

# THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



**All this sun—water required!**

Monthly Magazine of the E.B.K.A

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**June  
2011**

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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.*

## June and July 2011

- 2 June *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. Looking at Disease from a Divisional Perspective, a talk by Jean Smye.
- 3 June *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. The Hive Mafia, a talk by Eileen Marrable.
- 7 June *Tuesday 10.00am-4.30pm* **Hatfield Broad Oak Village Hall CM22 7HN** Managing Bee Health. A one-day event for the continuing professional development of bee-keepers. Suitable for all levels & experience. See advert.
- 11 June *Saturday 2.00pm* **Dengie Hundred and Maldon** Disease Tour lead by Peter Heath, Seasonal Bee Inspector. Followed by afternoon tea courtesy of Keith and Marilyn. Please contact Jean 07731856361 for start time.
- 11 June *Saturday 2.30pm* **Epping Forest** at Willow Cottage, Curtis Green. Clive Cohen will give a talk on swarms and will also discuss bumble bees from the perspective of removal of nests etc.
- 14 June *Tuesday 7.30pm* **Saffron Walden** at SW County High School CB11 4UH. Microscopy, 'Looking for Nosema and Acarine'.
- 18 June *Saturday* **Chelmsford** Disease Tour lead by Peter Heath Regional Bee Inspector. Do not miss this great opportunity to visit apiaries and gain the benefit of Peter's advice. We usually visit at least three prearranged apiaries and you may come and go as you wish throughout the day. Please contact Jean for venue details and start time. 07731856361
- 22 June *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Pam Hunter -Are current 'problems' really that new?
- 26 June *Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** at Foucher Farm, Good Easter - contact Richard Savage 01245 440367.
- 1 July *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. Beeswax and other hive products, a talk by Jean Smye.
- 7 July *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. 'To bee or not to bee' - Tony Gunton.
- 9 July *Saturday 2.00pm* **Dengie Hundred and Maldon** Mundon Victory Hall. Preparing for Shows: points to watch; the rules; purchase of cheap sugar.
- 9 July *Saturday 9.00am-4.00pm* **Colchester** Tendring Show Lawford House Park, Bromley Rd., Lawford, Nr. Manningtree. Help is needed, please ring Penny Barker 01255 830713.
- 9 July *Saturday* **Epping Forest** at Chapel Barn, Nazeing. A practical demonstration of honey extraction to division members by Ted Gradosielski. Due to the popularity of this subject and limited space there will be a morning and afternoon session.

- 10 July      *Sunday 12.00* **Saffron Walden** Annual Barbecue and Apiary Meeting at the home of Robert Pickford, Great Easton CM6 2HD.
- 16 July      *Saturday 2.00pm* **Dengie Hundred and Maldon** Southminster Village Show. Help needed to man the marquee.
- 18 July      *Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. Show Preparation Are you wanting to enter the shows but are unsure of what is expected of you and what the judges expect? Then come along to discuss the various classes. Speaker Jean Smye.
- 27 July      *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Beekeeping Blunders - Come along and relate stories of your beekeeping blunders and let's all learn from each others mistakes! Most deserving or funniest story wins a bottle of wine!
- 31 July      *Sunday 3.00pm* **Braintree** Apiary meeting at the apiary of Stuart Mitson in Great Leighs. tel. 01376 340683

**County Pheromones  
Richard Ridler (Chairman)**

Even the Archers were at the Beekeepers' Association spring convention buying a new hive, did anyone see them?...we didn't. A full half of your membership subscription goes to the BBKA of whom the EBKA is a member. Best you know what you get for your money and get value from it. The BBKA spring convention, held conveniently in April just before the beekeeping season starts, is one popular benefit. It's the only opportunity beekeepers have to compare and contrast equipment from many suppliers. We spent much time this year looking at polystyrene hives which I'm persuaded are now an excellent and much cheaper option than wooden ones. There are lectures, workshops and classes at the convention too. I'm pleased to say that some much needed big changes are afoot at the BBKA. The BBKA newsletter, which you all receive, has just become monthly rather than bi-monthly, it's now in colour and its layout is being becoming more accessible. The BBKA website is currently being completely re-designed, it will be far easier to use. More about the BBKA next month.

