Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

Newsletter December 2016

BRIGHTON AND LEWES DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

Next meetings – Jan 18th, AGM and Honey Show

Our first Honey Show for several years will follow the divisional AGM.

Our judge will need some time to come to his conclusions, so our AGM, followed by refreshments should give him plenty of time. It's up to us all to help make it a good show by entering as many classes as you can, and the person who gains the most points will receive a trophy. Each class will have certificates for 1st, 2nd & 3rd, so you stand a good chance of getting one and if you do well, go for the Sussex Agricultural Show and the National Honey Show. So you have lots of time to work on your entries over Christmas, be it Honey, Candles, Wax, Cakes, Biscuits or Photos. So let's have your entries. If those entering can let me know by email (poshpix@me.com) by Sunday 15th January, we can work out the exhibit numbering and spacing (entries will also be accepted on the night). Exhibits need to be at the hall by about 7.10pm on the night. If you need any more info, send me an email.

Bob Curtis

See attachments for Classes and entry details. Ed

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

Last meeting – 16th November – Soap making

A very pleasant evening was spent learning about soap and other cosmetic products with Elizabeth and David Ready. David 's(a long time beekeeper) wife Elizabeth amused herself making various items utilising by-products from David's activities with bees. At first like many she made limited amounts of soap etc but soon found that what she made very highly saleable.

She therefore started looking into the technical side of soap and creams/balms and soon through study became knowledgable about the methodology and regulations.

At the meeting they made a batch of soap talking through the various points of interest and dangers associated. The only real danger is in the use of caustic soda, this is a very corrosive chemical and the utmost care should be taken in handling it. In soap this strong alkali is nutralised by using acid (a reaction takes place neutralising both).

There are many ingredients that can be added to vary the finished products such as oatmeal or ash to make a scrub. One soap on display was a "Gin and Tonic" concoction – considered by your truly to be the wrong place for G&T (an internal not external treat).

Some attension was paid to ointment, creams and balms (ointments and cream contain water and therefore need preservatives in the recipe). Beeswax and propolis are frequently used to make these products so is an alternative to candle making.

Amanda advises

There is not too much to do in December with the bees apart from ensuring they are secure if we have gales and checking the entrances to make sure they are not blocked by dead bees. Heft now and then to ensure they have enough stores. I cannot be sure of the effect of the warm October – could they top up their stores and use less to heat the brood or did they start using up more because they were more active? Trim the grass around the hives so they benefit from any sun or breeze and dry out quickly after rain. Short grass or a slab under the hive entrance makes it easier to check for dead bees, I have a slab at the Burgess Hill Divisional apiary which has woodchip underfoot and would otherwise make dead bees very difficult to spot. One colony there has several bees on the ground in front, thankfully the only one out of the 24 or so I am looking after. It has had the highest mite drop in the apiary (third highest drop out of all my bees) and smells damp and fermenting when I open the lid, which has condensation underneath. I would not be surprised if it does not survive the winter. A shame as they were the largest colony (hence highest mites) and had no problems other than a couple of chalk brood, but I think the apiary is a damp one, next to a stream with lots of willows around and probably not ideal.

It is a good idea to check the mite levels in December, either by putting the insert in for a week to find the daily drop, or more quickly and accurately an icing sugar dust if the weather permits. Then you can decide whether you need to treat with oxalic acid at the end of the month when the brood is at its lowest. Research from Sussex University suggest that treating with oxalic acid sublimation at the end of December having removed any brood shortly before, is very effective at keeping varroa low for over a year. I do have my reservations though; it is rather disturbing for the bees and potentially dangerous to us if we breath the fumes, and I think it is more important to get the mites down before winter bees are produced rather than afterward (see discussion below). However, I can no longer include cost in my reservations as I see Thornes are now selling a vaporiser for £35, but you have to obtain a car battery too which will be at least £40. But I must have spent all of that on icing sugar this year! An alternative to sublimation is oxalic acid trickling which is less hazardous or disturbing (and possibly less effective), but it is a good idea to remove the brood beforehand too, by scratching it with a fork or hive tool. Although my colonies seem to be a very good size, how well they survive will depend on the varroa and virus levels in the colony.

