

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Monthly Magazine of the Essex Beekeepers' Association

*Registered Charity number 1031419
Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex*

No. 610

www.essexbeekeepers.com

**October
2015**

EBKA Divisional Meetings

Diary dates for October / November 2015

1 Oct	Thursday 8.00pm	Harlow	'Wax Extraction' - cleaning and making products. Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA
2 Oct	Friday 8.00pm	Romford	Talk by Ted Gradosielski. Chadwick Hall, St. Michaels Church, Main Road, Gidea Park, Romford RM2 5EL
13 Oct	Tuesday 7.30pm	Saffron Walden	'Apitherapy' with Barbara Dalby. Swards End Village Hall CB10 2LG
15 Oct	Thursday 7.30pm	Epping Forest	'Honey Tasting & Pollen Identification' , Chingford Horticultural Hall
19 Oct	Monday 7.30pm	Chelmsford	'Divisional Honey Show' at The Link, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB
21 Oct	Wednesday 7.30pm	Dengie 100 & Maldon	Members meeting. The Oakhouse. High Street, Maldon CM9 5PF
22 Oct	Thursday 7.30pm	Colchester	Trees and Bats - Talk by Neil Catchpole. Langham Community Centre, School Road, Colchester CO4 5PA
28 Oct	Wednesday 7.30pm	Southend	'Divisional Honey Show' at the WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED
30 Oct	Friday 8.00pm	Braintree	'Making Mead' - Mike Barke, Constitutional Club, Braintree CM7 1TY
29— 31 October	Thursday to Saturday	National Event	National Honey Show , Weybridge, Surrey
31 Oct	Saturday	County Event	Annual Conference - Ormiston Rivers Academy, Burnham-on-Crouch
5 Nov	Thursday 8.00pm	Harlow	'Life Cycle of the Wasp' - Danny Nicoll at Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA
6 Nov	Friday 8.00pm	Romford	'Mock Honey Show' . Chadwick Hall, St. Michaels Church, Main Road, Gidea Park, Romford RM2 5EL
16 Nov	Monday 7.30pm	Chelmsford	'Bumblebee Conservation Trust' at The Link, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB
18 Nov	Wednesday 7.30pm	Dengie 100 & Maldon	Members meeting. The Oakhouse. High Street, Maldon CM9 5PF
19 Nov	Thursday 7.30pm	Epping Forest	'Thermodynamics of Bees and the Hives' — Derek Mitchell at Chingford Horticultural hall.
20 Nov	Tuesday 7.30pm	Saffron Walden	'More than Honey' Film at Swards End Village Hall CB10 2LG

More EBKA Divisional Meetings

25 Nov	Wednesday 7.30pm	Southend	at the WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED
27 Nov	Friday 8.00pm	Braintree	'Making Soap' with Dr Sara Robb. Constitutional Club, Braintree CM7 1TY

Note to Secretaries: Please inform the Editor of the details of your Divisional Monthly Meeting so that it can be included in these listings

Deadline: 4th of the preceding month

Denzie 100 & Maldon Beekeepers' Association
host

**Essex Beekeepers' Association
2015 ANNUAL
BEEKEEPERS' CONFERENCE**

Saturday 31 October 2015
Ormiston Academy, Burnham-on-Crouch CM0 8BD
9.45am - 4.30pm

GUEST SPEAKERS

Professor Francis Ratnieks, Sussex University
Professor of Apiculture (Evolution, Behaviour and Environment)

Professor Linda Field, Rothamsted Research
Head of Biological Chemistry and Crop Protection

Barbara Dalby, Pebadale Apiaries
Apitherapist

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**Cover: Starting young at the 128th County Honey Show  
2015 held at Barleylands 12/13th September  
Full report next month — Photograph by Jean Smye**

# MAQS & Wasps, and beginner mistakes

Julian Green - Romford Division

I have not been beekeeping for long and due to a case of mistaken EFB it was suggested that I attend the Bee Health Day arranged by EBKA where I came face to face with combs with AFB, EFB, deformed wing virus, sac brood, and chalk brood, and probably a few others, but I can't remember them (sorry Pat). I also met the Regional Bee Inspector who gave a talk on varroa treatment, and introduced a fairly new product called MAQS. Sounded interesting, but MAQS has a fairly short shelf life and comes in packs of 10 – too much for my small apiary.

