Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

I don't think I've known such an active time in B&L—though I'm a relative newcomer having only been a member since 2015.

Perhaps the biggest project we've undertaken in terms of how long it will take to see results but with also potentially the widest implications is our bee improvement initiative.

Spearheaded by Jude New, B&L is embarking on a a queen rearing project with the aim of using black British bees—those which have evolved to cope with our rubbish climate—to create queens that incorporate desirable characteristics.

These include productivity, low propensity to swarm, calm temperament and self-sufficiency so they don't need constant feeding.

Clearly, many of those objectives could be at cross-purposes with each other—we shall find out. For example, it may be that honey production is not very compatible with self-sufficiency.

We discussed that in committee and decided that honey production is not a top priority. So, if necessary, to make more honey we can always add more colonies, with Grassroots, our Burgess Hill apiary, as the launchpad.

The way that it will work is that a number of members need to be involved in this initiative, which is by no means confined to the committee, so if you'd like to get involved, please contact Jude New.

We won't be doing this alone either: other divisions in the county are pursuing similar aims so we hope to get together with them and pool our resources. We shall see how that works in practice but I would expect the ability to tap into the experience and knowledge of others can only be of benefit.

Quick tip

June is all about building up the colony, and managing the bees to avoid swarming. So take the equipment you might need with you to the apiary at every visit. This includes a floor, roof, crownboard and brood box, or a nuc. This gives you options when you are confronted with a bevy of fat queen cells.

See hints and tips for details (p3).

NEWSLETTER
JUNE 2021

EVENTS

- Out-apiary meetings about every two weeks.
- Tom Seeley talk
- See p13 for all details

NEXT MONTH

- More summer 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 June

It's been a funny old year, in many ways than one, but I'm talking about the weather. Earlier on in the season it was very dry, and the spring flowers bloomed early. Then it became wet and cold and the bees we unable to fly and collect nectar, prompting The National Bee Unit to issue a starvation warning.

And now I'm going to remind you of the possibility of another possible starvation event 'The June gap'. This is a period normally around June (surprise, surprise) when the last of the spring flowers (not just flowers but trees as well) have gone over and it's too early for the early summer trees and flowers to bloom. Because of climate change we may not get one this year, but the weather is so very changeable at present the bees may be confined to the hive for some time.

Remember, with the colony rapidly expanding, it can get through about 5kg of stores in a week, so count how much is in your hive/s. A brood frame filled on both sides weigh about 2.5kg. Check what percentage of each frame is covered by stores to calculate whether the colony will survive a prolonged period of confinement.

If in doubt feed them. Use either commercial, invert sugar syrup or make your own. I make mine in a ratio of one litre of water to one kg of sugar. You don't have to heat it but it helps to dissolve the sugar. Don't feed the colony with supers on or you'll end up with syrup in your supers.

Colony splitting

Last month, I talked about swarm control and splitting your strong colonies. Unless you have a source of mated or virgin queens, it will take at least three weeks before you see any sign of new brood being laid in the queenless hive. About four or five days after splitting the colony, knock out all but one or two of the queen cells, and then leave them alone. You will only end up trying to inspect a very defensive colony and that's no fun for any of us. However, you will still need to continue with weekly inspections to ensure that new queen cells have not developed in your unsplit colonies.

Once the new queen has hatched and is laying, you will have to find and mark her. If you're really keen on selling on your queens, you'll use the internationally recognised colour for the year:

- White: years ending 1 & 6 (eg 2021)
- Yellow: years ending 2 & 7
- Red: years ending 3 & 8
- Green: years ending 4 & 9
- Blue: years ending 0 & 5

Try the mnemonic: *Will You Rear Good Bees*.

Or if like me and you are not as young as you were, then use colours you can easily see: yellow or white.

Finding the queen

On a warm still day when all the foragers are out doing their job, open the hive and work as smoothly as you can. Picture what the queen looks like. Take out the first frame, if it has few bees on it, place on the ground near the entrance.

As you lift each successive frame, scan each face in a zig-zag pattern from top to bottom and then around the sides. The queen will usually move to the darker side of the frame so you might see her as she goes over the top.

The queen has a very characteristic way of walking close to the comb, almost scraping her abdomen along the wax. She will also be trying, determinedly, to reach the darker side, so look for a bee that is on the march. Look for the longer abdomen and the longer brown legs. If you're lucky you'll see a 'court' of bees around her. If you haven't found her on your second pass through the hive, your next step is to pair up the frames.

Put two pairs of frames (four) in a spare nuc with a space between them. Space the remaining frames in the main hive so there is at least a frames gap between each pair. We know the queen will prefer the darker side of a frame, so take a pair of frames out of the hive and open them like a book. Do this with each pair of frames until you find the queen.

