CANTERBURY BEEKEEPERS

A branch of Kent Beekeepers Association

EDITOR'S NOTES

With a good spell of dry and sunny weather, and the days now longer than the nights, Spring is in full cry. Whilst the BBKA Spring Convention is yet to finish, I've heard reports of very strong colonies and lots of drones. Oil seed rape is now in flower, so any hive within a kilometre of such fields will likely be pulling in nectar and pollen at a huge rate. Great if you want the colony to expand rapidly, but make sure that you've got enough boxes on to cope with the flow.

There's always lots to think about at this time of the year. Everyone should have a clear plan for anticipating and dealing with swarming. Whilst colonies are still building, it's a good time to mark (and clip) queens. If you are not confident to do this on your own, please ask someone to help – the committee will be glad to recommend someone, or help directly.

For well-established colonies, with lots of dark or black brood comb, April and May are the perfect times to replace comb, either by simple exchange, by the Bailey comb change method, or even a shook swarm approach. All three methods were discussed in the January 2017 edition of BBKA news (link here), so it's worth digging it out. Comb change is critical to reduce the disease burden in hives (particularly nosema) as well as getting rid of distorted and mangled comb. And there's an aesthetic pleasure in seeing healthy brood in almost white fresh broodcomb!

Apiary Meeting

Debbie's Apiary

Waverley

Stanford
TN25 6DL

Saturday 22nd April

2.00-4.00pm

Don't forget to sign up for the Bee Safari (more on p2), and we hope to see lots of you either in Palmsted Wood on 8th April, or at Debbie Burton's apiary in Stanford on 22nd April.

Adrian

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The easiest way to contact us is via email using the links above, but you can also use the contacts page on the website.

Contact Newsletter Editor to contribute articles

APRIL 2017

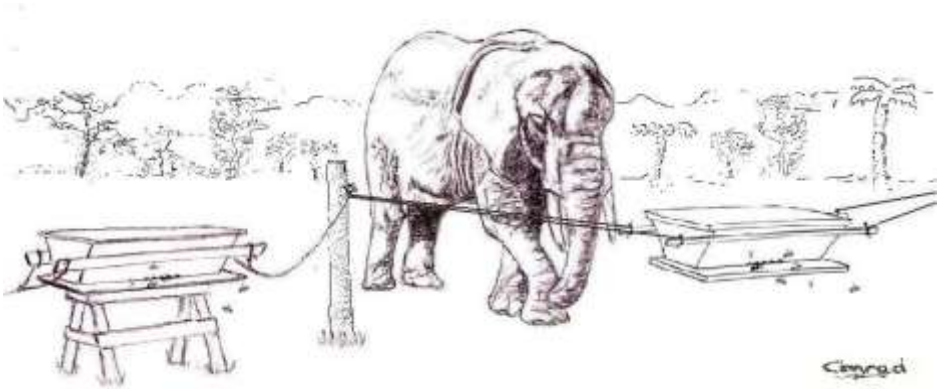
A newsletter for friends and members of the Canterbury branch of Kent BKA

DATES FOR DIARY: yearbook at http://canterburybeekeepers.org.uk/calendar/cbka-list/

Saturday 8th April	**1-3pm. Working party – spring-clean around the apiary, Palmsted Wood, Bekesbourne**
7-9 April 2017	BBKA Spring Convention, Harper Adams University
Saturday 22nd April	**Apiary meeting, 2-4pm. Spring preparations. Debbie Burton's apiary**
Thursday 4th May	Committee meeting, 7-9pm, Old Gate Inn
Saturday 6th May	**Apiary meeting (bee safari), with SBI Kay Wreford**
Saturday 27th May	Canterbury in Bloom – meet the public in Whitefriars, 10-4pm (date TBC)
Saturday 4th June	**Apiary meeting (queen rearing)**

You can get our calendar, either as a google calendar (cantbees@gmail.com), or for other programmes using this URL: https://calendar.google.com/calendar/ical/cantbees%40gmail.com/public/basic.ics

Bee Safari



OK. I didn't actually mean that we would visit a project in Kenya to dissuade elephants from trampling a precious field of crops. Rather I am referring to our annual Spring tour of members' apiaries.

Our meeting on **Saturday 6th May** will be a safari – Kay Wreford, our local bee inspector, will tour around with Canterbury Beekeepers to help with spring inspections. Please let me know if you are happy to have us visit you on that day. In past years, this has been very successful; we can usually fit in 5-7 apiaries. Last year we started in Deal, then passed through Staple and Bekesbourne, Chestfield and Whitstable– so we get a lot of value and time from our SBI. Members whose apiaries we are not visiting are welcome to join us at conveniently close locations.

We'd hope that each of the neighbourhood groups is represented during the tour, as it's a good way to re-start the seasonal support groups. I've already had requests to visit apiaries in Fordwich and Harbledown/Chartham Hatch, but we have plenty of time to visit several other apiaries, wherever they are in East Kent.

Email cantbees@gmail.com , as soon as possible, if you would like to put your name down for a visit by Kay. Thanks to those who've already indicated their interest. I will circulate the final details by email on or about the 3rd May, so please reply before then if you want to be a stop on the safari.

