

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



Newsletter November 2016

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

Next meetings - Nov 16th, Our very own Soap (making)

For our next indoor meeting, Elizabeth and David Ready are coming to the church hall to make a clean sweep. Don't wash your hands of it, come and learn all about

making soap the beekeeper way!
Don't forget November 26th SBKA- Annual Convention. Uckfield Civic Centre. See attached information.

Indoor meeting - 19th October - Top Tips

A well attended meeting, with lots of conversation and tip swapping. For most of the evening we moved from display to display; Oxalic acid sublimation (with sugar instead of Oxalic Acid), hive building and cleaning, frame construction (with a bit of hands-on for those brave enough to work under Heather's eagle eye). There was a display of feeders, with all their pros and cons, which just made you realise how many variations there are, as by no means were all possible variations on show. The tasting of Honey brought in by members proved popular, with the stronger flavoured honeys being the favorites and the Lime Honey (all the way from Poland) being the least. The honey was also good for checking water contents with a refractometer, to make sure it's below 20% (preferably 18%) to stop fermentation. Ray brought in a couple of his antique microscopes to compare with more modern ones and it certainly became apparent that heavy, in fact very heavy was good for making microscopes & especially dissecting microscopes to stay nice and stable. He also had some Victorian slides with bee parts painstakingly dissected and laid out on the slides, really fine work produced for viewing in the Victorian drawing room. Plus a selection of innovative beekeeping gadgets, including a great way to steam melt wax. We were also lucky to have Ken Stevens in attendance with his wealth of knowledge. Many thanks to all those who provided the displays and made this a thoroughly enjoyable meeting.
Bob Curtis



Amanda advises

Most of my other winter preparations are complete. Mouse guards or 5.5mm high entrances are on all colonies, insulation is now on all of them on the crownboard, with an eke or old super to contain it. One apiary still needs woodpecker netting although these birds should not be a problem until it turns really cold, and I have put bricks on the hive roofs and straps round in exposed sites. Do check that there are no gaps between boxes and crown board, I am not just thinking of ones that bees and wasps can get through but the gaps which produce draughts and cause the bees to work harder to maintain their optimum environment. Last month I swapped a couple of brood and super which had a bit of damage or were bowed at the junction and have scraped all the contact surfaces between crownboards and boxes where a build-up of propolis can leave a gap. If all else fails I might have to stuff a bit of paper in there – better than nothing.

There are still a few frames to scrape and boil but otherwise I am fairly up to date with cleaning. I must bottle some more honey, and now the weather is cooler will partially melt and bottle some fine grained honey to make a soft set. It sets fastest and therefore most finely, at 14 deg C so I tend to do it at this time of year when the garage goes down to that temperature. Scrubbing and scraping my smoker though, always seems to be the last job I want to tackle! I am still dusting a few colonies after the usual late October mite invasion but most are now down to a low level and the colonies seem to be bursting with bees although beginning to look more clustered. The bees are still busy and lots of

bright yellow pollen has been going in, not sure what from, I do not think it is Ivy which is a dull yellow, and the ragwort is all over now. I look forward to a quieter period, I can assess the records of my colonies and decide the best to rear queens from next year although heaven knows I don't want any more colonies.

I have found a number of queen wasps trying to hibernate under the roofs - a chance to reduce your problems for next year if you can catch them.

Winter bee research from Canada out in October, on neonics, suggests that the breakdown metabolites of certain neonics, esp clothianidin are more toxic than the untransformed pesticide. In addition while in summer many of the concentrations of a variety of neonics do not reach LD50 (the amount required to kill 50% of bees); in winter as the bees live up to six months or so and eat stored honey and pollen all winter this LD50 can be exceeded more easily. It has also been found that drones can pass viruses on to the queen when they mate with her. This results in virus throughout her body. Multiple mating can increase the risks to the colony although if she survives this, the genetic diversity can lead to a more robust, healthy colony.