The last resort is to sift the bees through a queen excluder. As the name implies, all but the queen will pass through the excluder. *(I hope this helps next time Manek. Thanks, Ian! Ed.)*.

The queen and her court

Next steps

In the event the weather improves, you will need to put supers on your hive. The first super will need to go on when the hive has about nine seams of bees in it. Shuffle the position of frames as they fill to get evenly drawn combs and a full super. The next super should go on (above or below the existing) when the first super is nearly full.

If you have hives near oilseed rape (OSR) then you will need to extract the honey before it sets like concrete.

Do not wait until the honey is capped: that's too late. Do the shake test before it is capped. Hold the frame upside down and shake vigorously. If nectar drips out, leave it for a few more days. If no nectar drips out, it's time to extract.

Continue to monitor the varroa mite count. An average of more than ten a day indicate that treatment is required urgently. If you have honey supers on use MAQS or another type of treatment that can be used when the supers are on. Otherwise treat with your preferred agent.

In the event you haven't been able to split your hive/s, always have a bait hive set up nearby; you never know, you might even catch someone else's bees.

Ian White

That June gap

Continue to check that your colonies have sufficient room. This means sufficient room for the queen to lay in the brood box, sufficient space to store nectar in the supers and sufficient space for the foragers to use after foraging finishes. Remember that nectar takes up more space than honey as the bees reduce the water content for storage as honey.

The need for regular inspections is still important. Overwintered queens are less likely to be wanting to swarm but of course all beekeepers make mistakes, and damaged queens or dead queens will be replaced by the colony unless the beekeeper has spotted the problem and acted themselves.

Newly mated queens are less likely to swarm if they are part of a honey producing colony. Some beekeepers only use newly mated queens for honey production, as their laying pattern ensures plenty of worker brood to populate the hive and to forage. This is especially important in June, the main honey month in Sussex. But this is also the month when we can experience a gap in nectar producing flowers; the spring flowers have finished, and the new nectar supplies have not yet emerged. This link [PDF] shows which pollinators use these plants for pollen and or nectar.

BBKA often issues starvation warnings during the June gap, which we pass on. Bees should be fed a syrup of 1:1 sugar until the gap is over, usually around the middle of the month.

You can feed Invertabee at this time of year but ensure that syrup is not stored, adulterating your honey and rendering it unfit for sale. If you can, take the supers off while feeding.

I have recently used Google Maps to find details of local land use to help predict nectar flow and dearth, and to give an idea of where the pollen and nectar supplies are being foraged.

For instance there is farmland within the three-mile radius to the north of B&L's apiary in Hove (see image below), so if a crop of oilseed rape is sown in that area, honey granulating in the supers could be attributed to that.

Farmland north of B&L's Hove Apiary

List for reference what is generally growing in gardens and hedges each month. New beekeepers could be forgiven for assuming that, if the hive with the queen and house bees is moved within a garden, the foragers will find the hive and return to it, but this is why it doesn't work.

So collecting swarms and taking them to your own apiary or garden is fine, but as the Somerset BKA points out, moving them after that point has its difficulties.

Jude New

Queen cells and increases

You open the hive and are faced with queen cells. What to do now?

Queen cells are initially created as 'play cups' like a small acorn cup. Colonies will produce play cups if there is space for the queen to lay, there is brood in all stages. If the queen is present then all is well, for now. Check again in seven days. If after seven days the cell contains an egg, royal jelly and nurse bees around it then it is charged queen cell. A bee lifecycle calculator shows roughly how long you have until you need to take action--see Hove apiary report for a download link.

Ready your poly nucs

If the flying bees think that they have swarmed and have stores, swarming behaviour will stop, which is the purpose of this manipulation.

Have poly nucs ready with frames of foundation. Remove three frames of foundation from the nuc and place the frame with a queen cell into the nuc. Be careful not to damage the queen cell.

The nuc now has one frame with a queen cell on it. Remove a frame of sealed worker brood from that hive or another in the apiary. The frame of capped worker brood will be accepted by the nuc. The nuc now has two frames of brood and one queen cell. Shake some bees into the space created by the removal of the third frame. The nuc now has bees of all ages, a queen cell and capped worker brood.

Feed the bees

Put an eke over the frames of the nuc and add a contact feeder of light syrup (1:1).

Put the nuc on the stand which had the hive and queen in it. Move the hive away from the nuc to allow the flying bees to return to the nuc.

Add two frames of foundation to the original brood box, one each side of the brood nest to allow it to grow both sides. Add a queen excluder.

Feed with light syrup or frames of honey from last year so that the hive has stores until the foragers start deliveries of water and nectar again.

