

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Just resting –see excellent swarm article on pages 9 to 14 - Photograph by Jean Smye

Monthly Magazine of the Essex Beekeepers' Association

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Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex

No. 619

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**July
2016**

EBKA Divisional Meetings

Diary dates for July & August 2016

7 July	Thursday 8.00pm	Harlow	'Honey Hygiene and Regulations' - with Andy Pedley. Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA
7 July	Thursday 8.00pm	Romford	Apiary meeting at Thames Chase Country Park, Pike lane, Upminster RM14 3NS - Pat Allen
16 July	Saturday 2.30pm	Epping Forest	BBQ and varroa treatment - Wanstead Apiary
18 July	Monday 7.30pm	Chelmsford	'From Cappings to Candles' - candle making demonstration with Sue Carter. The Link , Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB
20 July	Wednesday 6.00pm	Dengie 100 & Maldon	Apiary Visit - Basic Hive Management at Arcadia Road, Burnham on Crouch CM0 8EF. Peter Davidson
24 July	Sunday 3.00pm	Braintree	Apiary meeting with Geoff & Alison Brewer, Felstead CM6 3ET. Telephone 01371 822 043
27 July	Wednesday 7.30pm	Southend	'Nuclei - producing, using and maintaining them' Clive de Bruyn at WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED
30 July	Saturday	Saffron Walden	Apiary meeting - Gerald Smith's apiary, Cole End near Saffron Walden.
4 Aug	Thursday 8.00pm	Romford	'Microscopy & Disease Recognition' Pat Allen. Chadwick Hall, Main Road Gidea Park RM2 5EL
4 Aug	Thursday 8.00pm	Harlow	'Harlow Honey Show' - Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA
15 Aug	Monday 7.30pm	Chelmsford	'Preparations for Winter, feeding, treating & winter protection' . The Link, Trinity Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford, CM1 2XB
17 Aug	Wednesday 6.00pm	Dengie 100 & Maldon	Apiary visit – Carters' Apiary, Maldon CM9 6EE. Meet at the gate at 6.00pm. Summer BBQ and final harvest.
20 Aug	Saturday 2.30pm	Epping Forest	'Feed me, feed me now' . - Wanstead Apiary
21 Aug	Sunday 3.00pm	Braintree	Apiary meeting with Mick Keepence, Cressing CM77 8DY. tel: 01376 323 413
24 Aug	Wednesday 7.30pm	Southend - on-Sea	'Using microscopes in beekeeping' Paul Abbott, Rita Wilson & others. Rayleigh WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED

EBKA COUNTY HONEY SHOW 2016

What could be more exciting?

Enter the Classes – don't be shy- there's a class for everyone.

*See the August edition of *The Essex Beekeeper* for the Show Schedule and Entry Form.*

Do you enjoy talking to the public? Then come along as a helper. All levels of experience needed. Knowledgeable helpers for the Obs' Hives are needed and enthusiastic newbees for the Candle Rolling, the centre Exhibits Display, Honey Sales, etc. etc...is open to all levels.

You could offer to help Sally in the Face Painting marquee or the Maldon members in the making of Solitary Bee homes.

Guidance and help will be given if needed.

*Helpers receive a **free Show Pass** for the day*

(you need to arrive before 9.30am)

*Please give your contact details to **Richard Alabone** if you wish to help—
01245 259 288.*

There will be a good value two course lunch and numerous teas, coffees and biscuits provided by Romford Division.

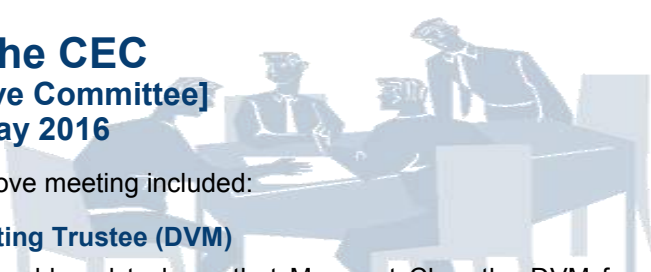
Photograph by Jean Smye



Notes from the CEC

[Central Executive Committee]

Meeting on 26 May 2016



Items taken at the above meeting included:

EBKA Divisional Voting Trustee (DVM)

The committee was saddened to learn that Margaret Clay, the DVM for Chelmsford Division would have to stand down on health grounds and that Peter Aldridge would be a proxy DVM for the rest of the year. The committee welcomed Peter to the meeting and extended their thanks to Margaret for her input as Trustee for Chelmsford.

