

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



A queue to unload pollen—a bee jam?

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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.

May and June 2011

- 5 May *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. A talk by Richard and Jane Ridler on Honey Extracting and Preparing for Show (*combined with marital harmony-Ed.*)
- 6 May *Friday 8.00pm* **Romford** Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park. 'To Hive and Hive Not' (apologies to Hemingway). A presentation on the pros and cons of various types of bee hive with Speaker John O'Connell.
- 7 May *Saturday 2.30pm* **Saffron Walden** at the Apiary of Penny Learmonth Felsted CM6 3EF. Preparing for the BBKA Basic Assessment 2, 'Practical Training' with Derek Webber.
- 14 May *Saturday 2.00pm* **Dengie Hundred and Maldon** at Mundon Victory Hall, Mundon Village. 'Help!! How can I deal with OSR?'
- 14 May *Saturday 2.30pm* **Epping Forest** at Wanstead Apiary, Langley Drive. Beginners welcome to attend the opening up of the hives in our first visit of the year to the division's apiary.
- 15 May *Sunday TBA* **Harlow** Divisional Apiary meeting: David Tyler and Peter Heath
- 16 May *Monday 7.30pm* **Chelmsford** Link Hall Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. Marking Queens and Splitting Colonies. Robert Pickford needs little introduction so come along and learn from an expert.
- 21 May *Saturday 3.00pm* **Colchester** Apiary meeting and Garden Party at the home of Colin Sergeant. Phone 01206 735607 for further details.
- 25 May *Wednesday 7.30pm* **Southend** at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Stuart Baldwin will be speaking on beekeeping.
- 29 May *Sunday 2.00pm* **Braintree** Apiary meeting—Dr. Hufton-Rees. Telephone for details 01245233759.
- 2 June *Thursday 7.30pm* **Harlow** at Kings Church Red Willow. DEFRA Disease Monitoring and Control, 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.
- 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'.
- 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** Apiary meeting Dr Hufton-Rees. Telephone for details 01245233759

June TBA **TBA Chelmsford** This is a real must do meeting. You will have the opportunity to visit the Apiaries of other beekeepers and watch their bees being handled and inspected. The usual start time is around 10am and finishes around 3pm, but you don't have to stay for the whole day. Peter Heath Seasonal Bee Inspector will be guiding the day. Contact Jean for further information 07731 856361.

June TBA **TBA Dengie Hundred and Maldon** with Seasonal Bee Inspector and Divisional Disease Liaison. This is an excellent opportunity to tour the district looking at others bees. The day will finish off with our usual delicious afternoon tea at Hop Gardens courtesy of Keith & Marilyn.
Please contact Jean – 07731 856 361 - if you want to participate.

County Pheromones Richard Ridler (Chairman)

There are some sound reasons to be aware of and be respectful to your apiary neighbours. The first is disease; we all have a responsibility to avoid the spread of diseases. It cuts both ways, you don't want theirs and they don't want yours. Make sure your bees are healthy. Know about the location of neighbouring apiaries and try to be aware of the health of their bees. Treat swarms with great care; isolate them for a time until you are sure they are fit and well. The second reason is forage availability; with a doubling in our membership in two years there is an increased possibility of overcrowding of hives in an area. Again this cuts both ways, overcrowding disadvantages all parties. The only realistic way to find out about neighbours is through contact in your division and with neighbouring divisions. Please use the network of contacts that exists in our association when you are setting up a new apiary and be particularly mindful of disease if you take swarms collected by another beekeeper.

Essex Beekeepers contribute to Bee Research

Essex members donated £628 to the BBKA Research Fund in 2010. Our General Treasurer has received letters of acknowledgement from the BBKA expressing their thanks and appreciation of members' generosity.

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Dealing with Rape

Richard Alabone (Mr Beesy)

Twenty five years ago I had my first super of rape honey. By the time I'd got my act together in order to extract it, the whole box was as hard as a rock. Having learnt much by my mistakes over the years I can now offer some comments which I hope may help others.

In order to take advantage of a crop of rape your colonies need to be strong by the end of April. This is helped by giving extra warmth from February to April; I put two layers of bubble wrap over the crown board, or an empty super and an old towel. A block of fondant over the porter escape hole, which is kept warmer by the extra insulation, seems to be more attractive than stored honey and is another encouragement for the production of brood. Some beekeepers also put on pollen patties during the same period which again increases the amount of brood. I used one once, but it all went mouldy very quickly, so I have never bothered since. I suspect a mould inhibitor should have been added; it's probably part of modern recipes.

