

Beemaster

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In this issue

- 4 Diary dates
- 5 From the Editor, *Stuart Humphreys*
- Coronavirus**
- 6 Important message from the National Bee Unit
- 8 Coronavirus deprives Chinese bees, *Alison Knox*
- Local news and advice**
- 10 Notes from Norwell, *Griff Dixon*
- 12 View from the Vale, *Stuart Humphreys*
- 14 This month in your apiary, *Penny Forsyth*
- Association reports**
- 16 Nottingham region meeting, *Stuart Humphreys*
- Asian hornet updates**
- 18 NBKA Asian Hornet Action Team news, *Penny Forsyth*
- Articles contributed by Members**
- 19 An adventure 'up North', *Anne & Rob Mason*
- 20 In the news, *Stuart Humphreys*
- 21 Recipe of the month, *Linda Jordan*
- 21 Beelines
- 22 Advertisements

Cover photo: Pollen-laden bee on skimmia in March, Stuart Humphreys

Other photo credits: Stuart Humphreys

Please note:

Beemaster is published monthly. Contributions by 25th of prior month, please, to the Editor. Copy received after this date may have to be held over to the next Beemaster. The Editor retains the right to amend submitted articles or to reject articles which appear, in his opinion, to be unsuitable. Views expressed in Beemaster articles are not necessarily those of the Editor and may not reflect the opinions of the Council of the Nottinghamshire Beekeepers' Association.

Diary dates

Some videos for you to watch whilst *Staying at Home, Protecting the NHS & Saving Lives*

As you will all be aware, the current restrictions during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic means that the Nottingham region meetings for April and May have been cancelled; likewise, the Newark region meetings have been cancelled until further notice. The Lincoln BKA and NBKA auctions toward the end of March were, of course, also cancelled. The Honey & Honey Processing Day on 30 May organised by Leicestershire & Rutland BKA has also been cancelled.

The excellent **NBKA website** is regularly updated by Griff Dixon, so please keep an eye on that for the latest updates on the situation.

www.nottsbees.org.uk

Although the **BBKA Spring Convention** was cancelled, Anne Mason has kindly pointed out that three videos are available on the link below of the lectures Professor Tom Seeley would have given. The videos have been sponsored by the C.B. Dennis British Beekeepers' Research Trust and the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers.

www.bbka.org.uk/spring-convention-videos

The three videos, with Prof Seeley's descriptions, cover:

Bee Hunting. This presentation will show you a fun way to locate wild colonies of honey bees, using the tools and techniques of a bee hunter. It is a kind of treasure hunt, though these days the treasure is the discovery, not the honey in the bee tree. Sometimes, though, it will lead you to a beekeeper's hive, but that is fun, too!

The Lives of Bees. This presentation will give you an overview of what is known about how honey bee colonies live in the wild, that is, when they are not living in a beekeeper's hive and are not subject to a beekeeper's manipulation. In short, it provides a look at the true natural history of *Apis mellifera*, at least for the colonies that live in the countryside around the small city of Ithaca, New York, USA.

Darwinian Beekeeping. This presentation provides an introduction to a way of being a beekeeper who wants to let his or her colonies live as naturally as possible. This is an approach to beekeeping that is only relevant for a small-scale beekeeper, one who has just a few hives, and for a beekeeper who does not seek to get a lot of honey from his or her bees. It is appropriate for somebody who wants to relate to the bees more as a beewatcher than as a beekeeper

From the Editor

Stuart Humphreys welcomes you to this month's newsletter

Welcome to April's *Beemaster*, and many thanks to those of you who took the time to provide feedback on last month's newsletter – it's very much appreciated. It hasn't all been plain sailing though, as when Gerry Collins, our guest speaker at the Nottingham region meeting, pointed out that the winning photo for the Photography Cup was actually of a hoverfly rather than a honey bee!

Ironically, around half of March's issue comprised reports on various meetings, shows and conventions. A month later, we are all staying home and keeping our distance... On which subject, the Honorary Secretary has emailed all members with the advice the BBKA has provided about Beekeeping and Swarm Collecting during the pandemic; it is worth repeating here. Both statements are dated 24 March from BBKA Chair Anne Rowberry.

