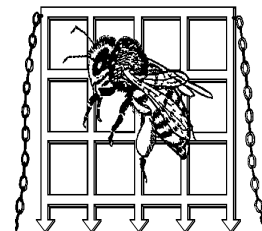


Romsey & District Beekeepers' Association

December 2018 Newsletter



Future Meetings

Wednesday 16 January at King John's House, 7:30 p.m.

THERE IS NO MEETING IN DECEMBER. The third Wednesday of the month is close to Christmas and many members have other things on their minds.

However, if you are missing your beekeeping 'fix' you could always snuggle up beside the fire on the 19th and browse through your beekeeping records for 2018. If you are just starting out and have neither bees nor records, you probably have a good beginners' book so it's a good time to indulge in a couple of hours of reading.

The next meeting is our Annual General Meeting and Cheese and Wine Social in January. It's always packed with beekeepers and beginners, exchanging tales and making plans for the coming year.

(King John's House, Church St, Romsey SO51 8BT is down the passageway to the right of the Post Office.)

At a Glance

Wednesday 16 January 2019 at KJH – our AGM followed by Cheese & Wine Social

9-10 February 2019 - Integrated Pest Management course run by NDB, Morden national-diploma-beekeeping.org/front-page/short-course-calendar/

9 March 2019 – BeeTradex at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. Tickets online from 1 December

16 March – South Hampshire Spring Convention – Meon Hall, Meonstoke

12-14 April 2019 – BBKA Spring Convention at Harper Adams University. Tickets on sale from January 2019

27 April – West Sussex BKA Annual Bee Market & Auction

27-28 April 2019 – our Beginners' Course weekend at Awbridge Village Hall

4 May Meon Valley Beekeepers' annual auction



Thornes' Winter Sale – and Others'

If you have kept bees for a while this won't be news. If you are new to beekeeping, Thornes will have a very useful online winter sale at the start of January.

The sale usually starts at around 3 a.m. so that only insomniacs and obsessives place their orders early, and the rest of us gradually join in as we surface. It prevents their systems from grinding to a halt with the deluge of beekeepers looking for bargains. They publish their sale list beforehand, so that you can make a shopping list. That avoids spending such a long time browsing that the items you put in your 'basket' are out of stock by the time you go to 'checkout'. All in all, it's a good system, with some useful bargains.

Other beekeeping suppliers will probably also have New Year offers. Make sure you are on your favourite suppliers' mailing lists if you want to be kept informed.

BBKA News

Shopping

If you are still seeking last-minute gifts, the BBKA shop in conjunction with Dobies has some interesting ideas from seed mixes to hedgehog homes, books to bird feeders, smartphone add-ons, jewellery and sponsorships. It's worth a look - www.dobies.co.uk/Garden/bbka/

Anaphylaxis

Most of us have an annoying but short-lived reaction to bee (and other) stings but any one of us can develop a more severe reaction with no warning. Bodies are strange things. In the depths of winter, while we are catching up with our reading and cleaning, it's a good idea to refresh on recognising and reacting to anaphylaxis. BBKA have reissued an informative poster - www.bbka.org.uk/bee-stings-and-anaphylaxis (if you do not have a computer, you could ask someone to print it for you). The points covered are:

1. Avoid getting stung (any good beekeeping book will tell you how)
2. Use of adrenaline pens
3. Go to your GP after a worrying episode
4. Seek long-term treatment if necessary

BBKA Assessments and Modules

BBKA have changed the syllabi for many of their modules and assessments for 2019. Please check the website (www.bbka.org.uk/modules) if you are intending to enter any of these.

Studying for the assessments and modules is an excellent way to ensure that you are progressing as a beekeeper. Even if you do not take the module or assessments, having covered the topics ensures that you are helping your bees.

Each Module costs £30 to enter but, if you pass, HBA refunds that fee. There's an incentive! Entries for taking Modules on 23 March 2019 are to be received before 10 February. Entries for taking Modules on 9 November must be received before 30 September.

Fondant Order

During the winter months it can be difficult to tell how much food a colony has, and if they are more active during mild weather then will consume more food anyway so stores may need to be topped up. It will be too cold for them to process liquid stores so during the winter fondant is the best option for feeding them. Many beekeepers like to put on a block of fondant after Christmas to ensure the bees have plenty of food to see them through to spring.

We will pass on whatever discount we can achieve with our order so the price per box will be £24.00 less discount. If you would like to buy part of a box then each 2.5 kg pack will be £4.80 less the same discount.

