



CANTERBURY BEEKEEPERS



A branch of Kent Beekeepers Association

EDITORS MESSAGE

And so, It's March.

I'm sure that during the recent few days of warm weather you've seen your bees out and busy, making cleansing flights, picking up water and taking pollen into the hives.

We had some small amusement at home, as last year we built the bees their own pond, with lots of stones and gravel so that they could drink safely. Sadly, they preferred the 'mud mat' outside the back door, clearly the tempting aroma of dirty water was more of a lure than any 'des res' pool. We had some very quick exits and entrances to gain access to the house and the dog was completely confused by the hundreds of bees milling around the back door, Fortunately, a good splash of sugar syrup over the stones and gravel has significantly reduced the problem now.

This vibrant activity is a sure sign that the colonies are ramping up for production.

Sadly, our weather can be very fickle and has misled both plants and our bees by flicking back to a cold snap. I noticed that my peonies buds have also taken a severe hammering in the frosts.

So, it's a good idea to keep an eye on your hives, and as Julie Coleman said in her meeting with us this month, if you see your bees near the top of your hive, it's likely they are hungry, so make sure you have some fondant ready. At this time of year, she likes to use Apicandy, which is 6% brewer's yeast and helps to provide the protein that they will need this month.

As an association, we want to make sure you are all being given the support you need during this time, so look out for a call from your local group to have some smaller meetings where you can discuss any concerns and share ideas with like-minded beekeepers within an approximate five miles radius.

It's good to talk!

It's a bumper edition this month with some great contributions from the Womenswold group and don't forget to test your knowledge with the quiz after the branch news.

We'd love to hear your stories and interests, or cover any topics that you would like to see in future issues, please drop me a note on...
newsletter@canterburybeekeepers.org.uk

Lisa

CBKA Officers

Chairman:

Adrian Davis

24 The Grove
Deal CT14 9TL
07380 399167

Treasurer:

Andy King

22 New Dover Road
Canterbury
CT1 3AP

Secretary and Membership

Jan Soetaert

90 Heaton Road
Canterbury
CT1 3QA

Committee Members

Stuart Andrews

Julian Audsley ([courses](#))

David Cockburn

Simon Daniell

Dougal Hendry ([courses](#))

George Jenkins

Lisa Jenkins

Maggie McKenzie

Magdalene Mei Halkes

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.

MARCH 2021

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

2021 YEAR PROGRAMME

Feeding your bees – Julie Coleman. Branch zoom meeting 3rd March.

It was with great thanks that Julie Coleman accepted our invitation to talk at this month's meeting. Julie is one of only five master beekeepers in Kent and is the Education officer for the Whitstable and Herne Bay beekeepers, a member of KBKA Council and is on the Education and Exams committee of the BBKA. Therefore, we were honoured that she accepted our invitation to talk to us and share her expertise about 'feeding your bees'.



Julie opened the meeting with a most intriguing comment, which made you sit up and think.... 'where is this conversation going?' She said that the way she feeds her bees was influenced by a lecture from Ron Hoskins, who has spent many years breeding bees for Varroa tolerance. We now know the situation is very complex but listening to Ron, led Julie to develop selection of her bees to be Varroa tolerant. The result of which is that her bees don't need Varroa treatment in the autumn and she spends this valuable time feeding her bees and building them up for the winter. The value added benefit of her bees being busy building with no brood to look after, is that she encourages them to draw an extra box of brood comb frames on top of the existing brood box. In this way, she has fresh drawn brood comb ready for the spring. As Julie said chuckling, "they don't have anything else to do!"

Julie then took us through a season-by-season approach to feeding her bees, providing us with many great tips and observations. One tip in particular is that most starvation in hives is during March and April with remaining winter bees using their energy on building comb and nursing new bees when there may not yet be forage freely available, so checking your bees and feeding where required is essential during this time.

With her knowledge of what is happening countrywide from her roles in the BBKA and KBKA, she also advised that feedback from across the country has highlighted many colony losses this winter, which has been suggested to be due to a combination of Varroa mites and Chronic Bee Paralysis rather than isolation starvation.

It was a thought provoking and highly informative session, which personally made me evaluate how we feed our bees at home, if you missed this talk, you missed some interesting insights.

MEETING IN APRIL

As we start the Bee season, we are planning a supportive programme for our members, the first of which will be announced very soon once details have been confirmed.

Watch this space!

