Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

If you know your veg, then you'll recognise the plant in the image above as sugar beet. It's the plant which attracted huge publicity (including here) because the Government decided to lift a ban on neonicitinoid pesticides, substances shown in lab tests to affect bee health.

The Government said that an application by the sugar industry for its use was 'an emergency authorisation'.

A range of experts and the BBKA condemned the decision and urged a reversal of course. In the end, the Government backed down, saying that there was no need to lift the ban.

What this demonstrates is the power of publicity. It also shows how little joined-up thinking goes on at the highest levels. The sugar industry—like tobacco before it—has much to answer for when it comes to encouragement of behaviour likely to damage our health. Obesity is a growing problem that not only damages the health of individuals but also cost the hard-pressed NHS £6.1 billion between 2014-15.

So the Government called the sugar industry's problem 'an emergency'.

But this month, we hear that the Healthy Bee Plan 2030, set up by Defra, wants beekeeper input (see news pages). If deadly pesticides are to be unleashed into the environment after a bit of lobbying by a major industry with, it would appear from the outside, little thought about wider issues, what hope is there for this plan that purports to improve the health of honey bees—or any other species of bee, for that matter? Where is the joined-up thinking?

Rant over.

Mentored

Finding the queen has been a problem for me, but B&L Secretary Hilary Osman came to my rescue and helped me with my first inspection recently. I'm down from three to two colonies but we managed to find both queens seemingly happy and healthy—and I spotted one of them first.

Thank you Hil!

NEWSLETTER
MAY 2021

EVENTS

- Out-apiary meetings about every two weeks.
- BBKA & BIBBA events
- See p16 for all details

NEXT MONTH

- Summer hints and tips
- Your contributions
- Apiary reports
- Committee news
- Asian Hornet update
- News updates
- From around the web

CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE?

Do you have interesting photos or video links you'd like to share? Or an insight from your beekeeping that would could enhance the hobby for others? Do you have skills that could be useful to other members? Anything else you'd like to see in this newsletter? Ideas and contributions welcome: all contact details are on the back page.

ONLINE

brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

QR link to our website

Seasonal tips for May

I have just seen a warning from the BBKA that there are cases of European foulbrood in some areas, and that due to the present cold weather conditions (writing this in mid-April) the bees might be hungry.

Come May, things should be warmer. If not, open the roof and examine the crown board. If there are bees in the bee escapes there are probably a lot of bees inside. If there is brace comb in the bee escapes and/or bees walking around on the crown board, then put a queen excluder on and a super of drawn comb, then replace the lid until such time as the temperatures rise and you can inspect properly.

Is it warm enough to fully inspect? The exact temperature depends on many factors, including wind, but 14°C or above should be OK.

Disease

Check for European foulbrood (EFB) on each inspection. As you will see from this article, once the infection is advanced there may bee signs of robbing which then leads to other hives being infected with material that has been robbed. Examine the images below to get a good idea of what EFB looks like.

Foulbroods are notifiable and one of the reasons that you have Bee Disease Insurance. If you suspect that your hives have foulbrood you must inform the Bee Inspectors, they will come to confirm, and then talk through the options with you.

Our Seasonal Bee Inspector is Diane Steele, whose details can be found on the back page.

I spend time weeding the dandelions out of my grass, but bees use this for pollen and nectar source early in the season

Feeding and watering

Normally at this time of year we would feed syrup but it might be easier to use fondant at this time. Just put it over the crown board for the bees to come through or place directly on the frames with an eke under the roof to allow the bees access to the feed.

The colonies will be taking water from any source to dilute food stores and to feed the growing brood.

At the Hove Apiary we have supplied the hives with two pots of compost which are soaking up rainwater, and wetted with rainwater on each of my visits. This allows the water carriers to safely suck up water and return to the hive without using too much energy, so that they can provide waiting bees with water for their jobs around the hive.

Now would be a good time to make a bee beach or bee café, you might like to delegate or make it yourself!

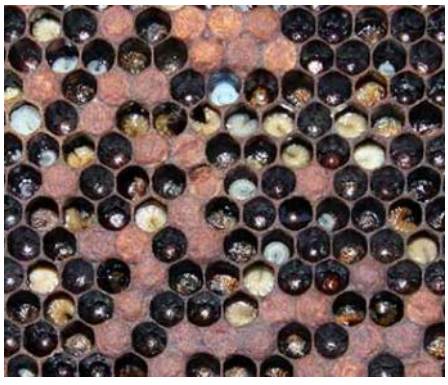
I have bee beaches in my garden made from pot saucers with gravel and moss and topped up with rainwater. The saucer is shallow so dries up quickly.

Bees like warm water and a reliable supply. They will find any water source and use it (my neighbours tell me the bees have been using their swimming pool) they use our pond and I have seen them gather around a dripping tap.

Bees seem to prefer warm water so I leave the bee beach in a sunny position. I spend time weeding the dandelions out of my grass, but bees use this as a pollen and nectar source early in the season, so maybe put dandelions in the pot, as the video attached suggests. Lavender is a particularly good source of pollen and nectar for the bees. Sunshine helps the plants to produce nectar, so leave the pot in a sunny space and watch the bees come.

If you add the fruit then other pollinating insects will be attracted, just remember to replace it frequently.

Jude New



All three images: close-ups of cells suffering from the European foulbrood bacterium *Melissococcus plutoniu*.

Swarm control

May is the month that bees start to think about swarming—so much of your work this month is likely to involve swarm prevention and control.

It is natural for colonies to swarm but if you want a honey harvest you need to manage the inclination. People talk about swarmy bees and non-swarmy bees, but in my experience they all swarm at some time, so be prepared. In the words of the Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy 'Don't Panic'.

