



CANTERBURY BEEKEEPERS

A branch of Kent Beekeepers Association

EDITOR'S NOTES

At this month's meeting we are privileged to have Dr Margaret Couvillon of the University of Sussex coming to talk to us, with the title "How good is the British countryside for honey bees? Decoding waggle dances to determine

where bees forage". It promises to be a great opportunity to hear about how scientists are learning ever more about how bees interact with their environment.

Please note the change of location – we are meeting in Thanington Resource Centre. Later

in the newsletter there is a biography of Margaret to whet your appetite – whilst scientific in outlook, she is very articulate and makes her work accessible to all.

I'm sure you are as fed up as me with the continuing wintry weather. The BBC

weather centre did a [nice report](#) over the weekend explaining that the high pressure area over northern Europe that is still bringing us easterly Artic winds, was a few hundred miles south last March, and brought us warm southeasterlies from Africa. Let's hope that the system

finally dissolves, or at least moves southwards soon!

Whilst the weather seems set to remain cold, we will have to make a late judgement about our **6th April apiary meeting**. We were intending to meet at Westbere Apiary, but will likely

reschedule it for later in the month, given that the cold shows no signs of breaking. Watch out for late-breaking emails, or even an announcement at our Wednesday meeting.

Adrian

Next Meeting
DR MARGARET
COUVILLON

How good is the
British countryside for
honey bees?

Wed 3rd April 7.30pm

The Stour Room
Thanington Resource
Centre

Directions – see p2

CBKA OFFICERS

Chairman: Julian Audsley

Briar House
Waldershare Road
Ashley
Dover CT15 5JA
0776 183 9119

Treasurer: Joan McAllister

42 Canterbury Road
Lydden
Dover CT15 7ER
07824 668042

Secretary & Newsletter

Editor: Adrian Davis

24 The Grove
Deal CT14 9TL
07816 975286

Committee Members

Chris Bristow
Michael Roberts
David Cockburn
Chris Bailes
Maggie McKenzie

The easiest way to contact us is via the website, but you can also e-mail

cantbees@gmail.com

Contact Newsletter editor to contribute articles

APRIL 2013

A newsletter for friends and members of Canterbury BKA

DIRECTIONS

Stour Room, Thanington Neighbourhood Resource Centre,
Thanington Rd, Canterbury, CT1 3XE

For the meeting with Margaret Couvillon, we've moved to Thanington, in order to secure a slightly bigger room than we normally use. Please car share if you can, as there will be groups in other rooms within the centre.

By car Set satnav post code to CT1 3XE

Leave Canterbury City centre along Wincheap (A28). Go past Morrisons, and through the traffic lights to the A2. TRC is on the right-hand side, opposite St Nicholas Road, just beyond the A2 sliproad towards London. If coming from Dover direction, exit A2 at junction with A28, turn left, and almost immediately, TRC is on the right.

By foot / BUS

Stagecoach services 1/1A/1X/004 stop on Thanington Road opposite the Resource Centre. Alternatively, you can use the Park and Ride service (until 7.30pm), out to the Wincheap carpark, for a 5min walk to TRC.



APIARY NOTES

April

I am in danger of repeating myself since April seems much like March as winter continues. There is no sign of a letup and so the need to check stores continues. Now if extra is needed I would be inclined to use 50:50 syrup in a small contact feeder such as inverted jar. Oil seed rape seems to have grown very little - I am trying to guess when it will be in flower which may be at the end of April.

So while we wait for it to be warm enough to check our colonies it might be useful to plan how we will obtain new comb to replace the old. The two main methods are either to replace old comb which you have placed at the edge of the hive last year or to replace all with a Bailey comb change which is the easiest way to ensure a complete renewal. If renewing 2 or 3 combs this is best done with drawn comb you have kept in store. If you don't have this then in May use foundation placed one sheet at a time on the edge of the brood nest where it will be more readily drawn. Supplies of drawn comb can be obtained during a honey flow by placing a box of brood comb over the existing chamber as a super and then extracting the honey and storing the frames. Make sure you can obtain an extractor large enough for your brood frames. You need to extract very gently because the combs will be soft and easily damaged. Comb drawn over the brood nest is better because the bees will draw this evenly right down to the bottom of the frames unlike those often drawn in the brood chamber itself or below it.

The Bailey comb change is very similar to this in that a box of brood foundation is placed above the brood nest but without a queen excluder. When the combs are starting to be fully drawn out the queen is placed in the top box and a queen excluder placed underneath. Once she starts laying in the top box you can provide an upper entrance in the top box made from three pieces of lath which encourages the bees to empty the lower box. This can be removed when all the brood has hatched in about three weeks. Unless there is a heavy nectar flow it is usually best to feed the bees with sugar syrup in a large contact feeder to get the new comb drawn quickly. FERA have a leaflet about replacing comb [here](#).

