

Chairman's Report 2017
Essex Beekeepers' Association (EBKA)

Beekeepers spend a lot of time with a 'weather eye' out. Last year we had the same uncertain mix of weather patterns. However with such a gloomy start, followed by a cold, wet May, wind and rain caused tricky conditions for Queens to mate. Additionally it's always a challenge to good beekeeping practice as we try to counter pests and diseases for strong healthy stocks. Suddenly, after all the cold and rain, warm humid conditions followed allowing summer to stretch into late October. Thankfully the bees did well resulting in good honey crops.

Our membership remains strong with plenty joining and hopefully taking hold of the reins in the years to come. Beekeepers new to this hobby join us with a lot of other skills. My hope is that they will freely volunteer their knowledge to help the Association move forward and develop. Like any community we have lost friends and members. I would like to mention Eric Fenner, our past President whose wife, Jean passed away in January.

Our finances remain in good health, resulting from prudent management of our resources as well as from increased membership. Collectively, this has been put to good use for all, with training courses and resources for Divisions being made available. It has also enabled us to absorb an increased capitation fee from the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA). We continue to look for good ideas where we can utilise our resources to benefit the EBKA Membership as a whole.

We continue to invite our BBKA Link Trustee, Howard Pool, to Central Executive Committee (CEC) meetings for dialogue and feedback on what the BBKA are doing for their Membership. He will visit us again this summer.

Since last summer it was confirmed that the Asian Hornet (*Vespa Velutina*) had arrived in England. Gloucestershire is only 150 miles from Chelmsford and with transport just over 2 hours! We all have a problem that is imminent. Essex has many points of entry from which the Hornet can arrive. I urge you all to make or purchase traps, learn the correct identification of this non-native species and monitor regularly around your hives. We must remember that the Asian Hornet will prey upon our indigenous insects. As Beekeepers we have a duty to care for and respect of the environment, so please be mindful. The Small Hive Beetle (*Aethina Tumida*) is also a major threat, which again can enter the UK through multiple ways via Essex.

Our education programme continues to make progress with members taking exams. We ran countywide Module workshops as well a Basic Assessment exam workshop. I would like to thank our Master Beekeeper Jane Ridler and Richard Ridler for continuity and perseverance in very successfully teaching "old dogs new tricks". Well done to all. We would like to see more members take advantage of all EBKA funded opportunities. The National Bee Unit (NBU) Bee Health Day in June last year was a great success. Keith Morgan, the Eastern Regions, Regional Bee Inspector would like to see new faces at this year's event. It is a good way to learn about bee diseases and to see the result of disease with real examples.

Our Divisions are collectively represented by Divisional Voting Members (DVMs) at the CEC. Our DVMs have a very important role undertaking the stewardship of the Association as laid down by the Charity Commission. It is important that the membership make full use of DVMs. In order to help them in their role, members may wish to question them and give feedback with ideas as to what additionally the CEC could do for its members.

The work of the CEC in recent times has introduced the annual "Ted Hooper Memorial Lecture", continued to develop a county wide education programme, kept the membership fees stable and provided for all Divisions discounted annual bulk buys of microscopes in 2015 and pop-up shelters in 2016. Looking forward 2017, the CEC is to set up working parties to look at governance issues and plans to develop the EBKA. We also have also continued to challenge the BBKA in order to ensure that they operate in a more cost effective manner and questioned them on their activities as a critical friend.

The Ted Hooper Memorial Lecture took place last spring with great enthusiasm from the large audience who listened to Margaret Thomas and Clive de Bryun talk about Ted Hooper and his teaching methods. Members of the Ted Hooper family joined us at this inaugural event. We will be holding the second lecture of the series on Sunday 2nd April 2017.

The Essex Honey Show again saw high quality entries. With mixed weather during the weekend, the EBKA tent and demonstrations were well attended with great interest from the good folk of Essex. We must thank all those who graciously volunteered their time and energy - especially Pat Allen and Paul Abbott for their stocks of bees. Sadly the Barleylands show will not be happening in 2017. The Show Committee will be holding the event at the Orsett Show at the beginning of September for one year at least. We must remain vigilant and concerned about the role that Essex Beekeepers should perform in

communicating with the non-beekeeping public and question whether we are fulfilling our mandate to promote our craft?

Entries for the National Honey Show in October at Weybridge showed a large increase with richly deserved success for those who took part. It was nice to see members from the EBKA participating in lectures and taking prizes; mentioning especially Jan French and Paul Abbott.

All Divisions have shown interesting and varied activities over the year, including training, lectures, demonstrations and workshops. All of these activities take a great deal of effort and good humour to organise and implement by willing volunteers. It is this attitude that binds our Association together. If you have not thought about volunteering, now is the time to consider getting involved and get to know fellow members in a meaningful way.

Romford Division ran the EBKA 2016 Annual Conference. The conference was a breath of fresh air, with excellent speakers, great food together with a quality raffle. As usual there was the presentation of cups from the Honey Show and BBKA examination certificates. I would like to congratulate members of Romford Division for all their hard work – it really paid off. Colchester Division has now picked up the baton for 2017. Please do your utmost to support them. Be involved!

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have given their time to help support the EBKA during the past year. I also offer my sincere thanks to members of the CEC for their continued support and, in particular, to the County Treasurer, Bob Manning whose term of office comes to an end at this year's AGM. We look forward to welcoming the new appointee in due course. I am also pleased to be welcoming to the CEC, Peter Aldridge, Vanessa Wilkinson and Chad Colby-Blake, the new DVMs for Chelmsford, Saffron Walden and Southend respectively.

Ian Nichols
6 February 2017