

Notes from SE Region Associations Day

6th September 2011

Venue: Roots & Shoots, Vauxhall



The Food and Environment
Research Agency

Attendees:

Ashford BKA	Frank Wood
Barnet BKA	Steve Leveridge
Brighton BKA	Heather McNiven
Bromley BKA	Jennifer Spon-Smith
Canterbury BKA	Julian Audsley
Chichester BKA	Jim Norfolk
Croydon BKA	Mark Stott
Dartford BKA	Barry Adams
Dover BKA	Len Mole
Ealing BKA	Patrice Munro
Enfield BKA	Mary Hunter
Epping BKA	Eric Beaumont
Epsom BKA	Philip Sheperd
Farnham BKA	Hazel Sharples
Harrow BKA	Brian Desborough
Kent BKA	Clive Watson
Kingston BKA	Avis Marshall
London BKA	John Chapple
Medway BKA	Bob Smith
Mid Kent BKA	Barbara Harris
Middlesex BKA	Jo Telfer
North London BKA	Liz Jack
Romford BKA	Pat Allen
Sidcup BKA	David Rea
Surrey BKA	Max Gladwyn
Thanet BKA	Rowena Pearce
Twickenham BKA	John Weston
Weald BKA	Nick Mengham
West Sussex BKA	Roger Patterson
Weybridge BKA	Michael Main
Wimbledon BKA	Gareth Morgan
Wisborough BKA	Gordon Allen
Worthing BKA	Guy Wheatley
Yalding BKA	Steve Clarkson
BFA	Alastair Welch
BFA	Toby Mason

Apologies were received from:

Essex BKA	Eileen Marrable
Pinner BKA	Penny Perry
Reigate BKA	Paul Cleaver
Westerham BKA	Geoff Close

SE area NBU Inspectors:

Diane Steele
Michael Cooper
Caroline Washington
David Rudland
Brian McCallum
Alan Byham

Introduction:

Alan Byham, Regional Bee Inspector, opened the meeting thanking everyone for their attendance. This year is the second of these events and in response to some comments from last year's meeting, attendees were sought from all local Branch Associations and not only Counties as in 2010. Attendees were given information sheets on arrival, which consisted of: a programme, an email list for all attendees, contact details for all SE area Bee Inspectors together with their areas of work and a list of the events carried out by the NBU in the SE area. All delegates had previously been sent some questions to consider for the afternoon discussion session.

Round-Up from Beekeeping Associations:

Representative from some of the BKA's in attendance were asked to give a brief account of the season's beekeeping and the state of their Association.

Particular Comments:

John Chapple (London): felt there were now becoming too many beekeepers in London, too many companies trying to tick the green box by having a beehive on their roof. London Bka don't want any more new beekeepers but need to improve skills of existing bks. London Bka now has approx 302 members.

Max Gladwyn (Surrey): Had similar views as John Chapple. Surrey was coping with new bks at divisional level but is not able to give follow on knowledge to more experienced bks. 2011 was a poor year honey wise and colonies were lost through starvation during the season.

Jennifer Spon-Smith (Bromley): Bromley is a large Bka with approx 140 members. She has dealt with many phone calls from public about beekeeping matters and wanted to discuss how to get other members of committee to take calls. She noted that the standard of beekeeping was poor as indicated by the number of swarms lost.

Heather McNiven (Brighton): Brighton has 190 members. They teach on a one to one mentoring basis. Brighton was having to deal with a breakaway group of beekeepers and has been told to assist where possible. She felt this went against the grain and the breakaway group should remain a part of their Association. Heather asked why some of their members were not getting email notification of foul brood outbreaks. (They live outside the 5km ring for notification or no email is registered with Beebase) They had a good spring flow but not good main flow.

Roger Patterson (West Sussex): West Sussex County Association has three groups: Wisborough Green is the most rural but all three have teaching apiaries. Wisborough Green is considered harsh in the way they deal with new bks: they have three visits and then placed into ability groups. They have ten hive demonstrators.

Pat Allen (Romford): Has problems directing public to the right place to get information. Essex has nine divisions that work independent of each other. She considers there are problems with the competency of those keeping bees, and is frustrated that there is no control over who keeps bees and to what standard. Romford have difficulty in providing improver knowledge to beekeepers.

Jo Telfer (Middlesex): Middlesex has five associations who work independently of each other. Some have closed their books and are not taking on new bks but are trying to consolidate/upgrade their member's knowledge. Need extra help as their 4th year bks can't id EFB or AFB.

Nick Mengham (Weald): Felt that they should keep poor bks on board so as to have some control over them. The RBI should give instructions/guidance notes on how to use Beebase. He commented that those who don't have access to computers will fall through the net for information being given out via Beebase and emails.

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.

