

The Essex Beekeeper

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In this issue

Update from the CEC Chair

How to give a beekeeping talk and demonstration to the public

Robbing

Moisture content of honey

Ivy bees (*Colletes hederæ*)

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Essex Beekeepers' Association
www.ebka.org

Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex
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Update from the CEC Chair

Jane Ridler, Chair, CEC



I know beekeepers remark every season that it's been a bad year for queens, forage, weather or whatever, but this year has really not been the best, in this part of Essex, at least. Our honey crop is well down, with prevailing conditions depriving us of our usual crops from field beans and lime. I used to joke when I was teaching beginners that 'the first 20 years are the trickiest'. I am thinking of revising this to the first 30! In 2018, among others, I bred what I thought was a splendid large queen from peaceful, non-swarmy stock, clipped and marked red. She outgrew the Saffron Walden observation hive very quickly and has since swarmed 3 times, despite management. Easily seen, she was retrieved each time from the grass and re-hived, and I have sent the wretch and both daughters to one of Richard's out-apiaries!

The July CEC meeting was too late in the month for me to write for the August Essex Beekeeper, but here in brief is the news.

Garth and Robert are making progress with the eR2 transition for BBKA membership and the magazine respectively. The eR2 is a significant workload for a few members in each Division and I'd like to thank you all for being prepared to do this work. There is no choice, as the BBKA have committed to this. To add to our team, we were delighted to welcome Katy Langley and Salma Attan to the meeting. They are taking on the role of Bee Health Secretary on the CEC. This role is of increasing importance, not only for the looming presence of the Asian hornet over the channel, but also because the outbreak of foulbrood in Essex this season has been a great concern. They have already initiated an AHAT/bee health liaison between divisions, whereby each Division has/will nominate a Bee Health Secretary. Their meetings and other communications will enhance the delivery of new information to

everyone throughout the County. If you are particularly interested, especially in the Asian hornet, and would like to be involved, please contact Katy and Salma.

The new trustees had their training session before the meeting, which had had to be cancelled in May, and policies continue to be reviewed and finished, as well as the update for the Trustees' Handbook. Please think hard about any questions for the BBKA at the ADM (Annual Delegates' Meeting) in January. This is the opportunity for all members to make proposals to be put to the BBKA and voted on by the national representatives. Any ideas must get to your committee to be presented at the next CEC meeting on 24th September.

The idea of Training our Beginners' Trainers was raised. For the divisional trainers of new beekeepers to get together and share good practice and clever ideas, as well as perhaps some presentations from our BBKA examiners sounds like a great idea. If you are one of these excellent teams and think it's worth pursuing, please make sure your committee know and trustees can bring an idea of the level of enthusiasm to the next meeting, so that plans can progress during the low season.

As you read this, we will be in the midst of County Honey Show preparations for 7th September at Orsett. Thank you in advance to our hard-working Honey Show Committee. I hope you have put in your entries for all the many choices of class available. Even if you haven't, it's a really great day out, especially if you've volunteered to help – such fun sharing our amazing hobby with members of the general public from two years to ninety two. And don't forget now's the time to get your ticket for the Annual Conference on October 20th. There are fantastic speakers this year. Look in this magazine for more details. 🐝

Divisional meetings around the County

Meetings in September 2019

- 5** 20:00–22:00 - A-Rated Homes - Derek Mitchell, Harlow Division
Address: tbc
- 5** 20:00–22:00 - Romford - Beekeeper Experiences, Romford Division
Address: Chadwick Hall, Gidea Park, Romford RM2 5EL
- 7** **Essex Annual Honey Show, Orsett Showground**

25 19:30–21:30 - BeeBee Wraps with Kath Austin, Saffron Walden Division

Address: Swards End Hall, Radwinter Rd, CB10 2LG

25 19:30–21:30 - Chad Colby-Blake - subject tbc, Southend Division

Address: WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED

29 15:00 - Apiary meeting (Telephone Antony Stark 07769-681135), Braintree Division

