

# THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Photo taken by Arthur Huggins. This photograph was awarded a 'highly commended' in Class 59 'colour print not close up' at the National Honey Show 2009

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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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## January and February 2010

- 7 Jan. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. AGM followed by an informative video on the honeybee. Speaker is Colin Wright.
- 8 Jan. *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. AGM for Romford Division followed by a debate 'Why take the BBKA Basic Assessment?' chaired by Jim McNeill.
- 13 Jan. *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Braintree** Tabor Science College Panfield Lane, Braintree CM7 5XP Microscopy Group Meeting.
- 16 Jan. *Saturday 2.00pm* **Maldon** at Blue Boar Maldon. AGM for Maldon Division followed by a 'start of the season' meeting
- 18 Jan. *Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Methodist Church Rainsford Rd. Chelmsford CMN1 2XB. AGM for Chelmsford Division.
- 21 Jan. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Epping Forest** at Chingford Horticultural Society Hall. This will be our AGM when the officers will be giving reports about the years events and voting for the officers for 2010 will take place. It is also an opportunity for members to raise any issues they may have. The meeting will be followed by the presentation of the cups awarded for the Honey Show.
- 22 Jan. *Friday 7.15pm* **Saffron Walden** at Dunmow Day Centre, Gt. Dunmow CM6 1AE. Annual Dinner and AGM.
- 27 Jan. *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend**. AGM for Southend Division followed by a Quiz.
- 28 Jan. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Colchester** at Langham Community Centre. AGM for Colchester Division followed by a film (which was originally scheduled for the November meeting).
- 29 Jan. *Friday 8.00pm* **Braintree** at the Constitutional Club. AGM for Braintree Division.
- 4 Feb. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. Equipment and Tools required for beekeeping with speaker Colin Wardell.
- 5 Feb. *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. Speaker is John Hendrie on "Driving Licences for Beekeepers". John Hendrie is BBKA Moderator and will be talking about the BBKA examination structure and encouraging us all to get ourselves more qualified.
- 9 Feb. *Tuesday 7.45pm* **Saffron Walden** at the Guildhall, High Street, Thaxted. Presentation - 'Beekeeping in Germany' with Uli Gerhard.

- 10 Feb. *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Braintree** Tabor Science College Panfield Lane, Braintree CM7 5XP Microscopy Group Meeting.
- 18 Feb. *Thursday 8.00pm* **Epping Forest** at The Chingford Horticultural Society Hall, Larkshall Road, Chingford, E4 6NH. We hope to have a talk on 'Urban Beekeeping'.
- 24 Feb. *Wednesday 7.30pm.* **Southend** Mead making, a talk given by Eric Fenner.
- 25 Feb. *Thursday 7.30pm* **Colchester** Langham Community Centre. Artificial Swarming—an evening of theory and discussion.

### Behind the Veil with Geoff Mills (Hon. Life Member)

#### How was your interest in beekeeping kindled?

You may already know that one of my other hobbies is amateur radio and whilst I am licensed to both transmit and receive signals there are some other radio amateurs who are simply listeners, that is to say they listen and receive short wave signals only and have not passed the examinations for a full licence. One of these was a short wave listener (SWL), Colin, and member of the Vange radio club, who used to work locally to me when I lived in Billericay in the early 60's. By way of conversation we got around to talking about why my top fruit trees never produced any fruit. He told me that they were not being pollinated and therefore I should keep a hive or two of honeybees. And from there I have never looked back. I later found that bullfinches looking for insects in the buds were damaging my fruit trees. However, I was then hooked on keeping honeybees. As a schoolboy I had been taken, on days out, to visit some friends of my parents in Feltwell, Norfolk. The husband was a baker who kept bees, but I never realised, at that time, why he took nobody with him to his bees at the bottom of the meadow behind his house. I suspect that he may have known that the bees behave differently when a stranger was present (Pheromones?). Honey in those days was largely sold in sections and I can remember my mother buying them in the local market in Great Yarmouth where I was brought up. (6d a time, which was a lot of money then, a haircut cost 3d and now £7 for a pensioner). So perhaps we're underselling our sections today. Should they be £14 plus?