This season 1177 apiaries and 4039 colonies have been inspected in the SE region. 161 colonies were found with EFB and 4 with AFB. Graphs and maps showing the trends and spread of EFB were demonstrated. The Random Apiary Survey (RAS) was completed at the end of May, 4480 apiaries had been surveyed in England and Wales. Results will be posted to individual beekeepers that had been surveyed by November.

This season 1662 queens had been imported from 'Third countries' (IE those outside the EU that can import to the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina) together with 4100 from EU countries.

108 apiary visits especially to check for the presence of Small hive beetle and Tropilaelaps mites (Exotic pest inspections) had been carried out in those areas considered to be 'at risk'. Sentinel apiaries were discussed, where a beekeeper is given all necessary equipment and asked to check their colonies regularly for the presence of these pests and report to the NBU. A request was made for any beekeepers willing to help with this arrangement.

The training programme, as indicated by the information sheet already distributed was discussed. Events such as these can be arranged for all associations, please contact and discuss your requirements with your RBI.

Asian Hornet:

Michael Cooper, Seasonal Bee Inspector, gave a presentation on the Asian Hornet, covering all aspects of the risks from this likely exotic invader. He began by giving a thorough description of the lifecycle and biology of *Vespa velutina* and gave a comparison with the European hornet *Vespa crabro*. This outlined the possible problems associated with the incursion of this hornet both to honeybees and other insects. He then showed information regarding the spread of this insect in France, which is at the rate of approximately 100km per year.

Michael then went on to discuss a risk assessment that has been carried out to determine the likelihood of the Asian Hornet arriving, establishing and spreading in the UK and what the impact of

that would be. The chances of the hornet arriving in Britain are high due to the possibility of cross channel flight of the insect, importation with wood products, importation with other products or simply hitching a ride on a cross channel vehicle. Establishment would seem not to be a problem as the climate would be suitable and there would be food, nesting sites, hibernating sites etc. available. It is assumed that spread, as in France would occur at a similar rate. The impacts of the establishment of *Vespa velutina* in the UK may mean loss of pollination services due to damage to colonies and loss of honey production.

In managing the risk we all need to be alert and report any sightings immediately, either to the National Bee Unit, www.nationalbeeunit.com, or the Non Native Species Secretariat, www.nonnativespecies.org

Update on Bee Research from the NBU:

Dr Giles Budge, Research co-ordinator from the NBU, gave a lecture entitled 'Update on research from the NBU'. This centred on three main topics, the Random Apiary Survey (RAS), Nosema and the Insect Pollinators Initiative.

The Random Apiary Survey was initiated by Defra after the National Audit Office (NAO) review of 2008-9. The NAO remit was to; scrutinise public spending on behalf of Parliament and also to: help public service managers improve performance and service delivery. A key part of this was that Defra should evaluate what capacity is needed to enable the National Bee Unit to provide a sufficient level of inspection and advice to beekeepers nationally to prevent disease occurring and reduce the risk of disease spreading. As a consequence of this Defra commissioned a survey to establish a clear picture of pest, pathogen and disease prevalence across England and Wales. The RAS is the largest apiary survey ever carried out and samples have been gathered from more than 4700 apiaries in England and Wales. The detailed aims of the survey are to check for the prevalence of:

EFB and AFB and causative organisms, *Nosema apis* and *Nosema ceranae*, Varroosis, *Varroa*-transmitted viruses, Viruses not transmitted by *Varroa*

and to look for:

Correlations between beekeeper characteristics, Correlations with apiary health & Associations between pests & pathogens.

All apiary results should be available before December 2011 and should be accessed by participating beekeepers logging into their secure area on BeeBase.

So what do the results tell us? They indicate that the way in which the NBU works, by doing risk based inspections, is the most effective way to find disease. Current risk labelling of apiaries as high, medium or low are useful for targeting disease, which suggest that the NBU has a good idea where foul brood is located. The RAS indicates that apiaries with shared ownership (joint apiaries) are more likely to have EFB than apiaries run by a single beekeeper and also shows that DWV is the most common virus and that those that cause colony loss in the US are not prevalent.

The results with regard to *Nosema* gave an idea of the spread and historic range of *Nosema ceranae*. The RAS results showed that both types of *Nosema* are well distributed over England and Wales but *Nosema Apis* is more common. The NBU obtained some old bee samples from Rothamstead and *Nosema ceranae* was not found in these samples, suggesting that it is a recent invader. In some countries, (Portugal, Spain, Greece) *Nosema ceranae* is thought to a serious pathogen but in others it is classed as a low grade pathogen. (Canada, France, Germany) The NBU has been running an apiary with known *Nosema* infection for several years; the colonies have been subject to the normal good NBU standard of husbandry but have not been treated for *Nosema* infections specifically. So far no colonies have died due to *Nosema* and honey crops have remained at the NBU overall level. So it seems that in the UK *Nosema* infections are not a serious pathogen yet.