Back when I was in the construction industry, we were taught about the fire triangle or combustion triangle. It is a simple model for understanding the necessary ingredients for most fires and illustrates the three elements a fire needs to ignite: heat, fuel, and an oxidising agent (usually oxygen). A fire naturally occurs when the elements are present and combined in the right mixture.

Swarm components

Claire and Adrian Waring proposed a similar model for the swarm. The three elements of a swarm are.

- A queen
- Brood and nurse bees
- Flying bees

In the fire model, if you remove one element from the equation then the fire can't ignite, so if you remove one element from the swarm equation, the bees can't leave the hive.

Early 2021 swarm. Photo: Ken Isted

Sounds simple doesn't it?

A colony will not usually swarm until there are drones for the new queens to mate with, so if you can't see drone cells, they're not ready to swarm. Once drone cells are visible and the hive starts to become congested, about seven to ten seams of bees, then if you have not already put a super on do so now. There will be a lot of flying bees and they need somewhere to put their nectar and pollen.

Swarm to-do list

Start looking awfully hard for the preparation of queen cells. Not to be confused with supersedure cells or emergency cells, which will be covered in a later article. Queen cells will usually be built at the bottom of the frame and will be built down towards the floor and once complete will look like a peanut shell.

I said 'look hard', and 'usually', because they can be built on the sides of the frame or between unevenly drawn comb. They start life as small cups, and it's at this stage you need to start making your plan.

Once a queen cell is big enough the queen will lay an egg in it; make sure you have the equipment necessary for your plan.

Next the egg will hatch, and the nurse bees will flood the cell with royal jelly; now is the time to act as you only have a couple of days until the cell is sealed, and once that happens the hive will have usually swarmed.

Knocking the queen cells down will not stop them swarming. It is therefore particularly important that you inspect your bees on a weekly basis during the swarm season. Not so bad for us retired folk but if you're working, you can't afford to miss an inspection even if the weather is not conducive or the family intervenes.

Development timeline

The timeline of a queen's development goes like this:

- Day 1, the egg is laid
- Day 4, the egg hatches and the larva starts to be fed royal jelly
- Day 8, the cell is sealed, and the old queen and half the bees will swarm
- Days 9-15, the new queen pupates
- Day 16, The new queen hatches

Separating the colony

So, back to our swarm model and your plan. There are various ways of separating the elements of a swarm (see the artificial swarm diagram on), some of them are quite straightforward and some are like 'Find the Lady' in some carnival side show; what most of the methods require is that you find the queen.

You can separate the queen and the flying bees from the brood and nurse bees creating an artificial swarm. By

(Continued on page 4)

Swarm!

Walking them in. Photo: Ken Isted

Swarm control (continued)

leaving the queen in the original hive, in the original position and moving the brood and nurse bees to a different hive and location.

Remember, you need to ensure the brood and nurse bees have enough stores to see them through until they develop enough foragers to sustain themselves. They also need the ability to create a new queen, so leave one queen cell intact to develop into the new queen or have at least one frame in the hive with the eggs or larvae in the right stage for the remaining bees to develop a new queen.

The nuc alternative

Alternatively, you can create a nucleus with the queen and a couple of frames of brood, nurse bees and stores. Remember to feed this nucleus as there will be no foragers for quite a while.

Again, you will have left at least queen cell intact or have one frame in the original hive with the eggs or larvae in the right stage for the remaining bees to develop a new queen.

Is finding the queen essential?

What happens if you can't find the queen?

Split the hive into two nucleus boxes. with an equal distribution of brood (in all stages) and nurse bees. Shake a few extra frames full of nurse bees into one of the nucs. Remove all the queen cells from both nucs. Leave the nuc with the depleted number of nurse bees in the original position to catch all the flying bees and move the other one to a different location and in a different orientation to the original.

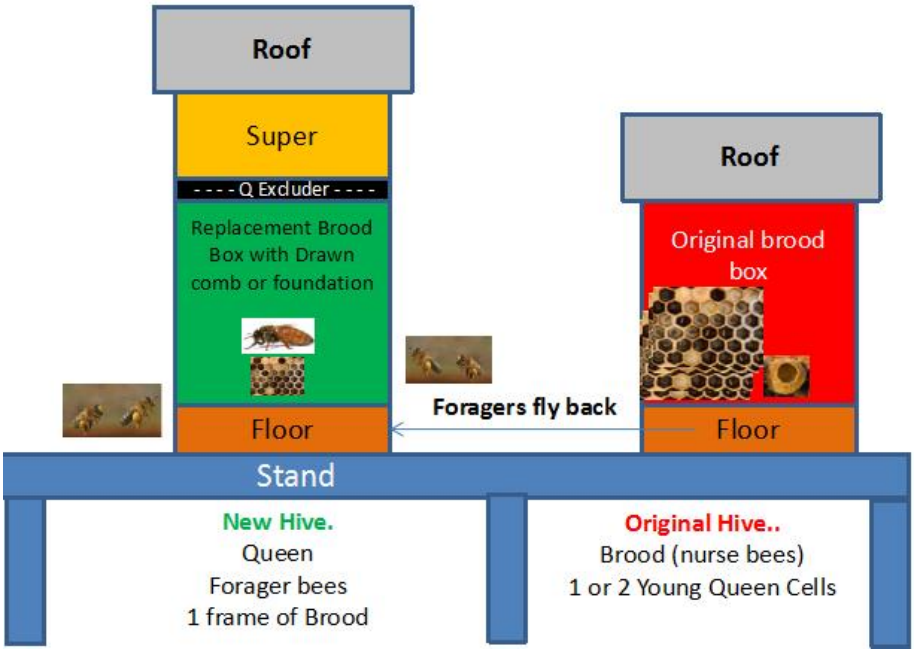
What you have now created is a combination of the artificial swarm and the nucleus method. The nuc with the queen think it has swarmed and will settle down to expand, while the one without the queen will create a new queen cell and raise a new queen.

