

# THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



## Meeting a hornet

At Epping Forest's June meeting at Peter Dalby's Potter's Bar apiary this native hornet nest was found inside an empty hive, attached to the underside of the crownboard.

This beautiful and harmless insect must not be confused with *Vespa velutina*, the Asian hornet, which has different colouring, and is an invasive and serious threat to honeybees

Photograph by Eric Beaumont

Monthly Magazine of the  
Essex Beekeepers' Association  
[www.ebka.org](http://www.ebka.org)

*Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex*  
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# Divisional Meetings around the County

## Meetings in September:

1 Sept	Saturday 10am - 5pm	COUNTY EVENT	EBKA Annual Honey Show at Orsett Showground, Orsett, Thurrock
6 Sept	Thursday 8.00pm	Harlow	Legal Varroicides with David McCorkindale - Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA
6 Sept	Thursday 8.00pm	Romford	The Good, The Bad and the Downright Useless. Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park RM2 5EL
7 Sept	Friday 7.00pm	Colchester	Social Evening at The Wooden Fender, Ardleigh.
9 Sept	Sunday 1.30pm	Chelmsford	Taster Day - Divisional Apiary at Hylands Park, Chelmsford.
15 Sept	Saturday 2.30pm	Epping Forest	tba
15 Sept	Saturday 2.30pm	Saffron Walden	Taster Session for prospective beginners — Wimbish CB10 2UY
17 Sept	Monday 7.30pm	Chelmsford	Honey Show. The County Hotel, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford.
19 Sept	Wed 7.30pm	Dengie 100 & Maldon	Getting ready for winter - Eric Beaumont. The Oakhouse, High Street, Maldon
26 Sept	Wed 7.30pm	Saffron Walden	Labelling, Marketing & Selling Honey - Richard Ridler, Swards End Hall CB10 2LG
26 Sept	Wed 7.30pm	Southend	Apitherapy - the use of bees and bee products for health and healing. Barbara Dalby. W I Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED
30 Sept	Sunday 3.00pm	Braintree	Apiary meeting at Felsted CM6 3ET tel: Geoff Brewer 07802 442 167

## Meetings in October:

4 Oct	Thursday 8.00pm	Harlow	<b>Asian Hornet</b> with Andrew Durham. Kings Church, Red Willow, Harlow CM19 5PA
4 Oct	Thursday 8.00pm	Romford	<b>Rose Hives</b> - Matt Broughton. Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park RM2 5EL
11 Oct	Thursday 7.30pm	Saffron Walden	<b>The Flow Hive</b> - Rita Wilson. Great Dunmow Day Centre CM6 1EQ
14 Oct	Sunday 10am - 4.00pm	Braintree	<b>Apple Day</b> , Cressing Temple Barns, Witham Road, Cressing CM77 8PD
15 Oct	Monday 7.30pm	Chelmsford	<b>The Work of the NBU</b> - The Link, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB
18 Oct	Thursday 7.30pm	Epping Forest	<b>Microscopy Evening</b> - have your bees checked for nosema & view pollen. Chingford Horticultural Hall.
24 Oct	Wed 7.30pm	Southend	<b>Veolia</b> - Consideration of the environment at the large waste management site at Pitsea. W I Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED
25 Oct	Thursday 7.30pm	Colchester	Tba

Would each Division kindly ensure that their meeting details - topic, venue and time are notified to the editor at [dsmye@lineone.net](mailto:dsmye@lineone.net) by the 4th of the month so that a comprehensive list is available to all members.

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# **EBKA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2018**

## **'Bees and Well Being'**

The theme of our conference is the ways in which bees enrich our lives and make a difference to our world. Bees promote biodiversity by providing essential pollination for a wide range of crops. Honey is becoming a powerful new weapon in the battle against hospital-acquired infections. Being around bees can raise a person's self-esteem and the educational benefits are now being recognised.

Let's learn more from our three speakers.

### **Speakers:**

#### **Bunny Campione, Daws Hall Trust**

*Many of you will know Bunny from the Antiques Roadshow, but you may not be aware that she is a fellow beekeeper.*

#### **Dr Rowena Jenkins, Swansea University Medical School, Department of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases.**

*Rowena is a lecturer in microbiology.*

#### **Chris Newenham, Managing Director, Wilkin & Sons Ltd**

*Chris will be speaking about the importance of bees as pollinators and the collaboration between beekeepers and agriculturists.*

### **Date and venue:**

**Saturday 3rd November 2018**

10 - 4pm

Chelmsford City Racecourse

Great Leighs, CM3 1QP

**Tickets £25**

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**to advise transfer has been made and you will receive an e-ticket by return.**

*Cash:*

**Cash to Braintree Committee members when visiting Divisional meetings**

**(a ticket will be given immediately)**

## WINTER FEEDING PRACTICALITIES.

Mike Rowbottom - Harrogate & Ripon BKA - *via ebees*

For winter feeding the stronger the syrup (that is the more sugar per volume of syrup) the better it is. The maximum possible amount of sugar will then be provided for any given feeder, and the less excess water the bees will have to evaporate. The sugar used is white, granulated sugar; there is no discernible difference between cane and beet sugars.

