Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers Newsletter

Volume 1 - January 2018

Editor: Norman Dickinson

BRIGHTON AND LEWES DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

Next winter meeting

Wednesday 17th January 2018 - AGM, B&L Honey Show and Amanda's quiz night

B&L Membership Renewal

The B&L membership renewal is due at the end of December and a copy of the renewal form is attached to the covering email for this newsletter. Completed form and subscription should be sent to Pat Clowser, full details are on the form. Please note that there is an additional tick box this year to confirm members registration on BeeBase, if you have not previously registered then please do so now.

SBKA 2018 Spring Meeting and AGM

The SBKA 2018 Spring Meeting and AGM is being hosted by the High Weald Division on Saturday, 3rd March 2018 and will be held in the Broad Oak (Heathfield) Village Hall, TN21 8SS. High Weald are in the process of finalising the speakers and will be publishing full details in due course.

Beekeeping Tuition 2018 with Amanda Millar

Amanda Millar, Brighton and Lewes Education Coordinator, will be running two tuition days, on 8th and 29th April 2018, in Hurstpierpoint. If you are thinking of getting bees or have recently got some, this course will provide you with the essential information to get you started.

The course will cover Bee biology and behaviour, hive types and important beekeeping techniques, how to keep bees healthy and recognize diseases, pests and problems. The importance of bee plants and forage, harvesting honey and other bee products. Weather permitting, we will be opening a hive. Email Amanda for further details on Amanda.millar.rf3@btinternet.com

Amanda will also be running several two-day courses to cover the above in more detail, these will be held at Mantel Farm, Battle, further details on their website. If you are interested in doing the Basic Assessment in 2018 or any modules please contact Amanda.

Sussex Beekeepers Association 2017 Annual Convention

The annual SBKA Convention was held on Saturday, 25th November 2017 at the Uckfield Civic Centre and was well attended by members across the Association. The first speaker was Dr. John Feltwell who gave a most informative, and sometimes frightening talk on the Asian Hornet. B&L Members would recognise the subject matter as that given by John at the B&L October winter meeting, although there was a lot of information that updated the talk given in October. John's conclusion however was the same and that is that the Asian Hornet will establish itself in the UK Mainland, and it's all just a matter of time as to when this will happen.

As an update to the above, the NBU sent out an email to all registered beekeepers just before Christmas as an update on the Asian Hornet outbreak in Woolacombe in September 2017. For those Members who are not registered I include this update as below.

Please click the following red link to view an image of an Asian hornet sighting in Woolacombe hawking in front of beehives .

Following suspect sightings, on Sunday 24th September the NBU received two photographs from a beekeeper in Woolacombe, North Devon, of an Asian hornet. The following day, the 25th September, preliminary surveillance began in the apiary and the NBU's Contingency Plan was activated. The local Bee Inspector monitored the apiary and initially found surveillance difficult due to the position of the colonies in the apiary. However, that morning, the Inspector managed to capture a hornet and sent the sample to the NBU in Sand Hutton for formal identification. Later that afternoon, the Inspector returned to the apiary site and a further 7 hornets were seen hawking in front of hives, but no line of sight could be ascertained, to establish a flight path back to the nest.

On the 26th September, South West Region inspectors were deployed to intensify searches for Asian hornets hawking in the area. Wet, misty and murky morning weather conditions were not ideal, but the Inspectors continued to survey the original outbreak apiary and two lines of sight were established. Inspectors were able to identify a second apiary site about 1km from the original outbreak, where one hornet was seen hawking for returning foraging bees. A hornet sample was taken, in order to establish if the hornets visiting the second apiary site were from the same nest and thus determine if there were multiple nests in the area.

Hornets were also observed in an apiary at a further site and were seen flying in a similar line of sight. The lines of sight from both the outbreak apiary and the second apiary combined were enough for an initial triangulation to be taken and investigated. The Inspectors began investigating public footpaths and the area around where the lines of sight met at the triangulation. A great deal of Asian hornet activity was observed at a nearby building site and on 27th September an Asian hornet nest was discovered.

The nest was destroyed the following evening, removed and taken to the Fera lab (Sand Hutton, York) on Friday 29th Sept. Further surveillance was carried out within a 10 km zone of the nest site and no further Asian hornet activity was detected. Following analysis of the nest has shown that none of the adult hornets were male and this indicates that the nest was detected and removed before the production of queens which will have gone into winter and then produced nests in 2018.

