

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



"Queen Bee (Clipped & marked with yellow paint) laying eggs".
Photo by Paul Abbott

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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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The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the EBKA.

March 2013 and April 2013

- 1 Mar. *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park RM2 5EL. Swarm Control with Pat Allen.
- 2 Mar. *Saturday 2.00pm EBKA AGM* at Room E06 of Writtle College, Lordship Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3RP (opp Garden Centre). See page 13 of this issue for Agenda.
- 7 Mar. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. TBA
- 16 Mar. *Friday 7.30pm Braintree* Constitutional Club CM7 1TY. A talk given by John Barlow on Preparation for the year and Swarm Control.
- 18 Mar. *Monday 7.30pm Chelmsford* at Link Hall, Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. A talk by Eileen Marrable on Nosema with Microscopic slides followed by Hints and Tips.
- 19 Mar. *Tuesday 8.00pm Saffron Walden* at Thaxted Guildhall CM6 2LA, 'Dealing with Rape Honey' Talk by Richard Alabone.
- 21 Mar. *Thursday 8.00pm Epping Forest* at Chingford Horticultural Hall Larkshall Rd, London E4 6NH. Swarm Control.
- 23 Mar. *Saturday 11.00am-4.00pm Colchester* Wax Day at Rowan Lodge Tending. Cost £5.50 per person includes homemade soup for lunch and teas and coffees. Bees-wax and wick available to make candles by dipping and using moulds. Pay for material at the end of the day. Book early as numbers are limited. Phone Penny on 01255 830713.
- 27 Mar. *Wednesday 7.30pm Southend* at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. 'Swarms - Avoidance and Collection'.
- 4 April *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. Clive De Bruyn to speak on "What can the Hobby Beekeeper learn from commercial and professional beekeepers"
- 5 April *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park RM2 5EL. Preparing honey for show with Jean Smye.
- 13 April *Saturday Braintree* Coach to Harper Adams College Campus in Shropshire for the Spring Conference.
- 18 April *Thursday 8.00pm Epping Forest* at Chingford Horticultural Hall Larkshall Rd, London E4 6NH. How to prepare honey for show.
- 24 April *Wednesday 7.30pm Southend* at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. TBA
- 25 April *Thursday 7.30pm Colchester* at Community Centre Langham. 'Different methods of swarm control and Snelgrove Boards.'
- 28 April *Sunday 2.30pm Saffron Walden* Preparing for the BBKA Basic Assessment ' with Jane Ridler and Deryck Johnson, at Sally Freeman's apiary, Little Easton, CM6 2JW.

**County Pheromones
Richard Ridler (Chairman)**

This is the last issue of the Essex Beekeeper to be edited by Howard Gilbert; next month Jean Smye takes his place. Editor of the Beekeeper is perhaps the most demanding job in our Association requiring considerable time and effort month in month out. The Beekeeper is the one contact every member has with EBKA so it's a key part of what we do as an Association. Congratulations and thanks go to Howard for the high quality of content he has maintained in every issue. No doubt Jean will bring a fresh approach to the editorship and as one of the most experienced beekeepers in the Association I look forward to the April issue and beyond.

The BBKA annual spring convention is on 12-14 April, if you have never been then you have really missed the biggest and best event in the beekeeping calendar. The shopping opportunities alone make the journey to Shropshire worthwhile and the speakers are world class. Put it in your diary, try it!

***EBKA Annual General Meeting
Saturday 2nd March 2013***

Venue: Room E06, Lordship Road, Writtle, CM1 3RP

Yes, it seems ages away, but please put this date into your diary now!

The AGM itself, starting at 2pm, will not take very long, and then there will be a refreshment break, laid on by Epping Forest Division. After the break, there will be a speaker, **Graham Royle**, to give us a talk about the *Honeybee under the Microscope*.

Graham is an excellent speaker and his photographs are amazing. Let's make sure there is a large turnout for this event. It will be an enjoyable social occasion as well as a great opportunity to meet members from other parts of Essex. Bring your partners and children – they will love the pictures too. Everyone is welcome.

**Valete
Howard Gilbert**

I became editor of the Essex Beekeeper in October 2008. The broad format has remained the same: 16 pages of A5 published monthly. Prior to becoming editor, I had never used any publishing software. My sudden immersion into life as editor did not result in a drowning but merely a spluttering as I floated up to competency.

