

# Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

## Newsletter



Volume 1 – January 2020

Editor: Norman Dickinson

BRIGHTON AND LEWES DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

[www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk](http://www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk)

### Greetings from your Editor

Welcome to your first newsletter of 2020 and I trust that you have had a good festive holiday and are looking forward to a new beekeeping year. Our first winter meeting in 2020 will be on Wednesday, 15th January when we welcome back Christine Stevens who will talk on spring preparations and is likely to be very interesting and informative, not to be missed.

The Brighton and Lewes Beekeepers AGM will take place on Wednesday, 19th February, where a key Agenda item will be approval of the revised Constitution that your Committee spent a lot of time ensuring that it is fit for purpose. I know that Pat Clowser will be forwarding a copy to each member prior to the AGM so at least you will know

what you are voting for. In tandem with the AGM we will also be holding our annual Honey and Mead Show and after record entries into last years Show, we look forward a full exhibits bench. Show Rules and Entry Form will be emailed out to all members in plenty of time. After the AGM and whilst the judging is taking place we will be holding a mini-auction, so if you have any beekeeping related items (or not) that you wish to get rid of then bring them along. We would ask that all items are in reasonable condition and that anything associated with the harvesting of honey will meet food standards regulations. Our West Sussex BKA cousins will be holding their Annual Convention

on Saturday, 29th February, details of which can be found on the back page of this newsletter. Manek Dubash is doing an excellent job as Asian Hornet Action Team Coordinator (AHAT) but he relies on the B&L members who have signed up to the Team to spread the word to the wider general public. If you have not already signed up and wish to do so, then please contact Manek, his details are on the back page.

With the very mild but wet weather we have had recently it is imperative that you check your hives to ensure that the bees have sufficient stores, the last thing that you will want is for them to die of starvation. Here's looking forward to a most successful beekeeping year.

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### Forthcoming winter meetings:

- See rear panel

### Reading the Insert by Amanda Millar

The insert is a great resource to use at this time of year when the weather is not suitable to look inside, to determine a little of what is going on. It also enables us to plan actions for the spring.

I shall divide what we might find into Activity, Disease and Other things of interest. Usually to get meaningful information the insert needs to be in place for several days. All my floors whether bought or home made now have plastic Correx inserts;

they are easily washable and most debris and Varroa show up more clearly than on plywood inserts.

**Activity.** At this time of year we may be curious as to the size of the cluster and even if it is still alive. Lines of debris under the seams indicate live active bees and how large the cluster is. Looking more closely at the type of debris I recently saw on one of mine about 9 seams of debris with the two outer ones consisting of pale wax cappings which

indicated honey stores being accessed on the outer frames. As they normally work from the inside out it means they only have about three frames of stores left, in this case on a shallow box probably a maximum of 9lbs left. This was in agreement with the light weight on hefting. The inner seams of debris were brown and crumbly, probably indicating brood rearing and cleaning up cells for that purpose. The location of the debris

*(Continued on page 2)*

### In next months edition:

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

indicates where the cluster is. If it is in the middle, assuming they started with sufficient stores they would have put it at both sides of the cluster and could still move to either side. Some of mine are at one side now, hard up against the wall of the hive. Does this mean they could potentially be isolated from stores on the other side if the weather turns cold? Hefting in this case could be misleading. If you feel the need to add fondant, knowing which side they are on in advance could minimize disturbance if you have to move the crownboard round so the hole is above the cluster. If one of your colonies has no debris at all it either indicates your colony is dead, or that the mesh floor is so blocked with dead bees or debris that nothing is coming through, investigate! Sometimes one can see the circular discs which the pupae were sealed with, confirming that brood is hatching. I also spotted some wax scales, a bit unusual at this time of year as they prefer warmer weather to be wax building. However, it has been mild; up to 12 degrees C and I have even found some beige pollen loads dropped on the insert in the first few days of the New Year. If they have granulated stores, they sometimes suck the liquid and discard dry crystals, which show up on the insert. It seemed to be a good ivy year this last autumn so I would not be surprised to see some at some stage.

**Pests and Disease.** One of the main uses of the insert is to monitor for varroa. Ideally the insert should be in for 7 days in winter as a single day drop can be misleading. I put

the insert in December, prior to see if they need Oxalic acid vapourisation. After 24 hours on one colony there were no mites, great I thought! The second day there were 3, then 4, and 5 resulting in an average of 3 per day, so definitely worth treating. In the summer, with more activity, 5-7 days should give an idea of the average daily drop. I find icing sugar dusting is a much more accurate and quicker assessment of mite levels, for which of course the insert needs to be in place to catch the sugar and mites. Several treatments also require the insert to be in place, to keep the volatile treatments in the hive, such as Apiguard, and Oxalic acid vapourisation and of course to assess the effectiveness of the treatments.

Have you ever examined the varroa more closely? You may see light brown juvenile varroa, or even varroa which have been chewed; indicating a level of hygienic behaviour in your bees. If this is the case you may also find bits of pupae in the insert indicating that either you have a bad attack of mites or that the bees are opening up mite infested pupae and removing them and the juvenile varroa. Other reasons for pupal pieces may be that the bees are starving and cannibalizing them, and sometimes they do this during Apiguard treatment, so depending upon the weather etc it may be worth investigating further.

