

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



Newsletter January 2017

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

Next meetings - Jan 18th, AGM and Honey Show

Harold Clout will be judging the entries. Attached is the schedule (no change from last months attachment, just a timely reminder).

Happy New Year to all members!
Have you renewed your membership yet?

ABKA Convention Sat November 25th 2016 - Bob Curtis

As usual this was a very good day, with five very interesting speakers.

Elizabeth Ready (following on from her B&L demo) gave a more detailed explanation of the technical side of producing soaps and balms. With clean wax and care you can produce your own cosmetics, but to sell them it all gets a bit more complicated.

Amanda Miller gave a good talk about the variety of pollinators available to plants. Bees are important but not essential! The weight of the insect and the length of their tongues can determine which plants they visit. The positive electrical charge of the bee aids the collection of the negatively charged pollen and its ability to 'stick' to bees and other pollinators.

Jim Norfolk, from Chichester WSBKA, spoke on 'Getting to grips with Varroa', questioned whether treatment was always necessary. By monitoring the varroa drop regularly. Icing sugar on a 100ml sample (300 bees) can give a good assessment of the total colony load. Which of the many ways to treat for varroa do you use? Well, it seems to depend on the time of year and brood in the hive. Oxalic acid is always good if there is no brood, i.e. mid-winter or for swarms. Shook swarms in spring and drone culling can help reduce the varroa load, along with many more chemical means.

Dave Goulson on 'Bees, Pesticides and Politics' was, as usual, very entertaining and nicely complemented

Jim and Pam's talks. Pesticides, especially the Neonicotinoids and their use, seem to be as much tied up in politics and the profits of Bayer and Monsanto as efficacy. Bayer, for instance, appear to have monitored the residual pesticide in the soil over a five year period, just before the next year's treated seeds were planted. The results showed a significant build-up of pesticide, but the report published about the study claimed it was of no significance!

Pam Hunter spoke on 'Oil Seed Rape - a Blessing or a Curse'. She described how selective breeding mainly in Canada had reduced the erucic acid and the 'cabbage odor' and had greatly improved the oil (now called Canola oil which may stand for Can(ada) + o(il) + l(ow) + a(cid)) and its usability, as well as the flavour of the honey produced. Planning is essential if you are to maximize the production of rape honey. Your colony needs to have a good number of workers ready to go when the rape starts blooming, so feed about 6 weeks prior to the expected flow, then start with drawn supers, following with undrawn supers as the flow proceeds. It can all go wrong, however, if the temperatures are low, as it needs to be above 15°C for the bees to 'smell' the crop. The main problem is that rape honey is high in glucose so sets rapidly and so needs to be taken off and extracted quickly. However, it does cream very well!

Amanda advises

I read a thought provoking comment on the Honeybee Suite website recently. It is a US website but nonetheless has some useful comments. She pointed out that one of the main differences between beginner beekeepers and the experienced was that while beginners respond to an event (assuming they are looking and can recognise what they are seeing), whereas the experienced beekeepers anticipate and prevent problems from getting out of hand (most of the time!). The best way of making this transition is by learning the biology of our bees, their behaviour and their life cycles. But not just about the bees; we also need to understand the life cycle of the varroa, and other diseases which affect them and the weather and the flowering seasons of good bee plants and...and...

January is a good time to reflect on what has been and decide whether you want to remain an indifferent beginner all your life or whether you want to become a good beekeeper who can work with and understand your bees and anticipate their needs. The first step is to read lots of good books; not all those run of the mill beekeeping books often written by inexperienced beekeepers that should never have reached print. I could name some truly awful books out there. Go for something like Haynes Bee Manual by Claire and Adrian Waring. Ted Hoopers book of course, Celia Davis' two books on bee biology; (The Honey Bee Around and About and The Honey Bee Inside Out) are worth having and Jurgen Tautz's Buzz about Bees, and Keeping Healthy Honey Bees by David Aston and Sally Bucknall. Most are in the divisional library.

