

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

Newsletter



Volume 5 – May 2020

Editor: Norman Dickinson

BRIGHTON AND LEWES DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

Coronavirus may prove boost for UK's bees and rare wildflowers

By Jonathan Watts: Article submitted by Amanda Millar.

Populations could recover as verges are left uncut, setting what conservationists hope will be a long-term trend

Rare wildflowers and declining bee populations could start to recover during the coronavirus lockdown because many councils are leaving roadside verges uncut, according to Europe's biggest conservation charity for wild plants. The respite for these mini-meadows is likely to lead to an explosion of colour in the countryside this summer and bring benefits to other pollinators, including butterflies, birds and bats, botanists at [Plantlife](#) said. Roadside verges are [one of the last refuges](#) for the many plant species that have been devastated by the conversion of natural meadows into farmland and housing estates. These narrow strips of grassland are home to 700 species of wildflowers, nearly 45% of the UK's total flora. Their potential role as conservation areas, however, is normally undermined each spring by local councils when they mow the roadsides. This cuts down many plants before they can flower and seed, leading to a steady decline of oxeye daisy, yellow rattle, wild carrot, meadow crane's-bill, greater knapweed, white campion, burnet-saxifrage, betony, harebell and field scabious.

Plantlife says this may be the best summer for years for these plants because several councils are redistributing resources to other activities as a result of the pandemic. Flintshire, Lincolnshire, Newcastle, Norfolk and Somerset are among the growing number of councils that are scaling back or delaying their verge mowing operations. Some local authorities, such as Devon, had already begun to accept that this should be done later and less frequently. Trevor Dines, Plantlife's botanical specialist, said this could be a silver lining to the coronavirus crisis. "It's a real opportunity for verges to flower again, some for the first time," he said. "If the lockdown ends in late May, drivers will see great swaths of oxeye daisies and ladies bedstraw." Grass near junctions and sight lines needs to be trimmed more regularly for safety reasons, but he said most stretches of road can be left until much later in the year so that motorists can see the benefits outweigh the risks. "Our message to councils is that if you haven't cut verges until now then leave them until August and gauge the response from the public," he said. Kate Petty, the group's road verge campaign manager, said the

extraordinary short-term circumstances of the pandemic could help to shift opinion and policies with long-term benefits for threatened species such as wood-calamint. "The fix is startlingly straightforward. Simply cutting verges less and later will save plants, money and reduce emissions. We need to rewild ourselves and accept nature's wonderful 'messiness'," she said. Dines, who is also a beekeeper, said later and less frequent verge-mowing would help other species that depend on wildflowers. "This will certainly be good for pollinators. Last year, we already saw improvement in the areas where councils were cutting less. I had my best ever year for honey," he said. "It's also good for mental health. People are desperate for wildlife and colour right now. Let's see what the public response is. For lots of commuters, myself included, verges are the only chance to see wild plants." This year will almost certainly see much lower levels of wildlife roadkill. Past [estimates](#) suggest cars and trucks in the UK killed about 100,000 hedgehogs, 100,000 foxes, 50,000 badgers, 30,000 deer a year as well as barn owls and many other species of bird and insect.

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Ken Stevens

It is with sadness that we report that Ken Stevens recently died at 103 years. An obituary will appear in next months newsletter.

Forthcoming summer meetings:

- All currently cancelled. See rear panel

In next months edition:

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

Asian Hornet Action Team Report by Manek Dubash

So so good – as of the end of March when this column was written – there have been no sightings of the Asian hornet more: so far, so good. We've not had a single sighting of Asian hornets (*Vespa velutina*) in 2020 on the UK mainland, although absence of evidence is of course not evidence of absence.

That said, I'm mildly optimistic about our ability to keep the insect at bay this year, at least, because the reduction in shipping volumes internationally should reduce the likelihood of an Asian hornet queen stealing a ride in a container. On the other hand, the reduction in the numbers of people out and about also means the chances of spotting a nest

is also lower – although as a by-product, it seems as though nature is enjoying the break from the human onslaught on the environment.

Whatever happens, we as beekeepers are the first line of defence. I've seen lots of queries about hornets on social media in particular, and all of them have turned out to be wasps or European hornets (*Vespa crabro*). The public is alerted, which is a good thing – as I've said before, experience on the European mainland shows that an alerted public is crucial to spotting and identifying this invasive insect early, and subsequently to the location and destruction of their nests.

