

Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association

Newsletter – May 2019

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Contributions for the June newsletter should be received by Wednesday 29 May.

From the Editor

As I don't yet have my own bees, I enjoyed getting back to the apiary and helping to check the hives last month. As Roger says in his article, some brood boxes were very full indeed, with a lot of nectar and pollen already stored. Please note what he says about future dates for meetings and the need to let him know whether you will be attending. There is also an update on the plans for the new apiary; like all plans they change with the situation!

As the last Friday of the month is 31st, I would be grateful for contributions a little earlier, in order to have time to edit by the end of the month.

Tamsin



Dates for your diary

Apiary meetings:

Saturday 4th May

Saturday 11th May

Saturday 18th May

All meetings will begin at 2pm. Please email Roger (roger-patterson@btconnect.com) if you intend to attend; if you later change your mind then please also let him know. Bring a flask of tea if you wish as it will not be provided!

Shows:

There are several shows over the next few months that WGBKA will have a stand at or have members helping out at. We are sure the WG volunteers who will be helping out at these would be pleased to see anyone along to support them.

Sunday 19th May - Brinsbury Show & Country Fayre

Thursday 6th June – Saturday 8th June – South of England Show

Saturday 8th June - Loxwood Village Fete & Fun Dog Show

Sunday 30th June - Cranleigh Show

Shop

There will soon be a new page on the website showing items that are available to buy via the Association and current prices, so please refer to that for information over the season.

Patterson in Print

Each spring I find myself saying it is different than all the others, but this year I think I can say "a lot different". On the weekend of the 12-14 April I went to the BBKA Spring Convention in Shropshire, a road distance of nearly 200 miles in a north westerly direction, where you would expect the temperature to be a degree or two cooler. On the way I noticed three things that were progressively more advanced, the further I got from home. When I left, the OSR here was only just turning yellow, wild cherries were only just breaking flower bud and I had only seen one swallow. The further I drove, the more advanced the OSR was, with bright yellow fields seen from the M40. The cherries at the sides of motorways were in full bloom at about the same point on my journey. My first sighting of swallows was when on the M6 in the Walsall/Wolverhampton area. Even though there can be a couple of weeks or more variation in the spring, by the time August comes things have usually levelled out.

Considering many queens went off lay for much longer than normal last autumn, meaning there were fewer young bees going into winter, I am amazed at the strength of some colonies this spring. **OSR** is a week or two earlier this year and if supers were added early enough bees should have taken advantage of the good April weather. I was a bit late putting mine on and as you will see elsewhere the WGBKA ones were only added on 20th April, which in many years is early enough.

Although many colonies are bursting with bees, ours have made little attempt to swarm so far. I would like to think that is the result of careful selection and heavy culling over many years. I know some bees are swarming early because at the same time I had 4 empty hives or stacks of supers in my garden being scouted by bees, as well as a nuc box in my greenhouse. On the morning of 20th April I had 3 calls from people saying they had bees in cavity walls.

Our website is managed by an ex-beekeeper, Fionn Turnbull, with me doing the editing. We are aware it may not be flashy, but it gives information and is updated as quickly as volunteers can manage. I know there are many Beekeeping Association websites that are poorly updated and maintained, one I recently saw was showing their last meeting as 2017. There have been some recent changes, with archived newsletters going back to 2006. There are a few gaps, so if anyone can help fill them please email them to me. A member suggested some information on "What we do", so a page has been set up with a few topics. These will be added to when we get more material, so out with the cameras please. Whilst on the topic of the website I will point out there is practical information to help members, so please use it.

Several members gathered in Loxwood to **remove four colonies from a barn** that is going to be used for a family event. The barn is a magnet for swarms taking up residence and has a long history of doing so. Even in the few days after removal there were scout bees looking at it. This was a good learning experience and although buildings don't often replicate tree cavities you can often get an idea of how adaptable bees are at using available space. In that small number of nests there were **a few things that were unusual**, including the entrance of one at the top of the cavity instead of the more usual bottom, sealed honey was stored underneath brood, which is incredibly rare and all of them were a bit "spikey", which again is unusual. Feral colonies have a reputation of being bad and loaded with disease, but that isn't my experience. In general I find they are healthy and tough, otherwise natural selection would take them out during the winter.

At the BBKA Spring Convention I heard a lecture where the speaker stated that wild colonies spread out to share the forage better. I don't know where some of this "information" comes from, but the fact that 4 colonies chose to set up home close to others goes some way to disproving that theory. I suspect the person who came up with that didn't realise that bees use available nesting sites that may be spread widely.

