

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

Newsletter



Volume 6 – June 2020

Editor: Norman Dickinson

BRIGHTON AND LEWES DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

Ken Stevens Remembered 2nd May 1917 to 6th May 2020

Kenneth Charles Stevens was born just before the 1st World War finished and the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918 hit. He survived a scalding accident as a very young child, fought in and survived a second world war, saw the start of the computer age, mobile phones and more. Very few lives have encompassed the vast changes in society that Ken has lived through. He nearly made the 75th VE day celebration to which he was invited and was enthusiastically looking forward to. Ken was a man of many interests - Judo, languages (especially Esperanto), music and talking to people, but mainly Beekeeping.

In the 2nd World War he trained as an RAF Pilot, serving in Canada, Malta, India and Burma, achieving 10,000 hours of flying time and a few campaign medals. After the war he trained as a teacher, but in 1953 joined BA as a 1st Pilot, but in 1961 had to retire from flying as a result of organophosphate poisoning, which he used to kill woodworm.

Ken's beekeeping interest

started at the age of 14 during a holiday to Weymouth. He was given a colony which he "posted" via British Railways from Weymouth in Dorset to West Sutton near London. It arrived in good order with honey dripping everywhere.

After the war Ken concentrated on his beekeeping, particularly in gaining qualifications, which culminated in 1960 with him gaining the highest beekeeping qualification recognised in the UK, the National Diploma in Beekeeping (N.D.B.). To date, there have only been 90 Diplomas awarded since the N.D.B. was formed in 1954. He was County Beekeeping Instructor in Kent before John Hendrie's father took over in 1974, and has kept bees in various locations in the UK. In 1980, when he retired, he went to New Zealand for six months, only to return transporting Queens in his socks, whilst wearing them! Ken passed on his enthusiasm for bee keeping in many ways including authoring three books as well as writing regularly for the BBKJ, now incorporated into the BBKA News. Ken very rarely used gloves when handling his bees and ate honey every day



from them. On his 100th Birthday he was awarded the BBKA certificate for 80 years plus in beekeeping. Unfortunately, shortly after that he had to retire as an active beekeeper as he moved too far away from his apiary.

Ken was married to Violet for over 60 years until her death in 2000. They had five children; he is survived by three children and many descendants.

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Forthcoming summer meetings:

- All currently cancelled. See rear panel

In next months edition:

- Amanda Advises
- Asian Hornet Action Team
- Contributions from our members

Bees under lockdown as bacterial disease sweeps London

Report by Andy Gregory in the Independent newspaper

"It's like seeing SWAT squads getting toolled up going in to storm a hostile building," says beekeeper Dale Gibson, describing the moment when bee inspectors prepare to enter an apiary suspected of infection. If the hives are found to be compromised, they will be placed on lockdown for a number of weeks, with their entrances shrunk – making it

easier for guard bees to police who enters the hive and thus prevent the disease from spreading.

With the vast majority of the city's nearly 9 million residents living under coronavirus lockdown, London's beekeepers are contending, not only with the usual trials of summer swarm season, but with their own outbreak of a bacterial

infection, known as European Foulbrood (EFB).

While many hives that contract the bacterial infection will recover with a mixture of treatment, regular inspection and good fortune, those that do not will be placed in a hole and incinerated.

If EFB gets into a hive, it infects the youngest, known

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Memories from members past & present.

I met Ken over 10 years ago; I was retiring and my interest in bees was something I wanted to explore.

I contacted Brighton and Lewes Beekeepers and asked if there was anyone who could advise me if my garden was suitable. This gentleman turned up and we discussed the area, and after a cup of tea and advising me my garden was not suitable, Ken then went on to discuss bees in detail. He was fascinating to listen to and my eagerness to become a beekeeper was increased just by listening to Ken.

I joined Brighton and Lewes and found I could keep bees in the apiary at Stanmer Park. Ken helped me with my choice of hive, and within 24 hours of it being built he rang me to tell me to get my bee suit we were going after a swarm.

I watched him get this swarm out of a tree and put it in the box; so smooth.

