

the Petersfield Beekeeper

Winter Talks – Webinars.

At this time of year, your committee members furrow their collective brows and try to think of suitable topics of interest for winter talks at the Petersfield Community Centre. Clearly this winter is looking very different but we're still very keen to involve as many people as possible in as many sessions as we can!

At the time of writing, it looks as though the Community Centre will be able to host small groups of people but we would like to offer webinar sessions as an alternative. However....although most of us have probably attended a webinar, we're looking for help in organising and running one! If anyone is able to help or advise, please email melanie.espin@btinternet.com
As ever, we would also be very grateful for suggestions on topics of interest.

Asian Hornet Nest in Gosport

Another sighting of an Asian Hornet was confirmed by the National Bee Unit in the area north of Gosport on 10 September. This is the first official UK sighting since October 2019 when two related nests were discovered in Christchurch, Dorset. The Gosport hornets were first reported flying around a bunch of grapes - bee inspectors set up monitoring traps and located the nest in a nearby apple tree. The nest was destroyed by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) National Wildlife Management Centre.

Just a reminder that if you suspect you have seen an Asian Hornet, please report it via the Asian Hornet Watch app on your phone, the online report form <https://www.brc.ac.uk/risc/>

Summary of 16 August Committee meeting

No change to Government CV19 guidelines so the committee chose their favourite tree in Anne's garden to sit under – without even resorting to a vote. It rained. But it was a lovely tree with lots of leaves (thanks Anne)!

No change to the cancellation of nearly all the summer shows, although the SDNP team is doing a sterling job hosting a virtual Secrets of the Heath on 4-6 September.

The Apiary continues to be cared for by the Custodians, and information and videos are still available on the website.

Brad Davis continues to host his excellent weekly Zoom sessions for beginners. We're very keen to continue with monthly winter meetings in some form. If anyone has any suggestions as to format, or technical expertise with eg webinars, please do contact any committee member.

Thank you Helen for continuing to conjure up an excellent Newsletter with little input. This is very much appreciated at the moment, as we're all missing the social element of our Association. Please do have a think about any articles, trivia, photos you could submit to Helen.

We are in need of a Publicity Officer. Even though there are no events to publicise at the moment, we need to keep a focus on beekeeping, pollinators, Asian Hornets and all sorts of other interesting things. If you are interested, again please contact any committee member.

Please send items for inclusion in the November Newsletter by 25 October to depeyrecave@gmail.com



Preparing honey bee colonies for winter

The following advice was issued by the NBU in 2010 but remains entirely relevant.

The importance of preparing colonies to enter the winter in a healthy state, with an adequate supply of young healthy bees and stores, cannot be over-emphasised. The beekeeping year starts here, so a colony overwintered in good condition ensures that it is fit for purpose in the following spring.

Timing

Winter preparation is usually done after the removal of the last honey crop of the year, coinciding with any varroacide treatments that may be required. This date will vary with the apiary location, but is normally from early to mid-August. However, with late flows from crops such as Heather and Himalayan balsam it may be later, and if so particular care must be taken with respect to varroa levels and control. For instance, it may be necessary to apply a short term treatment to reduce the population of varroa prior to colonies working late flows.

Check each colony to ensure:

- **Queen-right.** It is better to overwinter colonies with young healthy queens, as they are less likely to die or become drone layers. Also, the brood nest of a young healthy queen is likely to be bigger later in the season than that of an old queen, thus helping to ensure an adequate replacement of the older worker bees. This is particularly important as those older bees may have shorter lives because of the pathogens associated with varroa infestations and other bee problems. Colonies that go into winter with too few young bees are likely to dwindle rapidly in the spring. To remain productive, honey-producing colonies should be headed by queens no more than two years old. Queens with desirable traits can be kept to a greater age for breeding purposes, and many beekeepers maintain these in nucleus colonies.
- **Disease free.** Check each colony for signs of brood and adult bee diseases. Remedial action or culling should be undertaken as appropriate. If the disease found or suspected is statutorily notifiable, i.e. European or American Foul Brood, you must inform your local Bee Inspector or the National Bee Unit. Beekeepers should know the signs of these diseases and inspect colonies for foul brood and other bee diseases throughout the season, as a minimum specifically once in the spring and once in the autumn. If colonies are small, find out why. If they are pest and disease free they can be united and re-queened. If diseased, remedial action can be taken, but culling may be a better option.
- **Sufficient stores.** The amount of stores required by a colony varies with the strain of bee. It is generally considered that a honey bee colony requires about 18 – 22 kg of honey to safely feed it through the winter. Larger hives headed by prolific queens may require more. When full a BS brood frame contains about 2.2 kg of honey, so assess the existing colony stores and feed the required balance using winter strength sugar syrup, i.e. 1 kg. of white granulated sugar to 500 ml of water. Sugar syrup can be fed to supplement honey stores or as a substitute for them. Watch out for robbing bees, this can be a problem in late summer. Colonies also require ample pollen to overwinter successfully, especially to rear brood. Ensure that your overwintering bees have access to good quality pollen crops both at the end of the season and early in the following season.
- **Hive in sound condition, waterproof and well ventilated.** Apiary sites need choosing carefully to ensure that they have good access in all weather, firm but well drained ground, sunny, not in a frost pocket, good air circulation, etc. Damp rather than cold kills bees so check hives, especially roofs, to ensure rain is shed away. It is best to ensure that your hives are off the ground on suitable stands. If your apiary site is not vulnerable to windy conditions, and you are using open mesh floors, they can be left with the floor inserts out. If not, or your hives are on solid floors, then you can lift the crown board on two-millimetre laths. Used matchsticks are excellent for this purpose.
- **Protected from vermin.** Fit mouse guards to prevent access by small rodents, which often nest in hives during the winter. In some areas green woodpeckers can damage hives, so if this is a known problem in, or near, your apiary, place a simple cage of chicken wire around and over the hive, at least 300 mm from the hive walls to prevent damage whilst permitting bees to fly.



