

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



Photo taken by Elizabeth Hatchell, Editor of Ludlow & District BKA Newsletter, which appeared in their December issue. Courtesy of EBees

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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.

January and February 2011

- 6 Jan. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. Divisional Annual General Meeting.
- 12 Jan. *Wednesday 7.30pm –9.30 Braintree* Microscopy classes at Tabor College Panfield La Braintree CM7 5XP. Telephone Stuart Mirson if you need further details: 01376 340683.
- 14 Jan. *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. Divisional Annual General Meeting.
- 17 Jan. *Monday 7.30pm Chelmsford* Link Hall Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. Divisional Annual General Meeting. Followed by a talk on colony losses over winter. Find out how to respond if you lose any of your colonies.
- 20 Jan. *Thursday 7.30pm Epping Forest* at Chingford Horticultural Society Hall, Larkshall Rd. Chingford E4 6NH. Divisional Annual General Meeting.
- 21 Jan. *Friday 7.15pm Saffron Walden* at Dunmow Day Centre, CM6 1AE. Divisional Annual General Meeting and Annual Dinner.
- 26 Jan. *Wednesday 7.30pm Southend* at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Divisional Annual General Meeting.
- 27 Jan. *Thursday 7.30pm Colchester* at Langham Community Centre. Divisional Annual General Meeting.
- 28 Jan. *Friday 8.00pm Braintree* at The Constitutional Club, Braintree. Divisional Annual General Meeting.
- 3 Feb. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. Spring Preparation.
- 4 Feb. *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. Trees for Bees with Speaker Colin Richardson, Arboriculturalist.
- Feb. 9 *Wednesday 7.30pm –9.30 Braintree* Microscopy classes at Tabor College Panfield La Braintree CM7 5XP. Telephone Stuart Mirson if you need further details: 01376 340683.
- Feb 15 *Tuesday 7.30pm Braintree* Course for beginner beekeepers commences For more details please telephone Colleen 01279 876 333.
- 21 Feb. *Monday 7.30pm Chelmsford* Link Hall Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. 'Start of Season' - Hopefully you will have some live bees at the end of the winter! For tips on how to get your bees into tip-top health for maximum honey production please join us for an evening about spring-time preparations for the forthcoming season.
- 24 Feb. *Thursday 7.30pm Colchester* at Langham Community Centre. Come and see a demonstration of the Beehaus by Omlet.
- 26 Feb *Friday 8.00pm Braintree* at The Constitutional Club, Braintree—Division's annual Dinner.

County Pheromones **Richard Ridler, Chairman EBKA**

A very happy new year to you all. Now is the traditional time to start thinking about the year ahead and in doing so the part your beekeeping will play in it. Your queens are already on the case, they will be starting laying again very soon. Many of you are relatively new to beekeeping and I encourage you to consider taking the BBKA basic assessment when ready. It's the equivalent to the driving test in the beekeeping world. Like the driving test it's mostly practical with a few theory questions and can be done locally. Unlike the driving test almost everyone passes first time and it's more fun. Of course the benefit lies in taking the time to ensure you have the knowledge beforehand. If you have been through one full season of beekeeping, (i.e. you first had bees in 2009 or before), you should be nearly there but probably have a few blind spots to mug up on. Your local division will be able to support you in preparing for the assessment.

If you already have the basic assessment then there are plenty more opportunities to dig deeper into the many fascinating aspects of the craft of beekeeping. On the theme of the BBKA exams our examinations secretary has written more elsewhere. Alternatively you might start planning your strategy for winning a cup at the county honey show or start making cosmetics containing bee products, the possibilities are endless. I've just made my first mead; unfortunately my book on the subject recommends storing it for 3 to 4 years....should have started sooner!

Behind the Veil with **Joanna Nightingale**

How was your interest in beekeeping kindled?