SURPLUS HONEY WANTED!

Do you have any honey in buckets that is surplus to your needs from last year? I have an outlet and would be happy to buy your ripe honey in buckets. It can be one or more and I will collect and return empty bucket or exchange. Please ring or text me Julian Audsley on 07761 839 119.



BRANCH NEWS

Congratulations! You're rearing Queen bees and you didn't even know it!

It's one of the many brilliant things about your bees, they instinctively know how to rear queens, it's somehow hard wired into them naturally.

However, just because they instinctively know what they are doing, sometimes it's a bit more challenging for us mere mortal beekeepers, and many of us have had to resort to buying one or two when needed.



Why did we import queens and bees? There is a long history of bee imports into the UK, dating back at least a century. However, in recent years the number of imports has markedly increased due to demand, which reflects in part the increasing popularity of beekeeping. There are about 45,000 'hobby' beekeepers in the UK, with approximately 250,000 hives, and about 40,000 of these are managed by circa 200 bee farmers.

Imported queens were previously available throughout the season as replacements for:

- swarming,
- poor mating
- failed supersedure
- mistakes by the beekeeper
- to make increase

In warmer climates, such as southern Italy or Greece, bees can be reared inexpensively, with an earlier start to the season. This means that queens, nucs or packages were available in March for the early season demand by UK beekeepers. (Packages = boxes of circa 1.3kg of bees and a caged mated queen. Packages do not contain wax or frames.)

If you want a nuc with a laying queen in March or April in the UK, you have two choices.

- a) buy imported bees, or
- b) prepare or purchase an overwintered nuc.

Importing bees is 'allegedly' a challenge at the moment, there is I believe, a ban on imports from Europe.... although... this importation may still be happening? There are also many arguments for not importing bees on grounds of environmental damage and the potential introduction of pests and pathogens, for example small hive beetle and Tropilaelaps. Both very unpleasant little monsters – If you're feeling brave, have a look at the following videos. Small Hive Beetles <https://youtu.be/vUkFcgf4f6Q>. Tropilaelaps <https://youtu.be/p34t9JKadqI>

So, taking these slightly scary thoughts into account, it seems sensible for us to be more self-sufficient? Which according to the experts is achieved by:

- Managing your stocks in a way to minimise winter losses.
- Rearing queens during the season to requeen your own colonies when needed (because colonies with young queens produce brood later into the autumn, so maximising winter bee production)
- Overwinter nucleus colonies to make up for any winter losses.

And it makes sense as producing good quality native queens also means their colonies are able to survive better in a local climate and environment.

Spookily enough, queen rearing is therefore a subject that has been requested by several of our members and is a topic that will be a feature on one of our upcoming zoom meetings and we hope to make this a feature in our association apiary this year. So anyone keen to raise their own queen, watch this space and be alert for email notifications.



The Scent of the Hive – a reflection from Andy King who looks after our branch apiary.

The scent of tomatoes on the vine always evokes memories of my late father. He was a gifted gardener who could transform a parcel of land into a production line for haricot beans, broad beans, runner beans, marrows and, of course, the stable food of the 1970s, potatoes. But for all that bounty, it is the tomatoes that remind me of him because their scent is so unique. Whenever I pinch out tomatoes, which releases the scent onto my hands, I'm immediately reminded of him and his greenhouse.

Beekeeping comes with its own wonderful scents that we learn, likewise, to associate with good times. We learn to recognise that musty scent which we instinctively note as a general sign of good colony health. It is that smell that overwhelms us when we open up our colonies for our weekly inspections in the bright days of spring and the balmy days of summer. Sometimes a waft of that sense catches us unaware as we, say, sip some mead at Christmas, and we are transported back to the joy of handling our bees.

Recently I experienced one of those unexpected, joyous moments when I sterilised boxes that had been kindly donated to the club apiary. One box needed patching for woodpecker damage, but most just needed a good scraping down to remove propolis and wax, followed by sterilisation with a blowtorch. To speed up the process, I removed the plastic runners, which would melt anyway, and then sterilised all surfaces, taking particular care with the corners. It was this act of heating the boxes that released the scent of the hive and turned this chore into a joy.

Donated boxes



So if you have a dead-out, or someone has given you some old kit and you are procrastinating on the clean-up, then go to it because you will be rewarded, not only with clean kit, but the scent of the hive, which is the reminder of happy times that soon will be with us when we prise open our boxes and handle our bees again.

