ISSUE
April 2021

The Apiarist

. . . High Weald Beekeepers' Newsletter

Chairman's Chatter

After a year of lockdown, I'm struggling to come up with something to write about … 'Thank goodness for that,' I suspect many may be thinking.... and it is not as if it's something I really relish either but seems important somehow to help maintain the momentum of our excellent revamped Apiarist magazine.

The business of the committee has continued via the now ubiquitous medium of Zoom, which although not as good as the real thing, is incredibly useful all the same and doesn't require travel on cold dark winter evenings … wish I'd bought shares in Zoom.

We have also used it quite successfully for a few talks, the most recent of which by Celia Davis I have not seen at the time of writing but I'm sure it will be / was excellent... as her talks always are!

Thanks to Bob from Brighton & Lewes and Helen from the HWBKA for organising it.

I didn't get around to trying Helen Hadley's recipe for an enhanced fondant she gave during her on-line talk, but I'm sure it will be excellent knowing Helen, and promise I will do so next year. I did do a quasi-scientific A/B comparison between various winter feeds though. On Steve's recommendation I tried Hive Alive in my syrup last year on a couple of colonies requiring late summer feeding and was impressed … so were the bees. I always had thought it probably a gimmick and expensive to boot (Did I mention I was tight with the dosh?) but I have become a convert. On that basis I placed regular fondant, Candipollen Gold and the new Hive Alive fondant on some crown boards … and the bees' scores on the doors/ hive entrances are 3rd place standard fondant, 2nd Candipollen Gold but edging it into first place by an antenna …Hive Alive fondant.

Zoom related also, the SBKA held their AGM last week with the existing team being re-elected. The hope is to share many more on-line talks across all divisions of the SBKA in future as indeed we did with Celia's talk. Unfortunately, all live SBKA events are cancelled for this year, including the Bee Market.

The Beginners' course

In terms of our own future live events, we'll be playing most of it by ear this year, although the one activity it was important to commit to early, was our own beginners' training course. This is a very important activity for the HWBKA, being our main source of income and equally importantly our source of new beekeepers. Also, we owed many folks

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All "live" events are still cancelled until further notice. We will try and arrange seminars via ZOOM though, so please check our web site now and then, and watch your email in-box.

For Full calendar & details see https://hwbka.org.uk/event/

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from last year's cancelled course. We agonised over this somewhat trying to second guess what COVID and government policy would be dictating at the time of starting, but finally committed to 2 classroom-based sessions ...by, guess what ...Zoom again, followed by 8 in-apiary sessions with one-to-one tutoring ...socially distanced of course. These will be in either the tutor's or participant's apiary, or at least until normal service can be resumed. This required many more tutors than normal of course and we are very grateful to those who stepped up.

One silver lining to this cloud and a most significant and exciting development has been the generation of new course material. Anticipating the forthcoming difficulties, we formed an Education Sub-Committee comprising Malcolm (of course), Steve Davies, Rob Gore and myself. A course syllabus was prepared and circulated, largely following previous courses, and to cover the whole beekeeping year. Two extensive PowerPoint presentations have been produced to enable us to hold sessions 1 and 2 over Zoom rather than in the customary village hall, although they'd be equally useful in that context too, and the 'pièce de résistance', a 140-page A5 bound course manual has been produced to support the participants and new tutors alike. Although written jointly by the ESC, Rob Gore deserves extra special mention and appreciation for orchestrating and pulling the manual together. This should stand us all in good stead for the future.

And after all that I've probably written too much again.

Well, the sun is shining, 'Spring has sprung, the grass is riz,' my bees are all looking strong after the winter and I'm off down the garden to commune with them.

Happy spring everyone!

Peter Coxon

Asian Hornet conference

By Talha Dinc

On 6th March, the Asian Hornet (AH) Conference was held over Internet by the BBKA.

It was mainly attended by the Asian Hornet Action Team (AHAT) members from all UK Beekeepers Associations but there were some other attendees also. It was well organised and planned to take us through the introduction of AH in France, their lifecycle and behaviour. Many speakers from both the UK and Europe gave their informative presentations in this all day event. BBKA chair Anne Rowberry opened the conference.

Vespa Velutina

Vespa Velutina, sometimes known as the 'Asian Hornet or Yellow-Legged Hornet' is an invasive non-native species to Europe and came originally from South East Asia. AH is slightly smaller than the European hornet, Vespa Crabro. Queens are up to 30mm and workers up to 25mm in length. The AH has distinctive yellow legs, as if they were dipped into yellow paint. The thorax is a velvety brown/black with a dark abdomen. The fourth segment of its abdomen is orange. The head is black with orangey/yellow face.

Asian Hornets arrived in the Bordeaux area of France in 2004. They are believed to have arrived in pottery crates from China. Since then, they have been identified in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany, Holland, Channel Islands and a few in the UK. Most likely, they are spreading into other European countries as well. They are also already widely seen in Korea and Japan, as well as other South East Asian countries.

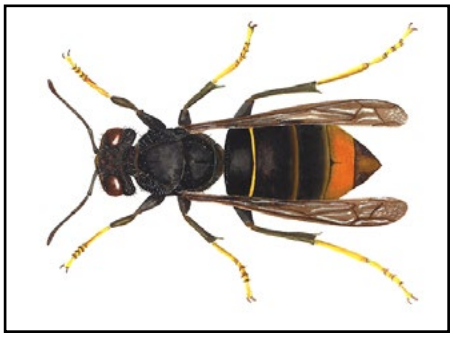


Illustration from the cover of the book "The Asian Hornet Handbook" by Sarah Bunker.