Deadline for orders is **5th December** - please email to Christine (*by Christine*)

eReturn2 - new BBKA membership administration system

The BBKA along with BDI (*) have set up a new membership administration system eReturn2 that will simplify the transfer of membership data to the BBKA and BDI in the future. The new system is anticipated to reduce the workload for membership secretaries, speeds up registration of new members with the BBKA and streamlines the work involved around the capitation invoicing cycle which is currently somewhat complicated!

Romsey & District BKA are amongst the first Associations to be transferring data to use the new system - in time for our renewals which are due from 1st January. Our membership secretary is preparing to set up our Association on the system and then upload the data.

When Association data is configured, the system 'partitions' the data so that local data is only accessible to the relevant local Association. It is not viewable to other Associations, the BBKA or BDI. BBKA will send members the BBKA News as previously done but will not contact members by email. Members may sign up to the members area of the BBKA website – this then creates a direct relationship between the BBKA and the member who can then opt to sign up to direct communications via that channel, in which case the BBKA may email the member direct.

The new system will give our Association the benefit of a built-in commercial email application for us to use the system for routine mailings to the membership.

The new system is secure and fully compliant with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

In future years it is anticipated that an online renewals system will be available, but for this upcoming 2019 renewal, we will be using paper, although BACS payments will be an available option. More information on this year's renewals will be available on our RDBKA website and sent out shortly.

(*) BDI = Bee Disease Insurance

by Christine Coulsting

Tap & Chatter, and Trap-Making

We are arranging a day-long workshop in February, the date yet to be confirmed. As it says, this will be a great opportunity to chatter to fellow-beekeepers, if you can be heard above the tapping of hammers on frame nails. This session is for making up frames in anticipation of a great season, and to make traps for Asian hornets intent on wreaking havoc.

The late summer sightings of Asian hornets were dealt with but deep down we all know that we will need to prepare our apiaries for foundress queens before early spring.

“Simple Mead Making” by Roger Patterson, Wednesday 21st November

We welcomed Roger Patterson from Wisborough Green in West Sussex to our November meeting. Roger started beekeeping in 1963, has been a BBKA Trustee, is a BIBBA Trustee, as well as being owner and manager of the Dave Cushman website www.dave-cushman.net.



Roger talked about “Simple Mead Making”, a good way of using ‘spare’ honey, and something that not many in the room had yet attempted.

He referred us to www.honeyrecipes.org.uk/, a website set up by Wisborough Green BKA with a host of recipes. His method of mead making is included, with various options and reflections.

First, Roger explained the definition of ‘mead’, which is (strictly speaking) “the fermentation of honey and water in the presence of fruit acid”. Some commercial “meads” have additional ingredients, which disqualify them from being mead. Beverages similar to mead are:

Melomel Mead with added fruit juice OTHER THAN mulberry, apple or grape

Morat Mead with the addition of mulberry juice

Cyser Mead with the addition of apple juice

Pyment Mead with the addition of grape juice

Hippocras Pyment with the addition of herbs and sugar

Metheglin A dry mead with the addition of herbs OR spices

Bragget or braggot Mead made with both honey and barley malt

So many varieties – where to start? Roger usually makes basic, authentic mead, which is simply any wine recipe with each $\frac{3}{4}$ lb sugar replaced by 1 lb honey to compensate for the water content of honey.

Roger told us that commercial mead is often a grape-based drink with honey added, making it very sweet (and not mead). Labelling is accurate and tells us what is in the bottle. One well-known manufacturer in the north-east of England sells mead “made with fermented grape juice, honey, herbs and pure water”. Another advertises “mead produced by flavouring fortified British wine with natural honey flavour”.

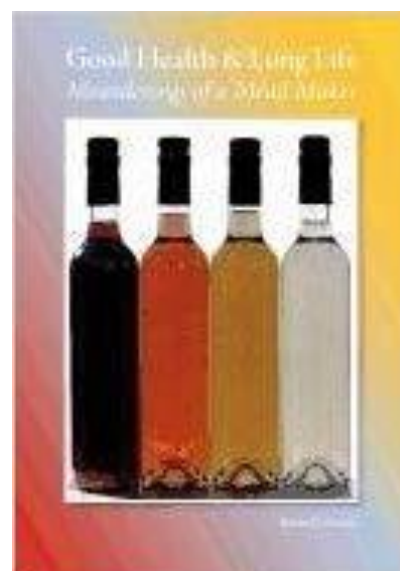
This was to explain why we should not discount mead on account of “mead” that we may have tried in the past and didn’t like. Even to mead-makers, it is an acquired taste and every batch is different, even if made with the same honey. However, it is a taste worth acquiring.