You will need to inspect this nuc to make sure there is only one queen cell, otherwise it can create lots of casts as the queen cells hatch until the nuc becomes unviable.

If nothing else, see this as an opportunity. On the one hand, it will help you develop your bee husbandry and confidence. On the other, you have the opportunity to harvest those spare (not unwanted) queen cells and create other nucs for future expansion or to start your own selection and breeding programme.

Told you it was simple. Remember, every day is a school day.

Ian White



Artificial swarm

Find the queen

Inside two queen cells with royal jelly

Peanut-shaped queen cell

Norman Dickinson
Chairman

Words from the Chair

In my April Chairman's Report I was very enthusiastic about our forthcoming out-apiary meetings. Unfortunately due to the continuing cold spell of weather we decided to cancel the meetings at Hove and Piddinghoe scheduled for Saturday 17 April. Our next meeting for both sites is scheduled for Sunday 2 May, but at present it looks like the cold spell will continue into the beginning of May, with the BBC Weather Centre predicting a maximum of 12°C on the day. We will of course continue to monitor the forecast and advise closer to the day.

On 21 April 2021, an amendment to the Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006 comes into force requiring beekeepers and/or officials to report the presence of varroa in any of the hives that they manage. This amendment will allow England to comply with the Animal Health Law which is necessary for future working relationships with the European Union. Similar arrangements are being made in Wales and Scotland.

To make this simple, a tick box on your BeeBase apiary entry allows beekeepers to report the presence or absence of varroa. Note that this is checked by default, which is sensible. This is another good reason why we encourage all B&L members to register their apiaries and colonies with BeeBase.

By registering on BeeBase you will also receive other useful information from them. If you have not yet registered, please do so here.

Your Committee is also looking into a number of different initiatives to help and assist our members, some of which by their very nature will be long-term, and as we finalise each of them we will be advising you as to what each are and how they will affect every one of us. Check the news pages

I am pleased to be able to advise you that as a beekeeping Division we are still picking up new members together with a trickle now of existing members still renewing for 2021. To date, we have picked up 33 new members for 2021 with 39 members who have either cancelled their membership or have allowed it to lapse for 2021, giving a total membership of 148 up to the 20th April 2021. If 2020 is anything to go by, we can probably expect a further 10, either new or renewing members, before year's end.

Hilary Osman
Secretary

Your Committee at work

Firstly, thank you to the 23 members, yes just 23 members, who replied to the questionnaire we sent out last month. It's been a very useful exercise for us.

With this information, we have managed to gain a few more mentors to partner up with the vast number of new beekeepers which have joined Brighton and Lewes Beekeepers Division. It would also seem that many of you would just like to 'get in' with some hands-on experience, trying to find the queen and how to mark her.

So mentors and mentees have been partnered up, but committee members are always ready to answer your questions and of course there is always the Facebook page as a place to look for help from someone local.

It was a shame that the first out-apiary meeting for the new beekeepers was cancelled due to the cold weather, but look at it today (19 April), sunny and warm. The drones are in the hives and bee numbers are building up, swarms maybe just around the corner so do some splits of your hives!

Judith is working on a bee improvement group and I am sure that there is something about this in the newsletter this month *[There is! See the news pages. Ed.]*. We all want good tempered bees, who are less swarmy, and who do not fly up into the air as soon as the crown-board is removed.

Bob is planning the winter meetings (yes, already), and we are hoping for both Zoom and face-to-face meetings. And even if it's a Zoom meeting, it is still possible to have a bee chat afterwards with a cuppa *[or a glass of something stronger! Ed]*, with the other attendees.

You may have seen that beekeepers are now obliged to tick a box on the BeeBase site to state whether or not we have varroa in our hives. I thought that this was an April Fool joke when I first saw it, but this 'will allow England to comply with the Animal Health Law which is necessary for future working relationships with the European Union'.

So lets get out and look at our bees, it's sunny today.

Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator

Asian hornet report

Asian hornet queens are being blown from France onto the Channel Islands, specifically Jersey. Local Asian hornet co-ordinators have noted that when winds blow from the mainland, they see more Asian hornet queens in their traps. They've found 15 so far this year, and counting.

This non-native, invasive species is knocking on our door and, if we are not vigilant, it will establish itself here all too easily. That's what happened in France.

Spreading of the hornet

The Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) is now endemic in France, the location of the accidental import of one or more Asian hornet queens some 15 years ago. The insect remained undetected until its expanding population became too big to eradicate.

The only strategy that then had a chance of succeeding was containment.

Unfortunately, the authorities did not take the problem seriously enough and the hornet spread throughout most of the country. Only in the north-east, where the climate is both coolest and most variable, do the numbers of nests fluctuate, reducing after cold winters and/or summers, returning when its warms up.

Beekeepers in France and now both northern Spain and Portugal are paying the price for that negligence.

And not just beekeepers. Because the insect follows human populations, where it prefers to site its primary nests because human dwellings with their nooks and crannies are warm, sheltered and usually near water, the general public is increasingly coming into accidental, often unpleasant, and occasionally fatal, contact with *V. velutina*.

Consequently, budgets for research and improved measures to detect and eliminate nests have stepped up in recent years. There are signs that counter-measures can be effective but right now, they are few and far between, although research continues.

