



Wiltshire BKA

2020 No 1

HONEY BEE TIMES

Journal of the Wiltshire Beekeepers' Association



BeeConnected – Asian hornets – Winter tasks

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*Members' honey being
displayed for sale at
the Wiltshire Bee &
Honey Day 2019*



Chairman's report

Let's hope that 2020 brings bountiful harvests of honey, low swarming, healthy bees and no more incursions of the Asian hornet to our shores. Well, I know not all of those statements will come true, as we know beekeeping is always a challenge but never a chore...

This might well be your first year keeping bees, or you may be embarking on one of the beginners' courses being held around the county. Good luck and welcome to the world of beekeeping! For older hands amongst us, perhaps it's time to update your knowledge of bee diseases, maybe try some queen rearing or even a new method of swarm control. That's the wonder of beekeeping – there's always plenty to get one's head around and to think about.

I tend to spend my winter months doing a number of chores and preparing for the coming season – and you will find an article on this on page 30.

I hope you'll accept my apologies for the fact in 2019 we weren't blessed with many issues of the *Honey Bee Times*. Best laid plans to take over from our old editor Richard Rickitt (who is now the editor of that esteemed publication, *Bee Craft*),

came to nought. But between myself and Sophie Butcher (who organises

our fantastic Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day), we've pulled together an edition – which takes an entirely NEW format... being published online for the first time. I hope you'll agree this is a step forward. Of course you can print it should you wish, but hopefully this'll save a few trees!

Over the coming season WBKA will once again be supporting the honey tent at the Royal Bath & West Show (led by Chris Rawlings of West Wilts) and also our own Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day in Devizes in early October. Plenty of time to get your crops in, bottled, prepared and ready for these shows.

But before then, we have the end of winter to cope with, and I urge you to do two things – ensure your bees have fondant on to help them survive the winter, and maybe a pollen patty when the weather warms up, and consider treating for varroa.

Here's to a great 2020.

Stephen Auty, Chairman





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Branch reports

Kennet BKA

2019 was another positive year for Kennet Beekeepers, with many members studying a range of topics to broaden their beekeeping knowledge.

Congratulations to all members who studied last year and I am delighted to report that nearly a third of our membership has successfully gained the Basic qualification. Our thanks go to Dick Church, Richard Oliver and all the other members who gave up their time to help support their fellow beekeepers.

2020 started strongly with many members renewing their memberships; a warm welcome is extended to those new to the club. We look forward to seeing you at our monthly club nights.

Changes have been made to the management of the club apiaries. Horton Road Apiary, our main training site, will be jointly managed by Mark Fife and Patrick Randall. Contact both at ApiaryHorton@kennet-beekeepers.co.uk David Brown will continue to manage the apiary at Caen Hill.

This year Kennet has invested in an Arnia, a tool to enhance training and help reduce some of the guesswork around what is happening inside a hive. This is in the process

of being set up in one of the apiaries and, once established, will provide a host of online 'Live' reports.

So what exactly will the Arnia do? Essentially, the hive will be placed on a special set of scales and the device will monitor such things as the hive weight, weather conditions and brood temperature. During peak flows the system will be able to identify how much honey has been collected and, in future, this data can be compared to that of past years.

The device will alert us if the hive has been tampered with or fallen over as well as inform us on hive humidity and how much fanning is going on during a nectar flow. Alerts can be set up to notify when the hive is too wet, more ventilation is required, if the colony has become broodless or indeed when the queen has started laying. Robbing can be identified via significant negative changes in hive weight; conversely the scales can identify when the hive is heavy and supers need to be added.

The Arnia doesn't replace the skills of the beekeeper or inspections, but compliments them while assisting new beekeepers to consolidate their learning as they come to understand the complex world of beekeeping.

Elaine Lewis, Secretary

Melksham & District BKA

2019 was a good year for Melksham Beekeepers. I am now into my second and final year as chair and will step down at the AGM in October.

We had two successful trips to Pertwood organic farm in Warminster (two trips because numbers were limited to 15 at a time). Pertwood is an organic farm and works with bees in a natural way. They have tree and log hives where the bees have taken up residency naturally, and are allowed to swarm and do their own thing, as bees do. If other associations are interested in a tour, then contact Pertwood Organic farm directly.

We also attended the Melksham Food and River Festival at the end of August. Our gazebos stood up to the winds and rain, unlike one of our neighbouring displays, which was literally blown away. The two days were very successful, selling lots of club and members' honey and wax products, and generally promoting the craft of beekeeping. We will attend again this year.

Our website, designed and run by Alison Daniels, is now a very slick and useful source of information. All our guest speakers and events are listed, so please use this very useful resource. Our Facebook following has also grown and this has proved another a useful tool for the club.

Speakers this year have included Richard Oliver, and, in February, a return visit by popular demand of the acclaimed wildlife photographer Phil Savoe.

Our membership has fluctuated, as you would expect; a few members decided that the grass is greener elsewhere, others have given up the craft or moved away. Overall, however, our membership remains strong with some new, very keen and enthusiastic members joining the club recently.

The beginners training course has just started, with 16 potential new members attending.

The club apiary, run by Liz Taylor and Steve Drewell, remains an asset. Last year it produced a healthy surplus of club honey. A big thank you to all involved.

Our committee members do a great job and give up their time to assist Melksham club. In particular, I'd like to thank Alison Daniels, our treasurer, membership secretary and vice chair. She works full-time around the country and is away from home most weeks. I can honestly say that she is the glue that holds Melksham together and, without her sterling efforts, I believe the club would not be in the strong place it is today.

Good luck to all our members for the coming season.