After this, Ken moved into the Deans, where I was a carer and we soon became friends. Every morning over breakfast we would discuss if we were going out that day, and on our travels we would discuss looking after bees, helping me understand them. I joined him on his inspections and he would help me on my one hive, which soon became more.

Throughout this time, Ken told me a lot about his life, his RAF days, his work and his two bee books and how he would love to find someone who could speak Esperanto as he loved the language; he did eventually. Ken was very much my mentor and friend. I still have the hive he gave me as a gift for driving him around on various trips. If we had a bee in the car he would keep it on his hand; if it stung he would be grateful as he always said it helped his body, just like his daily intake of honey.

Rest in peace Ken

Pat

When first meeting Ken, at a B&L out apiary on a sunny Saturday afternoon it was impossible to not be aware of his calmness and confidence when handling bees while wearing minimum protection. He was always listening to and watching the bees to check on behaviour interaction and activity. At this stage my proximity to bees had been minimal, but Ken was so encouraging to everyone he came into contact with that very soon handling bees and collecting swarms with just a straw hat and no gloves came naturally – thank you Ken. Amazingly he managed to communicate in a spellbinding manner to people of all ages

and was always keen to know what they were doing and how their bee keeping was going, with an amazing memory for detail and ready to embrace new ideas. He always put his longevity down to only eating large amounts of honey and never any sugar. So as he was running several hives out in the country, at the age of 95 he joined a gym to get fit enough to be able to carry full supers of honey back from the hives. Whilst living at the Dene in Rottingdean, he was still very active and at 100 he was so pleased to receive his card from the Queen. Within days he would walk out and help when there was a massive swarm high up in a tree in the school grounds opposite, I later realised that the swarm had probably come from the hives, that gave him so much pleasure, in the Kipling gardens very close by. Ken was nationally acclaimed for his many contributions to the world of bees and beekeepers, and B&L have been lucky and very appreciative of his kindness, experience and support. With the current COVID restrictions, it was so very kind of his son Barry to send the link for the funeral internet transmission celebration of Ken's 103 year life, live from Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton *. It was rather an odd feeling watching a funeral with so few people actually allowed to attend, when normally it would have been packed with the people that had felt their lives had been touched and enriched by knowing Ken. One always thinks you know something about a person, but no one would have guessed how many flying hours he had achieved, how many countries he had visited and worked in, or how many languages he had learned, including Esperanto and Russian. His life history and family life was intense and fascinating. One small but important legacy, in the modern world of monocultures and excessive pesticide use, is Ken's esteemed quote, "The bees will survive, despite humanity"

Philip Else

I got to know Ken really well when he had to move his bees from Stanmer Park. I was just starting beekeeping and had space in my apiary. He moved his hives in and would visit regularly with Peter Moole or another helper. Latterly Ken would come up to the Apiary on his mobility scooter; that scooter was his lifeline to independence and his beloved bees, even with the odd crash or battery failure. Even into his late 90's he was still extracting honey from his own bees. Latterly though he needed some assistance when manipulating hives, and who would not at his age! If it was possible Ken would do it. He had this, what seemed like, vast network of people he could call on to help him at a moments notice which gives an

indication of how much he was liked and respected. Ken described himself as an anomaly of nature being able to reach over 100 years. A remarkable person.

Bob

Ken was key in my introduction to bee keeping. His knowledge and calmness around bees helped greatly in my early days and continued when I had my own hives. He would often accompany me on my inspections and we became good friends. My fondest memory of Ken was as follows; Saturday morning I received a call from Bob to say Ken had travelled on his mobility scooter Friday to check his bees at Bob's and had had an accident just as he arrived and been taken to the Royal Sussex Hospital. On the Sunday Lorraine and I walked to the White Horse pub in Rottingdean and on the way I said we must go and visit Ken in hospital tomorrow. As we arrived at the pub Ken emerged onto the terrace with a small bandage on his head and a black eye. In one hand he had a pint of beer and his other hand was holding that of his 75 year old girlfriend. I think Ken was about 96 at the time. As we sat and chatted to him he still had a twinkle in his eyes.

Terry & Lorraine Tullett – France

My most lasting memory is of him with the queen between his lips to keep her out of harm's way during an inspection.

