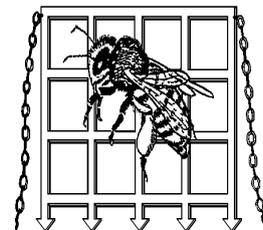


# Romsey & District Beekeepers' Association

## May 2019 Newsletter



### **Future Meetings**

Following on from our April meeting where we focussed on swarm prevention, we will be looking at ways of coping with crowded colonies so that the workforce is not depleted by swarming.

This meeting is being hosted by Evelyn at Michelmersh.

### **At a Glance**

Saturday 4 May - Meon Valley Beekeepers' annual auction –

<http://meonvalleybeekeepers.co.uk>

13-17 May – Invasive Species Week – see [www.nonnativespecies.org/index.cfm?sectionid=132](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/index.cfm?sectionid=132) . It's not just Asian hornets!

Sunday 19th May, 2pm – apiary meeting at Michelmersh.

Saturday 1 June from 10 a.m. – Apiary Safari starting at Beaulieu with Adrian Kelly, our seasonal bee inspector

Sunday 16 June at 2 p.m. – apiary meeting at Warsash with Charlie Bloom

Saturday 29 June – our Bee Health Day with our Bee Inspector – see below



**BEGINNERS** – every apiary experience will bring you closer to understanding the bees' intentions. Please let Christine know if you would like to borrow protective clothing.

**EXPERTS** – no matter how many years' experience you have, we can never fully understand the bees' intentions. They always throw something new at us. Please come and share your skills and tales with fellow members.

If you would like to attend, please contact Evelyn at least 48 hours beforehand.

### **These important rules must be followed, for the health and safety of the association's bees and your own:**

- You must wear newly laundered protective clothing (let us know if you need to borrow)
- Do not be tempted to wear it while you check your bees en-route to or from the meeting
- Your footwear must also be scrubbed clean
- Hive tools will be provided at the ACA; please do not bring your own
- If you wear any kind of non-disposable gloves, you must wear disposable gloves over them
- After the meeting, you must launder your bee suit and wash your boots again to eliminate all risk of taking disease back to your own bees

### **The most effective method of transmitting disease from one colony to another is the beekeeper**

## **Hampshire Beekeepers' Association News**

The HBA Annual Delegate Meeting was held on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Reflecting on the past year, it was noted that the association had not been very active. This was due in part to BBKA's move towards automating membership administration and fees, in which the county associations had previously played a role. The new Executive was elected en bloc and the new Chair will be elected from the Executive.

James Donaldson (Fleet BKA) has come to the end of his term as Chair and stepped down. He was warmly thanked by all present for his work and support in the past years. Steve Pestell has acted as pro tem honorary secretary since the previous incumbent resigned. He continues to do so but must step down before August this year because of work commitments.

Jean Frost, President and Education Secretary, said that Hampshire fielded 24 entrants for the Basic Assessment in 2018. All passed, 13 with credit. Given the total membership across Hampshire, Jean feels that far more ought to be taking the Basic. One retired assessor present commented that the assessment was more like a one-to-one with an expert beekeeper. No assessor wants to fail a candidate and he or she will give as much help as possible to guide the entrant through the questions and inspection. (Romsey members – please take note! It's too late to enter for 2019, but no matter how many years you have kept bees – we recommend a minimum of 2 – it's still a worthwhile experience.)

Avril Tillman spoke of the HBA Library housed in the Sustainability Centre near Portsmouth - <http://hampshirebeekeepers.org.uk/library-service/> . It boasts an impressive catalogue that is continually updated with new books as they are published, and is a valuable source of information including vintage publications, children's books, recipe books – and much more. The catalogue (on the HBA website) is worth browsing.

HBA will not be hosting a Convention in 2019 although local associations may be organising their own and these will be posted on the HBA website. There will, however, be an HBA Honey Show on 19<sup>th</sup> October at Sir Harold Hiller Gardens. This is timed so that local associations' honey shows will be over and the National Honey Show yet to come. It would be good to see several Romsey entries – our honey and hive products are worth it.