For my 45 birthday I was given a veil, a smoker and a hive tool from my very good friend Jill Sullivan. She had grown up on a farm nearby in Great Oakley where her father Ted was a keen beekeeper. Jill was keen to take up beekeeping again, and together we embarked on a week-end course at Thorne in Wragby.

I then told a pupil on my "learn self hypnosis" course of my fantastic week-end experience, her brother was a beekeeper too, she told me. He called Derek Webber, who called George Edwards, who called me and said, "I hear you are interested in beekeeping". Talk about jungledrums, eh!!

What were the formative influences on your beekeeping?

The formative influences was first of all Jill's wonderful memories, fuel by

Thorne's enthusiastic team, followed by George Edwards' gentle but persuasive, "why don't you start by borrowing one of my hives, and see how you get along"... how could I not be smitten by all this enthusiasm? I was also lucky enough to meet Dr. B. Hoskyns, who used to bring honey jars into the maternity unit in Harwich. The label said, "Made by the workers for the workers." And it was delicious.

How did things develop from your first hive?

I fetched my first hive from George Edwards on Monday the 24 May 1999 at 9.30pm after the bees had stopped flying, had their good night story, and settled for the night, and it was gently installed in my garden by the kind help of Jill's husband Brendan, who had gone off to help George fetch a swarm earlier that evening. So none of them were actually there when I arrived with veil, wellies and overall. But Iris, George's wife, made me very welcome whilst we waited for the men to return.

I spent most of the following day popping down to the hive at the back of the garden, (George had been to inspect the garden to see where would be most suitable for the hive) to see if they had survived the trip. They didn't start flying before the following day and by then I was absolutely convinced they had probably all died. Oh what a sigh of relief, when I saw them take off and landing safely back again.



I live in Harwich, and news travel fast here, on Wednesday the 26 May 1999 (two days later!) a lady called and said "I hear you keep bees, I have a swarm in the garden, can you help?" So in less than 48 hours I was the proud owner of two hives! (By the way, you do get the very interesting looks when driving around in the car dressed in your bee outfit, but take no notice as it is a lot more dangerous not to wear it whilst you are transporting bees.)

What keeps you beekeeping?

I am absolutely in awe of these little creatures, is it possible to love bees? Well I would use that term if they had never stung me. I am incredibly fond of them nevertheless. I sometimes put on my veil and just go and sit near them to see what they are up to.

What have been the high points of your beekeeping career?

Increasing stock by artificial swarming, fetching swarms and making honey. I have been particularly pleased when returning customers have reporting huge changes in hay fever and asthma.

Last year I also attended a wax day at Penny and Roger Barkers house in Tending, which was a fantastic day, with so many enthusiastic people offering help and advise.

Has anything ever gone wrong with your beekeeping?

Several things have gone wrong, I now keep a book called, "I learned from that" but what has upset me the most, has definitely been wasp attacks. Seeing the speed at which they can completely demolish a hive. They jump on the back of a bee, clip off the wings, then the legs and lastly the head and fly off with the body to feed their grubs. They also rub them selves in bee dust and march right into the hives and just hover up all the honey and grubs in no time at all, very frustrating and disappointing.

What do you consider to be your beekeeping legacy?

Making and selling "Nightingale's honey".

What about the future of beekeeping?

I fear for the future of bee keeping, we need bees and we must do all we can to preserve these very important creatures. We need more beekeepers and I have been very pleased recently to read, that there are many new members and there appears to be more interest in magazines and newspapers too. We also need more research into bee diseases and more support for beekeepers via the inspectors. I for one can certainly recommend this fantastic hobby, it is most rewarding in many ways. Unfortunately it is also a costly hobby, it would benefit us all if there could be some financial support perhaps from defra, but that is probably wishful thinking.

