

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Out Apiary in Bee Loud Glade in Apple Orchard.
Photo Paul Abbott

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

August 2012 and September 2012

- 2 Aug. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. A talk by Jean Smye on winter feeding and varroa control.
- 4 Aug. *Saturday TBA Dengie Hundred and Maldon* Bradwell Flower Show. Meet the public, show off your products, and talk about bees. In the first instance contact Jean Smye 07731 856361.
- 4 Aug. *Saturday 10.30am-4.30pm Romford* at Cranham Marsh Nature Reserve. A joint event with Essex Wildlife Trust on Pollinating insects, sweep-netting, honey sales.
- 18 Aug. *Saturday 2.30 Epping Forest* Feeding talk at Wanstead Apiary.
- 19 Aug. *Sunday 3.00pm Braintree* Apiary meeting at Coney Green. Telephone Pat Rowland for details 01376 326036.
- 19 Aug. *Sunday 2.30pm Saffron Walden* Apiary meeting 'To include the Beehaus' at Mark Vernon's CB11 4ED and also at Alison Greig's.
- 20 Aug. *Monday 7.30pm Chelmsford* Eric Fenner (EBKA President) will be guiding us on how to prepare our bees for the winter, make them comfortable and give us peace of mind.
- 22 Aug. *Wednesday 7.30pm Southend* at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. A talk by Pam Hunter, 'How bees perceive the world' – How the bee sees, smells, hears, tastes, touches and feels, including a comparison of the outer skeleton of the bee with the internal skeleton of mammals and what problems and advantages this brings.
- 22 Aug. *Wednesday 10.00am-4.00pm Colchester* Beth Chatto Wildlife Day, Beth Chatto Garden, Elmstead Market Colchester, Essex, CO7 7DB. Further information here <http://www.bethchatto.co.uk/wildlife2012.jpg>
- 1 Sep. *Saturday 10.00am Epping Forest* at Chingford Horticultural Hall Larkshall Rd, London E4 6NH. Divisional Show.
- 6 Sep. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. Practical Session on Products of the Hive – By Various Harlow Members. Preparing wax for use – Making Lip Balm & Creams - Candle making.
- 7 Sep. *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park RM2 5EL. Queen rearing with Clive de Bruyn.
- 8 & 9 Sep. *Saturday and Sunday All day County Honey Show at Barleylands* Help needed from Divisional members for this County event as part of the Barleylands Country Show. Free entry to show for helpers. See advert in magazine.
- 15 Sep. *Saturday 2.00pm Saffron Walden* Taster Session'—for next year's prospective Beginners at Paul Heales' Apiary, Saffron Walden CB10 2AQ.

- 17 Sep. *Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. Our new beekeepers will be entertaining us with stories of their first year beekeeping experiences.
- 23 Sep. *Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** Apiary Meeting contact Stuart Mitson. Telephone 01376 340683.
- 26 Sep. *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Hilary Hunter, RSPB will talk on the Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project, its aims and progress to date.

**County Pheromones
Richard Ridler (Chairman)**

August is the month to prepare your entries for our annual honey show. If you have not entered before please don't be shy or hesitant. There are several classes for novices and many classes which are not just for honey such as honey fudge, honey cake, honey biscuits, bee related photographs and candles. We have a huge marquee at the Essex Country Faye; it's on Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th September at Barleylands near Billericay. The show schedule and entry forms can be downloaded from our website. Be warned that entering is addictive! There are lots and lots of cups and other prizes to be won.

**County Honey Show
8th & 9th September at Barleylands Nr. Billericay**

Helpers Wanted for Annual Honey Show

Success depends on lots of helpers offering to man displays and observation hives, help with candle making, sell honey etc. Entry is free to volunteers. Interested, then please email your name and which day you can help to chair@ebka.org

**Migrating honey bees from commercial frames to 14x12s
part 1 and part 2
by Andy Sivell**

*Andy Sivell is a journalist, copy writer and magazine publisher. He got his first colony and took up beekeeping in 2010. He maintains a blog, *Diary of a Nervous Beekeeper*, which can be found at www.beekeepingadvice.co.uk*

The last few weeks have been wet. Very wet. Nearly five weeks of steady rainfall we've had now, which must have gone some way towards alleviating East Anglia's drought, you'd have thought. Leaving aside the issue as to whether it was the right *kind* of rain, both the bees and I have pretty much just had to get on with life – which, in the bees' case, they've interpreted literally. Five weeks ago I snuck a quick peek between cold snaps and found capped brood. Three weeks ago I nipped in between rain showers and saw eggs, larvae and more sealed brood. I also initiated step one of a convoluted plan to migrate the colony from commercial frames onto 14x12s. Last weekend I progressed to step two.