## **Helping the Sustainability Centre**

As its name suggests, one of the Centre's aims is to avoid sending rubbish to landfill. To help, HBA Library collects plastic milk bottle tops (which can be any colour but must have a recycling triangle with a 2 in it) because sorted, recycled waste can be sold. It only raises £30 per 300 KG but the library is over halfway there already and every little helps, environmentally and financially.



This is obviously a long-term thing. Please can you save your bottle tops, and give them to Gillian or Christine at any meeting?

## **Our Website**

A reminder – our website [www.romseybeekeepers.com/](http://www.romseybeekeepers.com/) carries a lot of information about bees and beekeeping. In the restricted members' area, our members have access to even more, such as directions to apiary meetings and scheduled visits to the ACA. Please contact Gillian and ask for your password if you do not already have it.

The Hampshire Beekeepers' Association website [hampshirebeekeepers.org.uk/](http://hampshirebeekeepers.org.uk/) includes details of events organised by local associations that are open to all HBA members, as well as events organised by HBA.

## Do You Need More Bees?

It's swarming season and the weather has been kind to honey bees (and other species). The first swarms were reported mid-April and they will keep on coming as long as there are feral colonies and beekeepers who have not mastered swarm prevention and control.

Always remember that the source and the state of health of a swarm are unknown. Treat the colony as though it is infected; keep it well away from your other bees for at least 2 brood cycles (=6 weeks) and check their health. Do not feed them for the first 48 hours after their arrival so that they use the honey that they brought with them, which could be infected, to draw comb.

Please contact Christine if you would like to give a home to a swarm. Mention how many colonies you can take, the type of hive that you have, your experience level, and your availability at short notice. If you are a beginner, please ask for help and advice.

Swarms of bees are provided on a not-for-profit basis but please be aware that the swarm-collector will ask you to reimburse for frames and/or food given and possibly other reasonable expenses.

## Asian Hornets

It's easy to become complacent about the Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*). We have reached May and, so far, there have been no reports of Asian hornets setting up nests in the UK.



Over-wintered Asian hornet queens should have come out of hibernation and set up their "primary nests" by now. These are small and are used to raise the first of the brood. Then the colony moves on to build a bigger nest which has traditionally been high in a tree but is now anywhere that provides camouflage and protection.

*Image: inside a primary nest*

Were there any over-wintered queens in the UK?

A single insect – the queen - is hard to spot and although we put out traps, we cannot assume that there were none.



*Image: the same primary nest, showing several colours from the woods used by the nest-builders*

(The Asian hornet nest above is a primary nest found in Beaulieu last year and given to Sylvia and Cliff, who brought it to a meeting so that we could marvel at the intricacy.)

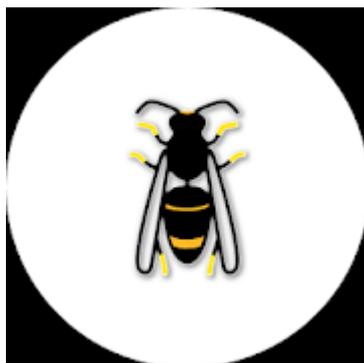
In late spring and early summer Asian hornets will not hawk our bees because they have enough nutrition in their nest; so a small primary nest with a busy queen and the first of this year's worker hornets will probably go unnoticed.

Therefore it is vital that we do not become complacent.



*Left, European; right, Asian*

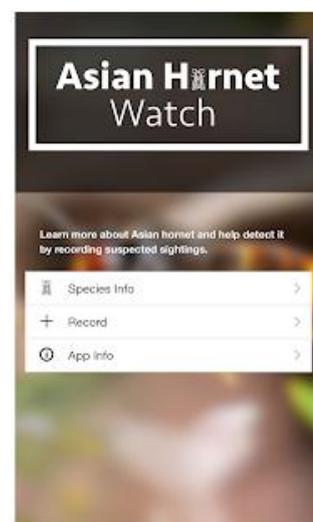
We are using our swarm line as a “response phone” for Asian hornets. Its number will appear on a BBKA map similar to the BBKA swarm line map so that members of the public can contact us as first responders. Please make a note of that number - **07508 716044** – and save it on your own mobile phone.