The Insect Pollinators Initiative (IPI) is a collaboration of funding from various bodies. There were 64 proposals submitted for funding, 9 were accepted, 3 of which were from the NBU. The project under discussion was 'Modelling systems for managing bee disease: the epidemiology of EFB'. Samples from EFB infected colonies have been collected throughout the 2011 season. In two regions, Eastern and Wales, a diseased comb was collected from every EFB colony, from all other regions a diseased comb was collected from every 4th apiary. This gave a range of intensive and normal sampling across EFB apiaries. Also collected were samples from healthy contact colonies in diseased apiaries and healthy combs from apiaries where there was no disease present. It is known that there are a number of variants of EFB and the sampling programme will show the spread of the various isolates.

The aims of the project are: to use EFB as an example disease, to develop a range of 'models' which predict disease spread across spatial scales and to improve EFB management and control.

Where do we go from here?

After lunch there were two sessions, in the first the delegates were split into 5 groups, each with an inspector to act as a 'facilitator'. A member of the group was chosen as a representative to report back to the whole meeting later. Questions to discuss had been circulated to all attendees before the day for consideration. These were:

- Is there any way in which you can help us (NBU/Inspectors) deal more effectively/efficiently with statutory diseases?
- Can the NBU provide better information/help/assistance regarding the control of endemic pests such as Varroa/viruses/Nosema? If so in what format?
- Would it serve a useful purpose to recreate the role of 'Bee Health Advisor' (BHA) in the SE region?
- How do you see the role of the NBU in providing education in the future?

Groups had sensible and lengthy debate about these and other subjects, their points were discussed in the Open forum

Open forum:

In the second session the representative from each group gave the group's ideas to the whole meeting for discussion. The main points from the discussion groups were: (with my responses, Alan Byham RBI, in brackets)

Group one

- Nuc colonies for sale should comply to a British Standard
- All bees should be inspected on a two year cycle (unfortunately not possible with the level of staffing we have and not within our remit under the Better Regulation Concordat)
- BHA would be good but should be trained by NBU and funded by government

Group two

- Beekeepers should register on Beebase (this is voluntary at the moment)
- Encourage new beekeepers to raise levels of competency
- More weekend courses to get better attendance (it's up to bee inspectors whether they wish to work at weekends and we already do many events on a Saturday or Sunday. I think it's time to broach the unasked question, could we hold this event on a weekday?)
- Each teaching apiary should have an annual inspection by the bee inspector (good idea but again depends on time/work commitments for inspectors)
- Navigation on Beebase difficult - needs to be simplified
- Change 'Registration' to 'Sign-up' on Beebase (good idea, not so 'official' sounding)(This suggestion has actually been implemented since the meeting)
- Produce and sell DVDS on bee keeping to raise funds (NBU did have plans to produce DVD but I understand that BBKA are looking at producing 'interactive' DVD in the future)
- BHA would be good idea
- NBU should continue to provide training for beekeepers

Group three

- Yes to BHA
- Be more open with each other and invite other members to see EFB in your hives to help with ID (use as a training opportunity)
- There should be auto registration on Beebase
- Premium reduction if bk passes BBKA basic

Group four

- Easier use of Beebase
- More knowledge on what to do with abandoned hives (BBKA produce a leaflet on Abandoned hives, NBU can only check for health status)

- BHA should have some form of qualification
- Divisions should identify the locations of all hives in their area (Good idea, I would very much like to have a copy of the apiary list)
- Hive treatments should be coordinated
- RBI to send prompts out during year to remind beekeepers of necessary beekeeping actions (I think we, NBU, have a role to play with information in emergency situations, such as the likelihood of starvation this summer past. Other than that I feel it is normal husbandry and beekeepers should be aware of what they need to do with colonies)
- Code of practice for those producing and selling nucs

Group five

- BHA would be good idea
- Beebase needs to be more user friendly
- Weekend workshops
- Decision sheet to work through problems with hive (good idea, BBKA, local Assoc to work this out? I'm very happy to advise, check decision sheet before completion)
- More links between BBKA and NBU (yes I agree this would be very useful and profitable to beekeeping)
- Fera not to keep changing its name
- More legislation on nucs
- Should NBU charge for some of its services

From these points several things keep recurring:

- There is a general wish that nucs for sale should conform to some sort of standard and that a code of practice for the industry would be useful. Discussions along these lines are currently taking place.
- There are issues about how user friendly Beebase is; there were comments as to how easy it is to navigate the site etc. The NBU will look at these issues
- Bee Health Advisors are seen to be a good idea. The RBI will look into the possibility of setting up a BHA training programme in the SE area.

The meeting closed at 16:00

Alan Byham SE region RBI