Check the nuc after six or seven days for queen cells. It is possible that the frame with the queen cell on it might have uncapped cells which could be made into emergency swarm cells.

After the first quick inspection for additional queen cells, the nuc can be left until the queen cell has hatched and the new queen is mated.

The new colony should be big enough to go into a full box, perhaps with dummy boards, gradually adding frames until they fill the brood box.

Jude New

Norman Dickinson
Chairman

Words from the Chair

In my April and May reports I was enthusiastic about our forthcoming out-apiary meetings but still the weather is being very unkind to us so we have had to cancel further apiary meetings. Now that we are permitted to have up to 30 people meeting outdoors under reduced Covid restrictions, we are all chomping at the bit to meet, and to give new members a chance to meet with existing B&L members. Surely, things can only get better, weather-wise. *[fingers crossed! Ed.]*

If you have registered on BeeBase you will have received a couple of notifications recently. The first, aimed at those keeping bees in western Lewes and towards the University of Sussex, was a notification about EFB being detected and asking you to be more attentive when inspecting. The second concerned changes made to hive records that beekeepers maintain on the BeeBase site, including a tick box to record whether varroa has been detected in your colonies, which I mentioned last month.

Again, I cannot stress enough how important it is to register your apiaries with BeeBase in order to receive these important notifications.

Towards the start of May I received a telephone call from the owner of the land that we use for our Piddinghoe out-apiary. It notified me that he has a proposed use for the land and wishes us to vacate the site, in line with our contract.

Fortunately, he is not pressing us to move immediately, so we do have a little time to undertake the relocation.

Hilary Osman and I recently visited a potential site to replace Piddinghoe and, after an initial visit to the site, we are waiting on confirmation for a second visit to go through the logistics with the owners and hopefully, we will have some good news for the July edition of the newsletter. We will also be expanding the number of hives at the Grassroots apiary just south of Burgess Hill, and thanks go to Jude New for her enthusiasm in building up Grassroots.

I am very pleased to advise that following a lot of hard work by Jude New, B&L will be holding a training course for our members wishing to take the BBKA Basic Assessment. This is currently fully subscribed and we have nine members participating, so good luck to all those taking the assessment.

I also mentioned last month that we were still picking up new members, with a total of 148 members up to 20th April. We are still seeing our membership increase with another two members joining plus one lapsed member renewing, bringing the total up to 151 for 2021.

Hilary Osman
Secretary

Your Committee at work

Work in progress seems to be the words at the moment.

Jude New has been working really hard finding a venue for the Bee Basic Assessment members, putting together a study programme, an assessor and generally planning the practical sessions.

Practical beekeeping for us all has been harder popping out to our apiaries looking for a window of good weather. It's May, and a lot of bees are still tucked up. Some of you may have been lucky to pick up a swarm, nothing that I have heard of, but those of you who have your name down on the list, I hope that you have everything in place, because when the weather improves it will be action stations!!

The Bee Disease Day planned for 2020, and now planning for 2022 is work in progress. Everywhere that we are trying to book appears not to take bookings for an ad hoc day, as they all appear to have 'their regular events', and the Bee Inspectors do not work at the weekends. So if you know of a venue, or a barn please let us know and we can proceed to plan, for what should be a great day.

Help required

As for mentors and mentees, I know we have a few gaps, and let's remember what it was like when you first had your bees. You always had a question…. Could you be a phone mentor? Don't be shy, you have more knowledge than 'never having held a frame new beekeeper', so please help us to help the newer members in our division. Let me know who are prepared to help out. PLEASE.

And it's still work in progress trying to find a new Librarian. Domi did a fantastic job and still is storing all of the books for the Division. Can you help out – please contact one of the committee. Numbers all on the back of the newsletter.

Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator

Asian hornet report

Once again, no news is good news, at last as far as the UK mainland is concerned. We have however heard of one Asian hornet queen discovered in Ireland, which is a first.

According to a report in the Irish Times, the discovery, in early May, prompted a national alert issued to the public and beekeepers, and marked the first identification of the species in the wild in Ireland. She was "alive but dying", reports the paper, in a private dwelling on the northside of Dublin. There was no indication of a nest in the vicinity.

Asian hornet. Photograph: Aidan O'Hanlon, National Museum of Ireland

I'm tempted to suggest that the insect skipped the UK mainland and headed straight for Ireland because it wanted to remain in the EU…but I won't.

Jersey queens

Elsewhere, alert beekeepers, the public and Asian hornet specialists on Jersey have now captured some 50 Asian hornet queens but found only a handful of primary nests; it's too early for the big secondaries containing thousands of insects.

The cold weather is thought by Jersey hornet co-ordination teams to be the main reason why there so few nests have been established compared to this time last year. This has not however stopped the predominately easterly winds blowing individual insects over from France.

