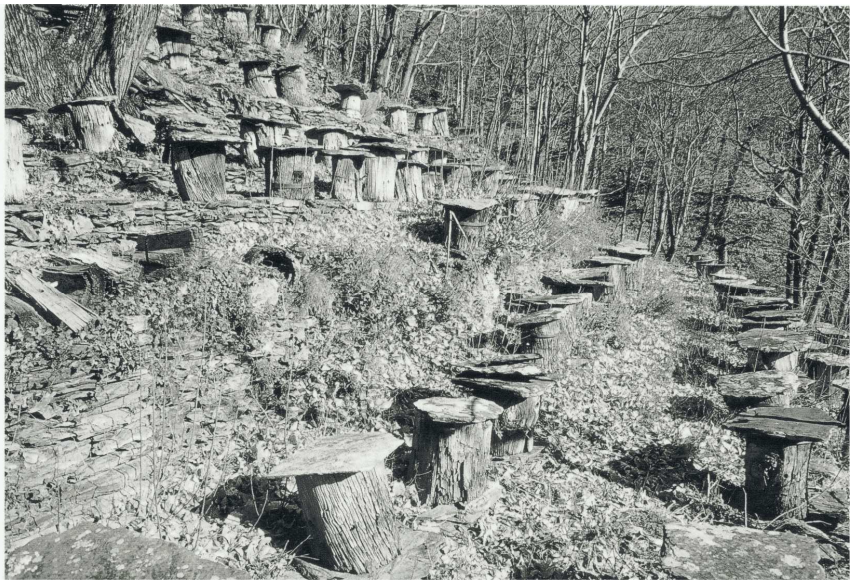
THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



A postcard from France showing hollowed-out chestnut tree trunks being used as hives. It is claimed that the tannin is an excellent natural protection against varroa.

Sent in by Christiane-Celine Duval (Southend)

Monthly Magazine of the E.B.K.A

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Essex Beekeeper's Association

The Essex Beekeepers' Association is a registered charity whose object is to further the craft of beekeeping in Essex.

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Derek Webber

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Please ensure that all material for publication is received by the Editor before the 10th of the preceding month to publication.

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April 2009

2 April *Thursday 7.30pm.* **Harlow**, Kings Church, Red Willow, Honey/ Pollen Reserves with R. Cropley.

3 April *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford**, Chadwick Hall, Main Road Gidea Park. Practical Evening, putting together hives frames. Learn how to extract honey.

4 April *Saturday 11.00am* **Colchester***,* Wax Day at Rowan Cottage, Tendring. £4 per person includes homemade soup for lunch and all teas and coffees. Beeswax and wick available to make candles by dipping or using moulds. Pay for materials at cost price. Beginners welcome. Phone Penny Barker to book on 01255 830713.

4 April *Saturday 2.00pm* **Maldon** Blue Boar Silver Street Maldon. What is in your toolbox? Will experienced beekeepers please bring along your beekeeping toolbox to discuss the contents for the benefit of beginners – although we all can still learn something from others!

5 April *Sunday 10.00am* **Southend** Hawkwell Village Hall. 'Introduction to Beekeeping' theory class.

16 April *Thursday 8.00pm* **Epping Forest** Chingford Horticultural Hall, Larkshall Road, Chingford. Beekeeping Examinations.

17 April *Friday 10.00am—6.30pm* **BBKA Spring Convention** Stoneleigh Park Exhibition and Conference Centre near Coventry, Warwickshire, CV8 2LZ.

18 April *Saturday 10.00am—6.30pm* **BBKA Spring Convention** Stoneleigh Park Exhibition and Conference Centre near Coventry, Warwickshire, CV8 2LZ.

20 April *Monday 8.00pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Methodist Church CM1 2XB. Don't lose your bees ! At this time of year, your bees might be looking for a new home and you could say goodbye to your honey yields ! We will be looking at what's in the hive mind, and what this means for the beekeeper.

22 April *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** W.I. Rayleigh. Swarm control.

24 April *Friday 7.30pm* **Braintree** Library of Tabor Science College, Braintree CM7 5XP. Speaker Mathilde. Brien 'The sniffer bee Technology'. Contact Nobby Clark 01277 220561.

29 April *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Saffron Walden** Thaxted Guildhall CM6 2LA. Lecture by Chris Chilvers on Collecting and Preventing Swarms.