So here's my plan: my one and only colony spent the winter housed on eleven commercial (10") frames, inside a commercial brood chamber. The commercial brood chamber doesn't belong to me, so needs to be returned to its owner. When I decided to build my own hives I elected to go for national 14x12 brood chambers because they're the most commonly used in these parts (we live next to fields of oil seed rape). National 14x12 frames will only fit into a commercial brood box with an eke fitted. Commercial frames will not fit into a national brood box of any description (standard or 14x12 deep). National frames will of course fit both a commercial *and* a 14x12 brood box, *but* they're too short and will encourage brace comb.

With me so far? Good. Because this is where it gets *really* complicated...

Apart from commercials, the only frames I have with drawn foundation are five (actually four and a bit) national frames (DN5s). All my 14x12 frames are brand new and therefore only have undrawn foundation. I live in an area where, as mentioned, the local oil seed rape normally produces an early crop of honey – which hardens within the frames if it's not harvested promptly. And I've never had so much as a single jar of honey from my bees since I took up beekeeping, er... two years ago. No pressure there then.

So my challenge is to migrate the bees from commercial frames to 14x12s, via a short stopover on nationals, without weakening the colony so much that they won't produce an early harvest. A bit like getting a fox, a chicken and a sack of corn across a river in a small boat without any of them getting eaten.

In this regard I've had some help from Deryck Johnson, who's forgotten more about beekeeping than I'll ever know. Together, we discussed the merits or otherwise of a shook swarm (essentially, tipping the bees from the commercial brood chamber into the 14x12) before rejecting the idea on grounds that, with so

much undrawn foundation, the new colony could be weakened too much to produce any honey. Had that not been the case it would also have been an effective method of disease control. Instead, we elected to go for the world's most complicated 12-step plan, involving spending a month or two carefully moving the commercial frames outwards from the centre and my few national frames, followed by 14x12s, inwards from the edge. And adding a homemade eke, and a super. And perhaps starting another, separate colony around the corner.

I can't see what could *possibly* go wrong.

I love to browse beekeeping books. I confess I don't own that many: two, to be precise. But I like to browse, or 'to look at the pictures' (as my sister once rudely described my reading habits). My problem with actually *buying* books is that I have no time to read them, and that I suspect the bees never get around to it either.

Anyone coming here from '*Migrating honey bees from commercial frames to 14x12s – part one*' with the not unreasonable expectation that 'part two' might – you know – progress from there, ought to brace themselves now. I had a plan, an elaborate twelve-point plan, which I'd even begun to render into a series of beautiful colour illustrations. Unfortunately, (or possibly fortunately) the bees had a different agenda.

Shop-bought super (below) versus homemade super (above). After taking this picture I went out and bought three supers. (see photo back page)

At my next inspection I found drone brood and over a dozen unsealed queen cells, the unmistakable signs that the colony was preparing to swarm. The presence of queen cells was obviously a dead give-away, but I was quite proud of the fact that having noticed more than the average volume of drone brood on the outer frames I was already on the look-out for queen cells before I found them. And what was this in the super above? Honey. Honest to goodness honey. Two years of trying and approximately £400 in equipment and granulated sugar was about to pay off and result in my first jar of golden nectar: retail price £4.

I called Deryck Johnson for advice and, bless him, he came over the very next day. I don't think I could have kept him away. I thought we'd split the colony, but what we ended up doing was an artificial swarm. I say "we". Deryck did all the work. I stumbled around knocking into things. I could finally see what he'd meant about my apiary being small. With two of us it was like working in a broom cupboard. I proudly showed him the new apiary site I'd prepared around the corner.



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I'd put up fencing and everything. He said it needed to be twice as big. Ah.

We (he) knocked down all but two queen cells and then moved them and the entire colony (minus the old live queen), in the commercial brood box, to the new site in the back garden. A single frame of brood was kept back and rehoused, together with the old queen, in my 14x12 brood box on the original site. The rest of the brood chamber was then filled with frames of undrawn 14x12 foundation. A second super was placed on top and I was left with strict instructions to leave both colonies alone for a fortnight, but to keep an eye on the supers. So far so good.

Thirteen days later the second colony swarmed.

Joke

Thanks to the Editor of 'The Eke', Stuart Ching.

