

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



Newsletter January 2016

BRIGHTON AND LEWES DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

Next meeting - Jan 20th, AGM - Using Nucs , David Rudland

The minutes of the last general meeting and the Agenda for the AGM are attached to this newsletter mailing. Following the AGM David Rudland will tell of some uses for nucs you may not have thought about.

Last meeting - Dave Cushman and his website.

Roger Pattson who has taken over Dave Cushman's website, at the behest of Dave Cushman before he died, gave us an insight into the man and the driving forces behind him. David had many and varied interests and was passionate about all of them. He had set up a business producing bee items many and varied, so varied that his endeavour soon led him to failure and bankruptcy. Fortunately for us his love and knowledge of beekeeping led him to set up this excellent website.

He was not afraid to include items and views he did not necessarily agree with but realised that some would endorse them. Sadly David died relatively young, he had endured ill health for much of his life. Roger has been given the onerous task of living up to the high standard set out – we wish him every success.

The evening concluded with a feast of seasonal party food brought in by members and supervised by Heather

Convention 2015 - some thoughts

Amanda Millar

The Sussex BKA Annual Convention at the end of 2015 was a great success. There was a well balanced range of speakers including a discussion on the causes of swarming by Bob Smith. Hasan Al Toufaily, a PhD student from Sussex University gave a very interesting and timely talk on how and when to treat with oxalic acid, based on the findings of LASI which produced a lot of lively questions. John Hendrie outlined the ways we can improve our beekeeping skills by following the exam route, both theoretical and practical. Pam Hunter's talk on unpalatable and

toxic nectar and pollen was also very useful. The final talk on scientifically tracking the movements of bees was actually the most fascinating; James Makinson volunteered to stand in for the original speaker, also from Queen Mary University, London, who could not make it, at 2 days notice and was preparing it on the train down but it was an extremely good presentation.

As usual the food was good, there were opportunities to chat with fellow beekeepers and browse and purchase books from Northern Bee books.

Diana Lewes

I registered for the event a few months ago and was looking forward to it as the presentations looked interesting. On the day I arrived and found the venue easily. The organisation was good with clear instructions and name badges were accessible. Welcome teas and coffees were on hand.

Sadly I only made it for the first presentation on

swarming and the mechanics of it as I was poorly with a really bad cough which I felt was distracting to those sitting around me so I left when the first session ended. The session I did attend was informative and interesting and being a beginner I learnt some more useful information although more training needed I'm sure!

Hopefully next year I will attend for the full day.

continued P2

Happy and successful beekeeping in 2016!

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Mary King

I always enjoy attending the SBKA Conference, as it is an opportunity to learn from experienced beekeepers and reflect on one's own beekeeping practices. The 2015 conference did not disappoint. I was also attracted to this particular meeting as two of the speakers will be speaking to B&L BKA during the Spring.

Bob Smith (who will be talking to us) started the day off with some very practical thoughts about swarm control. The two triggers that Bob has noted are 1: Overcrowding and 2: Older Queens. The talk did require a degree of simple arithmetic to understand the principles of how many cells would be occupied over a given period of time during the Spring build up. Basically the Queen needs room and it is the beekeepers job to ensure the brood box is for brood only and not full of cells filled with pollen or nectar. The answer – be brave and remove these frames and give the Queen some drawn comb or foundation to work on, provided there are adequate stores in a super. I found this talk very interesting and helpful as a budding beekeeper.

Hasan Al Toufalia from Sussex University LASI Unit spoke next about Oxalic Acid vaporisation during the winter season. This involves removing any brood in the nest 24 hours before vaporising oxalic crystals under the hive. This is done with all due precautions as vaporised oxalic acid crystals are very toxic to humans and varroa for that matter. The oxalic acid destroys the varroa mouthparts so they can't attach themselves to the bees. I have heard this talk in the past, but it was well worth listening to it again to refresh my memory and

understand the science of it all.

John Hendrie (who will be talking to us) was the speaker just before lunch and gave us a potted history of the development of the BBKA exam system. Within this talk he discussed the structure of the exam board, of which he is a member, and how the exam system has been modified over the years. It is relatively recently in the beekeeping history in this country that an exam system came into existence – in the 1980s if I remember rightly. And, like many exam systems it is audited, reviewed and modified at regular intervals.

Pam Hunter, well known to many of us, spoke next about toxic nectar and pollen. It was a very interesting world tour of plants producing poisonous pollen or nectar to humans and bees alike. The most toxic seems to be in New Zealand – the Tutu and Karaka trees – which the NZ beekeepers have to ensure are not near their hives as the products of the hive will be poisonous to humans! As there are no Tutu or Karaka trees growing in Sussex we do not have to be too concerned. But we do, of course, have rhododendrons in this country which are toxic to bees. There were many more plants that Pam spoke about, but too numerous to list here.

There was another speaker, but due to home commitments I had to leave at afternoon tea time.

All in all, very worthwhile on a miserable grey, windy November Day. I learnt much and questioned some of my beekeeping practices – always a good exercise!

Bob Curtis

This year the Sussex Convention was again at Uckfield Civic Centre with the great advantage of free parking, and four very interesting speakers. Bob Smith on Swarm Control had interesting ideas on keeping on top of when the Bees were about to swarm, and how to collect them if they did swarm. Later in the day James Makinson from Queen Mary College showed us how they were marking bees with little 'transmitters' to track their movements, a very very intricate job especially as they were marking the whole colony.

