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# The Essex Beekeeper

Issue 659  
 November 2019



**In this issue**  
 Update from the CEC Chair  
 132nd Annual Essex Honey Show  
 Beeswax day at EBKA Braintree Division  
 Asian Hornet Briefing  
 Preparing for winter  
 Feed your Bees  
 Insulation and bee behaviours



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## Update from the CEC Chair

Jane Ridler, Chair, CEC



As I write, we are between the two significant Essex Beekeepers' events of the year, although both will have passed by the time of reading. The Annual Honey Show and the County Conference. They represent the best of centralised Essex beekeeping and are large events which would be impossible to run as individual divisions. Also, because they involve members from all over the county.

The Honey Show is organised by a large committee representing all divisions working together and then extra volunteers from everywhere on the day. Truly a joint effort! The County Conference is run by each division in turn. For some reason, beyond my understanding, the rota does not run alphabetically (the better to keep you on your toes!). So, Saffron Walden, having just completed their Conference, are handing the baton to Chelmsford for 2020. Watch out Harlow, I believe it's you after that!

This year's Honey Show was a resounding success despite poor weather – all the competition winners were published in last month's Beekeeper. Thanks to Pauline Tidmas and all who helped there and to Saffron Walden Division (yes, the conference-running division also does the catering at the AGM & Honey Show the same year!). The 2019 Conference, which from the beekeeping credentials of the excellent speakers will, I'm sure, have been thought provoking and informative at lots of different levels of our craft and scientific interest. I hear that Chelmsford's plans for 2020 are going to be innovative; we'll hear more at the AGM on 7th March.

Divisions run introductory courses for beginners – all exemplary in their own way. This Spring (February 1st) we'll be running an Essex 'Training for Trainers Day'. This will involve some of the trainers/organisers/mentors from each division getting together

Not only has Torben Schiffer confirmed these results, but by observing bees in such nests he has discovered the behavioural hierarchy described above. He has also found that above 10C, propolis volatilises, suppressing mould growth and mites which gives another reason cold hives are unhealthy.

Torben is also researching how bees control humidity in hives. Warm air holds much more water vapour than cold. When ripening honey, bees warm the honey processing combs to 40C. If they can only warm them to 35C, the air will carry away 30% less moisture which means they need to work harder, by fanning more air, to remove water from nectar to make honey.

The other main point Gareth and Torben have been thinking about is that when swarms move into a cavity, they seem to build comb and breed at a rate to suit that cavity. The bees must use

comb to optimise ventilation to suit the size and shape of the cavity, and position of entrance. It follows, then, that removing top boxes full of dense, warm honey and adding a new empty box above or below is going to disrupt things. Even changing the volume of a hive is going to change internal conditions because, after all, the hive is the skin of the colony. 🐝



## Insulation and bee behaviours

By Lune Valley Community Beekeepers via eBees

Scientists are beginning to uncover why well insulated hives are so beneficial. Basically, hollow trees are so warm that the bees in them only need to gather one tenth the fuel to keep the colony going, compared to a conventional framed hive. It turns out that the bees do not just use the free time to gather more honey for a rainy day. Instead, they turn to cleaning the hive, propolis (sterilising) the walls, grooming mites off each other, and inspecting brood for sign of disease.

In other words, bees have a hierarchy of behaviours. The priority is gathering enough food to survive. If you keep them in cold hives, and keep taking their honey away, you suppress the others, the ones which keep them healthy.

You may want to pause and think about how unmanaged colonies thrive despite the lack of human help.

The initial research in this area was by Derek Mitchell in the UK. In summary, Mitchell, an instrumentation scientist, got thinking about his wife's hives, modelled hive heat flows on computer, and backed up his predictions with heaters in hives. He realised the immense impact insulation and absence of draughts had. Every kilo of honey requires the bees to bring in several kilos of nectar to make it, so small differences in insulation and draught proofing make a big difference to the stress on a colony.

Torben Schiffer, in Germany, has backed up Mitchell's theory with measurements on actual tree hive nests and confirms that a well-insulated tree colony may only have to gather one tenth as much nectar as one in a framed hive, that is 50kg instead of 500kg (half a ton!) a year. Long hives and Warrés are better than conventional framed hives, but still need considerably more nectar to run than a tree cavity. All hives and colonies benefit from extra insulation.

and sharing best practice and new ideas. Do please volunteer if you are part of your Divisional team.

