

1923 - 2020



Medway Beekeepers Association

Celebrating over 95 years of support for beekeeping
and beekeepers in and around the Medway Towns

Medway
Beekeepers
Association



Newsletter May 2020

There are concerns at the moment that we and others will find it difficult to manage our bees this season. Defra advice is that “The management of our livestock is a legitimate reason for leaving home so out apiaries can be visited, particularly to ensure they have sufficient food and to control swarming”.

Updates on Covid-19 situation:

Latest News:

3rd April 2020: Guidance from the bee health policy teams in England, Wales and Scotland: regarding beekeeping during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please [Click Here](#)

23rd March 2020: The BBKA Examinations Board has now decided to cancel all practical assessments until September. This will apply to Advanced Husbandry, General Husbandry, Bee Breeding, Bee Health, Basic and Junior Certificates. They will review the situation in September 2020 regarding the Microscopy Assessments.

Candidates who have applied already will receive a free transfer to next year or a refund if they prefer.

Bee Chat is cancelled until further notice.

The City Way Apiary Site is closed to all visitors until further notice. However, the bees will be checked and managed by the Apiary Team on a weekly basis.

The Swarm phone has been suspended for the foreseeable future.

May to June's Events and Meetings:

All events are cancelled until the end of June. Please visit the websites for further updates.



The Coronavirus (COVID-19) - An update from Anne Rowberry, BBKA Chair

The impact of the Coronavirus could not have been foreseen but the BBKA is working hard to support members. We regret that all the BBKA training courses at Stoneleigh have been cancelled, this includes the Healthy Hive training, General Husbandry and Advanced husbandry training. The Exam Board have cancelled the Module Exams, the Assessor Training and will be publishing information on the Healthy Hive and Basic Exams.

We are suggesting that Beginners courses and other Branch or Association organised training courses are postponed. It is important to keep the health of members at the front of our minds. It may be possible to deliver some aspects of these courses online. I would welcome suggestions as to the best way this could be achieved ; possibly some Associations have information that they would be prepared to share. We can post some ideas on our website so please share any that you think may help.

I am sure younger members of groups will support older members or those confined through association with family etc who have the virus by offering to check hives in out apiaries, making sure they are upright, have food and the bees are flying could be very helpful. Please follow the Government guidelines, we are asked to avoid social contact and unnecessary travel. This will mean considering carefully the swarm collection service and applying appropriate safeguards.

I have contacted Defra for advice on the position of beekeepers visiting their bees if the country moves into a more intensive 'lock down'. At the moment bees will be considered as livestock and can be tended accordingly but we are following Government advice and need to address possible future directions. I have also been in contact with Alpha and the All Party Parliamentary Group and I am writing to the Minister of Environment asking about the position of beekeepers visiting bees I have also suggested that should there be a sugar shortage beekeepers have an allowance (as I believe they had in the war). This may seem extreme but we need to be thinking now, just in case.

There are actions that the beekeeper can take to give their bees the best chance of survival and the most important is to feed them. Ensure they have plenty of food for any inclement weather, we can have snow in May and cold wet weather at any time may mean they starve. If you are concerned about visiting your bees put fondant above your supers, the bees will use it if they need it. If you do not have fondant then use syrup even if you have one or two supers on. They may move it to the supers which would mean you can't sell it as honey but you will still have your bees and also food for the Autumn/Winter. We do not know how long this severe situation will last.

We will endeavour to give more information through our website and BBKA social media. Beebase will also be posting information.

I hope this situation passes quickly and is not as severe as is now being portrayed.

Anne Rowberry (BBKA Chair)

NBU INSPECTIONS 2020 – MBKA

For the first part of this season 2020

If members have any concerns or issues and want advice – **Please call or email area SBI Julie Parker.**

She will discuss, assess and triage your concerns and organise a visit to your apiary by an available inspector if required - photos of any problems are useful.

This will help the area NBU team utilise their current resources. The NBU is grateful to MBKA for its help at this time.

NBU Contact Details:

SBI: Julie Parker 07769933191 julie.parker@apha.gov.uk

RBI: Kay Wreford 07775119483 kay.wreford@apha.gov.uk



Please continue to inspect your bees regularly – need help then please let us know.

