

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



DISAPPEARING BEES!

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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.

June 2010

- 3 June* *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. A talk by Jim McNeill on Processing Honey and a review of the Apiary meeting with Peter Heath, the 'disease inspector'.
- 4 June* *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. A talk by Pam Hunter, 'From Stingless Bees to Honey Bees'.
- 5 & 6 June* *Saturday and Sunday 10.00am-6.00pm* **Colchester** Little Bentley Hall Garden Show. The Colchester Division will be having a stand at this event. Help will be needed during the weekend; to offer assistance please ring Penny Barker 01255 830713. For more information concerning the event see www.littlebentley.net.
- 12 June* *Saturday 2.30pm* **Epping Forest** This is our annual meeting at Willow Cottage. Breda Reynolds is giving a talk on Organic Gardening. As we always provide tea in the garden after the talk, it would be helpful if we know roughly how many to cater for. Please will you contact Jenny Johns by email or by phoning 020 8529 2844 if you would like to come. A visit to Willow Cottage is a very pleasant way to spend a summer afternoon. A map will be included in the June Newsletter which is available on the website if you Google Epping Forest Beekeepers.
- 19 June* *Saturday 2.30pm* **Saffron Walden** Apiary Meeting on the subject of 'Building Nuclei' with Robert Pickford at Les Ridgewell's Apiary, Gt Bardfield.
- 21 June* *Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** at Link Hall, Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. Best Offer Table Top Sale. If you have Items of beekeeping equipment you no longer require or if you want to pick up a bargain, come and join us at Chelmsford's table top sale. Everybody is more than welcome.
- 23 June* *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Jim McNeill will give a talk on Preparing for the Honey Show.
- 27 June* *Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** Apiary meeting. Please telephone Stuart Mitson for details, tel. 01376 340683.
- 27 June* *Sunday 11.00am– 5.00pm* **Romford** A visit to Barnard's Farm.

July 2010

- 1 July *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. A talk by Terry Thrussell on 'Queen Rearing, Queen Introduction and Nukes'.
- 2 July *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. A talk by Jim McNeill on how to make beeswax polish.
- 7 July *Wednesday 9.45am* **Bee Husbandry Workshop** at Millennium Centre, The Chase, Dagenham Rd., RM7 0SS—see advert on page 14.
- 10 July *Saturday 9.00am– 6.00pm* **Colchester**. Tendring Show Lawford House Park, Bromley Road, Lawford, Nr Manningtree, Essex. CO11 2ND. If you can offer to help please phone Penny Barker 01255 830713.
- 10 July *Saturday 2.30pm* **Epping Forest**. We have kindly been invited for a return visit to Barbara and Peter Dalby's apiary. The subject for this visit will be Reading the Hive. Barbara teas are legendary and so it would be helpful if you could contact either Barbara on 01992 622 645 or Helen Chadwick 020 8523 5770 if you are planning to come. A map will be included in the July Newsletter which is available on the website if you Google Epping Forest Beekeepers.
- 18 July *Sunday TBA* **Saffron Walden** Apiary Meeting at Gerald Smith's Apiary, Saffron Walden, CB11 3BN.
- 25 July *Sunday TBA* **Braintree**. Apiary Meeting 3.00pm Please telephone John Barlow for details 01371 850756.
- 28 July *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Clive de Bruyn will give a talk on 'Beekeeping Mistakes'.
- 30 July *Friday 7.00pm* **Colchester**. Bar-B-Que at the home of Roger and Penny Barker, Rowan Lodge, Pilcox Hall Lane, Tendring, CO16 0DP. Please phone Penny Barker 01255 830713 for more information.

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Behind the Veil with Penny Learmonth (Saffron Walden)

How was your interest in beekeeping kindled?

I had an inspirational science teacher and did Higher School Certificate Biology – we dissected rabbits, frogs, earthworms and cockroaches. We studied insects generally and the social insects in more detail. Botany was also in the syllabus. The background was set. Then I married into a beekeeping family. My father-in-law, Eric, a food chemist by profession, kept up to eight WBC hives. He used the Rev. J.G. Digges' book (1928) and took a keenly scientific approach to his beekeeping. Newly married David and I only helped out with the heavy lifting and the spinning but when Eric died prematurely it seemed that we shouldn't just let the bees go.