Bees in a roof adventures - Amanda Millar

I was called by a developer in early October 2016 about a building in Ditchling which was being renovated/gutted and partly demolished, which had two colonies of bees which he did not want harmed, he said. Wednesday 5th October I went to look and assess, the building had belonged to Anne Boleyn and was very interesting. A friend said he could help with his petrol bee vac. On Thursday, the day planned to start the removal, he went down with severe gout and could not come. So I went out and spent the afternoon doing it the hard way by trying to scoop up bees in a pot, cutting out the brood comb, tying it into frames with elastic bands and leaving the frames in a box on the roof in the hope they would move to look after the brood. The rest of the comb was put in a bucket. The bees were in the soffit box near the apex, which I accessed by climbing up a tower frame and then scrambling up the roof battens having first removed the tiles as the builders would only go a little way up. I strained the honey from the resulting comb and rescued a few ounces of purified wax and 6.5lbs honey, by fine straining. Friday 7th October 2016 at 8.15am I went to collect the box with comb which turned out to be empty, blast! It was a smallish colony, with dark spotty brood. I put the few bees in a super at home but there were not more than a mug full of bees

and it was clear that the queen was not with them.

After much Googling of bee vacuums and designing on Saturday, we made one on Monday 10th from an old vacuum cleaner. The end of the vacuum, inserted into a



translucent fat-ball bucket, had mesh over the end and another hose emerged from the bucket lid which was used to suck the bees into. Egg boxes were put into the bucket to give the bees

something to cling to and avoid suffocation if they were in a heap. I was delighted how well it worked. It is a giant pooter really. I also designed and made a manual pump for use on the roof out of a piece of drain pipe and pipe bung and funnel on Tuesday, thinking I would not be able to get the vac up there. This manual pump was not efficient enough and although it sucked up a dozen bees I would have been on the roof all day. I realized that the bees had probably moved to the other side of

the apex, so Mark, the builder, lifted the vacuum up to the top of the tower frame for me. I hooked the collection bucket onto a nail on the soffit, and after removing some tiles on the other side of the apex, found where they had gone onto more comb, presumably with the queen and sucked them up very satisfactorily as the combination of two hoses was just long enough. Foragers were still coming back though and I spent half an hour sucking them up out of the air as they returned. I thought I had got all but a few dozen bees. As soon as I turned the vacuum off I swapped the lid with hoses for one with mesh taped over holes so they could breathe and avoid overheating and lowered them down to the ground using my tow rope. Unfortunately during the afternoon while working on the other colony, the weight of the bees clinging to the mesh loosened the tape and they started to escape. I threw a cloth over the top not having a spare lid (note for next time!) but on the journey home half escaped and there were several hundred crawling up the back windows of the car and I had to suck them up a second time when I got home. I also had to wash all the bee poo off the windows and seats. I don't think any died as a result of the bee vac pressure although later when collecting the second colony things started getting sticky with honey and some got stuck in and around the vacuum cleaner and hose and did not fare so well in the collecting box as they all got stuck together. Many were able to clean themselves up when in the hive.

After a break for lunch, I went into the room where the builder had located the nest in the ceiling above a dormer window



the previous day. After breaking off more of the lath and plaster ceiling between three joists around the nest I sucked all the bees I could reach. Between two joists was dark brood comb with a bit of honey above, and in the second section was clean honeycomb. I later found more honey on the other side of the brood. I started to cut the honey out first as it was closest. This was a mistake as it was immediately above me, confined as I was by the sides of the dormer and it dribbled down onto me. There was no other way of cutting it out though. Then I cut out the brood comb, sucking bees up as I removed each piece of comb. The flying bees went against window where I was able to suck them up. The non-flying bees retreated to the top, highest point of the dormer – I was already on the top of the step ladder with my head on the ceiling but sucked most up that I could see. Two buckets were needed for the bees as this colony was nearly twice the size of the first. I, and everything else, was becoming very sticky by then and I had trouble seeing through my veil for dribbling honey, my hair was sticky and the vac hose too and my

shoulders felt wet, and I had dropped some comb on floor. The last bucket of bees had no ventilation as I had not anticipated using a third bucket and they were sticky, but the egg boxes were essential and saved many from a sticky end. I finished about 3pm, knackered. There were still some foragers around, probably about 200, but I was past caring by then. The car was busy with bees and everything very sticky, I stripped off my sticky suit and boots, and drove home with a head veil on and a warning on the back saying bees in transit, but the numbers on the back window should have warned following traffic and most kept a safe distance. Oncoming traffic looked a bit surprised.

