

The Essex Beekeeper

Issue 670

October 2020

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Monthly Magazine of the
Essex Beekeepers' Association
www.ebka.org

Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex
Registered Charity number 1031419



Update from the CEC Chair

Jane Ridler, Chair, CEC



The most extraordinary season is drawing to a close. I hope all your honey is safely extracted, super frames cleaned by diligent and enthusiastic bees and varroa treatment completed. At the time of writing, (early September) we are about to start feeding. It's important to leave some nutritious honey for the colonies to overwinter – not just syrup – is this the 'junk food' of the bee world? The Indian summers of recent years make the decision of when to start feeding trickier. We have seen the bees so active late in the season that they have used up significant amounts of their winter feed during October. But then it's no good when the weather gets cold as the bees won't take the syrup down, and too much ivy in the stores is a pain in the spring.

The bimonthly meeting of the CEC took place in early September on Zoom. The main topics included the progress of the CIO Working Group and the General Husbandry Course, both encouraging; the new Trustees Handbook, now at the stage ready for trustees to check; virtual meetings; Risk Assessments; BBKA ADM proposals (none forthcoming from Essex divisions this year); and initial discussions for the AGM 2021, which may well have to be virtual.

We have had 29 names representing 8 of the 9 Divisions for the General Husbandry Course, and having passed their Basic Assessment. A fantastic response! The course will start in mid October. All of our Basic Assessors will be happy to contribute to the sessions, that is Pat Allen, Ted Grad and Deryck Johnson as well as Richard & me. The syllabus from the BBKA is vast and we will have much to consider over the winter via Zoom – hopefully though both informative and fun. The arrangements for the practical aspects of the course (which for the General Husbandry assessment is the priority) will have to be finalised later when we can appraise the Covid requirements accurately. We also look forward to lots of support being available the following year for a

record number of Basic Assessment entries.

The CEC financial support for an extended virtual Zoom licence is being rolled out, but with an eye to ongoing developments. There is no doubt there is a plethora of beekeeping lectures currently available nationwide, but Essex both wants and needs to extend invitations both across the County and to neighbours who have generously shared with us over the summer.

Risk Assessments were a timely consideration. It is vital in these high risk Covid times for all members to abide closely by the rules set up for any 'live' meetings and for the Divisional Safety Officer to have the Risk Assessment close at hand. Committees have considerable responsibility for setting up Covid secure environments – which applies after the meetings have finished too! Sadly, at the time of writing, the Government has just announced the 'rule of 6', so the apiary meetings being planned will now have to be postponed.

Our Bee Health Officers, Katy Langley & Salma Attan, have pointed out on a number of occasions that there is an obligation for all EBKA members to register their bees on APHA's BeeBase for the good of all of our bees and beekeepers. I have heard from Ian Nichols, one of our Seasonal Bee Inspectors, (and recent Chair of EBKA) that there are still folk out there who haven't registered. Foulbrood has been significant in our locality this season, so please do sign up if you haven't done so.

Last, but by no means least, we still have no permanent replacement for the General Secretary position (or for that matter, the County Membership Secretary). Please consider if you could take on either role. Having Zoom meetings for the CEC does make life a bit easier too....

Stay well and safe. 🐝

Meetings in October 2020

Members are more than welcome to attend another Division's Zoom meeting. Just contact the Division and talk to the relevant co-ordinator.

Please note that all of these meetings are subject to Government COVID-19 rules that may be in place. Please check with the Division, too, to ensure that the event is running.

01 19:30 - 21:00 - Manuka Honey, Jack Silberrad (The London Honey Company), Saffron Walden Division

Zoom meeting

01 20:00 - 22:00 - tbc, Harlow Division

Address: tba

01 20:00 - 22:00 - Kevin Thorn, Abberton Native HoneyBee Project, Romford Division

Zoom meeting

16 19:30 - 21:00 - Prosecco and Planning Evening, S/Walden Division

Zoom meeting

20 19:30 - 21:00 - Winter Preparations, S/Walden Division

Zoom meeting

23 19:30 - 21:30 - Roger Patterson - 'The Patterson Unit' - a different way of managing an apiary, Southend Division

Zoom meeting

22 09:30 - 21:00 - National Honey Show 2020

Virtual event. <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/general-announcements.php>