And in the meantime, if you haven't seen Lucy King's work on elephant-deterring fences of beehives, here's a couple of short videos: https://vimeo.com/109955819 and https://vimeo.com/109951492

BRANCH NEWS

Palmsted Wood Apiary

As mentioned in the last newsletter, we will be holding a working party on Saturday 8th April, 1-3pm, to assist Chris d'Souza with some management of the woodland around the apiary. No special skills required, and although we won't be opening up the hives, there should be plenty of time to discuss any questions you might have, as we prune, cut and generally tidy up. And as this picture from last Spring shows, the woods look particularly attractive when the wood anenomes and bluebells are flowering.

First Apiary Meeting

Our weather forecasting skills were somewhat pessimistic, as we scheduled the first branch apiary meeting on Saturday 22nd April down in Stanford at Debbie Burton's apiary. I will send out a reminder closer to the time, but we would be delighted to see a big turnout. If the weather remains fair, then we could be seeing either an early honey harvest, or swarming preparations, or both! This meeting will be quickly followed by the Bee Safari, on 6th May (see p2).

Queen Rearing Programme

Thanks to those of you who have already identified hives that contain Angels and others that contain Devils. We hope that we can visit some of the more Angelic colonies as part of the Bee Safari.

Given that stronger hives already have drones in them, we will soon be planning the timetable for our first branch foray into Queen Rearing. Dougal Hendry has been very busy making contacts down in the Warren near Folkestone, which we are hoping might make a good site for an isolation apiary. Whilst everything is not yet in place, Dougal has been working hard to identify the correct people at Network Rail and Natural England. I'm sure he'd be pleased to hear from any member with influence in those organizations. The concept of an isolation apiary is that we take a hive full of drones from an Angelic colony, and a number of virgin queens in mini-nucs raised in Palmsted, so that we can exert some selection controls on both the queens and the drones.

Basic Assessment in Bee Husbandry

For many beekeepers, the first recognition of their proficiency is the Basic Assessment. This is generally organized in a local apiary, with a county examiner (not from our branch), making a friendly assessment of your skills in the principal areas of beekeeping. We encourage everyone with a couple of years' experience to take the assessment. Julian Audsley has offered to run some sessions to run over the essential elements of this practical skills assessment. Please drop Julian an email if you want to be considered this season – typically the assessments would be done in the June-July timeframe. Email: introductory.courses@canterburybeekeepers.org.uk

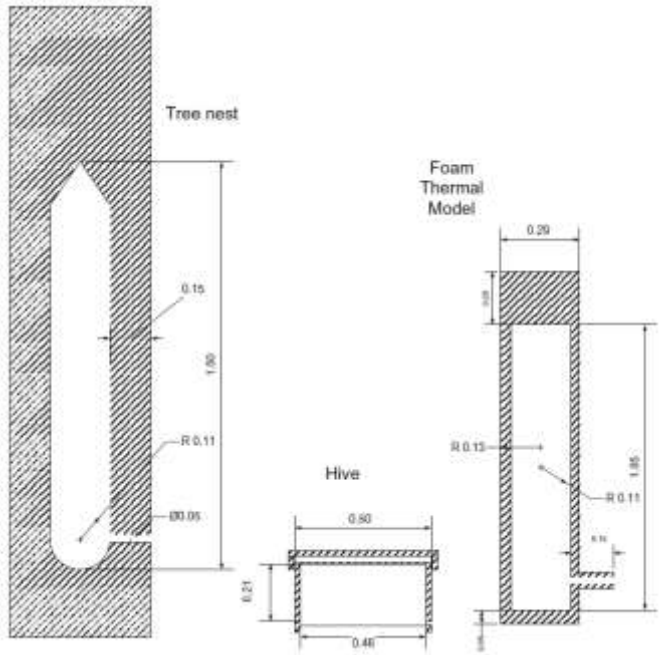
HEAT, HEAT LOSS AND HONEYBEES

On Saturday 25th March, Dover and District BKA had Elaine and Derek Mitchell visiting to give a talk on the comparative insulating properties of trees and typical beehive designs. Derek has recently published technical research on the thermal properties of beehives. If you are interested you can read the paper here, but be warned, Derek likes to do sums, and his paper is written for an academic audience. I was very engaged by their talk, as Derek and Elaine have partnered to apply the rigorous physics to real-world beekeeping. They now keep bees on conventional national pattern frames, but with hives entirely constructed from 50mm Recticel insulation boards, using a Dartington type floor with no open-mesh floor, or chemical treatment for varroa.

I found an article by the Oxfordshire Natural Beekeeping group that does a pretty good job of summarizing the Mitchells' work, so with acknowledgement that this is not my own work (apart from a few edits), here's a summary:

Q: Why do many sources say hives need lots of ventilation, but others stress warmth – which depends on minimum ventilation?

