

# THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Photograph by Conrad - see page 4

## Monthly Magazine of the Essex Beekeepers' Association

*Registered Charity number 1031419*

*Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex*

**No. 603**

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

**March  
2015**

# Divisional Meetings

## March & April 2015

<b>5 Mar</b>	Thursday 8.00pm	<b>Harlow</b>	<b>'Spring Preparation'</b> - Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA.
<b>6 Mar</b>	Friday 8.00pm	<b>Romford</b>	<b>Folklore of Wild Flowers and Bees</b> - William Tyler Chadwick Hall, St.Michael's Church, Main Road, Gidea Park, Romford RM2 5EL
<b>7 Mar</b>	Saturday 2.30pm	<b>Saffron Walden</b>	<b>'The Bee Gym - a new varroa control method'</b> Talk by its inventor Stuart Roweth at Thaxted Guildhall CM6 2LA
<b>11 Mar</b>	Wednesday 7.30pm	<b>Dengie 100 &amp; Maldon</b>	<b>'Nosema—to test or not to test?'</b> - The OakHouse, High Street, Maldon CM9 5PF
<b>14 Mar</b>	Saturday 2.00pm	<b>County Event</b>	<b>EBKA Annual General Meeting</b> - Writtle College, Chelmsford CM1 3RR
<b>16 Mar</b>	Monday 7.30pm	<b>Chelmsford</b>	<b>'What to do with your bees if .....</b> ' - Ted Grad. The Link, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford
<b>19 Mar</b>	Thursday 7.30pm	<b>Epping Forest</b>	<b>'Mead Making'</b> - Ron Hunter. Chingford Horticultural Hall
<b>25 Mar</b>	Wednesday 7.30pm	<b>Southend</b>	<b>Spring Preparation</b> - WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS
<b>26 Mar</b>	Thursday 7.30pm	<b>Colchester</b>	<b>'Getting Hives ready for the season'</b> - Langham Community Centre, School Road, Colchester
<b>27 Mar</b>	Friday 8.00pm	<b>Braintree</b>	Practical session - Preparing for the new season. Constiitucional Club, Braintree CM7 1TY
<b>2 April</b>	Thursday 8.00pm	<b>Harlow</b>	<b>'Techniques, tricks &amp; inventions' &amp; 'Swarm Control'</b> - Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA.
<b>8 April</b>	Wednesday 7.30pm	<b>Dengie 100 &amp; Maldon</b>	Members Meeting - The OakHouse, High Street, Maldon CM9 5PF
<b>10 April</b>	Friday 8.00pm	<b>Romford</b>	<b>'The Zest Hive' - varroa free by design.</b> Bill Summers Chadwick Hall, St.Michael's Church, Main Road, Gidea Park, Romford RM2 5EL
<b>16 April</b>	Thursday 7.30pm	<b>Epping Forest</b>	<b>'Skep making'</b> - Martin Buckle. Chingford Horticultural Hall.
<b>20 April</b>	Monday 7.30pm	<b>Chelmsford</b>	'First Aid for beekeepers' - with St. Johns' Ambulance The Link, Trinity Methodist Chuch, Rainsford Rd, Chelmsford
<b>22 April</b>	Wednesday 7.30pm	<b>Southend</b>	<b>'Maintaining healthy colonies in spite of Varroa'</b> - Clive deBruyn. WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh
<b>26 April</b>	Sunday 3.00pm	<b>Braintree</b>	Apiary Meeting with Claire Fisher - tel: 01376 503 647

**Essex Beekeepers' Association**  
**135th Annual General Meeting**  
to be held on  
**Saturday 14 March 2015 at 2pm**  
in Room E06, Writtle College, Lordship Lane,  
Chelmsford. CM1 3RP

