

Leiston Beekeepers' Newsletter

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The Apiary opens but where is Spring?

The apiary will open at 2.30pm on Saturday 3 April for the first time and again every Saturday at the same time throughout the bee season. We will open the hives if it is possible and the shed and bee equipment will need to be prepared for the coming season. See you there!

Leiston Beekeepers' AGM Report

The association is in a fit condition for another year. All existing officers were re-elected, funds are in a healthy state and two new committee members were appointed. Ken Macdonald stood down from the committee after 20 years, 18 of which were spent as Treasurer. A presentation was made to both Ken and his wife Pat for recognition of their work for the Leiston Association over the years.

Suffolk Beekeepers' AGM Report

The association held its Annual General Meeting on 3 March. There were reports from all the officers and its funds are also healthy. All officers' posts were reaffirmed. The meeting was followed by an interesting talk about the New Centre for Suffolk Punches at Hollesley Bay.

Events to Note:- (open to all members)

Ipswich Branch Speakers:-

Wednesday 21 April (previously advertised as 15 April (apologies Editor) - **Suffolk Beekeepers' President, Mike Graystone** will give a talk on *'How I keep bees'*. **Andy Wattam**, National Bee Inspector, says of Mike "He is one of the best beekeepers I know in Suffolk". For details see <http://www.suffolkbeekeepers.co.uk/page3.html>

The BBKA's Spring Convention:-

will be held on 17 April at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. This is a National event and is not to be missed. 2000 beekeepers; Equipment trading stands; Great bargains and speakers. For details and programme for the day see http://www.britishbee.org.uk/news/spring_convention/index.shtml

Did you know?

- that 70% of the colonies in America go to one valley to pollinate the Almonds trees in California. This means one and half million colonies of honeybees!! These colonies are spread over 650 miles ... for comparison this is from Bournemouth to Aberdeen. That is what I call a monocrop. They do it big in America!
- that 40% of the apple crop in China is hand

What is happening at the entrance of your hive?

You can learn what is going on inside the hive by studying the activity at the hive entrance. At this time of year on sunny and relatively warm days older bees will be out collecting pollen and the others will be collecting water. Younger bees will be out facing the hive dancing about in erratic jerky circles. What is happening?

The bees are collecting fresh pollen, water and learning where they live. Although there is stored pollen in the hive for food for developing larva as soon as fresh pollen becomes available outside from snowdrops, aconites and crocus the bees will avidly collect and use this fresh pollen in preference to the stored pollen. Water is collected to dilute the stored honey as larva cannot digest 'full strength' honey and it needs to be diluted. It is a good idea to put water near to your hive in a washing up bowl with a brick placed in it for a convenient landing stage. Bees doing their erratic dance are looking and learning where they live and by slowly enlarging their dance circles are memorising the nearby landmarks to ensure they can safely return home from future foraging trips. You will also see on warm days about midday lots of young bees from the rapidly expanding colony exit the hive and do this erratic dance creating a loud buzz then finally returning to the hive. This winter has been long and cold and because of this the colonies are holding back and are slow to expand. Those beekeepers that were frugal when feeding their bees last Autumn may be reaping the results of this behaviour as their bees die of starvation.

Leiston & District Beekeepers - an expanding Association.

Over the past two to three years the association's membership has increased by well over 50%. L&DBKA now has 71 members. Many of these are new beekeepers, which puts some pressure on the more experienced who give up their time to train and help these new members. The short course in February/March hopefully helped with the theory of managing colonies. The next stage is to put this theoretical knowledge into practice by opening the hives and learning to 'read the combs' and to recognize what the bees are doing and why. There will always be an experienced member at the apiary throughout the year to advise and help in this learning process. **Note: if you use the association's bee suits and tools at the apiary please make sure you leave them behind for future use.**

Are wild bees in decline?