“Tending Hives during COVID-19. Bees are livestock and should be tended. You may visit your bees for welfare purposes such as for checking feed or queen cell preparation. You must take into account social distancing and safe access. Also swarming, please do not go into houses, roofs, etc., or go through houses to reach swarm. We are working with DEFRA. NBU inspectors will still inspect if you have disease concerns.

“Swarm Collection during COVID-19. The swarm collection service will still be in operation during the pandemic. Swarm collection can go ahead but you must take into account social distancing. Risk assess the situation and do not take unnecessary risks as health services will be under pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As always, only collect when it is safe to do so. We are working with DEFRA.”

Please refer also to the NBU's comprehensive message on COVID-19 on the next page.

My thanks go to all of this month's contributors... **Alison Knox** introduces an article about the impact of coronavirus-related restrictions on beekeeping in China (as if honey bees in that country hadn't had enough to put up with in recent years). Having only just recovered from winter flooding, **Griff Dixon** describes the impact of the lockdown on his beekeeping activities. He also discusses an aspect of beekeeping that, I suspect, affects us all, namely quite how heavy the hives become when full of bees and stores. **Penny Forsyth** suggests what we should look out for in our apiaries as winter turns to spring. We've got reports from meetings in those halcyon days of early March: my write-up of Gerry Collins' presentation on swarm control, and **Anne & Rob Mason** report back from the Lancashire & North West Spring Convention. Penny keeps us up-to-date on the Asian Hornet Action Team, including a call for us to participate in the concerted nationwide effort to monitor Asian hornet queens in the second half of April. Last but not least, **Linda Jordan** tempts us with a recipe for 'beehive cookies', a delicious suggestion for these days of self-isolation and social distancing.

Finally, I should mention that, breaking with long-standing tradition, there isn't an April Fool's article this time round... at least not an intentional one!

I hope you enjoy the read. And stay safe.

COVID-19 and Beekeeping

An important message from the National Bee Unit

As beekeepers, please be aware of the following guidance when looking after your honey bees. Updates to this guidance will be provided where necessary. You should keep up to date with the latest guidance issued by the Government as it is subject to regular change.

Defra, Scottish Government and the Welsh Government ask you as beekeepers to be responsible and to ensure that you continue good beekeeping practices, effective stock management and health checks whilst observing the Government's guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) on COVID-19.

You should follow Public Health guidance on social distancing. Everyone, including beekeepers, should avoid gatherings of more than two people and this includes at your apiary. You should maintain a distance of 2 metres between yourself and others to limit the spread of COVID-19.

General advice for beekeepers is as follows:

- You should continue to work and care for your animals in the normal manner, as far as possible. You should not take measures that compromise the welfare of the animals in your care.
- You should maintain good biosecurity at your apiary (<http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>).
- You should not share beekeeping equipment with other beekeepers, particularly hive tools and other handheld devices and protective clothing.
- In line with the general advice on COVID-19, you should wash your hands for at least 20 seconds using soap and hot water before and after you come into contact with any animal. Use hand sanitiser if that's all you have access to.
- There are currently no restrictions on the movements of bee colonies – for example, moving bees to fulfil pollination contracts. However, you should observe the public health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 when carrying out these activities, including the guidance on social distancing.
- If you are required to visit premises other than your own, you should familiarise yourself with the public health guidance on infection prevention and control and take measures to minimise the risks from contaminated surfaces. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>)
- If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, you should be self-isolating at home and should not be visiting other premises. Ideally, another beekeeper should take on this duty wherever possible. We are suggesting that local associations consider how they can support those confined or unable to attend their bees at this difficult time for all of us.

- If your bees are due an inspection by a government inspector, you should be aware that this may be subject to a delay depending on available resources within the inspectorate.
- If your bees are due an inspection by a government inspector, and you are in a high-risk group, or are showing symptoms of COVID-19, you must let your inspector know ahead of the inspection. Arrangements will be made that will limit the chance of COVID-19 being spread. This may include the inspection proceeding without the beekeeper being present or delaying the inspection.
- For all inspections, 2 metre social distancing will be considered the minimum and so the beekeeper will not be able to stand at the hive side with the inspector while the inspection takes place.
- Imports of bees are still permitted. There is no evidence to support restrictions to international movement or trade in bees, and the UK has no additional rules for bee imports with respect to COVID-19.
- You should report any suspicion of notifiable diseases or pests to the authorities in the usual way – please see the bee health page on gov.uk for further information. (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bee-health>).
- You should use husbandry techniques to minimise swarming. If you have to respond to collect a swarm you need to ensure that you use the guidelines on social distancing when collecting the swarm. If that is not possible, then the swarm then should not be collected. Therefore, trying to prevent swarms is the best approach.

