



Unprecedented Times

As with many of you, I suspect, who have responsibility for producing the monthly newsletter for their County Association or Division I struggled to find the motivation for this month's edition!



Covid-19 has changed every aspect of our lives in the short term, not least of all, our beekeeping. What for many of us has been a team event is now reduced to a lone task or, at best, something to only be enjoyed with our nearest and dearest.

But the active beekeeping season is fast approaching, and the honey bees need our help and support. So there is still much to look forward to this spring and summer while we struggle with self isolation and social distancing.

As you will see in this newsletter everything we had planned and looked forward to for the foreseeable future is cancelled. We were lucky with the timing of our Convention; identified by so many of you that attended as a great success. Chrissy Blakeman reviews the event, and for those of you who couldn't join us, shows what you missed! Our Annual Bee Market and Auction has been cancelled as a result of coronavirus disappointing many of you who had already registered lots for sale or generously offered your time to help on the day. Nevertheless, your support as always is greatly appreciated.

Stay safe!

Inside this issue:

<i>Asian Hornet Conference - Review</i>	2
<i>Asian Hornet - not good for our bees</i>	3
<i>BBKA Positive Thinking Newsletter</i>	4
<i>BBKA Coronavirus Letter</i>	4
<i>WSBKA Convention Review</i>	5
<i>Around the Divisions</i>	6
<i>WSBKA AGM Cancelled</i>	6
<i>'The Pollinators' Interview</i>	6
<i>Melvyn's Missive</i>	7
<i>Events Update</i>	7
<i>West Sussex BKA website</i>	8

Asian Hornet Conference - 8th February

The first BBKA conference on the Asian hornet was attended by Harry Boxall (Chichester) who reviews the event for the County News.

The Conference was held at Myton school in Warwick and was well attended by over 200 country-wide AH Co-ordinators. It comprised a series of complimentary talks by Asian hornet experts:

Professor Steven Martin – Life History and current research.

Xesus Feas - Asian hornet research in Spain and Portugal.

Alistair Christie - The Jersey experience in 2019.

Peter Kennedy - Research in 2020.

Belinda Philipson and Sandra Gray - NBU update on 2019 and policy moving forward.

Anne Rowberry - Gaining Recognition for your position as AHAT Co-ordinator and Team members.

The conference was ended with a lively Question and Answer Session.



Plenty of new information came from experiences in both Jersey and Galicia, Spain. In particular, the economic impact of AHs is becoming noticeable. They have been destroying fruit crops – grape harvests in some vineyards have been literally wiped out and in orchards, apples, pears and other soft fruits have been spoiled. In addition, human harvesters risk being stung by the foraging AHs. The cost of treating AH hornet stings worldwide in a 5-year period was more than €5m. In Galicia €4.5m has been lost in honey production and 65% of bee colonies have been wiped out. In 4 years the number of AH nests found there has risen from 2 to over 10,000 (2016). In 2019 more than 25,000 nests destroyed. AHs are found now to be nesting everywhere including the ground, caves in cliff faces and on the outside of high-rise buildings. They are doing very well in cities and even nesting in cavity walls inside houses. Queens have been found overwintering in the upper parts of secondary nests as well as in beehives.

AH is rapidly spreading across the globe. In Europe it is established in Italy, Spain, France and the Channel Islands and more recently in Belgium, Holland and Germany. In the east it is to be found in China from where it originated, Korea and throughout the Japanese Islands. In the west it has spread well across Canada and the north USA as well as throughout the east coast USA states. It is forming an ever-widening belt around the southern part of the northern hemisphere. New Zealand is investing a lot of money in using nematodes to limit any future invasion.

There are AH research projects going on in many countries. Exeter University is involved in several, one of which is Atlantic Positive (EU funded) involving 5 Atlantic coastal countries (incl. UK). Its objectives are to prevent further AH expansion and minimise impact on ecosystems and develop trans-national policies. This includes apiary management techniques, traps and their impact on pollinator communities and testing radio telemetry method to locate nests. Once developed, users will be trained in conjunction with educational campaigns for instructors, beekeepers and the public. Targeted trapping is also being developed to avoid killing other insects as well as research in to what chemicals will kill AHs but not other insects. AH pheromones are being developed as a tool in order to catch males or confuse males seeking to mate.

Anne Rowberry, the conference chairperson gave a short talk about a planned AH certification qualification. Each association can have up to 15 members insured as long as they are certificated by the BBKA. This would be roughly the same cover as provided for swarm collectors. Each must successfully complete an online test. A person cannot move on to the next question until they have successfully answered the previous question. The test can be suspended as often as required while the person breaks

off to find the information that allows the question to be answered correctly. Some delegates thought this reduced the validity of the test but the BBKA is heeding the advice from Jersey, namely that more AHAT volunteers than you think are needed. All beekeepers can play a role in an AHAT since what's needed are: verifiers, tracking directors, trappers, bait station managers, observers / spotters and not a well-qualified team of AH experts.