I have been very fortunate during my time as editor. Both Chairmen of the EBKA have left me to publish everything that I decided was fit to publish. No influence was brought to bear—even over the extended correspondence conducted through the letters column of the magazine between members of the CEC committee, I was left in control of the content of the magazine. Freedom of expression was preserved whilst others were taking sides. Thank you.

It was quickly realised that to give the magazine a better appearance colour on both the front and back cover would make a big improvement. The first colour photos appeared in May 2009 and from February 2010 the new colour logo of the Essex Beekeepers' Association graced the front cover. As the magazine would be printed with colour photos a new system was required to send each issue to the printers. The magazine is sent via email to Ann Cushion (a beekeeper), of Streamset printers. She suggested a new system which resulted in an improvement to the quality of the print photo. Under the new system Ann was able to adjust the brightness and contrast of the photos to achieve the best result when transferred to print. Ann has always provided support and has acted as proof-reader to the magazines as they are submitted so sincere thanks go to her. All mistakes are my responsibility!

I am indebted to all those members who have contributed articles to the magazine. Without you there would be no magazine written by EBKA members. Regular contributions have made the magazine more local rather than succumbing to articles taken from other beekeeping magazines. The wonderful colour photos have made each issue appear as a magazine. Thank you to all contributors.

I deliberately chose not to write an editorial each month; I preferred to let the articles in the magazine present what is distinctive about Essex Beekeepers and their interests. The articles have ranged from beekeeping tips to manuka honey; the series 'Behind the Veil' revealed EBKA members and their interests. During my time as editor discussion about bee diseases and their causes has become increasingly important and such articles have found increasing space in the magazine.

The magazine is also the primary forum for publishing information from the Central Executive Committee (the initials 'CEC' always conjures up some old-style Soviet committee which would sit for hours and never reach a decision!).

It is also the primary reference for events which take place amongst Divisions of the EBKA.

The new editor is Jean Smye who was editor for a very brief period in the 1990s. I am sure she will find ways of improving the magazine and you will give her your full support.

Beekeeping Tips No.24
Early Spring Honey
By Pollinator

Providing the spring weather has arrived, that is to say, temperatures above 10° C by the 1 April, your colonies should be on ten or more frames in the brood chamber and foraging well; that means that you already have a super plus queen excluder on the hive. So now is the time, early in the day, to look into that super and see how many frames the bees are on. There is no need to lift the frames out ... simply look to see how many seams are occupied by bees.

If the bees are occupying five or more frames then another super is required to provide plenty of room for the bees. Hundreds of bees are emerging from the nursery cells each day. Note that this extra space is for the bees rather than honey. Adding another super in these circumstances will be the best deterrent to swarming, as lack of room for bees is a strong motive for swarming. You now have two options. Do you put the super on top or underneath the super already on the hive?

Top-supering is the norm at this time of year, but under-supering is essential if you have undrawn foundation in this second super as warmth is necessary to get the bees to draw out the wax foundation. This is because the space immediately above the brood chamber is the warmest part of the hive. The bees can be induced to move up even quicker into the undrawn frames if you have two drawn frames of foundation available to place one on each side of a central undrawn frame. Once this central frame is drawn, inserting an undrawn frame in the centre again can extend the process. If you wish to get the colony to produce cut-comb honey then use a few frames with starter strips instead of wired foundation.

At any time of the year knowledge of the local flora enables the beekeeper to anticipate honey flows and one crop in particular, that is to say OSR (Oil Seed Rape), is likely to be available to the bees in April in Essex. And once this crop is in flower several supers are likely to be filled quickly. This means that three supers should be available to the bees for filling by the beginning of May. A super can easily be filled in a week. So be prepared. An empty one should replace any super taken off. In the case of OSR honey I would recommend brushing off, or shaking the frame in the morning as the frames of honey (for later removal from the apiary) are transferred to an empty super box with a crown-board on top and underneath to stop robbing. All frames need not be sealed so long as they pass the shake test (See Beekeeping Tips no 16). Do not use clearer boards as when supers are left overnight the honey

will cool down and start the crystallising process, which will mean that it cannot be filtered after centrifuging, without clogging the filter. After leaving the apiary extract ASAP.