The BBKA Membership Survey

The CEC reviewed the results of the survey, which EBKA members may have completed online late last year. The committee was surprised to see that some results shown were in conflict with those appearing elsewhere. The CEC were interested and somewhat concerned to know how in the future the BBKA would make use of the results and whether major policy decisions would be made on the basis of this survey. It was agreed that Howard Pool, our BBKA Link Trustee should be invited to a future meeting where the CEC could discuss the issues with him and ascertain how the BBKA were planning to make use of this survey.

County Officer – General Treasurer

Bob Manning, the General Treasurer will complete his term of office at the AGM in March 2017. As this is seen as an important role, the CEC agreed that his replacement should be identified beforehand so that a smooth transfer of responsibilities can take place. It was felt that an advertisement should be put in *The Essex Beekeeper* outlining that the role required a firm knowledge of accounting principles for charities. The position also called for an ability to handle the computerized accounting system in order for the annual accounts to be prepared and audited ready for presentation at the EBKA AGM.

The Ted Hooper Memorial Lecture

The inaugural event held in April this year had been well received by all who attended – over 100 of our members. It is planned to host another lecture in April 2017 at the same venue and work is underway to decide on the speaker/s and topic to be addressed.

2016 Divisional Bulk Buy

The “Pop up Shelters” containing the EBKA logo have been ordered and will be ready for Divisions to use at events from June.

Feedback on any matter discussed by CEC is welcomed and should be directed to your Divisional Trustee (contact details on inside back page).

Feeling the Buzz – Beginning Beekeeping

Spicy warming clove oil, the trail of heady smoke, fervent hum of bees at work, spectrum of pollen, amber gold cells of syrupy sweetness, burnt sugar and scorched wood, I never imagined beekeeping would be such a treat for all the senses.

Or that working with bees would feel so instinctive, primeval even - a pursuit whereby you lose your sense of self altogether, and reach a truly 'mindful' state - unencumbered by thoughts of how you look, what you should have said or what tomorrow might bring. I have always marvelled at bees, but as a sometime vegan the idea of farming bees sat uncomfortably. I have however, come to realise that we humans need to be connected to the natural world; in touch with the changing seasons, and in harmony with other animals. Particularly in an urban setting; I have depressingly

lived for a decade in Salford and hardly noticed the years' ebbing and flowing. We look after bees, they look after us- and not just with pollination and honey, but by offering us the opportunity to truly experience the world as humans should, in tune with our surroundings.

How not to be a beekeeper

I have learned so much. Everyone I have met in beekeeping circles, even the very experienced admits they also continue to learn – such is the endless mystery and fascination of bees! They say that if you ask a question of 10 beekeepers, you'll get 11 different answers. The confusion of conflicting advice can be mitigated by aligning yourself with nurturing individuals who, in a shared love of all things beekeeping, will provide you a baseline of skills and knowledge - exactly the offer of the Manchester and District Beekeepers Association at The Dower House. And this was my first mistake. I completed my initial training elsewhere – thought it wonderful at the time, but spent 2 subsequent years gradually realising how ill equipped I actually was for beekeeping. I invested in poor equipment, and assembled it badly; and then a 'nucleus' I purchased turned out to be a small cast swarm. I also simultaneously joined the BBKA and the MDBKA (following advice from the trainer) leading to all sorts of confusion with insurance and so on.

My mother always said “When you know what you don't know you're half way there.”

I wasn't on the way at all! During my first apiary night at the Dower House I was amazed to swiftly learn what had gone wrong with my brood boxes and supers, what to do with left over wax, how to light a smoker - amongst other things – things I hadn't been taught in my initial training. Every visit has

inspired a succession of light bulb moments leading to my feeling much more confident and far less fearful (rather like a new mother!) for my army of little wondrous creatures.

A day of firsts

My first day at Weaste Apiary – I glimpsed a queen for the first time, and witnessed my first swarm...



The swarm I witnessed on my first Day at Weaste Allotment.

The swarm I collected from Weaste allotment to get my apiary at Ordsall allotment started. The bees preferred to build wild comb rather than use the frames we gave them! But they're doing it properly now.