*Left – the NNSS logo for the Asian hornet, which captures the significant points:*

- *Black/brown body*
- *Dark legs with yellow socks*
- *Dark abdomen with 4<sup>th</sup> segment yellow/orange*

*Please consider installing the Asian hornet app (available in Android or iPhone) which is an excellent and comprehensive method of reporting suspected sightings. You can use the QR code below to go to the NNSS links to download the app.*



The Asian hornet, once established, will drastically reduce populations of all insect species, not just honeybees. This, in turn, will have a serious effect on other wildlife species such as birds and small mammals

You can help in these ways:

- Make sure you tell friends, relatives, neighbours, local groups, the postman/lady and anyone else you can think of about the threat posed by the Asian hornet
- The association has a supply of laminated A4 information sheets. Please contact [rdbkasec@gmail.com](mailto:rdbkasec@gmail.com) for some; you can ask your local library, village hall, group or whatever to display it
- Please also post these information sheets, having obtained permission if necessary, on footpaths or anywhere that the public might see it
- Please ignore sensationalist, ill-informed media and press. Please check the NNSS website for your information, know what you are talking about, and inform the public without alarming them.

The Asian hornet will come to the UK, but we can make its arrival slow and controlled so that we, and our environment, can adapt and deal with the threats that they bring.

### **Winter Losses Survey**

COLOSS (Prevention of Honey Bee COlony LOSSes) has asked that we issue the link to their 2018/9 survey and encourage as many beekeepers as we can to enter data:

<https://www.bee-survey.com/index.php/368949>

The information gathered is confidential, and although it is not the easiest of surveys to complete, it will provide COLOSS and its European counterparts with useful information.

BBKA are also promoting their Winter Colony Survival Survey for all registered members:

[www.bbka.org.uk/winter-colony-survival-survey-1819](http://www.bbka.org.uk/winter-colony-survival-survey-1819)

It is simpler; the results will form a picture comparing losses across England's regions. Better still, do both.

### **Healthy Bee Day - Saturday, 29th June 9 am – 5 pm**

This will be held at Awbridge Village Hall SO51 0HG and is kindly sponsored by Bee Diseases Insurance and led by the seasonal bee inspector. Early booking is advised; places are limited and this is open to all Hampshire members.

Programme:



- Apiary hygiene and disease control
- Disease Inspections
- Disease comb recognition
- European and American Foulbrood and other brood disorders
- Small Hive beetle and Tropilaelaps monitoring
- Varroa – Integrated Pest Management
- Asian Hornet update

The charge for the day is £5 per R&DBKA member (£10 non-member), including light refreshments (please bring your own lunch). Please note that the visit to the hives is weather dependent.

To book your place please email Christine. You will need to bring:

- A packed lunch (we will provide tea and coffee)
- Your freshly cleaned bee suit or jacket and veil, boots and gloves. Leather gloves will not be permitted

## **April Meeting – “Swarming” Led by Christine Coulsting – Sunday 14 April**

April weather can be unreliable so the ‘apiary’ meeting was organised indoors, with equipment but without bees. The topic was swarming, and it was well attended being so relevant to the time of year.

Christine gave a presentation about swarming, the causes and the consequences. Congestion in the hive is a major trigger, causing poor transmission of queen substance (the mix of pheromones that tells the workers that everything in the hive is well).

When we see more than 6 frames filled with brood, some drone brood around the side and bottom edges, and queen cups with royal jelly we can tell that the bees are considering their options. We need to inspect every 7 days, looking closely for queen cells.

It is important that we remember that a female egg takes 3 days to hatch, then the larva that is to become a queen will develop in her unsealed cell for 5 days before pupating in her sealed cell for 8 days – approximately.

A sealed queen cell usually means that the colony has already swarmed. We may be lucky, if the weather is so poor that the bees have postponed their departure, and intercept them. A swarm will settle up to 100 yards from the parent colony and will cluster while it checks that the queen is with them. Scouting bees will come and go, testing out potential new sites.