That's the situation we could face here and, as I've mentioned in previous reports, we are in the firing line near the coast. As Covid measures relax and cross-Channel traffic increases, sooner or later queens will smuggle themselves into caravans and motorhomes—typical places they hide—and start building nests here.

At the risk of crying wolf, we once more need to put up traps, making them non-lethal as the by-catch can be considerable.

At this stage of their lifecycle, Asian hornet queens are vulnerable and are looking for sugary substances as energy for building a primary nest and then laying eggs to start a colony.

By the summer, their daughters will be looking for protein to feed the growing numbers of larvae. The thoraxes of honey bees, usually those of foragers returning to the hive, form the largest single component of their diet, largely because the bees are plentiful and defenceless.

Let's not let them get that far. Eyes peeled.

FROM AROUND THE WEB

We research the web so you don't have to.

- M&S faces backlash over plan to release 30m honeybees. Conservationists warn the initiative of ecosystem damage.
- BBKA History - post war changes. How the BBKA has changed over the last 70 years or so.
- Sir John Lubbock's pet wasp (video). Mentored by Charles Darwin, Lubbock not only kept a pet wasp but the insect was of so much interest that it received an obituary in the national press, the only wasp we know of to get an obit.
- New Scientist: Bees exposed to growing levels of toxicity from pesticides over 25 years
- New Scientist: Nearly 500 bee species are thriving in a small patch of US desert
- Study deems hive boxes draughty and inefficient. Researcher says hives are designed for the human first, with the bee a vague afterthought
- Honey bees rally to their queen using pheromone relays. It's how swarms stay together.
- Rolls-Royce recruits volunteer beekeepers for Goodwood Apiary
- Honey bees can find landmines with the help of drones. Analysts in Croatia have improved how honey bees are used as landmine locators.
- Nuclear fallout is showing up in U.S. honey, decades after bomb tests
- 'All she talks about is bees' – Samson Kayo and Jane Horrocks on their new sitcom Bloods
- Using honey bees to prevent human-elephant conflict in India
- Researchers to explore how air pollution impacts bee health

From our apiaries: just Barcombe this month

Barcombe

It's all starting to get interesting: the thrill of a new season is upon us and as such the first inspection of the year was carried out at the beginning of April. It happened to be a really warm day with no breeze at all and all the bees were flying freely.

Six colonies have survived winter and each have taken at least half a dozen big takeaway tubs of fondant over the last five months.

Hive 11 was by far the best, with eight frames of almost wall-to-wall brood in all stages (see picture bottom right) and still a fair amount of stores. So I decided to super this colony before they run out of room and start to think about swarming later in the month.

The queen was seen and looking very plump but unmarked and this early into the season I wasn't going to risk picking her up so she will stay this way for a few more weeks.

Disappointedly though this colony seems to have a fair amount of varroa still, they had made drone brood in the empty takeaway tub, and when I pulled it out the cells were quite infested (see picture below left).

I think I'll farm some more drone in this colony specifically to remove and reduce the mites. Two more hives had six and seven frames of brood while the others all had around three to four. All these have been left to build outwards a bit more before I add some supers.

B&L Barcombe Apiary

The weather has turned much colder throughout the rest of April so far and I haven't returned for another check, however now is the time to keep a very close eye on the colonies. They are building up so quickly that when the weather eventually turns warmer I wouldn't be surprised to see plentiful swarms unless prevention tactics can be taken in good time (like adding extra room as early as possible).

Tony Birkbeck, Apiary Manager

NB: short videos from Grassroots and Hove are on our Facebook page. Ed.

Varroa-infested drone larvae

Beautiful brood pattern at Barcombe Apiary. Photo (above & left): Tony Birkbeck

B&L to rear quality queens for members

Queen bee with her attendants

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers is to start a queen rearing and bee improvement service for members.

The aim is to ensure that there are always queens available for member beekeepers who need them, and that they display desirable behaviours: calm bees that are inclined to successfully over-winter, are less inclined to swarm, and which are likely to create productive colonies. It's an exciting initiative that we can all benefit from.

The committee in March that accepted Jude New's offer to spearhead the initiative that will ultimately allow B&L to make good quality queens available to members.

This is a first for B&L Beekeepers but we have started planning and aim to make the first concrete steps soon.

This will not the work of a moment, but we do hope that you will see the fruits of the plan in 2022 at the latest.

Watch this space for updates!

Beekeepers surveyed for Healthy Bees Plan

Healthy honey bees

Defra's Healthy Bees 2030 Plan (on which we reported in the December 2020 newsletter) will need feedback from beekeepers—that's you and me.

The Plan is a 10-year programme of partnership working between Defra, the Welsh Government and stakeholders designed to protect and improve the health of honey bees in England and Wales, according to Defra.

Defra is asking us to complete an online survey compiled by survey organisation ICF.

The government department said the aim of the study is to provide Defra and other interested stakeholders with clear evidence on how best to support beekeepers and bee farmers—through education, information and advice—to support them in effectively managing bee pests and diseases and ensuring the long-term sustainability of their practice and honey bee populations.

See front-page editorial for opinion.

Paynes voucher winner

When we sent out the membership questionnaire in March, it included a chance for a randomly-chosen responder to receive a £10 voucher towards anything from Paynes.

We're delighted to announce that new member Pernima Shah is the voucher winner, so congratulations to her. Enjoy!

B&L Facebook group: growth continues

Plenty of new members have once again joined the B&L Facebook Group this month and the forum is getting quite lively, so please join us if you haven't already.

