

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Bombus Lapidarius mating, 27 July 2008

Monthly Magazine of the E.B.K.A

No.527

EBKA website www.ebka.org

**November
2008**

Registered Charity number 1031419

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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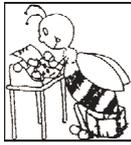
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November 2008

- Braintree *28 Nov. Friday* 8pm at the Constitutional Club. Great Square Braintree. Open Forum discussion on 'Review of the Year'.
- Chelmsford *14 Nov. Friday* 7.30pm Join us for a fish and chip supper desert and a glass of wine at the Great Baddow Parish Hall CM2 7DW, all included for £10, plus surprise speaker and Pauls famous raffle. Please reserve your place with Ian Grant on 01277 652855
- Colchester *16 Nov. Sunday* Annual Sunday Lunch 12.15pm for 1.00pm at The Crown Manningtree. Contact Derek Webber on 01206 271714.
17 Nov. Monday 7.30pm at The Venture Centre, Lawford CO11 2JG. A talk by Willie Robson of Chain Bridge Honey Farm. Berwick-on-Tweed (www.chainbridgehoney.co.uk).
- DH & Maldon *8 Nov. Saturday* Planning next year's programme of events with a display of Division's library books. RSVP to Nan 01621 773297.
- Epping Forest *20 Nov Thursday* 7.30pm at Chingford Horticultural Hall, Larkshall Rd., Chingford, London.E.4; the subject 'Making Mead'.
- Harlow *6 Nov. Thursday* 7.45pm King's Church, Red Willows.
- Romford *7 Nov Friday* 8pm at Chadwick Hall, Main Rd. Gidea Park; the subject 'Birding in Poland' by Pat Allen.
- Saffron Waldon No meeting
- Southend *26 Nov Wednesday* 7.30pm Social evening.

December 2008

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Braintree | <i>12 Dec. Friday</i> 8pm at Constitutional Club, Great Square, Braintree for 'A Social Evening'. |
| Chelmsford | <i>15 Dec. Monday</i> 7.30 - 9.00pm Beeginners - Meet your mentor plus a 15 min demonstration on treating hive with oxalic acid at Trinity Hall, Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford. |
| Colchester | No meeting. |
| DH & Maldon | <i>Date TBA</i> Divisional Oxalic Acid Treatments for all. |
| Epping Forest | <i>18 Dec. Thursday</i> 7.30pm Christmas social at Chingford Horticultural Show. |
| Harlow | <i>4 Dec. Thursday</i> 7.30pm Christmas buffet and gathering. Further details to follow |
| Romford | <i>5 Dec. Friday</i> 8pm Christmas Social at Chadwick Hall, Main Rd. |
| Saffron Waldon | No meeting. |
| Southend | No meeting. |



Editorial



This is my first month as editor and I hope I haven't changed the magazine for the worse. This month's issue includes reports on the Essex Annual Conference, further topical tips from Margaret Thomas and an article about promiscuous bees. I hope I haven't committed a cardinal error by omitting the Class Winners of Essex Annual Honey Show held at Barleylands, which were handed out at the Annual Conference at Langham, but there was not enough room in the magazine—I hope the results of the Trophy and Award Winners are sufficient and my apologies to the Class winners.

I thought that the front page photograph was justified since Ted Benton gave such an interesting talk on the bumblebee. I have included an article which further explains the bumblebee's life cycle. Next month I hope to focus on the talk by Selwyn Wilkins, from the National Bee Unit near York, which he gave at the Annual Conference.

I hope that this magazine is seen as the result of cooperation between beekeepers in Essex. Cooperation amongst Essex Beekeepers is highly visible, shown by the success of the Essex Annual Honey Show and the Annual Conference. I hope this spirit of cooperation will result in articles, reports or comments arriving at the editor's inbox!