Delegates were concerned about what they saw as a lack of policy and coordinated action by the BBKA. The NBU addressed this stating Defra will develop a policy this year on how to work with AHATs. It was confirmed that Brexit will not change anything as previous legislation is now enshrined in UK law. The NBU will monitor and take action against any AH incursions working with local AHATs. Findings for 2020 will be reviewed in the winter, ministers will be briefed and any required changes presented. Stephen Martin said the UK needs to play for time to allow research to bring in solutions. He urged the audience to support the NBU as his opinion was that AH will establish in the UK.

A detailed account of the conference can be found on the BBKA website:

www.bbka.org.uk/news/first-asian-hornet-conference-held

Asian Hornets (*Vespa velutina*) are not good news for our bees

BBKA Chair, Anne Rowberry confirms support for local AHATs.

We are asking every Association to select a team of 15 members to work with a co-ordinator to help identify the hornets. Each branch or group can establish their own team so that individuals will not be asked to travel vast distances. They should establish a good communication network between each other, so that the nearest team member can answer a call about a potential siting and call for backup if necessary.



What Does the Team do?

- Form a communication network of people confident in identifying what could be an Asian hornet, knowing how to report a suspected hornet.
- Distribute and inform individuals, businesses, market gardeners etc. in their area about Asian hornets and how to report them.
- Know how to set up open bait stations and advise the public about monitoring them (from a distance) if they are in suitable places such as a garden.
- Provide contact numbers so that hornets can be reported.
- Establish monitoring traps in their area or when directed by bee inspectors.
- Each member (verifier) should have a kit comprising;

Note book and pen—recording information on:

Location – map or postcode reference.

Direction of flight of hornet (reference point such as tree, side of building, mast).

Plant saucer + tissue, bait (Suterra type), + honey jar wick trap identifying card + information sheet for member of public.

Camera or phone with camera to take image.

Phone + Asian hornet app and co-ordinator's number.

Asian hornets are active between April and November, with a peak in July through to end of September. But may be seen at any time.

The hornets raid honey bee hives by hawking outside them and capturing workers as they go in and out.

Catching their prey in the air they move to a nearby branch and remove the head and abdomen, chew the thorax meat and take it back to the nest and feed it to their young larvae. They may also be seen where honey bees congregate to feed e.g. Hebe bush, or near wasps when they are feeding on apples etc.

We cannot keep this insect under control without your help. Please help organise teams, add coordinators to the map on the BBKA site (*BBKA will shortly be launching a real time AH Team Map on the BBKA website. For the public this will work in the same way as the Swarm Map*) and ensure all team members have completed the verifying exercise.

WSBKA has had its AHAT established for over a year. This is headed by Melvyn Essen (Central Sussex) supported by Harry Boxall (Chichester) and is represented in all Divisions. Ed.

BBKA Positive Thinking Newsletter



The March publication of the 'Positive Thinking' Newsletter from the BBKA's President, Margaret Wilson can now be accessed on the WSBKA website: www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/newsletters.html

Margaret reflects on the BBKA Executive Meeting in March and the consideration being given to making the BBKA News magazine easy to download to a phone or tablet and perhaps an app.

The association has been approached by a company interested in making a film on queen rearing and this may be progressed for next year. But in the meantime everything else is on hold due to Covid-19.

BBKA Coronavirus Letter

Anne Rowberry, BBKA Chair writes on the impact of coronavirus on the Association's plans for this season.

Anne explains that all training courses at Stoneleigh have been cancelled and is asking for suggestions on how to deliver some aspects of training online.



Advice has been sought from Defra on the position of beekeepers visiting their bees. Contact has also been made with Alpha and the All Party Parliamentary Group and the Minister of Environment. It has been suggested that should there be a sugar shortage beekeepers have an allowance (as they had in the war).

Anne's letter is available on the WSBKA website: www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/newsletters.html



West Sussex BKA Convention - Review



Chrissy Blakeman (Worthing) reviews our February Convention.

There was an excellent turnout for our annual Convention this year. Quite a number of delegates came from out of County, which evidenced the excellent line-up of speakers.

As we all know, the weather hasn't been kind over the last weeks and flooding for travellers was a serious consideration this year. However, on the day, we even had sunshine to welcome us to Lodge Hill.

The speakers were excellent. There were three main lectures.

We had a fascinating lesson in bee genetics from Marin Anastasov NDB whose lecture entitled '*Father of the Drone*' intrigued us from the start. Did you know that genetically drones are not the brothers of the female workers in the same hive and that genetically the father of the drone is actually its grandmother?! His final message was that, as beekeepers, we should only select/breed queens for desirable characteristics and always cull the worst – cull 50% of the worst and breed from the best 10%.

Professor Robert Pickard gave an entertaining and thought provoking lecture on '*Wonderful things about Bees*' and described how honey bees are a supra-organism and basically knock spots off the herding animal (humans included) and that as smart as we think we are, the honey bee sets the bar for what we should be aspiring to.