**For Sale**

Thorne's lightweight polythene, 9 frame manual tangential extractor on stand. Only used one season.

£200

Contact Audrey Shead 01371 870651

**Wanted**

Second hand electric or manual extractor – any condition considered.

Contact Brian 07786 218 701

## **Our First Year of Beekeeping**

### **Keith Munns**

*Ed: Keith Munns wrote this article in September 2010 but I thought I would save it to give all new aspiring beekeepers inspiration.*

Last summer I went to Austria to a friend's place in the Tyrol and her sons had bee hives in the rear garden. It is a common sight in the mountains and my curiosity was aroused. Later on that year I did some electrical work for Ted Gradosielski. His passion for bees was infectious and gradually what was a passing interest became a desire to have a go myself.

I enrolled for the beginner's course in the following Spring with the Epping Forest Beekeepers Association and attended Thursday evening lectures with Ken Barker. For the first few meetings I was mildly terrified at the various parasites, predators and diseases that preyed on bees and their honey. However, by the end of the course I was fascinated and in awe at the bees industry and was determined to get a hive for my rear garden.

Buoyed by my enthusiasm I drove up to the British Beekeepers Association Annual Conference in Coventry and was overwhelmed at both the number of people involved in this pursuit and the extensive array of stands selling every associated bee product you could think of. I came away with a bee suit for me and my wife, who by now had been cajoled into becoming the beekeeper's apprentice!

Still these came in handy once we both attended our first monthly meeting in Wanstead where a number of hives are located in the rear garden of a friendly solicitor. Held on a cold but dry Saturday last May, I recognised a number of the beginners from my course. Held by our local Association, the experienced beekeepers opened up some of the hives on site and demonstrated various timely tasks. Followed by tea and cakes it was a civilised way to pass an afternoon and reassuring to have so many knowledgeable people available to answer our numerous questions.

I got my nucleus from Ted first week in June and carefully drove them back from Nazeing to Cuffley and proudly introduced them to their new home. Located at the bottom of the garden and shielded by the apple trees, I hoped the hive would go unnoticed by the neighbours. I thought I had been rumbled when the man down the road asked my wife to keep the windows shut as he had noticed what he thought was either a bee or wasp's nest in his hedge and had called in the exterminators.

It was all we could do to wait a week for the first visit to the bottom of the garden to see how the Girls (as they were now being referred to) had settled in. We set up the camcorder on a tripod to film this momentous event and had a camera ready for close up shots. Lifting the lid off for the first time and hearing that satisfying buzz from the hive was amazing. The first visit was quite lengthy and made us both aware at having all the necessary gear available and somewhere to put it

once an inspection is underway. The most problematic thing was keeping the smoker going. We tried a variety of substances from egg boxes (good burners), pine cones (not very successful) and rolled up cardboard (so so).

Weekly inspections have been reasonably problem free and whereas the first one took over an hour as we were both overly cautious at inspecting the frames and trying not to squidge any bees, we have now got into a rhythm and methodology and they take about half an hour, including filling in the inspection sheet. We have spotted the Queen on all but one occasion, but weren't too fussed as we saw that there were plenty of eggs and brood. In fact, we were surprised by the speed at which she was filling up the frames. We did have to refer to the book (Ted Hooper, who else) on many occasions to understand what we were seeing and made enquiries of Ted when we saw what we thought were abnormal cells on the frames. One of these turned out to be a Queen cup which the bees destroyed themselves. The pattern of brood was as described and we watched as eggs turned to grubs and then as the bees emerged from their capped cells. In time these cells were then filled with honey stores at what appeared to us as an alarming rate. A phone call to Ted and we were instructed to put the first Super at the beginning of July. In the course of our weekly inspections this too was filling up fast and we subsequently had to introduce a second Super in the first week in August.

