



NHBKA April & May 2015 Newsletter

A quick recap on our last indoor meeting. Amy Judge took us through some of the work of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. She began by asking us to name non-native species found in Hertfordshire and the rest of the UK. There were plenty of candidates; Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, floating pennywort, harlequin ladybirds, rhododendrons. Managing these species, which have become so problematic because they are so successful, is part of the conservation work of the Trust.

Woodland restoration often looks back to work done in the past to see how woodlands were conserved. It is generally true that there is more wildlife in the first 20m of woodland than in the centre. Balls Wood near Hertford is an example of woodland conservation undertaken to create space so that species can prosper. At the local reserve at Amwell, featured on Springwatch last year, the Trust worked with the RSPB to plant reed beds to encourage bitterns. Once grown, some of the reeds were cut back to create sheltered open pools where the bitterns could hunt. A good positive habitat was created for amphibians and invertebrates. The Amwell reserve supports 200 species of birds.

Not only is the Trust responsible for all the work on the sites they own but they also provide advice and support for about 2000 other wildlife sites in Herts, offering surveys, and management to help the landowners and bring benefit to the sites.

The nature reserves are the 'jewels in the crown' of conservation but alone these are insufficient to conserve the wildlife in Hertfordshire and it is not possible to demolish a housing estate where there was once a woodland. A new approach called 'living landscape' is mapping Hertfordshire to identify good pockets of habitation, and then grading them to use conservation in the best areas. It is a scheme that draws in the developers so that the best conservation advice is available when decisions on habitats are made. Stevenage Borough Council with their management of roadside verges and Harpenden Golf Club where conifers were replaced with broad leaf trees, and pond side vegetation was allowed to develop are examples where the 'living landscape' is working. This can also work on farms where the environment can be quite sterile for wildlife; Nicholas Buxton who farms the Easneye Estate next to the Amwell reserve has planted oak trees and 1km of hedgerows together with field margins where plants can grow freely.

Gardens can become roads for nature, with lots of different flowers types, insect hotels, and piles of bricks and logs for insects. We can help by creating our own compost, feeding birds regularly, and of course making our gardeners a safe habitat for hedgehogs. Springwatch devotees will already be familiar with leaving gaps in fences and disinfecting feeders.

Amy reiterated that the Trust's aim was to make sure what we have is kept and restored, and that developments are done in best way, conserving and not degrading the environment any further. A big thank you to Amy and the Wildlife Trust for an extremely informative and thought provoking presentation.

Frank took over after the refreshment break and started with his extraordinary recording of the piping of virgin queens; would the Beekeeper's Christmas Carol have eleven queens a'piping?. His recording was achieved after four hours of patient listening and waiting. It is an impressive sound – the first queen to emerge emits a piping noise and the other queens that are ready to emerge respond with a much fainter sound, muffled by the walls of their cells. This fatal game of hide and seek ends with the non-emerged queens being stung to death through the cell wall by the first queen to emerge. Frank talked us through some of the swarms he has attended including one in Gravely church where the swarm had settled on a chair in the church. Frank described the bespoke swarm collection box he uses that has a handle at the top. This provides a degree of manoeuvrability when you knock the swarm into the box and need to make sure the box is held securely. Once the swarm is boxed, the box lid (the base) is fitted and the box turned over. The box lid has a ledge so the bees can get in and out. Frank sports a pair of surgical gloves when he's collecting swarms, not to prevent stings (bees that are swarming are quite docile) but to avoid ending up with a sticky steering wheel on the drive home. Frank also described the removal of a bee colony from a shed. When the colony was exposed, the beautiful catenary comb could be seen, the new comb being paper white. The comb was cut out to fit frames and tied in; by the end of a week, the bees will have attached the comb to the frame all the way round.

Derrick described his method of swarm control that allows the bees to swarm but provides suitable spaces for the swarm after it has emerged. These spaces need to be of the right size and contain some drawn comb to encourage the bees to settle. These bait hives need to be at the correct height, Derrick has several suitable boxes located in trees, two metres off the ground. It seems the bees will settle in a box with 4/5 frames, so something like a nuc box is ideal.

In May, it was North Herts' turn to organise the 'Bee World' event at the Herts County Show. We arrived to find the allocated space somewhat smaller than previous years but we ended up with a decent set of stalls despite the children's craft table being squeezed between the bonsai and the succulents. We developed the bee friendly plants idea from last year and created a small garden area with plants, and several model hives. As we were in the horticultural tent with all the florists, one of the arrangers persuaded the organisers to include our little garden in the judging. We won a silver-gilt medal! You can see our winning design on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/NHBKA>, together with other pictures from the event. We had volunteers over the weekend from other divisions within Hertfordshire, and had two successful days selling honey, meeting the public and answering questions about beekeeping.