On the beginners beekeeping course I had been shown how to do a varroa drop count test and so after the Bee Health Day I decided to do one on my bees, and I recorded a drop of 35 mites over 7 days. I looked up the drop rate on BeeBase website and it said I needed to treat.

The *BBKA News* arrives, and I spot an advert for MAQS in a smaller pack of two treatment packs. Ah, good I thought, I can get some of that and do my two hives, and if I muck it all up I still haven't ruined the honey. I bought a pack and applied it to my hives at the start of August as directed on the instructions:

- 1) Close off open mesh floor by inserting tray.
- 2) Take entrance block out. Needed for ventilation.
- 3) Two strips on the top bars of the brood combs.
- 4) Do not allow product to come in contact with metal components.
- 5) Before applying allow 3 days from the last inspection.
- 6) Leave alone for 7 days during treatment.

The time came to apply the MAQS to my bees. I opened the packet and got a whiff of it, it's pretty smelly stuff smelling of kettle de-scaler (same chemical). My queen excluder is metal so I added an eke to raise QX above the MAQS. The bees fizzed as I lay the strips on the top bars of the brood combs; ..... I closed up and went home.

My apiary is an out apiary, and after three days I just had to go and see how my bees were getting along. Shock horror when I arrived, a pile of dead bees on the ground outside hive No.2! “Blasted MAQS has killed my bees” I thought. But on more careful examination I found a number of wasps getting at my bees and killing them. Maybe the MAQS has weakened them – help what shall I do? – call my trusty bee buddy – Pat.

Pat explained that predation from wasps this time of year is common, and the best thing to do is to make the hive entrance really small. She suggested that I make up an entrance block with a piece of pipe used as the entrance, as wasps do not like crawling through a 'tunnel'. So I made up the entrance block with a short length of hose glued in and tried it out. But before I put an entrance block in I needed to maintain the correct amount of ventilation as the MAQS was still on. Putting an entrance block in would upset this. So to compensate for the entrance block I pulled the underfloor tray out by a distance of one and a half the width of the entrance block thus making a ventilation hole equivalent to the size of the entrance block (I reckoned that the mesh would restrict air flow).

With that problem solved, I fitted my home made tunnel entrance block, sat down in front of the hive and watched. Several confused bees laden with pollen buzzed around looking for a way in. They found the opening, but refused to enter. Then along came a wasp and went straight in! Blast! So much for the tunnel entrance block idea! Removed it, and replaced with the entrance block that came with the hive (better than nothing) and went home.

That night I got my copy of Ted Hooper's book out and read a small paragraph on wasps. His advice was to make the entrance as small as possible, a single bee way (Pat had also mentioned this to me, but the tunnel idea sounded more fun). The next morning I made up another two entrance blocks with really small entrance holes (7mm x 12mm), rushed over to the hives and fitted them. The bees liked this much better. In fact the small hole did not seem to hinder the bees at all, a small amount of confusion when one is coming out and another wants to go in, but the best part was when a wasp tries to get in, it finds the hole, enters, then comes out again – backwards. It seems that the bees are able to defend the small entrance quite well.

The time came to remove the MAQS. I open up the hives and there were a few wasps in there, but the bees are now in control and are in the process of evicting them. Pulling out the varroa tray I looked to see if the MAQS had worked. Amongst all the crumbs of bee litter there are dead varroa mites, in fact if you look closely, there were lots of them!

I inspect both colonies -

Colony No.1 is fine, can't find the queen (that's normal for me), there are eggs present and brood.