Additionally, if you are interested in finding out more details of the Tetbury outbreak in 2016, including genetic analysis of the hornets origin, this can be found in the PLoS One publication: Budge GE, Hodgetts J, Jones EP, Ostoja Starzewski JC, Hall J, Tomkies V, et al. (2017) The invasion, provenance and diversity of Vespa velutina Lepeletier (Hymenoptera: Vespidae) in Great Britain. PLoS ONE 12(9): e0185172. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185172.

Nikki Gammans was the next speaker who gave a captivating talk on the plight of the bumblebee and gardening for pollinators. She explained that there are three main species of bee, the Honey Bee, Solitary Bee and Bumblebee and briefly described the lifecycle for the Solitary and Bumblebee, noting that the solitary bee will only live for 4-8 weeks but is a far more efficient pollinator than the Honey Bee. In the UK we did have 27 species of bumblebee but 3 of these have now gone extinct and Nikki's project is to re-introduce one of the extinct species using Scandinavian bees. There are 250 species of bumble worldwide, most of which are in and around the Himalayas and China, which is where the bumblebee originated from and is why they very efficient at low temperatures and have even been known to forage in the snow. The greatest threat to the bumblebee is loss of forage, and one of the aims of the of the Bumblebee Conservation is to educate the populace, especially farmers, with the need to provide suitable forage in the form of wild flower meadows or field boundaries. Nikki post talk had selections of books, leaflets and wildflower seeds available for those interested in helping the bumblebee.

Our final speaker before lunch was Dr. Mike Williams, an East Sussex Hospital Group Consultant specialising in maxillofacial surgery and a Royal College of Surgeons Examiner, who gave a fascinating and captivating talk on the bee sting and the various effects that it has on the human body. He first described how the bee stings, what the anatomy of the sting was and the general chemical make-up of the venom injected into the body. This was followed by a discussion of the bodily reaction to the venom and the process by which the immune system attempts to fight the infection. Finally he described the effect that the venom can have on the body, ranging from swelling and pain at the affected part through to anaphylactic shock which has the potential to kill and what can be done to ease the effect. This was followed by a robust Q&A session and lunch.

After lunch Roger Patterson entertained us with his take on a simple approach to Bee Improvement and directed the audience to the Dave Cushman website which Roger manages following Dave's death and which contains a wealth of beekeeping information. Roger emphasised throughout his talk that the best teachers are the bees themselves and that as beekeepers we must interpret what they are telling us. Bee Improvement should really require the beekeeper raising Queens based on the traits that each individual requires, whether this be honey production, less likely to swarm, temperament etc. and Roger places good behaviour as the No.1 trait that as beekeepers we should be aiming for.
Roger practices simple management techniques, does not advocate complicating things *(Keep it Simple Stupid - KISS. Ed)* and with most of what he does being based on experience. In Rogers opinion, there is a lot of complicated and irrelevant information both on the Internet and elsewhere, most of which

should be taken with a generous pinch of salt. At the start of the season, beekeepers must have a plan of what they are striving for, whether this be maximising honey production, increasing the number of colonies etc. however the beekeeper must be prepared to adjust the plan as the season progresses. Don't be afraid to re-queen if the traits you are aiming for is not being achieved. Don't forget that for most of us, beekeeping is a hobby and above all beekeeping should be fun.

The final speaker of the day was Bob Smith NDB whose subject was Managing the Workers, subtitled 'Maintaining Industrial Relations and Avoiding Disputes'. Bob first statement was that the beekeeper is in charge, has a huge responsibility to the bees in his/her care as well as to other beekeepers and must work together with his/her bees. One should recognise that whatever each beekeeper does or does not do can have an impact on beekeepers local to ones apiary, i.e. transmission of disease etc., a good example being the introduction of the Varroa Mite in the 1990's.

A defining feature of our beekeeping which we must recognise is the provision of suitable stores and conditions such as to enable the colonies to get through winter, unlike bees in warmer climes which would have forage available throughout the year. As spring approaches and the Queen commences laying, there is a rapid expansion of the colony, which if the beekeeper does not / cannot recognise will lead to the colony swarming. Once the swarming period is over, the bees naturally build food stores for the forthcoming winter, which we beekeepers then take as a honey crop, so we must ensure that conditions are right for the colony to survive winter, and so the cycle continues. All the above is called 'reading the bees' together with an understand where in the cycle they are. There are five reasons for opening and inspecting a hive, these are 1) Is it Queen right? 2) Has it got enough space? 3) Is it healthy? 4) Are the stores OK? and 5) Is it thinking about swarming? We need to look for these, identify where in the cycle the bees are then decide how we will react to this information bearing in mind that as managers of the bees, are they doing what we require of them. As part of this process it is important to maintain good record keeping, as the past records will be a good indication of what was done in order to guide the bees down the path we wish for them to take and are we achieving it. If we are then fine, otherwise further steps need to be taken to meet our goal.