Coronavirus deprives Chinese bees

Alison Knox introduces this article from March's Vita Bee Newsletter

I thought NBKA Members would be interested to read this rather sad and shocking report of the 'knock on effect' of the current state of emergency due to COVID-19 in China. I doubt many members of the public would even think about this aspect and the far reaching implications of colony losses and failed agriculture.

China has suffered a lack of bees and other pollinators since around 2012 as wild bees have been eradicated by excessive pesticide use and a lack of natural habitat. The most dramatic example comes from the apple and pear orchards of south west China.

In recent years, farmers have been forced to hand-pollinate their trees, carrying pots of pollen and paintbrushes with which to individually pollinate every flower, and using their children to climb up to the highest blossoms. This is clearly just possible for this high-value crop, but there are not enough humans in the world to pollinate all of our crops by hand.

* * *

Traffic restrictions are preventing commercial beekeepers in China from moving hives as the countryside comes into bloom, disrupting an important part of the food chain.

Chinese beekeeper Mo Jiakai should be as busy as the inhabitants of his 200 or so hives at this time of year.

He and his wife should be close to Chengdu in the southwestern province of Sichuan, ready for the colonies to make the most of the canola crops coming into bloom.

Instead the 48-year-old is stuck much further south near a city called Panzhihua, trying to keep the bees alive as blanket traffic bans imposed to stop the coronavirus epidemic put their livelihood in danger.

"We would have to go into quarantine for 14 days upon our arrival in Chengdu, which means the hives would be left to starve and die," said Mo, who has been in the beekeeping business for more than two decades.

"For beekeepers, life is an adventure chasing blossom, but how can we if roads are blocked?" Mo said, adding that "without flowers, bees would die."

Food crops heavily dependent on bees for pollination are also threatened by traffic disruptions in China.

Mo is among roughly 300,000 commercial beekeepers in China, many of whom have struggled to keep their businesses alive amid tight restrictions on travel throughout the country.

But the threat is not only to their livelihood – agricultural experts said that food crops that were heavily dependent on bees for pollination could also be in danger.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, of the 100 crops that account for 90% of the food eaten around the world, 71 rely on bee pollination.

That includes about 85% of the fruit in China, from apples, oranges and pears, to peaches and grapes. Honey bees are also widely used for pollination to improve the productivity of many crops, including soybean, a staple in China.

“The honey bee plays an irreplaceable role in growing almonds, pears and peaches as well as strawberries in greenhouses,” *The Beijing News* quoted Wu Jie, former director of the Institute of Apicultural Research under the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, as saying.

Wu said the production and quality of fruit would be lower without the honey bee.

The apparent suicide of a beekeeper earlier this month in Sichuan prompted the Apicultural Science Association of China to try calm fears in the industry.

In a letter to members throughout the country, the association said the beekeeper despaired to see his colonies dying because traffic restrictions kept them away from much-needed food.

It said that, at this critical moment in the national fight against the coronavirus, beekeepers should remain calm and “always value their own lives first.”

In a notice issued on 15 February, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Transport as well as the National Development and Reform Commission, China’s top economic planner, urged local governments to ensure the passage of freight essential for daily life – an order that also applies to beekeepers. But still Mo is stuck.

For Mo and many beekeepers, the traffic restrictions are yet another blow in an already tough business battered by climate change and the proliferation of pesticides.

“Now the winter is not as cold as before, so the climate in spring is unstable, which means that honey production has decreased for years,” Zhou Linsheng, another Sichuan beekeeper, said.

While China is now encouraging workers to gradually return to work, Mo said severe labour shortages also meant that it was difficult to find workers to help build the hives. Transport costs have also sky-rocketed.

“We are not welcomed by villagers who fear we will bring in the virus, even though we try to reassure them that we just stay on farms,” Mo said.

Mo’s only hope is that the coronavirus outbreak would be contained soon so that he and his honey bees can take wing again.

