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# THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



**First Inspection!!! Hope they know what they are doing?**

Photograph by Jean Smye

(See article on page 9)

## Monthly Magazine of the Essex Beekeepers' Association

Registered Charity number 1031419

Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex

**No. 616**

[www.essexbeekeepers.com](http://www.essexbeekeepers.com)

**April  
2016**

## EBKA Divisional Meetings

### Diary dates for April 2016

7 April	Thursday	Harlow	'Queen rearing, Mini nucs & Queen introduction' – Pat Allen (followed by Swarm Control).
7 April	Thursday 8.00pm	Romford	<b>Company Drinks</b> - Susanna Wallis. Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park, RM2 5EL
12 April	Tuesday 7.30pm	Saffron Walden	'Microscopy - all about Nosema & Acarine' - Jane Ridler at Swards End Village Hall, CB10 2LG
17 April	Sunday 2.00pm	County Event	<b>Ted Hooper Memorial Lecture</b> - Coach House, Marks Hall, Coggeshall CO6 1TG
18 April	Monday 7.30pm	Chelmsford	'Health & Safety and Apiary Security' - Jon The Link, Trinity Methodist Church, Rainsford Rd, Chelmsford CM1 2XB
20 April	Wednesday 6.00pm	Dengie 100 & Maldon	<b>Apiary Visit</b> at Carter's Apiary CM9 6EE. Meet at gate. Darren Burge
21 April	Thursday 7.30pm	Epping Forest	<b>Barbara Dalby</b> - Chingford Horticultural Hall
24 April	Sunday 3.00pm	Braintree	<b>Apiary Meeting</b> at Coney Green, Great Bardfield CM7 4PY
27 April	Wednesday 7.30pm	Southend	'Improving your skills and knowledge of beekeeping' - Jane Ridler Rayleigh W I Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED
28 April	Thursday 7.30pm	Colchester	'Bees Abroad' project. Richard Ridler - Langham Community Centre, Colchester CO4 5PA
5 May	Thursday 8.00pm	Romford	'The Role of the BBKA Link Trustee'- Howard Pool Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park, RM2 5EL

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email [ian@jannichols.demon.co.uk](mailto:ian@jannichols.demon.co.uk) tel. 0208 558 4733 / 07980 299 638

**Secretary:** *Michael Webb* 19 Ingrebourne Gardens, Upminster, Essex RM14 1BQ  
email [gsecebka@virginmedia.com](mailto:gsecebka@virginmedia.com) tel. 01708 250 606 / 07712 490 511

**Treasurer:** *Bob Manning* 12, Moorland Close, Collier Row, RM5 2AB  
email [treasurer@ebka.org](mailto:treasurer@ebka.org) tel: 01708 760 770

### Divisional Trustees:

Braintree	<i>Stuart Mitson</i>	<a href="mailto:stuart.mitson@btinternet.com">stuart.mitson@btinternet.com</a>
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Colchester	<i>Tom Geddes</i>	<a href="mailto:tom.geddes@btinternet.com">tom.geddes@btinternet.com</a>
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Southend	<i>Marguerita Wilson</i>	<a href="mailto:philandritawilson@sky.com">philandritawilson@sky.com</a>

### Divisional Contacts:

**Braintree:** Colleen Chamberlain 01279 876 333 **Chelmsford:** Brian Spencer 01245 490 843  
**Colchester:** Morag Chase 01206 522 576 **D.H. & Maldon:** Kate Tuerena 07801 984 446  
**Harlow:** Nick Holmes 07730 735 752 **Epping Forest:** Robin Harman 07971 237 312  
**Romford:** Pat Allen 01708 220 897 **Saffron Walden:** Vanessa Wilkinson 01799 542 337  
**Southend:** Chad Colby-Blake 01702 302 209

**EBKA Education Contact:** Jane Ridler Old Barn House, 36 Walden Road, Swards End, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 2LF 01799 218 023 [jane.ridler@uwclub.net](mailto:jane.ridler@uwclub.net)