Heather

If you would like to see a recording of his funeral Service on Friday 22 May, it will be available to view until 21st June 2020 @ Website: www.obitus.com

Username: woodvale7873
Password: 770409



The Peoples Award 1967

Enduring memories of Ken



Asian Hornet Action Team Report by Manek Dubash

You may have been amused by some of the more fantastical attempts at journalism from the sensationalist end of the British press – and on occasion those deemed to be sensible – when it comes to reporting on hornets. The images range from confusing European hornets (*Vespa crabro*) with Asian hornets (*Vespa velutina*) and, most entertainingly, with the Giant Asian hornet (*Vespa mandarinia*). The words have not been much more enlightening in many cases either.

V. mandarinia is indeed large and packs a mighty punch from its tail end but, fortunately, we in the UK are not in the firing line. The insect has

reportedly made it to the US but there's no danger in the UK right now.

As for the Asian hornet, once more we seem to be blessed by its apparent absence. As I noted last month, with the lockdown in force, fewer eyes out and about could allow stray queens to build nests unobserved. On the other hand, with less international commerce, the vectors for invasion are fewer too. On Jersey (the closest that *V. velutina* has so far reached in any numbers), I gather that fewer nests have been discovered this year, although the AHATs speculate that hornets can be blown over from the mainland, meaning that they have a dilemma approaching what might previously have been

described as Forth Bridge painting situation (modern paints mean it no longer requires constant attention). Nonetheless, we need to keep our eyes open, our non-lethal traps supplied with sugary stuff until the autumn when protein becomes the bait, and encourage friends and relatives to load and use the Asian Hornet app on their mobile devices.

Enjoy your beekeeping!

You can build a hotel for bees with these kid-friendly instructions

Bee numbers are in decline, with pollinator populations growing smaller every year.

A big problem facing bees is a loss of suitable habitat - the creatures are losing the places they would usually use for nesting and breeding.

There are around 260 species of solitary bee in Britain, which don't have a hive and instead make their own nests.

Several of these species like to make their homes inside places like hollow plant stems or soft rotten wood.

Thankfully, it is easy enough to build your own bee habitat in your back garden to give the insects a comfortable new home.

The Royal Horticultural Society has

shared a simple set of instructions that is suitable for kids as well as adults.

You will need only four things to build your hotel - a terracotta plant pot, some modelling clay, plastic straws or bamboo canes, and some string.

The instructions from the RHS are as follows:

1. Cut the straws or bamboo canes to a length that fits the depth of your pot. If you are using bamboo canes you will need a grown up to carry out this part as it is tricky.
2. Tie the bundle of straws or canes together with a piece of string.
3. Place some modelling clay in the bottom of the pot and stick the bundle of straws or canes in to the clay.

4. Place the pot horizontally in your garden in a quiet place for the bees to move in.

If you are feeling productive and have plenty of space in your garden, you can stack several bee hotels alongside one another.

Other tips from the RHS to encourage pollinators to visit your garden is to plant pollen-rich flowers such as buddleia and hydrangea, and to leave water out for thirsty bees.

If you can grow a variety of plants that will flower all year round, even better.

Daisy Jackson CambridgeshireLive News 03/05/2020



© RHS The Royal Horticultural Society has shared tips to build a bee hotel with the kids

Amanda advises...

As I write this we are having another little heatwave. The forecast, dare I say it, looks promising for the next few weeks too, so there are things we need to consider to keep our bees as happy as possible.