“I hope everything will return to normal in May at the latest so that we don’t miss the flowering season in northern China,” Mo said. “But before that, I don’t really know where to go, probably just go wherever I can.”

* * *

Original article by Laura Zhou who is a contributor to Inkstone, a daily digest of China-focused stories. She is a reporter for the *South China Morning Post’s* Beijing bureau.

Notes from Norwell

By **Griff Dixon**, including his Honorary Secretary's report

What a difference a month makes... from high winds and looking forward to the start of my sixth season with all the outside events lined up, beginners courses started and new season excitement... then wham! CORVID-19 – the whole world changes, putting people into isolation and lockdown, making changes to our lives that we never thought we would ever see or be involved in. All events cancelled, beekeepers having to stay home, and social distancing the rule of the day.

The Association, whilst ticking over quietly in the background, has become very limited in what it can undertake for its members. I am sure as beekeepers we are all helping each other to get through not only the management of their bees but assisting in other ways as we show compassion for each other as human beings.

Of course, the bees don't know what's going on in the world and just get on with doing what they do best. Those beekeepers that are lucky enough not to be self-isolating or being in lockdown can spend time doing essential livestock tending. Fortunately, I am lucky enough to be in that category and can tend to my apiaries.

My business is also still operational as we have just been designated as a critical supplier/contractor as a specialist environmental consultancy to a major chemical producer that supplies the medical industry, although we don't expect to have any involvement during the current global crisis.

March has seen Norwell Apiary spring back into life and the plan was to pool two out apiaries into one next to a massive field of oil seed rape, and to set up a new out apiary at the Horological Institute with new colonies and package bees from Murray McGregor at Denrosa Apiaries. Then, of course, the world turns on its head: the Horological institute shuts its doors in lockdown; and package bees, being of Italian origin, have to pass through an embargoed France, so that bit of the plan has been cancelled until next year.

The new set up next to the OSR has been completed with all hives moved by me and now all on pallets. Some polyhives were very weighty to move so I left them a couple of weeks and they got lighter as they scooped their stores – apart from one polyhive. That one polyhive I could not move, so I split into pieces adding a floor and roof to the other half and strapping it down. I then managed to move both pieces and joined them up at the new location. The bees were none too pleased and let me know it!

After my total disaster at trying to move hives to the heather last August (with floors moving away from brood boxes) I decided that for the wooden hives I would bolt the floor to the brood box and use the clamps style strap. Not one slip failure with the 20-odd hives I moved. I made a replica wheelbarrow hive mover – 'à la Maurice Jordan' – which also did not let me down. So, all in all I have learnt how to move hives quite successfully – it's only taken me five years!

Cromwell Lock hive has come through its flood experiences with plenty of new brood showing and surprisingly a lot of bees still around; they were bringing in pollen when I inspected earlier in the week. There are three new empty hives set up – that now won't have package bees – but will now be splits from mine around May/June time. I have promised myself some queen raising this year as I have the previous two years but never managed it.

My WBC in Caunton has also come through winter well with new brood present, though a bit low on stores so a sugar syrup visit planned shortly.

As the BBKA and NBU have advised, beekeeping is an essential occupation as is swarm collection although we must adhere to the social distancing rules and not go into homes.

I will endeavour to keep the website up-to-date. I have not been informed of any beekeeping groups using video conferencing or anyone putting hive inspections on line or setting up a beginners course on-line but I expect these things will happen at some stage or in the future.

Video conferencing for the next Council Meeting or even an interim Council meeting could be possible. Bob Logan has suggested this using Zoom but I have not had a proper go at that yet.

I hope that those beekeepers needing support for their bees are able to get to speak to an appropriate person and that 'beekeeping buddies' is evolving if it isn't already well in place.

Stay safe and healthy.

View from the Vale (of Belvoir)

How bees are faring in the south-eastern corner of Notts by **Stuart Humphreys**

The arrival of spring in our garden is marked, as elsewhere, by the appearance of the first butterflies emerging from their winter hibernation – first the Brimstones, followed a few days later by Small Tortoiseshells. The latter spend the winter in our outbuildings and, judging by the occasional wing that appears detached on the floor, many presumably fall prey to spiders and mice. Those that survive provide a welcome early splash of colour.