**EBKA Examinations Secretary:** Pat Allen, 8 Franks Cottages, St Mary's Lane, Upminster, Essex RM14 3NU 01708 220 897 [pat.allen@btconnect.com](mailto:pat.allen@btconnect.com)

### The Essex Beekeeper Magazine:

**Editor:** Jean Smye, email: [jsmye@sky.com](mailto:jsmye@sky.com) tel. 07731 856 361  
**Advertising:** Jean Smye, email: [jsmye@sky.com](mailto:jsmye@sky.com)  
**Mailing Secretary:** Mary Heyes, email: [ml.heyes@virgin.net](mailto:ml.heyes@virgin.net)  
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**Web site:** Nick Holmes email: [webmaster@essexbeekeepers.com](mailto:webmaster@essexbeekeepers.com)

### Regional Bee Inspectors for EBKA Region:

Epping Forest and Romford Divisions (excluding Brentwood):  
Julian Parker [julian.parker@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:julian.parker@fera.gsi.gov.uk) tel. 07775 119 469

All other Divisions:  
Keith Morgan [keith.morgan@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:keith.morgan@fera.gsi.gov.uk) tel. 01485 520 838 or 07919 004 215

have nectar. Some of the poplars are useful pollen producers in early spring but one group in particular, the Balsam Poplars, produce a resin on their flower buds which is keenly collected by the bees to use as propolis.

The willows are an important group because they produce an abundance of pollen in February to March and one, *S. aegyptica*, can flower as early as January. If you decide to plant willow in your garden, pay particular attention to size, and gender. There are many small varieties including the ubiquitous *S. caprea* 'Kilmarnock' which fills the garden centres in Spring. Common it may be, but it is an excellent small tree and bees love it. There is a lovely variety called *S. hastata* which is upright with purple/red stems and remains compact. You just need to look at a list or on the web. Don't do what we did: we bought six *Salix caprea* trees for the garden and later found they were all female, so no pollen. The trees can be grown very easily from cuttings if you don't mind waiting. Willow grows in the wild so you may be lucky enough to have some near you. We live near the West Coast Main Line railway and *S. caprea* flourishes there. The willows are pretty unfussy plants and do not need water nearby.

Whetted your appetite for more information? Then here are two books:

- **Plants for Bees** by Kirk and Howes
- **The Bee Friendly Garden** by Hooper and Taylor

These are both good books, although the second one suffers a bit from not having an index.

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This is a very special event held in honour and respect of **Ted Hooper MBE** with presentations from key figures **Clive de Bruyn NBD** and **Margaret Thomas NBD**.

It is intended that this new lecture series in Ted's name is for all beekeepers - both new and seasoned alike.

The event is heavily subsidised by the EBKA with **tickets priced at only £8**.

Set in the majestic site of Marks Hall Estate, north of Coggeshall just off the A120 post code **CO6 1TG**.

Don't delay, as tickets numbers are limited and only available in advance.

Go to the Booking page at [www.ebka.com](http://www.ebka.com) and book your place now! We look forward to seeing you on **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016 at 2pm**.

# Ted Hooper Memorial Lecture 2016

The Essex Beekeepers'  
inaugural Ted Hooper  
Memorial Lecture  
series is to be held on:

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016  
at 2pm.**



## Apis & Pollen through the Looking Glass:

### A Day of Microscopy at Writtle

With Graham Royle NDB  
(National Diploma in Beekeeping)



On Saturday morning 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016 fourteen enthusiastic Divisional Apiarists assembled at Writtle Agricultural College, the centre of Essex Beekeeping education for decades when Ted Hooper NDB, followed by Clive DeBruyn NDB were County Beekeeping Lecturers.