Andrew Vidler, Chair

Swindon & District BKA

In 2019 we had some very varied topics at branch meetings, ranging from Richard Rickitt's talk 'From Buckfast Abbey to Buckingham Palace' about his travels for various articles in *Beecraft* magazine, to Lynne Ingram talking about her travels to Jersey to help the islanders with Asian hornet control and to learn about how we can stay on top when they do arrive in mainland UK. Mike Benson and Clive Harris talked about preparing for honey shows.

I think this paid off, as we had the largest entry to our branch honey show in September. Many thanks to Geraldine Lenert for judging again.

We also had various meetings at the new apiary at Lydiard during the season, which greatly benefited some of our newer/less experienced members. This was organised through a dedicated WhatsApp group. We now have 3 colonies at this site, and 2 and a nuc at TWIGS. Thanks to Kathy Hobson and Nicola Perrett for looking after the TWIGS site again.

We had a good year of training: approximately 28 people attended the Start Beekeeping courses or taster days. These were also held at TWIGS, using the club apiary to teach about colony inspections.

We were hoping that there would be some changes at the TWIGS apiary this winter by removing the pine

trees. However, the contractors arrived and decided that couldn't be done. Hopefully the trees will still be topped off and all the branches cut off on our side. If nothing else, this should stop the pigeon muck issues we always get!

I'd like to finish by thanking the committee and branch officers for their time and effort in organising the all the events we've benefited from this year, and I'm pleased to say that they are all prepared to stand for re-election for the coming year.

Tim Bullock, Chair

West Wiltshire BKA

In February 2019 Chris Rawlings and Geraldine Lenert demonstrated preparing and using wax

In April 2019 Chris Rawlings, Sue Rawlings, Den Pictor, Lucy Castleman, Frank Lenert, Geraldine Lenert and two members from Somerset attended the Bath & West show ground for the Field to Food Day. This was aimed at children under eleven to see how their food is produced. Over 1,500 children attended. We took along two observation hives, an extractor, candles and samples of honey to taste. The children enjoyed finding the queen in the observation hives. It was a great day and Lucy made a memorable impression dressed as a bee.

In April, Robert Carpenter-Turner

talked on 'And so I became a Bee Inspector', which was very entertaining.

There were fortnightly apiary visits between from April to the end of August. The Branch Honey Show in September received a good number of entries. Also in September, Ruth and Donald Watt gave a talk and demonstration of putting bees to bed for the winter.

The October skittles evening was very well attended. Meanwhile, the Annual General Meeting was held in November. Ian Walters has now taken over as Chair and Lucie

Castleman is Vice Chair.

In December, we had an amusing evening with Confessions of a Beekeeper, during which members confessed to the mistakes they had made during their time as beekeepers. This was appreciated by the newer members and hopefully they will remember and not make the same mistakes. In January 2020, we held our Annual Branch Dinner.

West Wiltshire now has a new website www.westwiltsbka.com, a great improvement on the old one.

Geraldine Lenert, Secretary

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Wiltshire Beekeepers' Association contacts

Chairman: Stephen Auty

T: 07767 838 317

E: sjauty@aol.com

Vice-Chair: (Vacant)

Secretary: Brian Wilson

T: 01225 708 540.

E: brian@europassociates.co.uk

Treasurer: Frank Lenert

T: 01380 870 229.

E: frank@flenert.plus.com

Education: Richard Oliver

T: 01380 812 368

E: raoliver.64@gmail.com

Membership: Sophie Butcher

T: 07711 951 343

E: sophie@activeinfo.co.uk

Webmaster: Sophie Butcher

T: 07711 951 343

E: sophie@activeinfo.co.uk

Seasonal Bee Inspector:

Avril Earl

T: 07824 529 422

E: avril.earl@apha.gov.uk

Honey Bee Times team:

Stephen Auty (adverts, articles)

Sophie Butcher (articles, design)

Local Asian Hornet Action Team (AHAT) leaders

AHAT Coordinator: Martin Phipps

T: 07799 472 084

E: martincphipps@btinternet.com

Kennet: Andy Reed

07976 131309

ahat@kennet-beekeepers.co.uk

Melksham: Stephen Auty

T: 07767 838317

E: sjauty@aol.com

Swindon: Ian Cowdy

T: 01793-854563

E: ian.cowdy@btinternet.com

West Wilts: David Newell

T: 01373 825560

E: sj007g0836@blueyonder.co.uk

Salisbury: Felton Kelly

T: 01980 610113

E: felton.kelly129@btinternet.com

Advertising in Honey Bee Times for members

This helps to pay our production costs. We try to find a good balance of adverts and articles. Rates per issue placed, as follows:

- Whole page £18
- Half page £11
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Wiltshire education and training

BBKA Modules

Up to 15 members attended the *Module 7: Selection and Breeding of Honey Bees* sessions.

Five members had applied to sit the exam in March, while two others had entered for *Module 1: Honey Bee Management*. However, the exams have been cancelled; fees will be honoured up until March 2021.

Assessments

To date, one member has applied to take the General Husbandry Certificate and another the Advanced Certificate.

Honey Bee Health Certificate

The BBKA runs courses to help members prepare for the Honey Bee Health Certificate, although the ones taking place in Stoneleigh (nearest), are currently booked up. Find out more: www.bbka.org.uk/pages/shop/department/training-courses

Basic Certificate

Courses. Kennet and West Wilts are planning courses to help members pass their Basic Certificate.

If there are spaces available, I am sure members from other branches will be welcome.

Contact Elaine Lewis (Kennet)

secretary@kennet-beekeepers.co.uk or Geraldine Lenert (West Wilts) geraldinelenert@gmail.com for more information.

Self-study. Those members that are unable to attend a course might consider self-study.

For those seeking more information, there is an excellent short article entitled *Taking the Basic Assessment* by John Hendrie on p55 of this month's *BBKA News*. Please encourage your members to give it a go.