As the weather warms, lockdown eases and travel volumes increase, I think we can expect to see a handful of sightings here, and maybe even a couple of nests established.

Let's hope not: remember, the eyes of public are our first line of defence.

FROM AROUND THE WEB

We search the web for bee-related news and views, so you don't have to.

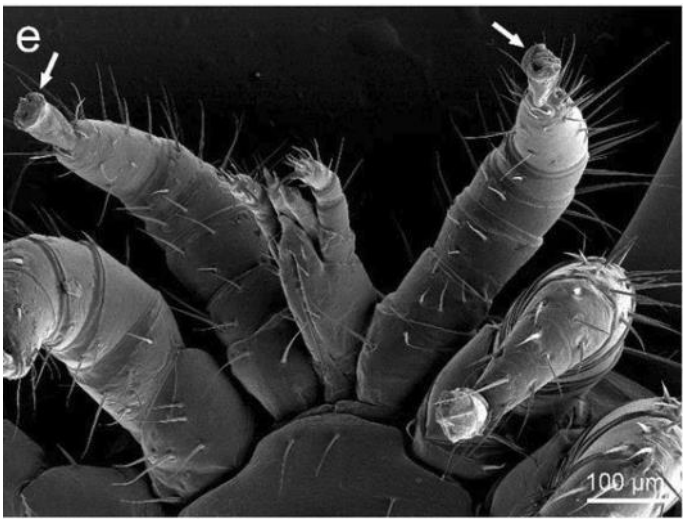
- BBKA: Government responds to Small Hive Beetle petition
- BBKA: Reporting varroa (see photo below, right)

Science

- Honey Authenticity project
- Honeybees are accumulating airborne microplastics on their bodies
- Honeybees find their queen by carrying out a cascade of scenting behaviors
- Beehives Are Held Together by Their Mutual Gut Microbes
- Vital soil organisms being harmed by pesticides, study shows
- Research Snapshot: Bees can tell time by temperature, Vanderbilt research finds
- Lab test rapidly IDs potential mite pest of honey bees
- Radar tracking uncovers mystery of where honeybee drones have sex
- Making honey without bees and milk without cows

Public policy

- Protecting bees: a new way forward for risk assessment
- Release of Honey Bees Threatens Wild Native Bee Populations and Ecosystems
- EU court upholds ban on insecticides linked to harming bees
- Bee population steady in Dutch cities thanks to pollinator strategy
- World Bee Day: Latest Research on How Pesticides Affect Honey Bees



Varroa destructor mouthparts close-up. Photo: Dr. Samuel Ramsey

From our apiaries: Barcombe, Grassroots, Hove & Piddinghoe

Barcombe

What a strange time we have been having with the weather!

April was the one of the driest and coldest on record and now May looks to be one of the wettest I can remember.

The bees at Barcombe have been challenging this month, mainly because I can only get to the apiary at weekends when the weather allows. One colony is massive and so far has been behaving itself. At the start of May it had a full brood box, bees in all stages, with three supers. The top two boxes were nice and heavy but now, three weeks into the month and after foraging opportunities have been limited, the top two boxes are much lighter as the bees have been eating their stores. I was planning to split this hive at the apiary day that was cancelled due to poor weather, but I'll re-assess at the next inspection.

As for the other colonies, two hives seem to be superseding so I'll just let them continue, while the other three are just ticking along gently.

A small spring harvest of honey seems unlikely to be as good as previously so I might leave all the boxes on until at least the summer flow starts, just to avoid any risk of the bees starving.

Hopefully June in the apiary will bring better weather and the start of a great summer's activity with the bees.

Tony Birkbeck, Apiary Manager

A full hive. Photo: Tony Birkbeck

Grassroots

Graham Bubloz reports on the rescue of a rare hive configuration. Photos by GB.

Original hive set up, unchanged for months

The Rose method (or One Size Box) is an alternative way of keeping bees. You should find out more. The system is natural, and the boxes are lighter than say Langstroth or National Brood boxes, making inspection easier—especially if you have a bad back!

There is just one such OSB hive within the out-apiaries in our division: at the Grassroots Apiary at Hassocks. So we felt it important to maintain and get a better understanding of the system. The following explains the first assessment of 2021.

Stage 1: 9 March

Stores check of the original Rose method or One Size Box (OSB) hive

The weather was cold (10° C). On arrival, there was no activity at the hive entrance. We (Jude New and I) thought that the hive might have died out over the winter. With the low temperatures at the time of assessment, Jude had devised a plan that would allow us to have a very quick look at each box to assess whether there was sufficient feed for the colony. She had organised us in a synchronised way, working quickly and therefore minimising heat losses to the colony: one would remove the roof / top covers from the stack of boxes and the other would place a cover (insulated sheet) over the boxes that were not being assessed. That allowed us a few seconds for the box that was being assessed to be checked for any stores.