Asian Hornets on protein bait.
Courtesy The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), Crown Copyright.

The lifecycle of AH/Yellow-legged hornet

The queen hibernates over winter following successful mating in late autumn. A solitary AH queen hibernates in dark, dry spaces over winter.

Timeline

February – March: Queen emerges from hibernation.

April – May: Queen starts building a primary nest on her own. Queen starts laying first eggs. Workers emerge.

May – September: Secondary nests being constructed.

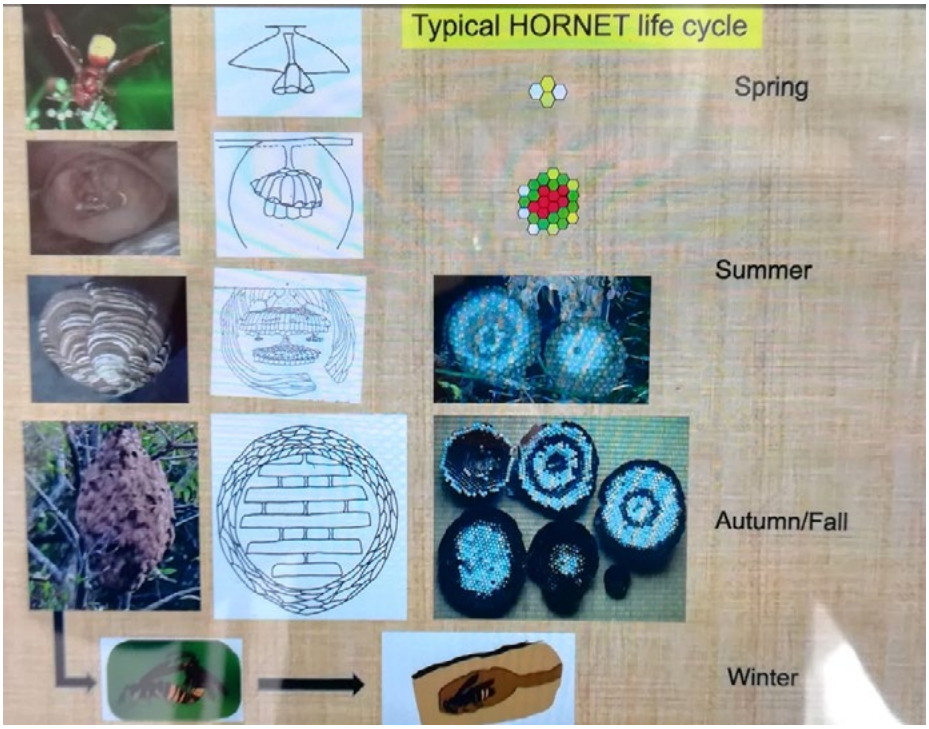
September - October: Thousands of workers emerge.

July – November: Sexual individuals emerge. Hundreds and even thousands of queens produced.

September – November: Males emerge. Queens start mating. Males and workers die off entering winter.

November: Solitary queen hibernates following successful mating.

The illustration on the next page was presented by Professor Stephen Martin to show the lifecycle of AH. Professor Stephen Martin has



Typical hornet life cycle, illustration by Professor Stephen Martin.

studied social insects (bees, wasps, termites, and ants) for most of his career. His areas of specialisation are the 'hornet ecology', 'pests and diseases of honeybees' and 'chemical ecology of ants'.

A single mated queen hibernates in any dark, dry place (not in the nest) with her wings under her body to keep her wings protected from the cold damage. During this time, she survives on fat stored in her body. When she emerges, she is in her most vulnerable state. She starts building her so-called primary nest and lays her first eggs. The first workers emerge between 30 to 50 days later. The nest grows from the initial tennis ball size to around football size when they decide to move and create a secondary nest. Depending on the number of workers, some nests could easily become around a metre or more in diameter. Although they nest on high trees, they also establish many nests in urban areas inside buildings, structures, hedges, shrubs etc. The brood requires animal proteins to develop. Therefore, workers pray on any protein sources. Not only honey bees but the whole insect kingdom is on AH's menu, including spiders.

A single nest could consume 11kg of insects in a season. AHs are carnivores but they would also consume rotting fruit. In the autumn, they start producing potential queens and male hornets for mating. Once new queens have mated, they don't come back to the nest but find a place to hibernate. The nests are usually left emptied once the workers and males die with the first frost. Also, the original queen loses her wings, hair and finally dies with the other workers.

Attracted to bees

Due to the sheer number of honey bees around the hives, AH / Yellow-Legged Hornets are attracted to this feast. They hover in front of the hive and try to catch any incoming or outgoing foragers in flight. They don't normally try to enter a hive or attack a cluster of bees unless the hive is in a very weak condition. Bees, especially in Asia, have developed some techniques to defend themselves. If they catch an AH, they quickly create a cluster and by moving their wings at a high speed around the AH, they generate heat up to 48°C to kill the AH. Some bees also coat the hive entrance with dung. The smell puts the AHs off. However, the main problem is that the honey bees get stressed and frightened, so they don't tend to leave the hive. In time, their stores diminish, and their number lessens and inevitable collapse occurs.