The best way we can all help is both to use and to encourage the use of the Asian Hornet app on our phones, as it really helps with identification and reporting.

And as a by-the-by, you may have seen some of the scare stories in the press about killer Giant Asian Hornets – please ignore those, as that creature is not poised to invade; it's a completely different animal.

Meanwhile the Brighton & Lewes Division's Asian Hornet Action Team stands ready to help with identification so, if you need help, please just ask.

Enjoy the sunshine, and happy beeking!

Photo Corner



Top left: Honey bees drinking from damp soil in tray of Allium seedlings early April.

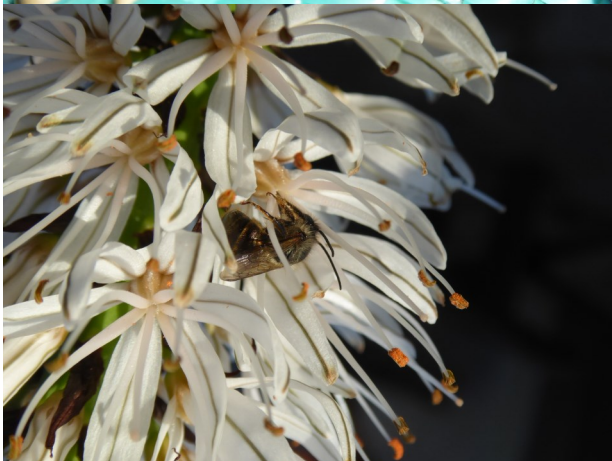


Top right: Honey bee on Ramsons 22.4.20 showing the white spot of pollen they receive between the eyes (same place as the yellow oil seed rape pollen)



Middle Right: Bees 696 pair of Red Mason Bees (*Osmia bicornis*) Note the conspicuous white mohican haircut on the male on top and the two 'horns' on the head of the female below. Both freshly emerged from my solitary bee tubes.

Bottom Right: 706 Blue Mason bee (I think) *Osmia caerulescens* on an Asphodel.



Thank you Amanda for these wonderful photos. Ed

Amanda advises...

After another fine week in the latter half of April all the bees have been very busy, expanding and collecting nectar. I hope you have managed to keep on top of their needs for supers for nectar and also space for expanding brood. Congestion in either area may lead to swarm preparations, which would be very inconvenient to collect during this lockdown. A few days of cool weather mid-April (following a cold March when inspections were not possible) meant my second full inspection was 12 days after the first instead of 7 and in that time three of mine had started queen cells, one even had sealed queen cells but the queen was still there as that day the weather had only just improved and they had not got round to swarming, also she was clipped. I do urge you to try clipping a wing of your queens, it saves so much trouble especially as weather seems to be more unpredictable and extreme these days interfering with inspections.

I carried out two artificial swarms and took the queen off in a nuc in a third. I was unable to do the Demaree I mentioned last month as I did not have two drawn supers to put between the broods. In late April there is time to split, get the virgin mated and laying and merge them before the main nectar flow starting June. The Demaree method would be ideal for a later swarm control as the colony stays together and will be large enough to collect nectar. The nuc is doing well, in one artificial swarm many of the bees returned to the parent instead of staying with their queen as I was unable to point the parent far enough away to make the foragers go to the artificial swarm part on the original site. The following day I remedied this. Don't forget to put a queen excluder between the floor and the artificial swarm or they can easily swarm off, although if the queen is clipped they will not go far. This can stay in place for a week until they are settled then remove it. In my experience they can decide to go 6 days later even though they have the queen laying.

The queen cells in the parent parts need to be thinned to one or two, 4 or 5 days later, but it

depends on the stage of the original queen cells. If you carry out the artificial swarm leaving open queen cells with visible larvae and charged full of royal jelly as recommended then 5 days is fine. However in my case with some good quality sealed cells which I judged might hatch in 4 days; I thinned them 3 days later. I will check again 4 days later in case the bees make queen cells from newly hatched eggs; remember eggs for 3 days, larvae for 5 days and they can make queen cells on up to two day old larvae, and they often do in response to the changes you have wrought. A missed emergency queen cell could lead to problems later. Taking good note of dates I usually check 2 days after she was due to hatch so I can make sure the queen cell has hatched normally and forestall early queen/brood lack, which could lead to drone laying workers. Any later than this and they will probably have torn down the old cell and it will be impossible to tell if she actually hatched. If this sounds complicated, read the Swarm control notes on the Brighton and Lewes website.