The strongest practical strength is made up with the ratio of 2 Kg of sugar to 1 litre (1 Kg) of water. This will start to crystallize at 15° C (59° F) and so the sugar should remain in solution at ambient temperatures in September and also sitting in a feeder on top of a colony while the bees take it down into their combs for storage.

The widely quoted 2 lbs of sugar to a pint of water is equivalent to 1.6Kg of sugar to 1 litre (1 Kg) of water, so is a significantly weaker strength. Some authors seem to believe that 2 lbs of sugar per pint of water is the same as 2KG sugar to 1 litre of water, but it is not; it is a weaker mixture.

A straightforward way to make syrup to this recommended strength is to put 4 Kg sugar into a 10 litre bucket (the type normally used to store honey) and to pour on 2 litres of boiling water. If the sugar is in 1 or 2 Kg bags then weighing out the required amount is very easy. For larger amounts of sugar 25 Kg sacks (available from cash & carry outlets for example) usually work out cheaper per Kg of sugar, but are a bit harder to manage without spilling sugar. A large polythene kitchen jug can be used to measure out the boiling water. The average kitchen kettle heats less than 2 litres at a time, so either a second kettle or an alternative source of boiling water, such as a pan on a stove, is helpful.

The water should be poured onto the sugar in one go, and the sugar should be immediately stirred vigorously into the boiling water so as to get all the sugar exposed to the hottest water as soon as possible. A large, sturdy slotted kitchen spoon is an ideal stirrer, and vigorous stirring immediately after the water is poured on should result in a fully dissolved mixture within 5 or 6 minutes.

After the first 30 seconds or so, break off from stirring to set up the next batch of boiling water, if required, so that it will be ready to use more or less when the previous batch of syrup is fully mixed.

4 kg of sugar mixed with 2 litres of water as described above will produce almost exactly 4.5 litres of syrup, which will effectively fill a “gallon” contact feeder, or will fill a small plastic contact feeder twice.



1 gallon Contact feeder



Ashforth Feeder  
(wood)



English Feeder  
(plastic)

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## Where has all the Rape honey gone?

2016 and the rape field was about a mile away. The weather wasn't very nice so I wasn't expecting a huge yield. I got none. They must have used it all up to provide the energy to get home. Trying to do some honey exchange proved to be very difficult as most other beekeepers in the region had suffered similarly.

That's something we just have to put up with and optimistically look forward to the next season I suppose

2017 saw the rape just over the garden hedge. Brilliant, I thought, this will compensate - not a drop.

2018 and the same farmer had his oil-seed -rape about 300 yards away. I did a field-walk and although there were honeybees on the flowers there were not as many as I would have expected. Those few were simply foraging pollen. So, they'd go to the field for pollen but why no nectar?

I went to see the farmer to find out what the problem was and to find out if he'd recently changed his variety of seed. "No. I haven't changed for the last three years. Campus". A quick internet search revealed that Newcastle and Exeter Universities have been doing research into oil-seed-rape nectar and found that new hybrid varieties, Campus in particular, have nectar little better than water. Why bother to collect it?

It seems ironic that this same farmer picks up a subsidy for sowing pollinator strips round his headlands but can then fill in the remaining 30 acres with a pollinator-unfriendly crop.

In a similar vein, another Uttlesford beekeeper was recounting chatting in the pub with a local farmer who said he missed the beautiful aroma he used to experience when he walked his bean fields. This beekeeper had moved hives into his huge field of beans expecting from past experience to get over 1,000 lbs of honey. He got 150 lbs. Yes, hybrid seed again; no smell, no nectar.

Deryck Johnson - Saffron Walden Division



## Season's End

David Buckley – Cheshire BKA – *via ebees*

Bee keeping has a relatively short active season and many beekeepers are now more concerned about the welfare of their bees throughout the year than just honey production. Health is paramount. Check for varroa and use treatments if necessary after honey removal. Brood inspections have been part of seasonal management and health should be a priority when inspecting the bees.

Coupled with this is the question about comb health. Clean combs attract healthy brood patterns and queens seem to favour fresh comb. This is natural I suppose, as swarms occupying old hives or cavities that have had bees in them before will invariably draw new comb in preference to reusing the previous occupants' old comb.

**'Health is paramount'**

If a Bailey comb change has not been utilised simply put on a box of brood foundation above the original brood chamber after honey removal. It is essential that the bees are fed or they will chew holes in the foundation and this damage is rarely repaired. This will keep the bees active with something to do but always be aware that robbing could be an issue so restrict entrances and only use strong colonies to draw comb. These combs are usually drawn to the bottom bar with no pop holes for the queen to hide in or for the bees to camouflage queen cells.