The day started with an introduction by lecturing Beekeeper/Microscopist Graham Royle NDB, who had travelled down from Cheshire for the weekend. He outlined the course, thus:



*“Microscopy is a valuable additional skill for beekeepers. Not only is it useful for disease identification but it also helps with basic understanding of honeybee biology. Study of the external and internal anatomy reveals the amazing adaptations which have evolved over millions of years to enable the honeybee to survive. Being able to identify pollen from within the hive, or extracted from honey helps the beekeeper to understand the foraging behaviour of the colony. During this one day course, we will cover several aspects of microscopy related to beekeeping.”*

Topics covered include:

- The theory behind the design of optical microscopes
- The compound and dissection microscopes and their uses related to beekeeping
- Limitations of optical microscopes
- Koehler illumination and how to achieve it
- Calibrating a microscope using the eyepiece graticule and stage micrometer

## Harbingers of Spring

Celia Davis, Warwickshire Beekeepers via eBees

In this article I am intending to look at something which should interest us all as beekeepers because we are totally dependent upon them for our honey - flowers - but not just a random selection of flowers. We are going to look at various plant families, see what characterises each group and what important bee plants each contains. That may just be one family but sometimes it will be more. Here, I'm going to look at two families which are relevant to this early part of the year and so make us think of spring.

**Iridaceae (*The iris family*)** This is not a huge family and contains some early-flowering plants, as well as later ones. The plants are usually upright with leaves coming from the base. Most grow from corms or rhizomes. The flowers are quite conspicuous and their structure is based on the number three: they have three sepals, three petals, three stamens but usually more than three stigmas. The petals and sepals are not obviously different so they appear as six petals to the casual observer. The family is divided into about 13 genera (sing. genus) most of which do not concern us here but one is crocus, which is important because it is one of our earliest bee plants.

Crocuses can be in flower as early as February, but more often it is March and they are a wonderful source of early pollen for our bees, some bumblebees and a few early solitary bees and hoverflies. They do contain nectar but it is difficult to reach for our bees and is not important. The pollen loads are usually bright orange or golden and are extremely valuable to the colony as it is building up. At this stage of the year, fresh pollen is worth its weight in gold to the colony, so it is well worth planting crocuses. It does not much matter what kind you grow, consult a catalogue and choose your favourites. Some will naturalise in grass, others need to be away from competition, colours vary through a whole range from white and yellow, through pink, and purple. I would say that some are very short and these stand up to the winds, which are often a feature of March weather, much better than the taller ones. One last point: if you plant in grass, don't mow them until six weeks after all the crocus flowers have gone.

**Salicaceae (*The willow family*)** This too is a small family with only two genera this time: *Populus*, poplars and *Salix*, willows. These are all trees or shrubs, many very large, others tiny and creeping along the ground, and their flowers are very much reduced catkins, held close to the stem. Each tree carries either male or female flowers, a condition described as dioecious. This means that only male trees have pollen, although both types

Close the hive up and write your notes before you forget what you found. From now on, depending on your colony strength and the weather, you may have to inspect weekly to spot early swarming signs.

Remember,

**Bees just do what they do, and they don't wait for your convenience !**

Click these links for further information:

Bailey Comb Change

[www.nationalbeeunit.com/download Document.cfm?id=170](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/download Document.cfm?id=170)

Shook Swarm

[www.nationalbeeunit.com/download Document.cfm?id=1075](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/download Document.cfm?id=1075)

## Asian Hornet

It is now in France, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Italy and Germany; also in South Korea. Queens emerge in the spring and raise a few workers. When a good food source is found, the colony relocates to within 1-2 km of that and then grows large. Honey bees form some 50% of their diet. Hornets 'stack' outside hive entrances at different levels. They do not enter colonies but 'hawk' outside them, catching returning foragers on the wing. This inhibits foraging! Commonly, there may be 10-12 nests per km<sup>2</sup>.

In October 2014, NBU pest control and Wildlife teams visited Andernos-les-Bains, a small town near in Bordeaux, France. The hornet has had a devastating effect; beekeepers are reporting honey harvests going down from 50kg to 10kg. To fight it, they employ a 'cherry-picker' and half a man's time. Nests cannot be tackled in daylight but at dawn, adding difficulty. When first encountered, there were 4 nests in the area; last year there were 100. Because sulphur dioxide is used in the wine trade, it is available, but it could not be used in the UK. There, it is injected into a nest using a lance, a far from easy task in semi gloom; it adds to the difficulty that 20% of nests are above 20 metres, one was 28 m high.