Over the last month, topics under discussion have included (but are not limited to):

- First swarm of the year
- Essential equipment for new beekeepers
- Early inspection reports
- B&L apiary reports and videos
- BBKA Basic Assessment syllabus
- Varroa on a wasp
- Requests for help
- Images from inside a hive (see Photo Corner too)
- BBKA Winter Survival Survey
- Oxalic acid in honey

… the list is long and growing.

I don't doubt that, now the beekeeping season has started, we'll also see a lot more posts relating to help and advice—there's usually someone there who can offer a friendly word.

So if you'd like to help and to offer advice or you need advice, join the group—and over a third of our membership have already done so—please jump in!

The water's warm and the atmosphere friendly.

To join, log into Facebook and search for B&L Beekeeping Division, or follow this link. Please note that we won't be admitting anyone whose name has not first been checked against the membership list.

New member meetings create a buzz

As there is a fairly high number of new members in 2020 / 2021, we felt as a club that we should offer a "Question Time" type of an event for new beekeepers. Consequently, on 16 February I created a post on our private Facebook group page—testing the water—to see what interest there was.

The idea was that it would allow any of our members who are new to beekeeping to individually explain their own set up to a small panel of established beekeepers, and to seek help with locating their hives, purchase of equipment and obtaining bees and so on.

We had six new members showing an interest: Maz Nusl, Lisa White, Ken

Grocutt, Jane Stimpson, Adrien Parker, and Paul Tarry.

Zooming in

With the Covid-19 restrictions, we were unable to offer a face-to-face meeting and so we scheduled a Zoom video conference call on Tuesday 23 March.

Our panel of experts consisted of Ian White, Hilary Osman and Jude New. Unfortunately, not all new members could attend on the night and so we may need to schedule another session, but for those who did make it, Jude started the session by sharing her screen and running through a short presentation of the available types of hives and some of the essential equipment that "New Beeks" need.

We wanted to have a casual atmosphere—and I think we achieved this—with plenty of opportunities for each new beekeeper to ask questions as we went along. Indeed, we asked each person to run through their own setup to give the panel an idea of their particular circumstances and experience.

Questions, questions

I had expected that to completed the session within an hour, but questions and comments kept coming, so after 90 minutes we finally concluded the meeting.

The general feedback that I have received since was that it was certainly a worthwhile event and that each new member gained something from it.

Another one?

If you missed the session – and would value attending another similar session – please get in touch with any of the officers of the club (email addresses are at the end of this newsletter) and if you are not already a member of the division's Facebook Group—please consider joining.

Our group is a useful place to pose your own specific question or demonstrate some beekeeping prowess—and as a result receive all sorts of feedback! We currently have around 60 members, but there's room for many more…

Graham Bubloz

BBKA Spring Convention report

Jude New reports on the 2021 BBKA Spring Convention, which took place on 15-18 April

This year the convention was of course a virtual event, so I had mixed feelings about it.

The event started, and I was drawn to David Alston's opening address, Tipping Points and Perceptions. He thinks that Covid and Brexit should both be tipping points for our perception of global and local events and how engaged we become in them.

He spoke of global warming, global trade and how we respond to these issues in the 21st century, of the history of beekeeping since Victorian times in the UK, our current heritage, and the perceptions of beekeepers and non-beekeepers to the place of bees in our environment.

It set the scene for the rest of the convention, as my choice of presentations were influenced by David's talk.

Speakers

The speakers had been selected for their knowledge as scientists or Master Beekeepers. The webinars have been recorded and are available to watch on the Spring Convention website. You can watch the question-and-answer sessions, as questions which occur to you may have already been answered on the day.

There were also demonstrations of some practical aspects of beekeeping which reminded me of some manipulations of hives and colonies and taught me skills I hadn't seen before.

This is a great opportunity to learn more about our chosen hobby. I commend the Spring Convention to anyone unable to attend the live event.

Jude New

Mentors step up

We're delighted to report that a number of members have agreed to mentor new beekeepers, of whom we have a number this year.

We could do with a few more though, with about six new beekeepers in need of mentoring, so please let Hilary know if you can help (details on back page).

Apiary site available

We have an offer of an apiary site in central Brighton, close to Preston Park. The garden grows lots of fruit and vegetable, mostly without the use of chemicals.

For further information, please contact B&L Secretary Hilary Osman (details on back page).

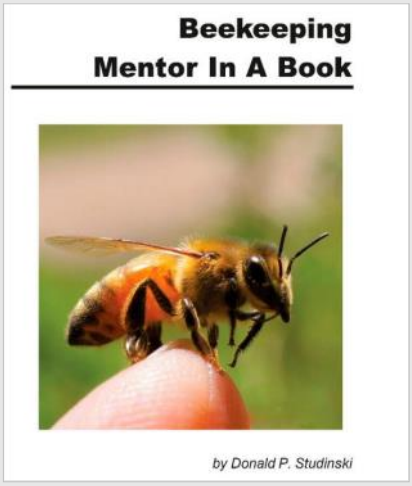
Book of the month

Beekeeping: Mentor in a Book by Donald Studinski

Are you a beginner considering beekeeping without chemicals? This book may be for you.

First published in 2014 and expensive to buy online, it consists of the experiences and wisdom of someone who has been at this a while, and guides you through a year of beekeeping.

To borrow the book from our library, please contact Norman (contact details on back page).



Fees to increase in 2022

B&L Beekeepers has decided to increase its membership fees by £3 annually from 2022.

Membership fees have not changed for years but this regrettable increase has been triggered by a decrease in income and an increase in outgoings.

The pandemic resulted in zero income from honey sales in 2020, the BBKA increased its capitation fee by £2 for 2021 onwards and, most importantly, we want to do more for members in future, which will increase outgoings. This includes queen rearing, bee improvement, more hives at the apiaries and better equipment, such as the new shed at our Barcombe apiary.