Original layout

Roof
5
4
3
2
1

Five supers stacked on an open mesh floor under an insulated roof

The hive was reassembled by placing the boxes 2, 3, 4 and 5 back as they were originally. We did not remove any frames. The whole check took less than 10 minutes and a further 10 minutes to reassemble, leaving the hive unchanged. During the check, it was found that box 3 was heavy with honey stores so no more feed was needed. We inserted varroa floor before we left.

First box moved

Ins sheet		
4		
3		crownboard
2		5
1		upturned roof

Remove roof. Upturn and place onto stand next to hive. Move top box (5) onto roof. Cover original stack with insulation sheet from under the roof. Placed a crownboard over box 5. Quick look at 5. And so on...

Stage 2: 23 March

Expanding the brood nest

We took boxes 4 & 5 – and removed the empty / unused frames from both and inserted frames with brood into a single new super.

The latter was inserted between the original boxes 3 & 4. The unused frames were removed from the hive and are being stored as drawn comb. (they will be fumigated or frozen because when the varroa floor was removed as there was evidence of wax moth infestation.) We achieved the insertion of the box by removing the

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From our apiaries: Barcombe, Grassroots, Hove & Piddinghoe

Grassroots

(Continued from page 6)

individual boxes exactly as in stage 1 - covering the boxes in the stack with a crownboard to reduce heat loss within the hive and to contain the bees within their boxes. On the day, the temperature was around 11°- 12°C.

Stage 3: 6 April

Reducing the working height of the hive stand and stack

We lowered the hive by removing two of the concrete blocks from each end of the stand and placing two recovered blocks under the centre of the two wooden spars that are part of the stand, to provide additional mechanical stability. See photo below.

Lowered hive, now with four boxes

This meant temporarily moving the entire stack of boxes off the stand. This was achieved as before, but with the new temporary position right in front of the original stack using a temporary stand fabricated from a spare brood box.

We removed the bottom box (1) that was on the open mesh floor. There were no stores in there, and the bees that were present were shaken into the hive and any brood was moved elsewhere, and the resulting empty frames removed. That left a stack of four boxes.

Stage 4: 20th April

Extra room needed?

Once again, it was cold: about 11° C. We had previously reduced the overall quantity of boxes to prevent the colony needing to heat a larger volume than was needed.

Lowered stand, but back to five boxes

However, on this visit, the colony was offered an extra box of foundation, which was put on the top of the stack in case the queen needed extra space. The bees were highly active.

Stage 5: 4 May

Final configuration

The temperature was 15°C. A complete inspection was carried out. Two queen cells were seen. One was left. The queen was not seen. There were large patches of brood on most frames, throughout the hive. The bees were easily controlled using a little smoke. Ambient temperatures were not high enough to leave this type of hive open for too long due to the area open to heat loss.

The overall condition of the hive was considered good. There was brood in all stages, a very small number of bees were seen to have deformed wings, but the vast majority of the colony were fine. The brood looked healthy, 'C' shaped, segmented, and white.

Final arrangement

The top box was not being used by the bees, and on full inspection there was space in the hive. A yellow strap was added after a day and night of high winds, to provide additional mechanical stability.

Graham Bubloz, Apiary Manager

Hove

I get 'itchy fingers' at the beginning of the season, I want to open the hives to see what the colonies have been up to during the winter months.

Temperature and rain are the two factors which guide me. If I am concerned, I have done quick inspections mid-April, when the bees were flying, sometimes that is a smidge below 15°C. Usually I wait until the

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From our apiaries: Barcombe, Grassroots, Hove & Piddinghoe

Hove (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)
entrance of the hive suggests that the colony is growing, lots of bees and pollen going into the hive.

In a recent webinar Wally Shaw, from the Anglesey BKA, said that many beekeepers understate the frequency of swarms, and the swarms they catch are never from their own hives! Depending on who beekeepers are talking to…

Neighbours will be reassured if told that swarming is under control, that measures have been taken to prevent or limit them. When speaking with other beekeepers the size of the swarm collected, the length of the ladder to climb a tree, to collect the swarm, the height of the chimney, the site of the cavity etc are all told in detail several times, until the next one! Meddling beekeepers can add to the list by accidentally dispatching or damaging the queen, so the bees make emergency queen cells.

Winter losses and feeding

At Hove we are making up winter losses, of two hives and making queens for two or three colonies at Grassroots. The apiary is looking tidy, and full of bee boxes of varying sizes. In mid-February, the bees in the main hives were offered a feed of pollen, with the intention of making new colonies.