An additional benefit of all these county events is that beekeepers mix, chat, learn and return to their divisions renewed and inspired (we hope!)

News from the last CEC meeting, held in September: -

We have broken the back of two of the recent problems for the CEC. Thanks go to Garth Milford & the eR2 teams at divisional level. There is still work to do so that we can optimise the use of the system, but all Divisions are now uploaded. Thanks also to Ted Grad and the Governance committee, who have now presented the main policies required. So, on to reviews and additional policies. With reference to the Health & Safety policy, when we have those stinging bees around, it's always a good idea for all members to be aware of safety and make sure the appointed H&S Officer is around.

In addition to the monthly Essex Beekeeper, which from 2020 will be either electronic only, printed or in combination, depending on the choice of each Division, our editor, Robert Silver, will be sending out an electronic Newsletter with up to the minute items.

The BBKA ADM delegate, Richard Ridler, will be tabling a motion on behalf of EBKA at January's BBKA Annual Delegates' meeting at Stoneleigh Park, supported by Yorkshire BKA. Basically, it proposes that the UK is once again a member of Apimondia – the world body of beekeeping, along with at least 80 other countries! Having just returned from the Apimondia Conference in Montreal, I can thoroughly recommend joining 5,000 delegates from round the world and spending four days looking into every aspect that you can imagine of beekeeping, bee products, bee science and bees in rural development. Even if this sounds a step too far for you personally, it is important that the British views on the issues are in the world mix.

Finally, our new Bee Health Officers, Katy Langley & Salma Attan have been busy over the summer. The representatives from the divisions have met and there was a fabulous Asian hornet display at the Honey Show. Excellent! We must all maintain our increased awareness.

I hope your bees are all tucked up warmly, disease free and well fed for the winter! 🐝

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**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](mailto:robert.silver@outlook.com)

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being allowed to breathe and only apply to the outside. Ideally all wood work should be left to stand for six weeks after treatment before it can be brought into service.

Before going into winter make sure your colonies are on hive stands of some description and are clear of the ground. Remember it is damp that kills off colonies not the cold. Keep an eye on your colonies throughout the winter and check the weight to make sure they still have ample stores. Minimise interference with your colonies when the weather is cold because disturbing them when they are in cluster might finish them of. 🐝

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## Divisional meetings around the County

### Meetings in November 2019

- 07** 20:00–22:00 - **Abberton Native Bee Project with Kevin Thorn, Harlow Division**  
*Address: tbc*
- 07** 20:00–22:00 - **Bumblebees with Dr Nikki Gammans, Romford Division**  
*Address: Chadwick Hall, Gidea Park, Romford RM2 5EL*
- 19** 19:30–21:00 - **CBK Monthly Meeting, Making soap, Chelmsford Division**  
*Address: Margaretting Village Hall, Wantz Rd, Margaretting, Ingatestone CM4 OEP*
- 22** 19:30–21:30 - **Saffron Walden: Christmas Social, Saffron Walden Division**  
*Address: The Three Horseshoes, Duton Hill, CM6 2DY*
- 27** 19:30–21:30 - **Southend: AGM and Fun Quiz, Southend Division**  
*Address: WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh, SS6 7ED*

- 29** 20:00 - **The Asian Hornet with Andrew Durham, Braintree Division**  
*Address: White Notley Village Hall*

### Meetings in December 2019

- 05** 20:00–22:00 - **Harlow: Christmas party, Harlow Division**  
*Address: tbc*
- 05** 20:00–22:00 - **Romford: Xmas Social**  
*Address: tbc*
- 13** **Xmas Social and craft activity, Braintree Division**  
*Address: White Notley Village Hall*
- 17** **CBK Monthly Meetin: Quiz night, Chelmsford Division**  
*Address: Margaretting Village Hall, Wantz Rd, Margaretting, Ingatestone, CM4 OEP*



# 132nd Annual Essex Honey Show

By Pauline Tidmas, Show Secretary

## Report of the Show Secretary

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**Y**et another memorable Essex Show at the Orsett Show in Thurrock.