Each issue of the magazine carries a diary of events for the following two months. I would like to expand this section so that each Division can give a more comprehensive account of their upcoming event(s). If this section goes beyond two pages then I think that this is a sign of success rather than something which has to be limited. Further, reports on the events held within each Division might be enjoyed and would encourage other beekeepers to attend events held by others. A good example is the talk to be given by Willie Robson of Chain Bridge Honey Farm, Berwick-on-Tweed which is being held by the Colchester Division. This promises to be an interesting talk and came about through Lydia talking to beekeepers in Suffolk and finding out what events they had planned.

I have changed the date by which all copy for the next issue has to arrive at the editor's desk. From November, I need to have any articles, diary events, letters or comments by the 10th of the preceding month of publication. For example, for the December issue I will need to have any material by the 10 November. This gives you all a little bit of extra time to write those articles!

Howard Gilbert—Editor

An article from Nottinghamshire Beekeepers magazine summarising an article by Susan Lang from Cornell University.

Promiscuous Bees

Why do queen honeybees mate with dozens of males? Does their extreme promiscuity, perhaps, serve a purpose? An answer to this age-old mystery is proposed in Science magazine by Cornell scientists. Promiscuous queens, they suggest, produce genetically diverse colonies that are far more productive and hardy than genetically uniform colonies produced by monogamous queens. "An intriguing trait of honeybee species worldwide is that each honeybee queen mates with an extraordinarily high number of males," said Heather Mattila. In every honeybee species, say researchers, queens mate with multiple males. The European honeybee mates with from six to 20 mates on average, for example, while the giant honeybee in Asia has a reported record of 102 mates.

To study the reasons for honeybees' promiscuity, the Cornell biologists inseminated 12 queens with sperm from 15 drones (a different set for each) and nine additional queens with sperm from a single drone (but a different one in each case). They then prompted the hives to swarm in early June to form new colonies. "After only two weeks of building new nests, the genetically diverse colonies constructed 30 percent more comb, stored 39% more food and maintained foraging levels that were 27-78% higher than genetically uniform colonies," said Mattila.

By the end of the summer, the genetically diverse colonies had five times more bees, eight times more reproductive males and heavier average body weights, mostly because of larger amounts of stored food. By winter's end, 25% of the genetically diverse colonies survived to their one-year anniversary (only about 20% of new honeybee colonies make it that long in up-state New York). But all of the genetically uniform hives starved to death.

"These differences are noteworthy considering colonies had similarly sized worker populations when they were first formed," said Mattila. "Undoubtedly, our results reveal enormous benefits of genetic diversity for the productivity of honeybee colonies. "For example, the researchers found that bees in the genetically diverse colonies used sophisticated mechanisms for communication, including waggle dancing, more often than bees in genetically uniform colonies to discover food sources and direct nest mates to food. Because there was more information available among nest mates about food discoveries, the diverse colonies gained far more weight than did genetically uniform colonies.

Local News

Braintree Division Microscopy Group. We would like to invite any interested party to our Microscopy evenings at Tabor Science College Panfield Lane, Braintree, CM7 5XP.

Programme includes preparing pollen samples; dissecting bees; disease investigation for Acarine and Nosema. Please Bring your own samples to work on (bees, other insects or pollen). You may wish to create your own library of slides. No equipment needed. Instruction can be given. No fee but any items used will be charged at cost.

Dates: Wednesday 9th January 2008
Wednesday 6th February 2008
Wednesday 5th March 2008
Time: 7-30pm to 9-30 pm

Essex Beekeeper's Association. The E.B.K.A. is holding an Extraordinary General Meeting on 27 November to approve changes to the Rules of Association. Please see page 15 of this issue for further details.