I have seen two **natural supersedures** this year already. In both cases the young unclipped and unmarked queen was seen first, when the records showed clipped and marked queens late in 2018. Mother in both cases was soon found. This is how supersedure should take place, not as it often does in recent years, where they supersede in the summer and mother soon disappears.

I was recently asked to see a member's bees where they were concerned about some brood. On arrival I was shown a frame with a suggestion the problem might be **sacbrood**. All other possibilities had been eliminated for good sound reasons. The concern was that it may have been American Foul Brood (AFB), which I have been called out to on many occasions only to find sacbrood. The beekeeper had done some reading and the elimination was based on good commonsense. Diseases can be rather variable and this didn't quite look like "normal" sacbrood, but the fact that with tweezers the infected larvae could be easily removed from the cells confirmed it. I believe a photograph was sent to the Bee Inspector who confirmed sacbrood without a visit.

I am proud of the fact that WBGKA members have quite a good history of spotting something that isn't right, eliminating some possibilities, seeking help and coming up with the right answer. One of the benefits of regularly attending meetings.

Roger

The Apiary and Learning

We finally have planning permission for a parking area at the **new apiary**, but there are conditions we must comply with before we can use it! This will take time to achieve, so apiary meetings are going to be a little difficult for a time. Please be patient.

I would like to thank all those who wrote in support of the application and have helped with clearing so far. In particular I thank Angus Farquhar for his time and expertise in trying to navigate round, through and over some rather difficult obstacles that were placed in front of us at regular intervals.

The new site has two main areas cleared, one for the main apiary, the other for queen mating and isolation for incoming bees/swarms. I had hoped to retain some of the standard trees, but many of them are ash that are suffering from ash dieback. This makes it unsafe, as beehives and people may be under branches when they drop. Clearing means there is less shade than there is at Dounhurst, so not quite so good for bees.

Originally I was hoping to move the bees in February/March when they weren't flying far, but as the direct distance between the two locations is only 1 mile, the later it got, the more of a problem moving colonies was going to be, especially as the OSR flowered early.

I brought the hives close together into 5 groups varying between 4 and 8 colonies, depending on where they were. The idea was to move all bar one, so any flying bees would fly back home and enter the nearest hive. I left it as late as I could, so we were only moving single brood boxes without supers, but unfortunately the fine weather and the early OSR changed plans. What will probably happen is that we leave most of the colonies at Dounhurst, extract the honey, then move the bees in single boxes. This and other problems means it is difficult to arrange meetings too far in advance, so they will be notified by email, with dates on the website if possible. It is important that I know who will be attending Dounhurst, so please email me 24 hours in advance if possible if you will be attending.

Although it was at short notice we had a very good **meeting on 20th April**. Time restrictions meant we couldn't do spring cleaning, but there was a lot to learn, with many brood boxes packed with pollen and nectar. Supers were added and brood frames were moved to encourage bees to remove pollen and nectar to give more room for the queens to lay in.

Amongst the most unusual things was a colony with a **laying queen and both swarm and emergency cells**. In another colony that hadn't been touched for about 4 weeks the queen had stopped laying around 14 days earlier. We could tell this because the youngest worker brood was at the "pink eye stage". There was just one small emergency cell that hadn't emerged. If you know the life cycles you can soon see a problem here and a possible reason. An emergency cell usually takes about 11 days from starting until emergence, which is 3 days less than the 14 days the queen had stopped laying. My guess is the queen stopped laying for whatever reason, but stayed in the colony for perhaps 6-7 days before "disappearing". At that point the vast majority of worker brood would have developed beyond the stage where the bees could turn it into queen cells. Occasionally I have come across a colony that "holds back" a small number of larvae for several days. I suspect this is why we had a small sealed emergency cell and only one of them.

If that had happened to you at home, would you have been able to work out what had happened? A good reason for knowing what should be happening in a colony, the life cycles and coming to meetings.

These two examples clearly shouldn't happen, but is typical of what is fairly common in recent times. All part of the "queen problems" I keep seeing and some very "clever" people deny are happening. See here <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/queenperformanceproblems.html> for more.

Roger

Rosie in Print

Nell has made me tell you a story about something daft our Dad did - well actually she dictated it to me, I think so I would get the blame if Dad read it with my name attached.

When Dad unlocks the shed door (two padlocks) at Dounhurst he is in the habit of putting the keys back in the hiding place before he opens the door, so there is no chance of losing the keys.

Recently someone else was with him and they were speaking, so Dad lost concentration and left the key in a lock and put it down inside the shed. Still talking he closed the door, closed one lock and oooooooooooooops! That nice Mr Mariner was kind enough to help Dad get over his embarrassment. What nice helpful people beekeepers are?

Rosie