

BBKA News

BBKA - Supporting Bees and Beekeepers



FREE TO MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

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What is the COLOSS Network?

One of the reasons why there has been so much media coverage of the recent honey bee colony losses around the world has been that there are few definite facts available, so there is plenty of scope for weird and wonderful theories as to possible explanations, some of which I have covered in a previous article⁴.

In particular, it is very difficult to prove that the scale of colony losses has increased in recent years, since there are few, if any long term records, and therefore no agreement of what degree of loss is 'normal'. A number of countries, including the UK, have at various times carried out beekeeper surveys of wintering and other losses^{1,5}, but the questions asked have often differed between surveys, and between years, making direct and meaningful comparison difficult or impossible. There is therefore a need to coordinate efforts on an international scale, certainly on a Europe wide basis.

Many people criticise the European Union for its bureaucracy and waste, but it has actually supported beekeeping rather well over the years. Some beekeepers will know of the direct support for beekeeping, through the annual grant, which in the UK offsets some of the costs of running the Fera National Bee Unit, but which in some other countries is used for subsidised varroa treatment and other

measures such as assisting migratory beekeeping. Perhaps less well known is the EU's support for bee research. It is therefore worth mentioning a few EU funded projects past and present (it should be noted that it is obligatory to have a meaningless acronym for such EU projects and networks).

One project completed a few years ago was BABE (Biodiversity in *Apis* and Beekeeping in Europe) coordinated by Dr Robin Moritz of the University of Halle, Germany, which studied the diversity of honey bees in Europe. In the UK, it helped to establish by DNA testing that a number of genetically distinct populations of the dark European honey bee *Apis mellifera mellifera* remain^{3,6}. Another short project was BRAVE (Bee Research and Virology in Europe). Coordinated by Dr Michel Aubert of AFSSA, France, this brought together scientists from Europe, the USA and Australia. It gave an opportunity for bee scientists who are not necessarily virologists, together with virologists who do not normally work on bees, to thrash out the vital issues concerning bee viruses and outline the work that is required².

Bee conservation on a wider scale has been considered by ALARM (Assessing Large scale Risks for biodiversity with tested Methods) coordinated by Dr Simon Potts of the University of Reading. This has considered pollinators in general, but has

recently documented the decline of beekeeping and beekeepers in Europe⁹. Another network of ten research groups is the current BEESHOP (Bees in Europe and Sustainable HONEY Production) also coordinated by Dr Robin Moritz of the University of Halle, Germany. BEESHOP focuses on the following topics: disease resistance in various European honey bee races to pests and pathogens to avoid the need for chemical controls; differences in foraging behaviour and its underlying mechanisms; analysis of antimicrobial properties of plant and bee derived compounds in bee products to evaluate the impact of honey quality on disease prevention; inspections of honey according to the current EC directives on honey quality; the genetic background of disease susceptibility; and selection of specific target genes to establish swiftly resistant but efficient stock.

To these must now be added COLOSS (prevention of COLony LOSSes). This network was initially a small number of European scientists, but it is now truly global, involving more than 160 members from 42 countries. COLOSS was set up in order to coordinate research and survey work aimed at identifying the cause of colony losses. Funded by the EU through the COST Programme under Action FA0803, and coordinated by Dr Peter Neumann in Switzerland, it

Continued on Page 4

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Chairman's Letter

I would like to thank the Trustees in accepting me as your Chairman and David Aston as Vice Chairman, I hope that comparison with my immediate predecessors will not disappoint.

A number of years ago I was lucky enough to win the National Honey Show Essay Competition and I repeat the opening paragraph because it explains what I seek to avoid.

My very first involvement in beekeeping was on a typical May day, it was raining, and I was responding to an advert in my local paper to become a beekeeper.

Just as I turned off the main road an extremely wet gentleman flagged down the car and pushed a piece of paper in my hand which advised me the meeting I was attending was unconstitutional; my first brush with beekeeping politics.

Sometimes we take ourselves too seriously, we are not trying to solve the problems of the West Bank but rather how to help honey bees and it is better to try and seek accommodations with people than maintain arguments.

The BBKA's recent withdrawal from the Healthy Bee Plan Board caused a lot of heat within and without the BBKA but I can report that we have met with Fera and that the Trustees have decided to rejoin the Board. It is now our task to look forwards not backwards, in that way we will make more progress, and perhaps enjoy ourselves a bit more.