In the sunshine their aerial activity is fascinating. And we have sat and watched them spellbound as they land on the wooden deck by the hive entrance heavily laden with pollen in a range of colours from a creamy white to a deep and vibrant red. We keep a pair of binoculars by the patio doors and check out what's going on throughout the day. They have distinctive patterns of industry and we have learnt not to inspect the hive at about 3.30pm in the afternoon when they are at their busiest. Indeed, the first few times we witnessed the volume of bees around the hive we thought they were going to swarm. We had to abandon one inspection as they were not happy with us disturbing them at that time. On the whole though, our bees have been extremely docile and friendly. We fill in the weekly inspection sheet and mark them generally 9 or 10 out of 10 for their behaviour.

We harvested the honey this week from our two Supers with Ted's help. It involves breaking the wax capping and placing the frames into a centrifuge, spinning out the honey and then decanting it into a holding chamber for pouring. I can't tell you how satisfying it was when I saw the syrupy liquid flow from the tap into the first jar. I continued pouring until 36 jars later the job was complete, or so I thought. Getting back into my car to drive my precious haul home, I was confronted with thousands of Ted's bees who had followed the scent of frame into the open boot of my car. We then spent a good hour or so smoking them out. Note to self, lock frames away from curious bees!

My work however is over for the year as I now have to ensure that I give the Girls the best chance to overwinter safely in preparation for next Spring. This involves feeding with sugar solution and checking and treating them for various parasites and diseases. Following a feeding demonstration by Helen Chadwick on Saturday, I knocked up some solution and put the feeder over the crown board and

the Girls are feeding furiously. To date they've had 8 litres of sugar syrup in 5 days so an urgent visit to Costco was made mid week to buy 5kg bags of white sugar at wholesale prices. I have also marked out the base board and will be inspecting for Varroa this weekend which we shall have to treat with Oxalic Acid solution if found in sufficient numbers. In addition, I shall be wrapping the hive with mesh to ensure that we don't get any woodpeckers attack as our garden backs Home Wood and we get all three species feeding in our garden. Finally, I shall be cleaning up my used frames and Supers to ensure that I am ready to go next Spring.

### **Father's Handwritten Notes on his Life and Beekeeping II 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 over the next few months.—Editor*

We moved house three times and every time we moved the bees were the last thing on the lorry or horse and cart. As years went by Father got more experienced with the bees and my interest got deeper. Also Father and I were out every summer collecting swarms and helping beginners. We had no CBIs to run to when we had a problem. We had to find out by experience.

In 1928 we moved to Bocking near Braintree in Bovington Road where we made friends with Mr Drane in Church Lane, Bocking who was a beekeeper and agent for Lees of Uxbridge. We also came in contact with Alf Gunn, Secretary of Braintree Division. It was then we joined the Beekeepers Association in 1930. The Braintree Division had very few members at that time but they were a very dedicated lot and attended the meetings regularly. Alf Gunn was Secretary and had a habit of ringing the members before a meeting to ask them if they were coming to the meeting on Saturday, then they were afraid to say no if they had not got a good excuse. Finding the Queen was a popular event at the garden meetings. The idea was to have a number of members inspect colonies all starting at the same time. The first one to find the Queen got the prize. Father was very lucky at this, he had a secret which he said was a great help. Before he opened the hive he would give the side of the hive a sharp tap – the queen would run to the opposite side of the brood box. His belief was that the queen would move away from the vibration caused by tapping the hive, then he would find the Queen on the opposite side of the brood box.

Father never covered his hands or arms when inspecting his bees, he always rolled his sleeves up before opening a hive. I don't know what he would say if he were to see the men from space who we see operating our bees today, but as he was always working with cattle on the farm every day with sleeves rolled up, his skin was tough. The bees never made much impression on him with their stings.

During the war the highlight of one of our meetings came when Alf Gunn arranged classes on anatomy of the bee at Braintree High School. Mrs Enever, the school biology teacher took the class, about 20 members attended.