We hope you'd agree this small increase represents good value.

Colony survival survey

The annual BBKA colony survival survey, which records and then reports on colony losses over the winter, is about to close (on 30 April—so be quick). If you have yet to complete it, you can do so here.

Equipment for sale

Need more kit? This is all that's left...

- Four-foot top-bar hive, with hinged roof and pre-waxed frames. £100
- Small bee suit, fencing-style hood. Normal retail price: £122. In excellent condition, Olive colour. £60

For further information, please contact B&L Secretary Hilary Osman on 07713 532285.

Basic assessment

Do you fancy taking your BBKA Basic Assessment? We can help you prepare. Please follow this link to download the appropriate form, and contact Hilary for more details (contact details on back page).

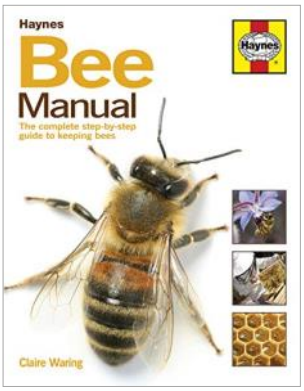
Correction: Swarm Co-ordinator email

Please note that the correct email for the Swarm Co-ordinator, Eric Prior, is swarms@brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk.

Apologies: we got it wrong last month. Didn't zip up my gremlin suit…

Haynes Bee Manual

B&L has bought a number of copies of the Haynes Bee Manual, a great starter for new beekeepers. We'll be using it as a teaching aid at out-apiary meetings but if you'd like to buy your own copy, Amazon has them available.



Survey help request

A Cambridge University researcher is asking for help. She writes:

" I am currently looking for people who would be interested in sharing their oral histories of beekeeping with me.

"I am also keen to put together a cultural history of bees (to also include solitary and bumblebees) and am curious about any historical information that has been kept about various honeybee hives throughout the years (e.g. weather and other temporal data, as well as behavioural observations). Is there an archive for this kind of information or even for beekeeping diaries? I so appreciate any help or advice you may be able to give."

You can contact Diane here.

BBKA sounds exotic pest alarm over bee imports

Small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*). Image from the National Bee Unit, which describes it as 'a serious threat'. Essential reading.

The British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) has warned the Government about the risks of importing bees. The BBKA warns that import arrangements since Brexit are causing an imminent and serious risk that the exotic bee pest the Small Hive Beetle (SHB) could be introduced to the British Isles.

The organisation, and many other beekeeping organisations around the country, has compiled a briefing note for the UK government and devolved administrations.

This states: "There is clear evidence that the proposed transfer of bees from Northern Ireland to Great Britain is not part of a legitimate trade, but rather is a way to get around the law that prevents bees being imported into Great Britain. As such it is a breach of the law.

"Ultimately this will need to be tested in court, but in the meantime, bees that are going to be sourced in the EU and supplied to Great Britain via Northern Ireland are being openly offered for sale on the internet. We call on the UK government to uphold its anti-avoidance legislation to prevent this trade commencing in the next two months when the bees become available."

The briefing note points out that importing, especially from southern Italy from where most such packages originate, is dangerous because the SHB is endemic there. It cites Defra's own guidance, which states that: "the SHB can multiply to huge numbers within infested colonies, where it eats brood, honey and pollen, destroys combs and causes fermentation and spoiling of the honey."

The note continues, saying, left unchecked, the SHB will destroy the colony, citing the USA's experience where at least 20,000 colonies have been lost to SHB at a cost running into millions of dollars.

We've been here before, with varroa; let's not go there again.

SHB in the hive, clearly visible

Asian hornets most vulnerable when emerging from hibernation, finds study

Asian hornet homing in on a honey bee

The best way to reduce the numbers of Asian hornets (*Vespa velutina*) is to trap them as they come out of hibernation, finds recent research.

The study, undertaken in north-west France, was intended to measure the effectiveness of methods of trapping the invasive insect in the Brittany department of Morbihan and was carried out by the *Association Brechoise de Sauvegarde des Abeilles et autres Pollinisateurs* (ABSAP), the Bee Institute and the National Museum of Natural History.

It found that catching queens as they emerge from hibernation and search for food is highly effective in reducing the number of secondary nests.

As we know, Asian hornets can wipe out entire colonies and will defend their nests aggressively if people get too close.

The queens start to wake when temperatures reach a consistent 12°C or more. They build a small primary nest, no bigger than a grapefruit, with a few hornets.

This four-to-five week period is the ideal time to trap them, according to the research, before the queen has established a colony by hatching workers, after which she devotes her time to laying eggs.

"In Brittany, [they start appearing] at the beginning of April until around May 8," Gilles Lanio, beekeeper and president of *API 56 abeilles et biodiversité*, based in Kervignac, told broadcaster France 3.

For the past four years, officials in Brec'h, in Morbihan, and the Brechoise Association for the Protection of Bees and other Pollinators (ABSAP) have distributed free traps to residents in March.

"This method has shown that in four years, the number of secondary nests has been divided by four," ABSAP president Michel Le Boudec said.

Story by The Connexion, France

Asian hornet primary nest

Bees get hi-viz vests

Bees are acquiring hi-viz vests for research purposes.

A team of researchers from the University of Sheffield and The Bumblebee Conservation Trust have been trialling new, low-cost ways to monitor bee species in the UK, by dressing bees in high-visibility, retroreflective vests.