**Collecting Bees from Unusual Places
Chris Southall**

During the beekeeping season we get many calls about bees. The largest numbers of calls are about wild bees, often small bumble bees nests in bird boxes or the corners of garden sheds. We do our best to convince folk to leave the bees alone, telling them that they are unlikely to be stung and that the bees will disappear in the autumn. That usually works but I have re-located a few bumble bees' nests taking care to move them more than three miles. The bees in containers like bird boxes are easy to move only needing to be shut up in the evening. Nests in other places I pop in a small cardboard box and collect them after the bees have stopped flying (well wrapped in a sheet!). We also collected a window

box full of solitary bees. They make individual cells fill them with food and an egg and leave them to hatch and fend for themselves. When all the bees had hatched out and flown the window box was ready to be used for flowers again.

I have also been asked to take honey bee colonies from odd spots including a compost bin, flat roof spaces and various chimneys and hollow spaces in houses. Sadly I have had to turn down some of those due to the inaccessibility of the bee combs and most these had to be killed.

I have had success however in relocating bees from the compost bin and roof space; the roof was being repaired and the builders were unhappy about the bees! My technique is to have a brood box with drawn comb, floor, queen excluder and solid top board plus another with a bottom board with a hole in it (and two more complete boards to close off the top and bottom of the stack. I cut the combs from the colony and brush the bees (with a chicken wing) into the brood box with the drawn comb. The combs that are mostly honey stores are put into large plastic boxes with lids. The combs of mostly worker brood are put into the other brood box with pieces of wood (brood frame sides) to separate them. Any drone brood gets fed to my chickens to keep the transfer of varroa down

When most of the bees are in the new hive I put the box with combs of brood over the new hive with the queen excluder between the two boxes to keep the queen confined below. I leave the assembly till the bees have stopped flying in the evening and move them to an apiary. I leave the hive well alone for a couple of weeks until the brood has hatched out from the old comb and check there is a laying queen in the bottom box. At that point I can brush any bees from the top box in front of the hive and treat the colony in the usual way making sure they have sufficient stores if there is no honey flow. These bees often carry a good load of varroa and so need treatment as soon as possible. However as they have survived without a beekeeper's care for some years they may well represent a hardy varroa resistant strain (we hope!).

See photos on back cover

**ESSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
131st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Saturday 5th March 2011
starting at 2pm**

Venue: Room E06, Writtle College, Lordship Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3RR

After the Annual General Meeting there will be a short break for refreshments, kindly provided by Chelmsford Division.

Following the break, we will have a speaker, who is yet to be confirmed.

Don't miss it. Put the date in your diary straight away! More details next month.

**BBKA Strategic Review 2011—future relationship with Plant
Protection Industry.
Summary by Penny Learmonth (BBKA Delegate)**

On the 16th November the BBKA Trustees announced that 'following discussion with the companies involved, endorsements and product specific payments will cease as soon as practically possible.'

There has been unease within the membership about the endorsement of some chemicals by the BBKA. On the other hand the BBKA has been able to exercise some influence on the industry.

The BBKA is reviewing its strategic relationships with the plant protection industry and will engage with the industry and other bodies to promote benefits to honey bees. One such collaboration has led to the recent publication of the Crop Protection Association leaflet 'Bee Safe, Bee Careful'.

In furthering the health and welfare of honey bees the BBKA Trustees do not preclude accepting funds from the industry and cite the examples of funding a research colloquium or making a contribution to the BBKA Research Fund. This aspect of the Review will be discussed at the ADM in January and will be subject to a vote by members' delegates.

A full statement of this can be read on the BBKA website

Other propositions for debate and voting at the ADM (Annual Delegates' Meeting) will be:

To cease to endorse specific products (see above) and to prevent the BBKA receiving any money from the Agro-Chemical companies (see above);

To introduce a category of Junior membership;

That the Trustees set up a committee to promote queens bred in the UK and to determine a standard for good quality queens;

An amendment to the constitution relating to the record of membership;

Three applications for Membership of the BBKA – Cleveland Beekeepers' Association, the Instrumented Hive Project and The Examination Board for the NDB.