When it comes to rape time, you need to have all the necessary equipment to hand. It's no good leaving it until the weekend to go and get some foundation or frames (not SN1's or SN4's). That should all have been done during the winter, and also and you will need several 30lb buckets for each hive — hopefully!

It's normally about a week after the fields turn yellow before there is anything in a super, but all of a sudden a super will fill up in a week or even less if the ground is wet and it's warm during the day. If the ground is dry, or the weather is cold, the flow will be much reduced. Don't give a super until needed. A hungry colony may need a contact feeder in March but a constant supply of fondant seems to work wonders, especially if kept warm.

The first super should be drawn comb, but if you have none, then leave the queen excluder off until they are drawing out comb. When the centre frames are drawn, change sides to middle. Once a flow has really started the bees will draw out foundation very quickly but it should be in the lower super, or you can alternate drawn frames with foundation. Towards the end of the rape time you may have three or even five supers, so it's a chore to put an empty one on the bottom. Being lazy, I tend to just bung one on the top.

Everybody knows that rape granulates quickly, but many do not understand the circumstances of granulation. If you have a strong colony, bees will keep the super frames somewhere around blood heat which prevents the honey crystallising, but if there are not enough bees to cover the supers they will chill and start to granulate immediately. Two opposing factors determine the likelihood of granulation. We warm honey to clear the granulation, or put it in a fridge to prevent it, so somewhere in the middle is a range where granulation will definitely start, and almost immediately. This temperature is between 10 and 20° C which will be the temperature of any super removed from the hive, or one not covered

by bees. It follows then that too many supers will encourage granulation: also if you have lost a swarm you should act immediately, either by extracting or putting the supers on another hive.

I have always let the bees tell me when they need another super: it's very easy. Just keep a spare over the crown board, and as soon as bees start to cluster on the frames over the central hole, put it under the crown board. You will always need another super when you start to clear anyway, so it does the two jobs.

Success with rape honey is very dependent on the weather. Often the nights are cold which may start granulation, especially if there are too many supers, or a spell of cold and wet weather will prevent bees from flying, and they may even desert a super.

But don't leave all the extraction to be done in one go; take off supers when they are ready. I always test the oldest super to see if it's ready by shaking a couple of frames into the hive. If nectar drips out then it will have to go back. Some beekeepers select ripe frames for extraction, but I've always taken whole boxes when ready. There is no point looking at the centre frames or the outside ones, I check the second one in, on each side of the super, to decide when to clear the bees off for extraction, and you don't have to wait till frames are fully capped – sometimes they are OK without any cappings.

Having always used a clearer board with a porter escape to get the bees off my supers, I now see that Ted Hooper said "you cannot use a clearer board" but shake the bees off, or use a chemical repellent. Obviously a cleared super left overnight would be asking for trouble, but I have generally put the board on in the morning, then shake and brush the bees off in the evening for extraction. I tried chemical repellent; sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't – and using the shake and brush method with fierce bees can be unpleasant; especially if they are followers. So why not use one of these quick-acting clearer boards?

When the rape flowers disappear, is when the honey should be ready to come off, but timing depends largely on the weather, and whether the shake test gives you the OK. If you are too quick you may well have fermentation later, but it does sometimes help to increase the top ventilation on a large pile of supers, helping the bees reduce the water content. On the other hand, if the weather has been warm and dry the water content will be low and extraction may not clear the comb sufficiently.

I always think it best to warm the supers before extraction, and use my arrangement using a large hair dryer to blow warm air through a pile of supers, which also warms the extraction room. (see the Essex Beekeeper August 2009). This heater warms the comb to about blood heat in a couple of hours, which can be tested by putting a hand on the top bars. It makes extraction quicker and more effective as rape honey left in the comb will granulate and seed any honey put on top of it. It's best to try and get bees to clean up the comb before refilling it. Put it over the crown board after the rape has finished.

If the extractor walks about, when trying to deal with part granulated frames, redistribute the offending frames to balance the extractor cage – my extractor is

screwed to the wall! There are two methods of dealing with the filtration after extracting rape honey. Some beekeepers just use a coarse filter to remove dead bees and chunks of wax, and then a few weeks later clear the honey and use a fine filter, before reseeded for storage. This also kills the wild yeasts which prevents fermentation. I always use a plastic double filter between the extractor and a 30lb storage bucket. The 10 inch filter is the right size for the bucket, but it sits in the honey, so I have fitted three wooden legs to keep the filter out of the honey. It only needs a little granulation to completely block a fine filter, but my solution is to use a curved spatula to stir up the crystals. This works fine, so that some granulation doesn't hold up extraction.