**AGENDA**

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the 134th AGM
- 3 Report of the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee (CEC)
- 4 General Treasurer's Report & Approval of the 2014 Accounts
- 5 Written Reports of other members of the CEC
- 6 Election of President
- 7 Election of County Officers (Trustees):  
    Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary
- 8 Notification of the 2015 Divisional Voting Members and 2016  
    Presiding Officer
- 9 Election of County (non Trustee) Appointees:  
    BBKA Delegate  
    Editor (*The Essex Beekeeper*)  
    Examinations Secretary  
    NHS Delegate  
    EBKA Show Secretary  
    Spray & Disease Committee Delegate
- 10 Notification of CEC Appointees and Co-opted Members
- 11 Confirmation of the Accounts Examiner (External Auditor)
- 12 2014 Conference Report
- 13 2015 Conference Preview
- 14 Installation of the 2015 Presiding Officer
- 15 Reading from the Book of Commemoration
- 16 Any other business

**Following the AGM**

Members of the Dengie Hundred & Maldon Division will  
provide refreshments.

**The AGM Keynote Speech will be given by Andrew Beer,**  
the current chairman of North Bucks Beekeepers' Association.

Andrew's talk will be on "**Bees & the Law**".

*Beekeepers and the authorities, to a lesser extent, do not have a sufficiently wide knowledge of the parameters of the law regulating their activities and may either fall foul of them or, through ignorance, may fail to take advantage.*

**Report by the Chair of the CEC to the  
EBKA 2015 Annual General Meeting  
Richard Ridler**

The summer of 2014 was generally warm and sometimes even hot with good rainfall resulting in most places in a better honey crop than 2013. The very early spring meant that was little rape honey because colonies had not built up sufficiently. Winter colony losses were back to normal following the exceptional losses experienced during the appalling cold winter of 2012/13.

Our membership has stabilised; whilst the numbers of beginners held up well it was roughly equal to the number who left us. Our financial position remains strong with good reserves and we are seeking more ways to spend to support our charitable objectives.

Once again this year honey bees featured in the national media; most notably in two BBC series presented by Martha Kearney. We continue to find that there is a direct relationship between the media exposure of beekeeping and the numbers wanting to take up the craft.

**Cover Photograph** by Conrad **Winter 2015**

What do you do when access to an out apiary, and in this case a *really* out of the way out apiary, becomes waterlogged? This was a scenario that would have been appreciated by the Top Gear Team. The very obliging farmer laughed at the idea of a 4 x 4 even considering the terrain and said the land was the worst he had seen it for some 30 years plus, with the water table about 2 inches below the surface. The only answer was to get out his biggest wheels, put a platform and a seat on the back and get us underway across approx 2 miles of thick clay and water. .... Result!

No doubt the inevitable arrival of Small Hive Beetle and Asian Hornet in the UK will attract a bubble of publicity when it happens. We will have to prepare our members in 2015 for this which will be something extra for us all to worry about and yet another threat to our bees.

The education programme directed at supporting our more experienced beekeepers to improve their knowledge and skills continued. We ran a well-attended course aimed at preparing for the BBKA's General Husbandry Examination. We hope some of those who attended will take and pass the exam this year. Also and for the first time, we ran study groups each based on the syllabus of individual BBKA module exams.

Our Annual Conference hosted by Southend Division was not as well attended as it should have been given the excellent speakers, venue and catering. Maybe the fact that two of the speakers spoke about 'fringe' subjects put people off. If so it's a pity, because I think we can learn a lot by broadening our knowledge and understanding of beekeeping.

Our Annual Honey show was blessed with better weather than 2013 and the many volunteers demonstrated aspects of beekeeping and spoke to a huge number of the public who as ever were fascinated. The quality of entries was high and the amount of feedback from the judges was greater than in the past which helps improve the learning of those who entered.

As usual, all the Divisions ran many and varied programmes of activities throughout the year. These take a lot of organising and I must congratulate the committees of our nine Divisions for their outstanding efforts and especially Southend for the Annual Conference.

[A copy of this report has been sent to the Charity Commissioners on behalf of the Trustees of EBKA as legally required]

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# Queen Rearing - is Grafting Best?