I noticed that the bees in one hive were bringing in lots of pollen. This hive also took the pollen patty the most readily.

Come 19 April, I could not wait any longer so I opened the box with the most activity and found three frames with beautiful queen cells. Two were sealed and two were open.

When I was learning to keep bees, I was told, 'when you look in the hive and you are faced with queen cells, close the hive up and make a cup of tea'.

At Hove, there are poly nucs, which I reasoned would insulate the small growing colonies I was about to create.

I had poly nucs ready with frames of foundation, so I took the single sealed cell with a frame of brood and filled the

Jude and poly nucs at the Hove apiary

space with frames of foundation. I do not have drawn brood foundation this year, that would have been better. I repeated this process three times. I could not use all the queen cells at that point.

I left the nucs in the position of the main hive so that the flying bees would return, and moved the main hive three feet away from the nuc entrance. I made up some light syrup and added that to each nuc.

When the queen starts laying, the worker bees start drawing comb. I worked out when the queen is likely to hatch using my bee lifecycle calculator.

I went back to the apiary to check on the nucs after four days and removed the queen cells that the bees made while they were waiting for the cell that I had chosen to hatch.

The two sealed cells were between four and six days old, I later calculated. The first sealed cell left the hive on 30 April, but because it started to rain, the bees went back to the hive!

PS: To use the lifecycle calculator, cut out the circles from card and skewer them with a split pin.

Jude New, Apiary Manager

Piddinghoe

It's a shame the weather has conspired against us this year and we have not been able to hold some early apiary meetings, but hopefully we will get the opportunity later on in the year.

As of Tuesday 18 May, there are three colonies at Piddinghoe, one of which is terminally sick with a serious case of sac brood. The other two are doing well.

One was transferred from Grassroots in the winter and built up strongly in the early spring. This colony was a 'brood and a half' divided over three supers as well as a super of stores and no queen excluder, which made inspection a bit of a chore. I have now got it down to a brood over two supers, with an excluder between the stores, which is a bit more manageable.

The last one is a split from the strong hive. Three of the super frames were put into a poly nuc with three brood frames. The idea is to feed them lots of syrup so that they draw out lots of new comb.

Drone cell comb is being built on the bottom of the super frames. Once these three frames are drawn out and full, they will be sacrificed as part of the integrated pest control measures and replaced with brood frames.

The original three brood frames will then have drawn combe and be filled with stores and brood to continue the new colony.

All of the other hives at Piddinghoe succumbed during the winter, much to my dismay.

Ian White, Apiary manager

Piddinghoe apiary

B&L Beekeepers responds to the winter survey

You asked and we have responded.

You asked for a novice meeting, we have had two meetings on Zoom to talk about those bits of kit you need when you start out.

Currently we have cancelled three meetings since 17 April—the willingness has been there, but the weather those days was too cold or wet to open hives.

You will find that bees can stand low temperatures, but not damp. While they will sometimes fly on wet days, it is more difficult, they get grumpy and stressed. Our beekeeping methods should be to minimise stress to the bees whenever possible.

Queen cells in a frame specially adapted for queen rearing

Basic Assessment

You asked for training Brighton and Lewes BKA are running a Basic Assessment course in June this year, we will cover:

- The life cycle of bees
- Definition of nectar and how it is made into honey
- What to recommend for first aid treatment of bee stings
- Hive robbing
- Honey extraction
- swarm control
- how to collect and hive a swarm
- Diseases and pests

The practical session is about handling honeybees, use of a smoker, how to identify cells and bee castes on the comb, bee space and making brood frames. All this is covered in two days, with the afternoon of the second day this year being spent at Hove Apiary.

To take the Basic Assessment you should have managed at least one colony of bees for a minimum of 12 months. The Basic Assessment syllabus can appear daunting at first glance but closer inspection will show that it merely lists the basic things which all beekeepers should know. The assessment is completely practical/oral and takes place mainly at the hive in a local apiary.

Other BBKA modules

You asked for modules, so this autumn a study group will be set up for Module 6: Bee Behaviour.

This module has elements from other modules: it includes topics been covered in Modules 1, 2 and 3.

The idea behind this is that the group meets, perhaps at a pub, talks about bee behaviour and then studies independently for up to two hours a week until the Module 6 exam.

There are usually two opportunities to take the exam, once in the spring and once in the autumn.

This Spring the exam was provided online—no worries about being late then!! There is an option, with agreement of the group, to complete an online study course as a group.

A beekeeper employed by the BBKA provides a set of past papers which are grouped to allow logical study through the course and provide feedback to the group about their discussion and submission.

Queen rearing

You asked for help with queen rearing, so B&L is starting a queen rearing group, in a small way, this year. It needs some close record-keeping and a large enough group to begin to work to produce our own queens for the association. Watch this space.

