

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



Newsletter April 2016

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

Next meeting - First out apiary, April 23, Grassroots

Saturday April 23rd, will include swarm prevention techniques and swarm control – see back page top panel

Last meeting - 16th March, John Hendrie

Blossom to honey jar.

John Hendrie president of the SBKA and retired chemist talked through the scientific aspects of the bees anatomy apropos nectar collection and the mechanics of nectar production by the flower. Honey is composed of a number of different sugars all with differing molecular components which accounts for the differing properties of honey layed down at varying times of collection and sources of nectar.

The talk then went into the regulations re honey and various other components therein eg pollen and minerals. Much of the regulations are aimed at larger commercial producers, particularly that of sugar content, to avoid adulteration of the product. Water as a percentage of honey determines onset of fermentation hence the upper limit 20%.

It was pointed out that most of the regulations are not aimed at the smaller producers (most of our members) and that there is little consistency between enforcers of some of the regulations. This does not mean they should be ignored but common sense has to prevail. A little time was devoted to labelling and sales, again legislation is aimed at commercial operations. It seems unlikely that hobby beekeepers would be prosecuted but this does not mean ignoring the regulations.

All in all an interesting enlightening evening. The talk as usual finishing with delightful cakes and hot drinks, thanks to the girls in the kitchen.



Under the microscope - 7th May @ Bob Curtis's

2:00pm at Woodside, Falmer Road, Woodingdean, Brighton, BN2 6LA



We will have a range of microscopes available, but if you have one please bring it. The aim is to have a look at various bee parts, pollen and disease diagnosis. Please bring a few bees if you would like to check for Nosema or Acarine (20 - 30 will be plenty, dead preferred). If you know lots about bee anatomy or nothing, it's a chance to meet, discuss and see what can be achieved with simple equipment or virtually no equipment, a simple magnifier can tell you a lot.

If you would like to attend this session please contact Bob, Tel: 01273 303311 or E: poshpix@me.com

SBKA AGM - 5th March, Ringmer village hall

The 2016 Annual General Meeting was hosted by our Division. The first part of the proceedings was the AGM. Amanda Millar stood down as chair but was made president replacing the outgoing Jonathan Coote. Pat Clowser of our division was voted in as chair. We wish them both a successful tenure. Elections were followed by treasurer and divisional reports.

The formal part of the afternoon over the speaker Chris Parker took the floor. Chris reminds one of Struwwelpeter (the childrens book) however he is also a skep beekeeper. His talk "The Island of Honey" traced the history of beekeeping in Britain.

Although there is little or no evidence of early

beekeeping we were entertained by Chris's knowledge of ancient celtic (all Welch in this case) and druidic history. The talk eventually led to mead and it's place in this history. A horn containing his own brewed mead was passed round the audience while the talk continued.

Afterwards all were treated to a fabulous spread under the alias refreshments. Thanks to all contributors to this feast and in particular to Heather for the organisation of same.

A very pleasant, informative afternoon!

See Robert Bonds below. Ed



Far left
New chair Pat Clowser
Left and above
Chris Parker

SBKA AGM - Robert Bond, Eastbourne Division, another view

Those of us that attended the Sussex beekeepers A.G.M. at Ringmer in March were in for a rare treat, the speaker following the meeting was Chris Park a skep beekeeper who spoke with knowledge and passion about the "The Old World" and about the importance of bees and honey in its culture and folklore. He understood much about the old Celtic language and its connection with present day society explaining how the modern day towns with "bic" in their names had an ancient association with honey as did people with it in their surname, such as Bickerstaffe, and how a long time ago this country of ours was known as the "Honey Island".

He learned his skep making skills from Karl Showler and put forward some thought provoking views about keeping bees in this way. He concluded his talk by

passing round a huge carved animal horn of home brewed metheglin for all who cared to give it a try.

There are invariably good speakers at these meetings, who can forget the forensics expert who could identify precisely the date somebody died and the area by the particular pollen on the body or the ex bee inspector who held his audience together for an hour talking only about beespace, and explaining how the little wooden sticks used for tea stirrers can be used to reduce the oversize gaps in our own hives.

There are often too few of our own members present at these meetings. The people who run our organisations give their own time freely for the benefit of all of us, they deserve better support in doing it.

Look forward to seeing you at the next one.