If you are concerned about a severe varroa infestation; when the queen starts laying you can remove the bottom box entirely and shake all these bees into the top box and then destroy the brood cells by placing in a freezer and then cut out the old comb. This will remove the majority of the varroa mites which will be in the sealed brood cells.

Julian

DATES FOR DIARY

3rd April 2013	Dr Margaret Couvillon, Lab of Social Insects, U of Sussex "How good is the British countryside for honey bees? Decoding waggle dances to determine where bees forage" Thanington Resource Centre, Thanington Rd, Canterbury, CT1 3XE
6 th April 2013 (TBC – weather dependent)	Outdoor meeting, Westbere Apiary
12- 14 April 2013	BBKA Spring Convention, Harper Adams University College, Newport. <i>The national beekeepers' event</i>
4 th May 2013	Spring safari – with Michael Cooper, Seasonal Bee inspector
11 th May 2013	Stall at EcoFest, St Georges Lane, Canterbury
Early June 2013	Visit to hives in the Cathedral's Deanery
Early July 2013	Visit to a member's apiary – please volunteer!
20-21 July 2013	Brogdale Cherry Festival
24-25 August 2013	Brogdale Cider Festival
19-20 October 2013	Brogdale Apple Festival

ROOFTOP APIARY

Whitefriars

Although recent reports from Julian are that the bees are healthy and well fed with fondant (he put 6kg on each hive in February), the plants and supports have not survived the wind. Maggie MacKenzie is keen to hear from anyone who can supply bee friendly, hardy plants (lavender etc) or moisture retaining compost, as we need to get that redone when conditions improve, having learnt what didn't work so well last season. Please contact her at the next meetings (or email her via cantbees@gmail.com)

SPRING CONVENTION

The BBKA Spring Convention is one of the highlights of the beekeeping calendar, and is being held in Shropshire, at Harper-Adams University College near Telford. This event is a combination of tradeshow, lectures and workshops, and is really worth going to, if you can make it. Use our discussion board to find like-minded CBKA members, if you want to share the driving. The buzz this year looks to be about a couple of new products - formic acid strips ("MAQS") for varroa control in sealed brood, and the Arnia "fully-instrumented" beehive monitor. I'm sure there will be lots of strong opinions aired in the café and bar about neonicotinoids and members' happiness or otherwise with the BBKA official position. It should be a memorable occasion!

Quicklink to Spring Convention website: [here](#)

Adrian

MENTORING

When you are standing in front of your open hive, sweating in your bee suit, thousands of bees boiling up and dive bombing your veil and something which looks suspiciously like the pictures of a queen cell, it's no time to be wondering what to do next and wishing you had a spare brood box.

The Canterbury beekeepers association has grown fast from a small base in the last five years and as a result the demography is not optimal; we have quite a lot of beginners who are working on or looking for their very first hive, we have a large number of keen members with up to five years of experience and very few very experienced members. So we have many depending on a few for knowledge, skills and practical experience: a problem which we are aiming to address with our mentoring programme. The other problem for the club is that it covers quite a large geographic area, from Faversham in the west to Folkestone in the south and Deal in the east, while it is helpful to have support close by so the mentor doesn't have to drive far and the mentee doesn't feel constrained to call for help.

Most people starting out on their first hive will have attended Julian's, or another, course so they will have a very good knowledge of the theory and a taste of practical experience. They will have likely read some books and been thoroughly confused as they've read different solutions to the same problem. Their big gap will be confidence; they may also need someone to point them towards good choices. A mentoring programme seems ideally adapted to meet these needs.

For our purposes we have divided East Kent into four areas with a mentoring 'cell' in each so all members will be in close proximity to others. All those Cells will meet in the next few weeks to agree their programmes. The Canterbury Cell had its first meeting last night as six people met to talk through what we hoped to achieve, plan our initial programme, exchange contact

details, eat delicious cakes and then talked about bees (surprisingly). We are a diverse group, none very experienced, most have taken a course and most either have their first bees or are planning to acquire them this spring. Our needs were more similar; we wanted to be able to call someone in close proximity, at short notice and ask for physical or verbal help or for confirmation that a planned action was the right one. We wanted to establish a buddy system.

For those looking for their first colony, we will aim to supply swarms or help people collect their own. As well as exchanging email and phone details and giving each other permission to make a phone call for help we also planned our initial meetings. The first will be an introductory one at my apiary where we will open a few hives if the weather permits, evaluate how they've come through the winter and if necessary take action to remedy problems. We'll also look talk the skills and tools needed to assemble your own hives. The second meeting will be a Safari; we will go on a tour of our apiaries, considering locations and evaluating colonies. We expect to have a further supplementary meeting in the autumn to experience extraction and winter preparation. These meetings will be in addition to the regular club meetings and will serve the purposes of building practical experience and getting to know each other.

