

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Visit to an Apiary during the one-day event held on 7 June—
'Managing Bee Health'. Photo taken by Paul Abbott.

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Essex Beekeeper's Association

The Essex Beekeepers' Association is a registered charity whose object is to further the craft of beekeeping in Essex.

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Please ensure that all material for publication is received by the Editor before the 10th of the preceding month to publication.

August and September 2011

- 4 Aug. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. Preparation for feeding and varroa treatment, a talk by David Tyler.
- 5 Aug. *Friday 7.00pm Colchester* BBQ at the home of Penny and Roger Barker. For details please ring Penny on 01255 830713.
- 6 Aug. *Saturday 11.30am Romford* Visit to Chafford Gorges.
- 6 Aug. *Saturday 2.00pm Dengie Hundred and Maldon* Bradwell Village Show. Help needed to man the marquee.
- 13 Aug. *Saturday 2.00pm Dengie Hundred and Maldon* Mundon Victory Hall. Divisional Honey Show followed by BBQ, courtesy of Bob & Vera Finch, from 5.30pm at Willowgrove, Burnham Road, Mundon CM9 6NT. A very popular social evening under cover in Bob and Vera's lovely garden. Bring your own food and drinks, but please telephone 01621 741 445 if you are coming.
- 13 Aug. *Saturday Epping Forest* at Chingford Horticultural Hall. Varroa count and winter preparation and feeding.
- 20 Aug. *Saturday Chelmsford* Garden Meeting at The Old Vicarage Good Easter. By kind Invitation of David Lockie. This will be a picnic tea along the lines of the successful event last year. Please contact Jean 07731 856361 for food information and contact David Lockie 01245 231959 if you intend to come.
- 20 Aug. *Saturday 3.00pm Colchester* Garden Party Meeting on Mersea Island. Please phone Peter Inson on 01206 382010 for directions.
- 21 Aug. *Sunday 3.00pm Braintree* Apiary Meeting at Coney Green. Tel, Pat Rowland for details 01376 326036.
- 24 Aug. *Wednesday 7.30pm Southend* at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Winter preparations.
- 27 Aug. *Saturday 2.30pm Saffron Walden* Apiary Meeting at the home of Uli Gerhard, Radwinter CB10 2SS. We will discuss 'Winter Feeding and Protection from Pests. Winter feed will be available for collection.
- 1 Sep. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. Education and Apiary management, a talk by Danny Nicoll.
- 2 Sep. *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. Preparing Honey for Show and Sale, led by Jim McNeill.
- 3 Sep. *Saturday 2.00pm Dengie Hundred and Maldon* Mundon Victory Hall. Legal requirements. What should we charge? Honey tastings of supermarket and members' honey.
- 6 Sep. *Tuesday 7.30pm Saffron Walden* Beginner's theory part 4, Review of first season's experience with Richard and Jane Ridler.

- 10 & 11 Sep. *Saturday and Sunday All day* **County Honey Show at Barleylands** Help needed from Divisional members for this County event as part of the Barleylands Country Show. Free entry to show for helpers. See advert below.
- 17 Sep. *Saturday* **Epping Forest** at Chingford Horticultural Hall. Epping Forest Divisional Honey Show
- 18 Sep. *Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** Apiary Meeting Geoff & Alison Brewer Felstead. Telephone for details 01371 822043.
- 19 Sep. *Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. Small Hive beetle and Exotic Pests. Have you ever seen a small hive beetle caged and fed by bees? This fascinating powerpoint presentation will be given by Mike Brown Head of the Bee Unit at York.
- 28 Sep. *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Divisional Honey Show.

County Pheromones Richard Ridler (Chairman)

I had planned to write more about the BBKA last month but was overtaken by more pressing matters; so back to the BBKA now. One low key but most valuable benefit of BBKA membership is insurance. As a beekeeper, you need to ensure that you are protected should you or your bees be accused of causing damage to other people or their property, whether the event relates to your apiary, collecting a swarm, participating in a show or a farmer's market or most other normal bee keeping activities. The BBKA policy also includes product liability insurance. If and when you need a copy of the policy it's available on the BBKA website. So nothing exciting but may one day you might be very grateful for it.

