



West Suffolk Beekeepers' Association

NEWSLETTER July 2020

WSBKA Officers and Committee for 2020/21

President	Sylvia Pettitt	07798 941533	sylviapettitt@live.co.uk
Chairman	Kevin Thorn	07557 418418	kevinthorn@me.com
Secretary	Carol Williamson	01449 736362	wsbka@yahoo.co.uk
Treasurer	Mark Moore	07969548163	marklamoore@googlemail.com
Membership Sec.	Tim Slaven	07795 211693	tim.slaven@btinternet.com
Newsletter Editor	Roger Merry	07890 169437	rogermerry6@gmail.com

Committee Zac Blackmore, Jane Corcoran, Philip Draycott, Mike Graystone, (Apiary Manager) 01359 269652 mg4mike@btinternet.co, Mike Shave, Alan Wren

The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor, nor of the Association

Notes from the Editor

Hello all

What strange times! My life like yours has been changed, in some ways for the worse i.e. socially, but often for the better. For instance, I have spent more time with my bees, not necessarily disturbing them too much, but observing their behaviour in the fairly wild habitat that they occupy. I have been very lax this year not clearing the ground around the hives and you can see the result (Plate 1), it is overrun by blackberries etc. This leads to the point that I was coming to. This very unusual season climatically, with an exceptionally wet spring followed by two months of very dry and often hot weather, has stimulated many plants into early flowering.



We had massive early nectar flows and abundant honey, but with the June Gap, early flowering and the lack of water suppressing nectar production, the bees will be struggling to find nectar throughout July and August. It is anybody's guess. At the moment nectar flows have ended but my bees are still flying. On the shadier side of the apiary there were only bumblebees, but where it was sunnier it was packed

Plate 1 My apiary with blackberries flowering in the foreground



Plate 2. Honeybee foraging on blackberry

with honeybees. The close-up in Plate 2 shows a honeybee on blackberry flowers. Another source near my bees was the Common Dogwood that was flowering in the local park (Plate 3) towards the end of May.



It attracted huge numbers of but they kept moving as I took the picture - there is one if you look very closely!

Two thousand and twenty has been a 'swarming' year. I have been called out several times in our village and have to admit that some of the swarms had probably issued forth from my hives, but it seems that most beekeepers had

Plate 3 Common Dogwood with bees

enough colonies by June/early July so it was difficult to find anyone to collect them. I did at one point arrive five minutes late to pick up a perfectly positioned swarm (almost certainly from my apiary) on a low shrub at the local park, to find another young beekeeper donning his gear - most frustrating. However, the swarming season has come to an end now.

Harvesting of honey has been early too, partly to ensure that the rape honey did not crystallise, although the rape around my apiary did not look good and I doubt yielded much nectar. The other reason was that I desperately needed more supers, a common problem for us beekeepers. I hope that you have all benefitted from these massive early flows and good luck for the rest of the season.

PS. I have wanted to do a series of pen portraits of our senior beekeepers and the first one is below, after the Chairman's report. I hope that you all enjoy it. This Newsletter will probably be the last of the special editions during the crisis and I'll get back to the three-monthly cycle in September.

Roger Merry

Chairman's Report

Every year is one of learning and improving techniques and this year is no different. As I mentioned in the last Newsletter I had high winter losses and some colonies only scraped through, a number with a patch of brood the size of a baked bean tin in April. I have experimented with some of these colonies to strengthen them and the method and results are as follows:

The colonies were too weak to give them a frame of brood, so I found the queen in a strong colony and reserved the frame. Taking another frame, I shook the bees into an upturned lid and by kicking the lid a few times, the older flying bees went home leaving the nurse bees behind - about a cup full. These I tipped into the nucleus feeder (which wasn't in use) and covered the feed hole so the bees could only go in one at a time. Two days later the queen had doubled the laying area so I repeated the procedure with two frames of nurse bees. A week later the queen had fully laid up one frame and two part frames. Leaving the colony for 3 weeks for these bees to emerge, I added a couple of frames of brood from strong colonies and within 6 weeks the colony had 9 frames of brood and now has supers on.