Everything discussed so far indicates that we have a plan for our bees, i.e. how many colonies do we intend to have next year, are we going into queen rearing this year, do we want improved honey production so these would be our objectives. To manage our bees effectively we must have this plan otherwise we are just following what the bees want to do and not what we want them to do.

Managing the health of our bees is paramount to what we do, ensure we have clean suits, gloves and equipment. When inspecting the hives, have an understanding of what you are looking for, i.e. condition of larvae, sealed brood etc, and act immediately, especially if one of the foul broods is suspected. If in doubt, contact your local Bee Inspector.

In summary, beekeepers are managers of their bees so should be steering the bees in the direction they want to go, not as the bees want. This will be in accordance with The Plan. Good beekeepers observe so take time to look into the colonies and try to understand what the bees are doing. Keep clothing and equipment clean to prevent spread of disease and finally, enjoy your beekeeping.

Report by Norman Dickinson

Nikki Gammans

Photo by Norman Dickinson

Bob Smith NDB

Photo by Norman Dickinson

Amanda advises

At this time of year, we cannot see what the bees are up to except by observing the entrance or briefly lifting the crownboard. The 20 colonies I am currently looking after are all reacting differently, probably related to their genetic make-up, colony size and disease states. In the course of ridding them of mites by dusting, and therefore opening most of them twice a week in November I have seen some in a tight quiet cluster, others are loosely clustered and active. Some are low down in the hive and I have to take the heavy super off to find them. One large colony is right at the top and is active throughout the top box. It does not feel as heavy as I would like so it is the only one I have put fondant on. Randy Oliver suggests that colonies awake and active under the lid in winter, have a problem, whereas a tight cluster in the lower box are more successful. See *colony build up and decline part 13c* on his Scientific Beekeeping website. He also suggests that the long lived winter bees are the ones in the outer shell, not doing much apart from insulating the inner. The inner bees, heater bees and those feeding brood will wear out more quickly. The least efficient temperature is 13-16 deg outside, not warm enough to forage, too warm to cluster, but warm enough to have to maintain a brood nest. The last couple of weeks it has generally been between 3 and 8 degrees, so I am hoping they will have been in a quiet, energy conserving cluster. Yesterday (20th December) the weather changed to about 10 degrees and the forecast is this for the next few days. Mine were all noisily flying round their entrances this morning, apart from one which I will take a look in tomorrow. It is a small one which always seems to be in a tighter cluster than the others so I expect they are OK, just have a different light/temperature threshold for activity. Do check the entrances are free of dead bees as they will not have been able to do any housework for a few cold weeks, but will now be trying to tidy up the inevitable casualties and could block the entrance as they have trouble getting them through mouseguards sometimes. Colonies with many mites and viruses may show up with more dead on the floor or in front of the entrance.

Although the recent weather up to now has been rather too cold or wet and or windy to open the bees to do any oxalic acid treatment, I trust you have monitored and know whether they require any mite treatment. The queen will probably at minimum laying level after this cold weather but by mid January, regardless of the weather, she will increase her laying and their food requirements will increase as they will need to generate more heat. So now it is important to monitor food levels by hefting (lifting one side then the other an estimating weight of stores), help them keep the brood warm by putting a bit of insulation over the crownboard, and getting your oxalic treatment done soon if they need it.

Apart from some frames to scrape and boil up and my smoker, most of my equipment is clean and sterilised. I must check through all my drawn supers though, to catch any wax moth.

Research and in the News:

Homebase have finally agreed to stop using neonics on their plants and stop selling them by the end of 2018. All the top ten garden centres have banned them (or will have by end 2018) so don't rush out and buy plants yet!

On 12/13th December EU member states should have voted on whether to extend the ban on outdoor uses of 3 neonics, unfortunately the vote has been delayed until new year now. Meanwhile 88% rivers in the UK have been found to be chronically polluted with neonics, which lingers in the soils so will be years before the levels decrease.