At this very difficult time it is vital that we all continue to inspect our bees on a weekly basis. However, if you are struggling to inspect your bees due to ill health or physical problems, please let us know and we may be able to offer help from a close neighbour beekeeper.

Also, if you know of a member who is struggling let us know or offer them some help.

The overriding caveat to this is, however, that we must maintain social distancing and biosecurity within our apiaries.

If you need help please contact John Chapman or Paul Lawrence see contact details at the end of this newsletter.

Please take a look at the guidance from the bee health policy teams in England, Wales and Scotland **the link is at the top of this newsletter.** This document **is also available on the website.**



Free Bees!!and bait hives ...

There are concerns at the moment that we and others will find it difficult to manage our bees this season. Defra advice¹ is that the management of our livestock is a legitimate reason for leaving home so out apiaries can be visited, particularly to ensure they have sufficient food and to control swarming.

Swarms this year are going to be a particular problem, both because apiary visits could be sporadic and swarming preparations missed but also because the usual swarm recovery service will be complicated by social distancing guidelines. For example, it will not be possible to deal with swarms in back gardens if that entails walking through a house, neither will bees in roof spaces and attics be removed.

1 Bee Base relevant bullet point is:

- **You should use husbandry techniques to minimise swarming. If you have to respond to collect a swarm you need to ensure you use the guidelines on social distancing when collecting the swarm. If that is not possible then the swarm should not be collected. Therefore, trying to prevent swarming is the best approach.**

What can we do? This situation makes it more important than ever that we minimise unmanaged swarms – regular weekly inspections, specifically looking for queen cells or cups with eggs in them. Having clipped queens provides an extra margin of safety and buys you a little time, you may lose the queen but not the bees. Ensure that the bees always have space, super well ahead of need and check that the brood nest does not become congested. Even under ideal circumstances, swarms can still be lost so it seems a good idea to deploy a few bait hives. You might pick up some free bees or catch one of your own swarms that evaded detection.

Bait hives – what are they, where should I put them.

A natural swarm relies upon its scout bees to locate potential new homes and to evaluate each, selecting the best. How do we make an empty hive, a bait hive, an attractive proposition for those scout bees? Drawing on the experience of Tony Edwards and Davis Evans², these seem to be the key points:

- Location – ideally some distance from your hives, up to 200m
- I'm going to put one at home even though I have no bees there
- South-facing entrance
- Ideally higher off the ground (though remember you will have to bring it down)
- National brood box is an ideal size
- Use a solid floor or temporarily block off the open mesh (piece of ply?)
- Reduced entrance, about 10cm
- ONE drawn frame, older is better, placed against the back wall
- 2 or 3 frames without foundation, maybe with small starter stripes
- Those frames against the drawn one
- Optionally, a swarm lure (£7 for 2 from Thornes) or a few drops of lemongrass oil could make the hive more attractive

Good luck, maybe you will capture a swarm that would have otherwise end up in a chimney?

Bob Smith 18th March 2020

¹ <https://theapiarist.org/bait-hive-guide/>

Also: <https://theapiarist.org/time-to-deploy/>



Swarm Phone 2020: Due to Government restrictions surrounding Covid-19, this service has been suspended for the foreseeable future.

However, if any fully registered member wishes to be placed on the BBKA Swarm List, please contact John Hendrie who will add you to this service. Email: bibba26@talktalk.net

Sonia Belsey (Swam Phone Co-ordinator)



A Letter from COLOSS

Dear Beekeeper,

In the last decade, elevated losses of western honey bee colonies have been observed, mainly in Europe and North America, but the underlying causes still remain unclear. In 2008, European and USA honey bee experts formed a network "COLOSS" realising that efforts by individual countries to identify the drivers of losses were unlikely to succeed, given the current consensus that causes are complex and can be different between regions and between the years. Now more than 1000 scientists are working together in this network in specific working groups.

The epidemiological working group have developed a standardised questionnaire to identify the underlying causal factors of losses and provide beekeepers sustainable management strategies.

We now invite you to fill in the questionnaire for 2020 which you will find below.

<https://www.bee-survey.com/index.php/958611>

This will enable us to compare your answers with other beekeepers. With your data we can estimate the relative risk of colony losses for beekeeper decisions such as Varroa treatment, migration of colonies and comb replacement. We also aim to identify differences in relative mortality risk between regions. This will enable follow up research projects in specific regions.

