

The Essex Beekeeper

Issue 655

July 2019

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Monthly Magazine of the
Essex Beekeepers' Association
www.ebka.org

Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex
Registered Charity number 1031419



132nd EBKA Annual Honey Show at the Orsett Showground on Saturday 7 September 2019

By Michael Webb, Chair of the Show Committee

In last month's edition of The Essex Beekeeper (and on the EBKA Website) I reported that this year's Show Schedule and Entry Form will be included in the July edition of the magazine.

Please take time to go through the Schedule and review the various classes for entries for this year's Show. You should note that the closing date for **registration of entries is Saturday 31 August** and no entries can be accepted without prior registration.

You can either post or email your entry form to the EBKA Show Secretary whose details can be found on the entry form. Please be aware that you will also need to supply a stamped addressed envelope for the return of exhibit stickers/labels to affix to exhibits **before** delivery to the Show marquee.

Setting up in our marquee, which is larger this year, will take place on **Friday 6 September** and all exhibits must be delivered by no later than **12 noon on that day**. If you are unable to get your entries to the Show, please arrange within your Division for the transportation (and collection) to and from the Show. Please also note that all entry fees must be paid in cash on the day of the Show. Again if you cannot attend, please arrange beforehand with your divisional representative to include the fees with your entry.

Finally, our volunteers on the day of the Annual Show certainly make an enormous contribution to its success. We welcome volunteers from all our divisions, especially from those of our membership who have not been before. If you would wish to volunteer to help at this year's Show, please give your details to your Division's secretary by **no later than the end of July**. A member of the Show Committee will then contact you with information about your role on the day. 🐝

Divisional meetings around the County

Meetings in July 2019

- 04** 20:00–22:00 - Preparation for Honey Shows, Harlow
Address: tbc
- 04** 20:00–22:00 - How to impress the Show Judges, Romford Division
Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park, Romford RM2 5EL
- 10** 19:00–21:00 - Beginners Theory - Preparing for Winter, Saffron Walden Division
Thaxted Day Centre, Vicarage Lane, CM6 2RL
- 13** Tending Show, Colchester Division
Bromley Rd, Lawford, Manningtree, CO11 2NE
- 15** 19:30–21:00 - Monthly Meeting - easy honey extraction, Chelmsford Division
The Link Trinity Methodist Church, Chelmsford
- 21** 14:30 - Show Preparation, Saffron Walden Division
Thaxted Day Centre, Vicarage Lane, Thaxted CM6 2RL

- 24** 19:30–21:30 - Topic to be announced soon, Southend Division
WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED

Meetings in August 2019

- 1** 20:00–22:00 - Harlow Show, Harlow Division
Address: tbc
- 1** 20:00–22:00 - The Rose Method, Matt Broughton, Romford Division
Address: tbc
- 19** 19:30–21:00 - Autumn Preparation, Chelmsford Division
The Link, Trinity Methodist Church, Chelmsford
- 25 & 26** The Countess of Warwick's Show, including Divisional Honey Competition
Little Easton, Dunmow, CM6 2JJ



Sunday, 20 October 2019

Felsted School, Dunmow, CM6 3JL
Tickets available now (£25): www.swbka.org

Saffron Walden Beekeepers present:

EBKA Conference 2019: The Changing Face of Beekeeping

Ged Marshall

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Dr Jonas Geldman

University of Cambridge
*Does conserving honeybees help
wildlife?*

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Will Messenger

*The history of beekeeping and the
history of the Porter Escape.
(There will also be an exhibition of
artefacts on display in the Foyer.)*

**Professor Steve Martin University of
Salford:**

*Our search to understand long term
Varroa tolerance*

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A tale of two/three swarms

By Ralph Cullen, Harlow division

As Monday 13 May started there was a plea for help from a new beekeeper. There was not one but two swarms in her vicinity. Could someone help remove them. They were not hers but Claire wanted to help collect them and expand her knowledge of collecting swarms/beekeeping. However, as usual, it was more of an experience not to be forgotten! There was one swarm in a tree top in one garden and another on a fence post in a garden opposite.

So I set out Monday evening Nuc in hand to find that they had landed in long grass by a fence post which they had a liking for. I managed to entice some into the Nuc, however I could not see the Queen but they were moving into this Airbnb so I left and told Claire that I would return the next morning to collect them as it was getting late.

The next morning, Tuesday 14 May, I received a call from Claire telling me that they were not in the Nuc. When I got there I tried to get them back in. I upended the Nuc against the post that they had gone back to but not before I noticed that the cut down tree in the next garden adjacent to the fence post had old comb in it. The tree had been felled during the previous year by tree surgeons who must have had a shock when it broke in half and the bees came out so they left it where it fell.

