

Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association

Newsletter – March 2019

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Contributions for the April newsletter should be received by Friday 29 March.

From the Editor

The last few days have been positively springlike, the blackthorn is out and the lawn has had its first cut. Roger has a few words of advice, in case your bees are a little over-enthusiastic in their foraging or your queen is too prolific.

There are still plenty of informative events being arranged; in particular, please note the Honey and Wax Workshops being arranged by Roger and Daisy to help us prepare our hive products as well as we can. The AGM will be held this month; please attend if you can and note that there are vacancies for committee members. Volunteers are also needed for the annual WSBKA Auction, and to assist in defending our apiaries against the threat from Asian Hornets. Please see Martin's article for more information about the Asian Hornet Action Team.

Finally, with spring will come regular apiary meetings, and these will follow a different pattern to last year's.

Tamsin



Photo by fotorunner via Pixabay.com

Dates for your diary

Winter Meetings

Tuesday March 12th – Annual General Meeting – North Hall, Loxwood.

Honey and Wax Workshops

Thursdays 7th and 14th March 7.00pm - Hampers Green Community Centre, Hampers Green, Petworth.
GU28 9NL

Daisy and Roger will run two separate evenings with different content. They will be interactive with demonstration and discussion. There will be no PowerPoint! The main purpose is to help and encourage members to enter our honey show and give them a better chance of success, by pointing out what a judge looks for and how to overcome some of the common mistakes made by exhibitors.

There will also be help on preparing and bottling honey for general use.

We invite members to bring along a jar or two of honey for comment if they wish. Don't worry about the number of jars, as it isn't competitive. We would like liquid of different colours, granulated and soft set. We won't cause embarrassment, but they will help us with teaching and discussion. Even something that isn't "perfect", such as "frosting" will be welcome.

Please make sure that jars and lids are identifiable, perhaps with sticky labels or "Post it" notes.

It might help if you can prepare as if you were entering for the show bench. For directions, please see the recent email.

Asian Hornets

Leconfield Hall, Petworth, **Wednesday 27th March 7.00 pm**

Bob Hogge, a beekeeper from Jersey, will be giving a presentation about this alien pest. It is now established in Jersey and probably on the mainland too, judging by the number of confirmed nests. It is strongly advised that members attend this free event that is hosted by West Sussex BKA.

Asian Hornet Action Teams (AHATs) are being set up and we will need volunteers. See Martin's article below.

Sustainable Bees & Queens – BIBBA event

Rudgwick Village Hall, **Saturday 30 March 2019**

There is growing concern amongst beekeepers of all abilities and experience about the ever-increasing importation of bees and queens. This is on several grounds, including the possibilities of introducing pests, diseases and pathogens, aggression in subsequent generations and the unsuitability to our fickle climate.

Defra has recently conducted a Queen Replacement Survey that shows the majority of beekeepers prefer home-reared queens but need help to produce them. In addition, many BKAs are unable to produce enough bees for their beginners and queens to head them.

In response to the obvious need the Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) are staging a series of one day regional events during the 2018/19 winter. These are to help and encourage everyone from the small-scale beekeeper upwards and BKAs to produce bees and queens from local stock, by using

simple techniques that may be little more than a variation of what many beekeepers already do and at little or no cost.

Topics include:-

- Why raise queens?
- Addressing perceived problems in producing queens in the U.K.
- Overwintering bees and queens.
- Demystifying queen rearing.
- Simple queen rearing methods.
- Simple and efficient ways to produce nuclei.
- Suggested methods for BKAs to supply bees and queens to members/beginners.
- Methods for small and larger quantities.
- Benefits of teaching apiaries.
- Queen rearing facility in teaching apiaries.
- Queen rearing as a collective exercise.
- Producing bees and queens, yet still getting a good honey crop.
- Including queen rearing and bee improvement in BKA teaching programmes.
- Reducing winter losses.
- Other events that provide relevant tuition.

It will be helpful to beekeepers of all abilities from beginners to the most experienced, as well as BKA officials, beekeeping teachers, apiary managers, and demonstrators.

The all-day event (10.00am-4.00pm) costs £11/head (around 30% of the price of one queen and 5-10% of a nuc!). Refreshments will be provided, but please provide your own lunch. Booking must be made in advance <https://beekeeping.events/event/sustainable-bees-and-queens-south-east>. There are still a few pages available – see *Patterson in Print* below.

Bee Market and Auction

The West Sussex Beekeepers' Association is again organising a Bee Market and Auction for the benefit of its members and non-members, with beekeepers attending to buy and sell from a very wide area. The event will again take place at Chichester College's Brinsbury Campus in Pulborough, West Sussex on **Saturday 27th April 2019**. Auction details, Guidance Notes and the Entry Form are available to download from the WSBKA website - www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html. The Auction catalogue will be published online after 22nd April.

For further details contact Graham on email secretary@westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk or phone 01403 752493 Mobile 07761 349281.

