

BOURNEMOUTH & DORSET SOUTH BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

July 2019



Chairman's Address

Dear All

Well, when I wrote my last column for the newsletter I never imagined that we would have such a strange year weather-wise: a constant see-saw of change. Our bees have been quite affected by this. Queens have been frequently on/off lay. The weaker hives, with a lower number of foragers and less stores built up during the false spring we had - have needed feeding. I think that because of lack of food colonies have seemed a little more aggressive. I have not found this year to be particularly enjoyable bee-keeping wise!

What it did show us though is that hives coming out of winter strong and with good numbers fared well even during all that has happened. To me, this reinforces the lesson of good preparation of hives at the end of summer.

Thanks to great support from some of our Members we managed to run a Wannabee Day, Beginners Course and Basic Assessment Prep Course this year. I'm sure you will all join me in sending a big "thank you" to those that helped, who were (in no particular order): Kelly Smith; Helga and David Aldersey; Alla Neal; Peter Darley; Paul Mann; Anne Moran; Carole Trim; Mike Duffin; Bob Menz; Sheila Orr; Edward Lutley and Adrian Rozkovec.

Of course, it's always great to receive feedback from Members. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns or suggestions.

Best wishes,

Dave Neal Chairman@bads-bka.org

'Swarm out there!

Swarm calls this year are about the same as last, just over 100 calls by the beginning of June.

Forty per cent of calls are about bumblebees, mainly White-tailed (*Bombus lucorum*), Buff-tailed (*Bombus terrestris*) or the Tree bumble (*Bombus hypnorum*), but this year there were a lot of calls about solitary bees, usually the red mason bee (*Osmia bicornis*), or mining bees, usually *Andrena* spp. The Tree bumble is always in cavities, very often nest boxes; if a caller says "I've got a swarm of bees in my nest box" it will likely be the Tree bumble. Occasionally it's one of the other two but they prefer underground nests.



White-tailed bumblebees (*Bombus lucorum*) nesting behind an air brick, under the Editor's house © Emma Fisher

This year a call from a letting agency resulted in a visit to a house in Poole. The bees were in a nest box, this time Buff/White tailed, and the lessee was a retired veterinary surgeon from America. He said that he tried to get rid of the bees, "I put lavatory cleaner in the box and then a hose pipe, but they are still there". It was difficult to remain polite, but the bees were rescued.

Calls for bees found when old sheds are being removed or old wood piles shifted will be White or Buff tails. Where I can I persuade the caller to leave them until the bees have finished their life cycle (usually ten to twelve weeks) then the nest will be empty and the householder can carry on. But if they have to be moved I have some small plastic buckets with a round 20mm entrance in which I put straw and then try to expose and lift the nest out in its entirety, put it in the bucket and take it away to a new home. The bees are not always convinced that this is a good idea and can get a bit tetchy, but having 'bucketed' them I leave them and ask the householder to go out after dark when all the bees are inside and put a piece of washing up sponge in the entrance of their new home. This keeps them contained and with enough air to be comfortable. I can then collect the bucket - which should have all the bees in - the next day.

It's the same technique with Tree bumblebees in nest boxes: a sponge in the entrance after dark and the complete removal of the nest box next day. But you have to make sure that the box is sound. Unscrewing the back board from the wall and pulling it away to find the box disintegrating on your hand is too exciting, especially as the Tree bumble is the feistiest of all our bumbles.

Honeybee swarms can be almost anywhere but flat on the ground is a challenge, especially if you cannot see the queen. Trees, walls shrubs and gateposts are normal, the knack is to get good, clear space around the swarm before you shake it into the collecting box. A skep is OK, but a nuc. with an adjustable entrance (open/closed) and ventilation, or queen excluder, is probably the best. Even if you do get the Queen first time, she may leave straight away and you are back to where you started. The queen excluder setting helps to prevent that. The swarmed bees pitch up wherever they think is OK for the moment.

They are no respecters of place. I have climbed over building sites, compost bins, and manky dustbins; last week the caller had to move his Bentley Convertible for me to gain access!

It is never less than interesting! Where I can I move the swarms on straight away, but if I can't they are homed with me until a new permanent des-res. can be found.

But it is not all me: both Bob Menz, Ian Warmer and particularly Mohammed Saeed and his father, Ahmed, members for a couple of years now, have been of great help this season.

Bob and Ian also take lots of calls in their own right, and I would like to thank all of them for their assistance.

Peter Darley
Swarm Co-ordinator

Waitrose... more than just a supermarket

A big "thank you" to Waitrose (Wimborne) and especially Steph Roberts. One of our committee members, Brian Ironside, recently registered us as a good cause in the Community Matters scheme, the green token bins. Brian and Dave Neal were delighted to collect a cheque from Waitrose for £410. This illustrates how important bees are and that this is recognised by people. Dave said "This will go towards the many things we do in helping the local eco system and educating everyone interested in bees".



A Busy Bee Weekend for the Editor

Cast your mind back to late April... husband Tim & I had just returned from an Easter break, walking the West Highland Way - highly recommended for any keen walkers amongst you. As a result, our two colonies, who'd been left with plenty of room and a super each, hadn't had their usual weekly inspection, but then we hadn't expected record temperatures at Easter.

My brother and his girlfriend were visiting. "Let's walk the dog," we said, "and on the way we can pop in to our neighbour, where we keep our bees, and water her veg patch."