Microscopy

Congratulations to Alan Hepper who gained his Microscopy Certificate in November.

Microscopy Group

Alan has now agreed to take a leading role with this year's meetings of the Microscopy Group, which started in February.

The club meets at Rowde Village Hall, 9am-1pm one Sunday/month. The plan is to run beginners' and improvers' sessions in parallel, with topics based on the recently revised syllabus.

To find out more about joining the club, email Richard Oliver: raoliver.64@gmail.com

Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day 2019

Last October, the Wiltshire Beekeepers Association enjoyed its most popular Bee & Honey Day to date.

Over 500 people attended, with nearly 200 entries in the Honey Show. Visitors enjoyed lectures on beekeeping, as well as mead-tasting and sampling the Honey Days Beer brewed specially by Wadworth for the event using Chippenham honey, and delivered in huge style by the Wadworth shire horses.

Entries to the show came from beekeepers from all four branches in classes ranging from clear honey to honeycomb, and from candles and flowers made from beeswax to mead.

The BBKA National Honey

Judges – Hazel Blackburn, Suzy Perkins and Michael Duffin – had their hands full trying to choose

competitors who had clearly taken a lot of trouble to make their entries as perfect as they could.

In the end, Chris Rawlings of West Wilts, walked away with the Methuen Cup, which is awarded to



Martin McDermott accepts the Norman Lovegrove Memorial Trophy for the best mead from Mayor Judy Rose

the individual with the most points in all classes. Martin McDermott of West Wilts was awarded the Norman Lovegrove Memorial Trophy for the Best Bottle of Mead in



Wadworth shire horses deliver the honey beer brewed especially for the show



Angela Barlow (L) and Pippa Gilham (R), together with the rest of the honey sales team sold over £1,400-worth of honey and hive products on the day. Head's up for next year: 12 oz jars were most popular with the public and flew out the door



Competition was tight, as demonstrated by five frames of honey on show – all excellent



Suzi Perkins hard at work to identify the best honey

the show. He also won the David Wick Cup for the Best Frame of Honey for Extraction. Siân Sims of Kennet was ecstatic when she was awarded the Novice Cup for the Best Jar of Honey by Someone New to Beekeeping. Geraldine Lenert (West Wilts) walked away with the Kennet Perpetual Trophy for the Best Non-honey Entry in the show. The King Shield for the Best Jar of Honey went to Sophie Butcher (Kennet), who also won the Blue Ribbon for the Best in Show with her Counter Display of Bee Products. The much-coveted Applegate Trophy for the Wiltshire branch with the most points in the show was kept, once again, by West Wilts.

Councillor Judy Rose, Mayor of Devizes, judged the open classes – A Bee Made Out of Vegetables and/or Fruit was won by pupils from Rowdeford School, and Three Cup Cakes Decorated with Bee Theme was won by Katie Bollen (9), while Annabel Bollen (6) came second. Both attend Dauntsey Academy Primary School.

Richard Rickitt from Melksham and deputy editor of *Bee Craft*, the UK's leading beekeeping magazine, gave an introductory talk to around 100 people thinking of taking up beekeeping as hobby.

Lynfa Davis, a Master Beekeeper

based in west Wales spoke to a packed audience about honeycomb and how and why bees make it, as well as on honey bee communication. Norman Carreck, who carries out research at the University of Sussex on bee breeding, and pesticides and bees, spoke on the future for local bees in Britain to both enthusiastic beekeepers and members of the public.

Meanwhile, over 60 children enjoyed themselves rolling a beeswax candle, while their parents browsed the stalls where bee-related gifts, honey and candles were on offer. Scores of people visited the Wessex Water stand, headline supporters of the event, to find out more about how visiting green spaces can help improve health and wellbeing. Finally, Avalon Vineyard and Lyme Bay Winery offered visitors the chance to taste their delicious specialty meads, which were so popular that they ran out of some lines.

The event was also supported by Corsham Printers of Corsham, which printed the marketing materials for free.

Over 500 people attended the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day, many sampling the Honey Days beer brewed especially for the event by Wadsworth



The Six Bee Products class included a wide range of products including beeswax wraps, lipsalve, mead, cut comb, chunk honey, dipped candles and wax flowers



Stephen Auty (L), chair of the WBKA presented the Teal Cup to Richard Oliver (R) for outstanding service to the WBKA



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All about Asian hornets

The Asian Hornet (AH) Conference at Myton School in Warwick on 8 February was organised by the BBKA and was well attended by Asian Hornet Action Team (AHAT) members from Northumberland to Cornwall.

Life cycle of Asian hornets

Professor Stephen Martin of the University of Salford gave an overview based on his studies in the Far East and recent experience in Europe.

AH – *Vespa velutina* (Hymenoptera: Vespidae) is of Asian origin and is a generalist predator of medium- to large-sized insects and scavenger of vertebrate carrion. It impacts on Diptera (flies), social

hymenopterans (social insects) and, in particular, on honey bees (*Apis* spp). It has been spreading in Asia (it is an invasive species in South Korea and Japan), and the subspecies *V. v. nigrithorax* was accidentally introduced to Europe, where it was first recorded in southern France in 2005. Since then it has been found in Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, the Channel Islands and the Balearic Islands.

It threatens both honey production and native pollinating insects. It may be introduced and transported accidentally in soil associated with plants, or in nooks and crannies in garden furniture,



pots, timber, vegetables and camping equipment, etc.

Nest managment

All the hornets have an annual life cycle. Nests in temperate regions are founded in spring by a single queen after the over-wintering hibernation period. In AH, the queen quickly builds a small embryo nest to rear the first batch of workers in an enclosed and protected place (a wall cavity, tree hollow, shed, porch etc). Nests are built from wood taken from dead trees, shrubs, posts, etc. These nests are small – 30-40 cells – around the size of a lemon. It appears that all nests are only ever used once and are destroyed by birds or the weather, although the same sites can be used year after year.