Other things to look for on the insert include; small live wax moth larvae which sometimes fall through the mesh; wax moth droppings indicating how many

and where they are so in warm weather you may be able to locate and kill them. In summer you may find bees and wasps on the insert, if this is a problem block the gap at the rear with some rolled up cloth or mesh. In March I have had a queen wasp licking any sweetness. Ants are difficult to deter but making sure the insert is regularly cleaned and free of spilled syrup, honey, icing sugar etc will help keep bees, wasps and ants away. If you find mouse droppings or nuts or seed shells on the insert in winter, bees will not appreciate the disturbance and smell and mice will mess up any varroa counts you are trying to achieve so definitely exclude them.

Other signs of trouble to be looked for are chalk brood mummies and spots of brown dysentery, indicating something is not right (virus, Nosema apis, fermenting stores etc).

**Other things.** In summer you may see small, long legged mites running fast on the insert, these are harmless pollen mites, eating debris and nothing to worry about. Sometimes in winter if there is very cold windy weather, I try to reduce draughts for small colonies by putting the insert in while it lasts.

In the spring and summer with a bit of experience you can tell which flowers they are visiting from the colour of the pollen loads.

In hot weather last year, a couple of my colonies hung out the front and then moved under the mesh floor, also a clipped queen failing to leave with a swarm may move under the mesh, followed by the returning swarm. In both cases, brushing them off into a box and returning them to the hive, putting the insert under the floor for a few days will solve the problem.

## Bees' hairy tongues help them mop up thick or thin nectar

Bumblebees can gorge on gloopy nectar just as easily as they can slurp up the runny kind—and now we know why. Its all down to tiny hairs on their tongues.

A close look at a bee's tongue reveals a long, rod-like stalk that is covered in thin, hair-like protrusions. This makes it look a little like a tiny mop, which the bee dips in and out of a flower to drink the sweet nectar.

Pascal Damman at the University of Mons in Belgium and his colleagues analysed videos of buff-tailed bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris audax*) feeding on nectar of different viscosities, and made an unexpected

discovery.

They found that regardless of the fluid's thickness, the bees lapped it up at an identical rate collecting the same volume of liquid every time they inserted their tongue. That is a surprise because, in theory, thicker liquids should be more likely than thin ones to stick to an object dipped into the solution. The researchers 3D printed rods that were either smooth or covered in tiny structures to mimic the bees' hair-like protrusions. They then dipped the rods into fluids of different viscosities..

It turned out that the distance between the microstructures on the

rods explained the puzzle. If they are spaced close enough to each other, then the liquid is automatically pulled between them by what is called capillary action. This process is fast enough to fill the gaps with nectar each time the bee dips its tongue in, and holds the liquid so it doesn't drip.

This means bees can cope even if the nectar's viscosity changes. "You don't want to starve just because your meal has got thinner" says Patrick Spicer at the University of South Wales, Australia, who wasn't involved in the study.

New Scientist, 10th August 2019

## Amanda advises...

In this quiet time it is an opportunity to reflect on the past, present and future.

How was your beekeeping this past year, did you achieve what you wanted and have you improved areas which need some work, such as better disease recognition and appropriate action, especially monitoring and recognising varroa and treating before serious damage is done? Read leaflets from the NBU website and attend meetings. Brighton & Lewes have a disease recognition day on 25th April at Ringmer. It will be opened for non-members if there are spaces so get booked on. As to the present, are you up to date, have you checked your bees recently that they are not underwater, or their entrance blocked with dead bees? Spare a thought also for the Australian Beekeepers who have been experiencing drought for the last few years which will affect forage for the bees, and all those who have and are losing bees to the wild fires raging and the poor wild bees. It sounds as though it could be a decade or more before the trees and plants recover enough to flower again.

And to the future... The threats to all our pollinators because of climate change, habitat loss and pesticides must be addressed. The new PM seems to have the environment a long way below making money, in his list of priorities. Which leaves us all, as

individuals and groups, to all do our bit to help insects; lobby and petition and encourage others to consider the environment and educate the young; and plant up our gardens in the most insect-friendly, pesticide-free way, although I fear we do not have that long and changes need to be made in the next few years.

The problems ahead make everything else pale to insignificance, however, thinking in the short term for our bees, we need to keep them healthy and alive. I am reasonably happy mine have the lowest feasible mite levels, but I shall still be putting the inserts under in the first week in January for a week, to make sure. It will also give me an idea of the size and what they are up to. See my article Reading the Insert.