Another way of using rape or mustard honey is to adopt the bee-farmers method. They deliberately let it granulate, then separate honey and wax at their leisure – generally in September. But they do not heat to melt the wax and let it float on the top, which spoils the honey, but slowly raise the temperature to clear the honey, then use a centrifuge to separate honey from wax. Amateur beekeepers get away with using more heat to melt the wax, and then blend the rape with other honey to hide the spoilage. Fully granulated combs may be scraped down to the mid rib, but beware dark old wax which is difficult to completely remove.

In the olden days beekeepers used clover honey, which produces a fine granulation, to seed other honeys: but now we have to use rape to prevent coarse granulation of later honey crops.

New beekeepers, who always want immediate breakfast honey, often bottle from the extractor, but then wonder why their knives get broken. Also direct bottling encourages frosting, where a low water content rape will shrink on crystallisation, producing unsightly white markings on the inside of the jar. This also happens where soft set honey is produced using too much heat, to make it pour easily, but the part-cleared honey then re-crystallises producing frosting. Some of the books say: "Have the jars at the temperature of the honey" and "Do not fill the jars too quickly" or "Run it down the side of the jar till nearly full, and then store at 54° F to avoid frosting". This is all RIDICULOUS as the problem is heating too quickly before bottling.

So to summarise, the problems are granulation, fermentation and frosting and I hope I have offered some useful advice. Part granulation is a nuisance, but can either be washed out, in warm washing up water, or saved till the bees are hungry in June and then put it over the crown board for them to rob out. Another problem can be a sudden flow in June/July which turns out to be a nasty surprise: Spring Rape!

Seventy years ago we had some honey at home with a rather strange smell. It was not unpleasant and as it was war time it all went, but I now know that it had fermented. Years later, when I first started beekeeping, I was asked to supply some local honey to the Council to put in gift baskets of local produce. But the honey fermented, the baskets and local produce became a very sticky, which was most embarrassing! Like most things in life: we learn the hard way, and if all else fails we can always make mead and drown our sorrows.

Beekeeping Tips No. 4

By Pollinator

Although supers are used for storing honey their main purpose in the early Spring is to make room in the brood chamber for the queen to be able to lay it out fully. This can be achieved only if room is given above the brood chamber (bc) for the bees to move the stores, in the bc, into the first super placed immediately above the bc. Supers are usually shallow boxes but deep boxes can be used as supers. The disadvantage of the latter is that they are very heavy to lift. In each case a queen excluder must be placed between the bc and the super. Beginners will not have drawn supers available, so supers containing foundation have to be used. These are best added without the queen excluder and at the next inspection (ten days later), the queen excluder can be added. After adding the queen excluder the super must be inspected to ensure the queen is below. Even if you have drawn supers it is helpful to put them over the bc without an excluder until the next inspection, since this gets the bees into the super quickly. Scratching the surface of sealed stores on the outer frames of the bc encourages the bees to move the honey to the super.

When the middle six super frames have been drawn and covered with bees it is then time to add the second super. I would recommend adding it under the first. At this time I would exchange the drawn super frames in the centre with the partially drawn frames on the outside of the cluster of bees. The super frames will have been on narrow spacing (37 mm). When all frames have been fully drawn they can be wide spaced (50 mm) apart. Correct spacing can be achieved using large plastic ends. In fact, narrow plastic ends need not be used at all because narrow spacing can be achieved by using large spacers on alternate frame ends to get narrow spacing of the frames in the first instance. Some beekeepers prefer not to use spacers at all because they space the frames by eye! Wide spacing lends itself to easy uncapping of the frames before honey is spun out using the extractor, and if no spacers have been used then no time is wasted pulling them off the frames before extraction and replacing them afterwards. Additionally, fewer frames means less cost. Some people use Manley frames which can be used without the need to change the spacing for foundation or drawn combs; however, they were designed for machine uncapping and when propolised are difficult to remove manually from the super.