23 09:30 - 21:00 - National Honey Show 2020

Virtual event

24 09:30 - 21:00 - National Honey Show 2020

Virtual event

28 19:30 - 21:30 - tbc, Southend Division

Address: WI Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED

29 19:30 - 21:00 - Bees Abroad with Richard Ridler, Saffron Walden Division

Zoom meeting

30 19:30 - 21:30 - Graham Royle - 'The Colony Mind', Braintree Division

Address: tba

November 2020

05 20:00 – 22:00 - Buckfast
talk, what the books
don't tell you and why
bees change their minds,
Romford Division

Zoom meeting

05 20:00 – 22:00 - tbc, Harlow
Division

Address: tba

17 19:30 – 21:00 - Kevin
Thorne will be sharing with
us his experiences with
the re-introduction of the
Native British Black Bee,
Chelmsford Division

Zoom meeting

25 19:30 – 21:30 - tbc,
Southend Division

*Address: WI Hall, Bellingham
Lane, Rayleigh SS6 7ED*

20 19:30 – 21:00 - Mead
brewing, Chelmsford
Division

Address: tba

27 19:30 - tbc, Braintree
Division

*Address: White Notley Village
Hall*



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Christine, leader of the Jireh Women's group in Kisoro Uganda, asks for your help. She is hoping for some candle moulds. When tourism restarts the women have an opportunity to sell candles to a chain of tourist shops. In the meantime we need to get the moulds there and teach them. If you have any 'spare' moulds please email Richard_ridler@beesabroad.org.uk



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Achieved: Chelmsford's first Beekeeper Taster Session of 2020!

By Jan Tutton, Chelmsford Division

The Coronavirus pandemic hasn't stopped Beekeeping enquiries to our Secretaries mailbox.

In fact Chelmsford Beekeepers have seen a marked increase in interest for all our New Beekeepers courses.

Rather than just say 'No way!' we undertook a Covid Risk Assessment (RA) to see if a Taster session was a possibility.

We found that by reducing numbers, providing the RA for participants to read before hand and sign on the day - stating they were free

from symptoms, changing the location of our introductory talk from our classroom to the open park, asking participants to bring masks and sanitiser along with the normal wellies and gloves, walk from the park fully kitted out carrying



Everyone ready for the Taster session to start

Photo by Brian Spencer

their chair in front of them to ensure a safe distance from the person in front, and providing individual plastic bags for depositing borrowed bee-suits for storing before washing, it was surprising what we achieved during the 2.5hr session allocated.

Relying on our volunteers, Jan, Brian and Jon, we accommodated 8 participants. Meeting and greeting in the car park, taking the

signed RAs, and checking everyone was well and had the correct equipment, explaining our procedures, we proceeded to an area in the open park near the Hylands Apiary, where distanced chairs had been previously laid out for the Bee Keeping Intro and Health and Safety briefing. Ensuring everyone was kitted up correctly in bee suits, we then proceeded into the apiary, where Brian and Jon each opened distanced hives to show just 4 participants the structure of the hive and colony within. Jan kept a watching brief for any potential issues throughout - which thankfully - there was none. Not only did we 'do it' in a safe Covid 'training manner' but we were praised for our friendly and thorough professionalism throughout. One participant even mentioning it was the best RA she had seen!



Happy beekeepers around the hives!
Photo by Brian Spencer

Would we do it again? I think we learnt a lot, were lucky with the weather and would be even 'slicker' next time and us volunteers felt it was a very worthwhile exercise. The only disappointment was that with only 8 participants, we were only too aware that only one or two would potentially become new bee keepers. The others were clearly very interested in pollinators, with lots of questions about Bumblebees!



Articles appearing in The Essex Beekeeper are not necessarily the views either of the Editor or the Essex Beekeepers' Association

To ensure inclusion within the diary of county-wide events would Divisions provide the editor with details of local meetings by the 4th of the previous month.

Robert Silver – robert.silver@outlook.com

The Healthy Broodbox

By Katy Langley and Salma Attan, Essex Bee Health Officers

Hopefully you will have extracted your honey, protected your winter bees by starting varroa treatment in August and be ready to store your equipment for next year. Correct cleaning and storage of equipment is an important part of beekeeping which often gets overlooked, until you start to see waxmoth fluttering around stored supers!