Researchers attached retroreflective tags to seven species of wild bee and to a commercially bred UK bumblebee subspecies. Then, the foraging behaviour and 3D flight path of various bees was monitored using the web interface of a custom-built, real time tracking system.

A bumblebee wearing its hi-viz jacket

Tricky tracking bees

Tracking bees in the wild is a critical part of understanding their ecology, allowing scientists to deduce their foraging and navigational behaviour, as well as their nest preferences.

Currently, it is very difficult and expensive to monitor bee populations. Commonly used methods such as harmonic radars are biased toward larger species, such as bumblebees, which are large enough to withstand the weight of the radar's tag. As such, there are several unknowns regarding the behaviour of the UK's smaller bee species.

Michael Smith, lead author and computer scientist at the University of Sheffield, said the tool will make finding bees far easier, making these studies a practical approach.

The system proved successful in monitoring seven wild species (covering as many as 100+ individuals), across two field sites in the UK, including a wild flower patch at Sheffield University. This involved smaller species such as honey bees and the solitary leafcutter bees.

The tracking system was able to detect bees from up to 40 metres away and tags were still detected a week later.

The retro-reflective tag is made of the same fabric as hi-viz cycling vests. When light hits the fabric, it bounces back to the source. When researchers used a camera with a flash to photograph the bee, the bee then appears as a tiny bright dot.

Early results

Michael Smith said of the pilot test: “We surprisingly found one of our buff-tailed bumblebees several metres up in a pine tree nearby, about 33 metres from the tracking system. It's not somewhere we would usually have looked, eliminating some human biases and motivating the system's use for re-observation studies.”

In addition to their durability, the researchers found no significant difference in the length of foraging time or number of flowers visited between tagged and non-tagged individuals. These results suggest that methods such as this could be used to safely monitor bees across their lifespan.

Tagging and tracking

The bees were captured with a net and transferred into a queen marking pot, commonly used by beekeepers, and then immobilised using cold air, allowing the tags to be safely and non-invasively deployed.

The tracking system is built out of off-the-shelf low-cost components and consists of a camera with an electronic shutter, a flash and a Raspberry Pi computer. The electronic shutter allows for a very short exposure, which means light from the flash illuminates the scene, rather than the sun.

A machine learning model was trained to automatically identify a tag within an image frame and to learn the difference between real tags and various false positives. The whole system can then, in real time, detect the appearance of a bee in the field of the camera or discard false positives, such as a piece of pollen.

By using a system capable of real-time detection, researchers can manually search for the bee and corroborate if the tracking system has correctly detected a real bee and find which individual has been detected.

Conservation benefits

Richard Comont, Science Manager of The Bumblebee Conservation Trust, said: “Being able to track bees from easy-to-find foraging sites back to the hard-to-find nest gives us the chance to find more nests, and nests much earlier in the life cycle. That means that it's much easier to establish nest site requirements, which can be taken into account when doing conservation work.”

Researchers plan to increase the system’s range and enable individual bees to be identified.

Unwanted colony is rescued and rehoused

The hive as I first saw it

Wild comb inside

Brace comb everywhere

Bees marching in

"Old unwanted bees at the bottom of my garden". This was the title of an email I received recently.

"The bees are very lively this spring and have stung my wife twice, so they need to go. We are also moving in the near future. I don't know how you will be able to move them or do this, but please help me". Desperate.

I love a challenge and duly contacted them. It would seem that the owner, did a bit of beekeeping with his brother, but he had moved on a few years ago, and NOTHING had been done to the bees for the past 3 years. They lived in the same village as myself… and I think that I had collected several swarms from this colony in the past, going to both neighbouring houses to retrieve bees.

On arriving at their house on a glorious day before Easter, the hive looked quite normal, with bee activity bringing in pollen. Lighting the smoker and 'going in' was another matter. It was well and truly stuck down with propolis and brace comb.

Eventually I managed to get the lift off, and I was prepared that brace comb might well be in the roof. It was, and there was no crown board either. The bees were amazingly calm while I disrupted their home.

Having got the roof off, the next problem was the super. It had just four super frames in it, with no bottom bars and no foundation either. Another job was the brace comb that had been built in the super.

I smoked this area and carefully cut the comb and popped this with the bees into a cardboard box. I would deal with this later, and all the time I kept my eyes open for the queen.

At last with the super sorted I could get into the brood box, but every time I tried to remove a frame it was so well stuck down, the frame broke. All the frames had been made with the pins going in the wrong direction, and there were not 11 pins in each frame when it had been made!

On the fourth frame, that I tried to remove, there was just a little movement, and it looked like the frame was not going to break. Success. I was then able to get my hand in to remove the previous broken frames, wax and bees.

Gradually as I moved my way through I managed to put the unbroken frames into a nuc box, and then I saw the queen. All though not marked (they hadn't done anything for years, so they would not have marked her, would they?) I had her, and carefully she went into the nuc box.

As I had her, the bees should follow her pheromone scent and they too would enter my nuc box, it was a march of bees following one another. A great sight which always amazes me. I filled up the brood area, and then the super area of the box. I had run out of room... so putting the lid on everything, went back home and picked up another nuc box and a travel screen lid, instead of a closed lid.

My plan now was to have two nuc boxes, on top of each other with a travel screen roof on the bottom box, so that the queen pheromone will travel up into the top box. It would be no good having one tall box as it would not fit in the car. I filled up the nuc boxes with the brood wax and bees fitting them into new frames held with elastic bands, and then secured the two nuc boxes together with a ratchet strap. The bees entered the nuc boxes, either in the top or bottom box, and I collected them early the following day.

Job done, and not one angry bee stung me.