What were the formative influences on your beekeeping?

Eric died at the beginning of May 1980 just as the bees were building up nicely. Neither David nor I had any significant practical experience with the bees but Dr



Castleden, an EBKA member and family friend, came to our rescue. As I was generally at home with the children it seemed natural that I should become the day-to-day beekeeper, so I helped Dr Castleden for the first inspection. Later that same day a hive swarmed out. Another Saffron Walden member came to help. Seeing the benefit we quickly joined the EBKA and I signed up for classes with Ted Hooper at Writtle College. Ted was a wonderfully enabling teacher giving one the confidence that yes, one could do

this beekeeping thing. Membership of the EBKA is a constant and generous help and even now I rarely go to a meeting without picking up a fresh nugget of beekeeping wisdom. We did it the wrong way round but I have never regretted keeping Eric's bees.

How did things develop from your first hive?

We moved the bees from my parents in law's garden in Thaxted to our own garden in Great Dunmow. We reduced the colonies to between two and four and kept them in an urban area. There was a good fence in front to raise them above six feet by the time they reached the pavement and, as far as we know, no one was ever stung. The honey yields in the town were good – sufficient and varied. At that time the fashion was to re-queen with Italian queens and I used to do this most seasons. In 1985 we moved to our present house in Felsted. We have a bigger garden and keep a core of six colonies, rising in number during the summer when swarms have been collected and artificial swarms made. I must admit we had eighteen boxes of bees in the summer of 2009 which was too many. It was difficult to keep up with them! One had to conclude that the bees were redressing the balance after the losses of 2008. That was a sad season. At the beginning of March we had all six colonies present but by April, three had died out. Two years previously we had lost two colonies but before that we had never lost bees during the

winter. It has been salutary. Certainly we are having to adapt to keep our bees healthy. My husband, David, retired a few years ago so now we are a beekeeping team. I still lead the day-to-day management but David more than pulls his weight and has a lifetime of background in beekeeping.

What keeps you beekeeping?

Lighting the smoker for the first time in the spring! That wonderful smokey bees-waxy smell that says that the new season has started. Opening the hives is always a moment – what will you find? The satisfaction of finding that all is well, the challenge of addressing problems that arise. Keeping going when utterly exhausted but the satisfaction of turning the spinner tap on the season's first run of honey. It is an endlessly varied hobby and infinitely fascinating.

What have been the highlights of your beekeeping career?

Every time we successfully re-queen a colony, mark a new queen or hive a swarm I sense the thrill of keeping bees. There was also the year when we harvested nearly nine hundred pounds of honey from five colonies – I believe it was 1995.

Has anything ever gone wrong with your beekeeping?

Oh yes! Sometimes it has been farcical. Last year there was the ignominy of two swarms in the garden at the same time – how did that happen? At least they were behind the hedge. Then there was the occasion when, as a new beekeeper having put on the wrong super, I thought I could change it without the bees noticing and before they had moved in – after dark. They were still hanging on the back door waiting for me to come out the next morning. I asked Ted Hooper about that at the next class. His reply was, "If it were that easy we'd all be keeping bees after dark!"

Finally there was the day when I scrubbed the Queen's highway in full rig. A swarm had flown out and the queen knocked out of the air by a passing lorry. The bees were in a vast pancake on the road. I found the poor dead body of the queen and removed it but still the bees stayed on the road being squashed. I felt the only answer was to get soapy water and a brush and scrub away the smell. It is a varied pastime and could turn you into a well known local eccentric.

What do you consider to be your beekeeping legacy?

I am a beekeeping enthusiast who has tried to tell others about the beauty and importance of honeybees. I find that most people are interested and I hope this interest will always safeguard the honeybees.

What about the future of Beekeeping?