We had a fantastic response from Divisions putting forward Volunteers with everyone gaining a place. The Show Committee would like to express our gratitude to everyone involved as all showed real enthusiasm when manning stands and engaging with the General Public. It was a wonderful display by Essex Beekeepers promoting our craft. Saffron Walden Division volunteers provided refreshments as well as presenting a lovely lunch, there was plenty for everyone. Well done to their organisers and members in the kitchen area.

This year was one of our biggest shows with 73 exhibitors entering around 400 exhibits. Well done to everyone who entered. Every exhibitor gained a mark for entering towards their Division's Grand Total and points were spread across the board. Well done Romford for coming out on top and winning the President's Cup for only the second time.

There were 2 feature stands focusing on current issues; one showing details of the Asian Hornet and a second featuring Alternative Hives. Both were very popular with the General Public and our own Beekeepers. Thanks go to Katy Langley (Epping Forest) & Peter Aldridge (Chelmsford) for their help and assistance.

If there is one thing we cannot control, it's the British weather. The day started very cold, the sky was full of black rain clouds and by the time the wind decided to throw itself around the Showground we had to abandon our live bee demonstrations. This is always such a shame as many of the General Public really look forward to the talks. Having live bees within the marque certainly compensated for this. The demonstration hives were busy all day.

**C**ontinue with your feeding programme; it is preferable to use cane sugar which is Tate and Lyle as opposed to Silver Spoon which is beet sugar. Beet sugar is ok and the improved refining process with beet sugar means there is little difference between the two but for some reason bees do prefer cane sugar as it is more natural. Silver spoon will do as an alternative if you are unable to get hold of cane sugar. Continue to feed with the winter feeding ratio of 1kg per one pint of water mixed as a syrup. Aim to try and get all your feeding done by the end of October. When the temperature falls to single figures the bees will experience difficulty in converting the sugar syrup into the sugars they require to sustain them throughout the winter. A strong colony will need thirty pounds of food on board. Feed all colonies in the apiary at the same time and towards the end of the day if possible to prevent any chance of robbing. Whilst feeding, maintain a reduced entrance.

## Varroa treatment

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Don't forget to carry out the varroa treatment in line with your integrated pest management plan. As there is limited brood in the colony most of the varroa mites are either on the bees or on the comb, this means that treatment is most effective at this time. What is most important is to remember to administer treatments in accordance to the manufactures instructions.

## Fit Mouse Guards / Housekeeping

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After you have completed your feeding programme remove all entrance blocks and fit mouse guards. Mouse guards need to be in place before the first major frosts of winter towards the end of October. Winter is the time to maintain all your equipment; cut out all old comb and burn. Don't put old comb in a dustbin because it might end up in a land-fill site which could be a good way to spread disease. Boil up old frames with washing soda, rinse in cold water and leave to dry. Treat all supers and brood boxes that are not in use to a coat of Cuprinol or a non-toxic wood preserver. Try and avoid using oil-based paint as this will prevent the woodwork from

honey to see it through the winter. However, in this part of the world hardly a winter goes by without the National Bee Unit warning of starving bees, which is the main reason why we do not advocate taking honey off in the autumn!



Bees feeding on fondant

How much honey bees need to over-winter is difficult to calculate due to the range of variable factors such as the length of time they will be unable to get out and forage and the strength of the colony. Bees kept in well insulated hives also tend to be more active during the colder months and consequently use up

more stores.

Feeding colonies with syrup solution is not an option during the winter months as the bees find it extremely difficult to reduce the moisture content sufficiently to be storable. Feeding fondant, sometimes known as candy, is the only practical option. However, as the bees cannot take down fondant or store it, it is a source of immediate food. This makes it important to ensure that any fondant is placed as near as possible to the cluster.

Although I live in a very rural area, I have never experienced a problem with mice. However, they are known to seek winter refuge in bee hives and can cause considerable damage during the period that the bees are dormant. You may, therefore, want to consider fitting a mouse guard or at least setting your entrance disc to “queen excluder” setting.