My first hive was acquired from a Mrs. Bungey whose husband was the then Chief Education Officer for Essex. Ironic in the sense that later I was to meet her husband in a professional capacity when I changed direction, in 1963, from working as designer of telephone systems for the Post Office (Now BT) to that of a tutor/counsellor in Tele-

communications and Electrical Engineering at Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford, and also working for the Open University when the latter was started by Harold Wilson (Prime Minister) in 1972. I was fortunate in having a local mentor just down the road from me when I started, a Mr. Britain. I straightaway joined Chelmsford Division by making contact with Mr. & Mrs. Wheeler, secretary and treasurer for Chelmsford Division, and from there I soon realised that I needed some professional help if I were to understand how to keep honeybees. So I went off to Writtle college.

#### **What were the formative influences on your beekeeping?**

I know that Ted Hooper NDB BEM, who had just started at Writtle Agricultural College, was the main influence (and he still is as I take him and his wife Joy to the local pub most weeks for a drink and some lunch). Also Eric Fenner and Margaret Thomas NDB started their beekeeping in the same year and their keenness rubbed off to me. We three very often were at the same county meetings and gained knowledge from the other EBKA members attending. Later on, when Ted retired, I attended courses run by Clive de Bruyn. Clive had arrived in Essex from another part of the country and to familiarise himself with Essex and its beekeepers he invited me to join a group that visited several apiaries belonging to EBKA members. It was at one of these near Harlow that I found the first varroa mite in Essex!

#### **How did things develop from your first hive?**

I think I started much the same as anyone else, that is to say I soon had my own swarms to deal with and therefore I soon had four hives at the bottom of my long garden in Billericay. I started on Nationals and today I am glad I did. Every year the brood chambers and supers appear to get heavier, and not because they contain more honey. At near 85, it is all I can do to lift a brood chamber and super together when I move hives between my four apiaries. When I took early retirement in 1981 I increased the number of hives I kept to 25 and participated in the Essex Pollination Scheme. In 1982 when Miss Edith Avey NDB asked me to take on the organisation of the Essex Scheme that I am still doing (Ted Hyde was the organiser and in fact he set up the Scheme with the National Farmers Union and Writtle college a few years earlier). By that time I had been living in Little Baddow since 1972, and I am still here. Fortunately, it is a large woodland garden where I normally keep some twelve hives plus eight queen rearing nuclei. I still have the occasional swarm but mostly they settle immediately in the bushes or trees on site.

Having been a Ted Hooper fan and student I believe in feeding down my honeybees with thick syrup in late August to the beginning of September in order to get plenty of young bees to take my colonies through the Winter. I use large (18" x 18") feeders that allow me to feed about ten litres over two or three days. A second such quantity is usually given as necessary. Sometimes they may be overfed but the frames of stores that are left in the Spring are given to any hives that show signs of getting short of food. So they are not wasted, and the removal of full frames of food allows the queen to lay further. In a good year and provided the crops are ready I expect the first supers to be full by 1<sup>st</sup> May. Occasionally I have had problems with European Foul brood (EFB), the worst case was when I destroyed a colony on 1<sup>st</sup> May with 100 lb of OSR honey already in the supers. Jim Griffiths was the ministry inspector at the time.

My early retirement from full-time paid work allowed me to take on, in 1982, the job of Show Committee secretary from George Linsell and to carry on the tradition of the Essex Honey Show for the next thirteen years. Les Gilbert was the Chairman of the

Show committee and Jim McNeill and Roger Shead were helping, particularly to book in all the exhibits at the show. And, I believe, Jim still does that. In those days we had a large marquee at the Essex Showground provided by the Essex Agricultural Society who were the owners. For several years EBKA was awarded the honour of being the best marquee on the showground.