Practical tips

You asked for practical tips, these will be provided once the summer meetings start. It is always reassuring to see inside the apiary hives to see if your hive looks the same. We will be talking about feeding bees, the June gap, preparing for honey harvest, checking for disease and varroa, and there will be a demonstration of how to use oxalic acid for winter varroa treatments.

Please also speak with your mentor about some help for issues which are more difficult to demonstrate when there is a big group around the hives. This might include topics such as queen marking, how to make splits near the beginning of the season and merging hives for the winter.

If you would like the committee to help you, by setting up groups or meetings, with you, then please write to us via Facebook, or the newsletter. There are no silly questions, our joint experience of beekeeping runs into hundreds of years.

Please keep in contact and make this Beekeeping Association a group which helps you find the answers to your beekeeping dilemmas.

Jude New

Mentors: more please!

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).

B&L members to take BBKA Basic Assessment

Nine B&L members will be taking the BBKA Basic Assessment this summer—which may be a record. The Basic is the baseline module aimed at confirming the competence of beekeepers who have been active in the hobby for a year or more, just listing the basic things which all beekeepers should know.

While the BBKA does offer a correspondence course, B&L has arranged a hands-on, pre-exam practice for the members taking the Basic this year.

To take the exam, please contact Hilary Osman (see back page for details).

Equipment for sale

- English rapid style plastic feeder. Fits all standard national hives. Fits over the crown board. Capacity 6 litres /1.3 gallons/10.5 pints: £7.00
- Stainless steel comb cutter (rectangular)10.5 cm x 10.5cm x 5.5cm deep: £5.00
- Frame cleaner hook hive tool. Solid wooden handle with a 355mm stainless steel shaft and a 90-degree 45mm long hook: £5.00
  Queen catcher, one-handed operation: £3.50
- Thorne's manipulation cloth: £15.00
- Over-bucket uncapping ledge
- Fits any standard 5 or 6 gallon bucket, underside recessed arch provides added stability, dishwasher safe: £5.00
- Refractometer: £12.00

- Stainless steel hive hanger, clips over the brood box, for holding frames from the hive during inspections, or holding made frames for storage: £5.00

Please contact Jude New if you would like to purchase any of these items.

BBKA summer courses

The BBKA has advised that the following training courses at Stoneleigh will be available for summer 2021.

- Advanced Queen Rearing: 3rd & 4th July (2 day course)
- Basic Queen Rearing: 11th July (1 day course)
- Advanced Husbandry Training 30th July to 1st August (3 day course) - Only three places left
- General Husbandry: 8th August, 14th & 15th August (3 day course)

Please go to the BBKA webshop for more details and to book a place:

If you have any queries please contact Sarah Snelson.

B&L Facebook group: great discussions, interesting posts

More members have joined the B&L Facebook Group this month and the forum is getting quite lively, so please join us if you haven't already. The group membership is now up to 73, which approaches half the membership.

Over the last month, there's been a variety of topics under discussion—which you'll find by going there.

Among the recent discussions and posts is:

- A list of the summer meetings
- Honey monitoring
- Entrance block gap height
- Poshbee survey
- New members introduce themselves
- Snelgrove gone wrong?
- Online events
- Tanging: utter rubbish or a new way of attracting swarms?
- Virgin queen available
- Beebase updates
- Cleanliness in the apiary
- Swarms, swarms and more swarms
- Aggressive bees
- Splitting for swarm control
- Assembling a hive
- European Foulbrood (EFB)
- Our hives are draughty and inefficient, study finds
- Cut-out in the ceiling of a Brighton flat
- Wax moth problems
- What to do about stings: NHS advice
- Bad weather beekeeping
- Dead colony
- Syrup mixture

So now the beekeeping season has started, we're seeing more posts relating to practical beekeeping issues, courses and events, and also a request for your thoughts on the newsletter and other B&L-related activity.

So if you have thoughts about any topic, you'd like to help and to offer advice or you need advice, 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.

Can honey treat hay fever?

In popular mythology, the consumption of honey to treat hay fever is fairly well-established, despite there being little or no evidence to substantiate this claim. So how solidly does evidence support the claim?

Botanist and New Scientist columnist James Wong researched the issue and found that reports of honey being effective against hay fever were mistaken. For example, a 2013 study in West Malaysia appeared to find that people showed improvements in symptoms for allergic rhinitis. However, the problem with this study, says Wong, is that there is no hay fever in tropical, humid Malaysia because plants don't release pollen en masse in sort bursts as happens in temperate zones.