We will need **helpers** on the day at the auction, so please offer assistance. Debbie Lawrence deellorry@hotmail.co.uk is co-ordinating this. Please contact her directly.

Summer Apiary Meetings

We will return to the times of every **third Saturday** and **third Wednesday in between** for 2019. We did this for 45 years, but only recently have changed to every Saturday, missing out Wednesday evenings. This put unacceptable pressure on demonstrators and resulted in many experienced beekeepers not attending meetings because of the commitment needed.

This should suit both those who can only make weekends and those who are unavailable at weekends.

I am happy to be flexible. We can have ad-hoc meetings if something needs doing and if members or demonstrators wish to have a technique demonstrated. I'm more than happy for that to happen, in which case we will send an email with the dates and times.

If members wish to see a particular technique demonstrated please contact me. If we can fit it in and have available demonstrators I'm more than willing to demonstrate anything if it is suitable for our situation. Please bear in mind though that some techniques you may see online may not be suitable for our conditions or for use in an out apiary.

I'm pleased to tell you that **Mel Robertson** has been appointed a demonstrator. She has been a beekeeper for some time and I think she will be popular. I was impressed with her several years ago when early in the spring she asked me to look at her bees because she thought they had European Foul Brood, which turned out to be positive.

Roger

Asian Hornet Action Team

On the 12th February, I (along with a few others from WGBKA) attended the Chichester BKA for an evening to explain the Asian Hornet Action Team (AHAT).

Melvin Essen gave us some facts and figures about the threat. Melvin is the W Sussex AHAT coordinator. Harry Boxal is the Chichester Coordinator.

Vespa Velutina, now also known as the **Yellow Legged Hornet**, will predate on honey bees and other native insects. The Queen is smaller than our European hornet but the workers are of a similar size. The colouring is black with a yellow band on the 4th segment, and of course yellow legs.

The overwintered Queens will come out of hibernation following 5 days of 12 degrees or more. They then build a primary nest of chewed wood and lay a few eggs. When the workers emerge they will either expand the nest or start a secondary nest. This will contain up to 6000 workers. In June/July they will predate on honey bees by "hawking" around the hive and feeding the thoraxes to the larvae. It has been noted that they tend to go for single hives in preference to Apiaries of many hives. It is thought they will fly about a mile from the nest to forage. The Hornets seem to prefer semi-urban areas in which to nest. In the autumn the nest will produce about 350 Queens and males, about 5% of which survive to hibernate, ready to start a nest in the following spring. At this time it is worth keeping your eye on the flowering Ivy as the hornets will be foraging on the insects and the nectar as they switch to sugar before hibernation.

So why join an AHAT? The purpose is to assist the NBU and non-native species secretariat in any way we can.

This will involve:

- **monitoring** traps in your apiaries from February onwards;
- **informing** and **educating** the public, maybe where you sell your honey, at your children's school or any other social groups you belong to. Posters are available.
- volunteers may be called upon by the NBU to help **locate** nests or help gain positive **identification** when sightings are reported by the public. BBKA have set up a map on the website similar to the swarm collectors list for reporting sightings.

As bee-keepers we will be NOT be shinning up trees or chasing round the countryside and destroying nests. This is left to the professionals and we are not covered under any form of insurance or allowed to trespass.

You can join Chichester or Central Sussex AHAT teams by contacting Harry Boxall on the Chichester Bee-keepers website. or Melvin Essen at Central Sussex Bee-keepers.

So get your traps out ASAP. These can be purchased from most of the bee-keeping suppliers or you can make your own. Chichester BKA will be running a workshop to make them. The best bait (we were told by Diane Steel SBI) is cloudy apple juice up until mid May then switch to prawns or other protein. Traps should be at eye height around the apiary in the sunshine.

Any AH that is caught must not be released but the whole trap placed in the freezer for 24 hours.

Photograph and report on alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk.

The more bee-keepers that monitor, the more chance we have of controlling this damaging and invasive species.

Martin Hill

A.G.M. and Committee

The AGM is an opportunity for the members to influence the way their organisation is run, so please attend if you can. It is also where the officers and committee are elected to manage the association during the year. I firmly believe the members and their views are important and where appropriate should be considered. There may be good reasons why a suggestion may not be appropriate or perhaps can be modified, but ideas and discussion are the important thing.

There is a constitution to give guidance on what the members want at the time it was last approved, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be consulted or listened to if it enhances what we are doing. Unless it is a major change in policy I believe the officers and committee should run the association in the best way they can with the resources and opportunities available. This can mean they sometimes have to comply with rules of other organisations we are members of such as WSBKA and BBKA, together with regulations.

History is important and within reason we should continue in the same manner to maintain stability. Of course progress won't be made unless we respond to opportunities and make changes, but these need to be positive and for the better. Change for the sake of it can be disruptive. Continuity is important, otherwise with a constantly changing population we could lurch from one direction to another, thereby causing problems that may be difficult to manage.