Next, if you have not taken the Basic Assessment yet, now is the time to start preparing. If there are a few people interested, then I shall run a session on the practical aspects, opening a hive and talking through what you see etc. The syllabus can be obtained from the BBKA website. But I expect you to have done the required reading first. Sometimes people need the incentive of an assessment or exam to make the effort to read and find out more. The first module exam is well worth thinking about if you have at least 3 years experience under your belt, I know it made a huge difference to my understanding of beekeeping. It is a challenge though, requiring a lot of reading but you will learn so much and become a better beekeeper for it. The most difficult part I found was having to write fast and continuously for 90 minutes. I am not used to writing; we all have keyboards or dictate to Siri!

As for the bees this month, heft them (lift each side) to judge the weight of stores. It is an inaccurate and difficult thing to judge though. If you are unsure, try lifting a floor, a brood with empty frames and crownboard from your equipment store as a comparison. I normally take off the roof and eke and can then sometimes get my arms round to lift the lot (unless it is a brood and a half). If in any doubt that they have enough, it will not hurt them to crack open the lid on a windless day to see if there are frames with sealed stores, without disturbing the cluster. If they have cleaned out all around them you could move a full frame right next to the cluster. Failing that put some fondant in a plastic

pot inverted over the crown hole above the cluster. However, this means you seriously misjudged the colony or the honey they had or the amount of stores you gave them. Once started you need to check the fondant every 10-14 days to replenish or reconstitute if it has gone hard. I

also don't like feeding fondant as they have to make more risky trips outside to get more water to dissolve it than they would with honey or syrup, and also it would render ineffective the solid Celotex insulation I have sitting snugly over the crownboard, just when they would benefit most from the insulation. The queen will be starting to lay more seriously now and Jan and Feb are traditionally the colder months so insulation is of greater benefit. Up to now it has been warm enough for the bees to move around the hive to access food and being active they may be using more stores and I doubt whether there has been a brood break. I even saw pollen going in to one colony last week. It may have been from my *Viburnum bodnantense* which has just opened, and the *V. tinus* has fat buds soon to open. The snowdrop buds are above the ground too and crocus leaves so there will soon be some fresh pollen for them.

Continue to monitor regularly for dead bees blocking the entrance or on the floor, by peering through the entrance. Only one of my colonies has any dead outside and had a pile on the floor. All the others have none on the ground, so I suggest if you see many outside then you have a problem. I scraped the floor clear but they did not like it and it would have been better for them if I had instead quickly changed the floor for a clean one if there had been anyone around to help me lift the hive – which there wasn't! Because it has been mild so far the small number of bees normally dying all the time in the hive in winter could have been taken well away from the hive on the regular flying days. If we have a cold spell in January or February then this normal housekeeping will be prevented and when it becomes warmer again there will be a general sweeping out of the front door and a small pile of dead bees may be seen at the front, this would not necessarily indicate any abnormality. When you get a pile in mild weather is the time to worry! I would be very interested to know how many people used the Oxalic acid vapourisation at the end of December and how many mites were dropped – please do let me know.

Latest research

Young bees fed fresh pollen or fresh pollen substitute had normal beneficial bacteria in their gut and normal hypopharyngeal (brood food) gland development. Bees fed diets of old pollen suffered impaired development, increased mortality and developed a significant microbial imbalance in their gut with more nosema present.



Bumble bees' ability to buzz pollinate is innate not learned. One advantage is that they can make use of any new flower coming in to their area but it could also mean they could invade other areas and out compete native pollinators (as is known they do well in new areas such as when introduced to NZ).

I hope you all had a good Christmas and have been able to keep a few jars of honey for the Divisional honey show.

BASIC ASSESSMENT

Anyone interested in taking the Basic Assessment this summer, please let me know as soon as possible. If sufficient interest I will try to arrange a practical session. Early summer would be best to take the assessment, (it becomes more difficult when the hives have lots of supers on). The syllabus can be down loaded from the BBKA website along with the reading list. Contact me on:- amanda.millar.rf3@btinternet.com

Verroa hitches a ride

Manek Dubash alerted me to this You Tube item. Incidentally it is followed by a short LASI video. Both are worth watching. Heres the link:- <https://youtu.be/Oij1HOxD3iU>

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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