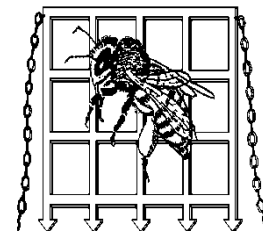


Romsey & District Beekeepers' Association

September 2020 Newsletter



Next Meeting – Sunday 20 September

Our last outdoor meeting – although this year's programme was scuppered - is on the equinox. Many experts say that the equinox marks the end of one beekeeping season and the start of the next so, appropriately, we will be focussing on winter preparations.

Any surplus honey has been taken off. We are now concentrating on the health, size and stores of our colonies to give them their best chance of surviving whatever winter brings.

This meeting will be at the Association Apiary starting at 2 p.m. To enable social distancing, we will be limiting this visit to a maximum of 12 attendees. Please book your place by emailing Christine before Friday, 18 September.

All those attending the apiary are required to bring freshly laundered bee suits, boots and gloves. **Covid 19: Please bring and wear a face mask whilst in the apiary.**

After the visit to the hives, we will be having a socially distanced gathering including lots of bee chat. Please bring your own chair, flask and cake.

YOU WILL BE NOTIFIED BY EMAIL a few days beforehand if the meeting can go ahead. If it cannot, sit back and browse your apiary records, and plan your winter preparations.

Virtual National Honey Show 2020

The National Honey Show will take a virtual form this year. No honey will be on show, but all the peripheral events can and will take place. The organisers are arranging pre-recorded lectures and workshops that will be presented from Thursday 22 October to Saturday 24 October. There are 2 considerable advantages: first, you do not have to leave home and second, there will hopefully be sufficient places for the most popular workshops to accommodate everyone.

For current information and that timetable, please check www.honeyshow.co.uk/. If you have never attended one of these shows this is a good opportunity to dip into the offerings and think about visiting in person sometime.

At a Glance

11 September – would have been our Honey Show. See below.

Sunday 20 September – last apiary meeting

11 October – RDBKA Centenary celebration – POSTPONED – but see below for Centenary Show

22-24 October – Virtual National Honey Show – see below

28 October 19:30 – talk by Stephen Fleming of BeeCraft

14 November 2020 – Hampshire Beekeeper's Virtual Convention – see below

25 November – our monthly meeting – this will be 'virtual', details to follow



Ivy blossom. Image: Pixabay.com

RDBKA Centenary Show

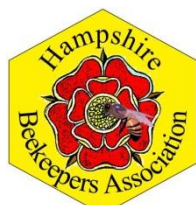
In the absence of our annual Honey Show, to provide an opportunity for you to share your 2020 beekeeping (and offer some light-hearted competition) we will be holding a Centenary Show to coincide with the Association's centenary celebrations in October. The show will make use of the Association's website and Members will be able to submit photographic entries by email or post in ten different Classes. These will be confirmed at the beginning of September, but to illustrate, here is a selection of the Classes being considered:

- Three Jars of Honey prepared and labelled for sale (tamper seals not required).
- An Exhibit of Beeswax - not less than 454 g and no more than 550 g.
- A Decorated Cake – A cake made to any recipe, decorated with a beekeeping theme. To be displayed on a plate.
- A photograph related to bees or beekeeping.
- A photograph of your apiary – To capture the heart and soul of beekeeping in your apiary during 2020.
- A photograph of your honey in an unusual situation – As humorous or as serious as you wish.

The fun part - every Member, regardless of whether or not you submit an entry, has the opportunity to cast a vote in each Class. Shortly before our Centenary Celebrations, winners will be announced on our website. There will also be a Best in Show, Second and Third Prize, attracting prizes of £20, £10, and £5 respectively, and we hope these will be announced by Stephen Fleming, Co-Editor of Bee Craft Magazine at our Celebrations on 28th October. Look out for your Centenary Show Schedule, in early September. This will list the Classes, the competition rules, provide instructions on how to submit your entries, and most importantly, how to vote for your favourite entries. Get involved, and let's enjoy ourselves this autumn!