Firstly, there is still the risk of swarms so keep on with the prevention techniques (plenty of space etc) which I mentioned in recent newsletters. And keep up with the regular inspections and control promptly. Half of mine seemed to have had a binge of swarming attempts in late April and the other half are behaving so far, thank goodness. It would be extremely unfortunate to have a colony try to swarm now, as the main nectar flow will start very shortly; I have already seen the first Bramble flowers open. One way to deal with swarming without depleting the main colony of workers (and reducing your honey crop) would be to either take the old queen into a nuc or apidea as insurance, or carry out a Demaree procedure I have mentioned earlier, rather than do an artificial swarm split. I have just finished merging my artificial swarms – actually this sounds so simple when it was not really. My artificial swarms were textbook – initially - but many of the large parent colonies failed to produce a mated queen, or else one of the two queen cells I left emerged and swarmed, and the remaining one failed to establish. (Next year I shall only leave one queen cell although this carries risks too but an Apidea with a spare cell should cover that). Virgins definitely mate much better from smaller colonies and all the castes I caught and nucs I made have mated very quickly and built up so it is those I am now merging back with the original queenless colonies, a merge of three colonies in one case. But what a lot of messing around with nucs in the wrong place as I did not forecast all this hassle! Try to get your colonies merged by early June if you want any honey. See photo of result of a merge, I need steps!

One adventure I had at the Divisional out apiary yesterday was with a virgin I was waiting to get mated from a huge colony, the brood had nearly all hatched out and I was prepared to give them a frame of open brood to keep them going but yesterday found a huge cluster under the floor. The newly mated queen must have missed the entrance and gone underneath. They had started to build 4 frames of comb with eggs. See photo. It was

quite enjoyable getting them back into the colony with the minimum equipment I had with me. Actually it was easy, I just set up the brood box over a new floor and held the comb over just touching and most rushed down into the nice smelling used comb.

There seems to have been a flow since the last short spell of cold weather, and I am in the process of taking my first spring crop off for several years. Sometimes there is a dearth in late May (it used to be called the June Gap but everything is 3 weeks early these days), as the spring flowers and trees go over and before the blackberry flowers start. Although it may vary depending upon where you are and although less is coming in this week, I think by the time you read this any dearth will be past as the Bramble is now coming into flower. So just be cautious if you take off honey, either make sure they have enough to tide them over or keep a close eye on the flowering around you. How busy they are at the entrance will be a clue. Mine are very busy; unusually the largest colonies were getting traffic jams at my shallow entrances a week ago, so I have had to open them up. I have also removed the insulation, which was useful only a fortnight ago when we had frosts. Check you have not accidentally left an insert in, they need the ventilation when the temperature is as hot as it has been today; 24°C. I put an empty super between the crownboard and roof to allow excess heat to rise up and also act as a buffer if the metal roof is in full sun. In extreme heat put a board raised up to shade the roof, last year there was one week when I had to drape old white sheets over the hives in full sun which helped to cool and shade them. If mine do cluster underneath, or a stray swarm clusters there (eg clipped queen falls out, returning virgin misses the entrance...) then it is helpful to clear them off the mesh into a tray to check for a queen, and put the insert in for just a day or so to dissuade them from returning.

I check my varroa in April, so I don't have to worry about it while the honey supers are on, there is little you can safely use at this time and it is too difficult with all the supers. So I can concentrate on keeping them comfortable and managing the supers, moving full supers or frames up, and taking them off as soon as fully capped as they are just so heavy to lift each

time, especially from the height mine are now. Make sure they have space above the brood so they don't feel congested.

With a nectar flow it is a good time to get foundation drawn beautifully and straight and that could go above the brood area in a large colony. I have become short of frames and foundation while the shops are closed so have been making my own foundation (but it is very time consuming) or cutting sheets in half and letting them draw the rest out. I discovered the hard way that to prevent these slipping down in the warmth of the hive, I had to dribble molten wax along the top bar and foundation to hold it. They have been drawing it out well, providing I give them a full length foundation to climb up in the middle. Some frames have not been built right down to the bottom yet, so I have to handle it carefully and straighten up one or two to avoid wavy comb, and hope I don't have too many collapses when I come to extract. But that is a problem for the future, for now the bees are happy and busy and have plenty of space, although they are keeping me busy making up the frames and cutting down surplus brood frames to make shallow.

I came across this very interesting video on Rearing and renting Mason bees;

<https://thewalrusandthehoneybee.com/mason-bees/>

This video is a must see, whoever thought you could rent bees. Ed



Nice clean comb



(Continued from page 1)

as larvae, and starves them of nutrition. "So you end up with non-viable brood that don't even get past the first stage of development. That's going to kill a hive, and it's also very contagious," says Gibson, founder of multi-award-winning company Bermondsey Street Bees. Unbeknown to many of its human residents, the capital has the densest bee population of any city in Europe, and possibly the world.

