

1923 - 2020



Medway
Beekeepers
Association

Medway Beekeepers Association

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



Newsletter July 2020

We hope you are all keeping well and safe during these very difficult times. Swarming has seemed particularly frequent this year as the weather continues to cause problems for us all. If you are struggling to tend to your bees for any reason, please do get in touch and we will try to help in any way possible.

Updates on Covid-19 situation:

Latest News:

10th – 12th July 2020 Kent Agricultural Show
County Show Ground Maidstone

5th – 6th September 2020 MBKA Honey Show
Elmcourt Garden Centre

These events have now been cancelled.

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

All Events and Meetings for 2020:

Following last week's Committee Meeting it was reluctantly decided that all events are cancelled up until the end of 2020. Please visit the websites for further updates.

Swarm Phone 2020:

The Swarm phone has been suspended for the remainder of the year. Swarm management is being achieved through the BBKA Swarm List. **If you would like to receive a swarm see below.**

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**

Similarly, if you would like to receive a swarm then:

Please phone John Chapman on: 07399823948.



Collecting a Swarm Safely

You will need:

A Skep or suitable box

A thin board to cover the skep/box

A large sheet

How to collect a swarm safely:

When collecting a swarm, use a skep or a box, a large sheet and a thin board, about 460mm (18") square (to fit over the skep/box).

Having got the swarm cluster into the skep place the board over the top of the skep and carefully turn the skep and board upside down so that the board is under the skep. Then place skep and board onto the middle of the sheet, put a stone or piece of wood under the edge of the skep to lift it off the board by about 20mm. The skep/box only needs to be raised by 20mm on one side. This will give the bees plenty of room to get in.

Remember that scout bees will be going out looking for somewhere more permanent to live, so although you may think you have all the bees the scouts will be out and they will have recruited other bees to go with them to view possible homes. **It is essential to get all the bees.** Any left behind will not have a purpose once separated from the colony so will linger at the site for several days being a nuisance to the public.

Always leave the skep or box on site until dusk. When you can return, carefully remove the stone, fold the sheet over the skep so that it is bee-tight and then take it away.

These are the essentials when collecting a swarm. The BBKA provide a leaflet which gives more detail about preparing to collect a swarm and your responsibilities. It is available to print off and is useful reading. Go to the BBKA site: www.bbka.org.uk/.

Points to note: Swarm collecting can become a bit of a spectator sport. In collecting the swarm, you are probably going to scatter a few bees so keep members of the public back at a safe distance.

Mark Ballard et al.



Bait Hives – a continuing story! By Paul Newman

Last year I had four hives at a friend's field in Bearsted. It was a busy year for collecting swarms, which were then hived in my apiary, taking the total to six colonies. The phone seemed to be red hot with swarm calls, not of course all honeybees, but the usual mix of clusters of noisy bees (bumbles) on cotoneaster, the odd wasp's nests, solitary bees nesting in the ground, and even a few easily accessed swarms. Unfortunately, there were also a few swarms where pest controllers had to be called in order to destroy inaccessible swarms which were in walls on blocks of flats, up

chimneys and high in facias and soffits, or under tiles and in one case totally buried under mattresses and other debris in a garden shed.

Early last year, before the swarm season began, I had intended to build bait hives. But never got around to it. So, this year was the year! Except it was interrupted by an unhelpful viral pandemic. Social distancing was the order of the day and I declined to be on swarm duty for the BBKA or MBKA. Fortunately, Archie has taken on the mantle (Scots being impervious to anything) and although BBKA were still passing people on to me, I was able to forward them to Archie, who has done sterling work.

I could not initially get hold of plywood or any other timber to construct the hives, so was limited to looking at what had been published (Tom Seeley always to the fore) and designing my own, based on what seemed to work.



A timber supplier near me, which I passed to and from Maidstone Canoe Club, opened up for limited trade and I took the opportunity to wear a bee suit (just in case I was stopped by the men in blue), and visit to place an order for cut ply. With the best laid plans, this inevitably took longer than anticipated. Only one man was operating in the yard and had not been able to cut my wood. When I visited again he offered to cut the ply while I waited, so I ended up one side of the circular saw – a suitable distance away- and helped cut it to my specifications.

Joining, cutting entrances, putting hinges on the roofs, adding runners for frames and then coating the boxes with a bee friendly weatherproofing took a few days – mainly waiting for paint to dry. Beekeepers have to be patient. I had some old drawn comb and the rest was made up with new foundation, the bees did not seem to mind. Both pheromone strips and swarm lures were tried, inside and outside the hives.

Now to the good bit! One of the boxes I took to Hartlip, where a friend, has two of my colonies. A stand was constructed on his fence about 5m from my existing hives. The following day after scouts had investigated, a swarm arrived with a flying roar. This was, according to his frightened wife. But not from one of my colonies. They all marched in like well-behaved bees. We are just awaiting seeing pollen arriving with foraging bees to indicate the queen is laying in the combs inside the bait hive, they will then be transferred to a proper National hive and taken to the main apiary in Loddington.