IT'S NOT ALWAYS BEES YOU HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT

A rather cocky Bee Inspector stopped at a farm and spoke to the old farmer who had a sideline keeping bees. He told him, "I need to inspect your apiary." The old farmer said, "OK, but don't go in that field over yonder." The Inspector replied, "Mister, I have the authority of the Government with me. See this ID? This means I am allowed to go wherever I wish on any agricultural land. No questions asked or answered. Have I made myself clear? Do you understand?"

The bee farmer nodded politely and went about his farm chores. Half an hour later, the farmer heard loud screams and saw the Inspector running for the fence and close behind was the farmer's huge-horned prize bull. The bull was gaining on him with every step. The man was clearly terrified, so the bee farmer immediately threw down his tools, and ran to the fence and shouted out, "**Your ID! Your ID! Show him your ID!**"

New Jersey BKA

Editor Wanted

Howard's term as Editor of the Essex Beekeeper comes to an end with the March 2013 issue. We are seeking his replacement now to allow plenty of time for a handover. If you might be interested please contact Howard or the CEC chairman (Richard Ridler). Contact details are on the inside cover.

**Building a beehive – national, modified national and 14x12
hive types explained
by Andy Sivell**

*Andy Sivell is a journalist, copy writer and magazine publisher. He got his first colony and took up beekeeping in 2010. He maintains a blog, *Diary of a Nervous Beekeeper*, which can be found at www.beekeepingadvice.co.uk*

As a b2b writer I'll occasionally get the urge to revisit an article and tweak it. A word or a sentence will start to bother me. So I'll change it. And then the paragraph it sits in won't work as well. So I'll swap it around, only to find that doing that messes up the ending. Before you know it I'll have cut and pasted the thing to shreds and found that I've had to start over again practically from scratch.

My first homemade beehive, completed in the summer of 2010, is back in pieces on the garage floor.

It didn't have a varroa mesh floor, which wasn't the end of the world, but it struck me as sensible to provide it with one before installing a colony. More significantly, I wasn't sure whether I wanted it to remain a modified national. And I didn't like the roof. And, well, I'm not terribly good at sawing wood in straight lines so wasn't convinced about some of the gaps between brood chamber and super. And then I bought a tin of bee-friendly beehive paint and thought that I should probably use it to cover up the untested Sadolin Classic Wood Protection Colourless Base I'd already coated it in.

All that said, my haphazard approach should at least reassure any DIY beekeepers contemplating making their own beehives: believe me, if I can do this stuff, you can.

A modified national brood chamber, together with eke to convert it to a 14x12, plus national DN4 frame (left) and 14x12 frame (right) for comparison. I'll fix the eke permanently to the underside of the brood chamber.

Let's focus on perhaps the most serious problem. I chose the 'modified national' design because, well, I was given a set of plans. And because the 'national' remains the most popular type of beehive in England. Interestingly, it *isn't* the most popular hive type among experienced beekeepers in these parts (north Essex). We're surrounded by fields of yellow oil seed rape – as anyone who's driven up the M11 couldn't fail to spot. The bees love it and they make *lots* of honey out of it. Local, more experienced, beekeepers therefore tend to favour the '14x12', sometimes referred to as the 'national 14x12'.

Now if you're wondering what the differences are between a 'national' beehive, a 'modified national' and a 'national 14x12' you're not alone. I searched high and low before being told the answer.

A 'national' beehive, sometimes also referred to as a 'standard national', has a brood box measuring 460mm x 460mm x 225mm externally. So does a 'modified

'national'. The only difference between the two is that a 'standard national' has a double-thickness wall on two sides (the sides that carry the frames). The 'modified national' has L-shaped rails top and bottom, connected to the side walls (see photo above). The top rail carries the frames. The bottom rail extends outwards to line up with the floor. As a consequence the 'modified national' can be made with four walls of uniform thickness. The 'national 14in x 12in' shares the 460mm x 460mm footprint, but is a lot deeper – 315mm deep to be precise. It can therefore take taller frames, which means more brood and, ultimately, more honey. Whoever came up with the idea of mixing imperial and metric measurements was clearly having a laugh.

All three hive types share the same floor, super and roof dimensions. The differences only affect the brood chamber. Both the 'national' and 'modified national' brood chamber can be converted to a 14x12 by means of an 'eke' – a 460mm x 460mm x 90mm wooden spacer. Which is what I'm now adding.

Many 'homemade' hive plans quote internal or (occasionally) external dimensions only, forcing the DIY beehive builder to compensate based on the thickness of the timber they're using, or compromise based on the standard external dimensions of shop-bought crownboards, queen excluders and floors. The internal dimensions are more important. Get those wrong and either your frames won't fit or your bees will fill the gaps with brace comb.