At your option your personal details may be recorded however we undertake not to disclose them to any third party to protect your privacy.

Finally, your help is much appreciated. Please can I ask you to promote this survey and the questionnaire link through this open letter to as many English bee keepers as you are able to do so. Feel free to share the link by email, word of mouth, newsletters or social media and to your local bee keeping organisations. In doing so you will be making a contribution to tackling the problem of colony losses and ensuring that English data is represented as an equal partner in the **COLOSS** European community.

Thanking you

Dr Anthony Williams

COLOSS Survey Coordinator for England

De Montfort University

A Member of Leicester and Rutland Beekeepers Association

Email: anthony.williams@dmu.ac.uk

Tel: 0116 207 846

For further information about the COLOSS colony loss core project and past results please see the COLOSS website: <https://coloss.org/core-projects/colony-losses-monitoring/>

Results from previous surveys have been published in Journal Apicultural Research, the most recent article was published as an open access document and can be found at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00218839.2019.1615661>

Reading Around:



A monthly glance at a topic or two in the media with Archie McLellan.

This month: Janet Wilson baldly states: *Darwinian Beekeeping. Is. Not. Darwinian.* After all, there is a big difference between evolution via natural selection and suddenly applying a big, catastrophic selective pressure. Think Varroa, think a dinosaur-eliminating meteorite. Revisiting Robert Pickard's talk on everything at the 2014 National Honey Show. And what is the most important thing that honey bees have given to mankind?

To view this month's edition please: [Click here](#)



Members Gallery:

In these difficult times why not share a little light relief?

If you have anything, a video, photograph or story that is interesting or amusing just let me know and I will post it!

This post is from Archie McLellan:

[Pollen and a Dark Visitor 18'03'2020](#)

Also:

BBKA have put up links to some spring convention lectures that have been cancelled. You can view a few here: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/spring-convention-videos>

Enjoy!



Donations of honey to NHS staff at Medway Hospital

I have seen elsewhere that a number of Hen Keepers, have donated eggs to their local hospital. This gesture got me to wondering whether amongst the membership we have any bee keepers who might have a spare jar or two of honey that can be similarly donated to NHS staff at Medway Hospital.

I appreciate we are not harvesting just yet, but thought there may be the odd jar from last year lurking on a shelf somewhere.

I am happy (current sanctions permitting) to collect from doorsteps between Rochester and Hoo, as I have to visit my elderly parents for their daily care (adhering to social distancing protocols of course). If there is anyone else who can similarly collect from their areas, I can arrange with them to pick up from them too.

If there is anyone is interested in this and you would be willing to donate to this cause, I will make the necessary arrangements with the hospital to do a drop off to them.

With Kind Regards, Louise Balderston

You may contact Louise: Mob 07986 323603

Asian Hornet Update:



COVID-19 or not, the Asian hornet threat is not going away so understanding the biology and nesting habits of this invasive species is important. The need to put out traps and bait stations was also reinforced, we need to know where the hornets are if they start to nest here.

The BBKA electronic membership system now has an option to register whether you are able to participate in Asian Hornet Action Team activities. Like the swarm collector information please let John Hendrie know if you want to be on the list and he will add your details, at the same time it would be very useful if you would also let John Chapman know that you have registered an interest and tell him what area you are willing to cover, Chatham, Gillingham, etc. Email John Hendrie at: bibba26@talktalk.net

Visit: www.nationalbeeunit.com for the latest updates.

Website Update:

For the next few months it is important that everyone looks regularly at the websites for important updates to this present difficult situation.

Please let me know of any difficulties you may have when using the Member's Area and I will reset your password for you.

Information will be posted on both websites so please check both.

Paul Lawrence (Website Manager)

Facebook: Will also carry up to date information.

Join our Facebook page for information, updates and events:

<https://www.facebook.com/medwaybka/>

This Year's Meetings:

A full list of cancellations and updates can be viewed by going to: the Member's Website: [click here](#)

And Finally:

Many thanks to all who have contributed to the newsletter at this difficult time. Please remember if anyone has any questions, queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact any of us. Paul Lawrence and John Chapman at the address shown below. But equally you can contact most members of the committee by going to the 'contact us' tab in the members area.

Contact Details:

Chairman

John Chapman
john.chapman@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Newsletter and Website Enquiries

Paul Lawrence
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