(by Steve Pickard)

HBA Web-Vention



Hampshire Beekeepers' Association (HBA) has turned their planned autumn convention virtual. The date remains the same – Saturday 14 November – but it will be shortened to a mere 4 to 4½ hours and be delivered by the ubiquitous Zoom.

Does that sound ominous? Firstly, all this virtual stuff is not to everyone's taste but in the current health climate the only alternative is to do nothing; venues are limited in the numbers they can admit, speakers are reluctant to mingle with large crowds, and people are rightly cautious about attending large gatherings which may even have to be cancelled at short notice. Secondly, that's a long time to sit in front of a computer. That has been taken into consideration - a short 'comfort break' in the middle will allow you to put the kettle on.

Details are being posted on the HBA website as they are confirmed - <http://hampshirebeekeepers.org.uk/hba-convention-november-2020/> so keep watching. We can confirm now that the key speakers will be the renowned Celia Davis and Bob Smith, and that there will be a prize draw, open to all HBA members, that is included in the ticket price (£5 but not yet on sale).

This will be followed by another mini-convention in March, date and details to be confirmed later.

Asian Hornet Week begins on 3rd September 2020

We live on an island relying heavily on imported goods. Accidental importation of the Asian Hornet into France has caused devastation to the European economy, agriculture, and the insect life. From there it has spread to the Channel Islands. Jersey beekeepers have destroyed 38 nests this season so far.

Here in Hampshire, in some areas, this season has been severely affected by wasps in the apiary.

Asian Hornets behave similarly to wasps with three differences; they are faster, blacker and have a bigger stinger. There are two other differences. They can be found in Asian restaurants wrapped in a spring roll and they've proved themselves very adaptable in foreign countries.

From August onwards, Asian hornet workers – just like wasps – are losing their source of flower nectar and begin looking elsewhere for sugary energy and may be found preying on your bees, fallen fruit, ivy and near boundary hedges etc.

We need to be monitoring regularly to protect our beneficial insects, and so that we have live samples that could be tracked if necessary.

Please register your monitoring stations in apiaries on BeeBase.



- Open bait stations – a plastic tray with screwed up kitchen roll, a heavy stone, and your liquid bait. Ideally protect these from rain – like a bird table you can watch them come and go; and hopefully obtain a photo.

In the Autumn, Asian Hornet nests will be in protected zones away from wind and rain; under the eaves of your house, in your tool shed, the corner of your garage.

Worker hornets can be observed on fruit trees, grape vines, and windfall apples and on ivy plants, where they will often be seen taking insects (biting off their head and tails and taking the muscle meat back to their offspring). They have been observed on the carcasses of dead mammals, dead birds and at the back of fish restaurants picking off the prawns – if there are baby hornets in the nest needing protein.

Males and new queens will be produced in the late Autumn and males can be seen feeding on flowers. This is a crucial time to spot Asian Hornets as it is important to find any nests before the queens emerge and go into hibernation. Observe plants, fruits and look around your apiary.

If you think you have seen an Asian Hornet

- Get a photo (or sample)
- If you are not sure or are struggling to get evidence contact your local Asian Hornet Action Team – ahat.romsey@gmail.com
- If you are sure and you have evidence, then report on the [Asian Hornet Watch App](#)
- or email alernonnative@ceh.ac.uk
- and to Janelle Quitman 07447 035 668 – I have a container of Trappit for those members who want to be involved in a monitoring record programme.

Due to current restrictions please make sure that you keep yourself safe and comply with government guidelines. Check BBKA website for updates on how this relates to beekeepers.

(by Janelle Quitman)



BeeBase is the National Bee Unit's website for beekeepers and you are strongly encouraged to register if you have not done so already.