Photos: Amber Sanchez, 2016

Under the wing of Liz at Weaste allotments apiary, I have gained a marvellous insight into the workings of the hive via weekly inspections. All week long I wonder how the girls are doing; the apiary visits create a sort of stop frame animation of each colony's progress. Better than a 'soap'. Exciting, and very, very addictive.

Amber Sanchez (From Manchester Bee News—via eBees)

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'

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

Photographing bees

- and other insects

Courtesy of Somerton BKA via eBees

The photographic classes in the honey show may tempt you to demonstrate your skills with that close up of a bee on your biggest hollyhock. But how do you achieve show winning results? Here are some tips from the Nikon web site.

The first basic rule of close-up photography is to get close to the subject. Insect photography requires a macro lens that will allow you to focus very close to the subject. A Macro lens lets you photograph your subjects at near life size. Most non-SLR digital cameras have a close up (macro) setting denoted by a flower symbol. Even mobile phone cameras are capable of taking reasonably detailed close up photos these days. See the photograph below taken with a Sony Xperia phone camera for an example. But



Ideally you should use a tripod to steady the camera, especially when you are using a telephoto lens or long shutter speed. When shooting

with your camera on a tripod, using a cable release to trip the shutter is the ideal shooting method. If you don't have a cable release, you can use the camera's self-timer instead.

Depending on how close you can get, you will be able to fill the frame with the insect's entire body, or a portion of its body such as its head and antennae.

Most insects gathering nectar don't seem to mind a camera (and photographer) coming close to them. The exception is butterflies.

While shooting insects with a macro lens might seem intimidating, start out with creatures that can't sting you. The shorter the focal length of the macro lens, the closer you will have to be to your subject, so keep that in mind when choosing which lens to use



Insects have fascinating bodies, and one of the goals of close-up nature photography is to bring out all the colour and detail of insect life. Good macro photography puts the camera's focus on the eyes, legs and bodies of these bugs, and their tiny world. For example, taking a photograph of a spider in its web tells a more interesting story.

Background colour plays an important role in composition. For example, if the subject is dark coloured, as many insects are, a lighter, out-of-focus background will make the creature stand out from its surroundings and focus the viewers' attention on it



The technique for getting an insect to stand out from the background is to use a shallow depth of field. Depth of field is defined as the area in front of, and behind the subject, that is in focus. Depth of field is determined by the aperture setting. Low f/stops, like f/2.8 will give you a shallow depth of field, which pin-points the focus on your subject, while the background goes out of focus. Another technique that nature photographers use is to position their camera so that a brightly lit subject is photographed against a dark background. Exposing for a well-lit subject, under full daylight for example, or with a fill-flash, will



Photo: beedreams.com

cause a dark background to under-expose and creates a dark, even background, making the subject stand out. But if the subject and background are both brightly lit, the insect may be difficult to separate from its surroundings. Placing a household item like a piece of cloth or paper behind the subject can work as a portable studio backdrop, isolating the insect against a plain background and setting it apart from its surroundings. Photo editing programs will allow you to crop your image, and adjust the brightness and contrast. Most cameras also will allow you to crop the image and afford some adjustment to brightness and contrast.

Insects are more mobile in warm weather, so photograph them in the early morning or evening when it is cooler, and they will be moving slower. The available light at those times of day will also be more flattering too. Placing an insect in a container in the refrigerator or freezer for a short while before taking your photo will slow down its metabolism and make it torpid. Leaving it too long in the freezer however, will make it dead!

And it is not just the insects themselves that provide that honey show winning shot.



Photo: !thekeepers.com

The following is some general information for new beekeepers, (and perhaps for some more experienced), about dealing with the aftermath of swarming.



The Bees have Swarmed:

It happens to us all - the colony has laughed at your swarm prevention and ignored your swarm control, and now there is a large lump of bees hanging off a low branch near your hive/s. Believe it or not, this is not too bad! Assuming you inspected not much more than a week ago, this will be the prime swarm, with your laying queen in it. You have arrived in time to retrieve it. The swarm has considerably clustered where you can reach it. You will be able to make sure that the colony does not throw any casts.

You will now have to collect the swarm in a skep, or similar container; later you will have to hive the swarm and you will need to do some post-swarm management in order to prevent casting from the parent colony.

1. Collecting a Swarm:

This can be great fun, or very frustrating. Every swarm is different and each swarm collection is different, so if in any doubt about what to do contact an experienced beekeeper for advice/help. Always be as gentle as possible. Shaking or brushing are often required, but the rougher you are, the more excited the bees will become. Cutting a branch off and putting it, with the bees, into your skep, is much less upsetting for all, than even gentle shaking.