Secretary CBKA - Jan Soetaert My Beekeeping Year

It's been a rollercoaster this year. Now I come to think of it, every beekeeping year is a roller coaster. Having a young family, a demanding job in London and a restless nature that makes me want to try out every idea my brain thinks is interesting usually spells out chaos with capital letters.

Everything was meant to play out in my favour this year. Covid lock down, good weather and nothing much to do socially. I started the year with 7 colonies that I reduced to 4. That gave me 4 strong colonies to catch the first flows. 2 of the 4 queens turned out to be drone layers so left the starting blocks with 2 colonies that were behind on the flow. That was just fine by me as I can usually not manage honey from that many colonies comfortably anyway.

Then came swarming season. The commercial beekeeper up the road had a very bad year in my opinion as swarm after swarm landed on my driveway to the point that my other half had enough of it and banned me from having empty equipment out. Turns out that wheelie bins work just as well as bait hives... Then June came and work demanded me to commute again to London to do the job I used to do before but without my team. So now, my beekeeping went back to the usual rush squared. Rush in, rush out and hope for the best. It worked out fine. None of them swarmed and harvested 150kg of honey. I still feel my arm a couple of months down the line 😊. Winter was quiet, none of the usual deer or horses pushed over the hives and by march I finally got round to move them to the other side of the farm.

I am totally not ready for the new season but I never am. Crisis management is what I do best so I am just going to roll with it!

Happy beekeeping!

News and views from Womenswold Neighbourhood Group.

Experiences of a new beekeeper in lockdown - **Rajini Dasan**

In the absence of CBKA indoor and outdoor meetings during lockdown, (not the best of time to start beekeeping), our neighbourhood group has provided a welcomed virtual forum. As a new beekeeper in the locality, I have benefitted very much from the advice, encouragement and reassurance from Julian, Maggie and Joan who have imparted a wealth of information on all aspects of bee matters, even to the extent of putting up with my penchant for asking very silly questions! The opportunity to share our trials and tribulations with other new and experienced beekeepers is a bonus and I must say, with all the support I have had, I feel less anxious and a little more confident that I have learnt from my past disastrous mistakes... but then I fear the bees may have the last laugh on that sentiment!

Chairman KBKA - **David Cockburn**

After the volatile recent weather we had a bit nicer day on Monday and the forecast was for worse. I therefore decided to do a spring inspection. First hive, all well, 4 frames of brood, plenty of stores, new queen which I couldn't catch to mark. I removed the nadir, replaced some crystallised stores with new frames and closed it all up. Its neighbour was a different story, few bees and angry, no brood, lots of dead ones on the floor, plenty of stores. I'll investigate further when it's warmer but it does look like a lost queen. Question; should I have checked further to ensure it wasn't a disease problem?

Chris Ricketts reported he had a quick inspection at the end Feb and spotted his Queen with some sealed brood already.

Andrew Deacon and Sam Olivia have had different experiences of their bees collecting water recently:

Andrew sought help because a neighbour was concerned about his bees taking water from a sunny area in which her children played – they ignored a bird bath in his garden, which they had routinely drunk from throughout last summer, because it remained un-warmed by the low winter sun. **David Cockburn** responded and showed him his water feeder, see photo next column.



Sam has no problem on water issue. He said, "I've discovered the main source of water for my hives! A friendly neighbour that lives at the other end of my block of houses is a keen gardener. I give him my spent grains from home brewing and discovered that he keeps a pond filled with pebbles and pondweed on the surface for insects to drink water from, and he's observed my bees going crazy for the water there".

Here are a few expressions made during our Zoom meeting:

Stuart Andrews: I've put teak oil on the outside of my spare supers and brood boxes ready for use this season. This year will be the third with hives up at a meadow in Blean. Following the talk I gave to Blean Primary School the year before last, and their visit to the meadow to see my bees and other insect pollinators, this year the children are going to be designing a label to go on jars of Blean honey.

Dave Cockburn: I have progressively reduced the number of hives in my back yard from the highest of 8 hives down to 2 last year, then I did a varroa treatment at end of July after I found a high count. I lost one colony over the winter! I have been using bait to attract swarms for a few years with good success. I am keen on studying swarming in this new season.