The “prime” swarm contains the queen and about 60% of the bees. Only 25% of swarms will survive. Once virgin queens emerge, a cast with a virgin could leave but is even less likely to survive. If more than one cast leaves, the parent colony will struggle to survive.



The consequences of swarming are loss of foraging force in our colonies, transmission of diseases and pests, bees taking up residence in unsuitable places, annoyance to neighbours.

Responsible beekeeping involves swarm prevention.

We can prevent swarming by:

- inspecting every 7 days
- keeping young queens (2 years old or younger)
- managing comb to give plenty space for the queen to lay up to 1,000 eggs per day, and for processing nectar and storing honey
- learning the signs, and practising a swarm control method
- having spare kit available in the apiary
- marking the queen (possibly clipping to increase inspection period to 10 days)

A colony needs 3 things to be able to swarm – a queen, lots of brood, lots of workers. If you take one of those things away, you remove their ability to swarm. However, congestion will always be a swarm trigger.

There are 3 types of queen cell and we should all be able to tell the difference:

- emergency queen cells are built to replace a lost queen. The bees will select a young worker larva and build the cell out and downwards – like a “Roman nose”. There will be very few, often just one, and it will be on the face of the comb
- supersedure queen cells are planned by the bees. There are very few, usually on the face of the comb, built on a queen cup, long and straight. The bees should be allowed to deal with this; remove all but one cell and mark the frame with a drawing pin
- swarm cells are plentiful when they occur, often 20, 30 or more and usually round the side bars and bottom bar

On seeing queen cells:

1. decide which type of queen cell
2. if swarm cells, look carefully for ALL capped queen cells
3. can you see the queen? This is why we mark queens
4. are there eggs or unsealed brood? This indicates whether a laying queen is present

There are several methods of swarm control, the most popular being Pagden, Demarée and Snelgrove. These were demonstrated using bee-free hives.

A nuc box can deal with impending swarms; put a frame with a good queen cell in the centre, a frame with brood in all stages either side, and a frame with honey and pollen either side, making 5 frames in all. Add plenty young bees and leave until you (hopefully) see pollen being taken in – the sign of a mated, laying queen in residence.

Thank you, Christine, for a useful session.

### **Your Seasonal Bee Inspector**

You never know when you might need your Seasonal Bee Inspector. He/she is the person to call as soon as you suspect any foulbrood or other notifiable issue with your bees. Be prepared, and put the contact details of your local SBI on your phone now, using the postcode finder at [www.nationalbeeunit.com/public/Contacts/contacts.cfm#searchPostcode](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/public/Contacts/contacts.cfm#searchPostcode) .

Note – use the postcode for your apiary in preference to your home postcode. Your postcode could result in the message “Sorry, we do not have any inspectors currently working in your area”. If so, try again with a nearby postcode.

### **Peak Hives Photo Competition 2019**



[www.peak-hives.co.uk](http://www.peak-hives.co.uk)



For our keen photographers, Peak Hives [www.peak-hives.co.uk](http://www.peak-hives.co.uk) have launched a photography competition to mark the launch of their Pollinator Plants. They are looking for photographs featuring pollinators or something related to pollinators; so bees, butterflies, moths are all suitable subjects.

Copyright of photographs will reside with the photographer with license to use being given to Peak Hives.

The first prize is one of their Cedar 6-frame nucleus hives with a Varroa floor. Entries should be sent to [nicholas@peak-hives.co.uk](mailto:nicholas@peak-hives.co.uk) marking the email “Photo Comp 2019”. The closing date is 1 November 2019.

## **The Price of Bees**

Our members are always generous with their bees but some members occasionally have an excess of good colonies and would like to sell them as part of the income from their hobby.

Locally-bred nuclei and colonies will have queens suited to our environment, with a proven history. However, rearing a strong, healthy nucleus of bees is not cheap. At least 5 frames with foundation are needed, which at Thornes' current prices amounts to £14.97. The bees will have drawn comb by producing wax, and that's a valuable commodity in itself. The bees will possibly have been given sugar feeds, and the beekeeper's time and costs must be considered.