Address: Fambridge Hall, White Notley, CM8 1RN

Meetings in October 2019

15 14:30–16:30 - Taster Session for Prospective Beginners, Saffron Walden Division

Address: Little Canfield, nr Great Dunmow

17 19:30–21:00 - CBK Honey Show, Chelmsford Division

Address: Margaretting Village Hall, Wantz Rd, Margaretting, Ingatestone CM4 OEP

03 20:00–22:00 - Gift Making for the Festive Period - Local Members, Harlow Division

Address: tbc

03 20:00–22:00 - Varroa Control 2019 - Spoilt for Choice by Robert Smith, Romford Division

Address: Chadwick Hall, Gidea Park, Romford

12 Honey Show, Romford Division

*Address: Chadwick Hall,
Gidea Park, Romford*

20 09:30-16:30 - EBKA Conference: The Changing Face of Beekeeping

*Address: Felsted School, Felsted,
Dunmow CM6 3JL*

22 19:30-21:00 - Monthly Meeting - Essex for Bees, CHelmsford Division

Address: Margaretting Village Hall, Wantz Rd, Margaretting, Ingatestone CM4 0EP

23 19:30-21:00 - Update on RSPB Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project, Southend Division

Address: WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED

27 14:00 - Braintree Beekeepers' Association Honey Show. Talk on Mead Making whilst judging takes place

Address: White Notley Village Hall



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

How to give a beekeeping talk and demonstration to the public. A talk by Robert Hart

By Mike Rowbottom, HRBKA, via eBees

A talk about giving talks is a subject seldom visited in beekeeping circles, but it should be! As Robert demonstrated admirably such a talk can be interesting and instructive, and there are many organisations looking for good speakers on interesting topics. Bees and beekeeping will always have a draw as a topic, and Robert threw out a lot of ideas that would improve even the most experienced of speakers.

Teaching is a part of our Association's charitable objective to promote beekeeping. This generally involves talking to non-keepers and it is essential to tailor a talk to the prospective audience. Robert's memory stick contains 10 talks, each one tweaked to suit a specific audience.

Most people feel uncomfortable taking to an audience, but even experienced speakers feel nervous before every talk, and this never gets better. Bigger audiences are generally more difficult. Robert gave three basic things to remember:

1. Always realise that non-keepers know very little about beekeeping. Anyone who has taken a beekeeping course - even a 1 day taster - will know vastly more than the average member of the public about all aspects of beekeeping.
2. Remember that you are not there to show how much you know.
3. Do not agree to do something you are not qualified to do.

A good guide is K.I.S.S. - Keep it Simple. Don't be afraid to act and show animation. Walking around the stage, waving your arms and eye contact with individuals in the audience all add to the audience interest. If you have a moveable microphone so much the better.

Avoid jargon - how many keepers know what a Snelgrove Board looks like. If you have to use such names, make sure you

explain what they are. Visual aids are essential, but make sure they are organised so that you can immediately show the relevant items. Nothing loses an audience faster than the speaker talking to himself while riffling through a pile of kit at the side of the stage.

For indoor talks Powerpoint is a great tool, but keep the word count very low for any one slide and avoid complicated graphs. Also watch out for compatibility between versions, and also if using Libra or other comparable products.

For outdoor presentations then use bee kit - either your own or the Association's. The hive with the colour pictures mounted in the frames is a great tool.

The old army advice to "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you told them" is always sound. You need a plan for the talk, but sharing this with the audience helps them understand where you are and where you are going. You also need to know what the audience wants - you can ask the organiser, or sometimes you can work it out. For example an invitation to speak in a care home after lunch gives a clue that nothing too stimulating is needed. If all else fails, ask the audience what they are looking for at the start of the session. This can work well for Taster Days, and you can tailor or amend your presentation as required.