Letters to the Editor

I wish to thank the many well wishers who have been very generous following my heart surgery - a triple by-pass and new main valve. I am making good progress and hope to be fully operative after Christmas.

I shall still supply high quality foundation at prices which are 30% off catalogue costs. This I can manage when beekeepers sell me their old wax for which I give a generous price. The cleanest wax gets £2 a pound and a bit less if it needs purifying. I will buy cappings.

I have been asked to give a talk to one Essex Division on 'My Foreign Travels' and experiences in beekeeping. Unfortunately I cannot find details of the Division to whom I am meant to give the talk. Please could you get in touch again.

Roy Cropley

Call if you have an unusual order.

Telephone:- 01992 626668 email:- roy.cropley1@tiscali.co.uk

Dear Editor,

I just received my Essex Beekeeper this morning and read the letter from Deryck Johnson.

I assume you have your own computer and a printer associated with it? So why look further ... print your own! I've been doing it for the last 20 years or so, admittedly mine are in black and white only. If you have a design then simply get it into a file on you computer. Mine was done originally using Paint (A standard Windows file).

I have considered changing mine to a coloured label but have not yet done it. The way I would do it would be to take a coloured photo, of the design, on my digital camera and transfer it to my computer. It would then be ready to replicate, ten to a sheet of A4 paper, for printing. I could not find a commercial sized label to fit a honey jar. I use a water-based glue A4 paper which glue dissolves readily, in water, when empty jars are returned to me from my customers (I encourage recycling of jars by a small allowance for each when they next buy honey from me; OK I have to put them through the dishwasher). The paper when bought as a ream (500 sheets) cost around £50.

With ten labels per sheet this works out at 1p per label. Ink costs will increase the overall cost/label and does not even double the cost. Because I print only a few sheets at a time I can modify the sell buy date on each batch of honey labels. My printer is an Epson ink-jet machine and is quite old.

Geoff Mills

Feral Bees Invade Bat Roost **Andrew Perry**

From 'The Apiarist, Harrogate and Ripon Bee-keepers Association November 2010 editor Judith Rowbottom, courtesy of EBees.

I was recently faced with a problem that I thought you may find interesting. As well as being a bee-keeper and member of the HRBKA, I am a Natural England Volunteer Bat Warden (NE is the statutory body that oversees wildlife legislation in England). We provide a free, friendly service, on behalf of NE, to encourage home owners to seek proper advice regarding bats with the aim of preserving the very many bat roosts found in homes. To do this we:

- 1:** Reassure owners that bat roosts often cause little or no inconvenience to the owner.
- 2:** Explain the legislation regarding bats (it is illegal to kill, injure or disturb bats or to damage a bat roost (roosts are protected whether bats are present or not)).
- 3:** Offer advice on how bats and home owners can happily co-exist and on how works, which may impact a roost, can go ahead legally, ensuring bat roosts are not damaged.

Our advice is formalised by NE in a letter to the home owner and this letter allows otherwise illegal actions (with regards to bats roosts) to go ahead legally.

OK so now to the problem. I was called out to a house with a long standing and much loved bat roost in a porch immediately above the front door. The bats had vacated the roost in late August (perfectly normal) and a colony of feral honeybees had moved into the roost in early September. The bees not only pose a risk to the bat roost (by potentially filling it with comb), but are an unwelcome nuisance to the home owner and a potential safety hazard (the postman has refused to deliver letters). My initial thought was simply to advise insecticide application in October, when bats are not present, using an insecticide recommended by NE for use in bat roosts. However, an association member advised me that the dead colony may be robbed by a managed colony, who would in turn take the poison back to their hive, killing them.

Therefore thinking that the eradication of feral bee colonies, where the use of chemical insecticides was undesirable, would be a pretty common activity I sought some advice and got far more than I bargained for.