It takes 30-50 days for the first batch of workers to emerge in sub-tropical and temperate regions. If the site does not allow for colony expansion, relocation is triggered and the colony builds a secondary nest at up to 200m from the primary nest.

Subsequently, as the workers take over the duties of foraging and nest building, the queen's duties become confined to egg laying. As the number of workers increases, the nest undergoes a rapid period of expansion before the queen switches to laying males and future queens. By the end of summer, the colony

contain over 1,000 adult workers and hundreds to thousands of sexuals (i.e. potential queens and males).

It is at this point that workers are most visible and we need to concentrate on nest location and destruction to prevent virgin queens mating. (Realistically this is between August and the beginning of October.)

When the new drones and virgin queens start to emerge, the females feed on larval regurgitations to build up their fat bodies, after which they leave the nest and mate, usually up in the tree canopy. The mother queen lives for about a year. After mating the males die. The workers probably die of old age in the tropics, not starvation due to the onset of winter, as they do in temperate regions.

The fertilised queens undergo a period of dormancy in temperate climates and hibernate during winter. They can hibernate alone or in clusters of 2 to 3 under the bark of trees or under stones, similar to queen wasps. The mortality rate of overwintering queens is not known, but is believed to be high. It is assumed that fertile queens migrate after winter hibernation.

In temperate climates, nests are constructed yearly in spring; they are left empty during winter, although Dr Feas disagrees – see below.

There is a positive correlation between the nest size and the number of queens raised.

Hunting tactics

The AH is one of the most adept hornets at catching honeybees on the wing. They hover 30-40cm in front of the hive and swoop down, trying repeatedly to catch foragers. Once a bee has been caught, it may be taken straight to the nest, or carried off to a tree where the head, wings, legs and abdomen are removed; the meatball of flight muscle in the thorax is fed to

AH larvae back in the nest. They will also feed larvae meat from mammal and bird carcasses, as well as fish from fishmongers' stalls. (Adult AH feed on sweet carbohydrates, such as nectar, ripe fruit and tree sap, and on special regurgitations from the larvae.)

Attacks on honey bee colonies are numerous and frequent, particularly at the end of the season (September to December) when the production of new queens makes high demands on hornet workers.

A key characteristic is their resilience to environmental change and their capacity to overcome difficulties. They are a generalist forger and have almost no predators



The Asian Hornet nest in Tetbury, 2016

(in late autumn, some bird species such as green woodpeckers raid the nests for larva when worker numbers have declined). Natural population control may only occur due to lack of prey and other food sources, bad weather at key stages of the life cycle, limited nest sites and usurpation (queen fighting).

One of the key factors in their success is their ability to keep their nests at a constant temperature of around 30°C, even if ambient temperatures are lower. Therefore, most of Europe will be suitable for AH, and certainly the UK.

AH impact in Spain & Portugal

Dr Xesús Feás is a scientific researcher with a keen interest in the observation of the AH. He has been investigating methods for controlling the species since 2011.

Vespa velutina is a fast spreading, highly aggressive predator posing a significant threat to honey bees and other insects. In Northern Spain (Galicia), numbers increased from just two nests to 10,642 nests in only 4 years. Spread can be assisted by human activity and can jump ahead of its natural progression. Research shows that other countries previously invaded have failed at attempts to prevent and control their spread. It first sighted in the UK in September 2016, and the nest was destroyed.

The increase in AH predation has had a big impact on beekeepers, fruit growers, forestry, farming and wildlife. Galicia has lost 65% of its bees to the AH. It is estimated that \$4.5 million has been lost to its economy thanks to this pest.

All nests need removing whenever they are found. In Spain, overwintering females gynes have been located in previous season's nests.

The AH is also a danger to people, both from stings and the resulting allergic reactions, and by people taking eradication into their own hands and using their own unapproved methods. For example, removing a nest from a cavity in a wall using gas resulted in an explosion; using unapproved poisons resulted in other non-targeted species being effected, including useful pollinators. One person even attempted to remove a nest from electricity pylons.

In Spain, primary and secondary nests have been found in trees, houses, unattended cars and under ground – in other words anywhere with a suitable cavity or anchor point, and with a convenient food source.

Dr Feas advises against indiscriminant trapping and urges authorities rather to teach people to recognize and report the pest.

Traps need to be pest-specific

and monitored regularly to prevent by-catch and huge losses of other species.

Dr Feas is researching a specific AH trap. In the interim, the Vita Pharma Traps and BBKA approved monitoring traps are OK to use, but daily monitoring to release bycatch is essential.

He is also researching the AH venom, which differs from that of the European hornet: six people have died in Galicia and the difference in venom type may be essential to ensure successful sting treatment.

V. velutina sex pheromone lure

Dr Feás was pleased to announce he has had some success in replicating the *V. velutina* sexual pheromones (successfully synthesized in Campus Terra University of Santiago de Compostela).

The sex pheromones are used to attract adult males. Insect pheromone is highly efficient, non-toxic, non-polluting, does not harm other insects. Such pheromones can be used to control different lives phases of pests in the following ways.

- By monitoring: identifying the the mating period, indicating the level of infestation and evaluating the most suitable treatment and application time.
- By mass trapping to reduce or eliminate numbers.

- By mating disruption and impeding the encounter between both sexes (usually the female releases pheromone and the males flies towards the source).

Work on these pheromones continues.

The Jersey experience

Alistair Christie, AHAT coordinator for Jersey, offered insight on tracking methods and lessons learnt.

In 2017, Jersey had 15 primary and secondary nests (all destroyed). In 2019, 81 nests were located and destroyed. He is still positive that their actions are preventing AHs from establishing in the large numbers seen on continental Europe.