Update on wild colony rescued in October. They are now all together in one super, covering over 8 seams in early November, which reduced to 6 in a tight cluster when cold, the queen has been marked and they had small patches of brood on at least two frames, the rest is full of honey and syrup. The first dust produced only 18 mites, the next 41 then 28, 24 and then 12 on 10th Nov. Most of this dusting was before their brood was at a stage when larval cells were ready to be capped so I hope they will benefit from a fairly mite-free winter. There is not much pollen around for them to store so I have given them a couple of lumps of Neopoll which disappeared in no time. I will now leave them alone until about Jan or Feb when I will check they have enough food.

A round-up of recent research and news

A recent article in BBKA news by Jurgen Tautz, whom I respect enormously after reading his wonderful book, the Buzz about Bees, indicates a bee becomes a winter bee or a summer bee depending upon the temperature of the brood nest; 36°C results in summer bees and 34.5°C in winter bees. Research by Tautz in 2003 demonstrates that pupal temperatures influence their learning and dance ability when adults thus influencing their later tasks, however, I have been unable to find any paper at all on temperature affecting lifespan.

I had previously understood from Randy Oliver's investigations on the Scientific Beekeeping website that research by Smedal in 2009 and others found that a reduction in pollen income leads to reduced brood, which reduces the levels of Brood Pheromone. Young bees raised in an environment with little Brood Pheromone, stored more of the important Vitellogenin protein in their fat bodies and became long lived winter bees. He further suggests that nearly all the winter bees emerge in the last three weeks of brood rearing.

These apparently contrasting theories raise a lot of questions for me. In biology things are rarely cut and dried so it might be that there is an element of both temperature and Brood Pheromone, involved. Honey bees are perfectly capable of maintaining the brood area temperature so what causes them to rear the autumn brood at a lower temperature if that is really what Tautz has found?

I have mostly read that winter bees are produced in late summer to early autumn, eg about September in the UK. In colder areas than southern England there probably is a distinct cessation of brood rearing, but down here we have had an exceptionally warm September and October this year. I know in mid October there was a substantial amount of brood still. So will our winter bees be produced much later than normal this year? It depends what the trigger level of Brood Pheromone is.

Regarding Oxalic acid treatment I will just quote from a paper by Amdam, 2004, "Overall, findings suggest that treatments with chemicals or organic acids intended exclusively to kill Varroa destructor mites in late autumn

may fail to prevent losses of colonies because the physiology of the bees has already been impaired. Beekeepers in temperate climates should therefore combine late autumn management strategies with mid and late summer treatment protocols to keep the mite population at low levels before and during the period when the winter bees emerge."

In research by Dooremalen 2012, in the Netherlands, they found that individual bees lived longer in colder winters, when there was less brood and they did not have to revert to being nurse bees. The negative effects of varroa were greater in colder winters. (My data on mite fall concurs with this, when we had a cold winter in 2012 all my colonies dropping more than 300 mites on the first dust in October later died. The last two mild winters, a similar level of mites did not result in colony loss, just smaller in the spring and requiring a bit of TLC.) They also found that treating colonies against mites in July and August ie before the winter bees were produced, resulted in the bees living longer and having larger colonies in the spring. Those treated in September were shorter lived bees and had smaller spring colonies.

It has recently been estimated that hundreds of billions of pollinating insects, *Hymenoptera*, *Diptera* and *Lepidoptera* are killed on roads; that is in addition to the other causes which are multifaceted and synergistic and include pesticides, herbicides, monoculture, urbanization, disease, parasites, and climate change.

And did you know that the English Mustard Growers collective are 2 years in to a ten year project to enhance the forage availability for bees in their hedges field margins. It is the biggest project of its kind covering 10,000 hectares in Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk (intensively agricultural counties though!). After having a survey for seasonal forage availability on each farm, which was mostly found to be short in early spring and autumn, they have been busy planting bulbs, hedges, and wild flowers so the bees have a continuous supply of forage. It is encouraging to read of good news somewhere. I wish something similar was being done in Sussex on that scale, eg to improve our verges and hedges.

I wish you a peaceful and happy Christmas!

Membership renewal

The time has come again to renew your membership for Brighton and Lewes Bee Keepers. We now start our new year from the 1st January 2017

The Secretary of Beecraft has asked me for any names who require the Beecraft magazine that also starts in January, but she needs the names by the middle of December.

