



Research Campaign Bulletin

No: 2 – 30 June 2008

Just ten weeks into the campaign pressure is building on a number of fronts and a great deal is happening where it counts, at grass roots level. Please forward this bulletin to Divisional or Branch Secretaries, for onward transmission to the membership. Every action counts and there is no way it can all come from the centre.

The Petition: This is really flying and as of last week we had comfortably passed the **36,000** signatures mark; this means that we should this week pass the whole of the 2005 total of 37,500; remember however that this time we are looking for six figures. As noted previously, if each member completes just one form amongst family, friends and colleagues we would have 230,000! To be perfectly clear the petition stays open until the Autumn, when we plan to present it to the Government – more on this later. So in the meantime, keep on gathering those signatures!

Shows: I was a little disappointed by the response to my request for details of upcoming shows however big or small; I still need details please. That said, the response from the shows has been outstanding with 1000+ signatures from each of the Surrey and Devon shows and 2500 from the Bath and West. Please tell me of your successes as they take place. Do make use of the flyers and posters available from Stoneleigh and after use, return loan materials (A1 posters and roundels) as soon as you can so that others can borrow them.

Letters: I have seen many many replies to MPs and individuals from the Minister. These are to a standard format and basically refer to what (I mean how little!) Defra spends on bee health, the BBKA meeting with Lord Rooker last December and the publication of the Bee Health Strategy for consultation, as if this will be a panacea for bee health notwithstanding its failure to promise funds for research. Mention is also made of the NBU's close liaison with US scientists over CCD. The letter then asserts that the high winter losses are predominantly down to poor varroa control. Given that most experts agree that varroa plays a key role in CCD it is easy to put it down to this element rather than the other factors of viruses and *Nosema ceranae* which are thought to play a contributory role with varroa. The letter then goes on to assure the reader that varroa management has become a routine part of bee husbandry and that IPM holds the answer. We know that that is important but not the full story, particularly when some IPM approaches are made illegal by government legislation.

The time has thus come to question these points in follow-up correspondence. BY our providing draft letters Defra is able to respond with its own draft – we need now to adopt a more individual approach. With winter losses measured in the BBKA survey of 30% nationally, the problem is a little greater than inadequate varroa management; and anyway, how did we ‘forget’ how to do it over the last two years when losses have risen from 10% to 15% to 30% this year. We’ve been using IPM for several years so what’s the new element? – only research will tell us of course.

Some recent good news was Defra’s decision to monitor losses more closely; they also found an extra £90K to spend on this monitoring exercise. If they are so cash strapped where did this come from? Was it just a reallocation exercise with the NBU budget calling inspection work research? I suggest that this could be a subject to write and ask them about.

Media Activity: We have continued to enjoy extensive coverage in the national and local press with a substantial piece in the Observer supplement, an article by Vince Cable in the Daily Mail and much else. More output on Country File, the World Service, Radio Kent, GMTV etc has kept the issue to the fore. Whilst the research message was not promoted on Egg Heads our team, although unsuccessful did a good job for the craft.

Westminster: The early day motion has more than 100 MPs’ signatures attached now – few get this number! Keep up your efforts on your MP to sign-up – the motion remains open until Parliament goes into recess at the end of July. I attach a copy of those who have signed up to date.

Thanks to the unstinting efforts of Ian Gibson, Tuesday 17 June saw a small piece of history at Westminster with the granting of an Adjournment Debate in Westminster Hall, with a full 90 minute allocation. Dr Gibson opened the debate under the heading, “The future of the UK Bee Industry”. Setting-out the problems facing bees, he highlighted the BBKA’s Research Programme which has been put forward to Defra with a modest request for £8 million invest over 5 years. David Heath MP emphasized the importance of bee pollination to the Cider Industry and Bob Marris MP urged the Minister to find the funds, urgently, saying that the Government ought actually to be investing £4 million per annum! Several informed interventions from John Penrose (Con - Weston super Mare) who is a beekeeper helped support the case. Bill Wiggin MP, Shadow Minister for Agriculture gave a well considered speech exposing the poor financing of bee research over recent years and the losses to the research base. The full transcript is available on the Hansard section of the Parliament web-site. Here’s what they said:

“It is vital that every country maximises its potential to produce home-grown food, because that is becoming the big challenge, or at least one of the big challenges, for us in the agricultural movement in this country. Honey bees have never been more important for mankind than today”.