If the weather is likely to be cool, or very cool nights are forecast, and the bees are foraging on oil seed rape (OSR) then it may be wiser to put the second super on top so that the OSR honey is kept warm and is less likely to crystallise. With OSR honey it is best not to wait for all the cells in the frames to be capped, as there is the danger of the honey crystallising. Thus the frame cannot be spun in the extractor to obtain the honey that then has to be cut out and melted. The suitability of the uncapped honey can be ascertained by shaking the comb over the super and if any falls out it is insufficiently ripe for extraction. Do this test in the morning as if left to the afternoon there will be lots of recently collected nectar, to drop out, that needs the following night in the hive for the bees to reduce its water content.

Finally, one should have a third super ready and installed before the second is full of honey and bees.

Essex Beekeepers' Association
Minutes of the 131st Annual General Meeting
held on

Saturday 5th March 2011 at 2pm

in Room E06, Writtle College, Chelmsford, Essex

These minutes will be considered correct if no objection is raised in writing (or by email) before Saturday 28th May 2011. Any point challenged will be brought before the next meeting for correction of the record.

Presiding Officer: Jane Ridler (in the absence of Robert Pickford)

Also present: As listed in Attendance Book.

- 1 **Apologies for absence** were received from Donald Earle, Howard Gilbert, Marlene Harris, Mary Heyes, Jeremy Huband, David Learmonth, Geoff Pears, Robert Pickford, Daphne Wardle.
- 2 **The Minutes of the 130th AGM** had been published in the May 2010 edition of *The Essex Beekeeper* for review by members. No challenges to the accuracy had been received so the minutes were approved (proposed Ken Barker, seconded Jim McNeill) as a true record and signed by the Presiding Officer.

3 CEC Chairman's Report

This had been published in the February 2011 edition of *The Essex Beekeeper*.

4 General Treasurer's Report and Approval of the 2010 Accounts

The Treasurer's report had been published in the March 2011 edition of *The Essex Beekeeper*. Unaudited summarised accounts and narrative summary had been printed and distributed to members together with the March magazine.

The Treasurer handed out an Addendum to the accounts and went through this, giving the reasons why audited accounts were not available for approval by members at this meeting. He apologised to members but confirmed that the information in the distributed accounts was substantially correct. The main problem had been the interface between 2009 and 2010 accounts and will be sorted out as soon as the Treasurer can arrange a meeting with the auditor, whom he had not been able to contact since 19th February. An Extraordinary General Meeting will be held later in the year to approve the accounts.

Ian Grant asked if Chelmsford can expect the same level of grant for the conference in 2011 as was given to Saffron Walden in 2010? The Treasurer indicated that the CEC had agreed a figure of £250 for this purpose. It was explained that the grant was larger in 2010 because it was part of the grant from Essex County Council which had put conditions on to the use of the grant. The 2010 conference made a surplus so Saffron Walden will be refunding at least part of the grant to central funds. Ken Barker felt we should be spending more of the Association's money; the Treasurer responded explaining that there had been a deficit for the year in central funds and spending was within Charity Commission guidelines.

Members gave a vote of thanks to the Treasurer, Tony Edwards, for his hard work. Tony was standing down as Treasurer.

5 Reports from other members of the Central Executive Committee

Reports from the Examinations Secretary and the Book of Commemoration Secretary had been published in the March issue of *The Essex Beekeeper*.

6 Election of President

Derek Webber was re-elected *nem con*, proposed Jean Smye, seconded Ken Barker.

7 Election of County Officers

Chairman	Richard Ridler	Proposed Ken Barker, seconded Geoff Mills.
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Secretary	Pat Allen Deryck Johnson.	Proposed Richard Ridler, seconded
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Treasurer	Uli Gerhard	Proposed Richard Ridler, seconded Ian Nichols.
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All elected *nem con*.

8 Notification of the 2011 Divisional Members and of the 2012 Presiding Officer

Braintree	Pat Rowland
Chelmsford	Jean Smye
Colchester	(vacant but hope to have someone soon)
DH & Maldon	Roy Carter
Epping Forest	Ian Nichols
Harlow	Mike Barke
Romford	William Stephens
Saffron Walden	Sarah Jenkins
Southend	Jeremy Huband

Presiding Officer 2012: From Harlow Division, probably Dave Tyler.