Summing up, get the super on earlier rather than later.

A Note from the European Parliament 'Existing Scientific Evidence of the Effects of Neonicotinoid Pesticides on Bees'. IP/A/ENVI/NT/2012-09 December 2012 PE 492.465

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

1. Although bee declines can be attributed to multifarious causes, the use of neonicotinoids is increasingly held responsible for recent honeybee losses.
2. Neonicotinoids show high acute toxicity to honeybees.
3. Chronic exposure of honeybees to sub-lethal doses of neonicotinoids can also result in serious effects, which include a wide range of behavioural disturbances in bees, such as problems with flying and navigation, impaired memory and learning, reduced foraging ability, as well as reduction in breeding success and disease resistance.
4. Recent scientific findings are urging to reassess the bee safety of approved uses of neonicotinoid insecticides at European level. A current review, carried out by the European Food Safety Authority EFSA (on behalf of the European Commission) will give new insights into this issue.

As long as there are uncertainties concerning the effects of neonicotinoids on honey bees, the Precautionary Principle in accordance with the Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 should be applied when using neonicotinoids.

Pollination, provided by a great variety of bees and other insects, represents a vital ecosystem service. For Europe it is estimated that more than 80% of all crops rely at least to some extent on insect pollination. Against this background, the increasing number of reports about colony losses and damage inflicted on honeybees and other wild pollinator species throughout Europe is of great concern. For the most part, declines are attributed to an interaction of various factors. However, pesticide use is more and more under the suspicion of having a significant impact on bee mortality. Particularly neonicotinoids, a widely used group of systemic insecticides, are held responsible for recent bee declines.

Besides the common ways of exposure, their systemic character enables them to migrate through the entire plant all the way to the flowers, potentially causing chronic low dose exposure to pollinators.

Besides giving the acute toxicity profiles of neonicotinoids, this briefing note gives an overview about the findings of recent studies on the sub-lethal effects of these systemic pesticides. Reported sub-lethal impacts on honeybees include

various behavioural disturbances, such as reduced homing ability, impaired memory and learning, as well as negative impacts on the ability of worker bees to forage and communicate. Other studies found that the chronic exposure to low doses of neonicotinoids can reduce the breeding success of bees and lead to a neonicotinoid-induced reduction in disease resistance. Thus, a widespread conclusion of different authors is that neonicotinoids can contribute to lethality even at low doses by making bee colonies more vulnerable to other disruptive factors.

Although existing research documents measure the sub-lethal effects, the results are sometimes put into question. Recent scientific findings are urging for an update of the risk assessment of all neonicotinoid insecticides approved at European level and their effects on bees. In order to fully assess the risk to bees, it is necessary to carry out additional, and properly designed, field studies which are conducted over a long period of time. So far various European countries have implemented measures which aim to avoid possible negative effects of neonicotinoid applications on bees.

However, risk mitigation measures on EU and national level concentrate on reducing the risks from acute poisoning of bees, but they do not consider the risks of chronic exposure to sub-lethal doses. New insights can be expected from a current review performed by the European Food Safety Authority EFSA on behalf of the European Commission. Further action on EU-wide level is not expected before this new assessment is available.

Several recent publications suggest that exposure to different classes of neonicotinoids even at very low doses reduces the fitness of bees. As long as these and other questions remain unclear the precautionary principle in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market should be applied, ensuring a high level of protection of both human and animal health and the environment.

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Letter to the Editor

Subject: re-use of honey jars

Chad Colby-Blake says that lids should not be re-used. Some beekeepers wash their new jars but this seems entirely unnecessary as they are boxed as they come out of the furnace, where the glass reaches a temperature of 1000°C, and they are not handled by humans. I would suggest that this temperature ensures no bacteria are left. I have always remembered a beekeeping organised visit to the honey jar manufacturer in Harlow, Essex, where I saw jars being made.

Commercial beekeepers use them directly from the transport boxes. I think hobbyists should do the same.

So long as the lids are not rusty, scratched or dented they can be re-used when they have been through a domestic dishwashing machine.

All my returned jars go through an automatic dishwasher machine. I understand milk bottles are re-used some 20 times on average. So why not honey jars?