Meanwhile, I had placed another bait hive on my garden shed roof. Scout bees were seen to be entering and leaving. Four days later a swarm arrived while I was watching and again entered with no problems. They were transferred to a National hive after five days. These too will be off to the main apiary at Loddington in the next good spell of weather. Hive stands are now the urgent need. I will build two more, each holding two hives.

So, this is swarm collection without the social distancing problems, and without inconveniencing anyone else! I now have four bait hives in place, complete with pheromone assistance, to collect any other swarms in the vicinity. Two out of four was not bad for a start, and so soon after placement. It could be even better before the end of the swarming season if more swarms decide to take up residence.

Quarantining is a problem, but by taking hives home and sharing with a neighbour over the road, I am trying to be a bit safer. Anyway, to my huge surprise the bait hives I built seem to work a treat and the number of colonies is increasing, together with the splits into nucs I have been making. By the end of the year I should have enough colonies to decide which to unite for the winter and which look strong enough to leave.

Why not try a bait hive, that is unless you have already done so.



Notes from the Association's Apiary:

This year has been a rather difficult one for us all and this also applies to our apiary bees. Following a wet spring May was exceptionally dry which seems to have made things a little unpredictable, if, that is, one can say that bees are ever predictable. Re-queening has been rife and we also suffered from a couple of swarms. But things have now settled down and the dedicated team continues to undertake weekly inspections. The Apiary currently has 4 colonies. Hives 1 and 4 are national hives with 14 x 12 brood boxes, hive 2 is a national with a standard brood box, and hive 5 is a WBC with a 14 x 12 brood box.

Mark Ballard has worked hard to keep the grounds tidy with regular grass cutting and tidying up. As well as making up super and brood frames, and keeping an eye on the various other consumables such as food and smoker fuel. Social distancing has made this a rather lonely set of tasks.

This year we have posted the report cards on the member's area website to assist team members in looking back at the history of each colony before they visit the apiary to inspect the bees. If you would like to read about the bee's progress you can find them under the 'Apiary' tab. This week's inspection found the following and is just one example of the information that we gather.

Weather 18° C, cloudy and overcast, rain threatening.
The Bees were all well behaved: 0

Hive 1: Queen: Not seen, no queen cells present, e / l / s on 6 frames, 1 frame of stores, 10 frames of bees. Put a super on to give the colony more room. Colony doing very well.

Next week: Standard inspection.

Hive 2: Queen seen marked blue, no queen cells present, e / l / s on 5 frames, stores on 3 frames, 8 frames of bees. Put a 2nd super on. Colony doing well.

Next week: Standard inspection.

Hive 4: Queen not seen, 2 charged queen cells present, eggs and larvae on 1 frame, some stores and still needs to draw out foundation. Reduced the hive to 6 frames which include 2 frames of foundation and fitted a dummy board. Left queen cells in place (colony is too small to swarm). Put on a feeder and filled with syrup to encourage the bees to draw out comb.

Next week: Suggest we leave this colony alone until the 18th July Inspection. Just check and top up the feeder if required. We need to give this little lot a chance to recover.

Hive 5: Queen: Not seen, 1 discharged queen cell (took down), no brood present, plenty of stores. The bees are very quiet and organised. Top super nearly ready to come off for extraction.

Next week: Check for eggs. This week was probably a bit early.

The new Pavilion Apiary Site has seen little progress this year due to the restrictions caused by Covid19. However, the track down to the apiary has had a much-needed grade and top dressing applied to enable easier car access. Mark has worked hard to make the Pavilion itself more secure and there has been no new vandalism taking place. The grass will be cut over the next few weeks and once the water supply has been sorted we may be able to start some minor works it all depends on the public health instructions we are given. We will keep you all updated via the website as soon as it is possible to make any progress with this project.

Paul Lawrence



Reading Around:



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

This month: Obsessed with stings? Not that you'd admit to, but it's the one thing that engages people when talking to beekeepers. The sight of bees on bare skin has the feel of a circus act, so why do some beekeepers recommend working bare-handed. Plus Jay D Evans's new book (no, not D J Evans) on the significance of bee research, and yet another gripping novel centred in beekeeping in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Other bits and pieces scattered about too.

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:

A Swarm arriving at a bait hive: [Click here](#)

Also:

The Bee Unit have put up links to some interesting video presentations:

Asian Hornet Biology: [Click here](#)

Asian Hornet Genetics: [Click here](#)

European Foulbrood: [Click here](#)

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.

The BBKA Asian Hornet Exercise:

All members are welcome to take this exercise as a means of increasing awareness of the Asian Hornet. It can be found at the BBKA website: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/asian-hornet-action-team-map>

Please note there will be no official training certificate provided for completing the online assessment.

Julie Horbury
Fundraising Administrator
The British Beekeepers Association (BBKA)

A Message from Margaret Wilson BBKA:

To view Margaret's latest message please: [Click here](#)

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 also carries up to date information.

Join our Facebook page for information, updates and events:

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

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:

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Newsletter and Website Enquiries

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