County Honey Show

10th & 11th September at Barleylands Nr. Billericay

This is our biggest public event of the year; it's a fun day out and a great opportunity to promote beekeeping. Helpers get free show entry and we need lots and lots of you to come along. If you are planning to enter any of the show classes August is the month be preparing. Looking forward to seeing you there. For more information contact your divisional honey show representative or chair@ebka.org.

Father's Handwritten Notes on his Life and Beekeeping IV Collated by John Gilbert

Les Gilbert, who died on Christmas Day 2010 aged 97, left some handwritten notes on his life and beekeeping. His son John has given permission for these to be reprinted in the Essex Beekeeper.—Editor

Just before I retired eleven years ago I tried to think of something I could make for beekeeping that would keep me occupied. When I retired the first thing I tried to improve was the entrance block. After several attempts I finished up with what is known as the Gilbert Entrance. I continued manufacturing them for several years and distributed 2,000 over the UK. In all my innovations I received 4 prizes at the National Honey Show. I shall always remember when I entered the Gilbert Entrance at the National. I was so excited when I saw the red card on my entry and I wanted to know what other people thought of my idea so I stayed near by to hear the conversations as visitors inspected the exhibits. After a few favourable comments an important looking lady and gentleman came along. The lady fiddled about with my exhibit and she said to her husband this won't be any good, the bees will propolyse it and it will go terribly rusty, and to add to my agony as she moved away she put immense pressure on my exhibit to try and break it. However it didn't break. It hasn't gone rusty and the bees don't propolyse it. So be warned when you go to an exhibition. Keep your opinions to yourself, if someone stands near by it might be the inventor!

I have enjoyed my beekeeping immensely. Beekeeping has been an education to me and brought be into contact with some lovely people both beekeepers and non beekeepers, for wherever one goes may it be on holiday or anywhere else as soon as it becomes known you are a beekeeper you never stop talking and answering questions about bees. I served 3 years as Chairman of Braintree Division and also 3 years as County Chairman, 7 years Show Committee Chairman and a member of CEC 10 years.

I have enjoyed going to local organisations to give talks and sell my honey. I hope to continue beekeeping as long as I can lift a super and longer than that if I can get some help.

Leslie Arthur Gilbert

John Gilbert writes,

I think he would have been 76 when he wrote the beekeeping sections and probably later he added the pieces about his young life and that of his father.

Father loved his family, his grandchildren and great grandchildren and was always interested to know how they were growing and developing. He was so very fond of his nieces Margaret and Beryl who both made lovely cakes and he enjoyed his visits to Felixstowe, which we managed to do every year.

Notes from John Barlow:

Les was Chairman of the Essex Beekeepers Show Committee for over 12 years and took an active part in the show both as an organiser and a competitor. The show at the time was a very important event in Essex and the surrounding area and was a major part of "The Essex Show". His Mead and country wine was considered to be of excellent quality and won many prizes.

He was an active member of Braintree Division of The Essex Beekeepers and was willing to help wherever and whenever he could. He served for over 10 years as President of the division as well as being a committee member for more years than anyone can remember.

He was a great believer of educating children about bees and went to many schools and gave talks as well as inviting party's of youngsters to his home apiary for practical demonstrations.

He was also a bit of an inventor as well as an engineer. He designed and made a device for demonstrating how to perform an artificial swarm, used by beekeepers to try to prevent colonies from swarming. We think but cannot confirm that he won a prize at the National Honey Show for this device.

He also designed and made a new style of entrance block for hives. This was very successful and went into commercial production and was sold by Taylor's of Welling, a major beekeeping supplier of the time.

This is a grace found in one of his notebooks:

For thy creature the bee
The Honey and the Wax
We thank thee O Lord
By the light of all men
Christ Jesus our King
May this food now be blessed.

Beekeeping tips No. 7—Honey Extraction by Pollinator

By now most of the Spring blossom honey and the honey from the Winter sown Oil Seed Rape (OSR) should have been extracted, although it is always prudent to leave a super of stores in the event that the flow from following crops is not within flying range. This is to prevent starvation that can occur in May or later if all the full supers of honey are taken off the hive as they become full. If you find yourself in the situation with no stores in the hive then five litres of thin syrup should be fed immediately (Two kilogrammes to 2.5 litres of water). Otherwise you stand to lose your colony.