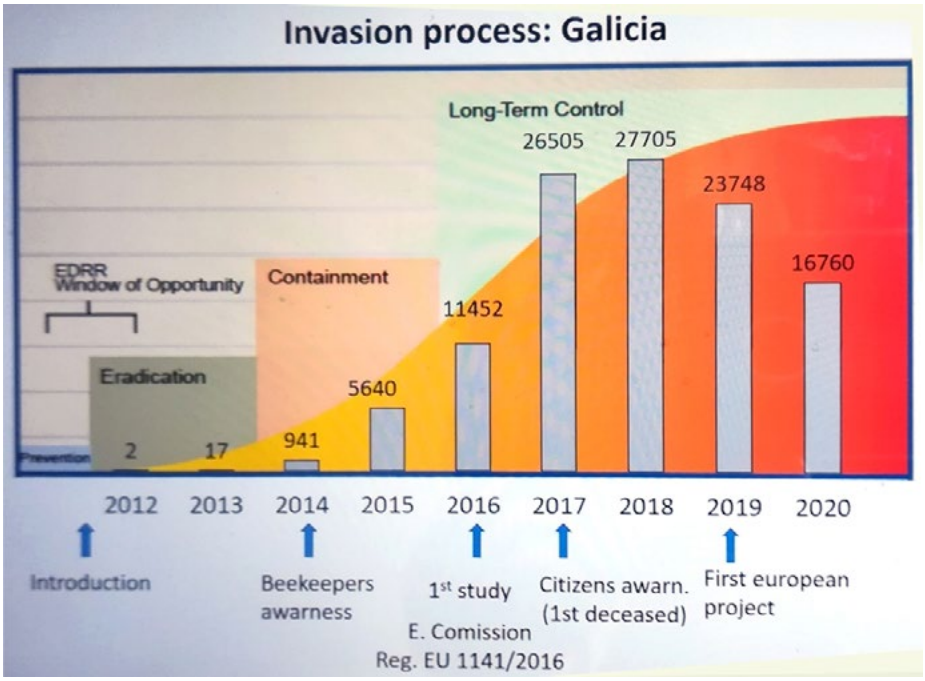
AH on the increase.

Expansion of AH numbers has many detrimental effects, not only on honey bees but all-round. Honey production drops drastically, pollinating insect levels also drop, impacting on crop yield. In France and other countries, AH attacks are on the increase. They don't normally attack humans unless feeling threatened by being in very close proximity to the nest (less than 6m). Recent encounters are in hundreds and human fatalities have been recorded. They have multiple weapons in their armoury. Not only do they have stings with venom but they are observed to spit at human eyes which may require hospital treatment.

Horror movie

Dr Eric Darrouzet works at the University of Tours, and provides a lot of information online, including a video which can be found on the BBKA web site, or directly on YouTube (follow link here to see it). The video clearly shows the tactics of AH and behaviour of honey bees. Dr. Darrouzet has been working on the biology and ecology of AHs, and to develop specific controls of this invasive species (selective traps and colony control without pesticide).

The AH population in Europe has been genetically studied and found to be uniquely from the originally arriving queen. On the next page you see an illustration of how rapidly and aggressively these species spread. They prefer mild damp climates and usually around rivers, where water is in abundance. They don't thrive in cold, dry areas and where the food is scarce. That is also why they have



The spread of AH nests in Galicia, Spain. Illustration by Dr Sandra Rojas Nossa.

recently moved to urban areas in Europe. They don't tend to fly too far away from their primary nest (around 200-500m) but a mated queen can easily travel kilometres.

There have been many ways to control the spread of this invasive species both in Europe and in the UK. Their genetic sequence has been carefully monitored. A parasitic fly seems to manage to mate with the queen, causing its embryo to eat the queens organs from inside and killing her.

Some of the more intrusive methods varied from burning the nest, to firing a shot gun or injecting poison or steam. None of these methods should be practised by beekeepers or by the public. Here in the UK, a radio device has been developed to find nests. Attaching a radio tag to some of the workers leads to their nest and then it is destroyed by suitable means.

In 2020, there has been one sighting of AH in the Gosport area. From the notification to destruction, the National Bee Unit took only three days.

The table above is provided by Dr Sandra Rojas Nossa, illustrating the spread of AH nests in Galicia area of Spain. It is very clear that if necessary actions are not taken in the beginning, it becomes a damage limitation activity ever after. Dr Sandra Rojas's current research focuses on understanding the ecological processes related to the invasion by Vespa Velutina and improving the control methods while protecting native biodiversity.

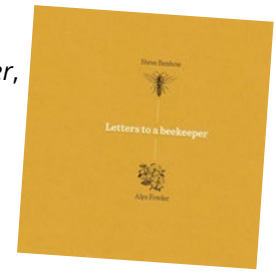
It is almost inevitable that AHs will turn up in numbers in the UK. It is just a matter of time. Therefore, we all need to be very vigilant and get the message out to everyone around us, including the public.

If you believe you have seen an Asian Hornet, you should report it to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk. When emailing, please include your name, the location of the sighting and if possible, a photograph of the hornet. Please do not put yourself in any danger of getting stung when trying to take a photo. Even if you are unsure, send it in anyway – it's better to be safe than sorry. There is a link on the BBKA web site to a helpful Asian hornet identification leaflet (click here).

We also have many printed copies and can send you some if you would care to post them up in local shops, halls, garden centres etc to help spread the word.

Book review

By Mark Ballett



Letters To A Beekeeper, by Alys Fowler & Steve Benbow

I got this book for Xmas. It documents how Alys, a gardener, and Steve, the founder of the London Honey Company and author of The Urban Beekeeper, introduced each other to their respective passions. Over one summer, Alys helped Steve build an insect friendly garden at Tate Britain and Steve helped Alys to build and tend a homemade top-bar hive.

The text and photos are interspersed with facsimiles of actual correspondence between Alys and Steve. While a neat design idea it is the most unsatisfactory aspect of the book for me as neither of them have handwriting that is easy to read – not that I can talk, as mine is literally cryptic. In fact, I gave up a few times as it was just illegible. So, it was a bit frustrating to find that this correspondence had been transcribed into a more readable format in the last section. Perhaps that was signalled early on, but if it was, I missed it.