Equipment needed

You will need either a straw skep, or stout cardboard box, preferably roughened on the inside, or a flexible builder's trig or plastic bucket. The last two are used differently from the rough-surfaced skep. Even a stout pillowcase can be used for some freely hanging swarms.

Occasionally you can put the swarm straight into a hive. You also need a board of a size to go under the skep, an old cotton sheet, and an assortment of extras like secateurs, stout string or rope, a stone to prop the skep up, smoker, plastic bin liner in case of rain.

Now into action !

A cluster dangling off a low branch is a rare event - enjoy it. Spread the sheet under the cluster, this is mainly to stop the bees getting lost in the grass. Place the board in the middle of it. Hold the skep in one hand, right up to the cluster, shake the branch sharply and the bees should fall into the skep in a big blob. Immediately, gently up-end the skep on to the board and prop the edge up with a stone.



You will see bees start to raise their rear ends and fan their wings - this is to spread the Nasanov homing pheromone around. This will attract all the bees flying about, and so long as you have the queen in the skep, eventually all the bees will join her.



Because the skep has a rough surface the bees can cling to it easily and will be quite happy inside. The bees flying around often re-cluster where they were before, and you can deter them by smoking the site and disguising their scent there, but don't overdo it, as the Nasanov pheromone should not be masked as well.

If the queen is not in the skep, all the bees will leave it, to join her wherever she is, and you will have to start all over again. The collected swarm should be left in the skep until evening to allow all the bees to enter it. This is particularly important in other people's gardens, as any bees left behind may cause a nuisance when they find they are homeless. In your own apiary, if the hives are nearby, stragglers will quickly find a home in their old hive or with the swarm. If it looks like rain, tie a plastic bag around the skep. When moving the skep in the evening, if in your own apiary, just pick it up carefully and take it to where you want it. If you have to travel, it needs to be wrapped up - this is the second reason for having the sheet. Take the stone away, arrange the sheet over the skep so that there are no gaps and tie tightly with the string or rope, around the skep middle and around the board as well. This should now be bee-tight in your car !

If you do not have a rough skep, but only a slippery trug or bucket, do things a bit differently.. As the bees cannot grip the sides of the trug, you have to decant them straight into a hive with frames of foundation. Put the hive on

the sheet under, or as near as possible to, the cluster.

Remove six middle frames and block the entrance temporarily. Shake the cluster into the trug and immediately slide them gently into the space in the hive. Place the frames gently on top of the clump of bees - it will not squash them, they will climb up the frames which will descend into the hive. Put the crownboard and roof on as soon as possible. Remove the entrance block (it was only there to stop the bees coming straight out of the front) so that the bees can start fanning to attract the strays. Leave the hive until all the swarm has gone in, then strap up securely and move to its permanent position.

Not so Easy Clusters:

Sadly, swarms are much more likely to cluster in the middle of a holly bush or wrapped around three or four iron railings than to dangle invitingly from the end of a low branch.

Apart from shaking, swarms can also be collected by brushing down into a skep, (like brushing off a wall), or smoking upwards into the skep, (as from a fence post). A cluster flat on the ground will crawl into a skep propped over it, with one edge touching the bees. A hive with frames would be a good choice as you will collect and hive the swarm in one go. The flexible trug is very handy for a swarm in the middle of a bush, as it will reach places skeps can't go.



Frames of old comb placed by the swarm will readily attract the bees and with patience most of the swarm can be gathered this way and put straight into a hive. If none of this is possible, then get as many bees as you can into the skep, place it near the cluster on the sheet and then mobilise the rest of the bees by shaking, smoking etc. The bees in the skep should start fanning Nasonov pheromone around, which hopefully will eventually attract all the, by now

extremely excited, flying bees. Keep agitating the original cluster site to stop the swarm re-settling there. There are also bee-repellent sprays available. Catch any small clusters and put them by the skep to add to the fanning force. This can take some time, depending on where the queen is. It is rather a swarm catcher's last resort !

Remember:-

- BBKA insurance only covers you for third party damage, not personal loss or injury.
- Do not trespass if it is only the next-door neighbour of the swarm

owner who called you.