Some people like to use Oxalic Acid (OA) trickle at the turn of the year, as this is when the brood is at the minimum and so it will be most effective. However, you need to remember not to leave it too late as the queen should start laying again in January. OA trickle is not tolerated by the bees as well as OA vapourisation, partly because the trickle is in syrup which the bees lick up. The vapour is essentially external and the bees have no incentive to eat it. So don't be tempted to give more than one trickle a year. It is a good idea to start hefting the hives now and then, although if you fed properly in the autumn

they should be ok. The only ones I need to keep an eye on are nucs, which sometimes do not take sufficient

down in the autumn or do not have enough room in a cosy nuc to store enough. Also because they have a smaller population and can generate less warmth, they may be unable to move to where there may be a frame of stores at the edge. Reading the debris on the insert will give you an idea of the population size and where it is and hefting may indicate if it is time to take a quick peep under the crownboard on a mild, dry, low wind day and move a full frame nearer to the cluster to avoid isolation starvation. A day when they are flying would be a good one to check them if you are worried about them, especially if you see one with not activity when others are busy. (It reached 13 degrees on 19th December and when the sun came out on the 18th my bees went berserk; flying and orientating - and I hope going to the toilet!) If a colony, which was large in the autumn, reaches a low population and has problems moving to its stores it is likely caused by disease or excess varroa and may not be worth wasting much time on because of low disease resistance (or neglectful owner).



Bee taking pollen into the hive over Christmas time. Could be Mahonia which is in flower at this time.

Picture submitted by Tony Robinson



Concern has been growing over the spread of a deadly disease among the Welsh bee population.

American Foulbrood (AFB) is a highly-infectious disease which is caused by spore-forming bacteria transferred to the bees through infected food.

It is described as the most widespread and destructive of all the bee brood diseases with no cure.

If detected the whole hive including the bees and honey have to be destroyed.

Gruffydd Rees, who has been keeping bees for almost 10 years at Dryslwyn, Carmarthenshire, said he was devastated by the loss of one of his hives last week.

"I've had training in spotting disease and infection, so I knew straight away that something wasn't right," he said. "It was a really strong colony but I could tell there was a problem."

Mr Rees said destroying the hive was one of the hardest

things he has had to do.

He added: "I had to wait until it was dark so that all the bees were back in the hive, pour in a can of petrol to kill them then burn the hive and all the frames."

*"Gruffydd Rees says destroying his hive was one of the hardest things he's had to do"*

Cases of AFB have been recorded in the UK for many years, but figures suggest that new cases are on the rise. According to the UK government's BeeBase database there have been 14 new cases in Wales so far this year compared to three in 2018 and 26 the year before.

Some of the highest numbers have been recorded in Pembrokeshire.

Beekeepers are legally obliged to notify the authorities if they

suspect they may have a case. Frank Gellatly, chief bee inspector for Wales, said it was vital beekeepers let authorities know how many hives they have and where they are located.

But Paul Eades, a member of Pembrokeshire Beekeepers Association, said anyone keeping bees commercially or privately should have to register their hives.

"Disease like AFB can spread quickly within an area," he said.

"We've been concerned about a number of new cases in Pembrokeshire this year and feel that Welsh Government should be making it compulsory for all keepers to register their hives."

The Welsh Government said the issue of registration is under review by the European Union and the result of that "may require all beekeepers to register with the government, however details are still to be established".

BBC News, August 2019





## Photo Corner



Left: This photo is the good news, lovely weather today (Christmas Day) and all the hives were busy including the only one which was not flying yesterday. Activity was in direct proportion to the amount of sun on them. Note to self: move ones in shade or get on with pruning hedge so they all get a bit of winter sun.

Right: This photo is the bad news; noticed 3 drones fall out of colony 13(!!) one of which had Deformed Wing Virus (DWV). Note to self: don't lumber a colony with a number like 13, and check it when conditions are next suitable. Question: what are the implications of drones, with DWV, on Christmas Day? Answers in the next newsletter!

PS Tony Robinson has the answer to colony number 13.

If you number your hives in hexadecimal rather than decimal you can avoid the curse of 13!

13 decimal is 0D in hexadecimal  
13 hexadecimal is 19 in decimal

So completely safe



Left: Honey bee sculpture seen on the London South Bank made entirely out of vegetables, which without the honey bee and other pollinators, would simply not exist.

A true work of art (the bee that is)

## B&L Divisional Diary 2019 / 2020

### Indoor meetings:

Meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

### Dates for your diary:

7th March: Sussex BKA AGM.

25th April 2020: Bee Disease Day, Ringmer.

16th May: Sussex BKA Bee Market, Heathfield.

## West Sussex BKA Annual Convention – Saturday 29th February 2020

Lodge Hill Centre, Watersfield, Pulborough, West Sussex,  
RH20 1LZ

### Not to be missed!

We again have a renowned group of speakers and an impressive mix of lectures and seminars with something for everyone. Our main speakers are **Marin Anastasov NDB**, **Professor Robert Pickard** and **Dr Anna Oliver**.

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

We have already had a lot of interest in the event and encourage your members to book early to ensure that they secure a place on their preferred seminars.

Full details are now on the website with speakers' profiles and a Booking Form to download: [www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/convention.html](http://www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/convention.html)

[www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk](http://www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk)

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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

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QR Link to B&L Website



The co-operative membership  
Community Fund