At home and in a clean bee suit, I reversed the car over the lawn to the hive so the ones loose in the car had a chance of finding the hive. I dumped them all in a super after dusting with icing sugar so the two groups would mix, having removed all the brood comb apart from one section with fresh pollen on, otherwise the box was full with clean drawn shallow comb. They were briefly shut in as the first bucket just tried to get out as fast as possible. After a few minutes I opened the entrance and they started grouping over the mesh vents in the crown board so I let them in that way too. They seemed to be fanning etc, so thought probably one of the two queens was there. They were given a small contact feeder of syrup. Next morning they were quite active orientating and more fanning at the entrance and coming and going and defending against wasps although I did not see any pollen going in. There were 2.5 buckets of comb from the second colony which felt like 30 lbs honey, and probably cleaner than roof ones as the comb was hanging from wood not roofing felt and no broken tiles mixed in. After straining it I got 20lb honey with a moisture content of 16.3%! Quite dark and flavourful. I gave the bees the dodgy honey and broken up comb to lick and am feeding syrup too.

This is very late in the year to rescue a colony and they will need a lot of feeding, at least they do not have to draw out comb. The weather, although mild for the time of year during the day, has cold nights and could very soon deteriorate. I am interested to see how they turn out, they are certainly very well behaved and even while I was destroying their home I experienced no aggression from them and just a few stings on my hands from some stuck with honey and being unintentionally squashed. They had obviously been there a year or two at least from the colour of the brood comb (or a previous colony?) and I hope they will be relatively disease and varroa resistant. Starting on new comb they will leave much varroa and disease behind. I dusted them after a few days and they only dropped 18 mites, I am hopeful!

A couple of days later the builders said there were still a lot of bees and I returned with bee vac expecting a quick vac and return home, but found a cluster 9" x 6" x 3" around 4 little, new combs full of honey. They had cleaned all the runny honey up. I began to think the queen must have remained for them to be so organized and industrious. So I sucked them all up and with half a tub full I decided to put them in a 2 storey Apidea with sterilized partially drawn comb in case I now had two queens. After 4 days to settle down I inspected them on 19th October. There were eggs in the 2 storey Apidea

which was full of bees, but only lots of stores and some empty queen cups made in the super which had 6 seams of bees. I merged the Apidea on top of the super and hope she will soon go down as I don't want them to winter



in that configuration. With a bit of luck I now have the queen from the larger colony which had the better brood. Two days later, there was pollen going in and I must pluck up courage as soon as the day warms up, to shake the Apidea bees into the super, hopefully finding and marking her as I go so she can lay in the better protected super. The long range forecast is muttering about a dry, cool first half of winter and they need to be able to get into a proper cluster rather than spread two sides of a crownboard.

To be continued...

A stupid idea for beekeeping - from Philips Electical

This "beehive" fits onto a window in your living room. According to the literature you can observe the bees at work and at the pull of a cord have honey. There is a hole through which smoke can be blown to calm the

bees down before inspection. See the whole advert: <http://inhabitat.com/philips-unveils-sexy-concept-bee-keeping-gadget/> (copy and paste link please).



I have had this item waiting for an opportunity to include it in the newsletter. Following Amanda's article on bee recovery, I thought it an appropriate time to expose messrs Philips to full scorn. I cannot think of a more idiotic way to sell beekeeping to the public at large.

Editor

Divisional Diary 2016

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. Non-members are welcome.

Programme

Indoor meetings

21st September–Andy Willis– Purifying and maximising your wax crop

19th October–Practical evening

16th November–Elizabeth and David Ready–Soap-making

18th January–AGM– Honey Show with Harold Clout

15th February–Bee disease–Amanda Millar

15th March–Bob Smith–Shook Swarm and non chemical varroa control

For your diary

26th November Sussex Beekeepers' Association Annual Convention. Uckfield Civic Centre

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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