National brood chamber dimensions: the figures in brackets show the width at the narrowest point, where the frames hang.

That being the case, why did I quote external dimensions? Because if you ask any experienced beekeeper what size a national brood chamber is, chances are those are the measurements they'll supply. The *internal* dimensions of the brood chamber are shown in the table above. And if you think *that's* confusing, don't get me started on brood and super frame types and spacing...

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Good Husbandry is the answer for Essex Apiarists by Paul Abbott

On the one fine Summer's Day of Thursday 28th June 2012, Mrs Eileen Mar-
rable, on behalf of The Essex Beekeepers' Association, organised a day of
"Good Husbandry Techniques". This educational course was held at the Village
Hall of Domesday cited, Aldham, near Colchester. Practical, live bee demonstra-
tions by two seasonal Bee inspectors were also performed at the nearby Apiary
of Essex Beekeepers' President: Derek Webber.

Regional Bee Inspector Keith Morgan presented an illustrated programme outlin-
ing the work of FERA (The food and environment Research Agency), starting
with the statement that: "Happy Bees are Healthy Bees".

He produced statistics that show that there are 685 Beekeepers in Essex with
1048 Apiaries containing 4041 beehives. These are just the known number of
Apiarists etc.; many beekeepers choose to remain elusive, and unrecorded.

Everyone should be encouraged to register with BeeBase (www.beebase.org),
which is the National Bee Unit website, and provides a wide range of free bee-
keeping information for all UK Beekeepers.

Husbandry topics covered included:

Healthy bees, and how to spot problems within the hive.

Brood diseases: American and European Foul Brood. Chalk Brood. Sac or slip-
per Brood. Bald brood.

Varroa mite infestation: Diagnosis and treatment. Viral deformities in bee devel-
opment.

Look out for the possible arrival of the Tropilaelaps Mite, the Small Hive Beetle,
and the Asian Hornet: Three exotic species yet to be identified in The United
Kingdom: Watch out! You have been warned!

Adult Bee diseases: Acarine (Tracheal Mite). Nosema Apis & Nosema Ceranae:
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Other pests and preventable problems mentioned included: Wax Moth damage. Rodent damage (Rats and Mice). The robbing of colonies by Wasps/ other Bees. Finally, look out for hive damage caused by Green Woodpeckers.

The afternoon practical session was led by Seasonal Bee Inspectors Peter Folge, and Peter Heath. They demonstrated how to examine a colony for signs of disease, and to spot abnormalities. Derek Webber's bees were healthy, with quite a lot of stored honey. The Inspector reckoned that some of the sealed super combs were possible honey show winners! Watch out for Webber entries in the various Essex Honey Shows of 2012.

The three Bee Inspectors reassured everyone present of their friendly approach, and free advice to all beekeepers seeking assistance. If concerned about the health of your bees, then contact your local Seasonal Bee inspector: Peter Heath: peter.heath@fera.gsi.gov.uk. Mobile No: 07775119429. Remember: "90% of all notifiable bee disease is identified by Bee Inspectors". If in doubt: Call the Inspector out!



President Derek Webber with attendant retinue of Bee Inspectors: Left to Right: Peter Heath, Peter Folge, Derek Webber, & Keith Morgan.

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Beekeeping Tips No.17
Autumn feeding
By Geoff Mills

The last week of August, or shortly after depending on the season and whether there is a honey flow, is the time to feed your bees down for the Winter. If there is a flow on wait until its finished and then extract the honey and immediately feed. The bees then have plenty of time to produce the young bees necessary to take the colony safely through the Winter.

I am always concerned when I hear, or read, that beekeepers are thinking of leaving supers of honey as food for the bees to take them through the oncoming Autumn and Winter. It is both an expensive and undesirable risk of losing your bees through starvation. Yes, they can starve when honey has granulated and they cannot fly to get water to break down the solid honey. The alternative to honey is to feed concentrated sugar solution. However, I have no concerns for honey left in the brood chamber as this occupies a small number of frames and prevents sugar syrup being stored there during Autumn feeding. The brood nest itself will occupy most of the space and the remainder will be sealed stores in the outside frames.

The danger of leaving honey as stores is that it may granulate/crystallise and become unavailable to the bees if the outside air temperature is too low (that is to say, below 10°C) to enable the bees to forage for water that will be needed to breakdown the crystals. Additionally, honey has more trace elements than concentrated sugar syrup. Sugar feed, therefore, calls for less cleansing flights. And this means less likelihood of defecation in the hive and spreading of disease.