Essex Beekeepers Conference, hosted by the Colchester Division, was held on 20 September with nearly one hundred beekeepers attending. The Conference had three speakers, Selwyn Wilkins from the National Bee Unit, Ted Benton, who has a particular interest in bumblebees, and Harvey Shairwood, who is Reserve Warden for Abbots Hall Reserve Complex. It was a highly informative and enjoyable day. For lunch the conference hall was transformed into a dining room in no time at all. A splendid lunch was served by Penny Barker and her helpers. Lunchtime discussions were animated and generally focused on bees (surprising?). There were further calls to celebration when 'Happy Birthday' was sung to Ted Hooper, who was soon to celebrate his next birthday—90 years old on the following day! Braintree, who are hosting next year's conference, have already begun preparations. In this month's issue I have focused upon the talk by Ted Benton on bumblebees and shall consider the points made by Selwyn Wilkins in next month's issue. I have included two photos of the day taken by Barbara Sharp.

The photo above: Ted and Joy Hooper having been presented with gifts at the Conference.

The photo to the right: What are these beekeepers discussing during tea break?



EBKA Trophy and Award Winners

| Award | For | Winner | Division |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------------|----------------|
| Burt Challenge Cup | Containers of cut comb honey | V M Taylor | Braintree |
| Cowan Vase | Sections and extractable frame | V M Taylor | Braintree |
| Dearman Cup | 12 Jars of crystallised/soft set honey | M Harris | Southend |
| Ford Trophy | Most points extracted honey classes | J McNeill | Romford |
| Horton Cake Cup and Knife | Honey fruit cake | C T Snell | Chelmsford |
| Mallinson Cup | Cake of beeswax & candles | R & M Thomas | Southend |
| Ongar Cup | Frame of extractable honey | C T Snell | Chelmsford |
| President's Cup | Division gaining highest total points (ex Wine) | Romford | Romford |
| Holmes Cup | Exhibitor gaining highest total points (ex wine) | J McNeill | Romford |
| Tidswell Challenge Bowl | Most points in honey classes | J McNeill | Romford |
| Jersey Cup | Best cake of beeswax | V M Taylor | Braintree |
| W.B.C. Cup | Biscuits, sandwich and fudge | J Ridler | Saffron Walden |
| Devall Medal | Novice gaining highest total points | J Ridler | Saffron Walden |
| Agricultural Society Medal | First prize, jar of clear honey | J McNeill | Romford |
| Agricultural Society Medal | First prize, jar of crystallised honey | J McNeill | Romford |
| Essex Chronicle Cup | Twelve jars of clear honey | J McNeill | Romford |
| Chelmsford Wine Circle Marconi Trophy | One bottle of sweet flower wine | H A Rogers | Saffron Walden |
| Walden Wine Shield | Best bottle of dry wine | N T W Vickery | Southend |
| G A Taylor Mazer | Best bottle of sweet or dry mead | F Richmond | Romford |
| Archie Horton Award | Most points for candles | R & M Thomas | Southend |

TOPICAL TIPS FOR NOVEMBER

Margaret Thomas

November is a time for reflection on how the season went: the weather, the bees, apiary sites, things that went right for you and things that went wrong. Plan to improve the quality of your bees and increase the amount of honey you collect. Review the equipment needed. Identify the courses to attend, and the books to read.

Young queens

The beekeeper should requeen each colony regularly to ensure that no queen heading a colony is older than two years. Young queens breed later into the autumn and young bees survive longer into the spring. An Australian friend of ours stated that most Australian colonies are requeened after the third honey flow. The beekeepers' underlying thinking is that brood nest expansion taxes the queens' egg-laying ability at each flow, making the queens become less productive after the third major build up. We have applied their thinking to build ups in Essex. Our bees' main nectar sources are oil seed rape, followed by field beans, followed by borage in July and possibly a flow from marshland plants in August, i.e. three to four build ups. So we try to requeen most colonies annually in September. Think about queen rearing for next year, possibly as a Divisional activity.

Viable size

The colony needs to be large enough to be able to maintain a minimum temperature during cold weather. Small colonies, especially those headed by older queens should have been united once their disease status had been checked and cleared. Nuclei with new queens can be built up to about 6 frames by feeding syrup and usually winter well.

The apiary

In windy Essex we surround our exposed apiaries in shelters made of old pallets. The planks stop a howling draught, while the gaps allow the air to circulate. Bees do not do well in damp conditions. Keep them away from overhanging trees, and keep the vegetation cut around the hives. Cold air tends to flow downhill, so apiaries should not be sited in low-lying areas where frost can collect.