The actions, as in the UK, are considered a holding exercise to prevent AH from becoming



Dan Basterfield NDB

Asian hornet at a nest entrance

established while control techniques are begin developed.

Crucially, the public must be taught to recognise and report the insect, and that AH is a risk to people, especially around nests.

Key lessons

- Create a pool of keen volunteers; they don't have to be beekeepers.
- Be prepared for an increase in human to hornet interactions. Have protocols in place to deal with nests to reduce health risks.
- The Jersey method of tracking works.
- Always leave monitoring traps up after locating and destroying nests.

Alastair also invited anyone who wants to learn more about tracking and hunting for nests to visit Jersey this year.

Research moving forward

Peter Kennedy talked about research under the stewardship of Atlantic Positive. This is a joint venture by various partners – Portugal, Spain, France and the UK, including Jersey and Ireland (eg Exeter university).

Its aim is to contribute to the preservation of pollination services by developing integrated approaches to control AH and minimize the impact of this invasive species for ecosystems and for the socioeconomic

development of the Atlantic Area.

Main aims

- To be able to detect AHs fast and efficiently and reduce rate of establishment by refining radio telemetry techniques and early warning acoustic devices for detecting hornets at hives.
- To measure impact of AH on honeybees and other pollinators especially with reference to a) the impact of hawking and predation on honeybee and bumblebee colonies, and b) on whether pollinators are disrupted at flower resources by AH.
- To predict the impact on pollinators, honeybees and pollination services in the UK. This can be achieved by focusing on improving detection and capturing techniques, improving management of apiaries (including setting out bait and traps), looking at environmentally-responsible control techniques (such as biocontrol agents), developing education and training campaigns, and possibly by identifying colonies of bees with good defensive techniques.

The National Bee Unit policy

Belinda Philipson gave an update on NBU policy together with



The confernece was well attended with delegates from Northumberland to Cornwall

Sandra Gray.

It was established there was no evidence to suggest that AH is yet established in the UK. Genetic testing showed no signs of any nest producing sexuals and that the queens are genetically identical to the French strain.

Therefore the policy of the National Bee Unit will be along the lines of 2019, with AHATs called upon to assist in the early identification of AH where viable sightings had been reported. Regional and seasonal bee inspectors will investigate background to sightings and local councils and AHATS will be informed.

Recognition for AHAT team members

Anne Rowberry gave a short talk about a short-study qualification, and discussed a couple sample questions.

It was also established that AHAT team members would be insured along the lines of swarm collectors,

once they had completed an online certification process, shortly to be published on the BBKA website (up to 15 per association).

The Q&A session at the end of the day became heated at times. There was a general feeling from the floor that AHATS should be utilised more, and for them to be given more training. However, it was agreed that NBU had been effective to date in preventing AH establishing itself on the UK mainland and should be supported.

Action now

Volunteers to join the Asian Hornet Action Team are needed from all branches. Please contact me to find out more.

This is not a verbatim account of the conference but a 'mash up' of talks and discussions, along with my own understanding of the subject.

*Martin Phipps
Wiltshire AHAT Coordinator*

BeeConnected: what is it and how it works

The relationship between farmers and beekeepers is a vital one. In the UK around 70 of the crops grown are dependent on, or benefit from, visits from bees and other pollinators, a value which is estimated at over £200 million per year.

Improving communication

While the importance of bees to UK agriculture is profound, it has not always been straightforward for farmers and beekeepers to communicate directly with each other.

So a new service – BeeConnected – was launched on the 12th September 2016. The aim was to digitise the communication process of farmers informing beekeepers of their intention to spray an insecticide.

It is

worth noting that there is no legal requirement to inform beekeepers (unless specified in the product label), but it is in the Code of Good Agricultural Practice, and is a requirement of a lot of the farm assurance schemes.

The beekeeper's point of view

So what does it mean for me as a

beekeeper? Traditionally, when a spray event was likely to happen, a farmer would contact his local beekeeper (if known) and possibly the spray liaison officer, either by phone or email.

But now, if I'm registered on BeeConnected, I will be emailed notifications of spray events within a specified distance from my hives.

When registering on the site, I plot the location(s) of my hives, and can set the distance (up to 5km) that I'd like notifications about.

Any notifications will tell me the approximate location of fields being sprayed (eg within 5km northwest of Hive 1), the crop being sprayed, and the active ingredient(s) involved.

As a beekeeper, it is worth noting that I can't see the location of other registered hives (or the number of local locations), so security of my hives isn't compromised.

What's involved for farmers and contractors?

When farmers or contractors register on the BeeConnected website, as well as the farm details, they plot the locations of their fields. However, while a farmer can see the location of

hives, they can't see how many are in each location or who registered them. Then, when they are generating a spray event, they highlight the field(s) that are due to be sprayed, the insecticide being used and an estimated date and approximate time that it'll happen.

From this information, emails are automatically generated and sent out to affected registered beekeepers.

The farmer or contractor will be told how many people have been notified, but not who the beekeepers are.

Requesting more data

On any spray notification there is the ability to contact the farmer if needed. So, if there are concerns (e.g. if the event is spraying an insecticide onto flowering beans in the middle of the day), these can be raised with the farmer or contractor. However, as a beekeeper, unless I give my name and direct

contact details in the email, any correspondence remains anonymous.