The Small Tortoiseshell above is photographed on the skimmia which starts to flower towards the end of March. Over the years it has grown unchecked into an enormous bush and, being just a couple of feet away from our apiary, must be the equivalent of a 'drive-thru' McDonalds for our bees. They certainly don't need much of a waggle dance to find it!



As the first week of lockdown coincided with a few warm spring days, we had the perfect opportunity to carry out a brief first inspection of our hives. The result: four colonies looking strong (with 8-9 frames of bees) and raring to go; the other two somewhat lethargic (3-4 frames of bees). All had brood in various stages and sufficient stores, so, as always, it will be interesting to see how they develop during April.

One of the weaker colonies had a frame of mouldy pollen. Despite the latest *BBKA News* stating (in response to a reader's letter) that there is nothing wrong with leaving this in the hive as the bees should eventually use it, I have zero tolerance for anything like that. Having removed the offending frame, I will get round to burning it on a day when the neighbours haven't got any washing out. Wasteful perhaps, but it is just my way.

We gave each of the four strong colonies a super; almost certainly much earlier than needed, but we have been caught out in the past by leaving it too late to provide extra space, and anything that has the chance of reducing swarming tendencies is fine by us!

Speaking of which, last year our first swarm was on 19 April. (This happened to be Good Friday – our bees do like a bank holiday!) Hopefully, this year we will be better prepared to avoid this. Touch wood.

We are wondering whether we will have any honey from oil seed rape at all this year. For the first six or seven years of our keeping bees, sometimes it seemed as though that was all we would get. But over the last couple of years I would say we have had hardly any. The farmers around us seem to be planting less and less, and one theory is that the strain they are using nowadays is less attractive to bees. And, of course, the appallingly wet winter may have out paid to any OSR this spring altogether; we shall soon see... (Penny also ponders OSR in her article on the next page.)

One postscript... We are used, of course, to the bees leaving their little brown streaks on our cars on the driveway, but we had thought they would show more respect than to make their deposits on or close our door knocker!



This month in the apiary: April

Penny Forsyth tells us what to watch out for as winter turns to spring

April generally marks the beginning of the active season with warmer days and the appearance of early blossom. After a winter of unceasing rain and endlessly unsettled weather we finally have some forage for our bees: the early snowdrops, hazel and alder have given way to wild plum and blackthorn, spring flowers and shrubs and my bees are taking full advantage.



There is little sign of oilseed rape in the fields around my apiary – the ground too wet at sowing time and the potential yield too uncertain thanks to the depredations of the cabbage stem flea beetle. The lack of OSR could be a blessing in disguise now that we are in virtual lockdown due to the COVID-19 crisis, although the BBKA has just declared that beekeepers may travel to tend their bees and that swarm collection may be carried out. Nevertheless, since many beekeepers may be unable to tend to their apiaries, obtain equipment or market their honey, a slower start to the season would be no bad thing.

Spring can be a dangerous time for our bees: the queens increase their laying rate as the days lengthen and, as stores in the hive dwindle, our bees need to go out foraging at every opportunity. No forage, no food and if poor weather prevents foraging there is the risk that our winter bees will perish before the colony has new foragers to take on the task. Bees can starve in an astonishingly short time – we beekeepers need to maintain our vigilance where stores are concerned and feed where necessary with syrup in a contact feeder once bees are flying freely.

The arrival of spring means it's time for regular inspections and the completion of any winter tasks we didn't quite get round to because soon we will have to turn our full attention to swarm prevention and control. Don't panic, there's plenty of help and information out there – just ask. If you need extra equipment and missed BeeTradex then you will have to rely on online purchases and home delivery now that the county auctions and the Spring Convention have been cancelled, but don't wait too long as demand will be high. It's going to be an interesting season...

Jobs for April



Continue to check stores by hefting, checking floor inserts or a quick look in.



Carry out your first detailed inspection if you haven't already done so.

Be clear what you are looking for:

- Queen present & laying?
- Brood at all stages?
- Good brood pattern with biscuit-coloured cappings?
- Bees looking normal & healthy?
- Acting normally?
- Any sign of disease or varroa mites (be sure to check floor inserts)?
- Are there enough stores to last the bees to your next inspection?
- Has the colony got enough room?



Check the queen's mark and renew if indistinct.



Add a queen excluder and super when the brood box is full of bees, not stores.



Replace any dirty, mouldy or damaged comb with frames of sterilised comb or new foundation or move these frames to the outside of the brood nest to replace later.