The rate of predation is such that, where there are hornets, beekeeping may become impossible. This hornet is now all along the north French coast; it can only be a matter of time before it reaches us. For further information and instructions on making a suitable trap see:

The NBUs BeeBase website: [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)

An ID sheet for the Asian hornet: [www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)

Taken from page 14 *Essex Beekeeper* November 2015 report on East Anglian Bee Forum proceedings by Jeremy Quinlan (Suffolk BKA) & Sandra Gray (SBI)

- Checking honeybee samples for *Nosema* and *Acarine*
- Making slides from pollen and disease samples
- External honeybee anatomy
- Tools and techniques used for dissection
- Dissection of the abdomen.

Graham was expertly assisted by Master Beekeeper and EBKA Education Officer Jane Ridler.



The first task for the participants was to unpack and setup several pairs of brand new microscopes, comprising of both Dissecting and Compound 'scopes supplied by Brunel Microscopes Ltd. These had been purchased for each of the Essex Divisions with the assistance

of a generous educational grant from The Essex Beekeepers' Association.

Once up and running, a fun filled day was on offer. Delegates supplied samples of their bees, honey, and pollen for analysis. As a "hands on, eyes down and looking" practical exercise this covered the preparation of slides/bee samples for looking at *Nosema* and *Acarine*; Pollen recognition and sample making, and looking at anatomical slides. This really was the ultimate "bees knees" of a day, and every participant was buzzing at the end.

Graham and Jane were thanked profusely for this masterclass in practical microscopy, and doubled the educational value to Divisional delegates by returning to teach another fourteen apprentices on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February. All in all, an eye catching weekend.

Report and photographs by **Paul Abbott** BDS:

Beekeeper & Photographer Chairman to Southend on Sea Division.

## Overwintered Colonies For Sale

2015 Queens  
On Commercial Frames  
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## CEC Education Secretary's Report 2015 -2016

2015 – 2016 has been the first year for the EBKA to have both an Examinations and an Education Secretary. Whilst taking BBKA exams continues to be encouraged, the education courses offered are to all EBKA members – everyone needs to increase their beekeeping skills and knowledge - for themselves, the bees and the public.

**Module Study Groups** this year have covered both Module 1 Honey Bee Management and Module 6 Honey Bee Biology. The courses were run as usual by the Ridlers and were very well attended with a reasonable number taking the exams. Great Dunmow is a good central location for these evening classes, but many members have quite a journey. Should any other experienced beekeepers feel like running Module courses –more facilitation than teaching being required, then groups could be held in different corners of the County and more people could benefit.

A **Health & Safety Course** was run in November with Andrea Woolley whose Beecraft articles drew our attention to the need for more awareness of medical emergencies which can arise in the apiary. As an A&E specialist nurse and sufferer from anaphylactic shock, she gave detailed advice on practical first aid – manikins & trainer adrenaline pens, stings & anaphylaxis management, CPR, unconsciousness and choking. We were interested to find that heart attack and stroke were more likely scenarios than anaphylaxis but whatever the cause of the emergency, we need to know what to do out in the field. Delegates were fully funded by the CEC and were either committee members or those involved with organising apiary meetings in their Divisions. So all Divisions should have action plans for apiary meetings coming up this season. Checking new members, mobile phones and awareness of DRs ABC and FAST is the starting point.

The **Microscopy Courses** are arranged for the end of February and have not yet taken place at the time of writing. Graham Royle NDB is always a mine of information and the modern lab in Writtle College will provide excellent facilities. Twenty eight EBKA members will benefit over the two days and hopefully some will enter for the BBKA Microscopy Examination. All delegates should now be in a position to help at Divisional level with basic training in care of microscopes, *Nosema* and acarine diagnosis and some anatomy and pollen recognition. Also, most Divisions have taken advantage of the 50:50 financial deal in acquiring new microscopes from Brunel. To have 10 stereo and 10 compound microscopes all identical, is a tremendous teaching tool for these practical courses and we are lucky to have this benefit going into the future.

vectored by varroa, so monitor the varroa levels and treat if necessary. You may even see varroa riding around on adult bees.