Protection against pests

Mice love the warmth and protection of beehives. Bees hate the smell of mice. Keep mice out by restricting the hive entrance with a mouseguard. There are two main variations, metal strips with 9mm holes, which are fixed over the entrance, or wooden bars with a slot no higher than 7mm, which are inserted into the entrance. If you are late putting them on, do it as soon as possible, but tap the hive sharply first, to evict any resident mouse.

... Cont page 10 ...

The green woodpecker has in the last few winters taken a keen interest in feasting on the brood in our hives, which are all now netted or covered in wire mesh or a plastic 'hoola' skirt. Follow local advice on the need for netting. Beware, once one bird learns there may be a tasty morsel in those square boxes, the word spreads.

Varroa

Controlling this mite is essential. The subject is complex and advice is often conflicting. Varroa mites damage both brood and adults by feeding off the bees' blood, sapping the energy of individual bees. Varroa is a complex organism as it spends part of its life cycle in the sealed brood, protected by the wax capping. Few chemicals can penetrate the wax capping. Varroa also acts as a vector for numerous viruses, just as aphids do on plants. Seeing worker bees with **deformed bodies or deformed wings** emerging from cells is a clear indication that Deformed Wing Virus is present. Even experienced beekeepers miss these signs. Left untreated, affected colonies will probably die.

We have been spoilt with the provision of 'easy to use' Bayvarol and Apistan strips. They are chemically impregnated with synthetic pyrethroids. To work, the contact chemicals rely on the bee or mite coming into contact with the strip. In 2001 mites in Devon and Cornwall were found to have become resistant to these chemicals, and resistant mites have now spread to most other areas. In fact resistance to pyrethroids is now so widespread that it is probably a waste of money to use them at all.

Resistance to chemicals is a natural outcome of the use of chemicals, especially chemicals that kill up to 97% of the target pest, such as Apistan and Bayvarol. The few surviving pests transmit to some of their offspring their ability to withstand the chemical. In each succeeding generation of mites, the resistant survivors become more plentiful and the chemical less effective.

Misuse of the strips has been common. Leaving the strips in for over the recommended period of 6 weeks results in a reduced dosage, as does leaving the chemical in for too short a period. There is also a danger that beeswax absorbs minute amounts of the chemical and thus may give off minute doses, thus hastening resistance. DO NOT leave pyrethroid strips in all winter. I am not advocating that we should abandon chemical intervention; simply that if used then it should be done with thought and planning.

References: *Practical Beekeeping* - de Bruyn Ch 19 & 20. *Bees and Honey* - Hooper, pages 96 -102, 186 - 188.

Next month:More on the management of varroa.

MORE ON THE ESSEX SHOW AT BARLEYLANDS.

1 One most important person did not receive mention in the last magazine. Ruth Huggins one of our stalwart caterers needs special mention having helped to feed over 60 helpers at the Essex Honey show. Thank you very much Ruth.

2 Today we received a letter of thanks from Joanna Philpot of Barleylands. A copy of the letter follows:

“Peter and I, along with the Committee, would like to thank you for organising the Essex Beekeeping display at the Essex Country Show again this year. We get many favourable comments from the public and I know it created an enormous amount of interest. We certainly understand the work involved and the commitment you all make to the Show and we certainly appreciate the time you spend with us over the weekend.

We matched the number who attended last year and with that we are very pleased. I am already planning the 2009 show and hope you will put the dates **12th and 13th September** in your diary. We will be sending the invitation letters out in the New Year.

As a result of this Show we will be sending £6,000 to six local charities, Haven's Hospice, the Children's Diabetic Fund at Broomfield Hospital, Farleigh Hospice, Southend Stroke Association, the Neptune Ward at Southend General Hospital and the Katie Hart-Greenfield appeal for Haven's Hospice. The Wickford and District Scouts, South East Essex Guides and Essex Young Farmers will also benefit financially from the support they gave us.