Richard Alabone - Chelmsford Division

We all need a queen from time to time but it needs a great deal of determination to make a reasonable job of it. Most of us leave it to the bees to raise their own. This is about my experiences.

## Too many methods.

I've tried most systems over the years and found many drawbacks. Firstly, I tried a very complicated system I read of, using a board vertically to divide the brood nest. It didn't work. Then I tried a frame of eggs and larvae laid flat on top of the supers, which produced a few cells all stuck together. I tried a piece of brood foundation cut into a W shape. Again it worked but half the cells were damaged trying to separate them. An American method I saw on the Internet, used strips of comb with larvae fitted to bars, but leaving only every third larvae in order to obtain cells that were not joined to each other. But that system was too difficult to organise. I also tried getting a queen to lay eggs in the little plastic cups of the Jenter system. Most of these methods needed the queen to be found and removed, which in itself has its problems. And of course I had tried grafting (the Doolittle method) because most of the books regard this as the best system. I even used a cloak board. Again, I met with problems and disaster. Clearly I needed training even though I had learned much of the necessary background over the years and was familiar with Ted Hooper's recommendation of using two brood chambers as a queenright colony, although it seemed too complicated to try.

## Sound advice ?

All this prolonged frustration made me more determined to really try the 'proper' way: and get some practice at grafting. I therefore paid good money for a one-day course with a respected queen breeder (outside of East Anglia) who was offering tuition; not realising that many beekeepers are reluctant to pass on good information. The method we were shown was using a queenright double brood box colony recommended in a paper in the American Bee Journal. All the books say the colony should be large and healthy; the ones we were shown had few bees and on old combs that should have been

discarded years ago. Combs were transferred, complete with bees between colonies, with no explanation of why this was okay, where normally bees would fight if given this treatment. When it came to grafting, it is generally recommended that the larvae must be kept warm. We did it in the open under trees, where it was draughty, cold and with little daylight. The actual grafting technique was almost useless; certainly for beginners. Two people I know had queens from this supplier that were so small that some ended up in the supers! So after this experience I decided to follow Ted Hooper's grafting advice, and to use a paper from the BBKA website, *Queen Rearing in CSL York*; by David Wilkinson and Mike Brown.

### Success

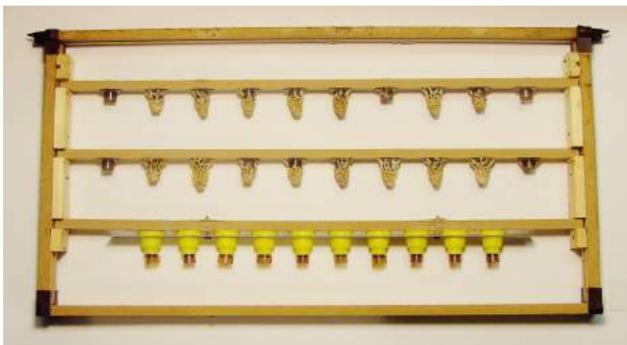
I now use a double Dadant system: the same as used by Clive de Bruyn when he taught me my beekeeping many years ago, but I use the queenright system of Wilkinson and Brown. Using that system they raised up to 1000 queens a year with an average graft acceptance of 81% on a double National, which has the advantage that any strong production colony can be used, with only simple manipulations at seven day intervals. I use plastic cell cups but prime them with royal jelly to help remove the graft as recommended by Hooper. As far as grafting tools are concerned the Chinese plastic one is clever but needs modifying; also the plastic tools available might be fine for large three day old larvae, but need much filing to be suitable for 36 hour old grubs. The car is a very convenient place for grafting, where temperature and humidity can be controlled, and I use a hot water bottle to keep larvae warm transferring to and from the hive. Although I have a selection of mating hives, the ones I find best are home-made from old super boxes modified for 4 nucs with a deep polystyrene roof. These are easy to set up, and return afterwards by putting the frames with bees back into a super: or alternatively, each two frame shallow nuc can be enlarged in a National brood box.