May 2009

1 May	*Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road Gidea Park. 'Selling Honey: the Regulations with Louise Coben-Gipps.
7 May	*Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** Kings Church, Red Willow. A talk by Mr D. Nichol on "swarm control".
9 May	*Saturday 2.00pm* **Maldon** Blue Boar Silver Street Maldon. Beginners Mistakes. As told by near-beginners. Perhaps experienced beekeepers might also reveal their blunders?
9 May	*Saturday* **Epping Forest** Apiary Meeting—details to follow.
10 May	*Sunday TBA* **Braintree** at The Apiary Coney Green, Gt. Bardfield. Queen rearing Part 1—ring Pat Rowland 01376 326036.
16 May	*Saturday 10.00am* **Romford** Inspection Tour starting at the Chase.
17 May	*Sunday 2.30pm* **Saffron Walden** Gunsmead, Gt Easton, CM6 2HD. Apiary Meeting—Queen rearing Part 2 with Robert Pickford.
17 May	*Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** Young Farmers Show at Boyton Hall Roxwell Chelmsford CM1 4LN.
18 May	*Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Methodist Church CM1 2XB. Looking down the microscope with Regional Bee Inspector, Andy Wattam. A practical demonstration and a hands-on to evaluate the level of nosema in your hive. Bring along a sample of you bees and see for yourself .
23 May	*Saturday 3.00pm* **Colchester** at Aldham Apiary. Assess the strength of your colonies against those at Aldham Apiary. Ring Derek Webber 01206 271714.
24 May	*Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** Apiary Meeting at Terling Farm. D. Rees telephone Darren Rees, 01245 233759.
27 May	*Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** W.I. Rayleigh. A talk by David Blackwood on 'Portrait of a honeybee'.

New Research to investigate the interaction of the honeybee and varroa, with a contribution from Essex Beekeepers Association.

The East Anglian Bee Forum, which consists of Member Associations from Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, West Norfolk, Peterborough, Huntingdon, Essex and Suffolk, has obtained £100,000 of funding from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) to investigate the interaction of honey bees and varroa. The Member Associations have committed some £16,000 over four years to support a PhD research studentship at Sheffield University.

Industry Supervisor for the project, David Bancalari, a member of West Norfolk Beekeepers, which is heading the consortium of associations, said "This project brings beekeepers and researchers closer together, a very necessary step to ensuring that all involved in beekeeping agree the priorities for research. It is a first for BBSRC to work with beekeepers in this way - the combination of excellent science and committed beekeepers has been at the heart of this research funding.

Dr Stephen Martin of the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences at Sheffield University, who will be mentoring the student, has been at the forefront of beekeeping research in the UK for many years. A recognised authority on the varroa mite, Dr Martin says that for a PhD studentship to succeed, the work must be original and capable of peer review by researchers both in the UK, Europe and world-wide. Research into beekeeping is very much a collaborative process in an international setting.

SPRAYING

The farmers' spraying season will soon be upon us and I thought a little information might help any beekeepers who could be affected.

•The Pesticides Safety Directorate, which is based at York, has a website – www.pesticides.gov.uk – and an information phone line – 01904 455755.

The service team will give information on pesticides (i.e. safe use for bees) and more importantly, information about mixes that farmers may be using.

•The Voluntary Initiative also publish information about insecticides "Insecticides – best practice to minimise their environmental impact in arable crops" on their website – www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk.

This information is primarily aimed at farmers but may be of help if you are contacted by a farmer who is going to use a spray.

Eileen Marrable

EBKA Spray & Disease Liaison Officer

Technical topics

Are we using "Very Unsatisfactory Equipment" ?

By Richard Alabone (Mr Beesy)

Last time, I had a moan about propolis sticking the sides of frames to the brood box. Langstroth's bee space is fine between combs and above the top bar, but at the bottom and sides it is not necessary. To prove my point, the gap between the bottom bars and floor, as well as the areas around the lugs especially if they are tapered, are much larger than the standard bee space but cause us no problems. Similarly the space between one bottom bar and the next is very often 5/8 inch, which beekeepers do not seem to notice. So, we can see that the bee space does not have to be the same everywhere within the hive. We shouldn't take Langstroth's word for it, not all the time.

I sometimes wonder if I'm just an old moaner, criticizing our beekeeping equipment and in consequence our methods of beekeeping.. But I have realized I'm not alone. John Yates used the words "very unsatisfactory equipment" in his Apicultural Monograph, published six years ago, in which he criticizes the equipment available for keeping bees and gives the history of what has gone wrong. He discusses [and criticizes] all aspects of hive design, manufacturing tolerances, including; frames, bee space, foundation, floors, crown boards, end boards, etc. even discussing the quality of smokers and the origin of the bees we mostly keep, in fact, everything from bees to extractors.

He asks, how has this come about? Apparently the BBKA involved the BSI [British Standards Institution] at one time, but then in 1984, pulled out 'due to a lack of interest on the part of the BBKA' according to the BSI., but the BBKA had a different story. Design has been piece-meal over the years. Some suppliers sell anything, whether its useful or not, which is understandable. It's up to the beekeeper to decide what he wants in terms of design and fit for purpose. I have struggled to assemble flat pack hives that needed a sledgehammer to fit the parts together. Without careful carpentry they would have split up, whereas hives in-the-flat from other suppliers fitted together perfectly. Some suppliers don't seem to care! I won't mention which.