For a variety of reasons we have 6 **committee members** who will not be standing for re-election. I would like to thank them for their work on behalf of WGBKA and for their willingness to continue assisting with various tasks. The current committee members who will be standing for re-election have approached some members who might be interested in joining the committee. This doesn't prevent others who would be interested and wish to put their name forward from doing so. If anyone is willing to stand or would like further information on the committee roles please email the secretary secretary@wgbka.org.uk.

Our **new rules** have recently been approved and until they are changed will stay in force, so will be those we will work to at this AGM.

As always I am excited about the coming year for WGBKA. We are a successful association that enjoys input and contributions from a willing membership, much of it unseen.

Microscopy Day - Cancelled

Microscopy Day - cancelled.

Owing to lack of interest these days have been cancelled. This is a pity as initial indications were encouraging. We will try to stage them at some time in the future. Thanks to those who responded. I'm sorry you have been let down.

Roger

Patterson in Print

As I have previously stated I am presenting the "*Sustainability - Bees and Queens for Everyone using low-cost, simple methods*" events in 9 locations around the country. The first four in Kent, Cheshire, Warwickshire and Suffolk have filled the venues. At the time of writing with 5 weeks to go there are only 14 places left at our **local event in Rudgwick**, so if you haven't booked in I suggest doing so before it's too late. This popularity has taken me by surprise and is a pretty good indication that beekeepers wish to produce their own bees and queens rather than buy them, especially if they are imported.

I am very surprised at how well bees have wintered so far, although it isn't until the start of May when you can be sure they have survived the winter as dwindling can often occur after the worst of the weather is over. In the autumn many queens didn't lay very well, so my guess was that colonies would die out in early spring as the older bees died off, so leaving the colony too weak to survive. At the moment I'm pleased to say it looks as if I am wrong. Out of 25 I have lost one of mine in December. The queen emerged late, starting laying in late July. She was very prolific. I should have culled her, but I didn't get round to it. She built up a strong colony quickly and they simply ran out of food although I fed them as well as others. That's natural selection! I can afford to lose a colony that isn't best suited to our environment, but it isn't amusing if you only have a couple of colonies. Out of 36 colonies and nucs at the apiary we have lost two, both to queen failure. All nucs have survived bar one that is one of the casualties. I usually put extra colonies into winter to make up for winter losses before they happen. This winter so far it doesn't look like they were needed, but there are several weeks to go yet. I am often asked by members for **queens** early in the year, so we have spares if needed. The food situation is very good, with no feeding needed, although in a couple of cases food has been removed from colonies that can afford it to give to those that are a bit short.

You can **close off feed holes now and remove woodpecker protection**, although I would leave mouse guards until late March/early April. Don't be frightened to have a quick look at a colony in March, especially if it seems to be light. Much better to **check for food** than leave it to find a starved colony. If one of my colonies is short of food when there is no obvious reason I usually mark it down for re-queening as it is likely to have a prolific queen and the colony has simply converted food into brood they may not need.

I had a call from Maggie saying that she had inspected her bees already. The day was warm, so no problem with that. She said that one of her colonies has 5 frames of brood, something I am hearing from several others around the country too. This shows a very **prolific queen** that may not be best suited to our conditions. It may sound good to have very strong colonies in the spring, but the likelihood is early swarms,

especially if the supers aren't put on early enough. We can still have bad weather until May and large colonies can consume huge quantities of food, leading to starvation.

Spring can often provide lots of nectar and pollen, mainly from trees. A few days of warm weather can mean that if there is no space above they will pack pollen and nectar around the brood, so cramping the queen. This can have a knock-on effect, giving possible swarming problems in April/May. **Give room** in the form of supers of drawn comb. The older beekeepers used to place a queen excluder over the brood box, then a couple of sheets of newspaper and a super. If and when the bees need it they will chew through the newspaper. This is an old trick that like others isn't mentioned in modern teaching.

The emails to the WGBKA website come through to me. I have just had our gas bill from "British Gas". It is for \$341.11. Some people obviously fall for these tricks, even though poorly presented.

Regular visitors to our **website** will have seen a few recent changes. There is a page on "What we do" that explains some of the things we teach. This was an idea from Lisa Baker that is an example of members making a contribution. There will be additions when time permits. There are also past newsletters, so we can look back at what we have done previously. For the newer members our website has been in existence for around 10 years. It is administered by Fionn Turnbull with me editing it. Fionn is a former beekeeper who does voluntary work for other organisations, so makes additions and updates when he has time - and if I get material to him quickly!

Roger

Wanted and For Sale

Please note that all descriptions and representations in this section are provided by individual members and that WGBKA does not endorse or take any steps to verify the information supplied.

Wanted

Clean, pale wax wanted. Contact Suzy Lion if you have any that you want to sell. salion52@gmail.com

Nell in Print

I have been to lots of places with my Dad recently. I have seen many beekeepers, some brought me biscuits. See the photograph of a bag a nice man in Cheshire gave me.

I have read that Auntie Mel will be a demonstrator this year. I like her because she always manages to get her pockets round some biscuits. I'm looking forward to apiary meetings to see you all again.