Amanda advises

March was a pretty shocking month for headlines and reporting breaking records. It was found that carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming, spiked more in the last 12 months than in any comparable period since 1959; up 3.76 ppm, this is now the highest on record at over 404ppm. February broke all records for temperature, being now the warmest ever. These findings are likely to have an impact on the health of our bees, because of more unsettled and more extreme weather conditions and also warmer winters which will promote varroa breeding. This last winter we have not seen any cold conditions which one might expect would kill disease organisms or weed out sickly bee strains.

And that is not all; depressing research out in March showed bumblebees exposed to a neonic: thiamethoxam took longer to learn to forage efficiently and had different flower preferences to unexposed bees. This has implications for the foraging success i.e. survival of the bees and the interactions between wild flowers and their pollinators.

The US Environmental Protection Agency identified a residue level for imidacloprid (another neonicotinoid) of 25 ppb, which sets a threshold above which effects on pollinator hives are likely to be seen and at that level and below which effects are unlikely. These effects include decreases in pollinators as well as less honey produced.

But I must concentrate on things nearer to home which we can control to some extent, rather than become maudlin about things we have little control over.

I have had mixed reports about the state of our bees after this cold unsettled March. Hopefully most people will have had a chance on the rather infrequent decent days to check our bees. Most of mine have abundant stores left, but seem to be perhaps a little smaller than average for the time of year and so far I have seen no sign of any drones being made (except in 2 colonies which had queen failure) so I think I shall be safe from swarming preparations for the next couple of weeks (I write this on 20th March). One person has reported large colonies nearly ready for a super, and therefore probably thinking about swarming when the weather improves. The key indicator is whether they are making drones; no drones = no risk of swarming... yet. By the way, if you had to feed sugar syrup because they were low on stores, it might stimulate them, so be vigilant in case of swarming. I was able to change all their floors and their crown boards while it was cool without disturbing them unduly. Sooner or later the weather will improve I hope and then will have to rush round with supers. It is best if you can put supers of drawn comb on at this time of year and leave the foundation drawing until it is warmer, but if you have no drawn available, then remove the queen excluder until they are drawing it out or it will act as a barrier.

So we need to get our swarm catching kit ready and our swarm control kit (basically a complete spare hive) read the instructions on the B&L website information page for swarm prevention, control and catching and care of swarms.

It is so much easier to prevent them thinking about swarming than have to deal at short notice with it. This is my **Swarm prevention checklist**

- Monitor the increase in drone brood in the colony; they are unlikely to swarm until drones are produced. Drones will not be produced until there are at least 4000 workers present.
- Try to give them enough space to prevent crowding and add supers well in advance of them becoming full of bees; nectar occupies three times the space the final honey will occupy. Empty drawn supers immediately above the brood nest can reverse a swarm impulse. Foundation does not provide extra space, but may act as a barrier.
- Make sure there are always plenty of unoccupied cells in the brood nest, it tricks the colony into thinking it should continue to grow rather than to swarm. Either give a super of drawn comb below the queen excluder, or remove the queen excluder altogether. See Minimising Swarming at <http://scientificbeekeeping.com/understanding-colony-buildup-and-decline-part-7b/>
- Remove frames of capped brood to nuclei and replace with drawn comb. Again, works with drawn comb best, they see foundation as empty space not useable space, but may work or at least delay swarming.
- Mark the queen and optionally clip one of her wings. If unclipped they usually swarm just as cell is capped assuming weather suitable. When the queen is clipped, swarms tend to emerge when the virgins are ready to hatch so, extra time is gained.
- Use young queens and a low swarming strain, i.e. don't breed from swarmy stock.
- Check the queen's egg laying rate. Reduced egg laying occurs before swarming (but may be only 1 day before so not reliable).
- Monitor the appearance of queen cells, small queen cups like acorn cups are found in most colonies, but when eggs and larvae appear in them, action needs to be taken.
- Anticipate when colonies might swarm and have enough equipment easily available.
- Be aware of swarm control techniques you can use.