Ian Gibson (Lab – Norwich North)

“We need a step change in investment in the investigation of bee disease if we are to stem a worldwide phenomenon that is lapping at our doorstep and has the potential to become a crisis, both for the insect population and in economic terms”

David Heath (LibDem – Somerton & Frome)

“The British Beekeepers Association’s suggested figure of £8 million over five years is incredibly modest—that is no criticism of the BBKA. It is not a ridiculous amount such as politicians often come across when people suggest amounts because they believe passionately in a pet project. It is a sensible amount and, if anything, is low. I urge the Minister to consider it carefully.”

Bob Marris (Lab - Wolverhampton SW)

“I pay tribute to the British Beekeepers Association, which has done much to raise the profile of beekeeping and to inform us about the importance of bees to our country. It has put a tremendous amount of effort into its campaign, and its commitment to bee health is keeping the issue high on the political agenda.”

Bill Wiggin (Con - Leominster)

The Minister, Jonathan Shaw in closing, attempted to parry the stinging criticism of Government inaction by sticking to the prospect of the Bee Health Strategy. No vote was taken of course but it looked like the Minister was in a minority of one.

The next major initiative we are planning will be a mass lobby of MPs by beekeepers, hopefully following a march down Whitehall, to present the petition. This will take place on a Wednesday afternoon in the Autumn after the summer recess. It is to be hoped that we will have representatives from Associations up and down and across Britain. More details in due course. In the meantime we continue to meet with politicians to press our case.

Non-governmental funding: We are talking to other non-governmental funding opportunities and are most grateful to HRH The Prince of Wales for his interest in the campaign and for putting us in touch with the Wellcome Trust, which is now evaluating our research proposals to see if there are any that fall into their remit. They intend holding a Frontiers Meeting in the Autumn which may represent an important step forward. Discussions are ongoing with other groups but it remains a sine qua non that we look to government to play the major role in funding.

The fighting fund continues to grow, with some £3700 received from Associations; many thanks! For those still to donate, we look forward to hearing from you!!

Tim Lovett (tjl@dermapharm.co.uk)

30.06

EDM Signatures; is your MP there?

EDM 1520

BEE HEALTH RESEARCH

08.05.2008

Moss, Malcolm

101 signatures

Ancram, Michael	Anderson, David	Bacon, Richard
Benyon, Richard	Berry, Roger	Borrow, David S
<i>Boswell, Tim</i>	Bottomley, Peter	Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin	Browne, Jeremy	Burns, Simon
Burt, Lorely	Cable, Vincent	Campbell, Gregory
Carmichael, Alistair	Caton, Martin	Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben	Corbyn, Jeremy	Cryer, Ann
Curry, David	Davey, Edward	Davies, Dai
Dismore, Andrew	Drew, David	<i>Ellwood, Tobias</i>
Etherington, Bill	Featherstone, Lynne	<i>Garnier, Edward</i>
George, Andrew	Gibson, Ian	Godsiff, Roger
Gray, James	Gummer, John	Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Mike	Hands, Greg	Harper, Mark
Hayes, John	Hendry, Charles	Holmes, Paul
Horam, John	Hunter, Mark	Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric	Jackson, Glenda	Jackson, Stewart
Jenkins, Brian	Jones, David	Jones, Lynne

Key, Robert	Lancaster, Mark	Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Julian	Llwyd, Elfyn	<i>Loughton, Tim</i>
Luff, Peter	MacNeil, Angus	Mallaber, Judy
Maples, John	McCafferty, Chris	McDonnell, Alasdair
McDonnell, John	Meale, Alan	Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew	Morgan, Julie	Murrison, Andrew
Oaten, Mark	O'Hara, Edward	<i>Ottaway, Richard</i>
Paice, James	Penning, Mike	Penrose, John
Prisk, Mark	Rogerson, Daniel	Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David	Russell, Bob	Scott, Lee
Simpson, Alan	Simpson, David	Simpson, Keith
Soames, Nicholas	Southworth, Helen	Spelman, Caroline
Spink, Bob	Swinson, Jo	Taylor, David
Taylor, Ian	Teather, Sarah	Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul	Vis, Rudi	Williams, Betty
Williams, Roger	Willis, Phil	Winterton, Ann
Winterton, Nicholas		