Overall, to me, there isn't much content in the book but it did give a feel for what beekeeping and gardening was all about and it contained some interesting facts. I hadn't heard of a Chinese Bee Bee Tree – Tetradium daniellii – before, which was promoted by Geoff Hopkinson, a columnist in Beecraft for many years. It seems that it yields prolific nectar and pollen late in the season.

For me, more of a coffee table, dip-into, book than a good read and like with so many books like this layout and design overwhelmed the content which I thought was rather lacking. However, that may well be because, after keeping bees for a year, I now know a little about them and this book may be much more appealing to someone who doesn't.

How did you come to be a beekeeper?

This is a fixed feature in the Apiarist – an interview with members about how they got into beekeeping. Meet Joanna "Jo" Gore, Vice Chair HWBKA.

Jo Gore is a relatively new beekeeper, and also new in the HWBKA committee as Vice Chair.

Question: Why and when did you get into beekeeping?

Answer: I can't remember exactly when my interest started, but we wanted to run a small holding, and bees would be a natural part of that. At one point we had a swarm in our chimney, and Jonathan Coote came and removed it, but I still dont think that was the trigger. But then Rob bought me the HWBKA Beginners' course for my birthday, and so we started. This must have been 4 years ago now. We have learned a lot in that time, including that on its own, beekeeping isn't quite as environmentally friendly as I once thought, as the honey bee is so effective that it crowds out other pollinators. It needs to be practiced as part of a wider approach, including increasing the available forage. We have definitely seen how the increased pollination thanks to the bees has improved the crops in our garden.

Q: What type (types) of bee hive do you prefer?

A: We bought a complete set of equipment and hives extremely cheaply from a friend who had to give up beekeeping, and they are WBC hives. They are very pretty, and I prefer wood to polystyrene. So we keep the WBC hives in the apiary close to the house. But in our out-apiary we have 14x12 National hives.

Q: Have you tried other types of hive design? If so, any comments on why you didn't continue with this (those)?

A: We only have some nucs as well, some poly and some ply, but haven't experimented with other hive designs.

Q: What's your best memory of bee keeping?

A: In our first year of beekeeping Rob was away on a business trip, and there was a big swarm in our garden. My bee buddy Amanda Savage kindly quickly came over to guide me in how to capture the swarm, and move it into a nuc. It turned out to be our own bees, but it was never the less a wonderful experience to scoop up the thousands of bees, and hold them in your hands.

Q: What's your worst memory/incident in beekeeping?

A: It was when after an inspection Rob got a bee stuck behind his glasses, and the bee panicked and stung him on the eye lid. His whole face swelled up terribly, and it was horrible to watch.

Q: Any particular mentor or beekeeper expert you are especially grateful to?

A: I'd like to mention two; my bee buddy Amanda Savage, who was always available to help when I was not sure how to best handle a tricky situation. She has given good advice over the years. And of course, Malcolm Wilkie. It was Malcolm who persuaded us to actually get bees in the first session of the course. Over the years we have had a few challenges, and Malcolm has always kindly helped. I have since realised he was at the same time helping several other new bee keepers, so he really put in an awful lot of good work in our association.

Q: If you were to give one single piece of advice to a prospective beekeeper, what would it be?

A: First of all – join a beekeeping association. And definitely do a course. Even if you can't take in all the new facts and information immediately, it gives you a solid knowledge base to work from. And with the contacts you get through the BKA, not least being appointed a bee buddy, will help tremendously once you get your own bees.

Q: Anything else you would like to add?

A: Don't be put off getting started by the cost and the amount of work involved. Once the bees are established, and you get into the routines, it's so very rewarding. To bring a cup of coffee down to the apiary, and see and hear the bees out and about in the Spring, is such a joy. And of course, you get honey!

Imported bees

Readers are reminded of the BBKA's position of discouraging the importation of queen bees and colonies from outside the UK. . . .Prospective purchasers should satisfy themselves both of the origin of bees offered for sale and the regulations on bee importations pertinent to their location.

No import of bee colonies from the EU after Brexit

Paul Lindström

As you might be aware the rules on bee-import changed with Brexit. While DEFRA has published information on this, there remain some questions about how the new rules on the ban should be applied.

Because the final agreement between the UK and the EU was made at the last minute, several companies who have traded with bee import were not prepared for or aware that from January 2021 the EU countries are now affected by the existing ban on the import of bees. Several newspapers have reported on the problems facing companies dependant on access to bee colonies from EU and beyond.

I became aware of this new situation when a Masters student in journalism at City University in London, Elena Vardon, asked for beekeepers to volunteer to be interviewed by her on this topic. I volunteered, among other more illustrious beekeepers like for example Roger Patterson, and she swiftly made a short video on the topic (to be presented later in April).

I decided to do some reasearch myself on this, and during this work a blog post headlined "Brexit and beekeeping" was posted by Professor David Evans on his web site "The Apiarist". I will just summarise my own findings here, since David Evans reports on the matter very well in his article.

Queens still allowed to be imported

The ban, introduced by DEFRA (Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs) in order to protect the UK from imported viruses and their impact on bees, is for whole colonies. Single queens can still be imported from EU countries (with a small entourage of a maximum of 20 attendants), providing this import is managed according the guidance, which can also be found on the web site BeeBase here. BeeBase is maintained by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), and it in turn cooperates closely with DEFRA. All imports need to have a health certificate and the queen needs to be moved over to a new cage immediately after arrival, and the old cage and the attendants need to be sent off for post import analysis. The cost for this analysis is said to be passed on to the exporter.