9 Election of remaining CEC posts

Advertising Secretary	Dee Inkersole
BBKA Delegate	Penny Learmonth
Book of Commemoration Sec'y	Penny Learmonth
CPRE Delegate	Roy Carter
Distribution Secretary	Mary Heyes
Editor	Howard Gilbert
Examinations Secretary	Jane Ridler
FWAG Delegate	Roy Carter
Membership Register Secretary	Pat Allen
Minutes Secretary	Eileen Marrable
NHS Delegate	Jim McNeill

Show Committee Delegate Richard Ridler

Spray & Disease C'tee Delegate Eileen Marrable

Proposed by Terry Watson, seconded by Roy Hardwicke, all accepted *nem con*.

10 Confirmation of Accounts Examiner

Emma Baker confirmed *nem con*, proposed Pat Allen, seconded Jim McNeill.

11 Propositions from the CEC

11.1 That EBKA capitation be increased by 50p, with effect from 1st January 2012.

Pat Allen pointed out that there had been no increase for several years, and that magazine costs will increase during 2011. Geoff Mills suggested that the magazine could be sent out electronically to those who wanted it so, thus reducing the number to be printed. A straw poll of those present revealed roughly 30–40% in favour of having it sent by email. Pauline Tidmas reported that in Harlow Division roughly half the members take the magazine by email. Pat Allen will try to arrange that a pdf is available for Harlow Division to make this easier. **Approval of the proposition was proposed by Richard Ridler, seconded by Jean Smye and carried by 41 votes to 2.**

11.2 That the EBKA Rule 7 be amended, to take effect at the end of this AGM, to add the following as the third paragraph:

Proxy Voting: The Trustees shall be permitted for not more than two CEC meetings per annum to exercise the right to appoint an EBKA member (excluding Associates and Juniors) as their proxy, with full voting rights. The General Secretary or CEC Chairman must be given the name of the proxy prior to a CEC meeting thus affected.

It was explained that some of the DVMs have to travel a considerable distance to attend CEC meetings and currently if they do not attend, they lose the opportunity to vote on CEC business, so there is no incentive to have someone attend in their stead. Being able to nominate a proxy would encourage full divisional representation at every CEC meeting. Approval of the proposition was proposed by Tony Edwards, seconded by Jean Smye and carried *nem con*.

12 2010 Conference Report: Saffron Walden Division

Jane Ridler reported on a very successful conference. Feedback showed that attendees enjoyed it and had appreciated the good speakers. There was an anniversary cake (EBKA 130th), and the raffle proceeds of about £350 were donated to Bees for Development.

13 2011 Conference Preview: Chelmsford Division

Ian Grant said the conference would be at Barleylands, in their impressive Conference Centre, which would also provide the catering. The car park is immense. There will international speakers. Put the date in your diary – Saturday 1st October 2011.

14 Installation of 2011 Presiding Officer & Reading from the Book of Commemoration Jean Smye will be Presiding Officer for 2011. Jean read from the Book of Commemoration.

The AGM business over, the meeting broke at 3.30pm for refreshments.

This break was followed by a very interesting illustrated presentation by Jane Moseley, who is the BBKA General Secretary/Operations Director. After her talk Jane fielded many questions and the meeting could have continued much longer except that we ran out of time.

The meeting closed at 4.35pm.

Letter to the Editor

I refer to the April issue of the E.B. and the letter from Nan Field.

1. I agree with Nan that finding sites for new beekeepers is not easy but this is not the first time that the Association has had 900 plus members, with quite a few of those having more than one apiary.
2. I'm not sure what the term "Out of Division Beekeepers" means. One might infer that this meant that if you were a Maldon Division member you had to keep your bees within certain geographic boundaries, that is to say, for example, within DH & M Division's area. Does anyone know where the boundaries of this Division or any other Division are located? There has never been any restriction on where you keep your bees and this could not be implemented in practice, and could never be. Also many beekeepers are not members of the Association and keep their bees where they please. Many beekeepers are members of Divisions far from where they keep their bees, but that is no problem (see 3 below).
3. As regards the potential problems concerned in notifying beekeepers about Spray and Disease. All Divisions over the years have had a Spray and Disease officer who should have an up-to-date list of all apiaries. Certainly, as Organiser of the Essex Pollination Scheme, I was well aware of where members apiaries were located. The position of apiaries was necessary to coordinate the placing of hives when pollinating crops, and to know whose apiaries might be affected by spray. There is already in existence a scheme which can warn beekeepers of where spraying is about to occur. Now my list, as Pollination Organiser, is out of date and some two months ago I asked for updates from all Divisional secretaries and have had only one response. If the Spray and Disease committee and their representatives in each Division do not have up to date lists then they cannot warn beekeepers about impending spraying operations. What I am saying is that there is/was a perfectly good system for giving spray warnings. Has that Scheme been abandoned?