I continued to serve on the County Executive committee and had the honour of being elected President of the Association for the term before Derek Webber, the present incumbent, took the job on. I still take an active interest in the activities of the EBKA and currently try to help mentoring the newcomers to the art.

#### **What keeps you beekeeping?**

It's one of those hobbies where you can always learn something new and therefore it still provides me with real challenges and opportunities to experiment. As Ted Hooper and others have always said that bees do nothing invariably.

#### **What have been the high points of your beekeeping career?**

In the early days I used to work with 11 B.S. deep frames for the brood plus a shallow on SN4s with metal (now plastic spacers), and that meant there were 22 frames to inspect for queen cells etc. and with several hives that was taking a lot of time that could be spent doing other things. I decided that I would still use a deep brood box plus shallow for the Winter but that I would, in the Spring, put the queen excluder between the two boxes so that throughout the broody period I would need only to inspect the deep frames. Additionally, I would have another super for honey. At the same time I commenced to change all my deep frames for those with Hoffman spacers, thus enabling me to use twelve frames in the deep if I chose to not use an end board. At first I thought that this change might produce more swarming, but, in fact, it reduced it. I only use my own queens and do not use imported ones that I've noticed have more prolific queens and require bigger brood chambers that are heavier to lift. They are not necessarily of quieter temperament than good native bees. I suppose 2009 was the high point of almost 50 years with bees as my crop averaged some 90 lb/colony (measured from the previous colony numbers in September when the bees were being prepared for the Winter).

#### **Has anything ever gone wrong with your beekeeping?**

Yes.

2006 saw me lose 12 out of 12 colonies in two apiaries on the same farm by the following Spring. It took me two years to realise that it was really my fault. With the changing climate, that is to say, milder Autumns I had been starting the feeding later and later with the result that I had missed six weeks for rearing those young bees that were going to takeover next Spring when all the old bees had died. Those six weeks meant upwards of several thousand bees not being born. I had noticed that those colonies were showing signs in late July, and through August, that few eggs were being laid and I did not immediately relate that to lack of pollen and nectar income. The fields surrounding these apiaries were planted with cereal crops and I therefore expected no income for the bees, and I did not feed until late September. In previous years the farmer had always planted sunflower on the headlands that I never saw because they were obscured by the cereal crops and those had provided the necessary income for the queens to continue egg laying. In November I found two colonies being robbed out by wasps and thought that was rather late in the year for that to occur. However, I did find the offending nest and destroyed it, but I was too late and the bees

had died by the following Spring as they had lost their queen (Hence why they were being robbed so easily. Without a queen they lack the will to defend). By the way, I have always kept my entrance blocks in through the whole year having learned this lesson when visiting and being visited by an Australian commercial beekeeper who had found that if he did not keep his hives with the entrance blocks fully in that he lost his colonies through a meltdown when everything flowed out of the entrance because air temperatures were in excess of 40° C. Have you ever seen a feral colony with a large entrance hole? So why did I need to open the entrances in temperatures that seldom exceed 30°C?

#### **What do you consider to be your beekeeping legacy?**

The knowledge that I can pass on some of the things I've learned not only to prospective

beekeepers, but to our youngsters who will be the beekeepers of the future. In that regard I enjoy talking and demonstrating beekeeping to school children and beaver scout groups and so on. Also the challenge that I can help improve the presentation of honey for sale, largely by entering shows to see how honey and its products should be presented .

#### **What about the future of beekeeping?**

I am a believer that united we can progress, exemplified by the events of last year when BBKA managed to highlight beekeeping, resulting in many newcomers to the art and more funding of research. However, I suspect that many newcomers will stay no longer than about four years. Without professional teachers at the colleges it will be increasingly difficult to teach newcomers. With many prospective beekeepers this may be the time to get sufficient support for a restart of college courses. After all many of our Divisions have been over subscribed by applicants for their courses.