There is an argument as to whether this is worthwhile but the colony had re-queened late so there was nothing wrong with it – there just hadn't been enough time for it to build up last year. The colonies that donated brood are over strength and removing brood has prevented them starting swarm preparations. The once weak colony is now providing a surplus of brood every week for making up more nuclei and will provide a super or two of honey, so it is in my opinion worthwhile.

A beekeeping friend from Westerham BKA shared another technique used for giving a colony sealed brood with covering bees. Having secured the queen, take a frame of brood that is ready to emerge. Hold the frame at arms-length in front of your face and shake it, moving the lugs forwards and backwards in what he calls a shiver shake. This dislodges the flying bees but not the nurse bees and can strengthen a colony quickly, leaving bees to cover the frame so it that doesn't get chilled. I've tried it several times and it works. The nurse bees won't fight or be attacked by bees in the receiving colony.

I've finally managed to complete the last 30 Bailey comb changes so my hives are now all converted from Commercial to National brood. I put second brood boxes (as supers above the queen excluder) on my strongest colonies and the bees are busily drawing these out and filling them with honey. Having drawn comb ready to use is



incredibly valuable and the nuclei I've been able to give it to have expanded much more quickly than those given undrawn foundation. So much so that I've needed to be on my toes to move them into full hives before they swarm!

Plate 4 shows a colony that I cut out with the help of Tim Easting. It had taken up home in a barn and unusually, it was hanging free rather than in a cavity. Tim being a foot taller than me was able to reach the top of the comb more easily. Cutting it carefully Tim handed it to me and I fastened into the frames using elastic bands. This turned out to be a smart move as the queen didn't survive the experience! The

Plate 4 Colony in a barn near Alpheton

bees have however made a new queen from the larvae and she is already laying, so the colony survives.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well. Things seem to be settling down, the mad demand for honey returning to normal. Julie has reopened our beeswax business and is busily making beeswax soap. I also hope everyone's bees are busy and the supers are filling up. The rain we have had could replenish the nectar so we may be good for a couple more weeks of flow.

Kevin Thorn

Mike Graystone – a legend of the WSBKA

All of you will know Mike. He is a genial, gregarious fellow with an absolute passion for beekeeping and loves nothing more than to impart his great knowledge of bees to all who have an ear.



As he said, after we finished the 1.5h interview, 'I could have gone on all day'!

Unfortunately, I didn't take a picture of Mike but I have since been able to locate a few. Here is one of him in a group photo (Plate 7) although I don't know the names of the others, perhaps some of you do?

Plate 7 Mike (right) with other beekeepers

I met him outside in my garden (with social distancing) for a chat about his life and in particular his long career in beekeeping. Mike was born and bred in Halesworth, Norfolk (Plate 6) and started adult life with National Service as most men of that era



did, signing on for 2/3 years in the Royal Norfolk Infantry Regiment in 1952 and training in Bury St Edmunds, later finding himself on a troop ship to Hong Kong on the way to acclimatise before going into active service in the Korean War. However, five days into voyage their ship met another carrying his battalion away from the theatre of war, so he never

Plate 6. As an angelic young lad

went into active service. After the army, he took up a job working for the International Stores, managing shops in the Anglian region. It was while managing a shop in Chingford that he met Maureen. They married in 1958 and moved to Bury St Edmunds and he pursued his old hobby of target shooting. He next took on a pioneering role, managing a shop in the then new frozen food trade, a forerunner of Iceland in Thetford.

Mike eventually took voluntary redundancy and was looking for something to interest and occupy him, taking on a part time job in the local garden centre where he met Geoff Messenger, who along with Geoff Greenwood (some of you may remember him as a former President of WSBKA, 2008-2013) were known as 'the two Geoffs'. In talking to them, his schoolboy interest in bees was rekindled. He then worked the bees with them for 2 years before getting his own colonies in 1992, starting with 3, then more and more hives ending with 100 in 10 apiaries. Mike did eventually find 100 colonies too time consuming and although as he says he found it difficult to cut back, he did rationalise down to 50, the number that he still has. During this time, he and Maureen ran the beginners' course from 2010 to 2016, when Kevin, who did Mike's course in 2014, took it on. It still continues, run by Jane Corcoran.