After the war was over we had a lot of problems with spraying crops as the MAF had no control about what farmers did to the crops. Owing to this situation beekeepers were losing their bees at an alarming rate with no compensation from the farmers.

However beekeeping had a good turn of fortune for me when a Bertie Ruggles in the village of Cressing advertised a honey extractor for sale. I got on my bike one Saturday afternoon to find Bertie Ruggles. Having found him I bought his four frame extractor in good condition for £2.50 (2 pounds 10 shillings). As it was the case of one beekeeper to another with a lot in common Bertie Ruggles asked me to stay for tea. Later on in the evening Bertie Ruggles' daughter arrived home and I got on just as well with the daughter although she didn't know anything about bees. However I did arrange to meet her again the next day. The friendship continued until we got married on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1940. On the wedding day the bees in the garden also decided to find a new home. A large swarm emerged and settled on the apple tree as the wedding guests were sitting on the lawn having tea. I thought this was a good start to a happy marriage.

The war had just started when I got married. I was not sure what my future would be about getting a house so I made my home with my in-laws. Mr Ruggles and I continued to keep bees together. He allowed me to put a shed in the garden where I made 6 WBC hives. I wanted a lot of bees because my mind was on making a lot of money having just got married. Mr Ruggles had other ideas. He was a very religious man and money was his last thought. He always told me he was not interested in making money. He had bees for a hobby. He was a nice kind man. He once told me that after he had two meals on one day anyone who had not eaten could have his third meal.

Bertie had one strong colony of bees and the hive was made by a local carpenter with 7/8 timber. Bertie was very fussy - everything had to be made to last a lifetime. It was a cowen hive (they can be found in old bee books). The brood box was double walled packed with cork granules. The supers were BS WBC. Bertie always got more honey per colony than I did (in February Bertie would heat a cup full of syrup to feed the bees). That I could never understand until one day I realized the secret. It was beside his cowen hive he had another very old hive with bees in but it never seemed to have as many bees coming in and out as the cowen hive. This was because Bertie would take the sealed brood from the spare hive and put it into the cowen hive so he had 2 queens working for one hive. He was getting twice as much honey as I was and he never let on. I am sure he enjoyed this little joke immensely.

After the war I bought my own bungalow. Taking over a new pace there was a lot to be done and I lost interest in the bees, the honey crops were very poor as the farmers were spraying deadly chemicals, bees were dying everywhere and the government did nothing about the situation. Therefore I gave up beekeeping and concentrated on bringing up a family. As time went by my daughter and son

got married and got their own homes.

Then one day in 1968 my daughter phoned to tell me there was a swarm of bees landed in her garden. As I had kept all my beekeeping things I collected the swarm and that was the beginning of my second go at beekeeping. I was very soon up to 6 hives and then 32!

### **Beekeeping Tips No. 5 By Pollinator**

Swarming is the honeybees' way of ensuring the species survives, especially for feral colonies before catastrophes such as forest fires, by splitting the colony into at least two parts. Unlike the human race, where we hope our offspring will set up their own home, the honeybee colony tells mother to leave with half the colony (up to ten thousand honeybees) at a time when the first queen cell is sealed.

For the beekeeper wishing to keep colonies at maximum foraging strength in order to obtain a good crop of honey this can result in a much lower surplus of honey. The first swarm (known as the prime swarm) will leave as soon as the first queen cell is sealed and weather permits.

A number of options are available to the beekeeper to control swarming, and one of these is to artificially swarm. A complete empty hive and empty brood frames should be to hand.

When open (as opposed to sealed) queen cells are found at the time of the regular inspection it is time to find the frame with the queen on it and to put that frame in a holding box. The queenless brood chamber (bc) is now moved 75 cm to one side (Call this bc B) and replaced by an empty brood chamber. (Call this bc A).

Both bc entrances should face in the same direction.

The empty brood chamber, A, is now given the frame of brood with the queen on it and preferably ten empty drawn frames (frames of foundation can be used if drawn combs are unavailable). Remove any queen cells on the frame with the queen. The supers that were removed at the start of the inspection should be replaced with the queen excluder on hive A.