Colony No.2 however is now making emergency queen cells – lots of them. I had heard that swarming in late summer is unlikely, so there must be another reason. The MAQS instructions state that queen cells are likely post treatment and not to destroy them, so I leave the colony alone.

Next inspection the bees have torn down all the queen cells, but there were no eggs. The bees were quiet and easy to handle. Maybe the queen has stopped laying (the MAQS instructions also said this could happen) and I failed to find her, so I wait another week .....

On this inspection there is no brood at all. "Blast! my queen is dead", call Pat. Pat seems to think that supersedure has taken place and there is possibly a virgin queen and mother in the hive at the same time, however due to the dwindling numbers in the brood chamber we think it best to unite the colony with my healthy colony No.1.

So one week later I get prepared for uniting and feeding. Go though colony No,2 again to try and find the queen (who is now on Death Row), but she is nowhere to be seen, and by now there are fewer bees getting in the way on the brood combs, so I feel fairly confident that the queen is gone, and I proceed with uniting. With newspaper on, extra queen excluder to stop paper blowing away, and brood box from No.2 on top of colony No.1, I start brushing the bees off the honey combs from the now surplus super (oddly, there are lots of bees in the super). By the time I get to the 4th comb I find brood. "Blast! I think, another beginner mistake" the queen has taken up residence in the super. I had completely overlooked this, "Pat is going to kill me!". How did the queen get up there? So I abandon the idea of uniting the colonies, I had caused enough trouble for one day so I decided to put the colonies back as they were but without the Queen excluder, fed them, and ..... went home.

Two weeks on and the bees have settled down nicely. They had taken all of the 1 gallon of syrup I had fed them and they were foraging well with bees returning with pollen. I find the queen, who is nice and large and has a good clean appearance. Maybe she is a new queen, the one I had seen before looked slightly tatty, and of course she must have mated as there are eggs present, and two full combs of eggs and brood. I feed another gallon of syrup to both colonies and went home.

So all is well that ends well – almost! At my latest inspection I notice a large number of dead bees in the bottom of hive No.2, and on taking a closer look some of the bees are completely black, and shiny. I put one in my pocket so I can look at it when I get home.

Back at home, I put 'black shiny bees' into Google and the first hit is the FERA web page on Honey Bee Viruses. There is a video of bees with Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus, and my bees look exactly like the video. Good job I did not unite with colony No.1. I call Pat and after talking over some more symptoms (wings not folding back and getting stuck in a K shape) we conclude that my bees do have CBPV. Well at least they don't have varroa!

It is now September and I still have two colonies of bees despite having CBPV, wasp predation and my mishandling. They are taking the food I give them amazingly quickly and storing and have four combs of brood on the go. The varroa treatment is all done, and I have repeated the varroa drop count test with 2 per day for colony No.1 and 0.5 per day for colony No.2. I have also put the supers below the brood box in preparation for winter, and by doing so it seems that I have improved the CBPV problem as the paralyzed bees have further to climb to reach the brood box. I did not see any more black bees on my last inspection.

The bees in colony No.2 seemed to react badly to MAQS, probably due to being weakened by CBPV, and they were a captured swarm. I had been warned that swarms sometimes carry disease, maybe this was the case all along and I had not noticed it.

Colony No.1 was bought as a nuc and had coped well with the treatment. The metal queen excluders (positioned above the MAQS by the eke) are still nice and shiny, but the mesh and tray on my nice new shiny open mesh floor is now tarnished. So if you fancy using MAQS yourself, it is nice and quick and doesn't ruin your honey, but take precautions to keep the fumes away from metal hive parts.

## **The 84th National Honey Show 2015**

### **Beekeeping Lectures, Workshops and Beekeeping Equipment Trade Show**

**29<sup>th</sup>- 31st October at St George's College  
Weybridge, Surrey, KT15 2QS**

#### **Trade Show**

Buy beekeeping equipment from the trade show located in the college's sports hall from 12:00 on Thursday 29th October 2015.