Waxmoth larvae tend to prefer used brood frames since they can feed on the skins discarded by bee larvae as they mature and pupate. However, waxmoth will also infest super frames, particularly those with even a trace of pollen, and can eat plastic bags. The waxmoth larvae will burrow into both wooden and poly boxes to pupate and can cause significant damage to equipment. The September issue of BBKA Magazine has an article on waxmoth by a retired Bee Inspector on page 312. Apiary hygiene should be maintained during equipment storage: supers and frames should be returned to their original colonies in Spring (identify the boxes with chalk or a permanent marker pen) and definitely not swapped between apiaries. Waxmoth larvae produce a mixture of webbing and excrement known as ‘frass’. If you tap a frame smartly with your hive tool, the waxmoth larvae will pop up to see what is going on and can be removed.

Spot the signs of waxmoth:



Achroia grisella,
lesser wax moth



Galleria mellonella,
greater wax moth



Wax moth trail



Wax moth larvae
and webbing



Wax moth larvae



Wax moth pupae

NB. The outbreak of both EFB and AFB is a continuing problem, please make sure your details are up to date on BeeBase: SBIs will want to alert you if your Apiary is near a foulbrood infection site; they cannot contact you if your phone number or email has changed, or you haven't got round to entering your latest apiary site. If you are not on Beebase, [please register now!](#) 🐝

Divisional Round-up

Harlow

The division is starting to plan for some meetings and these will be communicated with members, and they hope to have three people attend their general husbandry training.

Maldon

A decision was made to close their apiary in Burnham with equipment and bees relocated to other apiaries.

All shows for 2020 have been cancelled, including all educational visits, due to Covid.

Colchester

Despite managing a practical frame and hive assembly course before lockdown, due to the age profile of members all physical meetings have been cancelled.

Romford

Zoom meetings have successfully continued, but the committee have unfortunately taken the decision to cancel their honey show

this year after a lot of discussion.

Southend

People on the postponed beginners course have been emailed asking if they would be interested in a socially distanced visit of an experienced beekeeper's hive, subject to Covid rules in place. An ongoing search is continuing for a new apiary site within Southend.

Chelmsford

The division is continuing their frequent newsletters to members offering advice and support, and arranging training and supportive monthly meetings via Zoom.

They're still receiving enquiries from potential new beekeepers about beginner's courses and the division has undertaken a risk assessment in order to make a decision about offering a "Taster Session" this year. 🐝

Dealing with defensive bees

By Lesley Jacques, Cheshire Beekeepers Assoc, via eBees

As we all know, bees have well developed defence mechanisms to repel invaders (including beekeepers!) and to protect their brood and stores. We see this particularly toward the end of the summer when there is more at stake. The honey they have accumulated will need to support the colony over the winter. It is not unusual for colonies to become increasingly defensive throughout the season, particularly if they are under siege from wasps.

Aggressive versus defensive?

It's important to distinguish between defensive and aggressive behaviour. All bees will be defensive – how would you feel if someone took the roof off your house and moved all your furniture about? Every week! The bees will react to a perceived threat. Levels of defensiveness can vary from extremely low, where the bees are calm on the frame and don't fly up to harass the beekeeper, to those that become more agitated as an inspection progresses. They may

run over your hands, and the top bars or team out immediately when the crown board is lifted. The former is a joy to work with. The latter is more of a challenge!

Genuine aggression is thankfully rare – in ten years, I think I have encountered a genuinely aggressive colony only once. Aggressive bees will come to meet you as you approach the hive. They will boil out from under the crown board, bounce off your veil and burrow into the folds of your bee suit, up sleeves and down boots, trying to sting. Even when the hive is closed up again, they will continue to follow you across the apiary and continue the onslaught.

Ill temper in the bees may be transient, and so it is worth looking at the underlying causes. If you think it is a permanent or inherent trait, then clearly that needs to be managed.

Why?