Needless to say – this added administrative work will probably reduce the number of queens imported this season, and most likely raise the costs of imported queens anyhow.

There is talk about a possible loophole in the rules, and that is for importers to route the bees via Northern Ireland. But that surely would break the rule that trade over Northern Ireland should only be "genuine trade", and importing bees and then shortly afterwards re-exporting them to a country to which imports are not directly allowed can't possibly be right.

I should add that the only country that import import of whole colonies is allowed from is New Zealand, but that is a long journey for the bees to make, and the cost of bees from New Zealand is likely to rise considerably because of the new situation.

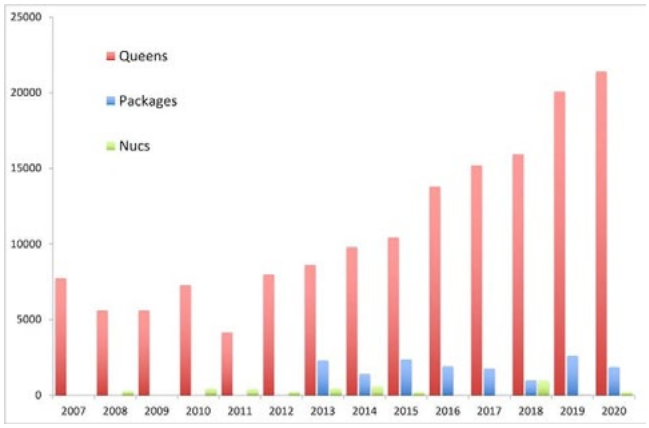
BBKA has also engaged in the discussion and commented on the situation in a post on their web site on 7 March, titled "Serious Risk of Exotic Bee Pest Being Imported". From this press release I quote:

> *"Ultimately this will need to be tested in court, but in the meantime, bees that are going to be sourced in the EU and supplied to Great Britain via Northern Ireland are being openly offered for sale on the internet. We call on the UK government to uphold its anti-avoidance legislation to prevent this trade commencing in the next two months when the bees become available."*

The BBKA has also organised a Parliamentary Petition headlined "Stop the importation of honey bees into GB from the EU via Northern Ireland". You find it here.

But does this really matter much to a hobby beekeeper? In short term it probably will, since the majority of the imported bees actually go to hobby beekeepers, and only a smaller number are imported by bee farmers. As you can see from the diagram below, taken from David Evan's article, the importation of queens and colonies to the UK has been steadily increasing over the last 10 years. This is actually not a good development.

The HWBKA will continue to support initiatives to breed more and better queens, as well as encourage systematic breeding of gentle and strong local bees. Long term this should benefit most beekeepers in the UK, not only us in the HWBKA.



The imports of queens, nucs and packages to the UK is steadily going up. The illustration is from The Apiarist article mentioned above, using data from National Bee Unit 2007-2020.

Hive on the roof

By Andy Hayward

Andy Hayward

My bungalow roof was not the first choice of an ideal position to site a hive, but the idea grew on me.

After a few years of successfully catching swarms with bait hives on my shed roof I began to think of all that space on my bungalow roof. So when I suddenly had an extra hive arrive with nowhere to put it, the roof looked a better option than the garden where my energetic spaniel would be zooming around.

My bungalow roof is easy to walk around on as it has a low pitch of 135 degrees and strong concrete tiles, but a metal hive roof would still slide off, so it had to go wood side down to stay where I put it. Safety was a prime consideration as I didn't want me, or the hive to fall off the roof.

An eye bolt goes through the roof with a nut on the inside.

First the access ladder was secured to the gutter board and the old navy rule of "one hand for the ship and one hand for yourself" was observed while climbing onto the roof. The hive frame is secured with a steel cable to an eye bolt on the apex and a security screw by the gutter. The frame is weighed down with 5 litre bottles of water and so far the hive has survived a few storms and I haven't fallen off the roof! As an added safety precaution, I can clip onto the eye bolt in case I stumble over a frame or trip on my shoe lace.

It's not easy fiddling with a hive on the roof, lugging up a car battery to vaporise varroa was just too much so ApiLife Var treatment was used on the Varroa.

There are plans to add another hive next year, this will need a new holding frame and probably slats on the roof to stop things sliding off, and approval from my wife, so I hope my bees are on best behaviour.

It's nice to keep an eye on the bees and watch them more often than at my main apiary, which is 100 metres away. My bees look happy high up in the sunshine, but how do the slugs find their way up into the hive? Perhaps "Because it's there" (remember the English mountaineer George Mallory's answer when asked "why did you want to climb Mount Everest?".

Hive entrance facing down the roof.

Swarm arriving at a bait hive on the shed roof.

Ladder secured to the gutter facia.

A brief summary of the latest HWBKA Committee meeting

The £2 BBKA increase in subsciption fee (due from Oct 2021) was discussed since we are unable to raise our subscription rates without first agreeing it in an AGM (due in Nov 2021).

Rob Gore suggested that, as we have just raised our own subscription by £2, we could swallow the 2021/22 BBKA raise for next year. This was agreed.

It was also agreed that we should propose a change in our Rules and Constitution (to be ratified at the next AGM) so that we don't have a similar situation in the future.

It had been suggested that HWBKA possibly should register as Charitable status – following a discussion, it was decided that Pete Coxon will speak with Harold Cloutt (SBKA treasurer) to discuss pros and cons with this.

It was decided to create a "Show sub-committee". Jo Gore volunteered to coordinate this, and Paul Lindström joined this sub-committee. One of the tasks for the sub-committee is to manage the observation hive, and to spread the workload. Anyone interested in joining should email Jo Gore (the.hwbka+vicechair@gmail.com).