Likely kept in the city for a millennium – initially by monks who used their wax for candles, and their honey for sustenance and mead – London's kept honeybee population has tripled in the last decade. By 2019, more than 5,500 hives were registered in the city's gardens and on rooftops, such as those of St Paul's Cathedral and the Tate Modern.

In 2015, Greater London had no identified cases of EFB. However in the past three years, it has "gone from virtually nothing to top of the league tables", Gibson says.

Some 47 colonies were diagnosed in 2019, 34 of which were destroyed as a result, according to the government's National Bee Unit. There have been 31 diagnoses so far this year – the highest anywhere in England, Scotland and Wales.

"That's quite an outbreak of a serious notifiable bee disease and here we are living alongside a human epicentre of infection," Gibson says. "It is an interesting parallel that although the bees are going about their business normally, there is still a genuine risk of infection, and we should be alert and aware of that as beekeepers."

While bees can spread the disease themselves, often by accidentally drifting into other hives, Gibson says it is mostly beekeepers who do so by using the same equipment to inspect different hives.

"That's why the awareness is so important, rather like social distancing now," he says. "It's just that level of added vigilance and awareness that actually makes the difference to people's outcomes and it will too if beekeepers are registered with the government, but they just need to be more careful."

The best protection against further spread of the disease is regular inspection. But while beekeeping has been designated a valid reason for travel during the coronavirus lockdown, the pandemic has – in addition to decimating honey sales – arrived at the start of beekeepers' busiest season. From April through until July, bees begin to reproduce and replace their

queens, a natural by-product of which can be "swarming".

Typically in this process, around half the colony will leave – with most of the honey and a queen – to establish a new hive, moving in a vast swarm consisting of tens of thousands of bees and settling in an intermediate location for up to three days, before the scouts find a more permanent place to live.

Beekeepers carry out regular inspections to stop this process from happening, however there are still considerable swarms across London every year.

When it became apparent that a Covid-19 lockdown was inevitable, beekeepers were quick to warn continued access to their hives was essential.

Gibson, who has apiaries on rooftops and in gardens across London, in historic locations such as the nearly 700-year-old Charterhouse and Lambeth Palace, said that while health and safety checks had increased to ensure social distancing measures were upheld, travelling to access hives had not been a problem. "Unlike other essential workers, we as beekeepers have pretty full PPE," he said. "It does make us visible, so that people can see us and understand what we're doing ... a full body suit, veil and gloves is not a bad start to get around town in the current environment."

Bermondsey Street Bees also has an apiary at Silverland Quays in London's Docklands, next to which a car park has been built to cater for ambulances and workers at the NHS Nightingale field hospital. He describes the previously busy industrial site, which was cleared up and left derelict 20 years ago, as a place of "enormous rewilding" where "nature has reasserted itself", adding: "You've got things like upturned boats with wild bees living in a hole in the hull" and "essentially native pioneer species coming back that normally live on the Thames estuary".

While much of it has been left untouched, he adds: "It's been a massive transformation of the environment around our beehives, which sit there quietly busying away no matter what happens around them. "We were asked whether it would be bad for the bees to have the construction activity and the vehicle

activity onsite, and in our experience it makes no difference at all.

"As long as we can have access to the bees to inspect for disease and prevent them from swarming, which can cause a little local disruption because you know, 20,000 bees in the air turning the sky dark and sounding for all the world as if they're threatening, although that's not what they're doing, it's not what you need in an emergency pandemic situation."

However, illness and the complications arising from Covid-19 have been a barrier for some beekeepers.

Last week, Gibson received a call from an elderly lady who kept hives in her garden. Her regular beekeeper had been absent, in part due to her being at higher risk of coronavirus, and many of the bees had died.

"A lot of people have had problems with lockdown and casual beekeepers who have switched off because of health fears," Gibson says, adding: "There are many more swarms, we're seeing it on Twitter all the time."