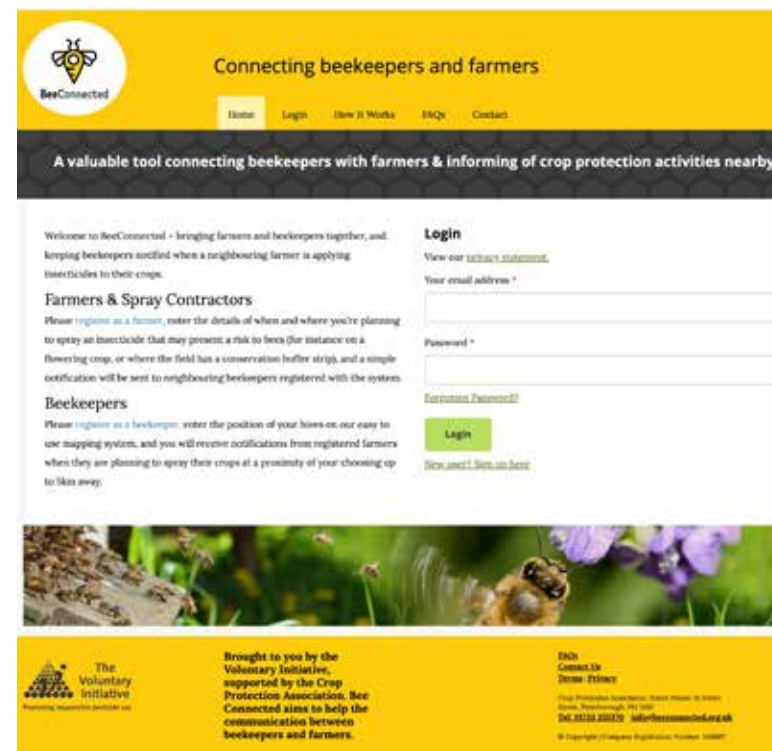
The whole purpose of BeeConnected is to make communication between farmer and beekeeper quicker and easier.

Uptake from beekeepers has been much faster than that of farmers, but it is worth noting that in the last 12 months the number of farmer registrations has increased dramatically.

If you have yet to register, I'd urge you to do so.

www.beeconnected.org.uk

Tim Bullock, Swindon



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A honey show steward's eye view

I stewarded at a honey show for the first time in October at the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day county show. I did it with the thought that I would give a little back, since I had exhibited at different levels before. As it happened, I learned a lot about how to show successfully.

The reluctant shower

The thing to say about exhibiting is that it is not exactly 'my thing'. However, coming from a line of farmers and smallholders, there was a feeling that it was the right thing to do – to aim for the highest standards so that people can be assured they are buying a quality product, but I was scared of taking the leap.

So what changed my desire to exhibit? Quite simply it was a call to arms after Somerset pipped Wiltshire and won the Challenge Shield at the Royal Bath & West Show 2017. It made me realise I had been too reliant on others to maintain the reputation of Wiltshire. So the following year I rummaged in the cupboard and found some old mead I could enter. I cleaned up some wax for a wax cake and wax blocks. I even made a couple of candles. Fortunately, several other Wiltshire beekeepers had also responded to the call to arms, and Wiltshire won back the Shield.

A cheeky entry

When the mead did far better than I expected (I had really only entered to 'make up the numbers'), I decided to be 'cheeky' and enter it at the National Honey Show, where it was placed!

Gosh! I'd like to think I was an accomplished mead-maker, but nothing could be further from the truth – it was complete luck.

Since I was at the



Presentation is vital. The best honey won't even get tasted by the judges if the jar is dirty



If you follow the rules precisely, you have as a good a chance of winning as anyone

National, anyway, I decided to enroll on a couple of workshops, one of which was mead making – I wanted to work out what I could do better or what I had done ‘right’.

I learned a huge amount about what could lose me points before my mead was even tasted. It was this knowledge that made me decide to volunteer to steward and see what other hints and tips I could pick up from the judges themselves.

Presentation matters

The National level judge I accompanied at the County Show confirmed what I had been taught at the workshop: poor presentation could mean an exhibit was deselected without even being tasted – if it isn’t in the right jar with the right kind of lid, as written down in the rules, it could be disqualified. I didn’t realise that the placing of the label (between the seams) could also count against the exhibit.

Each judge has a set of scales to weigh the wax and cut comb – this

may seem obvious, but they follow the class to the letter. If it says the wax should be ‘more than’ – it must be ‘more than’; if it says ‘approximately’, it must be close; if it is given a weight, then a couple of grams out could mean the difference between first and not being placed at all.

The detail matters

The run honey was another eye opener – a very strong torch is shone into the glass to look for incipient granulation. As soon as any granulation is seen, the exhibit goes no further.

The honey colour is checked to make sure it is in the right class. There is a standard set of grading glasses to assess this. At the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day, stewards each have a set which they will lend to exhibitors to allow them check their precious honey is in the right class. At this show, exhibitors may amend their class entry on the day so long as they have entered at least one of the



Beautiful bottles of mead on show at the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day 2019

light/medium/dark classes.)

The next stage of judging honey is to open the lid and smell the aroma. This is the first point at which things deviated from my formative days attending the Anglesey Show with my father. He always changed the lid at the show to make sure the lids were clean... but this reduces the aroma. So, it is far better to prepare them a while before and transport them in a show-ready state to allow the aroma to build up. The taste is then the decider. Best of luck.

Some of the judging was obvious to me: I was aware that the wax must be well polished, clean (no debris in there) and have a good colour; I was also aware that candles would be lit to make sure they burn correctly and have the right sized wick; spitting (due to dirt in the wax) is a no-no.

Judging the cakes was also obvious. It should be well cooked,

made to the recipe and definitely no soggy bottoms! If the biscuits class rules asks for the recipe to be included, anything without a recipe is disqualified.

Even the polishes are tested

The classes that surprised me were the polishes, creams and lip balm. They are *all* tested. The judges try the lip balm and creams on themselves. The furniture polish is tested on a piece of fresh wood kept in the judge’s bag. Colour, smell and shine are assessed. Food wraps are checked for evenness of the coating. In short, everything should be as good as it can be, and, with care, it is all achievable.