The next HWBKA Committee meeting will be on **Thursday 20 May** – suggestions of issues and projects are welcome!

DIY: Oversized dummy boards

By Steve Davies

These I have found to be very useful particularly during a Bailey Comb Change and for growing a nucleus into a full colony.

I make several two-frame and three-frame dummy boards as this gives me extra flexibility and, in the case of the Bailey Comb Change, whatever you put in the bottom brood box needs to be replicated in the top. For this you will need at least four of each size.

The measurements given will be for a three-frame dummy board to fit a 14x12 brood box. I have found it helpful to have an empty frame to use as a template (or the component parts).

Other than the top bar, the thickness of the timber is not critical but the top bar must be 10mm to maintain bee space. The width also does not need to be exact but these measurements replicate two and three frames in the brood box and makes life easier.

Materials needed:

- One length 432mm x 95mm x 10mm prepared timber for the top bar (length x width x thickness).
- Two lengths 270mm x 95mm x 20mm for the side bars.
- One length 355mm x 95mm x 20mm for the bottom bar.
- Two sections of 5mm plywood 355mm x 300mm.
- 8 x 50mm lost head nails.
- Small amount of good quality wood glue.
- Selection of frame nails.

Construction:

- Having cut the timber to size, mark the top bar 38mm from each end. Alternatively, use a standard top bar as the template but make sure you use the outer rebate for the mark.

- Then, mark and drill two holes either end on the inside of the lines. These will secure the side bars so they need to be half the width of your timber; ie. if using 20mm thick wood, drill the holes 10mm from the line.
- Repeat the same process on the ends of the bottom bar, again, half the width of the side bars.
- Apply a liberal amount of wood glue to one end of a side bar. Align that end to one of the top bar lines and nail together. Do not drive the nail fully home just yet to allow for minor adjustments.
- Repeat the process on the other side bar.
- Make sure both side bars are at right angles to the top bar and then drive the nails fully home. Wipe off any surplus glue.
- Next, apply a liberal amount of wood glue to the ends of both side bars then nail the bottom bar to both. Again,

. . .continues on next page

check that the frame is reasonably square before driving the nails fully home.

- Lay the frame on one side and apply wood glue around the edge of the side bars, bottom bar and top bar (between the side bars only – do not extend along the full length).
- Place one piece of 5mm plywood on top of the glue making sure it is aligned with the outside edges of the framework. Don't worry if it protrudes slightly, this will be fixed at the end!
- Using either a staple / nail gun (or simply a hammer and frame nails), evenly nail down the plywood using about four nails per edge.
- Turn the frame over and repeat the same process. Wipe off any surplus glue as you go along.
- Once the glue has set, sand down any overlaps of the plywood/frame. Then sand down the complete dummy board especially the edges of the plywood – nothing worse than getting plywood splinters, they're almost invisible to find!
- That's it, your dummy board is ready to use. There is no need to treat or paint this as it is inside the hive. You can, if required, fill this with compacted sawdust/Celotex for insulation.

The measurements for a two-frame 14 x 12 dummy board are as follows:

- Top bar – 432mm x 60mm x 10mm (length, width, thickness).
- Side bars – 270mm x 60mm x 20mm.
- Bottom bar – 355mm x 60mm x 20mm.
- 5mm plywood – 355mm x 300mm.

This method can easily be adapted for different frames, Langstroth, Dadant etc – just use an empty frame as your template.

Online lectures

By Paul Lindström

Because of COVID we still haven't been able to organise or attend "live" lectures, but as you hopefully have noticed we have organised some by now in HWBKA, the latest was a lecture by Celia Davis on 17 March – I hope you enjoyed that as much as I did.

Another good event, hosted by Cambridge BKA, was a lecture by Professor David Evans, editor of the blog site "The Apiarist", titled "Bait hives for profit and pleasure". I

learned a lot about how to place and set up bait hives. I actually ordered some Lemon grass essential oil the same evening – one or two drops of that supposedly will act as a lure for the bees. A 10 mL bottle was only £1.57, so not much to lose there I thought. Another thing I brought from the seminar was the importance of not filling up the space in the bait hive with frames with foundation. The scout bees will check that the volume of the new possible home is at least 40 L. If the bait hive is full of frames with foundation they might reject it, since the frames will obstruct them when they assess it flying across, as well as walking, the space. Put one frame in the far corner with some old comb, and then only use starter strips on the other frames. You can find the seminar on the CBKA web site, but you will need to apply to become an associate member. It's only £7, and since they have a whole range of interesting seminars it should be well worth it. Just follow this link.

Another very interesting webinar was the one organised by BIBBA (Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association). Kevin Thorn, coordinator of the Abberton Native Bee Project in Essex, talked about the work done to reintroduce the native honey bee to the area. The group coordinates their work with Colchester BKA, Essex and Suffolk Water and Essex Wildlife Trust, and the project has been going for nearly 4 years now.

I also listened to a podcast (a streamed radio program) about Drone Congregation Areas, posted on the Vita beehealth blog (click here for the link). It's part of the podcast series "Living Beeing", and it was nice to just listen to someone telling a fascinating story about the mysterious DCAs. The recording was made where Gilbert White reported on this phenomena 300 years ago.