However, London Beekeeper's Association (LBKA) chair Richard Glassborow disagrees that there has been an increase in swarms this year, and suggests many amateur beekeepers have had more time than usual during lockdown to look after hives.

LBKA run a voluntary swarm collection service, and published guidance for members ahead of lockdown saying they were "concerned London's colonies do not get neglected" as a result of illness,



Bees overlook London's Shard from Bermondsey

adding: "The prospect of that many swarms going feral is not attractive." As a result, they encouraged members to set up networking and "bee-buddy" schemes "to prepare in advance for the possibility that they fall sick and can't tend them themselves", which Glassborow says many have done. He says there has been no notable increase in the requests their members have received to collect swarms.

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Once collected, typically in a taped-up cardboard box, swarms also have to be quarantined for several weeks to ensure they are healthy, and LBKA has developed a network of people willing to host a box of bees in their garden to provide “micro-quarantine apiaries”. Additionally, Glassborow says the lockdown has seen an increase in the LBKA's online mentoring schemes, increasing the level of education readily available for intermediate and high-level beekeepers.

One of the major issues not exceptional to lockdown, Glassborow says, can be people installing hives at their place of work.

“Because it’s a place of work, there is movement – someone changes jobs, moves, and the bees are still there four weeks later,” he says, recalling an instance dealt with by an LBKA member the previous day in which bees had been abandoned four years previously.

Gibson also cited a memorable example during lockdown, in which he was called to rescue two hives from the roof of London’s Roundhouse, recalling: “We were just above the stage door making our entrance and went up on the scissor lift and picked up the hives.”

Glassborow adds: “It has consequences –

loved up on tummies full of honey they’re carrying to build their next nest, and it’s an awesome wonder of nature.

“But it’s not really that appropriate for central London. Not least because if we don’t collect them they set up feral colonies, often inside buildings, and they really can be a nuisance and we fear they could be a reservoir of pestilent disease.

However, he says “it’s happening all the time. Not all swarms are successful – they have a high failure rate, but that’s Darwinian evolution for you. You wouldn’t expect them all to succeed”.

He has also noticed an uptick in colonies sending out not one, but four or five smaller swarms – a far rarer phenomenon, which he believes may be a result of this year’s warm weather, which favours bees, and a Darwinian attempt to tip increase the odds of survival.

However, according to the IUCN’s 2015 report, nearly 10 per cent of European bee species are facing extinction. In 2019, WWF found that in the UK, 17 species were regionally extinct, 25 others threatened, and a further 31 species of conservation concern. While the UN calculates a third of the world’s food depends upon bees, these vital pollinators are often failed by our own agricultural practices, which favour increasingly vast homogenous fields of crops, which leave gorged bee

populations to starve once they are harvested.

Although cities such as London can now provide a wider variety of food sources for bees, there are serious concerns that the vast number of urban honeybees are introducing too much competition for wild bees to compete.



Hives overlook the car park serving the NHS Nightingale field hospital (Bermondsey Street Bees)

“London is not a homogenous environment, it’s very, very varied,” Glassborow says. “So you’ve got areas where there’s good forage provision and areas where there’s practically none, and that doesn’t correlate with where the bees are distributed.”

He and Gibson – whose company has won prizes for its focus on sustainability – urged those considering introducing new hives to think carefully about whether it was sustainable to do so, and to ensure that sufficient food sources were planted in the area beforehand so as not to further diminish the supply of pollen and nectar available to wild bees. Asked, in light of World Bee Day, what Londoners could do to help local bee populations, Glassborow says: “If we want to help bees it’s all about flowers ... if every Londoner planted one flower in a pot on their windowsill that’s nine million flowers, which is an environment. It’s very possible to help bees, it’s very, very possible.”

The lockdown already appears to have provided some benefits, with less intrusive land management on the likes of roadside verges giving flowers a chance to bloom – a trend campaigners hope will continue.

Alongside planting herbs and flowers where possible, Gibson suggested getting involved with local planting programmes, or even organising larger-scale efforts and applying for grants to re-adapt public space for planting. “People have to be opportunistic,” he says. “There is no formula, you just have to look around you and say, ‘where can I make a difference?’”