National Bee Unit view

The NBU advised me that the eradicated feral colony is likely to be robbed but knew of no other way to guarantee eradication other than the application of insecticides (NBU use CO2 but this takes considerable expertise and is not usually available to the general public). Their view is:

- 1:** There is a high likelihood that an eradicated feral colony will have its stores robbed.

2: Insecticides present in the eradicated feral colony will present a real danger to managed colonies as they may be taken back to the robbers hive.

3: If insecticides are used, robbing should be averted by:

A: Removing the honey and comb from the eradicated colony or

B: Sealing up the entrance of the eradicated colony permanently.

A bee-keeper's view

Next I spoke to a prominent member of the HRBKA who, although in agreement with NBU, was somewhat more sympathetic to the bats and suggested the following possible solutions:

1: The bees could be prevented from re-entry by way of a temporary one way escape and the returning bees either:

A: killed by the home owner as they clustered outside by spraying water and washing up liquid over them (admittedly unpleasant).

B: encouraged to re-house themselves by moving into a small nucleus hive placed near the entrance (containing bees /queen).

Pest Control Officer

On the advice of the bee-keeper, I then called a pest control officer (PCO), and member of HRBKA. He informed me that the insecticide typically used is Ficam D (authorised by NE for use in bat roosts). However, application would cause a legal conflict of interest for any PCO because:

1: It could only be applied to a bat roost if a licence from NE stated this was legal.

2: PCOs are legally obliged to adhere to the application instructions of any chemical. The instructions for Ficam D state "*Action should be taken to prevent foraging bees gaining access to treated bees nests, preferably by removing the combs or blocking the nest entrance*".

Natural England's view

I also called the local Wildlife Licensing Officer at NE. She knew of no other similar case this and promised to "send round an email" to her colleagues to see if they knew of a precedent and get back to me. So far she hasn't.

So in summary, the options are:

1: Do nothing and hope the bees go away or do not survive the winter.

The house owner is not only very attached to the bat roost; the bees are causing a nuisance and may potentially be a health and safety concern. The colony may not survive the winter; however, it will be a shame if the bees destroy the bat roost by filling it with comb before they perish.

5: Install a temporary one way bee escape to exclude the bees and either 1: kill the excluded bees as they cluster outside or 2: place a small nucleus hive close by to encourage the excluded bees to re locate. Option 1 is an unpleasant and potentially dangerous job with perhaps large numbers of agitated excluded bees flying around the porch.

Option 2 would involve somehow location a small nucleus in the porch very close to the bat roost entrance. I am not sure if this would have been practical or desirable to the home owner.

Outcome

Before I could put Option 5 to the home owner I was struck down with an extremely painful tooth infection and was unable to contact the home-owner for a week or so. In the mean time he had ensured no bats were present in the roost (by surveying the exit in the evenings) and blocked the entrance temporarily with a soft cloth and hung a commercially available insect repellent (citronella or something similar) in a tin just below the hole. He assured me this was working with a noticeable reduction of the number of bees in the porch.

Although unpleasant for the bees it does not involve the application of pesticides and therefore presents no danger to nearby managed hives, and the legal snooker faced by a PCO is avoided. I informed the home owner that I agreed with this approach but the cloth *must* be removed in February 2011 at the latest to allow bats back next year and informed him that even if this is successful in eradicating the bee colony the honey and comb still present may act as a lure encouraging other swarms to take up residence in the porch in future.

After about 3 weeks (in late October) NE finally issued their letter, they don't agree!! They consider the temporary blocking of the roost illegal. NE has the final say and if the home owner wants to treat the bees with insecticide may have to dismantle his porch roof under a development licence after all! The cost of a consultant and for the work is not likely to be cheap and as you can imagine NE's response has not gone down. However, the bees do seem to have gone (until next year???) and the home owner may be lucky in this case.

I find it hard to believe that this is an isolated case and although this home owner was very sympathetic to the plight of bees this has caused him problems, and may yet be a very costly to him. I think many people faced with a bee colony above the front door would have administered insecticides without any consideration to nearby managed bee colonies. If any readers are aware of a method of eradicating / moving unwanted feral bee colonies from inaccessible places without the use of highly toxic insecticides, or know of any similar situations or solutions, I would be very interested indeed.