While it has been known for a while that fungicides, esp chlorothalonil (an organochlorine pesticide) act synergistically with insecticides to harm bees, recent research has demonstrated that it specifically relates to increases in the bumblebee pathogen *Nosema bombi*, and is linked to range contraction of several bumblebee species in the US.

Breaking news, flowers have been found to have heat patterns, which bumblebees and probably other bees can detect. This increases further the sophistication of the relationship between plants and their pollinators. Already known are the electrostatic fields which bees use to navigate round flowers, fragrances and colours and UV 'honey guides' plants use to attract their pollinators. All these senses are ones which, apart from colour, we are pretty useless at detecting.

If you have not taken the Basic Assessment now is the time to start preparing. If there are a few people interested, then I shall run a session on the practical side, opening a hive and talking through what you see etc. Let me know. The syllabus can be obtained from the BBKA website. But I expect you to have done the required reading first.

Woodchips still needed! Don't forget if you have any wood chips to spare, I would like to replace the weed infested material at Grassroots, drop me an email or give me a ring if you have some and I will meet you at the apiary and help you unload.

WSBKA Annual Convention

The WSBKA will be holding their Annual Convention on Saturday, 24th February 2018 at the Lodge Hill Centre, Watersfield, Pulborough, West Sussex, RH20 1LZ. They will have a renowned group of speakers and an impressive mix of lectures and seminars, which should be of interest for everyone.

A simple lunch will be included and there will be many opportunities to catch up with fellow beekeepers from around the county and beyond. As always, Paynes Southdown Bee Farms will bring a range of equipment and books to the Convention for you to purchase.

There are 3 main lectures:-
'What's going on in my hive' by Gerry Collins
'Medicinal Apitherapy' by Dr. Gerry Brierley
'Use of light to reverse effects of Neonicotinoids on Bees' by Professor Glen Jeffery

In addition to the main lecture, there is a choice of two seminars:-

Seminar 1 (you can attend one of these)
1) 'Curse of the Wax Moth' – Gerry Collins
2) 'Requeening & Queen Introduction' – Jean Mozley
3) 'Up Close and Dangerous' – Claire Waring

Seminar 2 (you can attend one of these)
4) 'Bee Diseases: Identification & Control' – Sandra Gray
5) 'Swarm Control, My Way' – Jean Mozley
6) 'Big Bees, little Bees & Bees that don't Sting' – Claire Waring

Advance booking per person, WSBKA members £22
Members of other Associations and non-members £27
On the day if space allows £27

Full details, including speaker profiles, are on the website www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/convention.html with a Booking Form to download or contact Gordon Allan on 01798 343470 or email wsbkaconvention@gmail.com

They are hoping for record numbers to attend and encourage you to book early to ensure that you secure a place on your preferred seminar.

Divisional Diary 2017/8

Indoor Meetings: 7:15 for 7:30pm on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, October to March at Cliffe church hall, Lewes, unless otherwise stated. Members are invited to arrive early and assist in putting out chairs. Non-members are always welcome.

Summer Programme

Our summer programme of out apiary meetings will resume in the Spring of 2018

Winter Programme

Indoor meetings

~~Wed 27th September: The Inspector Calls with David Rudland~~
~~Wed 18th October: The Asian Hornet with John Feltwell~~
~~Wed 15th November: Mead Making with Steve Gibson~~
Wed 17th Jan 2018: AGM followed by a quiz with Amanda and the B&L Annual Honey Show
Wed 21st Feb: The Effect of Bee Stings on Humans with Mike Williams
Wed 21st March: Skep Beekeeping with Chris Parks

For your diary

~~6th to 28th Oct - 86th National Honey Show, Sandown Park Racecourse, KT10 9AJ.~~
~~Sat 25th November - Sussex Beekeepers' Association Annual Convention, Uckfield Civic Centre.~~
Sat 24th February 2018 - WSBKA Annual Convention, Lodge Hill Centre, Watersfield, West Sussex.
Sat 3rd March 2018 - Sussex Beekeepers' Association Spring Meeting and AGM, Broad Oak Village Hall.
8th April & 29th April - B&L Tuition days in Hurstpierpoint aimed at new beekeepers (and others!)
Sat 19th May 2018 - Sussex Beekeeper Association Festival of Bees, Heathfield Community College.

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, including photos, to the newsletter (max 900 words) can be sent, preferably by email, to the editor see panel above for details
Photos etc. for the website should be emailed to our webmaster, see panel above.

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