I make no apologies or the length of this article. Ed.



How are London's rooftop beekeepers faring during the coronavirus crisis (Bermondsey Street Bees)

swarming is a natural process from the bees' point of view, its reproduction so it's a very powerful instinct, but it can be a nuisance.

“It’s quite exciting. They look and sound awesome, but actually they’re very benign because they’re not at home, they have nothing to defend, they’re

Swarmtastical by Tony Birkbeck

It's started, slow at first which maybe an impact that bees have had more time and are monitoring their hives more frequently (so it's been suggested on social media). But on the weekend that warmed up following that chilly North Easterly the swarm reports have begun to come in, and how exciting some of them are – here's a quick report of just one of my weekends in the middle of May.

Friday afternoon, still stuck on endless conference calls and looking forward to a weekend where the weather will be much better. I've got a couple of crates of beer, loads of meat in the fridge and as far as I'm concerned the barbecue and garden lounge is going to get a lot of use over the next 2 days.

Cue call number 1!

"I have bees in my roof" came the call, "ok I'm on my way".

Risk assessment number 1 takes place. Customer has scaffolding, check, but it's not high enough. Two ladders go up and a volunteers recruited (my wife and fellow beekeeper!) to stand on the bottom of the ladders – passes the health and safety test as far as I'm concerned!

Loads of bees flying in and out of a small space under the roof tiles. After a discussion with the owner she is happy for me to remove the tiles and rescue the bees, what really helps is her brother is a roofer and agrees to come round later that week and put it all back permanently.

So, off (or up) I go. The nest is fully exposed after removing about 20 roof tiles, the breathable roofing felt under the tiles is quite damaged and needed replacing anyway. It soon became



apparent that this colony probably died in the early spring and the old comb was currently being robbed out by neighbouring bees, shame! So after all the old comb was cut out and the whole area cleaned with Jeyes fluid the roof was all put back together and the owner was really pleased!

Managed to still claim about 20Lb of honey from the comb though which is a

nice bonus I guess!

Cue call number 2

"I have a large swarm that's just settled in my chimney, my god they were noisy!", "ok I'm on my way". Risk assessment number 2 takes place. Customer has no ladder so a quick trip back to collect mine allowed me to climb the first part of the roof and then using a small roofing ladder got me to the chimney - passes the health and safety test as far as I'm concerned because the worst that could happen is I fall 4 foot! *Yes? Ed* Unfortunately the bees had found a hole in the brickwork and entered the chimney, the top of the chimney wasn't in the greatest of conditions and needed a bit of maintenance anyway. After a consultation with the owner she was happy for me to take the capping's and slate off the top of the chimney to reveal the actual void



that went down to a sealed off plate in her living room. Our assumption was that because the bees had literally just arrived I might be able to get to them and Hoover them out with Heathers trusty beevac (which, by chance,

happened to be in my garage!) Up I went, armed with a hammer and chisel. Tap, tap, bang, tap and off came the slate and I was faced with thousands of buzzing faces staring right at me. Hoover deployed and they started to 'bee' sucked harmlessly into the plastic bucket of safety.

Luckily they were all at the top and in about 4 hanging clusters. In my excitement with the first suck of one of the clusters I knocked it in half so the bottom half of the cluster fell down towards the sitting room, however the others were easy pickings. I knew her Maj was in the bucket because the flying bees were now beginning to gather around the Hoover exhaust outlet and the pheromones must have been strong.

In all it took about an hour of hoovering, my wife reminded me that's probably more hoovering than I've done in the last year! By the time I had finished the bees that fell down had come back up and were captured too.

Disinfectant deployed again to wash

the brickwork and chimney covered, when I left I could only see about 4 confused bees flying around the chimney!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJrN1Erb7rM>

video of the Hoover in action

Why couldn't I have calls for simple swarms?



Cue call number 3

"I have a swarm in my garden", "ok I'm on my way".

No pictures I'm afraid as I left my phone at home, but this was more like it, football size about 4ft high on a branch. Quick shake into a cardboard box, wrapped up and straight back to a waiting hive – perfect!!

