

KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

March 2019

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Can Foraging Spread Disease?

Insect numbers have been plummeting since the 1960s, not only due to pesticides, but also habitat loss, disease, chemicals and general cultural intensification. It is on the topic of disease transmission that Dr Emily Bailes from Royal Holloway College has been focusing her research; her work is predominantly centred on bumble bees.

In her talk for our February meeting she said there were a number of parasites and viruses affecting the insect population including Varroa, Sphaerularia, Apicystis, Nosema, Crithidia and Deformed Wing Virus. Tests in bumble bees have shown that flowers are transmission sites for parasites: bees feeding on a flower leave some of the parasite behind, which is in turn ingested by the next visiting bee and taken back to the nest site. Some have been shown to pass easily between species, making the spread of these parasites even more problematic. Bee viruses have also been detected in hover flies and other invertebrates, for example wax moth and small hive beetle, Asian hornet and carpenter ants.

This raises an uncomfortable question. Could wild flower strips be altering virus transmission? They provide forage for large numbers of insects. However, they could be contributing to the problem due to the high diversity of insects in the same way that garden bird feeders attract lots of different birds and act as transmission hubs for viruses and diseases.

Where do we go from here? The nectar of some flowers contains chemicals which may reduce infection or resist parasites, for example caffeine or thymol. Sunflower pollen can also lower parasite load. So, should we look at the diversity of flower species within these strips, potentially helping to reduce transmission between species as they forage and thus protecting bees? Should we be concerned for our own bees?

Clearly the research is currently at an early stage and, compared with pesticide usage, lack of forage diversity and disease, it is probably of less concern. However, it does show how complex our environment is, and that we can never stop learning.

Sue Knights

On Alert for the Asian Hornet



The BBKA has asked every branch to appoint a coordinator (I am the coordinator for the Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells branch) to act as a point of contact for Asian hornet sightings. If you think you have seen an Asian hornet, report it immediately. Email alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk or use the free Asian Hornet Watch app on a smartphone. Take a photo if possible. Contact me on: 07799 383996 / vanessajones@btinternet.com

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you think you have seen an Asian hornet and need advice on your sighting or a second pair of eyes.

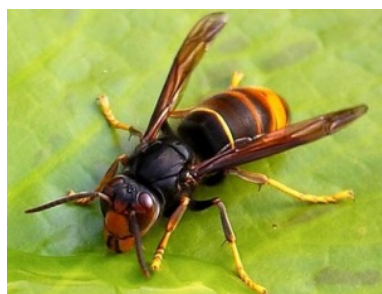
Our role as coordinators is to provide help and advice for anyone not sure about what they have seen or unsure about whether they should report. I live in Hever so can get to most places within our branch fairly quickly.

We cannot stress enough that early sightings are our best line of defence so do call if you are in doubt. Early detection to allow the National Bee Unit to intervene and prevent the establishment of nests on a localised basis is the plan. All the local coordinators for Kent will maintain records of sightings and share information within the county and report nationally. The overall Kent coordinator is Chris Morris. All coordinators details are on the BBKA website contained within the Asian Hornet Action Team web pages.

Vanessa Jones

How to Help Combat the Asian hornet

Advice from Anne Rowberry, Trustee and Vice Chair of BBKA



An Asian hornet

Now is the time to take an extra stroll around woodlands before they come into leaf to check no uninvited guests have been building nests. There won't be any Asian hornets in the nests but it may indicate that there could be overwintering queens about to emerge in the area. It is time to get all those hornet traps ready; they are sold by beekeeping equipment suppliers but can easily be made with plastic drink bottles. All the instructions are on the National Bee Unit site, take a look on Beebase.

It is the Spring and the only hornets around are likely to be overwintered queens or those joining us from France. When you put traps out remember to **monitor** them- there are several ways to eliminate killing some of the bycatch. These include a piece of sponge or tissue in the base of the traps that have no dry areas, small holes to aid escape etc. The method depends on the type of trap used.