Many factors affect the temperament of the bees. There may be environmental factors such as the weather or available forage, sometimes the location, the handling and also the queen status,

Some bees are extremely weather sensitive. If the weather is a bit close, or there are storms forecast, then ill temper may be more likely, but this will pass. During a rich nectar flow, the colony may be sweet and easy to handle, but that may change as the flow ends. Again though, that will be transient. Bees do not like vibration, so consider the location – if you are close to a railway, for example, might the passage of trains be a factor?

It is good practice to handle the bees carefully and respectfully. Treat the hive and the colony gently. Use as little smoke as possible. Carefully remove one frame and set it aside. Break the propolis seal on the remaining frames, one side at a time, gently and without waving your hands over the box. Remove and replace each frame without rolling or crushing bees under the frame lugs – move the bees from the top bars with a puff of smoke if you need to. Be careful not to crush bees between the sidebars or with brace comb when pushing frames together. Don't shake bees off

the frames unless necessary. Work reasonably quickly, carefully and confidently, and you may find inspections easier.

However, if the poor temperament is enduring, it may be that you need to look to the queen (or indeed, her absence!) as the source of the problem. Her pheromones or her genetics are likely to be the cause of temperament issues. Change the queen, and you will remedy the bad behaviour.

It's all about the queen

Firstly, do you know for sure that the colony is queenright? Queenless or broodless colonies can be grumpy but will right themselves as soon as they have a laying queen in situ. If the hive is queenright, then requeening will generally address any temperament issues. However, the first job is to find and remove the incumbent queen.

Preparation is key. Know before you start what you intend to do once you have found (and despatched) the original queen. Wash your bee suit in unscented detergent, without fabric conditioner. Bees are highly sensitive to odours, so it is wise to minimise anything that they may perceive as foreign, and also any lingering alarm/ sting pheromone that will endure from previous inspections. Don't wear perfume or aftershave, and don't go for a curry the night before! Ensure your gloves and your tools are clean. Check the weather forecast. If possible, choose a warm sunny day when the bees will be flying. The job will be easier if the majority of foragers are out and about.

Now find the queen and kill her. It sounds easy when you say it quickly, but this may be where the problem lies – fumbling through a colony of foul tempered bees trying to find just one! If the bees are so vicious that seeking out the queen is nigh impossible, it may be necessary to bleed off the flying bees. This is also helpful because it is these older bees that will be the aggressors.

To do this:

- Smoke the colony, then move the whole hive several metres

away to a different part of the apiary

- Return any supers to the original site. If there are no supers, use a spare brood box, nuc or super with some drawn comb.
- Now sit down for a cup of tea – give it twenty minutes or so. During this time any foragers will leave the hive but will return to the original site, so they are out of your hair for the time being.

Next, you can go through the colony more easily to seek out the queen. Once you find her, this is not the time for sentiment. Say your goodbyes and kill her – swiftly crushing the head and thorax is thought to be most humane. Once this is done, you can return the brood box to the original site in preparation for a new queen. Queen introduction is a big subject all of its own (see page 15). You will need to introduce the new queen and destroy any emergency queen cells so that the new genetics prevail.

Once an aggressive colony has been requeened, you may notice a change in temperament almost overnight, which indicates that the ill-temper was driven by the old queen's pheromones. Change the pheromone and the temperament changes to suit. Sometimes it will take a few weeks for the colony's behaviour to settle down, as the old queen's progeny die off, and are replaced by bees that are the offspring of the new queen. The lifespan of a bee in the summer season is about six weeks, so you should notice within this time that the situation is improved.

This summer, I had a large and feisty colony that I had requeened, using a queen cell from another hive. It had been broodless for many weeks and had been impenetrable for longer. They had all the symptoms of being queenless, and their temperament was vile. But twice, test frames indicated that there was a queen present. I concluded that there was an unmarked but non-laying queen in situ, and finding her was going to be a challenge, but necessary. I had a small nuc of excellent stock with which to requeen the nasty bees.

On the day in question, I donned full riot gear and opened up. The bees were like pussy cats. It took the wind out of my sails rather. And on closer inspection, a big fat stripy queen was in residence, and the beginnings of a brood nest – she had been laying less than a week. Now a queenright colony, their behaviour was completely different. So a happy ending, but one that, like many things in beekeeping, will teach me to have more patience. 🐝

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Queen introduction

By Steve Donohoe, Cheshire Beekeepers Assoc, via eBees

Honeybee colonies do not often go queenless for very long. After a swarm, they may be so temporarily, but very shortly a new virgin (or virgins) will emerge. Sometimes the queen will be inadvertently lost as a result of beekeeper intervention, but bees quickly build emergency queen cells to make a replacement. Bees can make a replacement for an old queen without swarming, by supersedure - a process that may result in the hive having two queens for a while.