Secondly, honeybees will survive and let's not believe that present problems are down to one cause only. I already notice that some colonies have much less damage from varroasis than others. Let's breed from them. Varroa is not the only problem.

### **The EBKA National conference—The Value of Bees Pat Allen (Romford Division)**

Hosted by Braintree Division and held on Saturday 10th October at The Alec Hunter School.

Maurice Bacon, Braintree's President, welcomed us all to the conference.

The pace of the day was pretty relaxed and we were fed and watered very well. After lunch the trophies from the Essex Honey Show were presented by Derek Webber, with Southend winning the President's Cup – congratulations! Cheques were also handed out to successful candidates in the BBKA exams and assessments (take note, prospective candidates, you get your exam fees reimbursed when you pass!). There was also a large number of raffle prizes.

The first speaker was **Richard Martin**, an agronomist by profession. His talk was titled "**Linking Cropping to the Life of the Bee**".

He first listed the main crops, such as **oil seed rape** which gives the bees and early

start for the year but prices for the farmer have not been good lately. **Beans** are usually autumn sown and also provide input for bees, mainly bumbles. **Peas** of several varieties are grown with varying success, but not used by bees. **Linseed** is building up due to a good payment system; it can be difficult to harvest and the bees do not get much from it, but the price has risen in the last couple of years. **Sunflowers** are not grown very much in Britain and there are several problems with them – mice eat the seeds, birds like the seeds, problem with botrytis – nonetheless they are now grown for bird food and as cover crops and bees like them. **Clover** is grown by organic farmers as it fixes nitrogen in the soil, but it can be difficult to control other weeds without damaging the clover; environmental schemes use clover strips and can be very good for bees. **Top fruit** is good for bees but difficult for the farmers because the supermarkets are so fussy and as a result a lot of apples go to cider-making! Field crops are sprayed against their various pests, but the chemicals used should repel bees.

**Environmental schemes** can help bees by enabling farmers to leave buffer zones, sown with bees-friendly plants, around crops and alongside water. There are different levels of scheme but they all reflect the change from crop payments to land payments. Phacelia, mustard and buckwheat are grown in France apparently, but these may not work here. Also, pollen and nectar mixes can be difficult to establish and to keep year on year.

Richard went through the **economics** for the farmers. For high-yielding **winter wheat** the fixed costs are around £100/acre so the farmer needs a minimum price around £100/tonne. The current price is about £95/tonne. For **specialist spring wheat** the yield is less so a higher price is needed for it to be viable. **Spring barley** is half the cost to grow, gives good yields and is benefitting from increased beer drinking. More **oats** are being grown. Overall farmers are not having an easy time and in some cases it is cheaper to leave the ground bare and take the EU money.

**Norman Carreck** was the second speaker. His topic was “**Pollination: why are bees important?**”

**Hive products** are not economically important but are worth about £11million a year. However, the value of the bees’ **pollination services** has been updated to £150m/year, using farm gate prices. A figure cannot be put on the value of bee pollination to wild plants.

Norman went through some of the trials that have been carried out to study pollination. **Glasshouse trials**, some with bees, some without as control. **Field cages** is another method, where it was found that long-tongued bees are best for beans, other bees tend to rob the flowers. **Field trials** have been held but more are needed as varieties have changed. In one clover trial bee behaviour was tested to find out how far pollen travelled. Some flowers were bagged, others left open to the bees. Norman found there was little interest in such studies until genetically modified crops came along.

**Are bees threatened?** Norman showed maps of bumble bee species pre- and post-1960. Some species have retreated and are now only in the south. Solitary bees too, are declining, but there is less information available.

Changes in land use have affected bees, such as different crops which may not need bees. Much woodland has been lost, and miles of hedges were grubbed out in the 1960s. Heathland has been lost to development, grassland to roads.