Common sense should prevail about this type of issue. And the old adage, 'Least said the soonest mended', applies. Today many non-beekeeping issues try to be settled by rules rather than the application of common sense.

I would challenge anyone to select six new jars lined up with six old clean jars, especially if all had been washed in an automatic washing machine.

Finally, how many beekeepers store their honey crop in 30 lb buckets ... and do they re-use them?

Geoff Mills, Hon. Life Member EBKA



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The Many Uses of a Snelgrove Board
Part 4b—The Difference between a Natural Swarm and an Artificial Swarm
By Wally Shaw

This article first appeared in Welsh Beekeepers Association Newsletter, Autumn 2009 edition. It is reprinted here courtesy of its Editor and with the co-operation of EBees.

Most beekeepers think that natural and artificial swarms are the same thing – they both consist of flying bees don't they? – but this perception could hardly be further from the truth.

An artificial swarm – by the way it is created by the beekeeper's manipulation, contains virtually all of the experienced flying bees (the foragers) from the original colony. However, it only contains a few younger nurse bees; those that were transferred with (and hatch out from) the single frame of brood and bees that it is usual to transfer to the box containing the artificial swarm.

A natural swarm – contrary to popular opinion, a natural swarm contains relatively few dedicated foragers (the oldest bees in a colony) but is rich in younger bees, many of which have little or no previous experience of flying. Studies have shown that up to 70% of worker bees under 10 days old depart with the prime swarm.

If you watch a hive in the process of swarming you can see some of this happening. Incoming foragers, ignoring the mayhem that surrounds them, can be seen struggling to get back into the hive against the flow of bees. Similarly, if you look at the newly settled swarm, you will usually see a few foragers with loads of pollen on their hind legs but a few minutes later they will have disappeared – presumably they realise they have no business there and have returned home.

The process by which the colony splits during the formation of a natural swarm – which bees go and which bees stay - is not understood. Presumably it is an instinctive, age-related response to the triggering buzz runs across the comb faces executed by the bees that are organising the swarming process (whoever they are). Some bees are recruited to the swarm and others hold back and provide the garrison for the home colony. The way a colony splits during a cast swarm may be even more complex but, again, virtually nothing is known about this.

When one thinks about the age composition of a natural swarm it makes perfect sense. What use are older bees to a swarm? A foraging bee has probably got only a few days more to live and what the swarm needs is bees that will survive a minimum of 3 weeks (and more typically 4 weeks) until there can be any new recruits. When the swarm settles in its new home it has to re-deploy its labour force to do the most urgent tasks that face it; into wax makers/comb builders and foragers, the latter to keep the wax makers well supplied with nectar. As soon as there is comb available and the queen starts to lay again some nurse bees will have to come on duty.

What does all this matter to the practical beekeeper? Well, I would have thought

you had worked that out by now! An artificial swarm and a natural swarm behave very differently. The artificial swarm is slow to recover and start to re-build its numbers - presumably because of the initial shortage of nurse bees. It is also not prepared for large scale wax production and comb building and will be quite reluctant to draw any foundation with which it is presented. By contrast, a natural swarm is all get-up-and-go and full of vigour. It wants to get a set of combs built as soon as possible, it wants to get the queen into lay quickly and it wants to start accumulating stores for the oncoming winter. The very process of swarming may have an invigorating (stimulative) effect on the bees.

Because an artificial swarm is what it says on the can – ‘artificial’ – the bees have not evolved any instinctive behaviour to deal with this entirely un-natural situation in which you (the beekeeper) have placed them. It is no wonder that initially they struggle but there is not much the beekeeper can do to help. Although we casually say that an artificial swarm ‘thinks that it has swarmed’, I very much doubt this is the case. There are some bees (not all of them) in that artificial swarm that were triggered to organise a swarm and you have frustrated them. Despite the manipulation to which they have been subjected, they often retain the urge to swarm and will do just that given the slightest opportunity. So it is no good introducing some nurse bees into the artificial swarm to help it recover more quickly because that will probably upset the delicate balance that exists during the early days. The safest option is to leave them to recover in their own time.

When one compares the comparative lethargy of an artificial swarm compared with a natural swarm it leads one to think that the old-time practice of beekeepers, assiduously collecting swarms and installing them in their skeps, had something to be said in its favour. Just a thought!