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/login.cfm>

Processing Wax

As the season draws to a close, you might find yourself with a stash of wax that has accumulated through the year. Maybe you have some beautiful opaque cappings from honey, or some mis-shapen comb removed from the hive. Maybe you have scraped and saved burr and brace comb from frames when inspecting.

No matter how clean or dirty the wax, the bees put a lot of effort into making it and it can be recovered with a little gentle heat, and recycled.



If you only have a small amount, you only need some unbleached muslin, an old saucepan big enough to hold the wax, and some string. Cut a large square of muslin, lay it out flat and pile some wax on top. Gather it together to make a bag and tie it tightly with string. Put it in the pan and fill up with rainwater – enough to cover the wax comfortably.

Rainwater is best; tap water contains chemicals that can affect the wax. Distilled water is a good substitute but if all else fails, just use tap water.

Put the pan on to heat GENTLY and be patient. Wax melts at 63°C. It spoils when it is heated beyond that point and – this is important – wax is highly flammable so you must NEVER use a gas flame, or leave it unattended, or let it overheat.



Once the wax has melted, use an old clean stick to lift the (hot!) muslin bag clear of the pan and straight onto an old plate (it drips and is messy). The bag retains all the dross. Let the liquid in the pan go completely cold. You will have a reasonably clean slab of beeswax which you can cut away from the pan sides. Pour the messy water away where it will do no harm; not down the kitchen sink. There will be debris on the underside of the wax, which you can scrape off.



For larger amounts, you can borrow the association's steam wax extractor (shown left) or use a solar wax extractor (shown right). The steam extractor gets the job done quickly using electricity; the solar extractor takes time but is ecological.

Wax that is reasonably 'clean' can be exchanged at Thornes for foundation (COVID-19 restrictions require you to arrange this beforehand either by phone or email).



Taking it a step further, this crudely filtered wax can be cleaned again then used to make candles and other moulded items. Delicate wax cappings recovered from honey extraction are ideal because they will be less tainted by pollen and will not have been used for brood-rearing. A pure beeswax candle burns slowly with a soft light and takes you back to the hives in summer.

There will be more about that second filtration and using moulds in the next newsletter.

Varroa - Going Treatment-Free

Prof. Tom Seeley's recent talks on "Darwinian Beekeeping" have given rise to many discussions, perhaps leading us to question whether we have been treating our bees with expensive and damaging medicines unnecessarily. However, Tom Seeley is a professor, a renowned expert in apiculture with a career that spans decades. He has worked with many of the world's leading bee scientists and has written many influential publications. Most of us are hobby beekeepers.



Image: National Bee Unit

"Natural Varroa-Resistant Honey Bees" is a newcomer in the BBKA News Special Issues series. It stresses from page one that simply stopping medication can (probably will) be detrimental to your colonies' health.

It's a slim edition but a slow read because it is heavily laced with science and research.

It's a worthwhile and thought-provoking read but in a nutshell:

- Our western honey bees have poor natural defences against Varroa destructor, which is a non-native species. Varroa mites are parasitic and weaken but do not kill bees
- Deformed Wing Virus (DWV) has been endemic in our bees for a very long time but in low concentrations. DWV can cause deformed wings but infected bees very often display no symptoms
- Varroa mites spread viruses as they travel from bee to bee, colony to colony. This has intensified the viral infection rate and severity which shortens the bee's life expectancy by weeks; for 'winter bees' this means that the colony is less likely to thrive until spring
- 'Hygienic' behaviour in bees is genetic. It can allow the bees to detect and deal with larval cells containing mites. If the bees open and empty such cells, the mite fails to reproduce
- Few of us knew about the "R-rate" a year ago. If the reproduction rate [of Varroa mites] is kept below 1, the rate of infection is reduced. If the incidence of hygienic bees increases, the Varroa R-rate can be reduced to less than 1
- As a parallel, if humans observe social distancing, wash hands frequently and wear face masks, we reduce the spread of Covid-19
- Prof. Tom Seeley found that feral colonies in his area were devastated when Varroa mites first arrived but those colonies with genetic hygienic behaviour survived and eventually flourished
- We could stop all treatment, let Nature take its course and allow most of our bees to die, which would quickly identify the small number of colonies with hygienic traits. Over the next decades our bee population would recover. On the other hand, Varroa mites arrived in the west through human intervention, not by Nature
- A more appropriate option is to understand and identify hygienic colonies, and to raise queens from them in the same way that we raise queens from mild-tempered colonies
- While we work towards that, we should carry on checking Varroa counts and taking appropriate action whether that is by using medication or 'mechanical' methods (see BBKA News Special Issue "Integrated Pest Management")