It is a misconception that super frames of honey must be completely sealed in order to be ready for extraction. Honey partly sealed, or not sealed at all, may be

extracted so long as it passes the 'shake' test. This test consists of shaking the frame above its super. If any honey falls out, in drops, then extraction is not possible as the water content is too high and the honey will ferment if extracted. Do this test preferably in the morning as in the afternoon there may be nectar that has only just arrived that will be thin enough to shake out. To be saleable honey must have a water content below 21%, with the exception that heather honey can be legally sold with a water content as high as 23%. To determine water content a refractometer calibrated for this purpose should be used. Enquire whether your Division, or a friend, has one since it is an expensive item to buy if used infrequently. The refractometer calibration will need to be corrected if temperature is other than 20°C.

Honey extractors fall into two types, that is to say they are either tangential or radial. Also each type may be hand driven or powered by an electric motor. For driving by hand I prefer a tangential machine that takes four shallow frames. As the name implies the frames are tangential to the circumference of the machine's container. With this type of extractor the frames must be very lightly rotated to remove some of the honey on that side of the frame closest to the inner wall of the machine. Each of the four frames is then reversed to extract the second side completely by spinning as fast as possible and finally the frames are reversed again to extract what remains of the honey in the first side. This type of extractor is useful if you have just two or three hives. The wet supers can be put back on the hives in the evening as the bees finish flying. Putting them on earlier in the day can start robbing amongst the hives in the apiary, which is then almost impossible to stop.

For beekeepers with several hives a motorised extractor is well worthwhile and for this purpose a twelve shallow frame radial extractor is a good bet. There is no need to reverse frames as both sides give up their honey at the same time. However, there is a need to ensure a good weight balance of the frames. In other words the frames diametrically opposite each other should be of the same weight and disposition of honey, otherwise the machine will shake violently and walk itself about the floor unless it is bolted down, or on castors! To obtain the best initial balance, start by taking out the second super frame in the super and putting it into the extractor cage. The first frame can then be placed diametrically opposite the one already in the cage. As you take further frames from the super alternate them in a similar way and continue around the cage until it is full with twelve frames. These machines have a speed control and initially start the machine slowly for a couple of minutes and then increase the speed to about 80% of what you will eventually find is the top speed. This is NOT the top speed of the

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machine, as that speed will result in broken comb or frames. A further three or four minutes, at top speed, is usually enough to full extract the honey. If your frames contain some set OSR honey then unbalance is possible as the liquid honey is spun out. To avoid this the set patches of OSR honey may be scraped out before the frames are placed in the extractor. An old spoon or a specially designed tool may be used for this job. If you find the frames are left with solid honey then scrape them down to the foundation as otherwise the rape honey will seed the next crop and cause that to solidify.

And, finally, uncapping. Modern kitchen knives used cold are quite useable and easy to use when the honey capping is proud of the frame woodwork. Otherwise, an electrically heated knife may be used but it is essential to keep its temperature such that the wax does not liquefy nor the honey caramelise. Both of which spoil the real taste. The frame to be extracted should be held firmly in a vertical position, tilted towards you, over a container into which the capping may fall. A standard uncapping tray is worthwhile if you have a large number of frames to extract. Cappings that are below the frame woodwork have to be scraped off with the knife or a specialised tool.

A Report on the event 'Managing Bee Health' by Geoff Pears

I don't think that we, as beekeepers, can ever know too much about managing the health of our bees.

'Managing Bee Health' was the title of a one day event which took place on Tuesday 7th June 2011. As well as myself, forty-six other beekeepers recognised the importance of this subject. We gathered in the village hall of Hatfield Broad Oak between 10.00 and 10.30a.m. and were welcomed with a cup of tea or coffee and biscuits. Nobby Clark was in charge of the register as we passed into the lecture hall.

The day just had to be enjoyable. Hatfield Broad Oak village is situated in a maze of lanes that are part of the beautiful Essex countryside found in the angle made by the M11 and A120 roads near Stansted Airport and, more interestingly, to the south of the one thousand acres of Hatfield Forest.