Andrew Deacon: I was very relieved I chose to do a varroa treatment (trickle method) at the turn of year. Despite relatively minimal varroa drop prior to the treatment, I was amazed how high the drop count was after. My colony has grown from a small May swarm, so I did not harvest any honey last year, but after the varroa treatment and

feeding fondant there has been significant amounts of pollen foraged recently, so I am hopeful the colony will continue to expand rapidly.

Richard Kemball-Cook: From having two strong hives that the BBC featured in a beekeeping programme two years ago to having no bees at the end of last summer. The two swarms I collected, one from the edge of the A28, failed to bed down. I am keen on getting back into beekeeping this year.

Hugh Larkins: I lost all but 1 colony last winter. During last year managed to build it back up and all have so far made it through the winter. I am keen to try my hand at Oil Seed Rape honey this year as a bit of an experiment and try making some soft set honey and hopefully not supers solid with crystallised honey. Not long to go now!

Andy King: I am a fiddler and I love experimenting how the bees survive and have kept two colonies in a nuc with just one cup of bees each, keeping them warm with external insulation and with stores. They came through the winter! I have a temperature gadget I installed in my hive, purely used to monitor brood or no brood status, so that I stay contacted with my bees throughout winter".

Lesley O'Brien: My colony came through the winter and treated with Oxalic acid for varroa in December. I am getting a second hive ready hopefully to get more bees. I would also like to be shown how honey is extracted.

Magdalene Mei Halkes: At last, my colony is in a new space since last August in a farm sharing it with Jan. My bees came through the winter but I have not inspected my hive yet. I look forward to having a good relationship with my bees and have an enjoyable season.

There is a common theme of 'observing bees at the entrance', and apparently several of us have books on the subject. **Stuart A** circulated the book by Storch.

When the situation allows and time is right, our group can hopefully organise a small party for a honey extracting session. **Richard K-C** kindly offered to facilitate the space. Let's look forward to an enjoyable season with lots of exciting experiences to come.

Information from our branch secretary - Jan Soetaert

BBKA Research day 27th march - Drs Rinke Rinkenoog and Matthew Pound. University of Northumbria.

BBKA Members are invited to another research day. The event is free but you need to pre-register, please book tickets here:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/Event/research-project-presentations-march-27th>

This project arose as a follow on from the previous project where urban and rural sites were compared. They are studying whether green infrastructure, provided by businesses, in urban environments can sustain bees and other pollinators. The work includes assessing pollinator diversity across a range of sites in the city centre. In addition, they are analysing pollen in honey and intend to use SEM. (Scanning Electron Microscopes)

Dr Barbara Smith. University of Coventry. Dr Smith is planning to evaluate the effect of particulate matter (pollution) on honeybee colonies by placing sensors in apiaries which will monitor the presence of particles of 10 microns and smaller ones of 2.5 microns. She is wanting to recruit beekeepers in the Midlands to take part in this study and to provide samples of bees and hive products.

Dr Barbara Smith's talk will be of particular interest to beekeepers in Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire with two or more hives as Barbara is seeking volunteers to take part in the project.

Dr Juliette Poidatz. University of Exeter. Dr Poidatz and her group have a large project working on various aspects of the Asian Hornet some of which Peter Kennedy presented at the recent BBKA Asian Hornet conference. but this smaller project funded by BBKA is looking specifically at the prey of the hornet. Work to date on this topic has mostly used microscopic remains of species which does not give a true picture. The aim here is to use next-generation DNA barcoding using the COI gene to identify the prey species accurately. They are working with partners in France, Jersey and in the UK who are collecting samples from hornet nests.

Volunteers needed to help with national Swarm calls. Your BBKA needs you!

During the swarm season the BBKA office receives hundreds of phone calls from the public, often elderly people who don't have access to the internet, asking for help with swarms. Very often the bees in question are not honeybees so the caller just needs more information or reassurance. If it is a genuine swarm call, we give them the contact details for a local BBKA swarm collector.



The office team are seeking beekeepers to help us answer some of the calls by volunteering to have calls redirected to their own mobiles or land lines for an hour or so a week.

The caller would not be able to identify your mobile or land line number as they will have rung the BBKA swarm help line initially and then the call is diverted. The swarm line is open between 8.30am and 4.30pm Monday to Fridays but busy times are late mornings onward.

It will be easy for volunteers to opt in and out of the system so this is not a forever commitment.