There are very few books about making mead and even fewer written by beekeepers, but Roger recommended “Good Health & Long Life - Meanderings of a Mead Maker” by Brian P Dennis.

You will need:

- 3lb honey (more for a carboy) (*)
- A 1-gallon glass demijohn (or larger carboy)
- Plastic tube to siphon
- Scrupulous cleanliness
- A lot of patience
- Sometimes, a bit of luck

Plastic bottles should not be used. Clear glass allows you to see what is happening. Any pans used should be stainless steel.



(*) Roger recommended about 2½ lb honey for a dry mead, 3 lb for medium, 3½ lb for sweet and 4 lb for dessert.

Some 'spare' jarred honey can be used, or washings after extraction, but in that case you would need a hygrometer to check specific gravity and calculate the water-to-honey ratio. A rule-of-thumb method for the correct proportion of honey to water is to let an egg bob in the mix. A little crown above the surface that is the area of an old sixpence results in medium mead. They won't tell you that in the books! Using fermented honey – as long as it's not too badly fermented – gives decent results but bland honey such as from oilseed rape makes bland mead.

Experts advise using spring water but Roger finds that tap water is just as good.

Honey contains natural yeasts that could be used but do not give a good result; fermentation takes a very long time, and the sediment does not drop and clump so well. His personal recommendation is “Gervin no. 3” which tolerates a low temperature and high alcohol, and restarts a 'stuck' fermentation readily. Other good yeasts are Maury (as used by Brother Adam) or Steinberg. 'Nitrogenous material' to nourish the yeast is needed. Some use 1 teaspoonful of Marmite, but Roger prefers yeast nutrient from brewers' suppliers. The tannin is provided by a small cup of cold tea. The essential fruit acid is supplied by the juice of one lemon.

Now to the method, having assembled all the ingredients and equipment. First, you need to make a yeast starter. Take a lidded jar – a honey jar will do – fill it half-full with water and add a tablespoonful of honey and the yeast. Mix gently then cover it and leave it somewhere out of draughts, such as on a sunny windowsill. There were a couple of warnings:

- DO NOT screw the lid on because a lot of carbon dioxide will be released and it could get messy
- Place the jar on a saucer in case it bubbles over (or just use a bigger jar!)

Leave the starter loosely covered for 6-12 hours until it is lively. Meanwhile, heat the honey in some of the water to just below boiling point, to kill its natural yeasts so that the yeast that you bought will work unhindered. Cover it and let it cool because you won't want to put hot liquid into a glass jar, and the heat would kill the yeast.

When it's ready, put the honey and water into the demijohn with the yeast starter, tannin, fruit acid and nutrient. Fill with water to about 4"-5" below the top because the initial fermentation will be vigorous and may spill over. Roger seals his jars with some polythene and an elastic band instead of an airlock, which he finds too fragile.

Once the initial reaction slows down – after a week or so – you can top up with water to the base of the bottle neck. Keep it in a warmish place to ferment. Yeast works on the sugar to release 50% carbon dioxide and 50% alcohol. A temperature that is too high or too low can inhibit this reaction, as can the lack of nitrogenous material, the lack of acidity or the lack of sugars. The end result depends on the honey, the fermentation speed, the yeast, and the time taken to mature.

After about 6 months you can rack the mead from the lees using a long, flexible, clean plastic tube. Roger fastens a piece of wood to the bottom of his siphoning tube to keep the end out of the sediment. Siphon the mead into a clean vessel and top up either with water or mead from another batch. You can rack the mead 2-3 times, depending on the amount of sediment, but he finds that the mead will mature better in bulk so keep it in a demijohn until it's needed. Mead kept in the dark preserves its rich colour better.

If you are feeling impatient you can drink your mead after 6 months but it will probably be a bit on the rough side. The best meads are left to mature for 2-5 years. So, if we start now, we could have wonderful mead in time for Christmas 2020!

Christine thanked Roger for a very interesting talk.



Images: Thornes

The bees are taking well-earned time off after their very busy summer.

This is our last newsletter for 2018 so, on behalf of the Romsey & District Beekeepers' Association -

**A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND**

**A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO YOU AND TO YOUR BEES**