Just now this seems rosier as so many people are coming forward to learn about beekeeping. Not all of them will carry on but enough will to ensure that the honeybee will have its champions. The advent of varroa has shown us that at times honeybees have to be in husbandry to survive. It was a man-made problem and the beekeepers were obliged to see them through. There are further environmental problems looming and we need to be prepared for them.

An Update on Articles appearing in Previous Issues! Nobby Clark (Braintree)

In the February issue I gave an account of my experiences during a bout of swine 'flu last summer. This brought an offer to buy my ancient WBC hive that was in need of renovation. I declined to part with it mainly for sentimental reasons because it was my first hive. I also have some respect for the WBC because it was designed with our climate in mind, in the days when we admittedly had the native strain of bee which was less prolific than the hybrids of today. I know it requires a doubling of effort because of the outer lifts and inner boxes and is not a practical hive when it comes to moving it. Over the years it has been condemned by many beekeepers and there is one well-known beekeeper in the county who always said that the WBC was only fit for use as firewood. That is until he heard of the good prices people were prepared to pay for WBCs for use as garden ornaments or compost bins! The offer I received came from a young lady wanting to start bee-keeping who had enrolled for a divisional course. Although I was able to put her in touch with an alternative source of supply I thought it better if she first learned on the course about various types of hive before finally settling on the WBC. It is much nicer looking than the practical boxes we mostly use and John Blakesley, a former Regional Bee Inspector, once told me that if he were keeping bees only in the garden he would settle for WBCs.

In the April issue Norma Nairne reported the attempts to rescue feral bees from a house that was being demolished in Stock. Sadly the bees did not survive and the rescue attempts were made during one of the coldest spells we have had, which is not an ideal time to break the clusters and there was no certainty that the queens had been secured. However, something had to be done in the circumstances. I did hear that Ian Brown managed to recover about 30lbs of honey from the surplus comb.

In the same issue Richard Alabone mentioned the possibility that Stradivari used propolis when making his stringed instruments. There has long been speculation about this and as far as I am aware nobody has yet come forward with conclusive proof. In a recent issue of the Strad magazine there was a report on a seven year research into Stradivari's varnishes by Jean-Philippe Richard and Balthazar Soulier. They used five of the master's instruments from the Paris Musee de la Musique which were produced between 1692 and 1724. One of the problems always facing researchers is whether an old instrument is genuine or original. The five instruments used were considered to be reliable because they had been rarely played or handled since being added to the collection and one, a viola d'amore, donated in 1873, was considered to be one of the best preserved of all Stradivari's varnishes.

Instruments have two distinct and separate varnish layers, the ground layer which fills the upper wood cells and the surface layer which contains the colour. During the research the surface layer was found to have the presence of resinous material coming from a species of the pinaceae family but excluded among other things of other resins as main components. Ageing and resulting oxidation and degra-

dition makes it difficult to distinguish between the aged resinous products from fir, pine, spruce and larch. Although the word propolis has nowhere been used we know that bees collect resins from trees and the question is whether Stradivari and other instrument makers at the time found propolis to be a convenient source of material for their varnishes. On the other hand were bees then kept in hives suitable for the recovery of propolis? The research showed that over the years Stradivari changed the pigments he used in his surface layer varnishes.

Research by other people in 2009 (Stewart Pollens - an appropriate name - and Stefan-Peter Greiner) indicate that substances such as charcoal, pine resin and shellac were used, no obscure ingredients were used and the theory of a connection between the varnish and the sound of Stradivari's instruments is untenable.

It is said that wooden stringed instruments improve with age whilst wind instruments deteriorate.. Perhaps, provided they have been cared for, it is the age of the wood that makes these instruments unique and, no doubt, it is the less damp climate of Italy that has helped in this.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I feel I must react to the criticism of my article on propolis where I recommended that the tincture should be made with Surgical Spirit. Despite what is said on Wikipedia, surgical spirit is **NOT** rubbing alcohol. Surgical Spirit is alcohol denatured by the addition of 1 to 5 per cent of methanol to make it undrinkable and so must not be taken internally when used to produce a tincture with propolis. But Scotch contains 0.2 – 0.3% methanol, as does apple juice, whereas a good home distilled spirit has only 0.007%. The fatal dose of methanol is 30ml, or 600ml of Surgical Spirit. Taking 10 drops of tincture, made with Surgical Spirit, contains as much methanol as 170 drops of Scotch, or 1 tsp, so the old fashioned use of Surgical Spirit was not really so out of order. However I am indebted to Barbara Dalby for pointing out that my recommendation for propolis tincture is not acceptable nowadays: I should have said to use Scotch or Brandy; but don't drink more than 10 litres - it could prove fatal!

