"Oh, bless, aren't they clever!"

I got my hat and veil while my son lifted the hive out of the van. Together we carried the bees to their final destination. My son uncovered them and eventually they flew out.

We had coffee. Later we went back and watched these wonderful creatures. After all they have been through, they did a recce of their new environment, (sadly) removed the bees that didn't make it and started foraging as they adjusted to their new home.

All I can say is I have a hero for a son.... and after all that he now wants to be a beekeeper!!!

PS - We still need some advice!

Dawn Gosling

# Classifieds

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## Mentor for Bicester Village

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We have been contacted by Susie Barnes, who is a member of OBKA and has attended the Beginners Course, from Bicester Village:

'At Bicester Village we are considering bringing 2 or 3 hives on to site and wondered if there is anyone in our area who would consider acting as our mentor? We have several novice beekeepers who work for us, so confidence is high but knowledge is basic. We have a site picked out and potential suppliers for hives, equipment and nucs.'

Please contact Susie on 07917 135834 or [sbarnes@valueretail.com](mailto:sbarnes@valueretail.com)

## Mentor for new beekeeper in Abingdon

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Anthony Ogilvie Thompson, of Upwood Park, Abingdon has recently joined OBKA. He is wondering if any experienced beekeepers would be prepared to mentor him through his first year or so of beekeeping. If you can help Anthony please contact him directly on [atot@btinternet.com](mailto:atot@btinternet.com), mobile 07974364511

## Potential Apiary Sites



## Stokenchurch

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Darran Smith tells us that he has recently purchased a house with land and is interested in having beehives in the garden.

'I was just wondering if you can point me in the direction if anyone that offers a service of installing and looking after the bees etc... as well as extracting the honey as it something I know little about.'

Contact Darran directly on [darran\\_smith@mac.com](mailto:darran_smith@mac.com),

## Sunningwell, Abingdon

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Richard Alden has a prospective site for some hives in open fields near Sunningwell.

Contact Richard directly on 07900 411345 for more details.

## Appleford, Abingdon

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Sally Jackson has a small paddock that's not being used and wondered if a beekeeper might like to put hives on it? The paddock is situated at Appleford and has access at all times.

If you are interested, please contact Sally Jackson; [sallyjacksonfour@icloud.com](mailto:sallyjacksonfour@icloud.com)

## South Ward allotments Oxford

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Emma Tinker has contacted us as follows:

'I am a former member of OBKA and now chair of South Ward Allotments in Oxford. We would very much like to have beekeepers on our site and would welcome applications from OBKA members. If any of the newly trained beekeepers from your course last year (2018 cohort) are Oxford-based and in need of an apiary site, feel free to put them in touch. I used to keep bees on the site myself and they did well, and didn't bother anyone. The allotments are not very busy and it is easy to find a plot where the bees can face onto a hedge. I don't have time to take up beekeeping again myself but if a new-comer occasionally wanted a hand, I'd be glad to help.

The site is at OX1 4XS, just off the A34, at the bottom of Abingdon Road. More information can be found [on our website](#).

Emma Tinker

Chair, South Ward Allotments Association; 07769 697208

## Littleworth nr. Faringdon

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Mike Wilson is offering his garden as a possible apiary site as follows:

'We will shortly move to a property in the village of Littleworth with a large garden with a number of fruit trees and other flowering plants. There is currently no beehive in the garden. I have no idea at the moment if others in the village have bees. While not a beekeeper myself I would be interested to know if anyone might wish to site a hive in the garden. I look forward to hearing from you.

'Mike Wilson;

[wilsomichael@gmail.com](mailto:wilsomichael@gmail.com); 07814176901

## Harwell Village

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Sharon Langford's mother would like to offer her back garden as a potential apiary site in Harwell Village.

'Are any members looking for additional hive sites? My mother has a reasonably large garden in a village location in Harwell Village, South Oxfordshire.... I'd be interested to know if there was a possibility that a beekeeper may be interested in having a hive in the garden (nil cost).

[sharon@sharonlangford.com](mailto:sharon@sharonlangford.com)

## Deddington

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My employer would like to know if there are any local bee keepers that would like to keep any of their hives on their land, free of charge in return for some honey. The land consist of rural fields, paddocks within a forty acre family home near Deddington Oxfordshire. Please feel free to contact me via mobile or email.

Martin Walker; [martin.walker@res-group.com](mailto:martin.walker@res-group.com); 07876825060

# Events Calendar

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## June

12-13th: BIBBA Course 'Improving bees by raising your own queens' See [OBKA website for details](#).

21-23rd: Blenheim Flower Show ([OBKA stand](#))

## July

13th: OBKA event - 'Preparing for a Honey Show' (further details TBC)

## August

01-04: Countryfile Live, Blenheim Palace - BBKA stand

03: Honey Bee Health Day run by GBKA; see [OBKA website for details](#).

17th: OBKA Event - 'Honey Extraction' (further details TBC)

## September

8th: OBKA Autumn Teaching Apiary clean-up. Bring your own lunch, further details to follow.

## October

13th: OBKA Honey Show, Cumnor Village Hall. Details to follow

24-26th: National Honey Show, Sandown Park Race course



## November

29th: OBKA Event 'Swarm Control' Cumnor Village Hall - further details to follow

## December

13th: OBKA Event 'Honey Tasting' Cumnor Village Hall; further details to follow

Full details of all events including location maps can be found on the OBKA website at <https://obka.org.uk/events>

**Oxfordshire Beekeepers Association is a  
registered charity Number 1005846.**

Please forward items for inclusion in future editions of the newsletter to

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