Commercially, Thornes charge £25 deposit plus £255 for a 2019 nucleus, and £75 for a British-bred queen. A queen from Becky's Beezzz costs £36 to £48; her nucs are roughly the same price as Thornes'. These prices are for British Standard frames, and a nucleus includes a Correx, plywood or polystyrene nuc box.

If you decide to buy or sell bees through our association, as a rough guide we would advise around £75 to £100 for a 5-frame nucleus on BS frames, depending on its strength, age of the queen; more for larger frames. A full colony is worth £120 to £240, again depending on the status of the bees and the frame size. Bees for sale should have a young, marked queen and good temper, and must always be thoroughly health-checked before being moved.

Whether buying or selling, locally or from a supplier, you should go to the APHA BeeBase website - "Advisory Leaflets, Training Manuals & Fact Sheets"  
<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=167> and read their Best Practice Guidelines leaflet number 5 for buying and 8 for selling.

Christine currently has more bees than she needs. She can supply a queen, a nuc or a full colony; whichever configuration you prefer. Please contact her for prices and details.

## **ACA update April 2019**

The colonies are building up nicely and like us enjoyed the warm Easter sunshine to get out an forage. All of the hives now have a super on and nectar starting to come in.



With the colonies building up, we are on 7 day inspections and giving the colonies plenty of space to help prevent swarming. The first Queen cell appeared at the end of the month – this may well have been supersedure, but to be sure the colony was split into a nucleus. There have been lots of visitors to the apiary as it was used for the practical session of the Honeybee Health course to demonstrate and practice carrying out disease inspections.

Our usual regular apiary training sessions have continued with a mix of beginner beekeepers carrying out their first forays into the hives helped very efficiently by our improvers who are now developing their skills including picking up drones and marking them with pink dots!

Our seasonal bee inspector Dan Etheridge visited the apiary to re-inspect the bees following the European Foulbrood diagnosis last August. The colony had been treated using a shook swarm and are usually rechecked about 6 weeks later once they have completed two brood cycles and it is only once the bees have been rechecked that the standstill order preventing the movement of bees, equipment and honey can be lifted. Unfortunately, the Bee Inspectors had been kept busy buzzing around locating Asian Hornet nests last autumn so the follow visit was delayed. The colonies were found to be clear apart from some chalkbrood and a little sacbrood. The ACA team are planning to carry out shook swarms on the colonies as an extra precaution and this will be carried out in the next few weeks. The apiary looks particularly pretty at this time of year, being situated in a bluebell wood.

*By Christine Coulsting*

Apiary sessions for May:

Apiary training sessions: Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 10.30 a.m.

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May 10.30 a.m.

If you would like to attend please email Christine.

Freshly cleaned bee suits, gloves and boots must be worn in the apiary.

**Hyacinthoides non-scripta**



“English bluebell” if you prefer.

Many insects feed on bluebell nectar. Bees bite a hole in the bottom of the bell to reach the nectar so do not pollinate the flower. These treasures are under threat from habitat destruction, people who pick them, and hybridisation with non-native Spanish bluebells.

*Image: Woodland Trust*

## **Bees in High Places**

We all saw the sad images of Notre Dame in flames, but news emerged shortly afterwards that there were 3 hives of bees on the roof.



Image: Daily Mail

These had been installed by Nicolas Géant in 2013 to help boost bee numbers across Paris. First reports said that the bees had not survived, but the hives were on top of the sacristy by Notre-Dame's south side, around 30m below the main roof. They did what all bees do when they detect the smoke – retreated inside the hive and gorged themselves on honey. The excessive CO<sub>2</sub> may have comatosed them.

The distressed beekeeper was forbidden from going up to check his bees but aerial images (taken by drones? Sorry ....) revealed that the hives were undamaged and bees were flying as normal.

## **The Price of Bees (Again)**

According to that mid-17th century saying -



A swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay

a swarm in June is worth a silver spoon



a swarm in July is not worth a fly

But please be sure to quarantine those stray bees!