Richard Alabone

Managing Hives (part 1)

Richard Alabone (Mr Beesy)

Experience is the main way we learn hive management. Much can be learnt working with an experienced beekeeper, though classes and a book are a good start. These notes are intended to cover points seldom discussed in classes or books and are generally learnt by experience.

Starting with a nuc, in about June, it should build up by September with enough bees to go safely through to spring. But don't let a small box get overcrowded or they may try to swarm. Get them into a big box as soon as possible. A National can be transferred into a full brood box, but you are better off with Commercial or 14 x 12 (jumbo National). Put any frames without brood to the outside to wean the colony on to the new frames, and feed of course.

To my mind the best type of feeder to use is a 1 gallon contact feeder. Put in the 3kg of sugar and fill with hot water; it's quick and easy and goes straight on the hive when cool. Making up bulk feed is generally more trouble than it's worth, except 6 kg in a 30lb honey bucket. When it comes to feeding a pollen patty in spring there are some problems. Generally it tends to go mouldy before the bees use most of it. Perhaps sodium benzoate in the mixture would help avoid mould. Beware too soft a mix; I have seen a hive where it all ran down between the frames, almost ruining the colony. Bees tend to manage perfectly well without any pollen substitute.

When building up a colony, make sure the queen always has somewhere to lay. A frame of stores, or a scruffy old frame, will stop egg laying, so make sure there is empty comb or foundation next to the nest. In summer full frames of stores are best replaced with foundation next to the brood nest, which should soon be drawn out depending on nectar availability. June is sometimes regarded as a problem, referred to as the June gap, but if there are lime trees about there can be a great bonanza and an explosion of brood. But when I fed a colony of New Zealand bees in June, they died of starvation in July!

The siting of hives causes some queries. Facing north or under trees being regarded as undesirable, but I don't think it matters a jot. Bees do well on the edge of a wood – but not actually in the wood. Car access, away from home, is more important, but at home there can be noticeable spots on washing or light cars, especially if the bees get dysentery, which won't amuse the neighbours when they realise the cause.

You can spend much time unnecessarily cleaning up the outside of frames. Only the tops of top bars are a must, and they are pretty easy to clean in situ. When I started, I unnecessarily cleaned underneath the lugs and the ends, but generally only the hive rebate needs cleaning. All too often the bee space between sidebar and the hive is too small so that it gets propolised. This is a design problem which we are stuck with; but try to ensure frames are square when new foundation is fitted. Propolis problems with queen excluder and crown board are less-

ened by the application of Vaseline, or even thick oil on new wood. Having used glass crown boards (quilts) for many years I've learnt to like them, but also, how to clean them. Detergent and water removes dirt, but it needs white spirit to clean wax, and meths for the propolis. Then a final detergent and water completes the job.

Hives sometimes need to be moved, and the 3ft or 3 mile rule need not be taken too seriously. I have found that about 5% of bees fly off anyway and get lost, or go back home if they had been moved only a quarter of a mile. Where they are moved say a 100 yards, they generally realise and go back to the hive, but moving bees successively 3 feet at a time is a disaster, as you lose 5 - 10% on each move. Small colonies can just be closed up and moved, if it's not too hot, in the evening or early morning, and a large colony needs a screen. Perhaps a varroa floor is sufficient, but we used to use a mesh top screen. A hive strap is all that is needed – clever locking slides are unnecessary. Two people can carry a hive easily, with two 18 inch carrying handles, fixed to ropes 4ft 6 inches long. Pass the ropes under the hive, with a handle each side. WBC's can be moved by placing the brood box on a piece of ply with a crown board or screen on the top, taking all the other bits separately. To move a complete hive, with the entrance closed, is hazardous, but it can be done.