The Philpot family, along with the Committee wish you the best for the coming twelve months when we hope to see you back at the Essex Country Show once again.

Signed Joanna Philpot.”

3 The Show Committee are looking to purchase a mouse and rat proof box trailer to house the show 'furniture'. Please contact Roy Hardwicke on 01245 225950 if you know of one.

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Some reflections on the talk by Ted Benton on Bumblebees

Whilst members of the EBKA direct most of their energies to honeybees, Ted Benton's talk was on bumblebees. His talk touched upon the distinction between these two species in respect of the degree of social relationships that existed within each species. Honeybees live in perennial colonies, each consisting of a queen and her many daughter workers. The queen and the workers are physically distinct. The queen is unable to live alone, for example she never forages, and the workers are unable to form a viable colony because they cannot mate and therefore produce female offspring. Such a colony has been technically defined as being a 'highly eusocial' colony; the bees always live in colonies and new colonies are created socially through swarming.

Most bumblebees (the parasitic species are different in this respect) live in small colonies started by a single fertile female. Initially, she works alone performing all the functions of nest-building, foraging, provisioning cells, feeding larvae and laying eggs. Only after the emergence of daughter workers may a colony life-style arise when there is some division of labour. These types of colonies are known as 'primitively eusocial' colonies.

During lunch a discussion arose amongst Colchester division members as to the characteristic behaviour of a solitary bee—a solitary bee constructs her own nest and provides food for her offspring; she has no help from other bees and usually dies or leaves before her offspring emerge. Such bees may be seen on banks on the ground. The ground is rich with holes—but each hole is inhabited by one bee for the purpose of laying eggs and for provisions. A good way of understanding the relationship of this aggregation of holes is that the bees are 'neighbours' rather than belonging to a colony. There are several such banks of earth at Fingringhoe nature reserve.

Ted Benton then discussed the typical life cycle of the bumblebee. Most life cycle commentaries start with the laying of the egg; I shall start with the picture found on the front of the magazine—mating between male and female. The picture on the front shows a *bombus lapidarius* male (smaller bee, with an orange tail and some bright yellow bands) and female (larger bee with orange tail) mating. When I photographed this coupling I thought that to get a clear photograph speed was going to be of the essence—but as it turned out the bees were joined for 40 minutes. This photograph shows them just as they were about to decouple. These bees were mating in a public place, Boxted playing field, on a warm sunny afternoon under the shade of a tree! Beekeepers do not usually see their charges mating, as it is done on the wing, so I thought that a front cover photograph of a different genus might suffice.

Cont. on page 13

The first challenge facing the fertilized queen is that she must survive the winter alone, unlike the queen honeybee which passes through winter with a colony of workers (colonies of some species of bombus may remain active during the winter). She continues to feed to build up her fat store but still returns to the parental nest. Eventually the newly-fertilised queen will have to find a place to hibernate alone for the winter. Little is known about the choice of location of such sites. According to Benton, the mortality of overwintered queens is very high—with some estimates putting it at over 80%.

With the arrival of spring the young queen's first task is to restore her energy levels and so she will be found on spring flowers, such as blackthorn, and early catkins for pollen. Her next task is to find a suitable site to start her own colony. I have tried for a couple of years to encourage a colony to start in a purpose made box, which would allow viewing of the colony, but to date no luck. It has been suggested that what might attract a queen to start her colony in such a box is placing some contents from a disused mouse nest; apparently the scent of this attracts the queen to such sites.

When a queen can be seen with pollen on her corbicula it is a sign that she has established her nest and is now beginning to prepare provisions for her soon to be laid eggs. In the nest these pollen loads are placed into cup-shaped cells which have been made earlier from wax extruded from her wax cells. Close to these brood cells the queen will have made a honey pot in which she stores nectar.