Although sugar may be considered expensive, honey is even more so and up to ten times as expensive. As EBKA or BBKA members, you can buy sugar in bulk, 20 kg bags or larger, at attractive rates (Please see back of your membership card). Concentrated Winter sugar feed is 1.5kg to 1 litre of water. To save weighing the sugar it can first be poured into a container and the top level marked. Warm water can then be added up to this mark and it will be the correct amount to dissolve the sugar. The concentrated solution weighs roughly two thirds more than the original amount of sugar.

A colony prepared for Winter should have around a total of 25 kg of stores, and this can be stored in a National brood chamber with a super on top, or the equivalent in other hive types. There must not be a queen excluder between the two boxes, otherwise the bees will not go through it in cold weather and may consequently starve. Larger brood boxes may well have sufficient empty drawn frames of comb to make it unnecessary to add a super. However, bees like to work their way upwards as they consume stores because the heat from the cluster tends to make these stores more readily available in the colder weather.

The weight of stores already in the brood chamber may be estimated by examining British Standard brood frames on the basis that, when sealed on both sides, they contain about 2 kg of stores, and pro rata.

Feed five litres at a time using a Rowse or Miller type feeder and a few days later, once the feeder is dry, give the remainder. A hive is seldom level, and ensure the access side of the feeder is on the lowest side. Otherwise the bees may drown in the last of the syrup.

The Many Uses of a Snelgrove Board
Part 3a—Methods for use when queen cells are present: artificial swarming and method II.
By Wally Shaw

This article first appeared in Welsh Beekeepers Association Newsletter, Autumn 2009 edition. It is reprinted here courtesy of its Editor and with the co-operation of EBees.

Background

In the third part of the series we are moving from pre-emptive methods of swarm control (for use before queen cells are present in a hive) to re-active methods (when queen cells are present). Even the very thorough Leonard Snelgrove did not always get it right with his pre-emptive method of swarm control (Method I – described in Part 2). Like the rest of us, he sometimes opened hives and found that queen cells had already been started. Initially his response to this situation was to do an artificial swam on the colony. As with all methods of artificial swarming, this involves splitting the colony into two; an **artificial swarm**, containing the queen plus the flying bees and just a handful of nurse bees, and the other part, the **parent colony**, comprised of all the brood, the queen cells and most of the non-flying bees. The artificial swam usually stays in its original position and, in a conventional artificial swarm (eg. the Pagden Method), the parent colony is set up in a new position in the same apiary. When the flying bees emerge from the parent colony they return to their previous location and join the artificial swarm.

In the Pagden Method, after the split, the parent colony is stood close to the artificial swarm, first on one side and then, after a few days, it is moved to the other side. After a further few days (but an emerged queen is present) the parent colony is moved to a more distant location in the apiary. In the first position the parent colony loses all its existing flying bees to the artificial swarm. During the stopover, more house bees are promoted to flying duties and, when the parent colony is moved to the other side of the artificial swarm, these new fliers return to the nearest colony they can find, which is the artificial swarm again. The same thing happens for a third time when the parent colony is moved away to a more distant location in the apiary. This series of manipulations is designed to

maximise the number bees in the artificial swarm, which is the main honey producing part of the split. At the same time, it removes virtually all the flying bees from the parent colony which no longer attempts to swarm and settles down to choose a queen from those available in the queen cells. All surplus queen cells are torn down and the occupants killed and, in due course, the queen gets mated and starts to lay. Despite what is says in some beekeeping books, **NO thinning of queen cells is required.**

In reality, most beekeepers do not bother with the two extra hive movements and simply put the parent colony in a new position in the apiary and let it get on with it. There is nothing wrong with this practice and, providing the flying bees in the parent colony at the time of the split return to the artificial swarm, no attempt will be made to swarm. The only disadvantage is that the artificial swarm will inevitably have fewer recruits and make less honey. As a point of interest, if the parent colony were to be closed up and immediately moved to another apiary it would almost inevitably swarm! I know this is not a normal beekeeping practice but something like it can happen if a colony is split up and made into several nucleuses for other beekeepers to take home with them. The different outcome reveals much about the underlying mechanism of artificial swarming. Think about it and I will give **my** explanation in Part 4.

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The bees are so impressed by my carpentry skills that they crowd around to admire the gaps between eke and brood chamber. See A. Sivell article page 5.

Shop-bought super (below) versus homemade super (above). After taking this picture I went out and bought three supers. See A. Sivell article page 5.



A modified national brood chamber, together with eke to convert it to a 14x12, plus national DN4 frame (left) and 14x12 frame (right) for comparison. I'll fix the eke permanently to the underside of the brood chamber. See A. Sivell article page 7.