Mike started with Nationals, then moved to Commercials to allow more space for the bees, but re-opened some National hives in the home apiary for teaching his beginners, all using top bee space and with open mesh floors. The experience gave them the choice of starting with either-sized hive once they had practised on both. Mike has always kept Buckfast X bees with no imported queens and he marks and clips them, the latter to aid in swarm control. I have never clipped queens, probably too squeamish, but Mike advocates the approach and told me that he rarely loses a swarm. He finds that during swarming a clipped queen usually goes down under the hive hanging in a cluster and clinging to the bottom of the floor. He then collects and hives them in a nucleus or a brood box. Thus, apart from the odd cast that is thrown off if a queen cell is missed, this approach works for him. He does occasionally do a modified Pagden artificial swarm, putting the queen on a frame of bees into a nucleus box and shaking bees in from four frames, whilst leaving two queen cells (one open and one closed if possible) in the parent box. Of course, the queen still has to be found but Mike believes that this approach is less labour intensive than Pagden.

I asked Mike about 'Topping and Tailing', an approach that he is famed for, which he started when we first needed to treat for varroa. It involves moving a super with stores underneath the brood box prior to varroa treatment. This allows easy access and minimal disturbance to the bees during application and gives a usually empty super a smell the bees know, to put back on top during the "Spring Clean". This approach evolved when varroa first came on the scene in Suffolk (at Ipswich) in 1996, and Mike has used it ever since. In those early days Bayvarol strips were hung between the brood frames and apparently all WSBKA members treated at the same time in the first week of September. Now he says that if you treat and manage your colonies well, varroa are not a problem. He only uses oxalic acid, trickled onto the seams of bees just after Christmas.

Mike took and passed his Basic Beekeeping Examination, followed by a module on Bee Husbandry, but is a very hands-on person and didn't go further with academic qualifications, but later went on pass the assessments to become a BBKA examiner for the Basic Beekeeping Qualification. He mainly worked in Cambridge and Norfolk during the past 13 years as he knows too many people in Suffolk, but has now had to give this up due to poor hearing.

Mike is known best for his management of the WSBKA Apiary, which was originally at Horringer and run by Dr Sam Thompson, with the Honey Show held at Nowton Park. After some discussion it was moved to Nowton, Mike taking over in about 1995. He kept his own bees alongside those of the Association and has continued to manage it and give practical training to new members, dedicating a lot of his life to encouraging people down the right route (Plate 8).



As he said, 'they don't necessarily have to follow everything that he says' but he tries to set them on the right path.

Mike loves honey but is a diabetic and the doctor forbad his eating of honey at one stage, but he has lapsed as he gets older and has a small spoonful on his porridge in the mornings.

Plate 8 Mike doing what he enjoys the most, practical teaching of his hobby

He is a true countryman with a love of wildlife and a passion for honeybees. We wish him many more years of happy beekeeping when he finally retires as Apiary Manager.

I would like to thank Maureen for her patient help in compiling this article.

Roger Merry

Offered Articles

Too scared to pick up the queen? Try anaesthetising her.

I've never had the confidence to pick up a wriggling queen to mark and clip her. Our craft magazine, *Beeecraft*, January 2020, featured 'Beekeeping Successes and Glorious Failures'. It invited readers to submit 'brilliant innovations that slipped away....glorious failures that arrived in a tsunami of hype only to disappear as quietly as the ebbing tide'. I replied with a reader's letter describing a method of anaesthetising the queen, making it easier for the nervous beekeeper to mark and clip her. Here is a resumé of my letter and now, a follow-up.



In the 1970s I remember using a mini-CO2 cylinder with an attached needle to open bottles of wine (Plate 9).