Brood chamber B is now examined for a good unsealed queen cell and the other queen cells, open or sealed, are destroyed. The good queen cell should have a

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well-fed larva visible and to be ready for capping. More than one open queen cell can be left subject to the move described in the next paragraph being carried out on time. Close the frames, and dummy board, together and replace the crown board and roof. Ensure both colonies have sufficient food. Hive A will most likely have sufficient in the supers and hive B can be fed with a rapid feeder.

The outcome of this series of manipulations is that as foraging bees emerge from hive B they will return to hive A in the ensuing week and boost its population and at the same time further depleting hive B of foraging bees. An essential part of these manipulations is that hive B must be moved to the opposed side of hive A in 7 days time; the result is that foraging bees will return to the old B position and from there to Hive A to further boost its number of flying bees. At this time examine hive A to verify the old queen is laying and that there are no queen cells.

At the next inspection of hive B, and at least 14 days after the commencement of these manipulations, you will be able to look for the new queen and/or eggs. Once she has mated you have the choice of whether to retain the extra colony or combine (unite) it with hive A. More about uniting on another occasion.

**South East Honey Survey 2010**  
**By Alan Byham (Regional Bee Inspector)**  
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As usual, I would like to start my report by thanking all the beekeepers that have taken the trouble to respond to my request for honey crop and price statistics. This year the number of responses was similar to last year at 240 which again makes some of the averages sensible. As you can see from the figures below, 94 from the 240 did not give prices for honey but I am still happy to accept the figures and include the average honey take per colony. Some of these beekeepers do not sell any of their honey and may feel they are being excluded from the survey. If this applies to you please just make a note on the form, I'm happy to receive any information you are willing to give.

The average take per colony was better than last year at 44lbs per colony, nearly equalling that of 2008 (47lbs). The early nectar flows were good and in many areas there was also a good main summer crop. Again, as last year the honey flow stopped abruptly around the middle of July, allowing me to extract supers, dry them and have my first varroa treatment on by 8th August. This sudden and relatively early cessation of the summer flow now seems to be a feature of rural beekeeping in the South East area. Of course, I know that for those of you in urban areas, the flow may well continue into August and September but this does then give you difficult choices about the timing of varroa control.

In the discussion below, I have made comparison with the final results from the previous survey asking the same questions about the 2009 season, so that you can compare this directly to last year's survey.

## Results 2010

- **Average Honey Yield per colony:** 240 replies ranging from 0.0lb to 211.0 per colony 2010 average = 44lb (2009 = 35lb)
- **Direct Sales Price (Flower):** 146 replies ranging from £2.00/lb to £10.00/lb 2010 average = £4.31/lb (2009 = £3.96/lb)
- **Wholesale Honey Price (Flower):** 50 replies ranging from £2.50/lb to £6.00/lb 2010 average = £3.73/lb (2009 = £3.50/lb)
- **Bulk Honey Price (Flower):** 6 replies ranging from £2.00/lb to £3.50/lb 2010 average = £2.43/lb (2009 = £2.40/lb)
- **Cut comb:** 18 replies were received ranging from £3.50/lb to £10.00/lb. 2010 average = £7.45/lb (2009 = £7.78/lb)

## Discussion

These results are compiled from beekeepers owning between 1 and 100 colonies with total yields between 0lbs and 8000lbs. The highest yield per colony (211lb) came from a beekeeper with 1 colony, well done to them! There is the usual wide variation in reported average honey yields – from 0 to 211lbs per colony. In fact 10 responses gave a zero return, some of which were new to the craft this season, I hope that they will be able to respond next year with improving figures. The average yield, 44lb, is a reasonable increase over the previous year's figure (36lb), which, I think, is explained by the wet winter leaving plenty of groundwater, for the warmer, drier weather of the summer.