The BBKA has highlighted a national need to improve the education of beekeepers generally and also to address the problem of the large numbers who give up after their first couple of years. We aim to address both these needs with our mentoring programme. Because the best way to learn is to teach, we also aim to improve the skill and knowledge of the 'improvers' who are the majority of the mentors.

Beekeeping is fascinating to me because 'all insect life is there'; science, sociobiology, carpentry and farming. All interests are catered for but it can be a solitary hobby, a bit like fishing. Our mentoring project aims to strengthen the social aspect.

DAVID COCKBURN

EAST KENT ASSOCIATIONS

Here's a quick digest of what the other local associations are doing over the next few weeks.

[Whitstable and Herne Bay](#) have a meeting focusing on swarm prevention, and varroa checking on 27th April. [Dover and District](#) are listening to Bob Smith talking about Integrated pest management on 6th April. [Thanet beekeepers](#) are holding their annual dinner on 5th April at the Pegwell Bay Hotel (hope it's well heated!).

Adrian

COURSES AT KSRC

KSRC Bees

The course series for Kentish beekeepers continue. The next two courses are entitled "Adult bee diseases" (nosema and acarine) on Wednesday 10th April, and "How to pass the Basic", with Mary Hill on 26th April (if Julian's course is not convenient for you). Go to their [website](#) to find out more

NDB Short Courses

The latest National Diploma in Beekeeping courses have been [publicised](#). Anyone can go on them but the level is really for those with at least the Basic Exam. The next in Sittingbourne is:

April 29, 30 Brood Diseases with Bob Smith

OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO AN ETHNOBOTANIST

We've been approached by Harry Woolner, a research student at University of Kent, to help him with some research he's undertaking. Here's his note:

I am an ethnobotany student in Canterbury researching the relationship between urban gardeners and the growing of bee-friendly plants. Given the intimate connection beekeepers have with bees, I would first like to talk to beekeepers and get a feel for what they consider to be important, as well as what is going on in Canterbury and other cities.

I wonder if you might be able to help me? I am looking to interview a couple of beekeepers in the next 2 weeks in Canterbury who have hives in the city or its suburbs in order to discuss bee-friendly plants with them. I hope to spend about 1hr or so chatting. I would be really grateful if anyone interested might fancy getting in touch with me and we could discuss it further. I am very keen to get a good grasp of what is being planted for bees by gardeners in the hope of shedding more light on the situation of bee forage and floral diversity in our urban areas.

Any interest or feedback would be greatly appreciated; beekeepers are my first port of call and I realise you have a particular affinity for this topic. I really appreciate any time you can give to advise me or help me out. I hope to be in touch in the near future, tea and coffee is on me!

Email: hw256@kent.ac.uk

MARGARET COUVILLON

Biography



Margaret is a postdoctoral researcher in the Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects (LASI) at the University of Sussex. She is interested in the behavioural ecology of social insects, specifically the evolved traits that have contributed to their success.

Originally from Louisiana, she received her BSc from Loyola University and then volunteered in the national service program, AmeriCorps. After her MSc (Duke University) in Neurobiology, she joined the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences at the University of Sheffield to study for a PhD. There she studied mechanisms of nestmate recognition in honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) and stingless bees. As a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Arizona, she worked mostly in the bumble bee *Bombus impatiens* to determine why worker size variation exists and how it develops.

Now a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Sussex, she works with Professor Francis Ratnieks on the Sussex Plan for Honey Bee Health and Well-being. They use a unique aspect of the honey bee - the dance language - to investigate foraging biology. By decoding waggle dances, they can determine from where honey bees collect nectar and pollen. Ultimately these data will allow the LASI scientists to evaluate the British landscape for honey bees.

Her publication record is already impressive, with papers covering details of the honey bee waggle dance, learning behavior comparisons between European and Africanised honeybees, as well as the effects of temperature on bumblebee foraging. She has also published work on the Brazilian stingless bee, *Frieseomelitta varia*, and the Brazilian ant *Forelius pusillus*. She seems to have a gift for eye-catching titles to research papers – my favourite being “Bourgeois behaviour and freeloading in the colonial orb web spider *Parawixia bistriata*”

She is much in demand as a speaker in the beekeeping community, and has spoken at the Houses of Parliament, at a TEDx event, about “Honey bee societies and dance floor democracy” – a video of which you can see if you click the link below.

[Quicklink](#) to Maggie's TEDx talk

[Quicklink](#) to “Lab of Apiculture and Social Insects”

Adrian