Pam Hunter made us think twice before we eat honey again, with a long explanation of the toxic nature of

some nectars and pollens, thankfully, practically all are only found abroad.

Hasan from LASI put us on the right track as to how to test for hygienic bees with little more than a large cut off tin can and the home freezer. Also, the best time to use Oxalic acid dribble and sublimation, but make sure there is no brood before you start. Again use it as part of an integrated varroa control scheme.

So all in all a great day, but we could have done with more biscuits!

Amanda advises

Routine jobs include checking for and wax moth larvae in sheds and stored boxes. I had some clean frames ready for putting wax into in the spring, in a paper sack at Grassroots and last week found a beastly mouse had made a nest in there and defecated over every one. Bees hate mouse smells (as do !!) so I shall have to boil them up again.

Heft all the colonies on a regular basis and check the entrances are clear of dead bees. I find some colonies put all their stores on one side, so I end up lifting each side of the colony in turn to try to judge the weight. If fed properly they should still have enough stores, but if fondant is put on, check every 10 days or so that they still have enough. Once you have started using fondant it is advisable to continue with it until spring as they will use it as they need and will not be storing it. Most importantly check that it is still moist so they can use it. It was not too bad in December as it was so humid and fondant stayed moist, but January may be colder and drier. If fondant is hard and dry, it can be reconstituted by mixing some water in until it has the consistency of marzipan or putty. I don't put fondant on unless they really need it as it is a bother to keep checking it and my insulation boards no longer fit flat on top of the crown board if there is a plastic tray of fondant over the hole, but I have it on two which felt inexplicably light, but they have not eaten much – the difficulties of hefting! I put a small quantity into a small plastic tray and put that over the crownboard hole to reduce it drying out. Move the crownboard round so the hole with fondant is above the cluster. Alternatively you could cover the fondant with polythene. Of course, if the colony is very short of food or it is cold then the fondant needs to be put directly on the top bars so the bees can get to it easily.

Goodness only knows what this mild weather is doing to their stores level. They have been more active and flying, therefore using up more stores, but they will not need to eat so much to keep the cluster warm, and they are not likely to die of isolation starvation (when cold and in a tight cluster they are unable to move to stores on the next frame) It will probably mean there is more brood than usual meaning varroa will keep increasing. A good hard frost is useful to kill off cold sensitive pests like wax moth and Nosema. I hope it does not mean we will have more disease problems in 2016, I thought 2015 was bad enough, but we should be vigilant.

My New Year plans include going through my records for 2015 and deciding which colonies performed best for breeding from in 2016. Unfortunately many of them have replaced their queens so it does not necessarily mean they will perform as well next year. I miss the

good old days when queens lasted two or even three years.

There are unseasonal flowers out. Mine were bringing in pollen on 18th December and I have *Viburnum tinus* (covered in bees) and *V. bodnantense*, Leucojum, jasmine and even some confused crocuses, snowdrops

and violets in flower. My neighbour had daffodils in flower before Christmas. This is all good news for the bees being reared this month.

Now for the latest crop of research.

One of the most interesting is that researchers have found that bees infected with varroa and Deformed Wing Virus variant B which is non-lethal, somehow protects them from the lethal variant A of DWV which can kill a colony. I understand that the famous resistant Swindon Bees have the Type B variant. This discovery opens up possibilities for a treatment or 'vaccination' to protect our bees.

Another piece of research has found that a honey bee's early-life social environment has lasting effects on individual aggression: bees that experienced high-aggression environments during pre-adult stages showed increased aggression when they reached adulthood relative to siblings that experienced low-aggression environments. I wonder if this has implications for queen rearing, but it probably does not matter if you have a bad tempered monarch, it is the workers we have to deal with. Of possibly more use is that they also found that aggressive bees had a greater immune response to pesticides, ie were more resistant to them, and they also had fewer mites. They shed no light on the rumour that aggressive bees collect more honey though. Pre-adult social experience may be crucial to the health of the ecologically threatened honey bee.

Other research has found that foragers, which inevitably encounter more pathogens and hazardous plant chemicals out in the field, express more immune genes than the young house bees. These genes include detoxification enzymes and peptides produced in the nectar processing tissues and which may contribute to the antimicrobial properties of honey.

Happy New Year.



Divisional Diary 2015/16

Indoor meetings 7.15 for 7.30pm on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, (October to March) at St. Thomas's church hall, Lewes unless otherwise stated. Members are invited to arrive early and assist in putting out chairs. Admittance £1 which will include tea/coffee, cake/biscuits Non-members are welcome.

Programme

Indoor meetings

October 21st – Candle making– Celia Rudland

November 18th – Preparing honey for show– Mollie Bonard

December 16th – Dave Cushman and his website - Roger Patterson

January 20th – AGM – Using Nucs – David Rudland

February 17th – 8mm of Nothing– Bob Smith

March 16th – Blossom to Honey Jar– John Hendrie

Dates for your diary

October 29-31 National Honey Show, St Georges College, Weybridge

November 28 SBKA Annual convention

The Brighton and Lewes Division of the SBKA cannot accept any responsibility for loss, injury or damage sustained by persons in consequence of their participation in activities arranged.

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Contributions to the newsletter (max 900 words) can be sent preferably by email to the editor see Officer panel above for details Photos etc. for the website should be emailed to our webmaster, see panel above.

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