



NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2020

Tending hives, swarm collections & Asian hornet during Covid-19

Lastest from the BBKA website

24 March 2020

BBKA Chair Anne Rowberry says: "The swarm collection service will still be in operation during the pandemic".

Swarm collection can go ahead but you must take into account social distancing.

Risk assess the situation and do not take unnecessary risks as health services will be under pressure due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

As always, only collect when it is safe to do so. We are working with DEFRA."

You can find info on swarms and our map of collectors here: www.bbka.org.uk/swarm

- **As far as Dorset BKA is concerned, swarms should only be collected if the beekeeper can do so safely whilst abiding by the government's current instructions on both social distancing and not undertaking unnecessary travel.**
- **The same applies to responding to calls in respect of possible sightings of the Asian hornet.**
- **For either swarm collection or Asian hornet call outs, beekeepers should be mindful of the position in respect of their insurance and if they are in any doubt should check the position BEFORE undertaking any swarm or Asian hornet sighting travel/activity. They should not put themselves in a position where they might accidentally invalidate their insurance by being involved in an incident or accident whilst undertaking a journey or activity which their insurers might deem to be in contravention of government advice, instructions, or emergency legislation.**
- **Attached is the latest update from the National Bee Unit, available on BeeBase; please keep checking on BeeBase for further updates.**
- **Please also keep checking on the BBKA website for any updates on advice in respect of swarms and/or Asian hornet calls.**

Message from our Chair - Caroline Dilke

Heartfelt sympathy to all this year's beekeeping students -- a wonderfully attentive and practical cohort of people -- that we have had to cut short the teaching sessions. People learn in different ways and while some thrive on lectures and hand-outs, others are much more comfortable with practical sessions. Every year we have a few people who find it hard to concentrate during the evening sessions -- but then once they get to the apiary their learning streaks ahead and they are suddenly confident and useful beekeepers. I particularly sympathise with those people!

Luckily, beekeeping is one of the safer hobbies when it comes to protection from infection. I very much hope that before long we will feel able to welcome you to the apiary, providing you are wearing a suit, veil and gloves and not coughing or sneezing.

In the meantime, can I suggest you re-read the hand-outs? Then you will be ready for the great moment when we feel it safe to introduce you to our bees.

Best wishes,

Caroline



MORE Ramblings

I do hope that you and your colonies are in good health.

I wrote most of the following before 16th March so it may have to be all change for some of us. The epidemic is no excuse for neglecting your bees. We still need to care for them, control their varroa, ensure they have space and stores, inspect for foulbrood and I suspect, even more importantly, watch out for the other Chinese invader, the yellow-legged hornet. I suspect it is even more likely now to become established here but we must still spread the word by mouth at a distance, by phone or the internet for neighbours and friends to watch out for them and their nests in their gardens and when they are out for a walk.

Buying a hive when you start beekeeping is like buying a house. Well -- you are, but as a rental property. I am a fan of Phil and Kirstie who get their clients to decide what they really want and what they are prepared to compromise on by showing them different houses. I would advise new prospective beekeepers to do the same and see how the different properties (hives) work for beekeepers and the compromises there are with the different ones. So basically ask, and see as many keepers and their hives as you can. Remember Carole, our secretary, is your first point of contact and will point you in the right direction.

This is a lifetime property and you need to picture yourself at 80 still beekeeping, so the hive choice you make needs to last and be adjustable to your strengths and weaknesses. This is especially important for lady beekeepers. Supers are heavy and need to be regularly lifted off and on again. You may say you will share the weight with a bee buddy but will the buddy still be around in 30 years' time? And bee buddies have other commitments. Also, are the hive's hand-holds good for two lifters or for only one person? Yes, there are ways round a problem, that is what your brain is for, but as Kevin says: "Keep it simple" is a good motto. Mine is "thought before action". You need to consider the construction material of your prospective property: western red cedar, Paulownia or plastic/polystyrene. How long will it last, and how are you going to sterilise it if you get foulbrood? Wood can be flamed but man-made needs a strong solution of soda, then bleach. If you are on a septic tank remember that your tank residents will be destroyed by bleach so you need to be able to dispose of it elsewhere. You need to ask yourself: should I be polluting the planet with more plastic? Wooden hives when getting tired make very good kindling wood. If you buy wooden, get the first hive constructed by the manufacturer and check with an experienced beekeeper that the maker is a good one, not a cowboy. Bee space needs to be perfect, otherwise your bees will do their own alterations and make life very difficult for you and -- even more important -- dangerous, possibly lethal for the tenants. We all have brood and super chambers/boxes suitable only for storing or sterilizing frames in.

The next choice is your tenant. The last one you want is one that keeps wanting to scarper i.e. have a family. One a year is good; two, that is a capital offence (for the queen, that is) I believe. Why? Because you get no rent as they keep going off with all the loot and are a pain in the proverbial. That type of bee is the Swarmy Dorset Bee.