- Don't feel obliged to climb trees etc. - any swarm high up will not be a nuisance. No swarm is worth a broken leg.
- Bees move upwards away from smoke and will happily go into a dark container.

2. Hiving a Swarm

In the evening, when all the swarm bees are settled in a skep or hive, wrap or strap them up and transport them to their permanent position. If nearby, don't leave this until the next day, as the bees will soon orientate on the position of the skep or hive where they were collected. If the swarm is already in a hive, simply put it in its place and remove the entrance block.

Swarms are 'hard-wired' to draw comb, so the hive should be furnished with frames of foundation. If it is your own swarm, so you know it has no health problems, feed a gallon of 1 to 1 sugar syrup to enable the bees to do this quickly. If it is an unknown swarm, it is advised that feeding is delayed for a couple of days, so that any honey they are carrying, possibly with foul brood spores in it, will provide the energy to draw the comb and not be stored. This is also a good opportunity to treat for varroa, as all the mites are phoretic. Any of the registered treatments would be suitable.

Another thing you can do with a prime swarm is to provide one frame of *drawn* comb. This enables the queen to start laying at once. As it is the only brood available until the other combs are drawn, most of the varroa will enter it just before sealing. When it is fully sealed remove it and its cargo of varroa. This is called a sacrificial brood frame.

(This does not work with a cast, as the combs will have been drawn before the virgin queen is mated and ready to lay and she will have the run of the hive to lay in.)

If the swarm arrives home in a skep, you will have to put it in a hive. It helps to have the hive in position beforehand. There are two ways of hiving a swarm from a skep:

- 'Dumping' them straight into the hive, or
- Running them up a sloping board to the hive entrance.

Dumping is quick, easy, slightly boring, but recommended on a cold evening. -

1. Remove about six middle frames from the hive. Temporarily block the entrance, to stop the bees coming straight out of the front door. Hold the skep directly over the hive, give a sharp shake and the bees should all fall into the hive in a clump. Knock the skep a couple of times to dislodge any that don't. Gently replace the frames on top of the bees, perhaps putting a drawn one in

the centre (see above). Remove the entrance block and close up the hive. Feed as above.

2. You can also leave all the frames in place and put an empty super on top to act as a funnel when dumping the bees in. Remove it when the bees have descended - a little smoke will encourage them down. Close the hive as soon as possible.

3. Put an empty super on the floorboard. Dump the bees into it and quickly put the brood box with frames on top and close the hive. Remove the super in a day or so.

Running in a swarm is much more fun but takes longer, there is a risk the queen will fly off, (particularly with a cast), and on a cold evening the bees may be too torpid to crawl into the hive at all.



You will need a large board and your swarm sheet. Slope the board up to the hive entrance at about 45 degrees to the vertical. Too steep and the clump will fall off the board, too shallow and the bees won't climb up very quickly. Spread the sheet smoothly over the board, right up to the entrance - this is to stop the bees (and perhaps the queen) clustering under the board or getting lost in the grass.

Dump the swarm out onto the board with a sharp shake. After some initial confusion the bees will begin to trek up the board and into the entrance. A little smoke from behind will encourage them upwards. Nasonov pheromone will be fanned around by many bees to attract the waifs and strays and in about twenty minutes all should be quiet. If you are lucky you may see the queen running in, and then you know all is well. Everyone should do this at least once !

Except when mentioned, all the above remarks apply equally to a prime swarm and a cast with a virgin queen. Cast swarms can be trickier to deal with as they are very 'flighty' and can take ages to settle into a cluster. If very small, use dummy boards to reduce the size of the brood chamber. Unfortunately, some swarms decide they don't like the Des. Res. you have given them and abscond the next day, along with the gallon of syrup you have fed them ! They almost certainly had chosen a new home before you caught them. It is sometimes suggested that a queen excluder between the floor and brood box will stop this, but be careful! This only applies to a

prime swarm and then only put it in place when you are sure the queen is on the frames and not on the floor, i.e. you can dump the swarm in with an excluder in place but do not run them in, or the queen will be trapped on the floor. As soon as there is brood the swarm should stay put so don't leave the excluder there for too long - it may rub the pollen from the bees legs as they enter.

Why can't you do this with a cast? The virgin queen has to go out to mate, that is why. If a cast absconds you can't do anything about it, though some say that hiving them with a frame of unsealed brood will ensure they stay put.

To be continued next month - Post Swarm Management

Courtesy of Harrogate & Ripon BKA via eBees

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