



Registered Charity No. 1121231

Newsletter

October 2020

Editors: Gwyn Marsh and Dorothea Jones

National Honey Show Online Conference

Don't forget to register to attend the Virtual Honey Show

<https://www.honeyshow.co.uk>

The Honey Show Committee has worked hard to ensure we don't miss our annual event. One advantage of the virus is that we are able to have both national and international speakers beamed into our homes!! There's a selection of workshops to choose from with a live question and answer sessions and interactive social events for the evenings.

This year's National Honey Show, 22nd to 24th October, will be a professional, online conference welcoming beekeepers worldwide.

Everyone is welcome to attend the event, free of charge.

Attendees will be able to attend lectures, demonstrations, visit our trade hall and take part in other exciting activities.

The AGM on Thursday, to which all members have been invited (see your emails for access details).

You will need to register (free) to tune in to any of the programmed events.

This can be done here: -

<https://www.honeyshow.co.uk>

or here:-

<https://www.facebook.com/nationalhoneyshow>

This Month's General Meeting

October 27th

7.30 - 9.30 Martin Hann and Clare Densley

Beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey

This should be a very interesting talk from 2 'insiders' at the Abbey.



Clare Densley has been keeping bees since 1992 and has worked at the Abbey for 10 years. She has also worked for two years as a seasonal bee inspector for Devon. "Working at the Abbey Bee department is the best job I have ever done. I'm so lucky to be able to indulge my passion for bees and get to share it with others." According to Clare Densley, the Abbey's Head Beekeeper, interest in bee-keeping is becoming fashionable.

Bee-keeping is the new yoga, really, she jokes. Everyone thinks they can save the world with bees, which is not quite true but there is that feeling about it. She adds: The main focus of our work is to promote gentle bee-keeping, working with the bees to promote better understanding of bees, and

to get involved in research which helps the honey bee. It's about being respectful of the bees, not pushing them too hard, not seeing them as a commodity, working with their natural instincts and not working against them. People can get much more out of it, she continues. The more you can understand them the more you can work alongside them rather than force them into a role we predetermined for them. It's learning from the bees and enjoying the bees.

Martin Hann has been working as a seasonal bee inspector for Devon and Cornwall for 3 years. We are incredibly fortunate to have Martin as part of our teaching, planning and maintenance team. His knowledge and experience complements and enriches the bee department's ethos to understand honeybee behaviour and therefore work with them as much as possible. The research in which the Abbey is involved includes combatting the Varroa parasite that has done so much damage to the British bee population since it emerged in this country in 1993. The Buckfast bees are also treasured for the contribution they make to the local environment in general. Forty hives each acting as homes to up to 80,000 bees during the summer months mean there may be more than three million bees active within a three-mile radius of the abbey. They fulfil a crucial link by pollinating flowering plants that in turn produce seed, nuts, fruit and vegetables.



Solitary bee *Colletes hederae*

Arnold Desandere

I was recently contacted by a beekeeper in Stokenchurch who could not understand why honeybees were flying in their thousands in his polytunnel during the day, not returning to their hives in the evening and dying alongside the structural beams.



On close inspection, these were not honeybees (*Apis Mellifera*) but ivy bees (*Colletes hederae*). Adults have creamy white stripes and are much less hairy than honeybees, making the striping more of a contrast but they do have a thick pile of ginger hair on the dorsal surface of the thorax, and fringes of ginger-buff hairs across the margins of the main abdominal segments.



female

They originated from Southern Europe, spotted first in Worth Matravers, Dorset in 2001 and subsequently in a single Devon locality but are thought to be all along the South coast of England. The first Essex record was of specimens feeding on Ivy blossom in October 2009 and the first observation of a nesting aggregation in Essex was in 2013.

Ivy bees prefer sandy or sparsely vegetated south facing lawns, banks and cliffs and tunnel lots of little galleries, fields can be full of them. You may see up to 20 nests per m² without vegetation and up to 300 per m² in areas with grass cover.

Whilst each nest only contains a single egg, they often aggregate in thousands of burrows in the same location (sometimes 3 to 4 cells clustered together) at a depth between 15 and 35 cm. By May of the following season, none of the larvae have reached pre-pupal stage (at which point gut contents are excreted), suggesting the bee overwinters in the larval state but by end of July, larvae in cells have pupated.



male

They spend most of their lives underground until late August and you only see them on the wings for a very brief period of time until early Nov. Ivy bees are active in autumn when most other bees have completed their life cycle which also means inter-specific competition is reduced.

Nectar and the all-important pollen are collected almost exclusively from ivy too (*Hedera helix*). The ivy bee is the only bee species that is specialised in ivy, other bees are known to be oligoleges of a plant family such as Asteraceae but never of a specific plant within a family.

Sexual behaviour

Males emerge first, then females. Males search for females to mate on average 7 days after emergence (they sexually mature earlier than *Apis Mellifera* drones), it often happens on the ground and looks like a fight between two bees but if you're familiar with the picture of a drone grasping a honey bee Queen from behind in flight, it looks similar except the female seems to be clinging to a grass blade.



Females are chased as soon as they come out of their nests by several males trying to copulate and eventually forming a copulation cluster (or mating ball) sometimes falling to the ground and the female mates with only one male. Females start digging and provisioning nests straight after mating and it is very common for them to use old nests and expand burrows before laying eggs.

The female gathers pollen to provision its nest cells and can be seen going into its burrow to unload its cargo and leave the nest after about 4 minutes, on average five or six pollen loads a day are needed to provision one cell (with the first flight being the longest probably due to feeding on nectar after a night in the cell) and females are able to provision up to 18 cells in as many days. The male does not gather pollen.

Does it sting? The likelihood of being stung or collided with when in an active aggregation is low, with an average of only 1 sting in 10 hours of activity (standing, walking, and “gardening”) by a human subject. The ivy bee sting is frequently unable to penetrate human skin as barbs cannot be seen at 35× magnification; their stings are significantly less painful than those of honey bee workers. Pain is often compared to that of a nettle sting, *Urtica dioica*. The ivy bee venom sac is 39% the volume of that of a worker honey bee.

There are two known parasites of the ivy bee: the beetle *Stenoria analis*, and cuckoo bees of the genus *Epeolus* which may threaten its survival. Let's hope they never become extinct as they are so beautiful to watch and we could do with some positive 'bee news'! They do no harm to anything and remember the best thing you can do is leave some ivy to flower - they don't need much else!

References:

<https://www.bwars.com>, information sheet: IVY BEE, Sep 2010.

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/ivyminingbee/> Last accessed Oct 2020

Bischoff, Inge et al, On the biology of the Ivy bee, zoological bulletin, issue 27- 36. June 2005

Saxton, S.M., Observations on the sexual behaviour of the ivy bee: *Colletes hederae* (Schmidt & Westrich) (Hymenoptera: Apoidea), Entomologist's Monthly Magazine 2009

Chalfont Beekeepers on YouTube

Did you know that there are a number of our monthly talks available to club members on our YouTube channel? If you missed a talk or would like to view one again, this is where you can find us.

Just go to Youtube and type in chalfonts beekeepers. You should find us there. If you press the red subscribe button you will be able to view the videos.



Varroa

The possibility of breeding varroa resistant bees

Some members may have joined the Windsor and Slough beekeepers for their very interesting and thought provoking talk by Steve Martin from Salford University to hear about the research he's engaged with, monitoring the levels of varroa in the honey population and the affects and effects on colonies of the various treatments or lack of intervention beekeepers use to manage infestation levels.

It appears, from his research, that any bee colony can, overtime, reach a point where they are able to manage varroa infestations to a minimal level. Obviously, this takes time and can result in colony losses until a varroa free-ish hive is achieved. Constant monitoring is essential, even when it appears there is no or little varroa. Neighbouring apiaries may not be as varroa free and drifting and drones are likely to bring mites into hives.

There has been 'discussion' in the beekeeping community about the effectiveness of using the same treatments annually, leading to thoughts that treatments should be varied from year to year. Steve Martin's talk gave a different dimension to this argument.

This year, without the input from Steve's talk, I opted not to treat any of my hives that had a mite drop of 5 or less per day. Time will tell! I'll let you know.

Chalfont Honey Show

The Chalfont St Giles Fete not being held this year almost put the kibosh on us having a honey show at all - but thanks to the efforts of a few of the committee, we managed to hold an albeit much smaller show and we didn't reach the 100 entries needed for a "blue ribbon" for the first time in over 10 years.



The honey show was staged in Bill Fisher's conservatory, which was a light and airy room, making the judging of the exhibits

easier. As usual for our area, the medium honey was the biggest class and the standard of the presentation of all of the exhibits was high. It was also good to see entries in most classes, even the novice section, which is often poorly represented. As judges, Bill and I enjoyed some very good honey and mead, loved the aroma from some nice fresh wax exhibits, thoroughly appreciated some honey sweets (thanks Gillian!) and we had fun judging one of the very few honey shows held in the country this year.

The best exhibit was the winner of the medium honey class - well done to Fiona and well done to everyone for making the effort to prepare and enter their exhibits.

Sue Carter

Well done to everyone who entered the first virtual honey show. Below are the results. Cups will be engraved and delivered to the worthy winners.



Class	First	Second	Third	VH Commended	H Commended	Commended
1 Two Jars of light honey	Nick Grey Showler Cup	Diane Bruce	Helen Cave	Alan Roberts	Edward Townsend	
2 Two jars of medium honey	Fiona Matheson Centuary Tankard	Dorothie Jones	Katharine McIntosh	Edward Townsend	Alan Roberts	Alison Thorpe
3 Two jars of dark honey	Diane Bruce Chalfonts Cup		Alan Roberts			
4 Two jars of naturally set honey	Gwyn Marsh Jones Cup	Helena Haywood				
5 Two jars of soft set honey	Mike Tucker Ronnie Mitchell Trophy					
6 Three jars of honey as offered for retail sale	Fiona Matheson	Nick Grey	Dorothie Jones	Mary Chris		Helen Cave
7 One cut comb, net wieght 7-9oz	Fiona Matheson					
8 Six blocks 1 oz of beeswax	Nick Grey	Meriet Duncan				
9 One cake of beeswax 7-9 oz	Nick Grey	Gwyn Marsh				
10 2 identical dipped or moulded natural beeswax candles	Helen Cave	Fiona Matheson	Mary Chris			
11 3 home-produced items	Gillian Jones	Nick Grey	Fiona Matheson	Helen Cave		
12 One bottle of mead	Nick Grey					
13 One wax model	Helen Cave Welford Cup					
14 One photograph	Katharine McIntosh					
15 2 identical decorative rolled beeswax candles	Fiona Matheson					
16 One jar run honey (clear)	Alison Thorpe Allen Mitchell Trophy	Katharine McIntosh	Dorothie Jones			Steve Troll

Tip of the month.

From Graham Burford

If, like me, you struggle to clean out the cone bit of rapid feeders with the propolis and wax deposits, try this tip from Graham.



We all know that whichever way up you drain the base of the feeder there is always some water left to drain out over your feet when you go to move it. Graham washes all his bee kit in his dishwasher. So, his very simple solution is to drill holes in the top of the cone. This allows water to drain out and doesn't interfere with the way the feeder works or cause the bees any difficulty accessing the feed.

Genius!!

Chalfont Beekeepers AGM

Tuesday November 24th 7.30pm

This will be held online using a webinar system which will allow voting to take place. Although this is not a very exciting 'event,' we are legally obliged to hold one and the club cannot progress to next year without it. This means we need a minimum number of members attending (a quorum,) excluding the committee, to be able to carry out the necessary voting etc. It is therefore important that as many of you attend as possible.

You will all be sent an email with a link for joining nearer the time and other relevant information.

Although there won't be the customary presentation of cups and prizes etc, it is a chance to hear what the club has been getting up to over the past year, ask questions....and to remind yourselves what your committee look like! Please put in your diaries. Fiona and the Committee.

News from the Apiaries

Stampwell - Cleaning Polystyrene Hives

At the Q&A online club meeting I was asked about cleaning Polystyrene Hives. I explained how I did it, but it's always good to hear what other people do.

In the August 2020 BeeCraft magazine on page 6, Stephen Lloyd Davis wrote a good description. He suggests, steam from a wallpaper stripper can be used to soften the wax and propolis so that it can be wiped off.

Then a 20-minute soak in cold washing soda solution, although if this is raised to 70C a 2-minute soak is sufficient. If the concentration of Washing Soda is greater than 10% it has some antibacterial properties.

After this treatment cleaning with bleach, he suggests, is not necessary. But the hive can be sterilised in a 0.5% cold solution for 20 minutes or a boiling solution for 2-3 minutes.

I thought there were some good ideas there and before use, I also coat all touching surfaces and frames runners with Petroleum Jelly to try and reduce the propolis build up.

When buying Polystyrene Hives, I look for hives using dense polystyrene with hardened plastic edges top and bottom, also hardened frame runners. A hive tool can make a terrible mess of these areas. Most Polynucs don't have hardened edges or frame runners and although good in the summer for swarms and small colonies, I'm reluctant to use them over winter because of the build-up of wax and propolis - bees also seem to enjoy chewing the polystyrene overwinter.

Jim Liness

P.S. from Gwyn - There is evidence that slugs are able to eat polystyrene!! I know of an Apidea which suffered severe slug damage - so store unused hives somewhere the slugs don't go and check over wintering hives in the apiary!!

Unusual visitors

Arriving up at the training apiary this week, confident that the previous wasp problem had been solved, we were met with further scenes of destruction on opening the door. Jars and tins from the shelves were all over the workbench and on the floor and a lot of things seemed had been moved about!

Evidence of the culprits was in the large amounts of 'droppings' (for want of a better word) scattered all over the place! We already suspected we maybe had mice in the shed and the previous week we had found 4 dead juvenile rats in the water butt ... ugh! After some discussion, we decided the only option was to empty the entire shed. This had not been our plan for the day!



So, here is what it all looked like
.....just as well it wasn't raining!



Not having reached the back of the shed for some time, we found all sorts of useful??? items we didn't know were there! By this time, the hives were active and bees were showing a distinct interest in all the supers etc now stacked outside!

We were accompanied in this task by the sound of the patter of tiny feet, and eventually the owners of said feet made their appearance.



Glis glis! Or the Edible Dormouse



For those who are not familiar, this rodent is a relative of the squirrel and confined in the UK to an area centred around Tring. It was introduced from Europe in the early 20th century and like the grey squirrel is considered a pest. This is a great pity as you can see how cute they are! There were about 3 of them we think.

They weren't causing any damage to stored supers or anything. This time of year, they are just looking for somewhere to hibernate. We found a cosy nest of shredded paper and shavings and a huge store of acorns and other nuts!

As they are a pest it is illegal to trap and re-release them into the wild. We decided that excluding them from their home didn't count as re-releasing. Nobody wanted to dispatch them to 'a better place'.

So, after all visible entrances blocked and everything returned to the shed, we crossed our fingers and headed home. Will they return? Watch this space!

Dorothie Jones

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