Even set aside has not always helped. Some mixes did not work in the UK, either not growing, or flowering when other crops were available. Modern mixes contain pha-

celia, borage, buckwheat, cornflowers, marrow – a mixture works better. ADAS carried out an experiment and found that a mix of grass and wild flowers was good at first but did not regenerate and ended with thistles and ragwort. It was difficult to know if this was doing any good as there were several farm schemes underway which kept changing.

MAFF did a 'big bee' project with white and red clover, grass, birdsfoot trefoil, but found it difficult to maintain. Results were variable from very good to very bad for bees. The project needed large estates or farms so the bees did not fly between plots. It proved difficult to get consistent results because the conditions were so variable.

Norman spoke of his work with tracking bees with radar. Generally bees fly in straight lines and it was proved that bees do follow the waggle dance. Finally he talked of his current work at Sussex University with Professor Ratnieks, which it is hoped will find out just how good the English countryside is for bees.

The final lecture of the day was given by **Terry Clare** of BIBBA. His topic was “**The Best Bee – is there one?**”

Terry first asked “what are we looking for” in our bees? This is really our own choice of priority – good temper, good honey-gathering, disease resistance, low swarming? Terry ranks the characteristics as: 1 docility; 2 non-swarmer; 3 hardiness; 4 disease resistance (including varroa resistance/tolerance); 5 economy; 6 production – but this depends on forage and strength of colony when flowering. In any case performance depends 60% on the environment and 40% on genetics. Over the millennia climate has changed – global warming, Gulf Stream changes, Arctic temperatures, repeat cooling across Europe, bitterly cold winters in Saxon and Viking times.

A world map showed how the bees originated in east Africa, evolved and migrated. Some travelled due north, ours 'turned left' and came up to Spain and then Europe. Terry listed the subspecies of honey bee and where they naturally live. Sometimes identification needs morphometry (such as wing measurements) and DNA. Each type of honey bee has its own characteristics, some good, some not so good. For instance, Caucasian bee is grey (black drones), long tongue, gentle, drifts, lots of propolis collected, susceptible to Nosema, not good in bad winters. Ligustican bee is yellow or 'leather' coloured, good in English winter, needs large stores, lays well in early spring but easily congested so swarms easily, docile, little propolis, drifts, good robbers. Our native bee, *Apis mellifera mellifera*, is dark brown almost black, winter hardy, small cluster needs minimum stores, easily stimulated to produce strong foraging force in April, works early and late in the day, flies at 6°C and in wind and rain, small colonies, low swarming, copes with poor summers.

So you pay your money and take your choice. Terry mentioned Greek queens which have been popular recently, saying how the bees become bad tempered after crossing, sometimes attacking cars and people. In the end, most bees are a mixture, or will become so as new queens are produced.

Thank you, Braintree, for a very good day.

## Dealing with Swarm Collections Lydia Geddes (Colchester)

I am often asked by members filling in their membership forms to pay their annual beekeeping subscription whether they should be replying “yes” or “no” to the question of whether or not they will collect swarms.

The answer is something only the individual can decide but it will help to know what might happen if you answer “yes” and this is a brief story of what happened in the Colchester area in 2009.

In early April local council offices were supplied with a list of beekeepers willing to collect swarms within their area. We gave only the essential information (name, phone number, and town or village) and we asked them not to leave a message on the phone as the beekeeper might not get the message in time to act.

Although swarm report calls do come through council offices, some referred by pest controllers called out to destroy bees and unwilling to do so, very often now swarms are reported directly by members of the public who search the internet and find my phone number as the contact for Colchester on the Essex Beekeepers website.

The first call in 2009 came on 24 April which is around the usual date. After asking a few questions to be sure the caller was reporting a genuine swarm and then asking more about the size and situation it was in, including height off the ground, I gave phone numbers of the two nearest beekeepers and said not to leave messages but call me again if there was no reply from either.