The venue and the beekeepers, in all stages of development, contributed to the day's success. And, of course, the speaker, Keith Morgan, is not just the Regional Bee Inspector but a superb lecturer. At a steady pace, with clarity and pauses, he spoke about his subject until lunchtime. We did have a coffee break! We all wanted to learn about how to keep our bees healthy and we did learn. One by one and step by step Keith punched home the information that is so important to all of us. It was impossible not to learn. The talk was illustrated with slides. The big beasts discussed on that day were American and European foul brood diseases and their recognition and what to do if there is a suspicion that something nasty is afoot.

The existence of the bee disease unit at Sand Hutton near York was highlighted.

The scientists at that unit are only too pleased to help beekeepers and can supply superbly illustrated booklets in colour, at no charge, under the umbrella of FERA (The Food and Environment Research Agency). And, what is more, the booklets are produced using shiny paper! So easy to wipe off any sticky fingerprints!

Other situations in the hive were discussed, with illustrations. The presence of the varroa mite and what to do about it, and when, is something we are all involved with. One point mentioned by Keith was the placing of the Apiguard tray in the hive and how very important it is to read the instructions on the box. Placing the tray upside-down on the frames is not recommended. Medicines should be ordered in good time.

Chalkbrood, Sacbrood, Baldbrood and other points were mentioned including the importance of replacing old comb. Also the ability to recognise the small hive beetle, not yet arrived - we hope. The attention to hygiene was stressed.

Lunchtime came and lunch boxes were opened.

In the afternoon we divided into two groups and in turn were able to examine combs infected with AFB and EFB and also normal combs. While combs were inspected the other group visited the apiary of Jane and Richard Ridler. It was a real pleasure and privilege to visit this apiary, sit at the side of an arable field, and to observe the hives being opened by Seasonal Bee Inspectors Peter Heath and Peter Folge. Their careful unhurried technique was obvious to us all - no bumping of woodwork or dragging of the brood frames as they were lifted vertically, in turn, from the brood box. The movement, en bloc, of the brood frames as they were repositioned was noted, cutting down on the number of collisions of the frames and the possibility of damage to the bees.

Jane and Richard were an excellent example of a beekeeping team at work. Accurate records were made. They also carried out a requeening operation.

The farmer had provided a suitable rural backdrop of a black mountain of a fresh and juicy waste product--compost! It was marvellous!

The day was arranged and organised by Eileen Marrable in her usual efficient and friendly style. The meeting closed at 4.30 p.m. just in time to miss the rush hour.

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Abandoned in France : 'A Tale of Two Hives' by Cassandra Elliott

The following article has been sent by Cassandra Elliott, former County Secretary of the EBKA who left the UK for France a few years ago. Now beekeeping in Normandy, the saying 'Once a beekeeper, always a beekeeper' certainly rings true for Cassandra as she shares with us the story of her recent discovery.

The story of these hives and the colonies within, started on my part almost two years ago when I read a call for help over the Internet from someone who had found two hives which had been left in their field four years previously by the former owner of the property. Thinking they were just wooden boxes they never gave them any thought until one day they saw bees flying in and out. France is a large country but their location turned out to be just 20 minutes from me so I replied with an offer of help. The weeks passed and I had almost forgotten about them when I received a belated reply to say thank you, but they had decided to leave them as they were.

Over a year had passed when I came into contact with a lady who had some items that I was in need of for the farm, so one not so fine morning I set off to see her. Upon arrival we got chatting about things in general when it came into conversation that she had two beehives at the far end of one of her fields. So off we trotted to take a quick look and sure enough, two damp sorrowful hives covered in tyres (which in turn were filled with rotting debris), sat under some trees. The grass around them was almost as tall as the hives themselves. One hive had a few bees flying, but not much was going on around the second. I had by now put two and two together and explained we had previously been in contact and renewed my offer of help, but Christmas was approaching and the time of year meant there was little I could do for the bees at that point. The owner was very nervous about being around the bees, and whilst wanting the best for them preferred to stand well back, remaining very undecided about what to do.