Later that day I was informed that there was another swarm in the first tree but this one was in the lower branches and easier to get to.

Earlier in the day I had bumped into another beekeeper, Steve, and was telling him about the swarms and he said that he was interested in accompanying me to the site of the swarms. That afternoon he followed me to the site and we assessed the tree with the two swarms in.



These photographs were taken by Claire on the evening of 13 May 2019 and shows the bees in the grass and on the fence post which later we discovered turned out to be the bees from the tree that had been felled

Whilst we were doing this another beekeeper (Binh) arrived. You know what it is like, you wait all day for one beekeeper then three turn up at once! Binh found that the swarm that was on the grass earlier that day had returned to the felled tree and gone inside. There was a small opening at the bottom of the tree. There was no easy access from this point and myself and Steve offered advice on how it might be obtained by cutting down through the wax. Binh was not impressed with our solution and produced an axe and said he was going to chop his way in. We said we would leave him to it and retired to a safer vantage point. He seemed happy in his work.

We returned to our tree. The swarm on the lower branch just dropped into our cardboard box and we just left a small hole for the stragglers to enter by. Whilst this was going on we borrowed a ladder (the type that you would clean gutters with) and once we had the ladder in place another cardboard box and sheet were laid out on the ground close to the tree. Steve climbed the ladder loppers in hand disappearing into the foliage on the way to the top of the ladder where our bee friends were waiting. I had the job of holding the ladder steady (you know what comes next!). Steve was clearing some small top branches out of the way and in doing so it started raining bees. It was then that I informed him that the box

was not quite in the right place. However, undeterred we carried on - Steve by now had the top of the tree in his hand plus bees. He fairly shinned down the ladder and headed straight for the box carrying the tree branch and bees. We gave it a good shake and most of the bees and the Queen fell in, but owing to the earlier fall of bees there were quite a cloud of them meandering about. We made an entrance to this cardboard box with some frames that we had and then we left them to it while we returned the ladder, etc.



Again these photographs were taken by Claire. The first photograph shows the tree trunk before Binh split it with the axe and the second photograph shows Binh removing the bees and the comb.

Then we went to see how Binh had fared. He was very pleased. He had come away with two Nucs and a box of bees. There had been two Queen cells in the tree stump, so he had one Queen cell in each Nuc and he then took his leave of us and went on his way.

Steve and I thanked Claire and her neighbour, collected our bounty and went on our way home each with a swarm!

Many thanks to Claire for taking the photographs. 🐝

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Bee Space, summary of a talk given by Bob Smith

By Gary Stapleton, Southend division

This was a very absorbing talk about something we are all aware of, believe we have provided, and then all too conveniently forget about... 6mm of 'nothing', crucial to bee and keeper alike. Inevitably such a subject must begin with the famed, eureka moment when the Reverend Lorenzo Lorraine Langstroth first 'discovered' the magic measurements relating to a honeybee's comb spacing and the free movement of its occupants to maintain and service the contents of the nest/hive. This gave birth to the development of the modular, moveable framed hives with which we are all, nowadays, familiar. The National, Commercial, Dadant, Smith and, of course the Langstroth are all well known examples of this type of modern hive. All are subject to the same rules of bee space along with the frames they contain. Or should be...but more on that later!

Bob explained that, simply put, a gap (space) greater than 6mm (5/16") will be filled with wild comb, whilst a smaller gap will be propolised to closure. Bob told us that, within narrow margins of tolerance this measurement is universal and is a space that bees will respect and leave unaltered. A further measurement of significance is the distance between comb centres (i.e. between the midribs) which, again, is a fairly universal figure of 35mm (1³/₄"). Both these important measurements were superbly illustrated by photos of wild comb built by colonies in the likes of soffit cavities and hollow logs etc. Beautiful and intriguing, these colonies, diversely domiciled as they were, all followed the same 35mm centre spacing rule, with 6mm separations between the combs. Therein lies the key fundament of modern hive design...

Or should be..!

At this point Bob made it clear that not all manufacturers pay the same attention to this important detail as do others. He produced

a homemade feeler gauge, made from scrap timber, useful either when making one's own equipment, or for double checking that the manufacturer has got his machining correct. Rebates in boxes can be particularly over generous, allowing too much lateral movement and consequently an excessive build up of propolis around lugs and runners, making inspections sticky and difficult.

This is a waste of the bees' energy and is trying on beekeeper patience. In extreme cases this movement can be enough to cause an oversized space down the length of the frame's side bar permitting brace comb to be built, further exacerbating the situation. Of course, we should all remember that bee space belongs to bees. They were employing these principles many millennia before the good Reverend's sleep was abruptly curtailed by realising the concept.