Some beekeepers talk about stealing the colony's honey. I hate that way of looking at taking off honey. Stealing is when you deprive them of all their stores so that if conditions are poor for a while the bees starve. Good beekeepers leave plenty on the colonies, so that when the NBU alerts go out they know their bees are fine. "Just in case" is another good saying. I think of honey as rent. You have given the tenant a very nice, expandable home, a clean nursery and storeroom furniture annually or at least every three years, controlled the vermin and maintained the property to a high standard. In return you take some rent when the colony can afford it. Honeybees are great panic buyers and hoarders. If it's out there and conditions are good they bring it in and store it away. They can fill their home and nursery with honey. Think of it like people filling their cots and beds with paracetamol tablets and loo rolls so there is no space for the new infant. That is what can happen in a good forage area in a good year if you don't provide enough space in the warehouse. For most amateur beekeepers, expenditure far outweighs income. Monetarily your new property is not a good investment, especially as it is not just one, but two, or -- if you catch the bug -- a garden and shed full.

Back to bees. In mid February I started feeding thin syrup with added garlic powder in jars with holes punched in the lid and in the second week in March gave the keen colonies a rapid feeder instead. The theory is that garlic is good for their microbiome and helps fight chronic bee paralysis virus (CBPV). Anyway the bees don't dislike it. If anyone wants some I have some jars of the powder. Thin syrup gives them some warm water as well as sugar and hopefully gets early colonies under way. Slower starters got larger jars when they sucked out tiny ones and then when they really started to clear the jar got a rapid feeder. I don't like syrup hanging around and going mouldy. You could add thymol but I suspect that is not good for their microbiome. There is quite a bit of pollen out there now; the willows are flowering and if the weather is good for a week it is an ideal time to do a shook swarm or give some foundation for them to draw.



March 16th was a red letter day in more than one way. Yes, Covid-19 advice was ramped up, WDBKA events cancelled, also the Spring Convention. A shame; but as I wrote in a note to the BBKA, we need to get keep fit to look after our bees and neighbours. More importantly for beekeepers the 16th was a beautiful, sunny, warm day, the day for opening colonies and checking on their welfare, to see if the queens had space and stores. It was wonderful to visit them again. Usually I could remove all the supers put underneath for the winter. This year only a third of them could be; the rest needed to go back over a queen excluder as they were at least half full. Most years the bottom brood box could also be emptied of old frames; not so this year. My colonies had brood on three to eleven frames. Do remember it is still chilly in the wind and it may be a while before everything is really under way but as flowering is early I do worry about a June gap this year, another challenge for bees and keepers as for both income is important. Do get those supers on when the colony needs the space. If they are not ready you may chill them if you do, so if you're not sure, put it above the crown board. When they are busy up there, move it down and stick another in its place.

One colony, instead of removing a wall as Kirstie often suggests, built one: a very fine one made of propolis. It had been built between the sloping area of my WBC floor and the inside edge of the front of the box bottom. It will be a bit unclear to those of you not conversant with WBCs but perhaps I can elucidate. The box rests on the floor with its front outer edge resting against the brown/red baton. The first lift rests on the front of the wedges (one seen to the left) in front of that baton and on top of my homemade entrance block. This is made from two thin batons a bee space thick; the shorter by 2" lower one creates a low entrance on the left, to the right of the front of the wedge. The bees have made a very small gap in the curtain/wall to the left, otherwise they need to go round the wall to the right and turn left to get out. This wall/curtain is presumably to stop the wind or rain being blown into the hive. As you can see there was quite a bit of debris that needed clearing away, one disadvantage of entrance blocks. Thanks Brian for the photo.



My very best wishes to you and your bees.

Sarah More

Apiary Update March 2020

As with many best laid plans this month, everything has been scaled down at the Apiary. All of the student and member sessions have been cancelled and our plans for queen raising have been shelved.

The Apiary Management Committee will continue to look after the Apiary colonies until current contact restrictions are relaxed.

A quick check of all the colonies on the 18th March revealed that the queen in colony 1 had failed and the queen in colony 7 was probably a drone layer. The other five colonies had brood of all stages in varying amounts, so appear to have come through the winter with viable queens.

It is very difficult to maintain the required social distancing when two beekeepers are peering into a colony trying to see eggs or something interesting but Carole Brown and I did our best and will no doubt become more adept at this over the coming months!

The new cabins are gradually being sorted out and we are making a detailed inventory of all our equipment so everything will be in perfect order when we can eventually run a member's meeting.

Carole Astbury

Here is something to look forward to when restrictions are off:



CLEAN SHED



DIRTY SHED

SORRY - NO EVENTS WILL BE ARRANGED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE