

Notes from SE Region Associations Day

7th September 2010

Venue: Roots & Shoots, Vauxhall



Attendees:

Clive Watson – Kent Bka
Bob Jackman – Kent Bka
Jo Telfer – Middlesex Bka
Mary Hunter – Middlesex Bka
Andy Pedley – Middlesex Bka
Angela Dougall – Middlesex Bka
Sandra Rickwood – Surrey Bka
Bob Maurer – Surrey Bka
Max Gladwin – Surrey Bka
Brian Hopper – Sussex Bka
James Norfolk – West Sussex Bka
Tom Moore – West Sussex Bka
Guy Wheatley – West Sussex Bka
Margaret Harrowell – Dover Bka
Len Mole – Dover Bka
Bob Smith – Medway Bka
Nikki Vane – London Bka

John Chapple – London Bka
Sharon Bassey – London Bka
Robert Monk – Twickenham & TV Bka
Antony Ellman – Twickenham & TV Bka
Rowena Pearce – Thanet Bka
Charles Matthews – Thanet Bka
Linda Perry – Barnet Bka
Michael Fullagar – Barnet Bka
Clive de Bruyn – Bee Farmers Association
Mike Brown – Head of NBU
Nigel Semmance – RBI NBU
Caroline Washington – SBI NBU
Diane Steele – SBI NBU
Brian McCallum – SBI NBU
David Rudland – SBI NBU
Michael Cooper – SBI NBU
Nick Withers – SBI NBU

Apologies were received from:

Pat Allen – Romford Bka
Eileen Marrable – Romford Bka

Peter Bowbrick – Bee Farmers Association

Proceedings:

Alan Byham opened the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance, especially as there was a tube strike that day. It was pointed out that this type of Associations Day event had not happened in the SE region previously and the day was intended for the National Bee Unit (NBU) to give it's assessment of beekeeping in the SE and for Associations to give feedback about our services

A round table 'introduction' took place with attendees introducing themselves and a little about their Associations / Organisations.

Round-Up from Beekeeping Associations:

Representative from each of the BKA's in attendance gave a brief update on the current play with their Associations. In brief all Associations reported a pronounced upsurge of interest in Beekeeping and the number of people wishing to partake in Beginners Courses is up.

Particular Comments:

John Chapple London BKA - membership has reached 180 and they are finding it difficult to deal with all the new members. Honey harvest mixed results.

Mike Fullagar Barnet Bka – 90 members (mentioned film on u tube). The Assoc has 4 apiary sites. Beginner's course runs from Xmas to April and it is already oversubscribed. Honey yield was also mixed. Very happy with service from Bee Inspectors.

Tom Moore West Sussex BKA (Wisborough Green Div) - they are struggling with all the new recruits. 200 people came for an introduction day course. He raised concerns about losing touch/interest with the existing members who were seeing the effort mainly focussed on the beginners.

Sandra Rickwood Surrey BKA – They have 8 divisions with 800+ members 4 of which have over 100 members. Still seeing strong interest from potential new BKs. Good honey crop reported generally. Fera services excellent.

Andy Pedley Middlesex BKA (Ealing Div) – membership number is now 70. 2 taster days run, very good year in apiary. 10 members passed BBKA Basic exam. Took the decision to run an Improvers course this year rather than a Beginners course. This was seen as a very proactive and sensible approach to achieving fully competent beekeepers and may be a good model for other Associations to follow.

Bob Jackman/Clive Watson Kent BKA – 12 branches, 30+ took Basic exam, many new beekeepers. Many swarms were collected but a good number of them absconded after being hived.

Robert Monk/ Antony Ellman Twickenham &TV BKA – Training apiary has only 8 hives. Members are able to keep bees at the recently amalgamated Mole Apiary Club site but it was difficult for new beekeepers to find sites in London. Again, a divide was reported between the more experienced and the beginner beekeepers.

Brian Hopper Sussex BKA – They have 5 associations and the membership has tripled in the last 2/3 years. Ran both Beginners and Improvers courses. Honey yield mixed.

Mary Hunter Middlesex (Enfield Div) - They anticipate not running a beginners course next year as they have been overwhelmed with so many new BK recently. She was concerned that at least a third of the membership doesn't attend meetings even though they pay the membership fee. Local council allow beekeepers on to allotments and have asked Enfield Div to assist in regeneration of certain areas. Delighted with Disease recognition course in the spring, members still talking about it. Honey yield was again mixed.

Clive de Bruyn Bee Farmers Association – Very good year and still have some borage. Cold winter no problem for bees. In Essex overall big increase in numbers of beekeepers and was worried that many will be '5 minute wonders' and will soon drop out. Also concerned that many new beekeepers do not realise the responsibility that they are taking on. He expressed a concern that there will be a shortage of experienced BK's for training in the future.

Jo Telfer Middlesex BKA (Harrow Div) – Membership is now 147, up from 47 in 2007. Running a taster course in October and then beginners afterwards. They are concerned with the volume of new members and how to deal with the large increase. As their Association is classified as a charity they can't close the membership book.

Regional disease and contingency update:

Alan Byham reported on the current disease status of the South East region using information from the public pages of Beebase, the National Bee Unit's website, www.nationalbeeunit.com, direct from the internet. All the information given is freely available to all members of the public and beekeepers alike.

1031 apiaries and 3615 colonies had so far been inspected with 101 colonies being found with EFB. Graphs and maps showing the trends and spread of EFB were demonstrated. A short report on the progress of the RAS (Random Apiary Survey) followed, with the information the NBU is on target to collect the 5,000 plus samples needed to complete the survey by the end of May 2011.

Import figures were shown revealing that 2400 queens had been imported from 'Third countries' IE those outside the EU that can import to the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina. Imports from Hawaii had been stopped at the beginning of the season when Small Hive Beetle was discovered on the Large Island. 7000 queens had been imported from the EU with the bulk of these coming from Greece and Slovenia.

Exotic pests and contingency planning were discussed; a map showing areas of risk was shown, covering locations such as air ports, sea ports, fruit markets, wax importers etc. 112 apiary visits especially to check for the presence of Small hive beetle and Tropilaelaps mites had been carried out in these areas considered to be 'at risk'. Sentinel apiaries are being introduced, where a beekeeper is asked to check their colonies regularly for the presence of these pests and report to the NBU. They are given all the necessary equipment and so far 11 beekeepers had been asked and agreed to help.

Other activities of the NBU South Eastern team were discussed, such as the training programme, a handout showing the types of events that bee inspectors had already participated in/been involved with was handed to all attendees. Events such as these can be arranged for all associations, please contact and discuss your requirements.

Different bees, different hives:

Nigel Semmence, Regional Bee Inspector, Southern Region gave us a fascinating talk on the subject of other types of pollinating bees. Nigel has worked in both the UK and the USA breeding solitary bees such as the Red mason bee, *Osmia rufa* and gave us an insight into their breeding cycle and their use as an efficient pollinator. He then showed *Megachile* spp. being used to pollinate Alafalfa and went on to talk about the role of solitary (and Honey) bees for commercial pollination in the USA.

Nigel then changed subject and went on to discuss the more unusual types of hive that are becoming more popular in UK beekeeping such as Warre', top bar, Omlet Beehaus etc. This led on to a lively discussion about the various types of hive and whether they were appropriate for keeping bees in the UK.

Roots and shoots tour:

During lunch, there was a chance for attendees who had not visited Roots and Shoots previously to take a tour of the gardens/permisses guided by David Perkins, Environmental, education and resources manager.