We will arrange a zoom meeting for potential volunteers to discuss how this will work in practice. If you want to consider joining the team and would like more information (without committing yourself) please email me – Leigh Sidaway, General Manager:
gen.manager@bbka.org.uk

Neonic - update communication from BBKA

Last month I indicated that we were taking steps to prevent the use of neonicotinoids on the sugar beet crop. We pursued this with the help of two barristers and a solicitor.

The Wildlife Trust was also involved and following a similar process, using a Pre-action Letter and a Judicial Review. I contacted them to ask if we could work together but unfortunately their policy

is to work alone on legal matters, but they have shared information with us that has been very helpful.



The derogation is only for this year but with a proviso that it could be applied again in 2022 and 2023, each being a separate action.

Because of the frosts we have recently suffered, which reduced the aphid count, it is now low enough for the pesticide not to be used in 2021. This has just been confirmed by the Government. However, that still leaves 2022 and 2023 when the derogation might rear its ugly head again.

John Chittenden, a solicitor at Humphries Kirk LLP and Yasin Patel, a barrister who would both be acting for us, agree that there is no need to take action for a Judicial Review this year. However, we need to ensure that we are ready and keep up the pressure throughout this year to show we are determined to prevent this pesticide use in future.

The thought is that the seed manufacturers will develop a seed that is resistant to aphids in future years, but this is likely to be after a couple more years at least.

The Wildlife Trust and the BBKA have agreed to share information so that we have the best chance of preventing the use of pesticides for future years. Both John and Yasin agree with this action and they will continue to support the BBKA to ensure that we can, if needed, apply for a Judicial Review.

One concern is that there may be a cost for any action, especially if we lose the review. This could potentially amount to tens of thousands of pounds, despite our trying to defray the costs. We will take advice from John regarding this and keep our members up to date as events unfold.

The Honeybee quiz – how many answers can you get right?

Answers can be found on the final page!

	Question
1	Based on beehive numbers, which country has the highest number of honeybees?
2	How many different types of bee are there in the UK? a) 25 b) 100 c) 290
3	How many miles do you think a hive of bees fly to make a 1lb jar of honey? a) 10 b) 50,000 c) 10,000
4	Up to how many flowers do bees visit to make a 1lbjar of honey? a) 2,000,000 b) 100,000 c) 25,000
5	What do bees eat? a) honey b) pollen c) sugar
6	What sounds can queen bees make? a) pipe b) buzz c) quack
7	How many eggs can a queen bee lay each day in summer? a) 3,000 b) 200 c) 20,000
8	How many bees could there be in a hive? a) 20,000 b) 60,000 c) 5,000
9	How do bees talk to each other? a) they buzz b) they dance c) they give off a smell
10	Worldwide, how many species of honeybee are there? a) 25 b) 7 c) 40
11	What colour can bees not see? a) blue b) green c) red
12	Which common insect eats bees? a) dragonflies b) ladybirds c) beetles

News from around the world

If you think it's been cold here.... try this!



It's showing -52 a tad chilly in northern Ontario Canada!

Craig Ramsey from Texas had some fun recently...

Come and collect a swarm, they said!!!!



It's low level, they said!!!



It was just a bit of a shock!



Craig was happy to share these photos with us, these bees were in a decommissioned cellular site equipment shelter in Atmore, Alabama.

And Finally don't forget...

BBKA Calendar

The BBKA calendar where branches can add their own events and view forthcoming new year's lectures and much more.

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/calendar-listing-page> BIBBA lectures in the new year.

<https://bibba.com/>

The 2021 BBKA Spring Convention

16-18 April

A virtual event offering a mix of practical and scientific lectures and presentations. To include a light-hearted Association team quiz. Any one fancy putting a team together for Canterbury? -

<https://canterburybeekeepers.org.uk/2021/02/2021-bbka-spring-convention/>

Quiz answers

Q.1	India second - China third - Turkey
Q.2	c) 290+ 1 - honeybee 20 -25 types of Bumble bee 270+ solitary bees
Q.3	b) 50,000 depending how close the source of nectar is
Q.4	a) 2,000,000
Q.5	All of these
Q.6	a) pipe and c) quack
Q.7	a) 3,000
Q.8	b) up to 60,000
Q.9	b) workers do a waggle dance to show distance/direction of food, and c) queens scent stops working bees laying eggs
Q.11	b) 7 species of honeybees (genus Apis) and 44 subspecies Found everywhere except North Pole and Antarctica.
Q.11	c) red
Q.12	a) dragonflies