Get Your Labelling Right

We all want an eye-catching label for our honey. However, some people take it a step too far. A Chilean beekeeper labelled her jars “Miel Gibson” because “miel” is Spanish for honey and “Gibson” Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. She also included an image of Mel Gibson in one of his more famous roles, the historical fiction “Braveheart”, complete with his baffling blue face paint. Naturally, Mr Gibson’s lawyers have expressed their objections and have issued a “cease and desist” notice. The beekeeper is considering her options.

It’s worth remembering that you cannot put whatever takes your fancy on a honey label. An image of a specific flower (clover, for example) is illegal unless the honey is predominantly from that species of flower. It’s hard to imagine why having an image of blue-faced Mel Gibson on a honey label was ever a good idea.

HEALTH CHECK

Before the bees snuggle down for winter, try to give each colony a thorough health check by examining the brood cells. To do this, you must shake ALL the bees off each frame then tilt it, holding the top bar closest to you, so that you can see inside all the open brood cells, which slope slightly downwards towards the mid-rib

Here is a very brief checklist of problems that you should look for, with brief advice. It’s not a comprehensive list and, if you find anything suspect, you should refer to the NBU web page of leaflets www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167 or other reliable text, or ask for help.

All images that follow are taken from the NBU website.

AFB Dark, sunken, patchy cell capping. “Rope” test with matchstick to confirm.

NOTIFIABLE DISEASE – bee inspector **MUST** be informed. Shut the hive immediately. Disinfect all tools and smoker, and your bee suit. Do not open any more hives



EFB Twisted larvae with creamy-white guts visible through the body wall. Melted down, yellowish white larvae

NOTIFIABLE DISEASE – bee inspector **MUST** be informed. Shut the hive immediately. Disinfect all tools and smoker, and your bee suit. Do not open any more hives



Sacbrood Dead larvae, yellow-brown, stretched out and curled up at outer end of cell.

A small number of affected cells is acceptable. The colony may recover if clean comb (drawn preferred) is substituted. Do not unite with another colony if more than slightly affected



Chalkbrood Chalky grey-white ‘mummies’ in cells and on floor

A small number of affected cells is acceptable. Sometimes caused by stress or poor ventilation. Ensure hive is not damp and that condensation can escape. Persistent infection could require re-queening



Nosema Soiled frames and front of hive. Colony will be slow or fail to build up in spring

Needs clean hive and comb. No medications are available. Remove soiled comb if possible; add clean drawn comb



Varroosis Mites on bees, deformed wings (deformed wing virus, DWV), stunted abdomens

Monitor regularly and treat for Varroa according to NBU advice. Do not ignore or underestimate the potential damage



Chronic bee paralysis virus (CBPV) Hairless or bloated abdomens, bees shivering on the frames or in front of the hive

Perhaps transmitted by Varroa – there is some debate. Severely affected colonies will not survive. Contagious within the hive; allow plenty room so that they rub against each other less. May need to requeen.