Read up on your chosen method of swarm control and assemble equipment.



Assemble the equipment you will need for swarm collection and read up on how to do it.



Set up Asian hornet traps and monitor closely: put a piece of foam or kitchen roll into the liquid reservoir to prevent non-target insects from drowning.



Keep on reading and asking questions but most of all, watch your bees and learn.

Regional report

Stuart Humphreys reports on the Nottingham region meeting held in early March

On 2 March Gerry Collins NDB came down from Doncaster to speak to the Nottingham region meeting on the subject of swarm control with a presentation entitled 'How do I stop my bees swarming?'. As someone who has conspicuously failed to master how to manage swarming behaviour, I was a particularly attentive member of the 60-strong audience. Overall, Gerry covered some 90+ slides in two hours, so this write-up cannot start to do justice to the information he conveyed. He also made a short presentation on bee diseases, but this article focuses on swarms.

Gerry started by reminding us – as if we needed it! – of the impact of swarms on beekeepers: public nuisance, the risks of collecting hard-to-reach swarms, the extra equipment required, loss of honey production, and the fact that the whole process is very labour-intensive. He explained why bees swarm, observing that natural selection favours genes for swarming, i.e. prosperous colonies are ones that tend to swarm.

On swarm triggers, swarming is more likely if the colony: has an old queen (she will be producing fewer pheromones); is doing well (plenty of stores or nectar available); is congested and overheated; and/or, has inherited excessive swarming traits.

Gerry described one of the first signs as being an increase in the number of queen cups. Once these contain larvae, it is clear that the bees have already been intent on swarming for several weeks (probably ever since you didn't give them a super for extra space...).

If you find several queen cells in various stages of development around the edges of brood comb (especially the bottom bars), these will be swarm cells rather than supersedure or emergency cells. In the week leading up to 'swarm-day', the queen will be slimmed down, the colony may appear less active as they fill their crops with honey from stores, and scout bees may start checking out spare equipment. Another possible sign is if the queen has reduced her rate of laying.

Timelines are, of course, critical. Eight or nine days after an egg is laid in the queen cup, the cell will be sealed. The prime swarm will issue on the next good weather day. (That's why it's important to inspect colonies every week rather than leaving it any longer.) Apparently, on swarm-day the scout bees 'pipe' to prime the other bees to get ready.

About a week later (Day 16) the first virgin queen will emerge. She pipes to the other queens; they respond by 'quacking', at which point the virgin queen seeks out her sisters and stings them to death through the sides of their cells. Thus, secondary swarms only occur if the workers prevent the virgin queen from killing all the other queens.

One thing to bear in mind is that colonies don't swarm in the absence of drones, and drone-rearing peaks about four weeks before swarming. Another thing to look out for is if the bees start putting pollen in the supers, as this suggests they don't have enough room for brood down below.

Gerry described various methods of swarm *prevention* (e.g. Demaree) and swarm *control*. These are described in all the usual literature and, for instance, on Dave Cushman's website www.dave-cushman.net.

Overall, Gerry's presentation was extremely informative although, I must admit, I was a little overawed by all the things I evidently need to be thinking about in managing the swarming process.

Nonetheless, some of the tips or reminders I took away from the evening included:

- During the swarm season (mostly early May to late July, but can include April and August), inspect your colonies every week. Don't be tempted to leave it that extra day or so.
- Super your colonies ahead of requirements as this will help reduce congestion in the brood chamber.
- Replace older queens as early in the year as possible.
- If you need to perform, say, the Demaree method of swarm prevention, do this regardless of the weather, even if it is raining.
- Wait until you observe unsealed swarm cells before carrying out swarm control.
- When inspecting for queen cells, use a feather to remove bees – don't shake a frame containing queen cells as this will risk damaging the larvae/pupae.
- Knocking off all the queen cells only affords a temporary 'relief' – at that point the colony will be able to produce a sealed queen cell within three days.
- Try and re-queen from low-swarving strains. So, don't use swarm cells from a colony whose queen is in her first full season, that produces lots of swarm cells, or that produces them despite being uncongested.
- Keep good beekeeping records as this will help identify which colonies have swarming tendencies. 'Breed from your best and cull the rest.'