A: Much of the research was done around WW2, for example there was a key book published in 1947, and in those days wood was scarce and they did not have access to modern insulators like polystyrene or cellotex. The hives were thin walled and cold. In these conditions, to avoid damp and mould, yes, you need plenty of ventilation! But these days, we can make much warmer hives, which mimic the hollow trees bees evolved for, and in this case high humidity is better (high humidity helps bee egg survival and hampers varroa breeding) and there are no cold walls for damp to condense on and promote mould growth. For a well-insulated hive, ventilation is undesirable. Apart from the desirability of high humidity arising from well-sealed hives, high temperatures hinder varroa breeding,



Relative sizes of tree nest enclosures, hives and tree models. Dimensions in metres

and suppress nosema and chalk brood, and promote grooming behaviour (which may also help versus varroa). And in general, better thermal control reduces early mortality – chilled brood don't live long, even if they hatch into adult bees.

Interestingly, although not describing herself as a natural beekeeper, Elaine Mitchell has stopped varroa treatments. Her super-insulated Nationals, which use frames and foundation, have a few varroa but never in high enough numbers to hamper the colonies.

Q. Don't bees use more energy when they are active? Colonies which are very well insulated don't seem to cluster in winter – surely they will use up their stores too quickly?

A. No, they don't use more energy. This is a misconception based on experiments on metabolic rate where bees were held in air at controlled temperatures. If they can warm the hive to a comfortable point, they don't need much energy to stay alive – so the key is to provide an environment which they can warm at minimum cost. A well-insulated cavity, in other words.

Q. What's the best insulated hive type?

A. The lecturers did some serious testing (2.3 million measurements!) on 8 types of hive (12 hives in total). They found that the best performing cavities (dimensions similar to a tree trunk, made from building insulation board) retained heat 4-7 times better than conventional national-type hives.

Further key points

Colonies use far more energy to gather and evaporate nectar, in Spring and Summer, than to survive through winter. Evaporation works much better at high temperatures. So counter-intuitively, insulation is more important in warm weather than cold! It's making the honey which is energy intensive, not surviving winter. One UK bee farmer has 1,000 wood and 1,000 polystyrene hives. He gets more honey from his poly hives and is changing to them as fast as possible.

Additional Reading

I was sufficiently impressed to visit Jewsons to acquire a 2.4x1.2m sheet of 50mm Recticel Eurothane GP to make some sleeves for my existing National hives. It turns out that others have had the same idea. Here's a nice article from Bee Culture ("the magazine of American beekeeping") in the US, that describes both husbandry and DIY aspects in an article about winter management:

http://www.beeculture.com/winter-management/

And here are the dressed hives:

BBKA NEWS SPECIAL ISSUES

You will shortly see adverts in *BBKA News* for their newest "Special Issue Series", entitled **General Husbandry**. Although no doubt targeted at the group of beekeepers who are considering entering themselves for the BBKA Certificate of General Husbandry assessment, it's a very useful compilation of a lot of material, that can be hard to find in other books. It's a chunky A4 pamphlet of 78 pages, and is probably £10 well-spent for the improving beekeeper, available from the BBKA shop here.

Having said that, almost all the material has been recently published in *BBKA News,* so as a service to the branch, I have identified all the articles from whjch this booklet was put together. If you've been a member for 3 years, you will have them all in your piles of magazines (and if not, back copies of all BBKA News can be downloaded from the BBKA website here). Turn over for an index to the material available free to all members of BBKA:

Apiary, Hives and Tools	BBKA news reference
Tips for taking the General husbandry assessment	2016;223:170
Planning for and Taking the General Husbandry	2016;223:171-172
Choosing an Apiary	2016;223:342-344
Balance in the Colony	2016;223:307-308
How To Use Your Smoker and Hive Tools	2016;223:214-215
Soda Crystals: The Answer to Everything	2016;223:390
Inspections	
How to handle a Frame	2016;223:158-158
Record Keeping and Numbering	2016;223:206-208
How To Find the Queen	2016;223:84-85
How To Mark and Clip a Queen	2016;223:129-130
Swarms and Their Management	
Orthodoxy and Swarming Triggers	2016;223:15-16
Queen cells? Swarm, Emergency and Supersedure	2015;222:91-92
Collecting and Caring for a Swarm	2015;222:121-123
Swarming, a Natural Urge, But a Problem for a Beekeeper	Not published elsewhere
General Management	
Comb Change	2017;224:15-18
Drone-Laying Queens and Laying Workers	2016;223:45-47
The Value of Nuclei	2015;222:87-90
How To Unite Two Colonies	2015;222:313-314
Managing an Aggressive Colony	2015;222:5-6
Queen Rearing	Not published elsewhere
Honey Regulations, Harvesting and Equipment	
The New Honey Regulations	2015;222:422-424
Extracting and Bottling Honey	2016;223:280-284
Honey and Honey Processing	Not published elsewhere
Warming Honey Safely	2016;223:9
The Solar Wax Extractor	2015;222:413
Winter Preparations	
Different Types of Feeds and their Uses	2015;222:281-283
Cleaning Equipment	Not published elsewhere
Disease Identification and Management	
Ethanoic Acid Fumigation	2013;218:19-20
The Bailey comb change for a colony with Nosema	2015;222:47-48
How To check for Exotic pests	2016;223:311-312
Integrated pest Management	2015;222:159-164