Two Innovative Ways of Using a Snelgrove Board

These are just a couple of things we have tried recently; they are not in the books but they seem to work.

Putting the Queen in Purdah

If you are beekeeping in an area where there is no late nectar flow, by the last week in June the queen will have laid the last eggs that are going to produce bees that will contribute to collecting the honey crop. Most annoyingly, this the moment at which some colonies will decide to swarm and you find the start of queen cells in the hive. What do you do about this? If you do an artificial swarm you will end up with two colonies that will not really be up to the job of producing much honey.

Providing you catch the process in its early stage, one solution is to find and remove the queen. In the past we have taken the queen plus a couple of frames of brood and bees and put them in a nuc – and it worked. Recently, instead of using a nuc, we have put her into the half-brood and placed that at the top of the hive on a Snelgrove board. We have then used door changing to divert surplus bees back into the (honey collecting) colony below. The main colony (now without a queen) will of course make emergency queen cells but will continue to function reasonably well during honey flow – and certainly much better than if it were split

or allowed to swarm. When the honey crop has been taken and if the main colony has successfully raised a new queen, a range of options are open. You can unite the colonies, choosing either the new or the old queen, or you can remove the colony on the Snelgrove board and give it its independence (use it to make increase).

If you are going on holiday in July and suspect a colony may attempt to swarm during the time you are away, you can deploy the same manipulation preemptively. This will ensure the colony does not swarm and probably cast swarm in your absence.

What to do with a July Swarm

This is the swarm that `isn't worth a fly` as the old saying goes. Basically this is a disaster for the honey crop, as neither the swarm nor the parent colony will make much honey on the main flow. Out of the blue (meaning we weren't looking properly) one of our colonies swarmed in early July. Instead of hiving it as an independent colony in the normal way, we chucked it into a box of comb on a Snelgrove board on top of the colony whence it came. A few days later, when it had settled down (which it did, slightly to our surprise), we did a door change to divert bees back into the parent colony below. As most of the bees were active fliers, a substantial number of bees were bled down by this manipulation but enough remained to support the old queen. If there had been a main flow (this was the summer of 2009 don't forget) this colony would have been able to collect quite a good crop. As it happened, the parent colony (at the bottom) did not succeed in raising a new queen so the old queen was returned to them after the honey had been taken. On the basis of one trial this method seemed to work and we will use it again if the opportunity arises – which it will no doubt.

What I have tried to demonstrate by these last two examples of the use of a Snelgrove board is what a flexible tool it can be for the beekeeper who is prepared to try something new. The only problem is that, when obtained from equipment suppliers, Snelgrove boards tend to be quite expensive. This is why plans for making your own boards accompany this last part of the series. There is nothing really complex about their construction – no fancy joints – just a bit of accurate measurement and cutting and it's just a bit fiddly. Why not band together as a group of beekeepers or an association and make a batch of Snelgrove boards?

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Defra Consultation on Proposed changes to managing and controlling pests and diseases

Consultation start: 10 January 2013

Consultation end: 9 March 2013

Summary

In 2009, Defra commissioned the National Bee Unit (NBU) to undertake a survey of honey bee pests and diseases with the aim of using the results to inform a review of current policies on managing these risks. The NBU carried out this survey from 2009 to 2011 by visiting and taking samples from around 5000 apiaries selected at random from BeeBase, their database of beekeepers in England and Wales. As the results started to become available in the second half of 2011, Defra initiated a review of its pest and disease control policy.

The review considered how best to manage pests and diseases in the future so that the optimum policies and interventions are in place; priorities for future collective action (partnership working) by government and beekeepers are clear; and we are making the best use of current public funding/resources for this programme in order to sustain a healthy honey bee population for pollination.

The review was undertaken by the Food and Environment Research Agency, on behalf of Defra and the Welsh Government, with the NBU, representatives from commercial and amateur beekeeper associations and an independent scientist over 12 months from July 2011. This consultation is seeking your views on the proposals which emerged from the review.

How to respond

The closing date for this consultation is the 9th March 2013

Responses should be sent to the following email address:

Beehealthinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk

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"Uncapped Worker Brood- Some freshly capped".

Photos by Paul Abbott

"Sealed Queen Cell & capped worker Brood".