When you think that your hive is queenless, probably because of a lack of open brood, do not be too hasty in assuming that your colony has no queen. She may have stopped laying for a while, or there may be a virgin queen in there somewhere. Many inexperienced

beekeepers “panic” and buy a mated queen to introduce to their supposedly queenless hive. They are frequently disappointed to find that the new queen is gone when they check on her a week later.

You can add a frame with eggs on it from another colony to your hive; if they make queen cells on it, your hive is queenless. If they don’t, start hunting, because they have a queen.

I know a few queen producers who often say, as they send out a queen to an eager new customer, “there goes another one to her death!” Introducing queens is a tricky thing to get right, and I’m not sure that anyone fully understands why. If the bees already have a queen, even a virgin or a drone layer, they will kill off the newly introduced imposter. But even queenless colonies sometimes reject an introduced queen.

There are two key factors to consider:

- the condition of the new queen
- the status of the colony into which she will go

If you raise queens, you can easily take a mated laying queen from her mating nuc and pop her into a cage with some candy at one end. Within an hour, she can be in her new home. She is a healthy laying queen likely to be accepted by a colony that knows it is queenless. When I do this, I don’t immediately allow the queen to be released; I leave her for a day or two then return to let the bees at her. I use plastic travel cages which have a tab that I remove to allow the queen out (once workers have tunnelled through the candy).

However, consider a queen that has arrived in the post. She is not a laying queen anymore; she is dehydrated & accompanied by attendant bees from another colony. Even a queenless colony may reject such a queen. They want a healthy egg layer, not some runt that smells wrong. This queen could initially go into a small nucleus of bees rather than a large hive. If she is left with them for

a few days before being released, they will hopefully look after her rather than end her days. Later on, the frames from the nuc can be combined with a larger hive using the newspaper method.

An alternative method, used by many commercial beekeepers (because it's quicker), for introducing a queen to a large colony is to use a push-in cage. The queen goes under the push-in cage which is pressed into the comb so that she cannot escape. The best frame to use is one with emerging brood and a little nectar. When I do this, I mark the frame on the top with a marker pen then place it in the hive and close up. I return four days later to release her, after first checking to ensure that there are no new eggs laid on the comb outside the cage. If there are eggs outside the cage, then there is already a laying queen present. I also remove any emergency queen cells.

This brings me to the second key factor; the status of the colony. In simple terms, the bigger the colony, the less likely it is to accept a new queen. The colony must be queenless, and better still, hopelessly so (no eggs, young larvae or queen cells). One 'belt and braces' method to achieve this is:

- find and kill the queen(s)
- return after four days and destroy all queen cells
- return after another four days and destroy all further queen cells
- add the new queen (travel cage or push-in cage)

The first batch of queen cells will be made by the bees using newly hatched larvae. Any eggs still in the hive will hatch in another one to four days, hence the above timings.

In my opinion, the best way to ensure that you have found all queens present is to shake the bees through a queen excluder. Commercial beekeepers that I have spoken to reckon that there is more than one queen in 10% to 30% of hives. I nail a framed queen excluder to the bottom of a brood box, then shake bees into this while it's sat on top of another brood box. The bees, encouraged

by some smoke and some brood frames below, will pass through the excluder. The queen is often running around the edge, where the excluder meets the wall of the box.

A research paper by Ratnieks (amongst others) that appeared in the Journal of Apicultural Research in December 2008 discussed the direct introduction of queens using smoke, i.e. no cage at all. It said, “Overall, our results clearly show three things about queen acceptance. Firstly, direct queen introduction with smoke gives very high acceptance ... Secondly, mated queens have higher acceptance rates than virgin queens. Thirdly, the length of time a colony has been queenless greatly affects its likelihood of accepting a queen, with colonies needing to be queenless for a longer period to accept virgin queens than mated queens.” 🐝

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