The study also used a rare honey from a rainforest bee that forages on completely different plants than those sought by honey bees in temperate climes. And finally, the study used a daily dose of one gramme per kilogramme of body weight. For Wong, it amounted to 90g of honey, which represents some 10,000 calories, three

Looks suspiciously like a jar of honey

times the maximum daily intake of sugar the NHS recommends, which would certainly cause more problems than a dose of hay fever.

So apples and oranges were being compared in that study.

Another, earlier, study in Finland found that people consuming birch pollen honey showed improved symptoms. But, as Wong points out, birch trees are pollinated by wind not insects, so birch pollen honey must consist of honey with added birch pollen. So again, this is not a like-for-like comparison.

A third study that Wong reports on came in 2002 from the University of Connecticut. The problem here was that very small numbers of people were used in the study, and they were taking anti-histamines on top of a consumption of a tablespoon of honey per day. This means that a conclusive result can't be established as there were no side-by-side comparisons between the two methodologies.

So while as yet there is no conclusive evidence, the short answer to whether honey is an effective treatment for hay fever is that it is at best unproven, but probably that it does not. But if consuming almost a quarter of a large jar of honey every day floats your boat, why not try it? But put your dentist on danger money.

Research suggests infection may stress the bees out

We beekeepers are well aware of pheromone communication among bees. We see Nasanov glands issuing come hither messages, queen substance tells the colony that all is right, and we experience the consequences of alarm pheromones when a bee is crushed or one of them stings you.

What's less well-known is the degree of stress this causes the bees. For example, research shows that alarm pheromones produced might be altered during infection and have consequences for social communication, which might be more devastating than the parasites.

An example of the interaction between infection and pheromones involves the nosema fungus, which infects the guts of honey bees. Christopher Mayack at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania suspected this might have something to do with how the fungus affects the bees' social structures.

"Subtle changes in behaviour can be critical for the honeybee because it's so highly social," he said. "If their social harmony – really, their functioning as a

Evidence of nosema. Photo: dbroberg

group – gets disrupted, it can cause colony collapse, meaning complete dysfunction of the hive."

Mayack and his team hoovered up bees from 30 hives and compared bees from infected hives with those from uninfected hives, and used spectrometry to compare pheromone production. He found that those from infected hives had much higher concentrations of the pheromone bees produce when threatened.

Mayack theorises that the pheromone may stimulate the bees to care for infected bees, but might also drive them to quarantine sick individuals or even kill them. Either way, Mayack suspects the bees' behaviour changes so much it could destroy their social balance and make them more aggressive.

More research is needed, he says.

Practical help for new beekeepers

Getting back to normal—or maybe we should call it the new normal: the June out-apiary meetings will be conducted in line with government advice, which allows up to 30 members who want to attend to do so. Please see the back page for dates.

All out-apiary meetings will, unless otherwise advised, start at 13:30 for new members, with the more experienced invited to attend from 14:00.

Booking is advised to ensure we don't bust the guidelines. To book, please contact Graham Bubloz (+44 7758 866278), to find out if there are places remaining.

Live Q&A session for beekeepers

Wednesday 2 June, 19:30
Scottish Beekeepers' Association hosts Randy Oliver for a live beekeeping Q&A session. Register here.

Randy is a biologist, based in California and has spent many years developinghis informative website http://scientificbeekeeping.com/

Tom Seeley: the craft of bee hunting

Wednesday 2 June, 19:00
Cambridgeshire BKA welcomes back Tom Seeley to talk about locating wild colonies of honey bees.

In this talk, Prof. Seeley will look at bee hunting—locating unknown colonies of honey bees. He will review the equipment involved and the process of establishing and following beelines: lines of bees flying back to their homes.

This activity is one of infinite variety, of suspense, perseverance, and (often) triumph! You go out and find honey bees foraging on flowers. Where is their home? A large tree, a building, or someone's hive? With simple equipment, and special skills, you can solve this mystery!

BIBBA conducts a series of webinars on bee improvement. The spring calendar events were all recorded.

The events covered a range of topics suited to absolute beginners as well as the more experienced. You'll find the full event list here, and events from other organisers, here.

PHOTO CORNER: Bees on the comb in the sunshine

A delightful image of bees on the comb at Preston Manor. Photo by Bob Curtis

B&L Divisional Diary, June 2021

Outdoor apiary meetings

We will be conducting meetings at our out-apiaries as follows:

Date	Location	Topic
Saturday 12 June	Ansty	Ansty Apiary
Sunday 27 June	Hove	Preparing to harvest

Meetings will be conducted in accordance with official social distancing guidelines in force at the time, so if you want to attend, please book your slot with Graham Bubloz (+44 7758 866278).

Indoor winter meetings

First one will be in November, date to be advised.

Contribution deadlines

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

Copy deadline: 18th of the month before the publication date. 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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