What can be done? Unfortunately, very little. People look in a catalogue and buy what they think they need, often without consulting another bee keeper to ask if it's any good. Returning faulty goods is expensive and generally the beekeeper, and his bees, can't wait. Assembly of badly made hive kits with a hammer can be disastrous. But we should complain bitterly about kits that cannot be assembled. Unfortunately we seldom do.

As far as design is concerned most beekeepers are blissfully unaware that things could be different. Our frame and hive designs are effectively from the last century. Personally, I have been aware of this for twenty years and John Yates is of the same opinion. On 54 page of his Apicultural Monograph, which is now being reprinted by Northern Bee Books, he says much about the very unsatisfactory equipment that we have become used to using. *Cont. page 7*

He suggests we should raise the matter at the BBKA ADM in order that a committee would be set up to recommend changes to design, specifications and standards. I see little hope of this producing worthwhile results, and feel that only small advances would be made, but things like tolerances might be highlighted. But he ends his Monograph by saying "The present situation is, in my opinion, a disgrace". Strong words:- but I have to agree with most of the things he says.

Beekeeping has only advanced in the past by individual beekeepers finding a solution to a problem. Unfortunately this only works for big problems and we put up with masses of small ones, making beekeeping all rather frustrating. My own efforts have produced plastic frame corners, which put all the complications of frame making into an easily made moulding that costs very little. At the same time, it allowed improvement to lug design and provision of frame spacing, as well as other worthwhile improvements. The initial frame design incorporated the usual wedge to hold the foundation and used difficult to obtain knot-free wood. This has now all been changed to the use of plywood with the same section all around; so simple, you can make your own.

Beekeepers have always had a problem with combs that sag and bulge, which often happens with deep frames. The best solution up to now has been the use of several horizontal or vertical wires to support the foundation, but this does allow some sag and bulge in the center of the frame. After many trials with different systems, a simple and workable solution has been found, which I will talk about next time.

John Yates words "very unsatisfactory" equipment, are perhaps hard to reconcile with the pleasure that most beekeepers get from using it. But he does spell out many deficiencies in manufacture, tolerances, design and also highlights items of equipment that are offered for sale, but that we could best do without. You can't really blame the suppliers - if people want to buy unsatisfactory or unnecessary items, they will have to put up with it.

Letter to the Editor

With regard to the 'Letter to the Editor', in the February 2009 edition of The Essex Beekeeper. It was very kind and understanding of David Blackwood to write, acknowledging my efforts and I was glad to be of service to you all. Thank you David.

I was pleased to receive a letter of thanks from Pat Allen too.

I look forward to seeing you all through the year.

Ann Tillbrook (Romford and Southend Divisions)

TOPICAL TIPS FOR APRIL

Margaret Thomas

As our bees are essentially wild animals, as such should not be tampered with unless it is strictly necessary.

Ted Hooper's simple aide memoir lists 5 relevant points to remind the beekeeper what to look for in a hive. As experience increases these observations become automatic.

Our record cards have the five main headings to act as reminders and are the basis on which our observations and actions are based.

1 *Have the bees enough room?*

Bees that are standing on more than three quarters of the available frames need more room. They need more room now in the form of a super, not next week, so always carry spare equipment with you. If you feel unsure (and the weather is variable), that the bees will have too great an area to keep warm, place the spare super above a sheet of newspaper. The bees will chew their way through when they need the room. However some bees are reluctant to go up through the queen excluder. The queen may go up into the super if the excluder is left off and this is a nuisance, as she has to be found and transferred back down at the next examination. One way to solve this problem is to store super comb 'wet', which means that the comb from the last extraction is not given back to the bees, but stored sticky. The remnants of honey will probably ferment and the super should be stored on a solid floor on plenty of newspaper to catch any drips. Bees given 'wet' comb are attracted into the super by the smell of honey, and once up will clean up the mess and start using the super. We sometimes store one or two supers 'wet' and distribute the combs amongst the other supers to go on first. One or two 'wet' combs each super usually does the trick. The point is to get the older house bees out of the brood nest before it gets congested and set in motion the sequence of swarm preparation.

We can get some quite phenomenal flows of nectar from rape fields in late April if the weather turns warm, so be alert to the need for a second super. Since we have had two years of poor weather and poor rape harvests this may take a new beekeeper by surprise.

2 *Is the queen present?*
No need to see the queen, eggs and normally capped brood are sufficient evidence of her presence. This is, however a good time to find her and mark and clip her wings. As there are fewer bees present in the colony she should be easier to spot. Practise on drones using queen-marking paint. Always check that you don’t have too much paint on the brush or marking pen as a small blob is all that is required. Dab a bit on the hive roof first. A number of books describe how to catch and clip a queen's wings.

