

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers Newsletter



March 2017

Editor: Norman Dickinson

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

In this Edition

We have a bumper edition this month with the regular Amanda Advises column, a preview of Dave Goulson's new book *Bee Quest* and his appearance on BBC Radio 4's *The Museum of Curiosity* plus Vita's new varroa grooming device *Bee Gym*. Photo Corner is a new feature which hopefully will become a regular feature but does rely on the membership sending in photos, bee related or otherwise. Gerald Legg has provided an interesting article from the NewScientist about drifting, bees that is not cars. There are also details of the SBKA AGM scheduled for 4th March together with snippets of information in Editors Corner.

Last Meeting 15th Feb - Bee Disease with Amanda Millar

The subject of this month's talk was Bee Disease and was given by Amanda Millar. Right from the start the emphasis was on how, as beekeepers, we should strive to maintain healthy bee colonies. Amanda listed several things that can have an adverse effect on our colonies, among them bee diseases, predators (including the Asian Hornet which has been sighted and eradicated at two locations in the UK last year), pesticides, climate change, where plant species are getting out of synchronisation causing lack of forage, and probably the most significant cause the beekeeper. All the preceding can lead to stress in the bee resulting in a lowered defence against disease. It was emphasised that all beekeepers have a duty of care to other beekeepers to maintain health colonies.

Amanda made the point that if possible we should try to encourage hygienic bees. There is evidence to suggest from recent studies of the bee genome that by breeding in the good traits, the bees own immune system can generate bacteria that will counteract some of the bee diseases. Traits such as bees grooming themselves and others to remove the likes of the varroa mite and sick bees leaving the hive to die should also be selected if possible.

In answer to the question, how do we keep our bees healthy, Amanda suggested that we should not overcrowd the apiary, try to keep hives well-spaced to prevent drifting [the drifting element does somewhat contradict a recent article in NewScientist which you can read on Page 3 of this newsletter. Editor] and there is mounting evidence to suggest that varroa level rise significantly when colonies are overcrowded. Beekeepers should pay particular attention to hygiene and sterilisation of their kit, a useful tip Amanda gave was to keep a container with diluted soda crystals to wash hive tool, gloves etc. between hive inspections. She also suggested that supers be numbered to each hive so as not to cross contaminate and stressed the importance to keep records updated, thus being able to monitor their health and know how they are progressing (or not). Amanda mentioned several times that if the colony is weak and unlikely to recover then we should cull them, hard as this may be.

Amanda went on to describe the various parasites that can adversely affect our bees, some of which can only be seen by dissection of the bee and viewing under a microscope. Varroa is probable the one parasite that most beekeepers

are familiar with and she described several methods of control including the use of chemicals and icing sugar. Most important to keep monitoring for varroa on a regular basis and treat accordingly. If Bald Brood is detected, then this could indicate that the bees have detected a serious varroa threat and are uncapping the brood to inhibit the varroa mite breeding.

This may be a sign of hygienic behaviour by the bees. Moving on to the foul broods, Amanda explained that generally, European Foul Brood is found in uncapped brood. If the larva is off-colour then suspect EFB, larva segments would normally be well defined in the cell. American Foul Brood generally only found in capped brood is also notifiable. It can be detected by sunken capping's, a good test is made by inserting a matchstick into the cell, twisting it and check for ropiness when drawing the matchstick back out. Both EFB and AFB are notifiable to the local Bee Inspector.

Her description of various viruses indicated that some can be attributable to poor hygiene by the beekeeper. Dysentery is something that beekeepers will come across from time to time, and worse case could require the colony to be culled. Chronic bee virus probably more common. This can be seen by the bees trembling, being lethargic, "K" wing and black & shiny abdomen. If one has a bad case, then the only option is to cull. Disease inspections should be carried out at least twice a year, and keep the apiary clean as well as gloves, boots, bee suits, hive tools etc. to prevent spread. Disinfect boxes each year. Following the talk Amanda, answered a number of questions, and all agreed that it had been a most informative evening, for which we thank Amanda very much.