Up to now I've said nothing about breeder queens and drones which should be carefully selected, rather than the rough Essex mongrels I put up with.

### An offer

I propose to keep my queen raising colony running during May, June and July, to be available to anyone who would like to try grafting from

their own stock and using their own drones: also with their own bees for the mating hive. The hope is that this will enable you to improve your stock by re-queening bad colonies, and for me to do the same, rather than paying for questionable queens from outside the county or abroad. **Call me on (01245) 259 288 if interested. ■■**



Queen cells on a Dadant frame, with a bar of Jenter cups.

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**Regards, Honey Helpers**

## Whatever will I learn in 2015?

Ted Bozman - Saffron Walden Division

January! - and a whole new year of beekeeping to anticipate, but also a pause in activity, to look back and learn. Last season was for me among the best in my experience, primarily because the weather was kind and there were good sources of honey accessible to my stocks. Then it is possible to use one of the most important techniques I have learned, - the application of masterly inaction, and enjoyable observation.

It is now 60 years since my first beekeeping lessons. I was taught first by a countryman in Hertfordshire who had kept bees in our garden during the war. He was a great source of wisdom and interest about bees and all kinds of other topics. He was a staunch advocate of walking the walk, rather than talking the talk. He avoided interfering with bees when their mood was unsuitable, so hardly ever wore any protection, but he had an old felt hat on his bald head, which he found a convenient place to put capped queen cells. On one occasion he let out a rustic expletive, took off the hat, and there was blood running down his scalp. An emerging queen, having eaten through the wax, was working her way into his scalp! I never heard of anyone else being bitten by a queen! A significant honour, I think.

As I was at boarding school, I took my bees to school on the train and brought them home in the summer holidays. During the term they were a great asset, as they could get me away from some of the more tedious activities, as well as from my least favourite classmates! An extra bonus was that it was arranged for me to visit Brother Adam at Buckfast. In the event he was much too busy to be bothered with a schoolboy, but it was a memorable encounter.

Among my transient New Year resolutions is always the intention to get done those jobs that have been put off during the season. Year after year I find that almost none of them have got themselves done when I emerge from near hibernation, and see the rape already well into flower, and action needed!

Much more agreeable is catching up with reading. One never opens a bee book or magazine without finding some nugget of interest. Still more stimulating is chewing the fat with other beekeepers. In my experience we are more secretive, more eccentric, more enthusiastic and more colourful than the average population! Best of all though, in my search for the lodestone of our craft, is to be inspecting a hive or taking a swarm. Time after time something turns up one has never encountered before. Last season my most unusual was a swarm in a children's play area which had built three or four combs with brood and honey low down in a conifer before it was spotted!

A happy year to all! ■■

**Request from Editor:**

Would all Divisional Secretaries inform me of their Trustees, Divisional Contacts and Programme Secretaries as soon as possible please.

Fellow Beekeepers,

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you that our oldest beekeeper, Harold Moss, died at the beginning of January. He was aged 101 and had kept bees for at least 50 years.

He held most positions within our Division in the 50's, 60's,70's and 80's, and last year his daughter donated a large number of his honey show and other awards gained over the years to the division. Eric Beaumont is currently looking after these should anyone wish to see them.

His funeral tookplace at Hainault Forest Cemetry on 27th January with donations made to the 'Forest Dene Amenity Fund' c/o Forest Dene, 48 Hermon Hill, E11. This is a fund that pays for the care home mini bus.