We are told that floors need cleaning every year. Not really – and nowadays many hives are fitted with a varroa floor. Old WBC floors used to get clogged up as the bee space was too small at the back, and this became infested with fleas, which could be extremely irritating! So that's a good reason to check the floor.

Part two will be in the next issue.

Honey Buckets

**Mr Beesy has 30lb buckets @ £1.30 each
For collection from Chelmsford CM1 2JG**

11 St James Park Call: Richard Alabone 01245 259 288

The benefits of taking bee assessments and modules Jane Ridler (Exams Secretary)

I'm here to promote the taking of BBKA exams and assessments! (I have just taken over as Essex Exams/Education Secretary.) There are two main reasons for my attempt to raise the profile of the assessments – (a) so that knowledge and skills are enhanced for the benefit of both beekeepers and bees, but also (b) I believe we need to keep a close eye on the public image of beekeepers. The current 'green, glowing and shiny' image of all things bee will quickly become tarnished if swarms become endemic in the towns and villages of England!

I'm going to concentrate on 3 of the assessment types, but take a look at the BBKA website for comprehensive details (address below). **The Basic Assessment** is probably the most important, representing what all beekeepers must know and be able to do – and who knows, may well become a legal requirement in the future.

If you're contemplating the Basic Assessment:-

Please don't be put off by the title 'Basic Assessment' – on the one hand, it is not so 'basic' that it is not worth it nor is it trivial; on the other hand it is a face-to-face test and the assessor will do everything possible to direct you towards the right answers during the session. The nature of the assessment, both practical and oral, involves both procedures and knowledge of bees and disease. To be eligible for the assessment you must have 'managed at least one colony for a minimum of 12 months' (The full syllabus and details are available from the BBKA website www.britishbee.org.uk). If you are entering after this minimum requirement, our Essex assessors would expect you to have done extra work in other apiaries. In general, at least 2 years beekeeping is recommended.

If you're contemplating the Theory Modules (8):-

These are (very) traditional written exams, e.g. in bee management, products/forage, disease or bee biology, but are well worth the effort if you take the challenge. You can enrol on a BBKA correspondence course and some Essex Divisions have had classes to help; others use the 'self help' method in the pub – which I can certainly recommend. Taking the exam focuses learning as well as organising in your mind what you already know. Four passes gives you the Intermediate Certificate and seven the Advanced. Again details are on the BBKA website.

If you're contemplating the Certificate in General Husbandry:-

First, if you are an experienced beekeeper and would consider becoming an assessor for the Basic, the General Husbandry qualification is a requirement by the BBKA. In Essex, we currently have only 4 assessors! **We must therefore have some more suitable volunteers next season, if we are to be able to encourage all our new and enthusiastic beginners of the last 2/3 years to take the Basic at the appropriate time.** The qualification does involve the BBKA assessor coming to visit both your apiary and honey room, but I know there are many

Essex beekeepers out there who could easily take this in their stride. Please consider!

There isn't space to describe all the other possibilities so do look them up if you're interested— including the Advanced Certificate in Beekeeping Husbandry, Microscopy, Show Judge qualification and the Junior Certificate.

There is someone in your Division who can give you more information – the Assessments Co-ordinator, who will make themselves known to you over the season (and will arrange the signing of eligibility for the Basic with a suitable person). Or please contact me.

Good Luck!

Jane Ridler

jane.ridler@uwclub.net

A Guideline to Bee Diseases Eileen Marrable

Key is to recognize healthy brood:

Healthy unsealed brood: pearly white ,curled up, 'Michelin Men';

Healthy sealed brood: domed cappings light to dark brown, dry and slightly convex.

Good brood pattern- few empty cells.

Notifiable Diseases- ie- must inform Regional Bee Inspector if you suspect the following:-

European Foul Brood.