Dave Goulson's new book *Bee Quest* and on BBC Radio 4

Listen to Professor Dave Goulson on BBC Radio 4's The Museum of Curiosity (Series 10, Episode 5), where he describes his experiences with the mating habit of the Death Watch Beetle.

Whilst on the subject of Dave Goulson, Amanda advises that he has a new book out called *Bee Quest*. A hunt for the world's most elusive bees leads Dave Goulson from the Salisbury plains to the Sussex hedgerows, from Poland to Patagonia. Whether he is tracking great yellow bumblebees in the Hebrides or chasing orchid bees through the Ecuadorian jungle, Dave Goulson's wit, humour and deep love of nature make him the ideal travelling companion. But perhaps *Bee Quest* is most magical when Dave Goulson explores closer to home, amongst the secret places hidden right under our noses: the abandoned industrial estates where great crested newts roam; or the rewilded estate at Knepp Castle, where, with the aid of some hairy, bluebell-eating Tamworth pigs, nightingale song has been heard for the first time in generations. This utterly charming book will inspire you to think about the ways in which we are all responsible for the future of our world. Through his scientific expertise and passion for conservation, Goulson shows us nature's resilience against the odds, and that beauty hides in the most surprising places. [Pre-orders for the book can be made at this link.](#)

Bee Gym

Vita are promoting a new patented device called The Bee Gym, which is a chemical free varroa grooming aid for use in the hive. It claims to encourage bees to "groom" themselves to rid them of the Varroa mite and uses a series of tensioned wires which the bee rubs against to remove mites from its back together with a number of "flippers and scrapers" that the bees use to remove mites from its abdomen. Vita further claim that "*with just a little help, bees could be taught how to more effectively groom off the varroa mite*" although they do not say what help for the bees is needed. Make you own mind up by visiting the [Bee GYM website](#).

Thank you to Amanda for pointing me in the direction of this. Editor

Membership Renewal

Members are reminded that membership renewal for Brighton and Lewes Bee Keepers was due on 1st January 2017. Membership benefits include BDI insurance and receiving the latest copies of this newsletter. A copy of the membership form is attached to this newsletter email. Completed copies of the form together with your fee payment can be done via email and bacs (details of our bank are on the form), or by post and cheque.

Beehives take in drifters in times of plenty - Gerald Legg

Honeybees may have a unique system for accepting migrants. 'Drifting' bees that wander into a hive may stay – if the guard bees see fit.

Such drift is common in apiaries, where hives are placed close together. A bee that drifts essentially migrates from its own hive to another, probably unintentionally.

Morgane Nouvian and her team at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, reviewed 161 papers on how honey bees defend their hives to get an overview of the phenomenon. They report that 10 to 15 per cent of honey bees take on nest-guarding roles, usually when 2 to 3 weeks old. Their main role involves detecting and dealing with predators, but they are also the first point of contact when drifting bees arrive.

In an inspection that can last half a minute, the guards check out chemical cues on the newcomer – typically hydrocarbons – that depend on hive-specific genetic factors and comb wax. If this profile matches or nearly matches that of their own hive, the guards will let the

drifter in. Around 30 per cent of drifting bees are allowed to stay.

A hive that is thriving is more welcoming, too. "It's interesting that when there are enough resources, for instance nectar near the hive, and fewer empty combs, guards allow in more non-nestmates," Nouvian says. There may not even be guards at the entrance in these circumstances.

Scarcity can shut these 'open borders' quickly. Guards not only reject newcomers at these time, but may even kill them, perhaps agitated by lack of food.

The guards are also adept at spotting bees that aim to steal honey. "We know now that these robber bees are detected by their flight patterns and speed," says Nouvian. "Guards can detect an incoming robber and sting it before it even reaches the nest."

[NewScientist 11 Feb 2017](#)

In next month's edition

How I came to love the buzz by Manek Dubash, tells the story of a new beekeepers first year keeping bees, reports on the last B+L indoor meeting this season with a talk by Bob Smith on varroa treatment using non-chemical controls and the Sussex BKA AGM hosted this year by the Eastbourne Division. Also included will be the regular Amanda Advises column and details of our forthcoming out apiary meetings and other significant events.