There were some great exhibits at the County show, we have some real talent, but we can’t become complacent.

Have a go

I spoke to many people during the day. Stewarding was a great way to chat to fellow beekeepers, and many said they would like to enter in following years. I beg you to do so; I was scared of failure. Yet if you fail, you will also learn, and that way, improve. As branches, we should keep the rivalry going; as county we should keep Somerset on its toes. We have a good heritage of showing, so please keep it up.

Alan Hepper, West Wilts

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Winter tasks

I've kept bees for over 30 years now – although I'm still a relative youngster being in my mid 40s, compared with the real 'old hands' out there. And while my hive numbers have increased – compared with when I began with a rescued WBC in my parents' garden together with a donated nucleus of bees from my old mentor, Lewis Bennett (Stroud, Glos) – I certainly think there is a lot more to do during the winter months than ever before.

When I started, it was usually the case that we fed in September/October and then packed the hive down for the winter and largely didn't open them again until Easter. Of course this was BV – Before Varroa. And, although it's easy to say so based on recent experience, it did seem our winters were far more severe and

colder, for longer, than of late.

Only this year I saw hives busy in early December with no sign of them clustering on a mild winter's day. And the hives seem a lot lighter in stores than I would have liked – especially as my last checks in November saw some colonies with 7 frames of brood and very full of bees.

Prepping frames

Winter months for me are largely spent manufacturing frames and equipment ready for the coming season. I find it easy to knock up 50 per session, and tend to make them complete, apart from the bottom bar, in lots of ten, then slip the foundation in, secure that and the bottom bars and then start on the rest. It's not quite specialisation in the form of Adam Smith but it's not far off. I store the completed frames either in empty brood chambers in the dry or in cardboard vegetable boxes one can easily find in supermarkets – they also stack nicely.

I also find that, during the season, I am always caught short with super frames, so I make up those too.

Checking kit

All the supers that were used in the previous year are checked and



Building and assembling kit, ready for summer



Stephen hard at work prepping supers

cleaned up, broken or damaged frames are removed for rendering, and repairs made to woodwork as required. This takes a couple of weeks usually and then, if I have time, each stack of 15 supers is given a coat of wood preserver and left covered up outdoors to dry.

I melt down set honeycomb during the winter months – I seem to have more of it than ever before from the Spring crops and I never get the time to extract on time. While this means the comb is destroyed, it means the honey is liquid and easy to bottle, and the wax harvest is useful for my customers.

Planning for the coming season

This winter, I decided to overhaul my extraction and bottling facility. Instead of multi-handling supers, I've invested in a steel container to store the contents of my garage, and I'm in the process of kitting out an empty garage for honey extraction, bottling, wax rendering and warming honey. No doubt some of you will see it in the coming months, and of course I'll share photos when it is complete.

Other things to think about are considering what method of swarm control you might use, and how much equipment that'll require. Luckily, all the big manufacturers have regular sales.

Maybe you're planning on queen rearing? There are some really cheap kits – frame bars and cell cups for example – available online which can be made to fit National frames, as well as all the oddments you'll need to keep queens segregated and banked when the time comes.

Catching up on reading

Finally, I never fail to spend time re-reading from some of my old beekeeping manuals and books. That's the magic of keeping bees – there's always something to be thinking about even if it's cold and dark outside.

Stephen Auty, Co-editor

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Bees and honey of Rhodes

Honey from Rhodes – is it one of the world's very best?

When walking in Rhodes, even in the late autumn (October 2019) you cannot help but notice bees still flying from flower to flower – since a hard frost is rarely occurs here, plants flower throughout the year. so bees in Rhodes work year long.

For centuries Rhodian honey has been known to be one of the finest honeys you can buy. It comes in many forms and tastes, although the most usual taste is a mild. Why not visit Rhodes and take the time to stop off at one of the many honey shops to sample some yourself? Thyme honey from Rhodes is specially renown and has one of the highest antioxidant levels of all the thyme honeys.

Why is the honey in Rhodes one of the best in the world? Well, there are several hundreds of flora

species on the island, including pine forests. Herbs grow profusely in the mountains including thyme, oregano, rosemary. Rhodes is also blest with plenty of sunshine – an ideal workplace for the bee.

Different bee species

The bees on Rhodes are related to ancient cavity-nesting honey bees. Today you can find Africanised honeybees, European honeybees, and eastern species. However, the European honeybee is said to produce a good quantity of honey. While there are other types of bees that also produce honey, only members of the genus group *Apis* are true honeybees.

Honey as a medicine

For centuries honey has been prescribed both as a medicine and enjoyed as a beverage. In the Bronze Age (circa 14th century BC), the choice of bererage included hydromel (honey and water) and oxymel (honey acidified with vinegar).

Mead, honey wine (fermented honey), was also popular – there

are numerous references in Homer's Odyssey to 'mellow' or 'sweet' wine – all watered down so that drinking and talking could continue for longer. The name for this activity – a symposium!

In Roman times, Plutarch said that, before man knew wine, he used honey (mead) as drink. Honey was drunk raw or boiled (when honey was of poor quality), mixed with milk as libation to the dead, and used as medicine.

In some parts of post-classical Greece, like Rhodes, it was formerly the custom for a bride to dip her fingers in honey and make the sign of the cross before entering her new home.

Honey from the heavens

Honey was important in religion and mythology of the ancient Greeks.

Its religious associations derive from the the idea that is was *ros caelestis* (heavenly dew) which fell from the upper air onto flowers, from where bees collected it, according to Aristotle.

In fact, honey was used to give libations to the dead, and it was fed to children to impart wisdom and eloquence.