Drone laying queen Patches of contiguous drone brood in areas of worker cells

This indicates a failing queen, perhaps old, damaged or poorly mated, that has run out of sperm. The colony will struggle to supersede at this time of year as drones are few. If the colony is otherwise in very good health, remove the queen and unite with another healthy colony



Laying workers Random drone brood cells, usually with more than 1 egg in, not at the bottom of the cell

Hopelessly queenless. Shake bees out in front of another hive, if both colonies are healthy.

Occasionally a newly-mated queen lays multiple eggs in a cell until she gets into her stride.



Wax moth Line of uncapped brood with a silken thread lying across.

Use your hive tool to pick out the silk and quickly intercept the wax moth larva that sprints out. Larvae damage the brood cappings; greater wax moth larvae (*Galleria mellonella*) will burrow into hive woodwork



R&DBKA Programme 2020 to 2021

This year's winter lecture programme will all be transmitted online via Zoom.



The programme is being rearranged to accommodate this, but lectures will all be held on our usual dates being the 4th Wednesday in the month.

Please do keep an eye out for further information shortly.

(by Christine Coulsting)

ACA Report – New Queens and honey!

At the beginning of the month the colonies were all checked for honey stores. 2 ½ supers were taken off three hives for extraction leaving these colonies each with a super plus of stores. This month has seen quite a contrast in weather, starting with a heatwave then torrential rain and storm Francis followed by a distinct chill! In most areas flow of nectar has come to an end, the plants have mostly been 3-4 weeks ahead of schedule much of this year and there has been a gap in nectar until the Ivy starts flowering.

New queens were found to have started laying in two of the colonies at the apiary. One of these new queens had been raised in the upper box of a Demarée stack and this colony now has two queens – it is planned to reunite the brood boxes keeping the young queen to take the colony through the winter. This is a good time to take stock of colonies around the apiary and unite smaller colonies – larger colonies tend to fare better over winter. Many apiaries are being plagued by persistent wasps this year, to help the bees defend themselves all entrances have been minimised.

The colonies are being prepared for winter – the colonies have been monitored for varroa and all need to be treated – this will be applied at the end of the month. At this time of the year it is particularly important to ensure that mite levels in the colony are low. The brood population is decreasing, and the varroa levels are at their highest so the proportion of larvae affected is at a peak. It is important for the new bees about to be developed to be healthy as it is these bees which will take the colony through the winter, and also take care of the building brood nest early in spring.

We have had a few more visitors in the past couple of months; the team have been pleased to welcome some of our new members who worked through our online beginners' course this year.

(by Christine Coulsting)

Autumnal Equinox

The UK autumnal equinox will be on 22 September at 2:30 p.m. this year, after which the northern hemisphere will have less sunlight than the southern hemisphere because the Earth spins round an axis that is tilted at an angle. Saturn is also tilted, but while Earth zips around the sun in 1 year, Saturn takes a sedate 30 years to orbit so its equinoxes are 15 years apart.

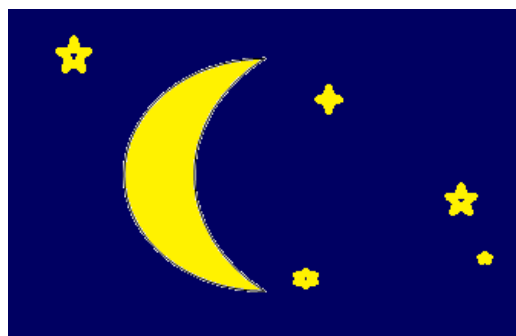
Does this mark the start of autumn? It depends how you define it.

Meteorologists define seasons as 3 whole months based on average monthly temperature so that the 3 warmest months are summer, the 3 coldest are winter and the months between are spring and autumn. They regard September, October and November as autumn.

Phenologists use ecological signs such as bird migration and leaf fall, which are affected by climate changes, making seasons hard to predict.



Astronomers define seasons using solstices and equinoxes so to them, and to our bees, autumn starts on 22 September this year.



It's time to look forward to the next beekeeping season!