Robin Harman  
Secretary - Epping Forest Division EBKA

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*Repeat of January course due to overwhelming demand*

### **Hands on the (Bee) Hive:**

An afternoon with Simon Cousins inspecting his beehives and learning how to find the queen:

**10 May 26 May 31 May**  
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## Passing It On

**Celia Davis - Warwickshire Beekeepers *via ebees***

Why is breeding better bees so involved? After all, every other food-producing animal that man keeps has been improved out of all recognition, but not bees. The answer lies in the breeding system and genetics of honey bees and in their method of sex determination. Because honey bees are such highly evolved social creatures, the various groups within the colony each has its own distinct function: the queen is the only complete reproductive female and the drones are adapted as sperm providers and really have no other function. Also, the mating system has evolved over millions of years to ensure out breeding.

A queen can mate for only a very short period, probably 4 weeks maximum, at the beginning of her life. She mates on the wing, quite high up in the air and will travel up to 1 mile on one, or occasionally more, mating flights. During the flight she will mate with usually 10 – 20 or more drones, these having collected in large drone congregation areas numbering thousands of insects from many colonies. She will retain about 10% of the sperm she receives from each drone and this will be stored and nourished in her spermatheca, a small round, white structure above the vagina, from which the sperms are released when needed to fertilise an egg, and which will store and nourish around 5 to 6 million sperm. These will have to last her for the rest of her life. She will use 200,000 of these sperm each year so her supply should last her quite easily, even if she lives for 5 years or so. The drones can only mate once and die immediately.

So far, so good, we are beginning to see some of the problems, and a major one is that honey bees will not mate naturally under any other conditions. The method they use is well suited to their lives: mating with many drones, each of which can only mate once, brings a whole range of different characteristics into the colony contributing to the colony make-up and conferring many advantages. Not all will be favourable of course and some will suit the bees but not the beekeeper. The other major advantage of the mating system is the

avoidance of closely-related drones as mates.

All the characteristics of a honey bee are passed on from one generation to another by the genes of the individuals concerned. I think we are all very familiar with this concept and the fact that genes are made of DNA. The genes form chromosomes, which are rod-like structures only visible when cells are dividing, and in the honeybee there are 32. We talk of them as 16 pairs, because the members of each pair (homologous chromosomes) resemble one another in shape and size and can be thought of as similar to identical twins. The genes are also in pairs or series (called allelomorphs or alleles for short) and at a particular place on a particular chromosome there will be 1 gene from the appropriate pair or series. The genes in the pair or series will control one characteristic, eg. the synthesis of one protein within the body of the bee, but the alleles themselves may not be identical and may produce different effects.

Now back to our sex determination. There are a number of sex genes carried on a particular chromosome and although there are many of them, (nobody seems sure how many, some say about 18, others say over a hundred), an individual egg or sperm will only carry one from this series.

If an egg remains unfertilised, so developing into a drone, it will not receive the chromosomes and genes from a sperm so it will only have 16 chromosomes. As the egg develops into an embryo, and finally an adult drone, the cells divide and every cell in the body of a drone will contain only 16 chromosomes. For those of you who like long words he is described as hemizygous. He will therefore inherit, from his mother, 1 sex gene out of the series. This is what determines that he is a male. Females, on the other hand, develop from fertilised eggs. An egg and sperm fuse, each contributing 16 chromosomes giving 32 chromosomes and all cells in the body of that individual will have 32 chromosomes. Now we come to the clever bit, because, if the two sex alleles in this individual are different she will be a female but if they are identical a drone will be the result. We call the full complement of chromosomes (32) the diploid number and the half complement (16) the haploid number. All females are therefore, said to be diploid and all normal drones are haploid, but our drone with 2 sex genes is called a diploid drone. He has 32 chromosomes but the 2 identical sex genes mean that he will develop as a identical drone

who will be infertile. He will therefore, be eaten by his sisters as soon as he hatches from the egg. Clearly, if a queen were to mate with just 1 drone who carried the same sex gene as one of hers, up to half of her fertilised brood would die and this would seriously deplete the colony. Mating with many drones minimises this effect.

Incidentally, some people struggle with the idea of a series of genes but, while one queen or worker can only carry two from that series and a normal drone carries one, the rest of the genes from the series are distributed throughout the honey bee population. ■■

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