

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



Newsletter May 2016

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

Next meeting - Out apiary, May 21, Barcombe

Saturday May 21st, Heather will be opening hives and answering questions as well as beekeeping hints and tips of a seasonal nature. 1.30 for beginners.

Last meeting - April 23rd. Grassroots, Heather McNiven

In spite of a bitterly cold wind there was a good turn out of mainly beginners. Because it was only 12 degrees (felt much lower) Amanda was reluctant to open the hives so started with a demonstration of a simple artificial swarm using empty hives.

Then came a demonstration of icing sugar dusting on all three colonies, which did not involve disturbing the frames, as varroa numbers seem to be on the increase. One colony had dropped 3 on 6th April after dusting, on the 20th it dropped 42 and today the 23rd they dropped 83 after the dusting. It does not pay to be complacent. There was some discussion about other treatments, some with effectiveness limited by the low temperatures we have been experiencing, others limited by the likelihood of honey supers either being on or going on shortly.

Chalkbrood mummies were observed on one insert. On another colony which was very small and had moved up into a fairly clean super the old brood box was removed and the dead brood, with Deformed Wing Virus was extracted and examined. The sun started to shine at this point and the wind dropped so the colony was briefly inspected, the brood looked OK and the queen was spotted. Hopefully this colony will outgrow its problem if the varroa is kept low, now it is on clean comb.

Thanks to Mary for helping me with tea.

Photos Bob Curtis



Under the microscope - 7th May

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.

A couple of places left. If you would like to attend this session please contact Bob Curtis, Tel: 01273 303311 or E: poshpix@me.com



Amanda advises



This has been a long cold spring and the bees have been slow to grow, but I am pleased to say most of mine are now making progress and today (20th April) I saw signs of nectar storage in one or two, so all feeders have been removed, and my three apiaries mostly have their first super on, but strangely not the Grassroots one, they are all showing significant disease, one has Deformed Wing Virus, one has significant Chalkbrood, the third a little of both but is making progress now. Could it be the damp, wind, forage availability that is lowering their immunity? All three were all swarms collected from different locations last year so genetically different and put on clean foundation and were doing well when they went into winter.

Any significant winter stores should be removed before or at the time the first super goes on. I know from experience that in order to make room for laying etc the first thing they do is move their syrup contaminated stores up into the new super which will contaminate the summer honey. These frames of capped stores, if syrup or liquid can be stored (Labelled) and returned to the hive they came off, in the autumn. If it is granulated honey then it is not much use to them and can be scraped back to the foundation which can be returned to them if it is clean. The granulated honey/wax can be warmed (40 degrees C) until it liquifies, strained and used for cooking.

The Oil Seed Rape is now in flower, if you have any fields of it within 4 miles, our bees are likely to be visiting. These days little nectar is obtained from the hybrid OSR but the bees collect pollen and come back with characteristic yellow spots between the eyes. They also risk bringing back a dose of Neonicotinoid pesticides as the ban has been lifted. Ramsons (wild garlic) is also in flower now and I found that also gives them a spot between the eyes, but of white pollen not yellow. Keep an eye on the OSR fields and be prepared to remove any surplus honey as soon as the rape flowers go over. If there is no surplus as I expect may be the case, then the bits of OSR honey may get into our main crop and cause it to granulate early. There is not much we can do about it, but if May is unsettled too then they may well eat it and solve that problem.

Do monitor for varroa and dust with icing sugar (it's about the only thing you can treat them with when supers are on, apart from MAQS which I have not tried yet). Any varroa around earlier will now be breeding like

mad as the bee brood levels increase, several colonies I thought were OK a month ago are now dropping mites again

May is normally the main month for swarms, but up to late April I have only seen empty cups, one had an egg in but that does not necessarily mean they are going to swarm soon. Remember that giving them drawn comb in good time will prevent them feeling they are congested and need to starting swarm preparations. Consider letting them have a brood and a super for the queen to lay in. I am convinced it reduces the swarm inclination in mine.

Latest research - it has long been known that our honey bees have a stop signal in the form of a head butt as a signal of danger and to stop waggle dancers recruiting bees to dangerous places for example. Researchers from China and US have recently discovered that the Asian honey bee has graded vibrational head butts, of different frequency vibration and duration to distinguish between species of hornet attacking and therefore the scale of the threat. This is the first time a graded response has been found in an insect, it is common in birds and primates. They can also distinguish between threats outside and an attack on the entrance which causes the bees to stop going out to forage but to prepare for heat balling the hornets. This makes it the most sophisticated alarm system yet found in any social insect. What clever things! You have to admire them (and the processes of evolution through which this has come about). If/when the Asian hornet reaches our shores, we can only hope that our species of honey bee evolution goes into overdrive to evolve a similar defence.

Dave Goulson has found that exposure to the neonicotinoid clothianidin affects learning in honeybees but not bumblebees. And more bad news; rising CO2 levels causes a reduction of protein in pollen, this is only going to get worse.

Lets hope for some warm weather soon and a reduction in this cold wind.

Sussex Bee Festival
May 14th - Heathfield

Other bees of Sussex - Amanda Millar

Spare a thought for all the other bees. At the end of April I went on a two day bee identification course arranged by the Sussex Wildlife Trust as they need more bee recorders in order to conserve them properly. Between the Solitary and Bumble bees there are nearly 300 species, some not too difficult to identify, others require the microscope to see, for example, the colour of the inner tibial spine or the relative width of the gena. We spent the first day peering down microscopes trying to key out the features to the species. The second day, fortunately not too bad weather, if a bit cool. First we had to determine the sex. The males have 13 antennal segments and the females 12 – try counting them with a hand lens in the field! There are quite a few bees which cuckoo on others, we saw several bumblebee cuckoos at Seaford Head. Others are very specific as to the plants they visit; many of us have already seen the Ivy bee, others are generalists. I was pleased to see the relatively large, easy to identify, wonderfully named, Hairy Footed Flower Bee, both male and female. We also saw lots of mining bees, one was the very attractive White Bellied Mining Bee, *Andrena gravida*, which is a Red Data Book 1 species, only previously found at Tunbridge Wells, even our course leader Steven Falk who has just published *The Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland* had not seen it alive before. All in all a very interesting weekend, with promise of many hours puzzling through an identification key to come.



Andrena gravida, White Bellied Mining Bee – extremely rare!



Female Hairy Footed Flower Bee, *Anthophora plumipes*



Above and left—Male *Anthophora plumipes* with the long hairs on the middle legs. The photographer was urged to hurry as it was biting the finger



Hay fever and honey - Editor

An appropriately named Mr Bacon from the Brighton based magazine "Taste" requested information via our website as to the claims often made as to the validity of local honey as a preventative against hay fever. There are many cures claimed for the wonder substance honey and this is just one of them.

Members who attended the evening lecture on pollen may recall the speaker dismissing the notion. As he told us hay fever is an allergy caused by airborne pollen, therefore there is no substantiation for local honey as a cure: bees do not deal with airborne pollen.

There is a long standing claim for the anti-bacterial effects of honey when used on open wounds. In general honey was used successfully in the past as a poultice. The reason for its efficacy is that honey is a hygroscopic substance (i.e. it attracts water). When applied to a wound it promotes a drying of the area, bacteria cannot survive in the dry so the effect is a cure.

Do you have any interesting cure/debunking remedies/nonsense, I will be glad to include them in future newsletters.

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 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 7th Microscopy @ Bob Curtis's, Woodingdean

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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