Finally, consider the security of your hives and the extent to which they can withstand strong winds. Placing the traditional brick on the hive roof may not be enough! Whilst heavily insulated hives might be too heavy to blow over, using straps to anchor your hives to a solid base, is a sensible precaution. 🐝

## Feed your Bees

By Mike Cross, Chair, The Derbyshire Beekeeper, via eBees

There is always a lot of work involved in setting up the show through Thursday and Friday, as well as organising the Show Day. Well done and thanks go to all those involved – a terrific job and great success. 🐝

## Beeswax day at EBKA Braintree Division

By Anthony Stark

Ten members gathered in Elspeth and Steve Bunting’s barn in Silver End on an autumn Sunday to learn how to make useful and decorative objects from beeswax. There were 4 demonstrations:

1. Making new foundation. A wooden tray was wetted in a plastic container of warm soapy water, then covered with a film of molten wax; this film was floated off under water and placed inside a folded semi-rigid plastic hexagon-patterned mould which was then pressed through a 50-year old mangle. Magic: about 30 sheets of fresh foundation. How to wire them? Stuart has his homemade kit of a jig to position the frame, foundation and wire, plus a battery and a wooden batten with 4 nails connected to it which are briefly touched on the wire to melt it into the foundation.



Making foundation

2. Candle dipping: proved very popular and we had a special thermostatically-controlled dipping container to make life easier.

3. Novelty candles: There must be over 200 decorative silicone moulds in the Thornes catalogue but we had about 10 available and one member had brought along some cheaper baking moulds with intricate rose patterns. It is not quite as easy as you might



think without an expert on hand to show you how to fit the wick and keep it taught.

4. Wax wrap making. This is right on trend – wrap your sandwiches and glass bowls with home-made colourful wax-impregnated cotton wraps. Use, rinse clean and re-use, no plastic container or clingfilm needed! Wax shavings and cotton squares, pinking scissors, a cheese-grater and an oven were on hand.

Thanks go to the 5 demonstrators (Stuart, Vi, Maria, Jan, Maurice) who came with gadgets, equipment, blocks of wax and lots of experience. And a special thanks to Elspeth and Steve for coffees, cakes, and their barn which had been specially cleared and made hospitable for us.

## Asian Hornet Briefing

A synopsis by Jan French

**A**ndrew Durham will be speaking at Braintree Division's meeting on Friday 29th November 7.30pm at White Notley Village Hall. Fellow EBKA members are welcome to attend. Below is a synopsis of his talk:

### Asian Hornet Briefing

Andrew Durham is a Cambridgeshire beekeeper who has travelled extensively in France and who spent the last three years researching the Asian Hornet. He has written articles on the Asian Hornet for the BBKA News and given a number of briefings to local beekeeping associations.

The briefing is split into six sections and covers:

The Asian hornet: why it is such a problem for beekeepers, how it predated bees and the bees response. The hornet's nests and lifecycle. By the end of this section you will know all about the hornet and the opportunities for control of the hornet over its yearly cycle.

The Invasion of France: I will cover the arrival of the hornet in France, how it has spread across France, and its impact on French beekeepers. The factors affecting its establishment / nest densities. By the end of this section you will have a good understanding of the scale of the problem and what you are likely to encounter if it establishes itself near you.

The Spring Trapping of Foundress Queens: I will give a balanced view of the issues surrounding this very controversial subject in order that you can decide whether or not you should trap in the Spring.

Defences against the hornet: I will cover the full range of defences against the Asian Hornet.

Management of bees under predation: Bees subject to predation by the hornet are under great stress. Absconding colonies, queens off-lay or even killed are a common outcome of hornet predation and colony failure over winter is the real danger. We will look at what beekeepers need to do to help their bees.

If there is time; we will look at the Collective Fight against the hornet in France, covering organisation, nest location and destruction.”.



## Preparing for winter

By Lune Valley Community Beekeepers, via eBees

**Y**ou should, by now, have completed your autumn colony inspections and ensured that your hives are as well prepared for winter as possible.

The first matter is to ensure that each colony has sufficient stores. Whilst your colonies may continue to forage until November or even December if forage is available and the temperature sufficiently mild, it is safest to assume that they will not. There was an old rule of thumb that stated that each colony requires 30lbs to 40lbs of