Update from the National Bee Unit:

Mike Brown, Head of the NBU, gave us an enthralling and comprehensive insight into the activities of the bee unit. He began by telling of his experiences working for a large scale commercial beekeeper in France, Famille Mary: www.famillemary.fr, moving swiftly on to his involvement with the NBU. The NBU is currently part of Fera, The Food and Environment Research Agency and Mike gave a broad overview of the size and range of activities of the agency. He then expanded on the work of the NBU, covering such things as: the Wildlife Incidence Investigation Scheme (for reporting suspect bee poisonings amongst many other things), Food safety, residues etc as it applies to honey, and our involvement with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

Mike then went on to explain Beebase and how it can be used by beekeepers but also how it is used by inspectors to plan the inspection programme, giving some interesting figures about the numbers of new beekeepers and their proximity to disease locations. From here he moved on to explain how the exotic pest surveillance programme worked, with inspectors checking apiaries for small hive beetle and tropilealaps but also pointing out that we must all be on the look out for the Asian hornet which is now well established in France.

Attention now turned to the research work at NBU and the first topic was the Random Apiary Survey (RAS). Mike covered how samples were taken and what was hoped to be achieved and indicated that final samples would be collected at the end of May 2011. Mike was by now running over time and suggested he finish but was encouraged to carry on by all the delegates, so he rounded up his talk with some information about the various research topics that are being looked at in collaboration with a number of other research institutes, universities etc. They cover a wide range of topics such as:

- Virus taxonomy
- AFB classification
- EFB epidemiology
- Chemical recognition in Varroa
- Transmission and evolution of Nosema
- Monitoring feral honeybee populations
- Exotic threats

Open Forum:

The last session of the day was a chance for attendees to put their views and a good general discussion ensued. Some of the points made were:

- Concern about apiary sites not known to inspectors/Beebase and also apiary sites that appear to be abandoned. Contact detail/map references and/or useful location information will be welcomed by the local bee inspector but inspectors have no power to remove abandoned hives; they are still the property of someone. BBKA has a useful information leaflet dealing with the issue of abandoned hives which can be obtained from the members section of their website: www.britishbee.org.uk/ Of course, it would be much better for local beekeepers to try and contact the beekeeper at these sites and try to encourage them to be a part of the local beekeeping scene.
- Beebase, how to encourage beekeepers to register. Several suggestions were made including making sure that new beekeepers realise the many advantages of registering. There was discussion

about the principle of passing Association members details to the inspectorate and it was noted that permission must be asked before this could be done. The simplest way to do this is to incorporate a tick-box into the Association membership form, saying that members tick the box if they don't want the details entered on Beebase. It was stressed that Beebase is completely independent of any other government database and that no information is shared with any other department other than statistics, IE no personal information is given over. Associations that don't already do this agreed to consider using tick boxes at the next membership round.

- Beebase, dissemination of information. This was a concern about knowing the location of diagnosed cases of foulbrood. There is now a new system called 'Alerts' which is in place on Beebase. All beekeepers that have an apiary within 5 km of an outbreak of foulbrood and have given an email address when registering on Beebase will automatically receive an email advising them that foulbrood has been found and that they should carefully check their colonies. An inspector will normally visit but the beekeeper should contact immediately if they have any concerns about their colonies. It is hoped that this system will keep beekeepers informed with up-to-date information about disease location but further details can be obtained by checking Beebase. Beebase is also running an 'email update' system in which beekeepers, who have given an email address on Beebase and have ticked the box allowing updates, will receive messages when new information is published on Beebase. A recent example of this was the new fact sheet on 'Preparing colonies for winter.' All beekeepers who want to use this service should go to Beebase and check their details, making sure the correct box has been ticked. You can unsubscribe from this service at any time.
- Drone layer queens. Has there been an increase in these in recent years? There was some discussion but no general consensus was reached. However it was agreed that honeybees needed careful attention and that this point should be remembered and also pointed out to new members.
- Future meetings. There was a general feeling that the day was a success and that future meeting should have a larger venue so that more attendees could be present. Also a point was made about the need for a later start time to allow travel at the 'cheap day' rate.

The meeting was closed at 16:15