The membership form is attached to the newsletter email. I would be grateful if you could send me the form with your fee, this can be done via email and bacs (details of our bank are on the form), or by post and cheque.

I look forward to hearing from you

Patricia Clowser

WANTED DIVISIONAL APIARY SITE

Preferably in Post Code areas BN1, 2, 3 or 7

Our division is looking to find a new site to provide a teaching facility with about four or five mature hives, and ideally with enough space for queen rearing and nuc production for use within the division. It would also be useful if space were available for new beekeepers to site their hives whilst developing their skills prior to finding their own apiary site.

The site should be reasonably isolated to reduce the potential hazard to the general public and nearby animals, be secure and have vehicle access. It would also help if it was level enough that the division can site storage sheds on the site.

If you think you can help or know of anybody who can, please contact Ian White on 07875 663665 or E: ianda.pinehill@yahoo.co.uk

Bargain Sale of Equipment

Sunday 4th December at Bob's Apiary. 10am to 2pm: The Old Cottage, Falmer Road, Woodingdean, BN2 6LA

National Broods, Supers, Roofs, Varroa Floors, Queen Excluders, Feeders, Quilts, Frames, Uncapping tray, Settling tank, garden tools, timber & more. All items are second hand from Sussex University and at very low prices. The Broods & Supers are mostly made of ply, but are serviceable, some will need repair. Roofs & floors are good and study.

Contact Bob on 07421 078683 or E: bob@bobcurtisphoto.co.uk for more info.

85th National Honey Show 27-29th Oct 2016 - Bob Curtis

This year's Honey Show was at a splendid new location in the stands of the Sandown Park Racecourse. The building is impressive, large and spread over quite an area but, unlike the old venue, it was mostly under one roof. The new arrangement meant that the Honey Show and the Trade Stands were in the same hall, so it all flowed very well, with many of the big suppliers in attendance and good deals to be had by all. The honey on display came from the UK,Ireland and further afield, but only a few entries for the Sussex Cups; other counties had far more entries! The main lecture room was on the second floor, which worked quite well. The workshops could have been closer and a little better signed, being in an adjacent stand. As last year the two main speakers again came from the USA. David Tarpy is from North Carolina State University. David launched the Beekeeper Education & Engagement System (BEES), https://ncsuapiculture.net/ which is basically an online learning and knowledge sharing hub for beekeepers. The other speaker was Susan Cobey from the University of California, who is an instrumental insemination specialist. Susan Cobey spoke on 'The Genomic responses to Varroa Parasitism', which as a title was baffling, but in essence she was proposing that the more drones a queen mated with resulted in a stronger queen who survived better and a colony which was more robust to the effects of disease. In her lecture on instrumental insemination she gave a bit of history going back to Dr. Lloyd Watson in 1926, the importance of CO2 to anaesthetise and stimulate egg laying and the use of semen from 2 – 3 week old drones for the best results. The queen is best mated at between 5 – 10 days with 8-12µl of sperm, but unless you do it artificially this is all a bit academic. David Tarpy talked about 'Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), an American Perspective'. The CCD was first spotted by David Hackenburg in Florida where he found hives de-populated of adult bees, but still with plenty of brood. The US press blew it out of all proportion, but in fact it appeared that it was normal in the US to loose a third of colonies over winter and of those perhaps 2.5% to CCD. The three most likely causes were nutritional stress, environmental contamination and a mix of pathogens, but starvation and weak queens seem to be greater killers. In the end I got the impression they still have no idea what causes CCD, or if it exists. Peter Schillick, a long time winner of many honey awards ran a workshop on producing honey for exhibition. His main tip was look for OLD HONEY JARS as they have a lot less glass faults and imperfections than new ones. It appears that good show honey is down to being very careful and planning your exhibit months in advance, even before you extract. Settle the honey properly in a warm area and choose the honey from the middle of the tank (this avoids scum, bits and 'heavy honey' from the bottom of the tank). Early season honey tends to be lighter, but will darken naturally. Above all you need to keep trying. The show was well worth a visit, and was even better as I won two classes for my photographs; I'm still working on the Honey!

Bob's prize pics

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 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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