The needle is pushed through the cork into the air space above the wine and the trigger pressed. The cork pops out. At about this time I remember reading an article describing using the gadget to anaesthetise the queen. The queen is spotted on the comb. A small container is placed over her (Plate 10).

The needle is then pushed through the comb from the opposite side and into the container (Plate 6). The CO2 cylinder is fired for a couple of seconds.

The queen and any accompanying bees are anaesthetised.

Plate 9 Pressurised wine bottle opener



I deployed this gadget a few times in the late 1970s with success, but I can't remember why I gave up. I was recently intrigued to see the gadget advertised by Thornes as part of a carbon dioxide varroa tester kit. Never one to miss the latest gizmo, I succumbed. I found an unmarked queen. A puff of CO2 put her to sleep

Plate 10 Polythene container for gassing



(Plate 11), the queen, which I clumsily marked and clipped (her abdomen points towards 2 o'clock), is seen.

She began to wake up after a minute or so and I returned the frame to the brood box. Two weeks later there was brood in all stages aplenty. Will I repeat the exercise? Probably not.

Plate 11 The queen marked green/blue on the head

- holding the frame upright, manoeuvring the container, piercing the comb and firing the gas all at once somehow seemed more difficult than I remember it, forty-odd years ago....

Giles Youngs

The Association Apiary and the Honey Show

At the last Committee meeting on July 7th we decided unanimously that unfortunately due to the ongoing Coronavirus situation and difficulties with social distancing and hygiene we will not be able to open the Association Apiary yet. Equally and for similar reasons the Honey Show will be cancelled and we will have to wait until next year. Very sad for new and more experienced beekeepers and but it is done in the interests of health and safety.

Winter Bee Feed

Re the item about winter feed - I've noted that it's already on the website and I'd really like to get more people using it, so I wonder about just putting

'anyone who wants winter bee feed can find details on our website by going to <https://westsuffolkbka.com/2020/06/17/sbka-winter-bee-feed/> - best to do this asap as they may get fully booked'.

For Sale and Advertisements etc.

Large amount of bee equipment for sale, both new and used, too much to itemise, National and WBC. Anyone interested please contact Nicola Biela

on nibiel@aol.com / home number 01638712896 / mobile 07880681158. For security, and coronavirus precautions, you will need to give Nicola your own name and contact details.

Honey stored in 30lb buckets:

contact rogermerry6@gmail.com or p.draycott@btinternet.com

WSBKA member, professional photographer and videographer / drone pilot who can capture high-resolution aerial videos and images - a top class way to check on local landscapes and forage.

Contact Salvatore Grasso on salvatoremac@me.com

Salvatore is also keen to expand his bee colonies and asks if there is any opportunity for an out-apiary in the Eriswell area.

Message from Peter Botterill <j35ter12@gmail.com> who wrote:

Dear Chair / Secretary,

My name is Peter Botterill and I was wondering whether you would be able to help me please? I am conducting some research about local beekeepers and their honey and I have created a short online survey that I would like to get out to as many beekeepers as I can. I was therefore wondering whether you would be able to pass on the survey to the members of your Association please? The survey asks questions about their beekeeping operation, what they do with their honey, whether they sell the honey or not, and what influences their decisions.

You may be wondering why I am asking for your help? Ever since I completed a beginners beekeeping course back in 2014 through Leeds BKA, I have been a huge fan of local honey. There is such a variety and richness in the flavours of local honey that just cannot be found in a lot of the generic honey often found in the larger grocery shops. It is because of this that I am trying to develop an idea I have had for more and more people to be able to access local honey and for local beekeepers to be able to sell their honey more easily and to a much wider market than they currently are able to.

To be able to see if my idea is viable and one that is worth pursuing I need to find out what beekeepers think about their operation and the reasons behind whether they sell their honey or not. The survey is completely anonymous but I would be very grateful if as many beekeepers as possible were able to spend about 10 minutes going through the survey.

Thank you for taking the time to read this e-mail. If you were able to pass this e-mail on I would be very grateful.

If you have any questions, please do get back to me.

Thank you.

Regards,

Peter Botterill