There seem to be two main baits sold, possibly with similar ingredients. Some counties are already ordering the wasp attractant known as 'Suterra'. If you use it please ensure you use disposable gloves, wash your hands when you finish and take care. It does contain traces of sulphite and a very few people may have an allergic reaction, especially if it gets on the face.

What can the beekeeper do to help to protect their bees except to be vigilant and look for hornets? The hornets often attack by flying under the hive from the back – a skirt from the base of the hive to the floor on three sides may help; let the grass grow, especially in front, as trackers in Jersey observed that the hornets were often patrolling a few inches above the ground in front of the hive. There is also a wire grid that can fit onto the front of the hive, it allows the bees to fly through but the hornets are apparently reticent to follow.

Research to isolate pheromones is making strides, especially in France, and there is some hope that the Asian hornet numbers in the future may be controlled.

Make Your Own Asian Hornet Trap

A good number of members turned up for a session to make their own Asian hornet trap held by Cliff Hayward before February's talk.

This is the trap I made following our meeting (writes John Farrow). I have hung it from the pergola in our back garden in sight from our sitting room. I filled it up to the mesh with sugar solution plus balsamic vinegar, which is the dark fluid you can see. On the first day my bees were flying together with a lone bumble bee, so I wonder if a queen hornet will soon follow and be attracted to this unique mixture?



John Farrow's Asian hornet trap

On the Web

How to Maximise your Honey Crop: This Canadian Bee Farmer's video on YouTube shows how he improves his honey crop by moving brood from strong colonies to weaker ones. This has the bonus of reducing the risk of the strong colony swarming, whilst building up the strength of the weaker one. He shows how he does this in one of his apiary sites and he can do these manipulations in less than 10 minutes i.e. 50 hives in a day! This video is over one hour, but well worth watching as it is very fast moving; I guess you have to be when you have nearly 1,500 colonies!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGSycKisL1c&t=2152s>

Click here <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk> or search for Sevenoaks beekeepers to find our site.

Lunchtime Bee Talk

Last year John Farrow and Liz Birchenough attended an event in Sevenoaks, showcasing local clubs and societies. At the meeting they were approached by the assistant minister at Bessels Green Baptist Church, enquiring whether they could provide speakers for his seniors lunch club.

The talk was arranged for 13th February in the church hall. The church has a large and active congregation, with more than 30 members attending the seniors lunch club. Liz presented a wide-ranging talk describing the joys and frustrations of keeping bees, starting from the point of view of an absolute novice, and the pitfalls in the journey to becoming a beekeeper. Liz took along a range of objects to illustrate the talk including a bee suit, nucleus box with samples of frames, a smoker and a skep.

Many of the attendees were well aware of the pressures on bees in the environment, and were keen to learn about what they could do as individuals to support bees with the careful choice of garden plants, and understanding the impact of the use of garden chemicals.

Diary Dates

Sunday 10th March at Barrwood Apiary from 10am to 12noon: Tidying up and clearing the apiary site. Bring gardening gloves, secateurs and shears for a cut back of the bramble. We will also be checking on stores.

Tuesday 19th March from 7.30pm to 9.30pm: Peter Aldridge will give a talk and demonstrate the use of top bar hives at Weald Memorial Hall, Weald, TN14 6PT.

Saturday 16th March at Hilbert Road Apiary from 2pm to 4pm. We will be clearing up from the winter, checking stores and, depending on the weather, maybe carrying out the first inspection of the year.

Saturday 23rd March at Barrwood Apiary from 2pm to 4pm. First inspection of the colonies.

Bee Market and Auction

The West Sussex Beekeepers' Association is again organising a Bee Market and Auction. It will take place at Chichester College's Brinsbury Campus in Pulborough, West Sussex on Saturday 27th April 2019. Auction details, Guidance Notes and the Entry Form are available to download from the WSBKA website - www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html The Auction catalogue will be published online after 22nd April.

Please send any articles or photos for the newsletter to Mary Staffurth: marystaffurth@yahoo.com