Geoff Mills

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A talk about solitary bees and wasps Summarised by Sally Hepher

Adrian Knowles of the Essex Wildlife Trust gave a talk to members of Colchester division about solitary bees and wasps. This was arranged by Howard Gilbert, who had become curious about these creatures when required to compare them with honey bees as part of his beekeeping exams, and his curiosity was shared by many of us, who have noticed small unidentified not-bees around the garden and countryside, and wondered what they were and what they were doing.

There are around 350 wild bee and wasp species found in East Anglia, many very small and very similar. Indeed, many can only be identified with certainty by examining dead specimens under a microscope. To put 'small' in context, Adrian showed us one picture of a solitary bee only 3-4mm long, which fitted comfortably on to the central boss of a lawn daisy. Assuming they are large enough for us to see them, we can tell bees and wasps apart from flies as the former both have two pairs of membranous wings, except for a few wasps that lack wings altogether, while flies have only one pair. Telling bees from wasps sounded a little harder, as many bees deliberately mimic the appearance of wasps. Wasps generally have the narrow wasp waist, while bees don't.

They differ in how they feed their young, as wasp larvae are carnivores, fed on caterpillars, aphids and other animal material, while solitary bee larvae are given larval food made from pollen and nectar. Solitary bees, like honey bees and bumbles, tend to have hairy bodies to help pollen to stick to them, while wasps, which are not aiming to collect pollen, tend to be smooth. Although we would not be able to see it without a microscope, some solitary bees have adapted to carry pollen in their crops.

Their nesting habits sounded varied and fascinating, and it is thought that the availability of nest sites is a limiting factor on some species. Some are truly solitary, one female making a nest, provisioning it with nectar and pollen, laying an egg, sealing it, and going on to start again elsewhere. The young bee left in the nest is wholly reliant on environmental warmth and stored food. They may hatch in the autumn, but remain underground until the spring, or over-winter as pupae. Some species nest individually but close to others of the same species, giving the appearance of a colony though without any of the social organisation of a honey or bumble bee. A few species show the beginnings of social behaviour and something approaching a worker caste, as the first larvae to hatch tend to be mainly female, and help the queen raise further eggs. Some are mining bees, digging burrows in the ground, which may be the cause of those little piles of sand we sometimes see. Their choice of ground may seem bizarre, as while most like light soil, some specialise in hard and stony areas, and others in damp and even marshy ground. It is amazing their nests do not flood. Some potter and mason bees build little chimneys over the nest entrance, maybe partly to shed rain. Other species nest in hollow stems. The last eggs to be laid block the exit for the first to be laid, which would tend to hatch first, and the bee compen-

sates for this by laying female eggs first, which take longer to mature, and the faster developing males near the exit. Some species nest in crevices in woody stems. Some will adopt purpose built bee nesting boxes, or use features of buildings like thatch, or natural objects like empty snail shells, which they may cover with bits of vegetation to hide or shade them. Gardeners will know the leaf-cutter bees, which take discs from the leaves of plants like roses, fly back to their nest with the piece of leaf rolled between their legs, and use the leaf segments to line the nest.

Some species are cuckoos, laying their eggs in the nests of other bee species. These may be highly species specific as to their host, and may mimic the appearance of the host species. It is thought that before entering a bumble bee colony to lay, the cuckoo queen may hang around the fringe of the colony for a while to acquire the colony scent. Some cuckoo bees are less hairy than the average bee, not needing to collect pollen. The larvae of some cuckoo species kill the host larvae.

We are aware of the value of honey bees and bumble bees in pollination, but some solitary bees are also important pollinators. Tongue length varies across species, so different bees feed on different plants. Their facial structures vary according to the length of tongue they have to accommodate, those with long tongues tending to have long faces.

Solitary bees can sting, though the smallest ones could not penetrate anything as thick as human skin, but it didn't sound as though they were very inclined to do so. Sadly, most enjoy no legal protection, even though some are much more rare than water voles or great crested newts. Solitary insects are Adrian's hobby rather than a main part of his day-job, and he is the County Hymenoptera Recorder for Suffolk. If he had brought along some leaflets for the charity Buglife I suspect that after his presentation he could have signed up a few new members on the spot!



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