The sixth episode in a multipart series called "Three Bees"

Once more into the light

By Laurel Lindström

The image is clip from the movie "More Than Honey" by Markus Imhoof

Sisters were marshalling themselves and herding a group of young drones towards the hive entrance. Curly and Twirly, were still asleep and had somehow managed to avoid the bee dragnet closing in around the other drones. Burly, half awake and still too tired to argue, was on the wrong side of the line. Messages flooding his senses muddled and tangled as other drones, bumped and pushed and loud worker bees thrust them ever forwards. Burly shook himself awake and looked around him in search of his brothers, but he couldn't see them and in the shoving confusion lost his footing, falling between two frames and missing the outstretched grapple one of the herding sisters offered. He landed with a bump on the hive floor, alone, no longer in the herd. From his secluded position he could see the group of other drone bees being ushered out onto the landing board of the hive. He could see shafts and shadows of light crossing the entrance to his home. And he could hear some of his sisters calling harshly to the drone bees to hurry up and to follow the scents in the sky. "Head for the Drone Congregation Area as fast as you can, now, get moving", he heard the ugly tones of one of the uber worker bees, a bee whose prowess with propolis and pollen collection was legendary. She was elegant, powerful, slightly larger than most of the other girls, and she was a special confidant of Mother. It might have been the other way round Curly had once told Burly, but no one was really sure. Even if it wasn't her idea, the Queen must have issued instructions to gather up so many drones to send them out into the morning air. "And don't come back too soon!" she yelled, adding, "if you come back at all" to the general amusement of her sniggering fellows.

Burly didn't know what was going on and Curly wasn't there to explain everything, so Burly kept very still. He sucked at some stray drops of nectar dripped to the floor of the hive by hurrying foragers. Soon he was feeling better, enjoying the morning air, rising, dewdropped and scented through the gaps in the floor. He could see bees flying around under the hive, before heading off into the morning, or returning to the landing board to deliver their loads. There is nothing quite so restful as watching others work, he pondered. He thought about getting back to Curly and Twirly, but it was so early and it was only by mistake he had ended up in that crowd. His brothers were probably still asleep anyways. With a full belly and an exciting story to tell, Burly was tempted to make his way back up and across the frames of honey and brood and eggs to share the excitement of his morning. But there was something else calling him. "They'll still be asleep," he said to himself, before getting another whiff of wild outside air, heavy with the scents of his fellow drones, lumbering their way up and away into the sky, in search of wherever that place was. "Drone Congregation Area" Burly repeated to himself, adding with a bit of bee bluster and a puff of his chest, "I like the sound of that". So instead of clambering back up to the top of the frame and struggling past all the busy bees to his brothers, Burly took the most important decision of his young life.

With the morning air rising to tickle his underbelly, Burly lifted his antennae and raised his bee chin just a little bit higher. He dragged his forearms over his face, cleaning his sticky mandibles and straightening as many of his body hairs as he could reach. He had noticed in the general roundup that a lot of sister bees were grooming their brothers ready for the excursion. Burly knew he was amongst the handsomest of drones in the colony for as well as being slightly bigger than pretty much all of his brothers, he also made a point of keeping himself in good trim. Yes, he slept a lot but he also traipsed about the hive a lot in search of the tastiest food, and then he always went back and got Twirly and Curly, making sure to take the shortest route back to the food and to help Twirly when he got panicked in the crowds. It meant he daily crossed many more frames and comb than his brothers and he was quietly pleased that he was so athletic and strong compared to them. Actually he wasn't at all quietly pleased about it, only in front of Twirly and Curly. To the rest of the hive Burly was known to be excessively full of himself, so apart from a couple of naive nursing bees, the girls and other drones tended to ignore him.

His vanity was to be Burly's undoing. He decided that he needed to redeem yesterday's failure to do the unknown job he was meant to do on the outside, out in the light, high in the sky. Despite feeling a little tired following yesterday's fruitless exertions Burly decided to make his way to the hive entrance, get a little additional preening and fly out into the light once more. He was pleased at the stir he caused amongst the remaining workers who were being fed and watered by some incoming bees. They paused and looked as one as Burly stepped onto the landing board wondering why he was late, not particularly at his glorious beauty. The sun shone bright and strong on his huge shiny eyes, and Burly could feel their gaze, puffing himself up a little bit more, basking, proud. A light breeze was tickling at the hairs on his head. His wings were trembling daintily in the air as a couple of workers added the finishing touches to his toilette. "Of you go, my lad" the brash uber worker growled as she shoved his attendants aside. "Out and up and away" pushing with her head as Burly's wings flicked and vibrated, and carried him suddenly upward with unexpected speed. Then he was alone high in the air, vaguely aware of a message that he should keep going high and straight until he could feel the mysterious call of other drones and a virgin queen.

The morning was lengthening and Burly was glad of his strength and power as he slid across the sky, antennae alert and all five openings to his heart beating a new and urgent rhythm. Light flooded his massive eyes, he was breathing new fresh air and could scent neither his brothers, nor his sisters. He had forgotten the warm cosy stink of the colony, the mix of propolis, pollen, baby bees, honey capped and uncapped. Mother. All of it was gone and only one message came

floating to call him on and on and on. The scent of a virgin queen bee somewhere in the sky. The intoxicating scent, beautiful, peculiar, alien and intense. It drew him on, closer and closer.

Gradually there were no other sensations for Burly, no sounds, no tiredness. There was no ache in his wings, no messages hitting his antennae. There were no thoughts of Curly and Twirly or of his home. Burly was utterly alone, suspended in the heavens, caught in a euphoria he had never before known. He was aware only of a single constant, something pulling every part of him closer and closer. As all thoughts and volition left his small bee brain, Burly saw in the near distance a magical creature, a bee bigger even than him. Bouncing black and gold against radiant blue, Burly was getting closer and closer to her. This was the virgin queen he had heard about, this was the bee who would be his own, his queen. Burly watched as she rejected an unworthy suitor, thrusting him suddenly out and away from her. Burly sneered seeing the drone's pathetic, inadequate body, wretched and torn, wing beats slowing, head drooping.