I heard nothing more so we were off to a good start. The next swarm was reported in a message left on our phone on 26 April. We were in London for the Marathon. Even watching can be pretty tiring but I returned the call when we arrived home only to learn that the swarm had moved on earlier in the day.

Calls came daily from then on, often three in the same day. There were also calls about bumblebee nests which were re-located by beekeepers when the caller would have had them destroyed if we had not rescued them. There were calls where the description was not of a swarm but a feral colony in a roof or chimney situation. I have to explain that we cannot generally help in this situation but only offer advice. Sometimes the caller wants a second opinion and is upset by having to make a decision which means bees being destroyed. Other people are aware that they have resident bees and are happy to co-exist with them, hopeful of sighting a swarm which can be collected. There always seemed to be a message on the phone when I came in from the garden for lunch. There were a few



mysteries including a long call with nothing but a dog barking and an occasional word I couldn't make out. Sensible calls where the caller had left no number I returned using BT ringback but I didn't ring the dog because I would have been barking up the wrong tree!

One weekend the phone went crazy. Friday, Saturday and Sunday we received around twenty calls each day. No more real swarms than usual but an article had appeared in the local paper about a beekeeper collecting a swarm in Wivenhoe cemetery. The importance of honeybees was mentioned along with my phone number in print! I wasn't rude to anyone but phoning up to report sighting 7 bees in your garden which the caller will spray with fly killer if a beekeeper doesn't come to the rescue may have been a wind up or maybe not!

Things were quieter in June but one of our members had received so many calls from Colchester Borough Council that he had his name removed from their list. Two swarms reported in the town centre in Colchester were high off the ground, one at the former Odeon cinema, and one in Eld Lane. I had apologised that we would have to let them go but I have since had a former fireman, now a beekeeper, say he is happy to climb a ladder to collect a swarm.

As usual after Tendring Show on 12 July the swarm season appeared to be over but there was further action in early September when a swarm was reported suspended from a hanging basket on the same day we were meeting at Fingringhoe for a guided walk around the Essex Wildlife Trust reserve. The bees were good enough to hang around for Alan Hayden-Case to collect them in the evening. A couple of days later I received another call. One of our new members had gone on holiday leaving a friend looking after the chickens. You wouldn't expect your bees to get up to mischief in September but Steve arrived home from holiday to find an extra nuc box in the garden. I hope they make it through the winter!

When filling in your form for 2010 if you want more bees yourself and have an empty hive clean and ready you can note this on your form and swarm co-ordinators will make sure you are phoned about swarms early in the season. If you have no experience of collecting a swarm ask if you can go along with someone and help before taking on the task alone. If you have all the bees you need and would like to help Derek with the provision of bees to get beginners started collect a swarm in a sturdy cardboard box. Have an old curtain it can be completely wrapped in to transport in the car and make arrangements with Derek to deliver. If the day is warm and sunny don't leave the box in the car but remove it to a shady position until you are ready to go over to Great Horkesley.

Members of Colchester Division do not generally charge a fee for collecting a swarm although if you have had to travel a distance it is quite okay to accept a contribution for expenses. Where people offer more than this some of our members are happy to accept a donation to Essex Air Ambulance.

## Earlybee Offer

**Annual Conference 23/10/10 20% Off Only £16**

If bought with annual membership before 31/1/10, full price £20. Just add payment to your cheque for annual membership or send to address below.

*2010 is the 130<sup>th</sup> birthday of EBKA. We didn't mark our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary so we intend to make the 2010 conference something special. To be sure of a place buy your ticket early.*

Dr Peter Neumann of the Swiss Bee Research Institute is coming to the UK just for our conference. Peter is globally recognised as an authority on the causes of honeybee colony losses.

John Hall, Director of the Essex Wildlife Trust, will talk about the environmental changes facing bees and beekeepers in Essex in the next half century.