Dr Anna Oliver is a Senior Molecular Biologist at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology at Wallingford and described the national Citizen Science project that involves volunteer helper beekeepers, some from West Sussex. The project is collecting honey samples from across the UK for the analysis of their pollen content (using molecular techniques) and pesticide residues. This will provide an early warning of any changes in bee diet and new threats from exposure to pesticides. The project is in its early stages and she gave us preliminary findings for 2018/2019 with regard to the forage that our bees major on – brambles and brassica being high on the list. Anna is recruiting more volunteer beekeepers for further sampling in 2020 and so if you are interested in taking part please contact her at: aela@ceh.ac.uk.

As well as our three main lectures, we had a choice of seminars to attend. My choices were '*Honey Bee Behaviour and Water*' by Sean Stephenson and '*Going with the Flow*' by Adrian Dwyer, talking about the Flow Hive... and I enjoyed both very much. Fellow delegates were saying exactly the same about the seminars that they attended.

All in all, it was a very successful and enjoyable day. We learned a lot, caught up with fellow beekeepers around the region and beyond, made essential purchases for the coming season from Paynes Southdown Bee Farms and generally had a very good time.

Huge thanks go to the West Sussex organising team, to volunteer helpers during the day and to Lodge Hill for hosting the event. Next year's Convention is being held on **Saturday 27th February**, so put that in your diary!

A number of delegates asked Marin Anastasov for copies of his presentations. These are now available on the WSBKA website: www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/convention.html. Ed.

Around the Divisions

Divisions are continuing to support members during these difficult times. Please speak to your Division if you need help.

Central Sussex Division

Details from: Debbie Rowland, chairman@centralsussexbka.org.uk or the Division's website: www.centralsussexbka.org.uk

Chichester Division

Details from: Ray Green, secretary@chichesterbeekeepers.co.uk or the Division's website: www.chichesterbeekeepers.co.uk

Wisborough Green Division

Details from : Martina Hendry, secretary@wgbka.org.uk or website: www.wgbka.org.uk.
The Division's Newsletter may be viewed or downloaded here: www.wgbka.org.uk/Newsletters.html

Worthing Division

Details from: Debra Edwards, dmcd.edwards@gmail.com or website: www.worthingbeekeepers.org.uk

WSBKA Annual General Meeting Cancelled



Covid-19 resulted in the cancellation of our AGM in March. As a result the incumbent Officers have agreed to continued in office for the time being:

President - Christine Stevens (Chichester)
Chair - Melvyn Essen (Central Sussex)
Vice Chair - Roger Patterson (Wisborough Green)
Treasurer - Steven Boyce (Wisborough Green)
Secretary - Graham Elliott (Chichester)

'The Pollinators' Interview

Our plan for screening *'The Pollinators'* as suggested in last month's newsletter has obviously had to be placed on hold along with everything else. However, Barry Crabtree from Ipswich and East Suffolk Beekeepers has shared a podcast of an interview with Peter Nelson, Director by Stewart Spinks.

www.norfolk-honey.co.uk/podcast/episode/4c2ba794/episode-94-interview-with-peter-nelson-the-pollinators



Melvyn's (Unexpected) Missive



Chairman, Melvyn Essen continues to write for the County News.

I had just sat down to start this unexpected 'Missive' and the radio lured me back into the bedroom. With all this time we have at home (us non-working oldies) you can stop what you are doing without feeling guilty. I heard the name Vaughan Williams, 'Fantasia on a theme from Thomas Tallis' and had to lie down on the bed to listen. I'm afraid I did drift off and snored a couple of times!

Well, what can I write about? Beekeeping perhaps. Like a lot of us I had plans to reduce my colonies, by shook swarming from Commercial hives into National so I can move them on more easily. With all this uncertainty I lost the enthusiasm to do this. No doubt I will get a second wind and carry on to do the shook swarming when the time is right, providing I can get some sugar without being given bad looks.

According to the government agency, NBU Beebase we should keep up to date with government guidelines, which can be found on the Beebase website, and continue to travel if necessary to look after our bees, observing the government guidelines which we are all familiar with.

With the amount of gardening going on around us, proving people can grow or buy plants on line our bees should have more forage, unfortunately tidy gardens are not necessarily good for wildlife so leave some places for insects etc. to hide.

Melvyn

chairman@westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk

Beekeeping Events Update

Many events have been cancelled as a result of coronavirus. The expectation is that the situation will continue to worsen so this is only a snapshot of known changes to programmes and events, many previously shown in the County News. The following events have all been cancelled:

BBKA Modules Examinations - 21st March

WSBKA AGM - 24th March

BDI AGM - 3rd April

BBKA Spring Convention - 3rd - 5th April

WSBKA Bee Market & Auction - 25th April

Sussex (East) BKA Bee Market - 16th May

BIBBA Workshop - 24th May

South of England Show - 11th - 13th June

BBKA - all training at Stoneleigh

We're on the web:
www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk

MEMBERS' COUNTY NEWSLETTER

Thanks to all this month's contributors. If you don't have access to the internet and want further details of anything in this newsletter, please contact the Editor & County Secretary. Likewise, if you would like to contribute to future newsletters please send articles and photographs to:

Graham Elliott, Editor & County Secretary, no later than the 20th of the preceding month.
secretary@westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk

Previous newsletters from the last 12 months are available on the website.



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