Education, education, education, I forget who said it but I sure he will not mind me using the same strap-line for our main message for 2010. Whilst there will be many and varied reasons why honey bee colonies die, without doubt there is a skills gap that if closed might help reduce the losses.

Our 'Course in a Case', to be issued to all 65 Area Associations gives us all an opportunity to refresh our skills to a common standard, and for those new to beekeeping to receive tuition to that same standard.

Those beekeepers who are members of Saga will have seen in the April issue of Saga Magazine our Adopt a Beehive scheme generously sponsored by Saga which if successful will help us achieve our Research and Education objectives.

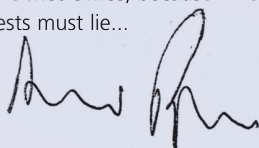
The BBKA's efforts in raising awareness to the problems that honey bees are facing is finding support throughout the country and I am grateful that Raymond Blanc, Michelin starred chef' has taken time to support our initiative.

'I like to cook with the finest fresh locally sourced fruit and vegetables and I know just how important honey bees are in pollinating them. We cannot take it for granted that the bees will always be buzzing around; we have to keep them healthy. If they disappear it will be a recipe for disaster. We can all help by planting pollen and nectar rich plants and trees and of course giving money to fund research into why they are dying. The Adopt a Beehive scheme will help. Remember, without bees, there may be no Apple Tart Maman Blanc... and no honey for tea.'

We have an extremely busy year ahead: -

- We have Adopt a Beehive and we seek your support to promote it further.
- We will continue the development of the 'Course in a Case' range.
- A members' working group is designing the new web site.
- We will develop a web shop with a quality range of products.
- We will return to working with Fera on the Healthy Bee Plan.

In addition we must try to find sufficient time to take advantage of the glorious summer weather that I have no doubt we will be promised by the Met Office, because in reality it is with the bees that our true interests must lie...



Brian Ripley,
BBKA Chairman

In the Apiary



This early spring time is difficult for our bees; the ones left from last autumn are coming to the end of their lives, younger ones will be looking after the brood, and the brood nest will be expanding as the queen increases her rate of laying. All of this to prepare for the increase in population which produces the largest number of foragers at the time when the flowers should be rich sources of nectar and pollen.

So our function is to work with the bees to help this natural growth, and especially to do our best to control the swarming impulse which may give us more stocks but will also give a reduced honey crop.

On the first available warm day go through all brood chambers to assess the colonies. It is tempting to fuss over any very weak stocks to endeavour to build them up, but this is rarely worth while. I find it better to check for disease and, if clear, take out the queen and unite to another stock which will profit from the addition of both bees and brood. Medium strength colonies may be given some thin syrup to encourage them. That leaves the strong colonies; give them some extra attention to reduce the probability of swarming. Continue to remove older brood combs from the flanks of the brood area but as the ambient temperature rises it is possible to give the bees one or two frames of foundation. I find it better to give a little at a time; if there is a shortage of forage then the bees will need feeding while they are working the wax. If you have many old frames to replace then do a Bailey comb change; the variation described by John Powell in the February BBKA News looks promising.

When taking out old frames be sure to leave the bees with adequate stores, if the combs taken out have significant stores then they can be cleaned and treated with acetic acid vapour. Any colony or nucleus which is hungry will make good use of these.

If not done already then floors should be changed and a warm day in April is a good time to change the brood chamber and clean up brace comb. As you do this shake most of the bees off each comb into their new home so that you can have a good look at the brood, looking for any sign of unhealthy bees.

If you do find foul brood then reassemble the hive with a reduced entrance, resist the temptation to look in any other hive and phone your Bee Inspector who will advise you.

Probably your bees will be healthy and so all is put back together with clean woodwork. If your bees are to do as well as the weather permits you must control their impulse to swarm. It will help some manipulations if you mark the queen now while the hive is not crowded with bees. You can buy queen marking cages or just pick her up; find someone locally to demonstrate the method for you. Humbrol enamel is the paint I use; it comes in convenient small tins from shops selling model railway equipment etc.

If you are able to keep a close watch on your stocks then remember that initially the brood area needs to be kept warm, so it helps to remove all supers and to reduce the entrance as well as putting some insulation over the crown board. Later on the need is to have space free to receive nectar and plenty of room for the queen to lay; crowding is likely to lead to swarming. The transition between these two states can happen very quickly so try helping your bees in this way only if you are sure to look in the brood chamber often enough to be confident of not encouraging swarming.