There are some general themes that play well for talks:

- What honey bees do, why this makes them important, how honeybees differ from other bees, protective clothing, stings, communication.
- Beekeeping as animal husbandry is a good over-arching theme covering breeding (3 castes, swarming, bee mating, colony reproduction, superorganism) Feeding (different plants, local sources, garden plants, winter needs) Housing (WBC hive, National hive where feral colonies live, where swarms will take up residence) and Health (although much beyond varroa is a turn off)

- Honey (Weather, yields, different colours/types, Manuka honey, other products (although wax is not of much interest)

Overall a most interesting and stimulating presentation, and Robert incorporated all the ideas to keep the audience interested and entertained throughout. 🐝

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Saffron Walden Beekeepers present:

EBKA Conference 2019:

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Robbing

via eBees

Robbing is a situation in which a beehive is attacked by wasps or invaders from other beehives. The invasion is serious for a bee colony for a number of reasons:

A hive defending itself against robbing will fight to the death. This battle can result in the loss of many bees and even destroy an entire colony. If the hive is unable to defend itself, the invading bees (or wasps) can strip the colony of all its food. Being robbed changes the disposition of a hive. The bees can become nasty, aggressive, and difficult to deal with. In the Autumn, when feeding your bees after any honey flow has ended, is a prime time for robbing to start, so be on the lookout for the tell-tale signs.

Indicators of Robbing

A colony that is under attack will appear to be more active than it previously was, but the activity at the entrance is different. When they are coming back to their own hive, bees will usually land on the periphery of the entrance then walk in. Bees that are robbing will dart around at the entrance, then make a dash for it, but straight for the entrance.

Bees fighting outside a hive is an early sign and can be confirmed by the erratic and characteristic 'zig zag' flight of the robbers on approach to the target hive. Guard bees recognise this flight pattern and will be on high alert. They challenge and examine all entrants for a period of about 1-3 seconds by antennal contact to determine a nest mate from an intruder by their odour. An intruder is usually mauled by the guard clamping onto a leg or a wing and curling the abdomen into a position enabling it to sting. A fight ensues and the robber is marked with 2 heptanone from the mandibular glands.

Other guard bees recognise the alarm and raise their abdomen and sting chamber releasing a further alarm pheromone, isopentyl acetate. If unable to escape, the robber is stung and dies.

If your sense of smell is good you will be able to smell the alarm pheromone which has a banana-like scent and if you smell this when examining the hive, be prepared for an attack, or close up the hive till a later date. If you take the crownboard off, robber bees will fly out in a hurry. Capped honey in the frames will have the cappings ripped off and the holes will have jagged edges.

If a target colony is weak and succumbs to attack, silent robbing ensues. The colony continues to work normally, while at the same time robbers enter and leave the hive unhindered. The only tell tale sign now is the flight of the robbers returning directly to another hive. Also, robber bees leaving the robbed hive, fully laden, will have the rear legs forward as opposed to a bee leaving the hive on a forage flight, unladen, when the rear legs will be trailing. Eventually, the robbed colony will be devoid of stores, may abandon the hive or even die off.

Dealing with Robbing

Once robbing starts it is difficult to stop, so it is important to prevent it - robbing is often brought on by the actions of the beekeeper spilling sugar syrup on the floor, leaving brace comb in the apiary or leaving hives open longer than necessary.

Prevention measures include feeding your bees at dusk when flying has ceased, to reduce any excitement and prevent the flying bees from leaving their hive to search for the food source; feeding all colonies at the same time and reducing the size of the entrances down to about 13mm ('four bees wide') or 10 mm so they can be more easily defended - especially important for nuc colonies. One method that is advocated to stop robbing is to lean a sheet of glass (or polycarbonate) against the entrance. The rightful entrants will find a way round it, but the robbers will keep flying into the glass and give up. You can also try putting some small branches with leaves on in front of the hive to confuse the robbers.