Of course, in amongst these three are a number of other calls that turn out to be bumbles, or masonry bees, in fact one other lady contacted me and was concerned that a bee had just flown into her garden and settled on her bird bath for a drink and wondered if I could come and collect it!

At about 7pm on Sunday evening I opened my first beer of the weekend Happy swarm collecting everyone, the moral of this story is only ever collect what you feel safe to collect. Having spent the early part of my career climbing telephone poles for a living I really don't have issues with heights, but never put yourself in a dangerous position. Always do a risk assessment and only ever work within your comfort zone.



Flowers for Bees and Flower Identification Quiz by Amanda Millar

In the last newsletter I mentioned research on the best flowers for solitary and bumblebees: (Nichols, R.N., Goulson, D. & Holland, J.M. The best wildflowers for wild bees. *J Insect Conserv* 23, 819–830 (2019)

This study looked at the relative attractiveness of 40 species of wild flower to bumblebees and solitary bees. Surprisingly, the flowers which most attracted wild bees are not included in commercial pollinator mixes and one that is (clover sp) was not found to be particularly attractive. The best flowers differed depending upon whether bumblebees or solitary bee visits were counted but either way the best flowers

seem to be Meadow cranesbill, Kidney vetch, Greater knapweed, Origanum, Primrose, Musk mallow and wild carrot. These are nice plants to have in any flowerbed. Other wild flowers which are also popular with bees but have a tendency to be invasive are Smooth hawksbeard, Dandelion, Wild mustard, Field bindweed, Rough chervil. I spend a lot of time battling the bindweed so will not tolerate that one but the others could be cut as soon as flowering is over, every morning at this time of year I go round the garden and remove the spent dandelion flowers. I have Meadow cranesbill and Primrose in my wild meadow and I try

to encourage the Musk mallow, which pops up in my flowerbeds and veg patch along with, where my rows of veg do a dog leg round them.

Now for a light-hearted quiz.

See if you can identify the following flowers very popular with honey bees and other pollinators.



Key to Photos

Top Left: Photo A

Top Right: Photo B

Middle Left: Photo C

Middle Rights: Photo D

Bottom Right: Photo E

Quiz answers on Back Page

Photo Corner



Left: How are London's rooftop beekeepers faring during the coronavirus crisis (Bermondsey Street Bees)

Below: Rooftop hives at the Hilton hotel on London's south bank (Bermondsey Street Bees)



Stepladder required?
Thanks Amanda for this one.



Tony Robinson finding the presence of wax moth in frames left in a bait hive. As he said "...finding the little buggers in the tiniest gaps"

B&L Divisional Diary 2020

Indoor meetings:

Meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, October to March at Cliffe church hall, Lewes, unless otherwise stated. Members are invited at 7.00pm to assist with setting out chairs etc. ready for a 7.15pm start. Non-members are always welcome.

Winter programme:

~~15th January 2020: Spring Preparation with Christine Stevens.~~

~~19th February: AGM + Honey & Mead Show + Mini-Auction.~~

~~18th March: Swarming – Prevention and Control with Amanda Millar.~~

Summer programme:

All currently cancelled until further notice.

Dates for your diary:

~~7th March: Sussex BKA AGM, Luxford Centre.~~

~~3rd, 4th & 5th April: SBKA – Spring Convention.~~

~~25th April 2020: Bee Disease Day, Ringmer.~~

~~16th May: Sussex BKA Bee Market, Heathfield.~~

~~11th, 12th & 13th June: South of England Show.~~

The above events have now been cancelled due to the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic.

Quiz Answers from Page 7

Photo A: Green alkanet with Blue Mason bee

Photo B: Birds Foot Trefoil

Photo C: Bugle

Photo D: Allium with Nomad bee

Photo E: Sweet rocket with *Volucella pellucida*

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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.

Contributions to your newsletter

Contributions for the newsletter, including photos can be sent, preferably by email, to the editor. Please refer to panel above for details. Please limit to a maximum of 900 words. Copy to be sent no later than the 12th of the month preceding the month of publication. Photos etc. for the website should be emailed to our Gerald Legg webmaster, see panel above.

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QR Link to B&L Website