The bees will build comb with these same perfect dimensions in any suitable receptacle...they just won't build it where you want them to! It is the use of those dimensions that benefits the beekeeper, allowing him to have control over the placement and attachment of comb in such a way that bees and frames can easily be removed for inspection or manipulation. I think it was Clive de Bruyn that, a while back, advised the use of frames with the wider top bar to avoid the problem of excessive brace comb being formed. Bob took this a step further by looking at the differences in side and bottom bar design and dimension.

An eye-opening illustration of these differences was provided by way of three correctly spaced, properly machined Hoffman frames stuck together for easy handling and observation. Another three Hoffman's of budget quality and with less regard to spacing, had been assembled in a similar way. A glancing comparison should have been enough to convince anybody present that it pays enormously to buy the best one can afford in this respect.

The latter had the appearance of an open lattice-work inviting brace comb in many areas, whereas the former sported much narrower (6mm) spacing in all the relevant areas. The larger timber profile

makes for a more robust construction that is less likely to distort or to lose square. The importance of assembling one's frames with precision cannot be overstressed either. Do not forget to check for square from every aspect. This should include sighting in profile to see that the side bars are in alignment with each other. Gentle force will usually correct this to an acceptable degree.

Our attention was also drawn to wood shrinkage, a natural phenomenon that is only controllable by selection of materials and by using preservatives where necessary. In an extreme case the shrinkage of wood can mean the box gets shorter with time and season, thus altering the top or bottom bee space of the hive.



Two angles of a beautifully crafted, miniature observation hive brought in by Bob Smith. At around 15" x 8", this little gem is made workable, solely by the closest attention to accurate bee space.

Cedar has long been renowned for its lightness and stability whilst at the same time needing no preservative. Other commonly used softwoods are far more susceptible to shrinkage. Nonetheless, an occasional check on any wooden hive will confirm your bee space has remained about right. Bob's presentation neither insulted the wise and learned, nor confused the beginner, the whole core being based on a couple of nature's simple truths. Simple truths

that, once realised by Rev. Langstroth, changed beekeeping husbandry for all time, and, most surely, for the better...It was good to have Bob Smith back with us again, his last visit unfortunately cancelled due to the arrival of the notorious Beast from the East of last winter, despite his own willingness to attempt the journey. Gladly, there were no such weather anomalies on this occasion and Bob was able to deliver a captivating and thought provoking talk on a subject we take for granted as being 'built in'. We can thank him warmly for showing us that it is certainly not much ado about nothing....

There are some very interesting comments regarding bee space on the Dave Cushman site (edited by Roger Patterson), which makes worthwhile reading, both as accompaniment and for comparison with, Bob's presentation as summarised above. 🐝

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The end of varroa is in sight?

By Kevin Thorn (this article is reproduced, with permission, from the BIBBA May Newsletter)

Two years ago I listened to a talk by Professor Stephen Martin, a world-wide expert on Varroa, at the Cambridge BKA Convention. He hinted at research that would be published that would spell the end of the need to treat Varroa.

At the BBKA spring convention in April 2019 he was able to elaborate further. His research team have found that honey bees in Africa, South and Central America are Varroa tolerant (and Africanised!). In the rest of the world while mites can reproduce 3-fold in worker brood and 5-fold in drone brood the actual rate is 1.2x. The difference is due to lack of fertility, accidents etc. In the Africanised bees the rate of reproduction is 0.8x. This is significant as any ratio below 1x means the mite population is reducing! The Varroa tolerant bees showed an infestation rate of 4% whereas non tolerant populations showed an average 27% infestation.

Enhanced grooming and hygienic behaviour was found to make little difference but a third behaviour - uncapping and recapping has been found to be the effective behaviour. In places where there is no Varroa there is no sign of this behaviour. The bees were seen to uncap and recap several times. Where mites are not present the bees had made a small hole and recapped. Where mites were present they made a larger hole and recapped (this can be seen as a silvery sheen on the capping as this is part of the pupal cocoon). This action exposes young mites and kills them and while the mother mite survives she is unable to reproduce. This may also show up as pepper pot brood.

The key message was **DON'T CHANGE YOUR CURRENT TREATMENT REGIME!** If we stop treating now we may create Varroa concentrations that could wipe out the tolerant populations AKA Varroa bombs. The next stage of the research is to look at how the average beekeeper can manage and select their colonies

to be able to take advantage of tolerant behaviour.

Perhaps not the end of Varroa but maybe the beginning of the end? 🐝

Articles appearing in The Essex Beekeeper are not necessarily the views either of the Editor or the Essex Beekeepers' Association

To ensure inclusion within the diary of county-wide events would Divisions provide the editor with details of local meetings by the 4th of the previous month.

Robert Silver – robert.silver@outlook.com

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