Brian Gant, Devon BKA



Spring 2010 Convention

Stoneleigh Park Warwickshire CV8 2LZ

- **Members' Day - Friday 16 April** ●
- **Public Day - Saturday 17 April** ●
- **Education Day - Sunday 18 April** ●

Lecture Programme

Jamie Ellis: Plight of the Honey Bee • Florida Bee Research

Ingemar Fries: Nosema Ceranae • AFB

Declan Schroeder: Honey Bee Viruses • Deformed Wing Virus

Steve Martin: Bee Diseases in CCD • Beekeeping Problems in Paradise

Andy Willis: Bee's Eye View • Twelve Months of Forage

Andy Wattam: NBU Random Apiary Survey • The Role of the Bee Inspector

Gerry Collins: Queens and Things • Reading the Comb

Andrew Gibb: History of Beekeeping Equipment

Michael Young: Swarm Control • Learning From Others

Workshops

Microscopy • Build Your Hive • Maximising Your Wax Crop • A Taste of Honey • Cookery
Patchwork • Encaustic Art • How to Pass the BBKA 'Basic' • NBU Disease Recognition Seminar
Computerised Pollen Analysis • Training Trainers • Beekeeping for Beginners
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Tickets

In advance: **Members £13** **Non-Members £18**
On the day: **Members £15** **Non-Members £20**

Tickets in advance (wrist bands) are available through the BBKA web-site or by postal application. Tickets purchased via the web-site after Monday 5 April will be made available for collection on the door. No postal applications for tickets will be accepted after Monday 5 April.

Postal applications: To receive wrist bands and one programme, send letter stating membership numbers and names for all wrist bands required, C5 (9" x 6") self-addressed envelope with a 90p stamp and cheque payable to BBKA to: Christine Hayward, 19 Kings Road, Leiston, IP16 4DA Tel: 01728 832487. E-mail: violinchristine@suffolkonline.net

Visit the BBKA website for more details: www.britishbeekeepers.com

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consists of four Working Groups. The first covers Monitoring and Diagnosis, developing standardised techniques for assessing colony health⁷, including the preparation of a definitive BeeBook of techniques for working with honey bees, to be published by IBRA⁸; the second covers Pests and Pathogens, aiming to identify the actual causes of colony losses; the third covers Environment and Beekeeping, developing husbandry methods to avoid losses, and the fourth, Diversity and Vitality covers breeding for disease resistance and improved vitality.

It should be noted that COLOSS does not directly fund research, but coordinates existing research efforts, although it is to be hoped that further funding for research will be forthcoming. The network operates by organising meetings and workshops. General meetings have already been held in Belfast, UK (September 2008); Brussels, Belgium (November 2008); Zagreb, Croatia (March 2009) and Montpellier, France (September 2009). Workshops have been held

at: Kirchain, Germany (July 2009) on 'vitality testing'; Guadalajara, Spain (October 2009) on 'Nosema disease: lack of knowledge and work standardisation'; Amsterdam, Netherlands (January 2010) on 'monitoring and standardisation - the Bee Book'; and Athens, Greece (February 2010) on 'standardised protocols for honey bee diversity and vitality'. Planned workshops include Bologna, Italy (April 2010) on 'standardised methods for honey bee rearing in hoarding cages'; and Graz, Austria (June 2010) on 'method standardization for larval tests'.

The UK members of the COLOSS Management Committee are Dr Robert Paxton (Queen's University, Belfast), Dr Stephen Martin (University of Sheffield) and Norman Carreck (International Bee Research Association and the University of Sussex). One immediate priority is the adoption of the standardised COLOSS questionnaire in beekeepers surveys. It may seem a straightforward task to count colony losses, but actually it is

surprisingly difficult. For example, what is a dead colony? If one finds a colony in spring with a queen and ten workers, is this a dead colony? Clearly not, but is it a useful colony? Again clearly not. And what time of year should one count dead colonies? After many discussions, the standard COLOSS questionnaire has been developed. This has already been used by Dr Mary Coffey in the Republic of Ireland, and will this year be incorporated in the survey of members being run for the third consecutive year by BBKA, which will be sent out shortly. If you receive a copy, please do fill it in and return it. Ultimately, it will hopefully be possible to produce one survey covering the whole of the British Isles, in a form that is directly compatible with those produced in mainland Europe, the US and China. Only after we have reliable baseline data will we be in a position to fully understand the phenomenon of colony losses.

Norman L Carreck, NDB

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