The New Year came and went, but early in April I had the opportunity to revisit the bees so I nipped down to the hives to see how they had fared over the Winter. Not well. On approach it was clear to see one hive was empty of bees (which an ear later pressed firmly against the hive wood confirmed), and the other appeared to be in decline. The owner was interested in taking a look inside the empty hive but I could barely get to it - the grass and weeds were thick and long and it was easy to see why they had been thought to be a couple of old wooden boxes. A 'past it's best' fence of chicken wire was around them and it was hard to see what was fence and what was nettles, so embedded were they. I climbed over and after removing the tyres which were filled with rank water and rotting gloopy leaves, I carried the empty hive (with a bit of male assistance) to the other side of the 'fence' and took the roof off (well I say roof, what I should actually say is rusty sheet of old tin metal). I began to investigate: Polystyrene, check! Mouse nest, check! Couple of layers of fabric, check! Wax worm, check! The owner had seen enough and declared it was going straight on the bonfire, at which point I

asked if I could take it so I could look at the inside more closely. She agreed, and it was duly loaded into the back of my car whereupon a few hundred woodlice made their dash for freedom.

So later that day, I sat outside on an upside down bucket on the gravel to begin a closer inspection. The hive had a viewing window at the rear: under the sliding door which covered it was a slice of thick polystyrene and a few bugs, but the glass was intact. Next, working from the top, I lifted the sheet metal roof, removed the thick slice of polystyrene, and two pieces of old fabric which the bees had glued firmly to the top bars. So rotten was the fabric that it just ripped into bits where the propolis was stronger than the material. I thought I'd take out the frames and examine the comb but they wouldn't move. I scraped back more propolis. Still firm. So there was nothing else for it, using my hive tool I lifted the top bar with a bit of brute force - and the wood cracked to reveal nails either side of the lugs and nothing else. No side bars, zilch. I looked down into the brood chamber to find them but there weren't any. I removed a few more top bars which all revealed the same thing - nailed on lugs, and comb firmly adhered to the inner walls. Not a side bar to be seen. I turned the chamber on it's side. Now the floor wouldn't budge. More nails. So out came the tool box and a chisel took on the job. The floor came away in one piece, and bearing in mind the hive had not been opened in over six years, the shape of the comb could have been in a much worse state, but I could see the bees had quite neatly 'rowed up' and it wasn't looking too wild in there. Not having any side bars meant the comb was firmly attached to the wood, so a carving knife had to be put to work cutting the comb from the inner side of the hive walls but it still wouldn't come out. Then the knife stopped cutting: two long thick criss crossed pieces of bamboo (in a style you'd expect to find in the back of the hair of Madam Butterfly) were jammed in there tight, corner to corner through every piece of comb, so I left it insitu removing instead the comb that had broken away. This hive was assembled never to be taken apart.

The comb was as expected, old and practically black. 90% of the cell space was filled with chalk brood - it had ideal conditions for it: a solid metal roof, 2" of polystyrene insulation, a couple of bed sheets, and no ventilation. Couple that with a patch of damp field under the hot Normandy sun and the poor things must have been fanning like mad throughout our hot summers. Inspection done, I concluded it was the oddest beehive I had come across, not quite Dadent, not quite Langstroth so I did a bit of research and it appears what I have is a Voirnot Hive which was designed by French monk Jean-Baptiste Voirnot (1844-1900).

And there the story ended, or so I thought, until a few weeks later I was again contacted by the owner of the surviving colony. They were concerned about the bees in the remaining hive - would I take it and see what I could do for them?

Having disassembled the empty Voirnot hive I thought I had a good idea of what the second (but differently shaped) hive would be built like. I couldn't be more wrong...

To be continued.....

Letters to the Editor

From Des Exworth I think the idea of a "forum" on the website is excellent. I believe that for it to be really useful it would need to be county wide, as there would be likely to be such little traffic on a division based forum that it would soon dry up and cease to be used.

As Kate says it could be used as a source of bees/kit/mentors but also to swap ideas and promote contact between beekeepers.

I only started beekeeping last year. I attend my division meetings etc, but can still feel rather isolated- perhaps a beginners section would be an idea, as I understand that there are such a lot of us.

From Ian Hunter A members' forum would be a great asset and it's good of Kate Miller to volunteer as moderator.

From Barbara Sharp: I read the article in magazine about starting a members forum, I joined "beekeeping forum" a while back and find it useful, interesting and sometimes helpful. There is an area on this site where areas can join eg Norfolk , Lancashire etc why not take a look ?



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Dessert:

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Photos from Managing Bee Health



An example of sac
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Photo Paul Abbott

Culling drone brood for Varroa
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Varroa mite on drone pupa.
Photo Paul Abbott