Amanda advises

This month I look forward to making the first full inspection of my colonies. I usually wait until there is a sunny, calm day with the temperature at least 12°C, preferably a couple of degrees more, usually first half of March. If any colonies are dead, seal them up immediately. The rest are likely to be smaller than in the autumn and it is a good time to remove any dark frames which are more or less empty of pollen, honey stores or brood. A pollen blocked frame can act as a barrier to the expansion of the brood area essential for the colony to strengthen. If the weather is not yet consistently warm then it would be best if you can replace these with a frame of sterilised drawn comb but always leave the colony in contact with stores on one side of the cluster at this time of year. If the weather is warm or the colony large then foundation can be used to replace the removed frames. Leave the insulation on to help them draw it out. If you have left them with a super of stores, and over winter they have moved up into it then you can remove the old empty brood box for recycling. When they are ready for more space and the weather is warm give them a clean brood box of foundation and as soon as quite a bit is drawn and the queen is laying in it then swap the boxes to get back to the standard configuration. I used to do this but found the different sized frames and swapping boxes a bit of a fiddle so often just keep them on supers now; less heavy lifting too. If they have not used all their stores then remove these frames before you add a super so the honey/syrup mix does not contaminate the summer honey. These sealed frames can be labeled and stored until autumn and given back to the colony they came off. Keep an eye on their stores and if they need more by now it should probably be warm enough for 1:1 syrup, just enough to keep them going until there are flowers around. At this time I make a start on swapping floors for clean sterilized ones, not having enough spare to do them all at once, and also take a pile of clean crownboards to replace any with lots of propolis or brace. Any mouseguards can be removed. Oh and if you have not yet got your wasp traps up, don't leave it too late.

I check the health of my colonies and based on that, finalise my assessment of which ones are best for breeding from, requeening or culling.

Get ready for shook swarms and Bailey exchange in April; use the first inspection to determine which is required on the basis of colony size, state of comb etc. Full instructions were given in the January issue of BBKA news

Have marker pen and scissors at your first inspection ready to mark and clip a new queen if you see her. You will be surprised how many supersedure queens are produced in the autumn. Also read through the swarm prevention and control instructions on the Brighton and Lewes beekeepers' website and have a spare hive ready. Swarms have been known to occur in late March. There is not much warning, apart from keeping

an eye on when they start producing drones, until then you need not worry too much about swarms.

I put an insert under one colony for a second time, as a mouse had messed up the first drop of a week, this time I had a striking example of the reason why we need to keep the insert in for a week in order to get a meaningful count. After 4 days I checked to make sure my mouse barrier had held and counted 22 mites (oh dear!) cleaned it off and put it in for the rest of the week - only 1 mite, resulting in a 23 mites in 7 days or about 3 a day, still serious but half a bad as if I had used the first figure of 22 in 4 days. An icing sugar dust a few days later produced 17, and a few days later 10 mites; reassuringly supporting the lower figure and not requiring any further treatment.

Incidentally, I have been reading about a new method of applying Oxalic acid, in glycerin, on a paper towel laid over the brood, being trialed in US. This is supposed to last a month before the bees remove it, thus spanning more than one brood cycle and obviating the need to remove brood. The bees seem to tolerate it better than trickle or vaporisation and it is less hazardous to us. Another slightly easier method is ground Oxalic crystals mixed with icing sugar and dusted on, being tried in Europe. Watch this space!

Latest Research:

Taktic, an Amitraz-containing mite treatment illegal in this country, is showing signs of resistance in the US and has been withdrawn from the market by the EPA. All chemical treatments have the potential of causing mite resistance, apparently even oxalic acid can, so it pays to keep an eye on how effective your chosen treatments are, and perhaps alternate between different treatments to keep the mites on their toes.

An unexpected sugary snack can give bumblebees a little buzz and appears to lift their mood, even making them optimistic, according to research that suggests pollinators have feelings, too. Researchers said their study lends support to "the notion that invertebrates have states that fit the criteria defining emotion."

An American horticultural institute has recently released a Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Bee Health in the Horticultural Industry. It is absolute rubbish! They say there is no scientific evidence that neonics harm pollinators etc. I wonder which sand-dune they have their heads buried in, or maybe an orange goblin has got to them, to protect his cronies in the chemical industry.