In an apiary, if there is only one colony doing the robbing and one being robbed, it is often sorted out by swapping places. This seems to confuse them and generally works. If the robbed colony

has taken a bit of a beating, then close the hive and move it three miles or more away. In its place put a brood box with some honey on a plate or saucer inside, or if there is a frame in another colony, preferably the robbers colony, with a small amount of liquid stores in, then place that in it. Once the robbers have cleared it up they should quieten down and return to normal. 🐝

Moisture content of honey

Somerton & District BKA, via eBees

Some people are not too clear of what moisture content is permissible in honey and how this can be ascertained. The statutory document that governs our honey sales is The Honey Regulations and Schedule 2, section 2 states that in general honey should not have a moisture content greater than 20%. Heather honey (calluna) and Baker's honey are allowed more moisture, with an upper limit of 23%. Just to complicate matters further, Baker's honey made from heather is allowed an upper limit of 25%. Baker's honey is usually classified as such because it has been downgraded in some way, such as the beginnings of fermentation, or it has a 'foreign taste or odour'. It is intended for industrial use, or for use in other foodstuffs which are then processed. As only very few of us take our bees to heather, we can concentrate on the 'general' category, so our honey should not exceed 20% moisture content.

Below 20%, honey stands a much better chance of not fermenting. The lower the moisture content, the less chance of fermentation. Bees reduce the moisture content of their stores to a level where they won't ferment, before capping them off. This is why we tend to take only capped honey for extraction. If it is capped then we can be pretty sure that the moisture content is below 20%. What about uncapped honey? Many beekeepers conduct a simple test to see if their honey can be taken. They shake the unsealed frame, in question, over the super from which it came. If liquid spills from the cells, it is assumed that the honey cannot be taken. If there

is no spillage, then it is thought to be safe to take. Whereas this is a rough guide to moisture content, it cannot be presumed as a guarantee. The safest way of ensuring that your honey is below the required moisture limit is by using a refractometer. These are available from beekeeping equipment suppliers, but at a somewhat extortionate price of around £80.00. A very similar product can be obtained from a well known online auction site for as little as £20.00 inc. p&p. Do make sure that you are buying a refractometer which will specifically measure the moisture content of honey, as there are different sorts available. You should calibrate it before use and it should come with a register block (small glass block) and calibration oil. Using a refractometer could not be simpler. There is a transparent plastic flap covering a blue plastic screen. Lift the flap and smear honey on the blue screen. Hold it up to the light, look through the eyepiece, which can be focused, and spot where the blue and clear areas meet. Read the right hand scale where these meet and that is your moisture content.

Earlier I mentioned the chance of fermentation being the reason for regulating moisture content. Where the 20% figure comes unstuck is with honey that has set. 'Once the honey has crystallized the fluid between the crystals is diluted by removal of solids, and rises by some 4 – 6% in water content. This brings most honey into the range where fermentation can occur' (Guide to Bees & Honey — Ted Hooper). 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, as different set honeys have different crystal sizes, and that will determine the percentage of moisture which is safe. 🐝

Ivy bees (*Colletes hederæ*)

Via eBees

Ivy bees (*Colletes hederæ*) were first seen in the British Isles in Dorset in 2001, having arrived from continental Europe. They feed exclusively on the nectar of ivy flowers and consequently

emerge in mid or late September to take advantage of the flowering season of the ivy and are on the wing until early November. They are the last solitary bees to emerge and because there are so few other bees around at this time of year, are relatively easy to identify. They look like small honeybees with orange striped abdomens and a furry ginger thorax. Several may be seen together on ivy flowers, particularly if there is a nest site nearby. They are now locally common in southern England and are spreading north and west into the Midlands and Wales.

Unlike honeybees, the ivy bee is solitary. After mating, the female digs a burrow in loose earth or sand and creates underground chambers. She lays several eggs which she supplies with pollen as food for the larvae when they hatch. She dies after a few weeks but the larvae pupate, staying underground and emerging as adults the following autumn. Tens or even hundreds of females nest close together in colonies, usually on sandy banks. The male bees wait by the burrows for females to emerge before ambushing them. Many males may attempt to mate with a single female, forming a writhing mass, or mating ball. 🐝



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