There are 270 species of wild bees in the United Kingdom with about 40 of these appearing in gardens. There are 3000 species in Europe and 22000 worldwide. Wild bees have declined in Central Europe from 1985 - 2005 by 11% and at its periphery (including UK) by 10%. Over the same period beekeeping has declined by 30% but honey production is up by between 30 to 50 percent and pollination by wild bees is down. The increase in honey production is explained by the increase in the number of Commercial Bee Farmers. Of the 20% of landscapes studied in the UK and Netherlands about 50% of wild bees were found to be threatened species. Habitat loss being the greatest problem facing these threatened species. Specialist pollinators such as butterflies are declining fastest with the more generalist pollinators less so. It has also been found in the UK and Netherlands that wild bee pollinated plants are declining and that wind pollinated plants are increasing. To maintain the vigour of plants and seeds there is a need for all pollinators and a diversity of plants to stop wild bee losses. This is why maintaining suitable habitats are important to help both wild bees and a full diversity of plant life. 35% of worldwide 'quality' food production is pollinated by wild bees so without bees the variety of the food we eat will decline along with the wild bees.

Notes from a talk given by Dr.Koos Beismeyer, University of Leeds at the Cambridge one Day

Why do we open the hives?

The hives are opened to answer five questions:-

1. Do the bees have enough space for the increasing brood and nectar? Remember fresh nectar needs up to 60% more space than honey.
2. Is the queen present and laying as you would expect for the time of year? Is she an old queen? Is there a good brood pattern? Are the bees bad tempered or followers?
3. Is the colony building up at about the same rate as other colonies? Are there queen cells present and at what stage of development?
4. Is the colony healthy?
5. Has the colony enough food to last until the next inspection?

March ... This is the month when the colonies can die. If the bees were adequately fed in the Autumn there should not be a problem. With lengthening days the queen will increase her egg laying and more brood means more food is needed. There is no nectar available outside at this time. If necessary you can put some baker's fondant over the feeding hole just to make sure.

April ... Inspections will now be every seven days, weather permitting. The weather should be getting warmer and the blossoms appearing. The odd drone will be seen and the population should be increasing dramatically. A good brood pattern will be in the ratio of 1:2:4; that is eggs/larva/sealed brood. If you see a circle of sealed brood in the centre of the comb these will be surrounded with larva and these will be surrounded with eggs. The pattern will change when the sealed brood hatches it will be replaced with eggs. The larva will then be sealed brood and the eggs larva. And so the pattern goes on. Supers will need to be put on the hive now.

May ... With good weather a flow of nectar and pollen coming in the queen will be reaching her peak laying rate and there should be brood filling the brood chamber. Add more supers if the bees are crowded in them - give them space. Watch out for signs of swarming. If there are queen cups with eggs the colony wants to swarm. At this stage you may squash these to delay swarming. You can delay swarming but eventually you will have to do swarm management to keep your bees together. For artificial swarming an additional hive will be necessary.

The three castes of bee – from egg to bee:-

Worker (21 days from egg to worker); egg for 3 days, larva for 5 days (4 moults) and sealed for 13 days (2 moults).

Drone (24 days from egg to drone); egg for 3 days, larva for 7 days (4 moults) and sealed for 14 days (2 moults).

Queen (16 days from egg to queen); egg for 3 days, larva for 5 days (4 moults) and sealed for 8 days (2 moults).

Knowing the sequence of the queen bee development you can predict and control the swarming process

June ... Unswarmed colonies will have lots of bees and the queen's laying will slacken. If you have oil seed rape honey in the supers now is the time to take it off or it will crystallise in the comb. You can take a crop of honey now but be aware that the bees need a lot of food and June can be a funny month for a nectar supply. Continue swarm inspections.

July ... If the weather is good the main nectar flow will occur. Add supers as necessary. Continue the swarm inspections on unswarmed colonies. The population begins to dwindle as the queen is laying fewer eggs. Drones are still present. You may want to unite colonies from the artificial swarm created earlier.

August ... A second honey crop can be removed and then treatment for varroa can be undertaken. Swarm inspections will no longer be necessary drones will still be around but restrict the entrance to the hive to help the bees stave off robbing wasps. You can go on holiday now!

September ... Drones will disappear. The hive population is smaller. When the varroa treatment is finished, near the end of the month, start to feed the bees.

October ... When feeding has finished put the mouse guards on and chicken wire for woodpecker protection. Secure the hive and that is it for the year.

Stop Press:- The Nosema and Acarine test evening held on 25 March was a great success. This was a first for Leiston Beekeepers with members bringing their matchboxes of bees to be tested. Everyone learnt a little about bee diseases. Perhaps we should arrange another 'testing evening' later in the year before the bees are tucked up for winter.