PETER DALBY—PEBADALE APIARIES

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Fleeces and all other orders will be dispatched as soon as possible by the cheapest route – via Trustees, other members, collection or the post.

Phone Penny Learmonth on 01371 820398, or contact Ann Cushion (Southend) or Tony Edwards (Romford)

Terry Bird has decided to retire from selling beekeeping supplies. Over the years I have relied upon Terry to supply me with much of my beekeeping equipment. I have appreciated his warm welcome and helpful advice. He has also been a long-time supporter of The Essex Beekeeper which we have greatly valued. Paul White, Box House Beekeeping Supplies, has decided to commence selling beekeeping equipment. I look forward to meeting Paul when I need to replace some of my equipment.



Box House Beekeeping Supplies

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The BBKA Exams and Assessments Explained
Part II The General Husbandry Assessment
Jane Ridler, Examinations/Education Secretary

Beekeepers in Essex with the General Husbandry qualification are quite rare. This is a pity on two counts, i) there are many of you out there with the experience and knowledge which could easily gain this and ii) we need beekeepers with this level of certification to train as assessors for the Basic Assessment. The Basic is something which all beekeepers should aspire to after their first couple of years – but more about that in Part III coming up shortly. If we don't have enough assessors for the Basic we can't raise the accepted level of proficiency of all beekeepers to a standard to protect the bees and the public at large.

Obviously the General Husbandry requires a significant level of expertise. After attending John Hendrie's training session recently at the National Honey Show, I can assure you that it's not so intimidating. For example, you don't need to be an expert at grafting techniques or other sophisticated queen rearing skills. What you do have to be able to show is that it is you, the beekeeper who is controlling the temper and behaviour of your bees and quality of the queen, not the bees themselves. What else do you need to be able to do?

First of all, you must apply by 28/2/2011, (£40). You must already hold the Basic qualification and have kept bees for at least 3 years (I suspect it'll be longer.) Two BBKA assessors will come to visit your apiary and honey room on a mutually convenient date in May, June or July and the minimum status of your apiary must be 3 honey production colonies, 1 nucleus and suitable spare equipment for the number of hives you have including feeding equipment. In your honey room you have to be able to show evidence of how you process your honey and wax and be able to answer questions on health and safety, and the legal requirements for selling honey. (If you've already done BBKA Module 2 these answers will already be at the tip of your tongue!)

The first thing the assessors ask to look at before going to the bees is your previous records, so make sure they make sense to you and you can explain them (a little review job for the cold winter months). You'll have to talk through your colony inspection technique as you do it and answer questions in the manner of the basic assessment, but the assessors will be probing the depths of your technical vocabulary and understanding in case you might want to become an assessor for the Basic yourself (and I hope you will!). You need to show evidence of how you select and rear your queens and show how you are inspecting for and controlling disease (adult and brood) and pests, as well as general hygiene. Well-behaved bees are clearly a must!

You'll then have to demonstrate and/or explain some of the essential beekeeping processes (and don't forget, as we all say, every beekeeper has her/his own way of doing things – the only vital point is that it works and you can justify it. These could include: artificial swarming; preparing hives for transport; queen introduction, and marking and clipping (if all yours are already beautifully prepared you'll be asked to do a drone); swarm collection; uniting 2 queen right colonies; making a nucleus.

This is it in a nutshell but you must get a syllabus (on BBKA website) to study the details which I've inevitably left out. You'll also need a selection of textbooks to help you along. I've got Yates & Yates, Hooper, Celia Davis, but ask around your Division amongst your experts for advice. Having written the article, it does look a bit daunting! But don't be put off; the idea is that you are only having to present yourself as a really competent beekeeper.



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See the article by Chris Southall on page 6.