NBKA Asian Hornet Action Team news

Penny Forsyth reports on the current UK situation

Current situation

As reported in last month's *Beemaster* the first Asian hornet of the year was found on 2 February by a member of the public in St Brelade, Jersey, after being disturbed from hibernation. It is now time to start thinking about monitoring for these non-native insects here on mainland Great Britain as over-wintering queens may be coming out of hibernation.

Keep your eyes open around your apiary and set up traps: if using a type with a reservoir for the attractant liquid, be sure to put a piece of foam or kitchen roll into the attractant to avoid the risk of drowning non-target insects and monitor the traps daily if possible, releasing any bycatch. A good bait for this time of year is beer mixed with Ribena. Beekeepers on Jersey have found a wicking bait station to be very effective and you can read about it and find instructions on how to make one via the link below. As part of a country-wide initiative to raise awareness of the problem, beekeepers and the general public are to be asked to spread the word and to help with Asian hornet queen monitoring by setting up bait stations during the period 13-30 April.

<https://www.ahat.org.uk/article/asian-hornet-queen-monitoring-13-30-april-2020>

The coronavirus crisis is, quite naturally, at the forefront of everyone's mind and it will inevitably impact upon the fight to contain the Asian hornet threat to this country. The nationwide lockdown and tight restrictions on movement will greatly hamper response to sightings and tracking and this will impact on nest destruction. It remains to be seen if restrictions will be lifted or reduced once sightings begin to come in. In the meantime, AHAT Co-ordinators will continue to function as points of contact and conduits for information. As always, vigilance is key.

The NBKA has now launched an AHAT Map on its website. For the public this will work in the same way as the Swarm Map which is drawing data in real time from the information in eR2. AHAT co-ordinators are taken from the officer section of eR2, and are shown with a blue 'pin' on the map. Individual members can also be set up as AHAT Verifiers to appear on the AHAT map. An additional tick box has been added to the member record, to indicate inclusion on the AHT verifiers map. If the member is already on the swarm list this is all that needs to be done, as the information displayed will be drawn from the Swarm Map fields.

Don't forget..... **See it, Snap it, Send it!** Non-Native Species Secretariat

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org> If you think you see an Asian hornet or nest be sure to report it immediately, preferably with a photo, via the Asian Hornet Watch app, downloadable for smartphones, or email details to: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk and please let me know.

Finally, if you would like to be involved in the NBKA Asian Hornet Action Team please contact me at pennyforsyth16@mail.com.

An adventure 'up North'

Anne Mason reports on the Lancashire & North West Spring Convention

Rob and I attended this Convention in early March in what seems like a lifetime ago!

I have been fundraising for Bees Abroad over the last seven years or so. It takes Rob and me on all sorts of adventures, meeting fellow beekeepers from different parts of the country, and giving us the opportunity to raise awareness of Bees Abroad whilst at the same time learning something new about bees and beekeeping.

Last autumn we were invited to join the Lancashire & North West BKA's Honey Show which we couldn't make, so instead we offered to join their next event, the Spring Convention taking place on Saturday, 7 March at Archbishop Temple School, Preston.

Our jolly included a visit to Tatton Park the day before and a wander round the gardens and arboretum before staying overnight not far from the venue. An early start is a must, so rather bleary-eyed we arrived at the school around 8am having checked where it was the previous evening. There were several stands including a Heritage Wild Flowers (selling native and naturalised British wildflower seeds and plants), Bee Ed (Thornes beekeeping supplies), Northern Bee Books, Northumberland Honey (Mead) and V&Js Lotions & Potions.

Jo Widdicombe from the Rame Peninsula in south-east Cornwall gave two talks entitled 'Getting started in Bee Improvement' and 'Taking Bee Improvement further – a National Programme'. He explained how to select and improve the quality of our bees from local stock rather than resorting to imported queens. Jo is currently the President of BIBBA and is the author of the book 'The Principles of Bee Improvement'.

Julia Piggott was the other speaker and she spoke about all kinds of bees in her talk about 'Bee Identification' and later spoke about 'The Bees Needs'. She is a local Bee Inspector and, with her husband, runs Bee Ed, a not-for-profit business which includes the Brigsteer Bee Reserve in Kendal, Cumbria. For more information go to www.beeed.org.uk for details about her talks, courses and the reserve itself, 17½ acres bought in 2007.

The adventure ended with a good trip home by car, and a feeling of having raised both awareness of Bees Abroad amongst the beekeepers that attended in addition to more funds from our sales, and finding out a bit more about bees and beekeeping 'up North'!

In the news

Stuart Humphreys curates a selection of recent articles from the news media

I had held back from last month's 30-page issue various articles that appeared in **The Guardian** in January and February. The first two relate to the challenges of using honey bees to pollinate California's almond crop, the third covers one aspect of how global warming might be affecting our bees' ability to forage.

Like sending bees to war: the deadly truth behind your almond milk obsession

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/07/honeybees-deaths-almonds-hives-aoe>

An in-depth report (from the Guardian's 'Age of extinction' series) on the industrial-scale use of bees in California's almond industry and the factors contributing to colony collapse disorder in the US. Dispiriting but worthwhile reading.

Hive heists: why the next threat to bees is organized crime

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/18/bees-hives-theft-stealing-organized-crime-threat>

Following on from the first article really, with almond growers paying \$200 per hive to pollinate their crops, hive thefts – not unknown in the UK, of course – are becoming big business in California.

Bees may struggle in winds caused by global warming, study finds

<https://theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/18/bees-may-struggle-in-winds-caused-by-global-warming-study-finds>

I have always admired our bees for venturing out during windy weather, but this study describes how high winds reduce the efficiency of their foraging activities.

I would admit that's all been fairly depressing reading so far, so to redress the balance a little, some good news on what happened to the bees sited on Notre Dame when the disastrous fire broke out last year...

They survived fire and toxic fumes. So, what happened next to Notre Dame's bees?

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/31/they-survived-fire-and-lead-poisoning-so-what-happened-next-to-notre-dames-bees-aoe>

Finally, a more than honourable mention must be made of NBKA members **Rukhsana Meherali**, her husband **Michael Browne**, and **Tim Axe**, as well as seasonal bee inspector **Tim Roper**, who feature in the 'Promoting local honey' article in April's **Beecraft**.

The byline reads: 'What do you get when you combine two local experienced beekeepers with a two-starred Michelin chef (Sat Bains)? A wonderful desert of ice cream, crème fraiche, pollen, camomile powder and grains – and, of course, honey.' The article describes how Rukhsana and Michael set up and manage the hives, the honey from which is used exclusively by Restaurant Sat Bains. A fantastic arrangement and tremendous (if not a little envy-making) achievement!

Recipe of the month: Beehive Cookies

Courtesy of **Linda Jordan**

Makes approx. 30

Ingredients:

4 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoon vanilla
225g (8oz) walnuts coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons plain flour
1 egg beaten
450g (16oz) shredded coconut
225g (8oz) dates chopped

Cooking method:

1. Mix together the egg, honey and vanilla.
2. Beat until well blended and stir in the coconut and nuts.
3. Coat the dates with the flour and add to the mixture.
4. Drop tablespoonfuls onto a greased baking sheet.
5. Bake at 170 degrees C (325 degrees F, gas mark 3) for 12 minutes or until slightly brown.

Beelines

Notices, views and news

Brackenhurst Apiary Manager, from Maurice Jordan

As they say, time and tide wait for no man, and time has finally caught up with me, I'm afraid, in so much that I have had to resign my post as Apiary Manager at Brackenhurst due to poor mobility. The present apiary site at Brackenhurst is on its fourth location since I have been involved. During this time I must have met and passed on to hundreds of beginners what knowledge I have acquired over 30 years of keeping bees. I have enjoyed every minute of it. Due to the corona virus I don't know when the apiary will be used again. I understand **Andrew Barber** will take on the task and there could not be a better person with a lifetime of knowledge.

From Mike Webster, NBKA Member

I have been a member with my bees for some 45 years and am reducing the number of hives. I have some excess parts for sale. Modified Commercial honey supers, brood chambers, roofs, crown boards, etc. I am based in Cotgrave. If interested, please contact me on 01159 893164.

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EXTRACTORS

Members may borrow the NBKA extractors - 4-frame, hand driven kept at Brackenhurst and hired from Maurice Jordan. An electric one (with settling tank) is held by Glenis Swift 0115 9538617. The EasyBee extractor which is useful for extracting frames that hold honey that has granulated is held by Frank Chambers in Calverton (0115 965 2128).

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