I came across an American website describing a common cause of winter colony mortality this week. <https://beeinformed.org/2016/03/08/why-did-my-honey-bees-die/> copy and paste

I feel sure it happens here too, as they describe. After treating my bees I frequently find a high number of mites in October and am obliged to do some extensive dusting to get the mites down as soon as possible. The mites have usually already done some damage to the bees and it is noticeable that the colonies which had

been the largest are often quite small in the spring whereas those which were swarms, nucs etc have maintained their size over winter and are sometimes larger when I make the first inspection. I am pleased to say I have not lost any over winter to parasitic mite syndrome, just a couple to failed queens which superseded too late to mate properly. Although I have a couple at Grassroots of small ones which were showing signs of CBPV last autumn, one of which has subsequently died and the other lost its queen and is shrinking rapidly. On inspection of the floor debris when I changed their floors mid March, I could see evidence of a few bees with DWV (Distorted Wing Virus) thrown out onto the floor on one colony, and another had some with paralysis virus. If we are to improve the chances of such colonies it would be a good idea to get them onto clean comb, shook swarm if large enough or Bailey if not or replacement of some brood frames with clean drawn comb and make sure they have almost no varroa left, by icing sugar dusting as soon as possible. They might be able to grow out of it then.

Today I came across another note on beeinformed.

org: <https://beeinformed.org/2015/03/30/i-prepped-my-honey-bees-for-winter-but-they-died-what-happened/#comment-1936935529> (copy and paste).

It is an interesting analysis of winter mortality, with some photos.

I am afraid I have to disagree with both of these blog's suggesting that viruses are not passed by equipment and you can re-use this dreadfully dark comb - dysentery streaks are known to harbour virus and can be picked up by following bees, so get them on really clean comb, sterilised with acetic acid, and boil up or burn up any from a colony with bad virus. The other thing I have reservations about is the assertion that when bees die so do varroa, well yes, in the end but there is evidence that varroa can survive for weeks if not longer in capped cells with dead bees, - just waiting to be robbed out in the spring? I am not convinced American Beekeepers know what hygiene, sterilisation or good beekeeping is; no wonder they have problems.

So at the risk of sounding like a stuck record, I will jump back on my soap box and proclaim 'monitor and remove those mites!'

Pollinators Vital to Our Food Supply Under Threat

Amanda Millar

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has recently published a report on pollinators world wide. There are more than 20,000 species of wild bees alone, plus many species of butterflies, flies, moths, wasps, beetles, birds, bats and other animals that contribute to pollination.

They found that 16% vertebrate pollinators are threatened with extinction and over 40% invertebrate pollinators locally. "Their decline is primarily due to changes in land use, intensive agricultural practices and pesticide use, alien invasive species, diseases and pests, and climate change."

The safeguards include the promotion of sustainable agriculture, which helps to diversify the agricultural landscape and makes use of ecological processes as part of food production.

Specific options include:

- Maintaining or creating greater diversity of pollinator habitats in agricultural and urban landscapes;
- Supporting traditional practices that manage habitat patchiness, crop rotation, and coproduction between science and indigenous local knowledge;
- Education and exchange of knowledge among farmers, scientists, industry, communities, and the

general public;

- Decreasing exposure of pollinators to pesticides by reducing their usage, seeking alternative forms of pest control, and adopting a range of specific application practices, including technologies to reduce pesticide drift; and
- Improving managed bee husbandry for pathogen control, coupled with better regulation of trade and use of commercial pollinators.

Additional findings:

- A high diversity of wild pollinators contributes to increased stability in pollination, even when managed bees are present in high numbers.
- Crop yields depend on both wild and managed species.
- The western honey bee is the most widespread managed pollinator in the world, producing an estimated 1.6 million tonnes of honey annually.
- The number of beehives has increased globally over the past 50 years, but a decrease in hives has occurred in many European and North American countries.
- Climate change has led to changes in the distribution of many pollinating bumblebees and butterflies and the plants that depend upon them.

Divisional Diary 2016

Outdoor meetings Meetings are on Saturdays and Sundays. Unless otherwise stated a 1.30 start with beginners in mind will be followed by a general meeting at 2pm. All meetings advertised will be weather permitting. Location maps are on the website in the members section.

Programme

Out apiary meetings

April Saturday 23rd – Grassroots (revised date)

May 7th Microscopy @ Bob Curtis's, Woodingdean

May Saturday 21st – Barcombe

June Sunday 19th – Stanmer or Peacehaven TBA

July Sunday 17th – Bob Curtis's, Woodingdean

August Saturday 21st – Grassroots

September Saturday 10th – Barcombe

Dates for your diary

May 14th–Sussex Bee Festival, Heathfield

6th August Rottingdean Fair

September 21st, First winter meet

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 our newsletter

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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