Meet old friends or make new ones over when taking a lunch break.

#### **Classes**

Why not have a go? You have nothing to lose. There are even classes just for Essex members. You will need to get a move on as the closing date for the majority of classes is the 9th October or the 16th October if you pay a late entry fee,

#### **Lectures**

There are twelve in all spread over the three days. Covering: Marketing, Biology, Pests, Neonicotinoids, Bumbles Bees, Queens and Genetics. All given by specialist in their respective fields.

For a schedule contact Jim McNeill **07743 310 143** or your Divisional Secretary

# BEEKEEPING HISTORY

Celia Davis - via eBees

Anyone who has ever read any of the beekeeping discussion boards or forums (or fora - just in case my use of this pluralisation causes controversy!), will know that beekeepers all have their own opinions and that some of them are not afraid to be quite forceful, (or downright rude) in denouncing those who cite alternative methods. As the following article shows, beekeepers have always disagreed but perhaps using language which was slightly more polite;

Extract from the *London Journal of Horticulture*, January 1881

## The Honey Harvest

The accounts which are coming in from various parts of the country giving reports of the honey harvest are various. In some counties hardly any honey seems to have been taken. The midland counties seem to have suffered worst in every way, owing to the deluges of rain following upon the constantly recurring thunderstorms of June and July. Of course, this weather must have been as disastrous to bees as to the farmer in respect of his corn and hay crops. The result of the year's beekeeping surely teaches the lesson *nil desperandum*, and should encourage all to take the utmost pains and to spare no expense in feeding up their stocks of bees in good time during the warm days and nights of mid autumn. Instead of all dying during the winter, as they certainly would have done, and left me in beggary as an apiarist, my colonies of bees now number 12 — all in good health and full of promise, worth at least 30s apiece, in all £18 and the profit of the year £13 additional, so that I am fully £31 better off than I should have been if I had despaired or neglected my bees as did so many of my hapless neighbours.

## ***Straw Hive Controversy.***

There is some discussion on the advantages of bar-frame hives, as compared with the old straw skep. Mr. Pettigrew is the champion of the latter and has thrown out a challenge to the bar-frame hive men to show results. Several of the latter are after him with facts and figures.

Mr. Wm. Mann, who has been converted from the straw skep method, remarks as follows: "I do not keep a record of every hive, but I did of one this year. It gave me 122 lbs. of comb honey in 1lb sections, 30 lbs extracted

honey and has over 40 lbs left to winter on; yet I consider this has been a poor honey season. I sold the honey taken from this hive for £9 10s, and have my colony left to me well supplied.”

Mr. James Anderson, of Scotland, says: “Your correspondent has a good right to praise his own system, but with your permission I will give one instance that came under my own observation of the benefits of the Stewarton system in Arran this most productive season.

From one colony James Crawford, a mason, obtained the following results: Old colony, 140lbs.; first swarm, 187lbs.; second swarm, 154lbs.; total 481lbs. It seems very strange to us that in this age of enlightenment, anyone (and especially Mr. Pettigrew), could be found to champion that old-fogy system of past ages. It is true, with good management and careful study, good results can be obtained from almost any hive in existence and in this Mr P. seems to rely for his supposed superiority on the straw hive. He is a careful and enthusiastic beekeeper, and would have good results with any hive.”

[Editor’s Footnote: *Stewarton Hive* - an octagonal hive (often with windows) invented by Robert Kerr and very popular in the late 19th century]

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What is the Water Content of Honey?

For 'general' honey, (ie excluding Heather honey or honey intended for industrial use such as 'Bakers honey', which are allowed higher moisture contents of 23% and 25% respectively), the statutory requirement is that the moisture content should not exceed 20%.

The statutory document (updated June 2015) that governs honey sales is the *The Honey Regulations* - Schedule 1 refers to moisture content.