During September the colony can be returned to the original configuration, i.e. if it started as a single brood box the queen can be restricted with a queen excluder to the new brood box, where she will probably be found and the old comb left to emerge before removal. If there is food in the old comb the bees can be encouraged to recycle it by putting it above the crown board without the porter escape in place.

**'Only give stores to the original hive to avoid disease spreading to other colonies'**

The bees will usually take this down for winter stores but only give it to the original hive to avoid disease spreading to other colonies. The comb can be recycled or burnt when clear of stores. If there are any good frames these can be treated with acetic acid and ventilated prior to reuse.

Now is the time to consolidate colonies. Frequently we end the season with more colonies than we need so what are the options?

Selling surplus is one but it is not the ideal time of the year for buying bees with winter ahead. However, uniting may be the option chosen. It is quite a straight forward procedure. The newspaper method is the simplest and most reliable. Having assessed the bees throughout the season for the qualities desirable to you choose your best, de-queening the unwanted colony. Try to have criteria for selecting the queen. It may be docility, honey gathering, reduced swarming etc. Don't just select the youngest queens as an older queen may have qualities for breeding in the future whereas retained swarms may propagate swarminess. If the hives are close together then in the evening put a sheet of paper over the brood box of the retained queen and make some pin holes in it. Then put the queen-less bees on top of the newspaper, leave the hive for at least a week before checking if it has been successful.

Finally, keep entrances reduced as wasps and robbing bees are potential hazards.

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## **EBKA General Secretary**

**We are still looking for a replacement General Secretary to take over from Michael Webb. His term of office ended at the last AGM in May and he is at present 'caretaking' the role, but this can't go on for long.**

**A willing volunteer is needed as soon as possible. If you are interested please contact Michael**

**[gsecebka@virginmedia.com](mailto:gsecebka@virginmedia.com)**

**07712 490 511 / 01708 250 606**

**to discuss the responsibilities and duties of the role.**

# How Do Bees Know which Way is Up ?

In the darkness of the hive the bee has to be able to know which way is up and which is down. This is crucial to the interpretation of the waggle dance. The dancing bee tries to recruit her fellow workers to a good forage source that she has found. She does this by signalling its direction using the angle between the Sun and the forage site in the dance.

This task is complicated by the fact that the dance is usually performed on a vertical comb and in the dark! A vertical line to the top of the comb stands for the direction of the Sun and the angle between the vertical and the direction of the waggle section of the dance shows the other workers which way to fly to reach the forage. The bees have to convert an angle in a horizontal plane outside in the open into the same angle on a vertical surface inside the hive.

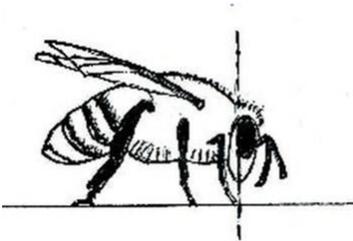
Honey bee evolution has solved the problem of detecting which way is up in several ways. Let's concentrate on just one aspect.

Bees are covered in tiny hairs and spines set into a socket in the cuticle (the outer skeleton). Some of these have sensory cells at their base, which are stimulated when the hair is bent. They then send nerve impulses to the central nervous system. In many of these cells, the hair is offset in its socket, so that it can only bend in one direction. This allows the insect to gather information about the direction of movement of the hair.

Combining the signals from groups of hairs can provide the bee with information about its position and motion.

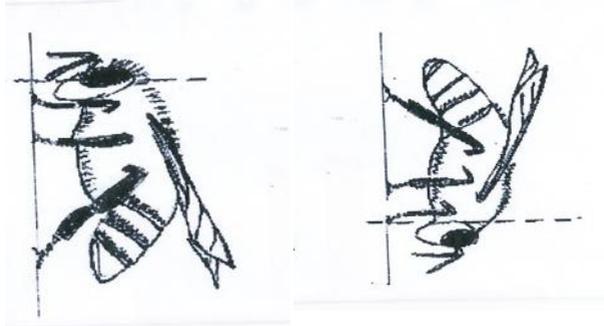
The head of the bee is attached to the thorax by being suspended on two pegs made of cuticle. There are hair plates on the pegs consisting of groups of hairs with their sensory cells.

When the bee is standing on a horizontal surface the head is in contact evenly with the hairs on the hair plates. Like a plumb bob the head hangs vertically down.



**Bee on a horizontal surface**

If the bee then climbs onto a vertical surface, such as the comb, the weight of the head tips it downwards and presses harder on the hair plates on the bee's front side. If the bee turns right to walk diagonally up the comb there will be more pressure on the hairs on the right side than on the left.