On arriving at our neighbour's, we found there was more to do than water the courgettes.... "There are a lot of bees here", exclaimed my brother....



A beautiful prime swarm, at a perfect height. What a gift! Tim returned home to pick up some kit, and we improvised with some play equipment that we found in a shed and a pvc tablecloth. The bees didn't appreciate the nuc box. Too small, by far. Two hours later we shook them a second time, into a brood box this time. Luckily they liked that, but by then there was a cast swarm in the same tree! We finally utilised the nuc box, then dealt with the Queen cells in the original colony, while brother Dave entertained the crowds...



The following day Alison Chopping, Peter Darley and I did some more entertaining. This time it was the Chorus Director of the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus, Gavin Carr and his wife Heather, for "a morning with the beekeepers". The Symphony Chorus regularly raises funds for all sorts of projects, tours and recordings, and Heather had bid and won a morning at High Mead in one of these fundraising auctions. Eventually we found a date that suited everyone.

Neither Gavin or Heather had any experience with bees; both were nervous, as we kitted them out in suits and wellies. We were delighted that Kelly was at High Mead that morning, preparing for one of the afternoon training sessions. With the hives open, time flew. Gavin and Heather were transfixed, quickly overcoming their initial anxiety. They clearly relished the experience, which is what the Association is all about.



Kelly explaining the mysteries of the hive to Gavin and Heather.

© Alison Chopping

Alison had made some honey biscuits (recipe in the March newsletter) and we gave them a couple of jars or High Mead honey to enjoy, but not this rather fine super frame!



Very impressive!
(You may recognise the suit)

© Alison Chopping

On arriving home, later that day, there was a voicemail from a friend in East Morden. "There's a swarm of bees in our chimney", said Janice. "Can you help?"



Driving over there in the gathering gloom, we then donned our suits. We did our best, lighting their wood-burner with just enough fuel to produce a decent smoke, hoping this would persuade the bees that this was not a sensible place to live, but to no avail. With night drawing in fast, and the house-proud friends in a mild panic, sadly this swarm did not have such a happy ending as ours a day earlier.

Fortunately for beekeepers, there are plenty of success stories too, as Peter Darley writes...

“The most interesting morning in years”...

Mrs Smith in Oakdale rang. A visit showed that the honeybees, which she said had been there since June last year, were in full occupation of a space under an overhang, outside an extension to a bungalow.

Mrs Smith was not concerned that wooden slats had to be removed to extract the bees and so Mohammed and Ahmed Saeed, along with me in a minor role, attended site in the morning of Thursday 20th June. We managed to remove the wooden slats and found thirteen beautiful combs of eggs, larvae, sealed cells and honey. Bees perform magic.



The shape of the overhang made it difficult to cut out the combs, but with patience and skill, Ahmed gently cut out each one and we placed it carefully in the Langstroth jumbo brood box that Mohamed had brought with them.



All the combs were cut out, put in the brood box and Mrs Smith was delighted to be given a full comb of sealed honey. She and her visiting friend sat there dipping their fingers in to the comb saying that they had not had such an interesting morning in years. Mohammed rigged up a stand on which to leave the brood box overnight and when we left things were looking OK.



However, next morning, Mrs Smith rang to say, “All the bees are back under the overhang!”

Ahh! On further investigation it became clear that above the void from which the bees had been cleared was a space between the roof felt and the roof itself. Careful removal of this felt revealed more bees and, presumably, the queen. These bees were decanted into the brood box and again the box was left overnight.

Next morning, Success!

All the bees happily in the brood box and able to be moved to their new home.

Ahmed, on the left here, Mohammed's father, is the experienced beekeeper having kept a large number of colonies in Syria. His handling of bees and combs is sure and gentle. Most of the time Mohammed and I were just spectators.



Thanks to Peter Darley for this vivid description. A beekeeper's life is never dull.



Literary Corner

"I hadn't been out to the hives before, so to start off she gave me a lesson in what she called 'bee yard etiquette'. She reminded me that the world was really one bee yard, and the same rules work fine in both places. Don't be afraid, as no life-loving bee wants to sting you. Still, don't be an idiot; wear long sleeves and pants. Don't swat. Don't even think about swatting. If you feel angry, whistle. Anger agitates while whistling melts a bee's temper. Act like you know what you're doing, even if you don't. Above all, send the bees love. Every little thing wants to be loved." - *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd

And finally...

At our last inspection, the bees were not impressed. Yes, you've guessed it... wasps! (well, it makes a change from *Vespa Velutina*). With the advent of wasp season, here are some thoughts taken from an interesting article kindly sent in by BADS member Graham Lovell...



Inside a garden shed in Petersfield. © Emma Fisher

The creator of this tiny marvel was a wasp. As beekeepers we often think "the only good wasp is a dead wasp". After all, they can create havoc in weaker honeybee colonies. But there's another side to these misunderstood creatures. For a start, they pollinate plants - just like bees. In some ways they're even more efficient, if only because there are so many different species - more than 100,000 - who do so many different things. They also have a healthy appetite for the pests that eat our plants and even house and blowflies. Market gardeners use them for biological pest control. They're particularly partial to whitefly. And they rarely sting us, unless we give them reason to.

Wasps have been around much longer than humans and they'll likely be here long after we're gone, with or without the help of Donald Trump. Now that's a reason to admire them!

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