Next meeting - 15th March - Bob Smith - varroa control

Bob Smith NDB returns once again and will give a talk on shook swarms and the non-chemical treatment of varroa. If this is anything like his 8mm of Nothing talk in February last year then it will be well worth attending. Don't miss it.

Errata

In the last edition I incorrectly reported that Heather McNiven was the B+L Education Coordinator, when in fact Amanda Millar is the Education Coordinator. The date of the 2017 Sussex Festival of Bees takes place on 20th May at Heathfield Community College not 20th March as reported.

Items for Sale

National hive equipment to manage about 3 hives, so if a new bee keeper would like to take their pick (some brood boxes and supers are second hand and are not in great nick but the rest is fairly new). Also an extractor and other useful items. Any reasonable offers considered. Contact Penny Acton at acton.penny@gmail.com

Editors Corner

We are rapidly approaching Spring and the days are already staying lighter for longer. There are a number of tasks that need to be done in March.

- Check stores/emergency feeding
- Hive Records -Get the new sheets/book all ready
- Replacing brood boxes/floors/queen excluders and general cleaning up.
- Varroa monitoring and treatment with apiguard or similar (but not when supers are on)
- First inspection? Only if its warm and not too windy (about 13C)
- Queen clipping and marking - again, only if warm enough

Members who live within 2 miles of crop growing farmland may wish to register with BeeConnected, a new web-based communication system between farmers and beekeepers in order to receive alerts from local farmers in connection with insecticide spraying events. Registered beekeepers will receive emails from local farmers as to when spraying will occur, the crop being treated and the compound being applied thus allowing beekeepers to take the appropriate mitigating action.

Registration is free at www.beeconnected.org.uk. Once registered, log in to the site and enter details of your apiary site. Job done.

[It's Just Not Cricket](#) Many thanks to Lionel for this one.

Reminder SBKA AGM - 4th March, Herstmonceux Village Hall,

The 2017 SBKA Annual General Meeting will be hosted by the Eastbourne and District Division on 4th March 2017 - the venue is Herstmonceux Village Hall, Hailsham Road, Herstmonceux, BN27 4JX. Parking is available at the Hall. Link to the [Village Hall Website](#).

PROGRAMME

13:00 Hall Opens
13:15 Trade Stands
14:15 SBKA AGM
15:00 Dr Mike Williams - The bee sting, how it works and its effect on humans and particularly their immune system.
15:30 Anaphylactic Shock – Steve Rochester
16:00 Tea, Questions & Discussion
16:30 Managing Aggressive Colonies – Jonathan Coote
17:00 Questions
17:30 Close

SPEAKERS

Dr Mike Williams. Mike an East Sussex Hospital Group Consultant. He specialises in maxillofacial surgery and is a Royal College of Surgeons Examiner. He is an Eastbourne BKA member, manages 15 colonies, has completed 6 out of 7 modules and modestly aspires eventually to be a Master Beekeeper.

Steve Rochester. Steve is Head of Resuscitation at the East Sussex Hospital Trust and has dedicated his career to ensuring the survival of trauma victims.

Jonathan Coote is a Past President of the SBKA and Chairman of Eastbourne BKA.

TRADE STANDS

Mantell Farm – a small-scale family business selling poultry and bee equipment.
The Bee People - Keeping bees and supplying equipment to beekeepers since 1984

Photo Corner



Elena, near Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria. Photo by Hilary Osman



More from the B+L 2017 Honey Show. Photos by Lionel Ruben

Divisional Diary 2016/7

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

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

Out Apiary meetings

22nd April - Grassroots with Amanda: hive opening and inspecting

14th May - Bob Curtis's Woodingdean: splitting hives and swarm control

For your diary

4th March - SBKA AGM hosted by the Eastbourne & District Division. Details on page 4 of this newsletter.

7th to 9th April - BBKA Spring Convention. [Details available on the BBKA website.](#)

20th May - Sussex Festival of Bees, Heathfield Community College.

8th to 10th June - South of England Show, 50th anniversary of this great show.

25th 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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