3 *Is the colony building up as expected, compared to other colonies in the apiary?*
Note the number of frames with brood on them on the record card. In spring a good queen with healthy workers will increase the brood nest by one frame each week. *Contd. Page 9*

If the colony remains stuck at 3 to 4 frames of brood week after week, suspect disease. Nosema disease is more in evidence over the last few poor seasons and this may be causing the adult bees to die prematurely and thus limiting the number of bees able to look after brood, keeping the brood nest small. Dysentery is sometimes associated with nosema and any signs of faeces on the frames or front of the hive should be investigated. Most Divisions have someone who is able to use a microscope to diagnose nosema. A high level of varroa mite infestation may be the cause for slow build up, in particular if the bees are also suffering from Deformed Wing Virus. The latter is obvious as the bees emerge with crumpled wings from the cells. Ask for help from an experienced beekeeper. If the bees are apparently healthy then the queen is failing or old and needs to be replaced.
From the end of April check for queen cells. These are queen cups containing a larvae or a sealed queen cell. (More about swarming next month)

4 *Have the bees enough food to last until your next visit in 7 – 10 days?*
A healthy colony will need about 10 – 15 pounds of stores to last 10 days. Bees short of food seem to 'sulk' and lack the energy to take advantage of short periods of good weather to gather a surplus. This leaves the beekeeper with a fine balancing act to estimate if they have enough stored food or feed them a small amount of sugar syrup (about a gallon) to ensure no syrup gets into any honey collected. Remember dead bees do not gather any honey.

5 *Is there any disease?*
Always note the 'minor' brood diseases such as CHALK or SAC BROOD on your record card. There is no treatment for these diseases except replacing the queen.

Nosema is treated by feeding Fumidil B in syrup and moving the bees onto clean comb. Ask for help. There is no treatment for Deformed Wing Virus. Keep the level of mites as low as possible by drone comb trapping and other physical methods. The Ministry leaflet is excellent.

Do one AMERICAN FOUL BROOD check in the spring and again in the autumn. Check for EUROPEAN FOUL BROOD during a nectar flow. Attend a course if you are not sure how to check for these diseases. Always call on an experienced beekeeper or the Seasonal Bees Officer if you see something unusual in your colonies.

And lastly note the general behaviour in the colony, their behaviour on the comb and their temper. Quiet bees are a pleasure to handle and good neighbours. Aggressive bees sting you and any passer by who is probably not wrapped up in a bee suit. Plan to requeen ill-tempered bees.

WANTED – PROJECT MANAGER

To project manage County Honey Show.

No experience of honey shows or even beekeeping needed.

If you are interested and want to find out more please contact

Richard Ridler - treasurer@ebka.org

Behind The Veil

As promised last month, the start of a new series of articles called 'Behind the Veil. This month Pat Allen, who is Chairman of the EBKA and is a member of the Romford Division has answered those important beekeeping questions.

How was your interest in beekeeping kindled?

I have been beekeeping for 28 years and what a pleasurable hobby it is! The idea was first put into my head by my husband, Tony, on a holiday in Greece in spring 1980. We had flown to Athens and hired a beaten-up VW beetle and we drove this all over the mainland of Greece. I had not realised that Greece was *quite* so mountainous, and the roads were truly dreadful, but everywhere we went there were beehives. There was always delicious honey for breakfast!

Tony suggested that I could keep bees. I don't know why me rather than him, but nonetheless I felt it was worth finding out a bit more. I read books from the library that summer, including Ted Hooper's *Guide to Bees and Honey*, and by the autumn I could not resist having a go.

What were the formative influences on your beekeeping?

I joined Romford Division that autumn and went to hive-making evening classes (yes, there really were hive-making classes in Hornchurch at that time!). That winter I made three hives to National design, complete with feeders, and two nuc hives. And I am still using some of this equipment. (Sadly the tutor moved away and there have been no such classes since.)

The following spring one of Romford's beekeepers ran some informal practical classes and Dick Marrable (a very experienced Romford beekeeper whom many of you knew and who is sadly no longer with us) got me a nucleus to get me started. Dick also helped me by letting me join him when he was inspecting his hives. Later on I was given a swarm, so by the end of that season I had two colonies in my garden, and a honey yield of 30lbs. ***Wonderful!*** These colonies survived the winter and the following year I expanded to four colonies.

How did things develop from your first hive?

Over the following decade I kept to 4–5 colonies as I found that was all I could properly manage alongside family commitments and working full-time. Looking back at my records I find that honey yields were generally good – in most years I had 100–110lbs of honey per colony.