The lower the moisture content the less chance of fermentation and below 20% this is unlikely. Bees reduce the moisture content of their stores to a level where they won't ferment before capping them. This is why we tend to only extract capped honey, because then we can be pretty sure the moisture content is below 20% if it is capped.

What about uncapped honey?

Many beekeepers conduct a simple test of shaking unsealed frames over the super. If liquid spills from the cells it is assumed that the honey cannot be taken. This is only a rough guide, and the best method is to use a refractometer to determine the moisture content. Prices vary significantly and range up to £300. They can be obtained from the usual beekeeping equipment suppliers for around £8. Lower cost alternatives are also available, but you need to check they are suitable for measuring the moisture content of honey. Preferably they should come with a small glass register block and calibration oil.

Care should be taken with 'set honey' because once the honey has crystallised the fluid between the crystals is diluted by removal of solids, and rises by some 4-6% in water content. This brings the honey into the range where fermentation can occur. It is therefore a good idea to ensure that set honey is well below the 20% mark, but by how much will depend on the variety of honey. Different set honeys have different crystal sizes and this will determine the moisture content that is safe.

Adapted from Somerton BKA via *eBees*

Bumble Bees and Alzheimers?

From Ipswich & East Suffolk BKA via eBees

Bees may be developing a kind of animal Alzheimer's disease because of exposure to aluminium in the environment. A new study has found that the young of bees already show high amounts of aluminium contamination which may be causing mental dysfunction and playing a role in the decline of bumblebee populations. Because of industrial discharge, aluminium is the Earth's most widespread pollutant and is already known to be responsible for the death of fish in acid lakes, forest decline and low crop productivity.

Previous studies had suggested that when bees forage for nectar they do not actively avoid nectar which contains aluminium. Researchers at Keele and Sussex Universities have been investigating whether bees could be accumulating harmful amounts of aluminium and have collected bumble bee pupae to study levels of the metal. The pupae were found to be heavily contaminated with aluminium, with individual contents ranging from between and 13 and nearly 200 ppm. Smaller pupae had significantly higher contents of aluminium. In humans, a value of 3 ppm would be considered as potentially toxic to human brain tissue. The researchers believe the quantities are significant enough to cause cognitive decline in bees in the same way as Alzheimer's Disease effects the human brain.

Professor Chris Exley of Keele, a leading authority on human exposure to aluminium, said: "It is widely accepted that a number of interacting factors are likely to be involved in the decline of bees and other pollinators, for example: lack of flowers, attacks by parasites, and exposure to pesticide cocktails. Aluminium is a known neurotoxin affecting behaviour in animal models of aluminium intoxication.

Bees, of course, rely heavily on cognitive function in their everyday behaviour and these data raise the intriguing spectre that aluminium-induced cognitive dysfunction may play a role in their population decline – are we looking at bees with Alzheimer's disease?"

More information at:

<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0127665>

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**HONEYBEES, CELL PHONES AND
THE FUTURE OF BEEKEEPING**

Marc Hoffman, Essex County BKA (USA) - via eBees

Are cell phones killing our bees?

I never let my bees use cell phones. They are social insects and I have found once I let them have cell phones it is impossible to control their use. The charges from time overruns can bankrupt even the most efficient apiary operation. Once they learn to use them they become dependent: they stop returning to the hive to dance and just phone in the location of their forage discoveries. Furthermore, the increased peer-to-peer communication plays havoc with traditional bee values. "To heck with pheromones!" they say. "Chemical communication is passé compared with digital!"

As in many societies, the young are the early adopters, spending their time text messaging instead of doing their jobs. In the end we observe a breakdown in hierarchy and, fatally, anti-royalist sentiment. This, then, is the cause of CCD - foolish notions of independence among the immature, loss of authority of the elders, breakdown of group cohesion, and collapse of the aristocracy.