The eggs look similar to honeybee eggs, 3-4 millimetres long, white and sausage shaped. When a group of eggs have been laid the queen completes the wax cell to enclose the eggs and then incubates them by stretching her body over the cell. The eggs hatch after four to six days. Some bumblebee larva feed on the pollen that had been earlier mass provisioned by the queen (Benton calls these pocket makers). Other species are fed individually by the queen (Benton calls these pollen storers). As the larva grow the queen enlarges the brood cell by adding more wax to the walls but all the time still incubates her brood. The larva go through several stages and when fully grown spins a cocoon to begin its pupal stage.

The queen removes the wax covering this brood and begins to make other cells which she provisions with pollen and then lays more eggs. Adult workers emerge from their pupa after about two weeks. These infertile females will assist the queen in foraging, feeding and tending the further batches of eggs laid by the queen. The queen will remain in the nest and fulfil her main role as egg-layer.

Cont. on page 14

Cont. from page 13

The colony will expand and there will be a critical point when the queen no longer lays eggs, which result in infertile workers, but will lay eggs that will result in males and daughter queens. There has been quite a lot of research as to the circumstances which cause the queen to change her laying priorities. Males, once they emerge, will be ready to leave the nest in two to four days. Once they leave it is assumed that they do not return. The daughter queens spend more time in the nest. Once they have mated the cycle has been completed.

I can recommend two books on bumblebees: the first is *Bumblebees* by Ted Benton, 2006, HarperCollins; the other is *The Humble-Bee* by F.W.L. Sladen, first published 1912 by Macmillan though the copy I have was published in 1989 by Logaston Press.

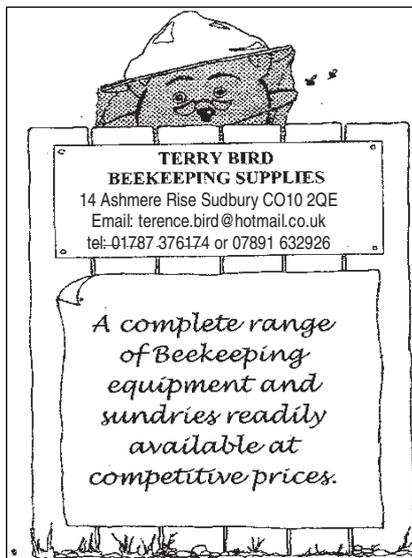
Howard Gilbert

Recipe: Honey Mincemeat

1 medium orange, juice and zest
150g. raisins
150g. diced cooking apples
75g. diced glace cherries
75g. diced walnuts
2 tbs. honey
1 tsp. mixed spice
1 tbs. Brandy/Cointreau

1. Place in large bowl orange juice and zest, then add raisins and allow to absorb juice for ten minutes or so.
2. Add all other ingredients to the bowl, and mix well.
3. Use the honey mincemeat to fill large or individual pies.

Note. Unlike shop bought mincemeat, this will not keep successfully. Use within a day or two.



FOR SALE

Heavy Duty 21 Frame Electric Extractor. Old but in good working order and serviced ready for use. Offers over £20 invited by 20 November, with sale proceeds to be donated to EBKA funds. Photo available on request and physical viewing welcomed. Please contact Martin Frostick on 01206 250263 (Colchester Division) .

**ESSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING**

**Thursday 27th November 2008
7.30pm**

Trinity Methodist Church Halls, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford.

To approve the following changes to the rules of the Association:

- 1 Rule 20b to read:
 - b) Remit to the General Treasurer capitation due to the county and to the BBKA:
 - by 1st April every year for all then current members;
 - by 1st September every year for members joining since the April capitation payment.The BBKA register of members shall be used as the authoritative record of membership against which the remittances will be requested by the General Treasurer.
- 2 Additional rule for section 20:
 - g) Submit a list to the General Treasurer by 30th May every year of sums received which qualified for Gift Aid during the previous tax year.

The change to Rule 20b is needed to comply with the new BBKA Constitution, which changed the arrangements for payment of BBKA capitation.

The additional Rule 20g will ensure that the EBKA can benefit fully from current Gift Aid rules.

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