Is there space for the queen to lay? The queen should be laying profusely now and needs to have empty comb available at all times. If there is nowhere else to put incoming nectar, it will be deposited in cells the queen should be laying in, so put a super on as soon as the bees cover eight or so frames. This will accommodate not only the nectar, but the increasing numbers of bees as well. With a very prolific queen, you may even need to extend the brood chamber as well, with a second deep or shallow box. Always give space before it is needed, and you may prevent swarming, though just delaying it is more likely.

Are there enough stores? At all times there should be the equivalent of two deep frames (10 lbs) of honey, preferably in the brood chamber, but can include any in the supers. It has to last until the next inspection and cope with any sudden change in the weather that might prevent foraging. Feed if necessary.

If the weather is too cold for frequent flying, then only feed fondant (candy). Syrup contains too much moisture when cleansing flights are not possible. Syrup feed should be a good 1 kg. white, granulated sugar dissolved in 1 litre hot water, fed in a contact feeder. The bees may not leave the cluster to access a rapid type feeder if it is cold weather.

When the inspection is over, replace any old comb with clean comb or foundation. If you place a frame of foundation between the last brood frame and the adjoining pollen frame, the bees will draw it out very quickly if the colony is strong enough; otherwise wait a week or so to do this, and put the foundation at the side of the box.

If you leave the varroa board in position, make sure you clean it weekly, as wax-moth become active as the weather warms up, and there will be a moth production line on the tray, where the bees cannot reach it.

**Spring Clean:** Take this opportunity to remove brace comb from the tops of the frames and crown board. Better still clean the top bars and put the frames and bees into a clean hive on a clean floor board. If you do not have new equipment, boxes that you have scraped out and lightly scorched will be fine.

It is very important to regularly replace brood comb and there are methods such as the Bailey Comb change or shook swarm to replace all the brood combs in a colony at the same time.

Have everything ready and accessible - hive tool, smoker and fuel, spare frames of foundation or clean comb, marking equipment. A frame holding box is very useful and the safest place to put the frame first removed from the hive, or the frame with the queen on, if you wish to keep her safe.

Remove the end frame and decide whether it is fit to keep. There may be several dark combs to replace. Put the frame somewhere safe, never on the ground or even leaning against the hive. Work inwards, assessing each frame in turn. Try to move older combs to the outside, where you can remove them once they are empty - if the queen doesn't beat you to it !

When you find a frame with pollen, the brood nest may start on the next frame - look out for the queen now, this is where she is most likely to be. As long as there is brood in all stages i.e. eggs, unsealed larvae and sealed larvae, you do not actually have to see the queen to know she is there. If you see her, note her appearance - is she marked? (Queen markings often wear away, but don't usually disappear altogether.) If she isn't, but should be, then you probably have a supercedure queen, hatched the previous year. Handle her frame very carefully, she is important.

Is the colony building up as expected? There should be about five or six frames with brood at this time of year. If they are weaker than this, try to ascertain why. The weaker the colony the slower the build-up, as there are not enough bees to look after much brood at a time. If otherwise healthy they should recover. If they are very strong already (eight frames or so) early swarming is likely.

Is the brood healthy looking? This means clean, dry and biscuit coloured sealed brood with no sunken cappings, greasy appearance or nasty smell. All the unsealed larvae should be pearly white, curled up comfortably and clearly segmented. They should not be stretched out, melted looking, or discoloured. If you see any which worry you, close up the hive and contact your Disease Liaison officer and/or the Bee Inspector. It could be foul brood. Any brown staining on the frames is caused by dysentery. This is a symptom, not a disease, but is frequently present when the colony is affected by nosema. Other causes could be feeding unrefined sugar or simply too much moisture in the feed when flying is impossible during the Winter. Are there signs of chalk brood in the cells? Don't worry about a few cells here and there, but keep an eye on chalkbrood, and if it gets very bad later on in the season, consider re-queening.