Burly watched as the unworthy one spiralled listless and slowly down towards the ground. He watched as a passing swallow gobbled up the unworthy one. He watched as the swallow spun slicing perfect arcs through the hovering drones to send them wheeling away, but ever far from the virgin queen. "Poor chap" Burly said to himself as he cruised into range of the luscious deliciousness calling him. He knew he had to move fast, before some other wannabee paramour got to his love first.

As he approached her, the young queen raised her antennae straight above her beautiful head, which she dipped in what Burly took for coy acquiescence. But if she'd been human she'd have been checking her watch. Shirley was much larger than Burly, with a tiny waist and a long abdomen tapering to an elegant point. Her colours were bright, radiant black and yellow bands, her hair stood straight and golden around her lovely eyes. Her iridescent wings were long and elegant. But her massive eyes saw nothing, lost as she was in a curious state of ecstasy. Burly understood that it was this ecstasy calling him, drawing him in closer and closer. He was upon her now and the air between them slid away as he climbed onto her back and felt a strange part of his body push out and into to join with his beloved. His antennae caressed his queen's gently up and down, his legs stroked hers, up and down, up and down in step with the motions of his body. And his legs clasped her beauty tighter and tighter to him. There were no more signals only this union, euphoric, joyful, soundless and full of light. And they two danced across the glowing sky in perfect motion, a rhythm shared, a rhythm deadly. She lifted her legs high and as Burly thrust forwards he felt himself turned inside out with delirious joy, he felt himself a creature of heaven.

But the light shining on Burly was about to fade. As his love rose and his rhythm slowed he felt a new ecstasy moving through his body, fiery, uncontrolled, a shimmering electricity exploding out of him and turning him into a quicksilver version of himself. Burly was aware that every atom in his beautiful drone body was a whelm of rapturous bliss. He was unaware that most of his abdomen was in shreds, and that she had cast him off, or that he was dying. As he floated down and away and into the open jaws of a hungry swallow, Burly's fickle queen welcomed her 26th drone of the day.

When Curly found out that Burly had once again gone out into the light, he kept his misgivings to himself. Twirly was already struggling to recover from Burly's tales of yesterday's excursion. He was especially worried that so few drones came back with Burly yesterday, but Twirly was unaware that his fear was not misplaced. All of the returning drones had the same story of confusion and bafflement. Not a one could explain or even share any idea of what they were supposed to do. And many too exhausted after a full day flying to even speak.

When darkness fell Curly told Twirly to settle down and get some sleep, "I'll keep watch" he said and crept to the hive entrance. Nodding to some sleepy guards Curly snuggled amongst them to stare out at the blackness. He heard owls and nightingales calling in the night, saw stars shining sharp and high in the sky, and he understood that the turning of the day would see no return of his brother. Curly wiped away a little tear and ambled back to Twirly pondering how to explain that Burly was gone. As he pondered Curly drifted gently to sleep, close and safe zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

Book review

By Mark Ballett

Ten Poems about Bees, by Brigit Strawbridge Howard.

This is a tiny book of musical words. If you like poetry and bees, you will like this book, a personal selection of bee poetry written by ten different people.

I watch the bees slow down the summer is the first poem and reading it made think of a pop song, full of nice sounding words that don't make immediate sense, but hint at some deeper meaning – not the pop songs, the poem. I re-read it several times and enjoyed it but can't tell you succinctly what it is trying to say.

The poems take you to faraway places: to your garden, but you didn't realise it was quite so magical; to the South American jungle with tribal dances honouring the stingless bees with the smell of cocoa in the air; to the intimacy between beekeeper and bees as they interact; to what it is like for both human and bee to be stung; to a daughter on her way home to her Queen mother; to a picture of a man assembling a beard of bees; to bees stocking up their eccentric homes for winter; to the loneliness of a January bee; and to a drone dreaming of foraging, lying drunk in his bed.

My favourite is *In the Senior Common Room* by David Briggs, about the romance of bee keeping and the humour of our world interacting with theirs – *'...flew a careless scrawl through the lunch hall window, to rummage among the treacle puddings.'*

The book doesn't contain many more words than I have written here but it communicates a myriad ideas that I am unable to put into better words. Perhaps that is what poetry does best and If you could write it in prose there would be no need for poems.

Hoping for a Spring harvest of honey?
– rent a honey extractor from HWBKA

The brand new SAF Natura radial 6-frames extractor

The association has three extractors available for rent. One new SAF NATURA radial 6-frames extractor, and one older tangential 3/6-frames extractor (pictured). We also have a smaller 3-frames tangential, kindly donated by Don Bastick.

You can rent them two days at a time. The newer 6-frames radial extractor cost £10 for two days (£20 deposit)

The older 6- and 3-frames tangential extractors cost £5 for two days (£15 deposit).

Included in the rent is a honey bucket, a sieve and an uncapping fork, if required + instructions for use.

Note that the deposit will be forfeit if returned late, damaged or dirty. Severe damage/repairs will be charged at cost.

The older tangential 6-frames extractor

Two of the extractors are stored by the editor of The Apiarist Paul Lindström in Southover (outside Burwash). The older 6-frames tangential is stored by Lynne Curtis at Lynne's Organic Farm (just outside Crowborough). Bookings and inquiries through Paul, see contact info below.

HIGH WEALD BEEKEEPERS

For info, availability and booking call either 01435-88 35 65 (preferred). Or call or text mobile 07833-088 766.
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