### **Bee on a vertical surface**

If the bee then turns and starts walking downwards on the comb the head tilts in the opposite direction and presses on the opposite set of hair plates. In this way the bee can sense whether it is walking up, down or diagonally on the vertical comb.

Research has shown that the neck hair plates are the most important part of its gravity sensing system. Other hair plates at the joint between the thorax and abdomen and in the legs also play a part but are less important.

*Courtesy of John Eaden, Manchester BKA - via ebees*

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## Asian hornet – the lost opportunity

*At the 2018 International Meeting of Young Beekeepers in Nerac, France, adults in the group had the honour of meeting the man who first discovered the Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) in France and learning of an early missed opportunity.*

Dr Jean Haxaire, associate professor at the University of Agen, discovered an Asian hornet quite by chance in some fruit near Bordeaux in 2004. Immediately realising that this could be significant, he identified the strange insect as *Vespa velutina* and alarm bells in his head started ringing. He knew of the reputation of hornets in the Far East and therefore realised that this could be a serious threat to France.

Dr Haxaire rapidly published an article in a scientific journal, but was very disappointed that reaction was muted and no-one seemed to want to take action. Sadly, his worst fears were to be realised as the hornet became established and within a couple of years its spread throughout France and beyond became unstoppable. If action

had been earlier, there might have been some hope in preventing its spread, but now he says we must regard it as a native of France – even though it is an uninvited guest.

Dr Haxaire is now certain that, as first thought, the intruder came in a consignment of bonsai plants. Genetics and trading patterns indicate with some certainty that it came into Bordeaux via Shanghai.

The good news might be that at least *velutina* wasn't one of its Far Eastern relatives that can be many times its size! The bad news is that it is an amazingly adaptable insect.

With graphs showing how the demographics of a nest changes through the season, Haxaire emphasised the importance of destroying nests early in the autumn before foundress queens emerge. When they do appear, the problems of further spread become enormous. In France, the trigger date for the first emergence of the queens is usually around the end of September.



The extent to which *velutina* predates on bees is strongly correlated with the environment – in cities, the predation is greatest because there are relatively fewer dietary alternatives to honey bees.

Attending the IMYB event a few days later, Dr Benjamin Poirot (a honey bee specialist from Apinov in La Rochelle) said that the situation in France this year at the beginning of July is very serious. He says he has never seen so many Asian hornets so early in the year. And he should know – for the past several years he has frequently been called out to destroy nests when they are found.

*Reprinted with permission from Vita Bee Health Newsletter—August 2018.*

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## A Difficult Colony . . . . .

### Pat Holden - Southend Division

Sharon and Willem, who were on Southend & District Division's beginners' course this year, liked the idea of a traditional look in their garden so bought some second-hand WBC equipment. Willem stripped it all and treated the wood so it looked like a work of art – but still needed some bees.

I offered to deliver a swarm and tipped them into the beautiful hive – the ones outside marched up the board like good little girls - wonderful! A few minutes later we noticed that they were exiting faster than they were going in and, not only that, but they were taking flight and landing on me. The poor bees had obviously lost their queen and were looking to me as a substitute mother figure or perhaps it was just the familiar smell of bees on my suit!

Half an hour down the line, I was still covered, in spite of Sharon's brave attempts, unsuited, to brush the bees off. Nor could I escape, as my car keys, in my foolishly un-zipped pocket, were being 'minded' by 40-odd bees, very reluctant to abandon their new, cosy, dark home. Luckily we both had a sense of humour, if not much idea what to do. I suddenly remembered a swarm-collecting trick for bee-dispersal and Sharon gave me a good dousing in a mild scented kitchen spray, which luckily did the trick.

Pockets gingerly emptied, I was able to drive, unscathed, to where I was due to collect bees from a compost bin.

I felt a slight movement on my leg en-route, but put it down to imagination. Heading for the compost bin, I suddenly felt a sting on my leg, then 2 more. I dashed to a discreet part of the garden, whipped off my trousers, and found about 30 bees between the net-like lining of my joggers and the outside fabric.

I couldn't believe how lucky I'd been not to get stung during the car journey; it just goes to show how reluctant bees are to sting, as a rule, and how much care needs to be taken to stop them from sneaking an unintended trip in your clothes (there were no holes in my pockets, so the intrusion remains a mystery!)



As for the queen-less bees, Sharon and Willem collected a frame of eggs, waited patiently for queen cells, dreaded the awful decision of which ones to cull, but were spared that, as the bees decided for themselves.

I received from them this super photo of eggs, which had me almost as excited as Sharon and Willem themselves.

And so two more people will be inescapably 'hooked' on these fascinating, clever, but often confusing, little insects.

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**Items appearing in the Essex Beekeeper are not necessarily the views either of the editor or EBKA.**

# WHO'S WHO & HOW TO CONTACT THEM

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