Direct sale to customers is always the commonest method of honey sales - 146 respondents provided a figure for this. As usual there is a wide price range, from £2.00/lb to 10.00/lb. The average price this year has finally broken the £4.00 barrier at £4.31/lb and is much nearer the sort of price that beekeepers should be asking for a premium product. Using figures from this survey, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £189.64 when sold direct at average price. (2009 = £138.60)

50 replies indicated selling honey wholesale to a retailer. I notice a rising trend of beekeepers selling to retailers over recent years. At the average wholesale price, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £164.12. (2009 = £122.50)

6 contributors sold honey in bulk. At the average bulk price, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £106.92. (2009 = £84.00)

Out of the 240 replies, 18 indicated selling cut-comb honey and it is assumed that the majority of this cut-comb is sold direct. This year the price per pound has dropped slightly to £7.45. At average cut comb price, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £327.80 (2009 = £272.30)

Overall, direct sales honey prices in 2010 have increased by approx 8.84% over 2009 prices to an all time high for honey prices recorded by this survey. The wholesale honey price increased by 23p, whilst the bulk price remained steady, only increasing by 3p.

Last year I had an enquiry about the total honey crop figures from the survey, so this year I will include these:

Total number of beekeepers 240  
 Total number of colonies 1251 (on 31st August 2010)  
 Total honey crop 55558lbs  
 Of which Heather honey 30lbs  
 Cut comb 796lbs  
 Flower honey 54730lbs

This year, as last year, I have obtained figures for other regions so that you may make a comparison. These regions are the administrative regions of the National Bee Unit and can be found on the NBU website:  
[www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)



Region	Flower	Flower	Flower	Cut comb	Maincrop
	Wholesale	Direct Sales	Bulk Sales	£/lb	yield (lb)
	£/lb	£/lb	£/lb	£/lb	
Western	£3.07	£4.35	£2.30	£9.20	88
Wales	£3.90	£5.40	£2.50	£8.48	22
Northern	£3.94	£4.30	£2.66	£10.05	48
South East	£3.71	£4.31	£2.43	£7.40	46
Southern	£3.54	£4.13	£3.00	£6.85	33
Eastern	£3.25	£4.50	£2.20	£6.00	40
South West	£3.50	£4.32	£1.82	£7.73	44
North East	£3.62	£4.29	£2.25	£6.16	70
<b>Average</b>	<b>£3.57</b>	<b>£4.45</b>	<b>£2.40</b>	<b>£7.73</b>	<b>49</b>

This year the direct honey sales price for the SE is just below the average for England and Wales as a whole. Once again, I still feel that there is room for a

higher price, which I believe should now be approaching £5 per pound. Remember how much time, effort and cost go into putting that honey in the jar, and sell your honey as a locally produced, premium product.

Alan Byham S.E. Regional Bee Inspector National Bee Unit Tel: 01306 611016  
Email: [alan.byham@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alan.byham@fera.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)

### Notice

Would Divisions consider whether there are any issues that they would like to be discussed at the BBKA Forum with a view to a resolution being voted on at the next Annual Delegates' Meeting. If there are issues please contact Penny Learmonth at [bbkadelegate@ebka.org](mailto:bbkadelegate@ebka.org)

### **PETER DALBY—PEBADALE APIARIES**

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634038



## Essex Beekeepers' Association

### Managing Bee Health

A one-day event for the continuing professional development of beekeepers.  
Suitable for all levels & experience.

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2011 - 10 00am to 4.30 pm.

Hatfield Broad Oak Village Hall CM22 7HN (near Stansted Airport) & nearby apiary.

Led by Eastern Regional Bee Inspector Keith Morgan & Local Seasonal Bee Inspector Peter Heath.

This relaxed and friendly day will be a mixture of Presentations, Useful Tips & Hints together with Discussion, Opportunities and a practical session to include:-

A Chance to see how to spot disease ,to get involved hands on, doing a disease inspection ,and making the beekeeper aware of normality.

**Important:**

You will need to bring a packed lunch  
And clean Beekeeping Protective Clothing  
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Enough water ... but too much can be fatal.