The third speaker is yet to be finalised and there will be a number of trade stands.



*The conference will be held in the Foakes Hall in Dunmow on **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> October**. Price includes celebratory lunch plus tea and coffee during the day. Tickets and programmes will be sent out in August by email (unless post requested).*

To buy earlybee tickets directly by post send cheque payable to EBKA Saffron Walden Division to Richard Ridler, Rundle House, High St., Hatfield Broad Oak, Bishop's Stortford, Herts. CM22 7HE

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### New Regional Bee Inspector for Essex

Essex has one new Regional Bee Inspector, Keith Morgan. He has supplied a photo so he is recognisable in the field (!) and has provided a summary of his beekeeping activities.

I have been a seasonal bee inspector for West Norfolk and North Cambridge since 2001. I have had a large amount of experience in dealing with notifiable diseases as Norfolk is regally on the top of the list in the Country for EFB.

I have nearly 30 years experience of running bees on a commercial scale so I am able to pass this experience over to beginners and bee-keepers in general. I am from an agricultural background having gained all my qualifications in poultry husbandry and business management and worked both on poultry farms and in the Country park on Sandringham Estate.



### Bee Programmes to watch on-line

Geoff Mills has sent this link where four programmes on bees can be found.

<http://www.sbs.com.au/documentary/program/honeybee-blues>

The longest programme, Honeybee Blues, tells the story of the world's disappearing honeybees and the efforts of Australian scientist Dr Denis Anderson to save them from annihilation.

From the native bush and orchards of Australia to the industrial farmlands of the United States and the highlands of Papua New Guinea, Honeybee Blues is a scientific detective story that tells a 21st century cautionary tale.

The film features observational sequences and interviews with biosecurity officers, bee exporters, pollinators and honey producers. Combining macro photography of the insect world, a lively blues soundtrack and animation sequences, Honeybee Blues tracks the incredible journey of the world's oldest domesticated animal and its predators around the globe.



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## **The Nucleus Hive Roy Cropley**

'No news is good news'. Since all news is bad it is just as well not to know what is going on. When the wireless set became popular in the 1920's people only heard bad things that were happening in the world and this contributed to the Great Depression.

In the 1960's there were enough nuclear bombs to destroy everything and everyone in the world several times. Underground shelters were built and stocked with tins of beans and dried milk. Anti-nuclear demonstrations and marches were ignored by our politicians whom we had elected as our democratic leaders. The placards bore the sign 'No nukes is Good Nukes'.

There is one place where this is not true. That is in beekeeping. We write it not as 'nuke' but as 'nuc' meaning a nucleus colony of bees with a queen, combs, brood and stores.

We want bees that are not bad-tempered, are not inclined to swarm, can resist disease and parasites and are productive. Young, prolific queens are essential. The best way to get these bees is to use nucs. The young queen should hatch out into a world of plenty. She should build up to optimum size and lay fat, well fed eggs.

Early summer is the time to make up nucs. Each consists of a comb of brood, two of stores and one of pollen. There are enough young bees to cover the frames.

It is better to move the nucs to a different apiary. A ripe queen cell (which is a day or so off hatching) is added to each. After 17 days each queen will have mated and produced a patch of brood. By the end of summer there will be full size colonies able to go through winter. Later nucs are also possible if wasps can be deterred.

Feeding is important. In a good year the nuc is self sufficient. It might even produce a super of honey.

Not every nuc is a success. Mating with bad drones or not mating at all, getting lost or having insufficient semen means the queen is culled. The beekeeper expects to kill any that are not 100%.

There is nothing more rewarding than producing a beautiful nuc. Not easy, but very rewarding.

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Photo taken by Colin Wright. The photograph was awarded a 1st in Class 41, 'One colour photograph unmounted, of any size' at the Essex Honey Show held at Barleylands 2009.

Photo taken by Ann Slater. This is probably a male *bombus pascuorum* (aka common carder bee) .