Tips for thinning queen cells: if its your first inspection after artificial swarm or other reason and you need to thin the cells, go for ones which you can see have loads of royal jelly and a larva in, also go for large dimpled ones especially if all you have are sealed ones. Smallish undimpled ones on the face of the brood are usually emergency cells and may not be as good. You may find both sorts after an artificial swarm. Think also about where they are. Those sticking out from the bottom bars may be vulnerable to damage when you put the hive back together, those on the outside of the brood area may not get the best attention, so perhaps move in towards the centre. I mark the top bar of my chosen cell (s) with a drawing pin so I can go straight to it or be especially careful when moving.

Because of the cool weather in early April, confining my large colonies indoors it encouraged an outbreak of Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus (CBPV) in one of my larger colonies – it always hits the

largest! I decided to cull them as they were clearly susceptible and risking the others. So far, touch wood, the rest



seem to have avoided or outgrown it. Twenty years ago CBPV was rare and only found covertly in about 1-2% of colonies, now it is present in about 60% or more colonies; becomes an overt infection when large colonies are confined indoors with inadequate 'social distancing' enabling the virus to spread; so it is seen in large colonies in the active season when weather is not ideal; something which is going to become more prevalent as climate changes, I fear. That colony should have had more space but I missed noticing their rapid expansion in the cool spell when I could not inspect. My motto is rear queens from my best colonies, cull the worst and diseased ones in order to slowly improve the quality and health of my bees. I wish more people did this.

The weather ahead seems to be uncertain, unsettled at times even for the first week or so in May. This is just when some of my virgins will need to go on their mating flights; I hope we are not going to have another rubbish mating season like last year!

Other things to think about in May include checking for varroa which will be building with the increase in brood, keeping up with their super requirements and don't forget to remove the honey promptly if you have oil seed rape near you.

I came across an interesting paper recently on the best wildflowers for wild bees (Nichols, R.N., Goulson, D. & Holland, J.M. The best wildflowers for wild bees. *J Insect Conserv* 23, 819–830 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10841-019-00180-8>) You should be able to get the full paper if you search on the web, unfortunately the link I have does not seem to work when pasted in.

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 outbreak.

Bee Equipment for Sale

Bee PPE suit x2. One almost new.
Bee PPE hood and jacket combined x2
Smoker x1
Metal ends wide x10
National lift x2
National base x1
WBC lift x2
Clearing boards-miscellaneous .
Varroa counting boards x2
Swarm box x2
Honey mixing stick aluminium x1
Small hive on stand, 6 frames
Honey melting box - rather ancient

Details are on the B&L website

Officers of the Division

President: Amanda Millar

Chairman: Heather McNiven
E: chair.blbees@btinternet.com

Vice-Chairman/Treasurer/Membership
Secretary: Pat Clowser
5 Wivelsfield Road, Saltdean, BN2 8FP
T: 01273 700404
E: patricia.blbees@hotmail.com

Hon Secretary: Hilary Osman
Holly Tree Cottage, Norlington Lane,
Ringmer, BN8 5SH
T: 01273 813045
E: secretary@brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

Meetings Secretary: Bob Curtis

Swarm Coordinator: Sue Taylor
M: 07999 987097

Webmaster: Gerald Legg
E: gerald@chelifier.com

Newsletter Editor: Norman Dickinson
34 Abergavenny Road, Lewes, BN7 1SN
M: 07792 296422
E: editor.blbees@outlook.com

Librarian: Dominic Zambito
E: librarian.blbees@outlook.com

Education Co-ordinator: Amanda Millar
E: amanda.millar.rf3@btinternet.com

Asian Hornet Action Team Co-ordinator:
Manek Dubash
T: 07762 312592
E: blbka.ahat@gmail.com

Out-Apiary Managers:
“Grassroots”: Amanda Millar
“Knowlands Farm”: Heather McNiven
“Hove”: Judith New

SBKA County Representative:
Bob Curtis

National Honey Show Representative:
Norman Dickinson

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

Regional Bee Inspector: Kay Wreford Mobile: TBA email: Kay.Wreford@apha.gov.uk

Seasonal Bee Inspector: Diane Steele Mobile: 07775 119452 email: diane.steele@apha.gsi.gov.uk

QR Link to B&L Website