Words & photos: Hilary Osman

Just four frames in the box

Practical help for new beekeepers

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers is holding its next out-apiary meeting for new beekeepers on **Sunday 2 May,** with further meetings on 15 and 29 May. We aim to help with the basics, such as frame inspection, use of equipment and finding the queen.

We will run meetings concurrently at our Barcombe, Hove and Piddinghoe apiaries to make it as convenient as possible for people to attend.

You must book in advance, as the meetings will be conducted in accordance with official social distancing guidelines in force at the time.

To book, please contact Graham Bubloz (+44 7758 866278), to find out if there are places remaining.

Honey Bee Watch. A citizen science study on free-living colonies

Tuesday 4 May 2021, 17:30

Dr. Grace McCormack

Do you know of bees living wild? Honey Bee Watch is a global citizen-science study of how feral colonies survive, starting with a UK pilot focused on *Apis mellifera*. Grace McCormack and Steve Rogenstein will describe the project and explain how beekeepers and concerned citizens can participate. Register here.

The magic and mystery of drone congregation areas

Wednesday 5 May 2021, 19:00

Stephen Fleming

How do drone congregation areas work? Stephen Fleming started looking for them around his apiaries but found one where he least expected. As he discovered more, a pattern seemed to appear but it didn't match findings in other parts of the world. His fascination with drone congregation areas is undimmed and the thrill of discovering new ones undiminished.

In his talk he will discuss his methods, prevailing ideas, plus videos and audios of a few DCA discoveries.

Biosecurity and apiculture

Thursday 13 May 2021, 20:00

Nicolas Vidal Naquet

Nicolas Vidal Naquet is the speaker at this event organised by the British Bee Veterinary Association.

An experienced bee vet with many qualifications, Nicolas teaches honey bee biology and pathology to students in the Veterinary School of Alfort and to veterinarians in the Veterinary School of Oniris in Nantes. Register here.

Wonderful things about bees

Wednesday 19 May 2021, 19:00

Prof. Robert Pickard

This talk by Professor Robert Pickard looks at the evolution of the honeybee supraorganism and its interaction with so many other species. It considers the contribution that honeybees make to the wellbeing of humankind and the changes that we will have to make if we want to create a sustainable future for ourselves.

Sussex bee boot sale

Saturday 22 May 2021, 08:30

This is a chance to meet fellow beekeepers and sell off your surplus beekeeping equipment (beehives, wax, extraction tools etc.).

The event will take place in the six-acre paddock behind the Half Moon Inn at Plumpton (refreshments available). Book here.

Is this the year's first actual meet?

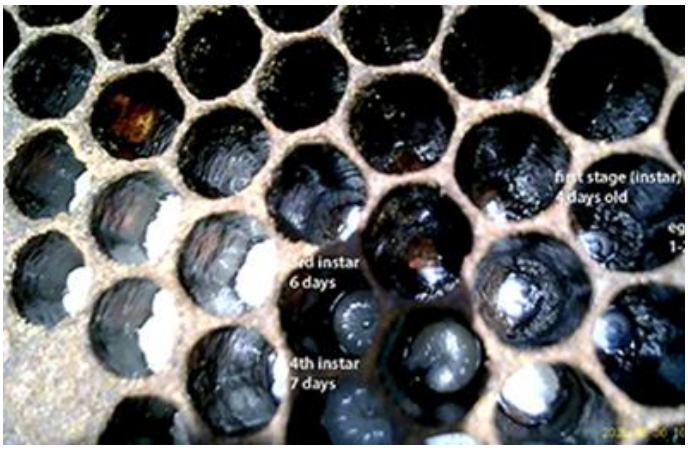
BIBBA conducts a rolling series of webinars on bee improvement—the list is too long to reproduce here, but it conducts at least two every week.

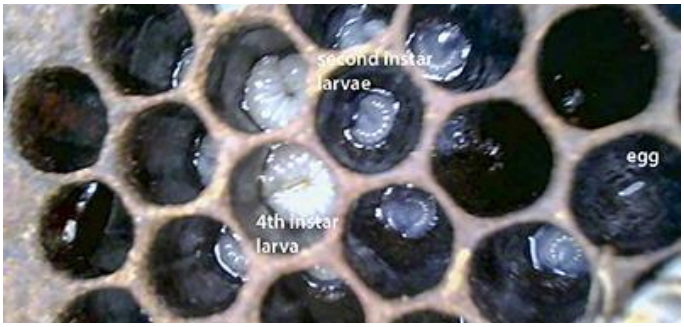
BIBBA's May events cover a wide range of topics suited to absolute beginners as well as the more experienced. Speakers include Sussex's own Roger Patterson.

You'll find the full event list here, and events from other organisers, such as the Central Association of Beekeepers, here.

Bees up close and personal, by Gerald Legg

First inspection of the year: Gerald's chance to show off his new toy, a snake camera that can take close-ups between the combs





B&L Divisional Diary 2021

Outdoor apiary meetings

We will be conducting concurrent, numbers-limited meetings at two of our apiaries on Sunday 2 May, and on Saturdays 15 and 29 May.

We prioritise education for new beekeepers, so we are opening the meetings to **new beekeepers only**. You must book in advance, as the meetings will be conducted in accordance with official social distancing guidelines in force at the time.

If you want to attend, please book your slot with Graham Bubloz (+44 7758 866278).

Indoor winter meetings

None planned for the moment.

Contribution deadlines

Please send all contributions for the newsletter, including photos, to the Editor (details on right). Maximum copy length: 700 words.

NEW copy deadline: 18th of the month preceding the month of publication. Email photos etc. for the website to Webmaster Gerald Legg (details on right).

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Disclaimer

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 by the Division.

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