A late swarm



Sitting on the lawn having lunch on a bright, sunny, mid-September day our peace was suddenly disturbed by a swarm coming to land in a hedge about 20 feet away. From its direction of approach we knew it was not one of my colonies making a bid for freedom and anyway, apart from 50% of the colonies superseding, there had been no signs of queen-rearing all season. Due to 'do' the bees that afternoon, I dug out the swarm collection gear - we haven't had a swarm in three years so the sheet was hard to find - and waited for the swarm to settle and my bee-buddies to arrive. Since three of them had never collected a swarm it was a great opportunity to enjoy the experience, especially since it would be a 'copy-book' collection from chest level. Soon a cu. ft. of buzzing was tucked up in my skep on the drive.

This season we have been really lucky to be able to have group sessions whilst strictly applying Covid-19 rules. With my twin, in his (compulsory) first beekeeping season, helping me with my three hives, Ian & Susan, new last year, inspecting their one hive and James, at the far end of the apiary, checking his two massive 14X12's, the apiary becomes a socially-distanced hive of activity. The colonies must have benefited because, to avoid personal interaction/contamination we have kept equipment separate and cleaned between sessions, this, my task, is a price worth paying for seeing friends and discussing bees and there is always tea and cake on the lawn at 5pm!

After a leisurely tea Ian & Susan prepared a hive for the swarm and 'ran them in' under James' distanced supervision. Three days later and contrary to my usual practice of leaving swarms to sort themselves out, I began feeding syrup. It is very late in the season with no prospect of a main flow and little sign, then, that the ivy was yielding. 20lbs. of sugar later and they are a calm colony with a fully drawn brood box and a laying queen. Oh, and I can now smell the distinct scent of ivy nectar!

A convert to plastic 'metal ends'

When I acquired my bees back in 2002 they were in elderly national boxes and the super frames had metal ends, both narrow & wide. Part the genetics of my bees, part the location of my hives close to resinous trees, these, because of their construction, were always clogged with propolis, murder to remove (the metal distorted and cut into the wood) and even worse to clean. Over time I graduated to new boxes and more speedily, converted to Hoffmans.

This year extracting Association honey, I have learned the true time & irritation-saving value of wide *plastic* ends. Uncapping four supers with ten or eleven skinny, parsimoniously filled and capped frames it was a joy to encounter a super with eight plump frames, any one of which would have won the 'frame ready for extraction' class at the honey show and easily uncapped with one passage of the knife. The plastic ends removed easily and, after a bath in washing soda and a quick swish with a brush, clean.

I am a convert to a method I abandoned twenty years ago - though I can't say I will use them in my own supers where I tend to 'work by eye' to maximise honey whilst reducing frame numbers and where the bees still love their propolis!

Pippa

SNIPPETS

A **report** by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew asserts that the growing popularity of urban beekeeping is threatening the diversity of wild bees. There is insufficient nectar and pollen to support wild pollinators as well as current beehive numbers in UK cities, particularly London.

Beekeepers usually keep one species of domesticated honeybee. In contrast, there are more than 250 species of wild bee living in the UK, including bumblebees, mining bees and mason bees. Now, bees managed by keepers have become so numerous that they could be outcompeting their wild relatives for food. They can also transmit diseases, so beekeeping to save pollinators could actually be having the opposite effect.

Experts at RBG Kew recommend that city dwellers do their bit to protect wildlife by appreciating and protecting the nature that's already around them.

Prof Phil Stevenson, Senior Research Leader at RBG Kew, who led the study, says, 'In many city parks you'll see signs telling you about the birds, bats, fungi, trees, grasses and wildflowers that live there. This is fantastic, as positive interactions with nature in cities are known to improve well-being and inspire changes in lifestyles that promote conservation of biodiversity. However, what they don't say is how all these organisms interact. We need much more information on the interactions and interdependence of organisms, and we mustn't be afraid to give people more complex information.'

An entertaining **article** in Wired magazine last month explored the success of social distancing as a strategy for disease control among honeybees compared to humans.

Beekeepers are all too aware of propolis, which functions as a sanitiser among other things. Recent research has also shown that bees feed to brood molecules of a substance that acts in a similar way to a vaccine.

Other forms of disease control practised by bees are effective but probably less appealing, such as dragging sick family members out of the hive and leaving them to die. This makes sense in a bee colony, where genetic survival mechanisms operate at the colony rather than the individual level, but it can appear shockingly ruthless to the human observer!

Ed

*Earlier this month a reporter and cameraman visited the Association apiary to interview Hilary Hayward on **beekeeping and climate change**. Luckily the weather was kind and we were able to film a brief hive inspection. Hilary was interviewed about her observations as a beekeeper and former bee inspector. This is part of a series of short films on the BBC South local news programme on Tuesday evenings at 6:30pm. The feature on bee-keeping is due to be featured in mid-October.*

Your Committee for 2020/1

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