Beekeepers on holiday

Finally, it is always pleasing enjoy the unofficial camaraderie between beekeepers. I visited a number of shops, and was accosted by a salesman who, when I said that I was a beekeeper, introduced me to the locals. With them, despite the language barrier, we talked about our problems with bees and looked forward to the future.

Brian Wilson, Melkaham



A servant waters the honey wine so that it can be drunk



Some old beehives – today they use standard hives

Fire in the bee shed

From the first you are taught never to light your smoker with your hood on (combustible), and always to make sure it is out before you put it away.

In February I fed my bees fondant – they are galloping through supplies. However, I could not get the smoker to light – damp cardboard – so I went inside to get some dry cardboard and returned to the shed *within five minutes* to find that the damp cardboard had indeed caught, the wind had knocked over the smoker, and I had a raging fire on my hands.

Luckily the hose was close to hand and I could fight the fire from the doorway – the fire extinguisher was good for 30 seconds, and I was dealing with a conflagration!

Lesson. Even if you think your smoker is out, do not leave it inside your bee shed. It took two days to clean my shed out, and I lost half my kit. Luckily the building didn't burn down and no one was hurt.

If I'd gone back to call the fire brigade, the building would have been torched: all those beautifully stacked boxes of drawn comb ready for the spring acted like chimneys! It took hours ensure every bit of smouldering wood was out. Hours. What a complete idiot I was.

Sophie Butcher (Kennet)



Beekkeeping in a changing climate

We have experienced wettest February on record. Storm Jorge thrashed the trees, there was localised flooding near Lacock, and apiaries were very wet under foot. So what we might have to do to assist our bees through next winter and beyond?

Having just completed a thorough check of all my sites, it's clear that, for no obvious reasons, some apiaries have fared far better than others in terms of losses. 40% losses on one site (mostly small nucs that went into the winter having been hit by wasps), 2% in another and even none in a couple. There seems to be no commonality yet there are some themes.

Common themes

- All apiaries suffered heavy wasp predation in the late summer and

long into autumn.

- Many full colonies were still on 7+ seams of bees when I did a late check in November.
- All colonies were treated for varroa in late summer/early autumn with an assortment of conventional medications.
- All were treated with oxalic trickle/oxalic vapo in December, depending on whether it was a poly hive/nuc or wooden hive respectively.
- Over 50% of the large colonies had their double brood left on to allow storage of ivy and late flowering nectar.
- All colonies were fed well in the autumn while it was still warm enough to allow the syrup to be evaporated.
- One apiary in particular suffered woodpecker damage for a second winter in a row.



Evidence of woodpecker damage

Damp hives

My management of colonies differed little to that of previous years. However, during the oxalic treatments in December, it was clear that many colonies had not clustered. The outcome is that they use more energy to keep warm, and consequently consume more

stores. This has the added impact of creating more condensation as they metabolise the syrup/honey.

One thing I have noticed in every apiary is a greater number of damp hives than in previous years. Damp on crownboards, inside the hives on back frames, and even moisture sitting in the channels below the frame lugs in a few hives. Damp seems to be a factor.

Meanwhile, in Poly Hives that are typically less able to 'breathe', I haven't noticed a large volume of moisture, and, in general, poly hives and nucs fared well.

Galloping through stores

I put fondant on all the hives far earlier than I tend to do, as I could already see in December that colonies were consuming stores at a fair rate. These large blocks of fondant, placed directly above the bees inside an eke, or where an eke wasn't available, above a feedhole on a crownboard, were some 2-4kg in size.

By mid February many of the colonies had consumed the lot, and a second large block was fed.

I usually feed a 'candi-pollen' mix which I buy in bulk from March to stimulate the colony. While this is expensive, 90% of the colonies tend to take the entire block, and seem to thrive on it. I have been in discussions with a fellow beekeeper

who has well over 300 colonies, and he intends to feed a soya-patty mix at the end of each and every flow this season to all his honey-producing colonies to maintain their brood-rearing capabilities, especially between honey flows when pollen can be less plentiful.

We also discussed whether to feed pollen supplements during the winter months to keep them topped up, given that colonies are less likely to cluster.

Commonalities

My experiences of over-wintering



Colonies being fed whole blocks of candy on the top bars directly over the cluster

are far different from people who keep bees in a maritime area, or even the highlands of Scotland, where anecdotally there has been the added challenge of removing hives from the heather on saturated ground.

What does seem to be true is the colonies are far more active this winter than in many previous years, albeit within the hive rather than out foraging.

Warmth in numbers

While a large over-wintering colony needs more food to keep it viable until the spring, there is no doubt a greater mass of bees keeps the whole colony warmer than a smaller mass. In addition, a young queen will generally head a more healthy colony than one on her last legs.

Varroa infestations

As for the varroa loadings – one apiary in particular had very heavy varroa loads in the late summer, which was double treated and then vaped.

No rhyme nor reason as to why, yet they did produce an exceptional crop.

Local bees

And in case your thoughts turn to the variety of my bees, I keep bees bred locally and with some bought in from top breeders in the UK – and

again no correlation to why certain apiaries fared better than others.

Planning this season

So in the coming season I will make some changes to colony management.

- All colonies will have bottom entrances made in floors, or new bottom-entrance floors made to reduce wasp attacks. These will be ready to use by mid summer.
- All nucs will be brought back to one location after July to offer 'strength in numbers' to keep wasps at bay.
- All colonies will have a spring varroa treatment before the spring flow.
- All colonies will benefit from feeding with home-made pollen substitute patties.
- More ekes will be made – one for each colony – to make it easier to feed candy during the winter months.
- All colonies will have a new queen introduced by June. Most will be home-grown, expanding on last year's breeding success.

Obviously, there are other things I could do, and I welcome comments or observations.

Stephen Auty, Melksham