I had one extraordinary year. In 1989 spring was very good and oil seed rape was planted directly opposite my house. I had four colonies in my garden. Tony and I were due to go on holiday in early May *cont. page 11*

and I inspected the hives the day before we planned to leave. All the hives were bursting with honey and I had no more spare supers. Luckily our holiday was to be an informal walking/touring affair in Britain and we had not booked anything. So we delayed departure for 24 hours and I spent the day removing supers and extracting honey and gave the empty supers back to the bees. We went away for a week and by the time we came back all the supers were full again! The total yield that year from my four colonies was 850lbs and only one had tried to swarm. Sadly I've never had it so good since.

So the early 1990s were good for my beekeeping. My records show that I had started using Les Ridgwell queens, that very few colonies attempted to swarm, and honey yields averaged well over 100lbs per colony. But then came trouble – in the form of the varroa mite. I found it in my hives in 1996 and things went downhill. I put just two colonies into winter 96/97 knowing they were not strong, and indeed they did not survive. Devastating!

However, I don't give up that easily! My dear beekeeping colleague, Dick Marrable, came to my rescue once again by giving me a nucleus in spring 1997 and I built up from there. I retired from work in April 2001 and since then I have maintained 10–12 colonies, most in my garden, the rest in two out apiaries. I also manage Romford's teaching colonies.

Honey yields from my own bees were good until 2004 but have been more variable since then. It is not obvious why this should be but there have been some changes around my garden. There's now a golf course opposite me, which is mown to within an inch of its life, instead of fields which sometimes had a crop of OSR. We have not had many good springs or summers lately and certainly not both in the same year. And I'm sure my queens are not as good as when Les Ridgwell queens were readily available – dear Les knew a thing or two about producing prolific, good-tempered, non-swarmy queens.

What keeps you beekeeping?

Not content with just keeping my bees, I do like getting involved with organising things (OK, call me bossy!) so I enjoy being part of Romford Division's committee, and the EBKA CEC – for instance, I edited *The Essex Beekeeper* for 11 years. For the past five years I have also been on the BBKA Executive; 2009 will be my last year there. It is the fact that there are so many other aspects to bees and beekeeping that keeps the hobby so interesting, topics such as photography, microscopy, educating the public, other bees, social events, and much more. Every year is different, there is always something to learn, and the more I know about our bees the more amazing I realise they are.

What have been the high points of your beekeeping career?

Is a hobby a career? High points come every year because I find the practical beekeeping such a pleasure. I also enjoy bringing this delight to new beekeepers. Way back in 1984 I had the privilege to be assessed for the Basic Exam by Ted Hooper. I left it many years before going any further and I was pleased indeed to pass the General Husbandry in 2007. *cont. page 12*

Another high point was doing some queen rearing with Les Ridgwell, though I still have much to learn on that topic. I have had help from many beekeeping colleagues over the years and a few have been especially influential – Ted Hooper, Clive de Bruyn, Dick Marrable, Les Ridgwell.

Has anything ever gone wrong with your beekeeping?

Yes, of course, lots. All the usual things that we all do wrong at some time or other. Losing your bees as I did in 1996 is demoralising. Leaking honey all over the floor is something of a nuisance(!) and quite memorable. Damaging a perfectly good queen when clipping her wings is ***very*** upsetting. I've mistimed things and lost swarms, although I'm getting better at this and I haven't lost a swarm for some years now. Some of my queen rearing attempts have been less than successful to put it mildly.

What do you consider to be your beekeeping legacy?

It is encouraging that there is currently such an upsurge in interest in beekeeping and I am keen to help others to experience the pleasures of the hobby, which in turn will benefit the bees too, I hope. I would like to think that my efforts towards organising our beekeeping courses and as chairman of the EBKA CEC are achieving these ends. Beekeepers helped and encouraged me when I was new to the craft and I would like to do the same for others coming into beekeeping now.

What about the future of beekeeping?

Bees are clearly suffering at the moment, for several reasons no doubt, but I bet varroa is the most important, at least here in Britain. It may also be that the way we have been trying to combat varroa has itself put pressure on the bees – e.g. sub-lethal effects of acaricides. We've had some bad seasons lately, long periods when the bees could not get out to forage, new queens unable to get out to mate. And when our bees do get out, they may well face some ghastly chemicals on their forage plants; here again it may be the sub-lethal effects that are worst, not mass die-offs due to spray damage which thankfully seem to be a thing of the past.

However, I am not as gloomy as this sounds. I do believe that we will get some research done and common sense will prevail over the use of treatments such as oxalic acid, and our bees *will* survive. Beekeeping is more complex than it used to be, and we must be prepared to breed from the best of our bees and be ruthless over getting rid of weak and otherwise unsatisfactory colonies. And not least, we need to look after our drones!

Pat Allen

March 2009

Essex Beekeepers Association.