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Wax Moth Larvae: A fast food feast for Robins

Paul F Abbott BDS - Southend on Sea Division
and Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Branch of KBA

There are currently two known species of wax moth that occupy and damage honey bee colonies. Each one has four stages of development: egg; larva; pupa; and adult. The greater wax moth, *Galleria mellonella* is the more destructive and common pest whilst the lesser wax moth, *Achroia grisella* is both less prevalent and less destructive.

Wax moth infestations are caused by unhygienic management practices. Leaving scraps of burr comb lying around the apiary and empty and exposed supers or brood boxes with drawn comb in will attract moths. When the equipment is left over a long period of time, this gives ample opportunity for infestations of wax moth to get out of control. Drawn comb, and wood-work can become damaged and eaten away, making it unworkable for colonies of honey bees.



The use of open mesh floors fitted with debris monitoring trays provides an ideal breeding ground for greater wax moth larvae. The detritus on the *varroa* collecting tray is inaccessible to hygienic worker house bees, and provides an excellent culture medium for the destructive grubs to thrive in isolation from the combs above.

The photographs taken at my home apiary demonstrate the nature of the problem. One solution is to strictly leave the *varroa* mite collecting trays in-situ only during periods of active monitoring, so that insufficient nourishing debris accumulates for the wax moth larvae to thrive. The rest of the time, the open mesh floors will permit all detritus to fall harmlessly away from the hive.

As the photographs show, a plucky robin soon devoured the luscious larvae from the collecting tray: Veritably a feast of fast food for the robin, the ever-present friendly companion of the gardener.



Article & photographs by Paul F Abbott.

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Regards, Honey Helperrs

The photograph accompanying the article 'Asian Hornet — on the way here?' in last month's issue shows the Giant Asian Hornet and was inserted in error. Apologies for any confusion this may have caused. Photographs of the Asian Hornet can be found on the BeeBase website.

Editor.

Who's who and how to contact them

President of EBKA **Pat Allen** Hon CLM

Trustees:

Chairman: *Ian Nichols* 17 Dyers Hall Road, Leytonstone, London E11 4AD
email ian@iannichols.demon.co.uk tel. 0208 558 4733 / 07980 299 638

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

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

Divisional Trustees:

Braintree	<i>Stuart Mitson</i>	stuart.mitson@btinternet.com
Chelmsford	<i>Margaret Clay</i>	margaretclay@btinternet.com
Colchester	<i>Tom Geddes</i>	tom.geddes@btinternet.com
Dengie Hundred & Maldon	<i>Glenn Mayes</i>	trustee@dmbka.org.uk
Epping Forest	<i>Mark Chambers</i>	mark.chambers@condecosoftware.com
Harlow	<i>Martin Cavalier</i>	cavalier@btinternet.com
Romford	<i>Pádraig Floyd</i>	psafloyd@yahoo.com
Saffron Walden	<i>Richard Ridler</i>	richard.ridler@uwclub.net
Southend	<i>Marguerita Wilson</i>	philandritawilson@sky.com

Divisional Contacts:

Braintree: Colleen Chamberlain 01279 876 333 **Chelmsford:** Brian Spencer 01245 490 843
Colchester: Morag Chase 01206 522 576 **D.H. & Maldon:** Carlie Mayes 01245 381 577
Harlow: Nick Holmes 07730 735 752 **Epping Forest:** Robin Harman 07971 237 312
Romford: Pat Allen 01708 220 897 **Saffron Walden:** Jane Ridler 01799 218 023
Southend: Chad Colby-Blake 01702 302 209

EBKA Education Contact: Jane Ridler Old Barn House, 36 Walden Road, Sewards End,
Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 2LF 01799 218 023 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

The Essex Beekeeper Magazine:

Editor: Jean Smye, email: jsmye@sky.com tel. 07731 856 361
Advertising: Jean Smye email: jsmye@sky.com
Mailing Secretary: Mary Heyes email: ml.heyas@virgin.net

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Web site: Nick Holmes email: webmaster@essexbeekeepers.com

Regional Bee Inspectors for EBKA Region:

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

All other Divisions:

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