Are the adult bees healthy looking ? Most bees die outside the hive, but stunted, deformed wings show that Deformed Wing Virus is present,

I have also arranged for the **BBKA Basic Assessment Training Day** to be on 30<sup>th</sup> April at Great Easton. Some Divisions arrange their own excellent support for those taking this test, but a specific day at the start of the season you are doing the assessment should be of great value, increasing confidence as well as familiarity with what is actually asked of you during the test. The areas of study include hive manipulation, equipment and frame making, natural history of bees and beekeeping, diseases, pests and poisoning and the new section in this year's syllabus - swarming, swarm control and effects. I would argue that the BBKA Basic Assessment would be better labelled as a competency assessment, and all beekeepers should be persuaded to take it for the good of neighbours (especially on allotments), the bees and the image of the EBKA.

And of course we are continuing with the **Annual Bee Health & Disease Recognition Day**, run to great effect by our regional and seasonal bee inspectors. This year it is in Great Easton on June 16<sup>th</sup> and is an opportunity, amongst other troubles, to get close to diseases you'd rather not find in your own hives.

The EBKA continues to be active in promoting education amongst its members. If you have any ideas that you would like to suggest for future education courses please email me at [jane.ridler@uwclub.net](mailto:jane.ridler@uwclub.net)

Jane M Ridler

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Ian Hodgson

## ***EBKA ANNUAL CONFERENCE***

hosted by Romford Division

**Saturday 5th November 2016 9.30am – 4.30pm**

Venue: Barking & Dagenham College Dagenham Road,  
Romford, Essex RM7 0XU

### ***'Raising the Standards of Beekeeping Husbandry'***

We cannot know what the burning issue for bee research will be by November 2016, and there may be practical challenges ahead (small hive beetle, tropilaelaps, Japanese hornet), but we can keep our bees strong, healthy, and fit for the challenges by improving our husbandry skills.

Let our speakers tell you how.

Celia Davis NDB *"Beekeeper versus Bee"*

Gerry Collins NDB *"What's going on in my Hive?"*

Robert Smith NDB *"The Importance of Bee Space"*

Ticket price (to be confirmed, approx £25) includes lunch.

Other attractions include excellent raffle prizes and trade stands.

**Put the date in your diary now... Saturday 5th November**

### **CUT PRICE HONEY JARS**

Your Divisional Secretary has now been given the 2016 jar order form for distribution to members.

Don't be caught short, even if you are a new beekeeper your bees will do their best for you and you could have honey at the end of the season.

**Last orders 31st May for collection in June.**

For additional order forms contact:

Jean **07731 856 361**

**jsmye@sky.com**

## **The First Spring Hive Inspection**

**Judith Rowbottom** Harrogate & Rippon BKA,  
plus extracts from NBU publications (via eBees)

The first hive inspection of the year always involves a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Although observing activity at the hive entrance – foragers returning with pollen – or the use of clear crown boards gives an indication of how well the colony has overwintered, it is only when the box is opened and the frames are inspected that a proper evaluation of the colony is possible.

Many early spring days in March/April are warm enough for full inspections and on fine days colonies can be fully inspected. As a general rule colonies should not be examined below 10°C, quickly between 10°C and 14°C and above 14°C there will be no problem. Bees do not usually fly below about 10°C so this is a very useful guide. But do not inspect too early. There is little to be gained from inspecting too early however tempting it might be, until there is a reasonable level of new brood it is not really possible to judge overwintering performance. It will take some time, so only inspect on a very warm day.

The first inspection is really no different from any other inspection, you are looking at the same five points

- Queen - Is the colony Queen-right with a young prolific Queen?
- Brood - Is the brood looking healthy?
- Space - Have the bees got enough room to expand the brood nest? Do the colonies need supers put on? Will they need supers at the next inspection?
- Stores - Have the bees got enough honey and pollen until the next inspection?
- Health - Are there signs of pests and diseases?

You also need to consider:

- Comb Condition - Do I need to change some or all of the frames and combs?
- Spring Clean – Do I need to clean up the hive?
- Queen cells - Are there any? Is the colony trying to swarm? First time round each year, you are not quite sure what to expect, which makes this a particularly interesting inspection.