



KENT BEE-KEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

County Newsletter No. 89 March 2018

EDITORIAL

Wildlife or Livestock?

In January an article appeared in Science that caused a stir in some newspapers and amongst some beekeepers. The article "Conserving honey bees does not help wildlife" by Jonas Geldmann and Juan P. González-Varo, members of the Conservation Science Group at Cambridge University, made the case, among other things, that large numbers of managed honey bees can exacerbate declines in the numbers of wild pollinators.

This has upset many beekeepers, who especially dislike the suggestion that managed honey bee colonies should be restricted or excluded from protected conservation areas where they compete with more fragile pollinator species. Could it spell the end of heather honey, some wondered?

The main point the authors make is that managed colonies should be treated as 'livestock' rather than wildlife, and that honey bee pollination services should be counted as 'agricultural' rather than 'ecological' services. Counting managed honey bees as wildlife, they argue, distorts the wider picture, downplays the risk to other pollinators, and directs public awareness, and possibly conservation funding, towards honey bees, while it's other insects that need conserving.

It's a reasonable point. But in Kent, where the short-haired bumblebee has been famously re-introduced, the balance seems to be about right. Although a lot of the initial publicity around the National Pollinator Strategy (NPS) was based on honey bees, the continuing is much broader, from research into neonicotinoids to the work district councils are doing with wildlife and conservation trusts to, for example, preserve roadside verges.

As the authors of the article acknowledge honey bees have been the 'canary in the coalmine', and are an important part of the NPS, which has helped launch BeeConnected, supported the work of the NBU on invasive pests and invested in neonicotinoid research. And I'm sure that, whenever we're personally asked about the decline in honey bees, we have, patience allowing, mentioned other pollinators.

Snow blindness?

As I write this, the Kent County Showground is under a couple of inches of snow and the temperature remains below freezing. Many beekeepers report seeing dead bees in front of their hives in the snow, and wonder why this might be. There are many intriguing theories.

One is that the bees, misled by the sun shining in at the entrance and warming the air in the hive, eagerly jump outside, where they cool too rapidly to return.

Another is that the bees are fooled by light reflected from the snow, which they confuse for the sky, and become disoriented. It's often reported that bees are reluctant to fly over bodies of water and, when inspecting in bright sunshine, you'll sometimes see bees landing legs-up on the metal roof of a hive, so that may be possible.

However, the light from the sky is polarised and the bees know this – it's how they work out the position of the sun in cloudy weather. And though the light reflected by water and metal surfaces is also polarised, that from snow – a huge number of crystals facing in all different directions - is not. Moreover, most flights will be cleansing flights, and less reliant on knowing the direction of the sun than a foraging trip.

Although snow doesn't reflect polarisation, it does reflect ultraviolet (UV) strongly, and bees can see UV. But though snow can reflect 80% of the light from the sky, it will always be 20% darker than the sky itself, even to a bee.

Besides, bees know which way is up already. That's how they build their combs so well, even under a roof and in the dark. At least, that's how they build them here on Earth, and we know they use gravity for that as honey bees on a Space Shuttle built a comb with cells angled "down" on one side, and "up" on the other.

There are many mysteries in beekeeping, and maybe we'll never know why exactly, when it snows, we see so many of dead ones in front of our hives.

But perhaps the answer has less to do with honeybees and more to do with humans. After all, it's a lot easier to see a dark, frozen little body in the snow than it is in the mud or the grass. And, at this time of year, bees will be dying every day, either choosing to die outside the hive or, if inside, being thrown out by their colleagues. Perhaps the only difference the snow makes is that it forces us to notice.

ORPINGTON CENTENARY

The Orpington Branch Centenary celebrations, which were to be held on February 28th 2018, have been postponed due to poor weather. We are happy to mark the occasion here, however, and wish them the best of beekeeping for the next hundred years.

COUNTY AND OTHER EVENTS

Bromley

Tue 20th March 2018 – 7.30pm – Kent House Road Clubhouse
Talk by Jim Vivian-Griffiths: *Spring Management*

Sevenoaks & Tunbridge Wells

Tue 20th March 2018 – 7.30 pm – Sevenoaks Weald Memorial Hall
Talk by Ian Beavis on *Solitary Bees*

Orpington

Wed 21st March 2018 – 7.30pm for 8pm – Atomwide Offices*
Talk by Jim Vivian-Griffiths: *Swarming – opportunity or problem?*

Dartford

Sat 28th April 2018 – 3pm to 5pm – Branch Apiary (Tredagar Allotments)
Talk by Terry Claire: *British Black Bees*

All Kent

Sat 28th April 2018 – 10am to 4pm – East Malling Village Hall ME19 6DD
An all-Kent **Bee Health Day** has been organised in conjunction with BDI and the NBU by members of the Kent and Medway Beekeepers Associations. It was fully booked within 2 days, but the organisers are operating a 'returns' list in case attendees drop out, and registrations for that are being accepted at www.ksrcbees.org.uk

BBKA EVENTS

BBKA Spring Convention

Fri 13th April – Sun 15th April 2018

Harper Adams University , Newport, TF10 8NB

Further details can be found in BBKA News & Bee Craft, and on

<http://www.bbka.org.uk>.

BBKA EXAMINATION & ASSESSMENT DATES

The Spring module examinations are closed for new entries, but there is still time to apply for the BBKA Basic Assessment and the new **Bee Health Certificate**.

The **Basic Assessments** take place throughout the season, up until August 31st. Entries must be submitted at least a month in advance, so please bear this in mind. This is to allow the Branch and BBKA exam secretaries time to coordinate between branches and assessors – and to give apiary managers fair warning!

For practical assessments, apiaries need to have good-tempered, queen-right colonies with brood in all stages, and it takes a lot of work by apiary managers to ensure that's the case, especially in the swarming season, so the more notice they have the better.

The BBKA exam board have asked us to remind candidates of modules and assessments that **fees will be forfeit** if candidates don't turn up on the day, unless they've given two weeks' notice or, in case of illness or other unavoidsabilities, have warned the exam secretary as soon as reasonable.

Last Entry Dates

Basic Assessment	31 st July 2018
Bee Health Certificate	31 st March 2018

Examination Dates

Written modules	24 th March 2018
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The dates for other assessments will be set in consultation with the relevant assessors and apiary managers.

REGIONAL BEE INSPECTOR

As the season has yet to get underway, the Regional Bee Inspector is the first contact for notifiable pests and diseases. Her details are:

Sandra Gray

email: sandra.gray@apha.gsi.gov.uk

tel: 01787 211531

mobile: 07775 119430

The seasonal inspectors for Kent for 2018 will be listed under 'contacts' on the BeeBase website at <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/>

DON'T FORGET to advise your Branch Secretary and the County Membership Secretary of any change to your e-mail address, postal address or telephone numbers.

If you have **any** branch information or articles you would like included in the Newsletter, please e-mail newsletter@kbka.org.uk