Present a one-day seminar for the Continuing Professional Development of Beekeepers of all levels & experience at: Aldham Village Hall, Brook Street, Aldham, Colchester, Essex. CO6 3RE:

Saturday 25th July 2009 - 10:00am to 4.30pm

"Managing Bee Health – Thriving Not Just Surviving"

With Eastern Regional Bee Inspector Andy Wattam
& Local Seasonal Bee Inspectors.

This relaxed and friendly day will be a mixture of Presentations, Useful Tips & Hints together with Discussion Opportunities and a practical session to include;

- Using Good Husbandry Techniques to lessen Disease Risk and Control Varroa.
- The Umbrella of Apiary Health Planning – 'Looking at the bigger picture'
- Recognising the warning signs early enough to act – Varroa & Viruses
- The Importance of checking for Adult Bee Disease
- Exotic Pests – What's the risk potential for Essex?

Important: You will need to bring a packed lunch.
Protective clothing for Beekeeping WILL BE required.
Tea and Coffee Provided
Certificate of Attendance provided to all attendees.

Pre Booking of places Essential – Please Contact:Mrs Eileen Marrable on: 01708 229441.

QUALITY OF HONEY MEASUREMENTS: 2
~ ELECTRICAL CONDUCTIVITY

Ross Gregory, Swindon

From HoneyBee Times, Journal of the Wiltshire Beekeepers Association

This is the second article in a short series on quality of honey measurements that a keen amateur beekeeper, or any other interested person, could make. Of particular interest to me is how possible it might be to distinguish honey containing honeydew. The first in the series focused on water content of honey. This article is concerned with measurements of electrical conductivity.

The electrical conductivity of a honey depends on the concentration of dissolved salts (i.e. mineral content) in that honey. It follows that conductivity will be greater for honey derived from honeydew than from flower nectar. Conductivity is measured for a solution containing 20% honey solids (i.e. taking account of moisture content). For ordinary honey the conductivity is expected to be less than 0.8 mS/cm. Honeydew and chestnut honey should be greater than 0.8 mS/cm, as might be honeys from specific plants e.g. eucalyptus, heather, lime, manuka and tea tree. Simple conductivity meters, which are sensitive enough for the amateur, can be purchased for less than about £40.

At the time of writing this article, I had measured the moisture content of 32 samples of honey. Thirteen of the samples were from different batches I had extracted the past season or so from my own colonies, 4 samples of other local honeys and 15 samples of 'exotics', which I had obtained over the years. The results of the measurements are given in the following table and graph. The results are arranged in order of electrical conductivity (EC).

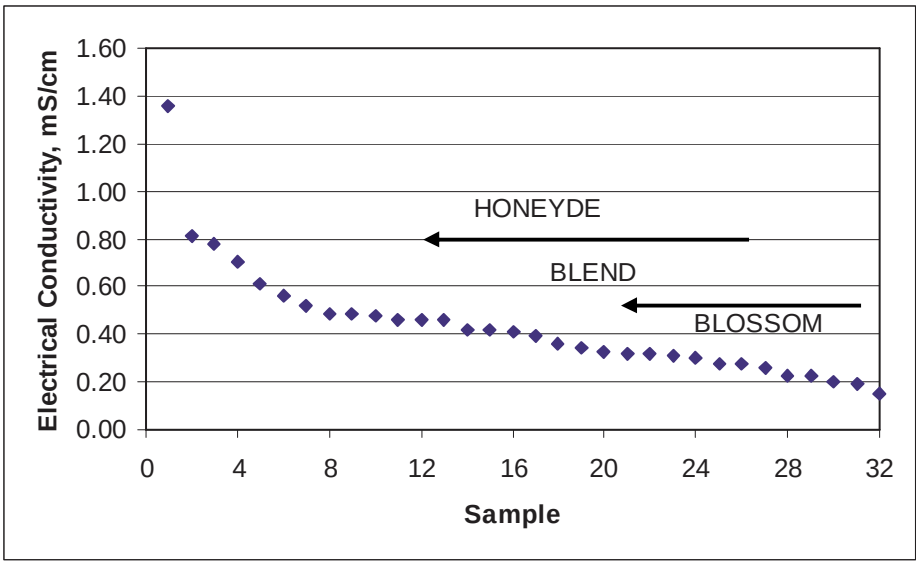
The conductivity of one sample, Turkish forest honey, was substantially greater than 0.8 mS/cm and one sample was just 0.81 and another 0.78 mS/cm. The conductivity of another four samples was greater than 0.50 mS/cm. These included the samples Sabah, Rata and Manuka honeys. They also included a particularly dark honey I had harvested in 2005. The sample of Lithuanian forest honey was just 0.49 mS/cm. The Dark 05 sample was distinctly dark whilst the 765M and 774M were not.

At the other end of the scale, the lowest conductivities were measured for a number of the floral honeys, so indicating that they were mainly monofloral. The Eastleach Melilot, harvested 'locally' to Swindon being notable. Some of the samples with low conductivity were dark.

The distribution of the conductivity measurements is shown in the graph. For the sample of measurements represented, as reflected by the shape of the distribution, in general the conductivity of floral honeys is less than about 0.5 mS/cm. As conductivity increases above about 0.5 mS/cm then the proportion of honeydew in the honey is probably increasing, i.e. a blend on floral and honeydew, until the conductivity is greater than 0.8 mS/cm when a honey can be considered to consist substantially of honeydew. *Contd. Page 15*

It would appear that a number of honeys harvested in the UK can be considered to be a distinct blend of floral and honeydew sources, However, the darkness of the honey can not be relied upon to indicate this: more on this in a future article on colour measurement.

Sample	EC mS/cm	Sample	EC mS/cm
Turkish forest	1.36	782W	0.39
Sabah	0.81	US citrus	0.36
NZ Rata	0.78	Indonesian dark	0.34
Manuka 10+	0.70	791G	0.33
765M	0.61	US Fireweed	0.32
Dark05	0.56	Indonesian light	0.32
774M	0.52	Welsh Heather	0.31
Lithuania 03	0.49	786F	0.30
771G	0.49	Eastleach Spring	0.28
RY Ivy	0.48	7711F	0.28
RG Ivy	0.46	Buckwheat	0.26
Arabic	0.46	Portugal rosemary	0.23
787M	0.46	French lavender	0.23
Fresh12/10/07	0.42	Eastleach Melilot	0.20
784M	0.42	US Dandelion	0.19
762W	0.41	Santa Cruz	0.15



Tales From The Hive

Rod Smart

“They told me the local beekeepers were all nice people and they were right !!”.

For me, it all started in June 2007. My wife strategically placed the local course prospectus in view and said, “I’m going on a drawing course what are you doing?” After browsing through the prospectus and finding nothing that really interested me and still getting questioned by management I thought well, I’m not too keen on wasps but I’ve always liked bees and working outdoors, I’ve never felt uneasy in their presence so how about beekeeping. Well, I never thought I’d say this, being a bit of a country boy, but I “googled”, “bee keeping in Essex” and up came Lydia as a contact. Next thing I know I’m talking to Derek ‘the beemaster’ Webber who said, come along to the garden party at Frating and bring some wellies with you (that was at Martin Frostik’s – another nice chap).

And so it was...., that on a beautiful summer afternoon my wife and I arrived at Martin’s garden party, not knowing anyone. The gate keeper come car park attendant turned out also to be the owner, Martin. As we entered the garden I remember thinking, Wow, nice food layout. We got introduced to people as you do, and trying desperately to remember their names we were offered some strange looking clothing to put on. It was hot day, believe me. I remember watching other people putting on their suits and different styles of headgear . It reminded me of my limited visits to London finding myself on the Underground where everybody seems to know what they’re doing and where they’re going – that is ,everyone but you. We delved into Derek’s bee bag for anything that fitted and somehow got sorted. Derek came up and introduced himself and said, “Come on, this way, don’t worry. Martin’s lovely garden seemed to go on for ever and even before we reached the apiary, there hanging beautifully under a tree limb, about ten feet up, was our first glimpse of a swarm. We could even see the comb they had built (thanks to Martin leaving them alone for all to see). Further on and the beehives came into view, it seemed textbook to me, a lovely setting among fruit trees and grassed areas. Cast your minds back if you will to that very first time you stared into an open hive, in mid-summer, in the heat and that’s just what I was thinking too! We had a great time nattering to all and taking it all in. My wife, Lorna, remembers the day well to as she got her first encounter with a bee sting – right on her bottom. Unfortunately she could only find a smock to wear and the “girls” soon found her thin summer trousers – lesson number one learnt.I have now been to more lovely “beeing” events and have been quite taken aback just how welcoming you all have been. I’m not just talking lovely homemade cakes, scones and tea but also how willing bee keepers are in parting with their knowledge and experience . In the “other world” which I guess we all come into contact with sometime or other. *Cont. page 17*

It's not quite as easy in getting people to tell you what they know, is it. People are generally guarded and start to think, Well I'd better not tell him cause he'll then know as much as me and then what might happen. Not so, in the "beekeeping world". Everyone I have met is keen to help you and impart their knowledge, not in a pushy way but rather, " try it this way or have you thought about this?".

I'm now into my second season and tasted the best honey ever – mine! I have made many new friends from both seasoned beekeepers and beginners like myself. I have experienced another chapter of being a new beekeeper - by passing my "Basic Bee Assessment exam"... and therein lies another story.