Caused by a Bacterial infection , infests the gut of unsealed brood- dead larvae can be seen in cells lying in an awkward position , can turn yellowish brown - brood pattern appears patchy- larvae dries to a scale which can be removed.

The bee inspector will decide the treatment either shook swarm or destruction.

There will be a standstill order on the Apiary for six weeks , no bees out- after which the Bee inspector will revisit and inspect.

American Foul Brood.

Caused by a bacterial infection-but this bacteria forms spores during its life cycle these spores are very resistant to heat and cold and therefore are very persistent.

It kills the larvae after the cell is sealed

The cell cappings become sunken and perforated and look greasy. The brood pattern again has holes and has a pepper-pot appearance. The larvae can be pulled out to a rope with a matchstick (burn afterwards)

The treatment is destruction supervised by the Bee Inspector.

There is a standstill order again only lifted after an inspection by the bee inspector

Both the above can be spread by drifting, robbing and the beekeeper.

The following are not notifiable diseases;-

Chalk Brood - caused by a fungus which kills the larvae and then develops into a hard chalky mummy sometimes found on the floor of the hive.

Nosema or sometimes called spring dwindling noticed in the spring- a colony fails to thrive. Can be associated with dysentery- yellow spots on the front of the hive or combs. Colonies fail to build up in the spring, disease can be confirmed by microscopic examination. Treat by renewing combs or/and feeding fumidol 'B' in the autumn feed. Nosema is caused by a protozoa which infects and feeds in the gut.

Acarine. Is caused by a mite which invades the trachea-again microscopic examination will confirm. No visible external signs but shortens the life of the bee. So colonies do not build up. No treatment available some suggest re-queening.

Poisoning.

Piles of dead bees outside the hive **of all ages.**

Can only be confirmed by laboratory tests.

Send a sample of 30 bees to CSL and put a duplicate set of bees in the freezer in case they are needed for verification. The Regional Bee Inspector is available also for advice.

A Message from Terry Bird

An unfortunate error of communication has arisen indicating that Terry Bird had passed away. I'm glad to say that I am still alive and kicking and supplying beekeeping equipment as usual.



in conjunction with the National Bee Unit

Bee Husbandry Workshop

at

The Millennium Centre

The Chase, Dagenham Road, RM7 0SS

Wednesday 7th July 2010

**Important you will need to bring a packed lunch.
Protective clothing for beekeeping will be required.**

Tea and coffee provided

Pre booking of places Essential- Please contact
Mrs E. Marrable on 01708 229441

PROGRAMME

- 9:45 Arrive The Millennium Centre
- tea & coffee
- 10:00 **Welcome; general outline of the day** - Essex BKA
- 10:10 **Opening Lecture** - Alan Byham SE Regional Inspector
- 10:40 **Workshop (1)**
Group 1 Varroa control, a management plan
Group 2 Nosema: An unseen enemy
Group 3 Hygiene in the apiary
- 11:20 **Apiary Session**
A look at shook swarming, Bailey comb change, open mesh floors, drone brood culling
- 12:30 **LUNCH** - please be ready to re-start promptly at 1:15
- 1:15 **Workshop (2)**
Group 1 Nosema: An unseen enemy
Group 2 Feeding - nutrition for bees
Group 3 Varroa control, a management plan
- 1:55 **Workshop (3)**
Group 1 Hygiene in the apiary
Group 2 Varroa control, a management plan
Group 3 Feeding - nutrition for bees
- 2:35 **BREAK FOR TEA**
- 2:50 **Workshop (4)**
Group 1 Feeding - nutrition for bees
Group 2 Hygiene in the apiary
Group 3 Nosema: An unseen enemy
- 3:30 **Final Lecture & Summary** - David Rudland, Seasonal Bee Inspector
Final Q&A, closure of meeting.

A Squirrel's Tale—see Back Page Photo Richard Alabone

For some years I've put nuts into bowls during cold weather. This year squirrels have left me soft moss to show their appreciation. Last year it was carefully collected fluffy bits from pampas grass heads. Unfortunately, this bedding material could not be used as intended ! But the thought was there.

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The Back Page

(See commentary on page 14)