I now have a much clearer picture on the struggle our bee colonies are faced with, from diseases and sprays to changes in weather patterns. Like everyone else, I am learning all the time and juggling with sometimes conflicting information on how best to look after them. But from what I have seen and heard from you all I know we will always have their wellbeing in the forefront of our minds and to ensure these fascinating little creatures have every help possible to survive. To quote an old Essex beekeeping saying, "DON'T WORRY, ALL WILL BE WELL"...

In Memoriam

DORIS BROWN of Stock (18 Nov 1914 to 25 Feb 2009)

It is with regret that I inform EBKA members of the death of Doris. She has been well known to many members for a considerable time as an agent for Thorne's and Taylor's of Welwyn previously until they were taken over by Thorne's in August 1984. She had a reputation for wanting to chat and it was always said that one needed to have at least an hour to spare when going to Stock for beekeeping supplies. Although knowledgeable about bees she was not a beekeeper herself because she reacted badly to bee stings, as does Ian her son who survives her. The beekeeper in the family was her late husband Hayward, who passed away almost four years ago. Doris had a remarkable memory and having been brought up in nearby Billericay she was able to recall almost everyone who lived there many years ago. I can recall her te3lling me once of having been taken to the site of the German Zeppelin crash during World War I. During the last year or two she had not been too well and her son Ian has been managing the bee supplies. A number of us have kept in touch by managing the reduced number of hives at Stock. Both Doris and Ian wanted to keep Hayward's memory alive by continuing to keep some bee colonies. Their surname is, in fact, Reid-Brown and I understand that Hayward's grandfather, who had been a sea captain in Scotland, decided to hyphenate his middle name of Reid with his surname to make it appear, more up-market.

Nobby Clark

ESSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Summary of Central Executive Committee Meeting, held 29 January 2009.

1 *Essex Show*

We have at last been able to purchase a covered trailer to house the honey show stands and other permanent show items. Thank you Roy Hardwicke for organising this. We can now keep the items clean and safe, and make transporting them to show grounds much simpler for our volunteers.

2 *Website*

The new website should be up and running from Easter.

3 *Divisional Grants*

As the interest in beekeeping has risen, there have been requests for practical information, resulting in beginners' courses due to take place in most Divisions. The CEC has released funds for Divisions holding practical courses to purchase protective wear for use during these sessions. Divisions can apply to the Treasurer for a one-off grant of up to £300.

Contacts:

chair@ebka.org,

treasurer@ebka.org,

or via your Trustee.

Honey

By Roy Cropley

Honey is produced by the honeybee when nectar from flowers is brought back to the colony and processed. Many flowers produce nectar which has a perfume that helps to attract bees. Flowers and honeys are often identified by the smell they produce. And whilst most nectars smell wonderful the bees themselves are the first to try to spoil things. They spread the nectar into empty cells and then use the enzyme sucrase to convert sucrose into the sugars fructose, glucose and maltose. The three sugars comprise 77% of honey, water makes up another 20%. This leaves only 3% for all the other components including the essential oils which create the smell.

One of the nicest parts of beekeeping is to go to the hives during the evening of a honey flow. There is a gentle hum as the bees flap their wings to create a circulation of air. Using a little smoke we see that air is entering one part of the entrance and leaving at another part. Together with the humid air which is produced comes the volatile content of the nectar. It is a shame to lose so much of this lovely bouquet to the air.

Every process that the honey is subjected to causes a loss of smell. It is extracted, filtered and bottled. With each of these the room is filled with the aroma that would be better not lost. The honey processing room always smells so sweetly. Some customers prefer to eat honeycomb. This has been chilled or frozen to preserve the aroma. When eaten there is wax and pollen and perhaps a little propolis as well as the honey. None of the fragrance has been lost.

When honey sets much of the smell disappears. Many of the entries of set honey in shows have no smell at all. At the other extreme beautiful odours come from orange blossom honey, manuka, heather, leather wood, lime and many others.

It is very important to preserve the smell of honey. It should be strained when extracted and kept warm for a few hours for the bubbles to rise. When bottled it is kept cool to prevent crystals forming. The entries should not be opened for several days prior to a show. The smell of set honey is so subtle that it is most important to keep the lid on until the judge tests it.

Ragwort is a pernicious weed. If eaten by grazing animals it makes them sick. If incorporated into hay the dried plant is even more toxic. The flowers of this plant have a foul smell and the honey is to most people inedible. There is nothing that can be done to it to make it pleasant. Blending good honey with it only spoils the good stuff. Bees love it but not many people do.

The latest bloom of the year is ivy. If there is a mild Indian Summer a full super could be produced on each hive. There is a distinctive bad smell in the apiary as the nectar from this plant is ripened by the bees. The honey has an awful taste and smell. It is unfortunate that the honey sets so quickly. The bees starve when the winter stores are unavailable to them.

The jar of honey that graces the table is opened for seconds only. Along with all the foods in jars be they jams, pickles or sauces, honey should be opened as little as possible to conserve its smell.