At the end of May, North Herts were in action again at the Healthy Bee Day in Knebworth. Keith Morgan, the Eastern Regional Bee Inspector led the day with the help of 3 Seasonal Bee Inspectors. They demonstrated good husbandry practices to reduce the possibility of bee diseases being spread by the beekeeper and had samples of pests and diseases so that those attending could see and smell brood diseases first hand.

A big thank you to Gary for being the principal organiser for both these very successful events.

This weekend, Saturday, 27th June and Sunday, 28th June, is the Walkern Magna Carta Fair celebrating the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta. The barons forced King John to agree to the Rules of Law enshrined in the Magna Carta Charter which limited the absolute power of the throne. Walkern's Baron was William de Lanvaley, whose fine effigy lies in St Mary's Church. North Herts will be running a stall over the weekend so why not go along, entry is free although numbers are limited, but you can download your free ticket at <http://www.walkernhistorysociety.co.uk/>. If you go along, look out for a beekeeper making a habit of beekeeping.

Our annual visit to Pat Veasey's apiary has been arranged for Saturday, 11th July, starting at 14:30. The apiary is at Gosmore Cross, Newlands Lane in Hitchin, SG4 9BD for the satnav beekeepers. Please let me or Gary know if you are attending so that we can advise numbers for refreshments. This is always an excellent opportunity to learn more about bee keeping and enjoy a splendid afternoon tea.

Training for new and prospective beekeepers continues at the Hillbrow apiary. We will be holding a BBQ at the apiary on Sunday, 2nd August starting at 16:00 so keep the date free. More details will be made available nearer the date

For all the events in our calendar look at the Calendar page on the website, www.nhbka.org.uk

We have acquired an additional extractor that Gary has refurbished with a new handle. It's an old-fashioned Taylor's 10 frame radial extractor and is available for member's to borrow. Please remember that the extractors need to be completely cleaned after you've finished with them.

We have received a request for a talk from Barratt Homes; they work with the BBKA to plant bee friendly plants in new developments and engage in in-school educational projects. They would like a beekeeper to talk to children about being a beekeeper, the importance of planting bee friendly plants and to take along some beekeeping kit to show them. The school is in Letchworth next to one of their developments. The date is flexible but would need to be before the end of term. If you are interested, please let me or Gary know.

We are in the middle of the swarming season although the majority of the 40 calls I have received so far have been about bumble bees. If you are interested in bumble bees, the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust are running surveys to monitor bumble bee numbers. Have a look at <http://bumblebeeconservation.org/get-involved/volunteering/opportunities/>

The crack Queen Marking Team of Frank, Derrick and John deserve a mention here; the following describes one of their days out.

The Queen Marking Team in Action

On 20th May, the Queen Marking Team of Frank Everest, and Derrick Richardson visited Colin Ware's hives at St. Ippolyts to mark his queens. Colin has two hives.

In the first hive, there were many queen cells, no eggs, and a small amount of brood that was 4/5 days old. Frank looked at one queen cell and there was a virgin queen about to emerge. All the other queen cells were destroyed and the virgin queen was released from the cell, She emerged 'like a greyhound' (Ed. Or perhaps a virgin queen on a mission). The virgin was not marked as this was likely to make her unacceptable to drones.

In the second hive there was a good strong colony. In the top box, Frank looked at the brood pattern and on the fifth frame he indentified very recently laid brood (by age of brood and eggs) indicating that the queen was on this frame. The queen was found on the other side of the frame. The queen was marked and the hive closed.

The telephone rang just as tea and biscuits were offered. There was a swarm in Essex Road in Stevenage. The Queen Marking Team left without the promised refreshments to attend the swarm. The large swarm was at head height in an apple tree. While Frank held the box to receive the swarm, Derrick shook the branch and the swarm dropped into the box. The box was turned over on the ground, and peace and quiet returned as all the bees were boxed. This time the tea and biscuits were delivered and consumed. The swarm was taken to John Hill's apiary at Box Wood to unite with a smaller colony. A swarm cannot be run in to another colony as it will have a different scent and would be rejected so the flour method was applied. The recipient colony was opened and flour was sieved onto the bees. An empty super was placed on top of the receiving colony and the swarm was knocked into the super whilst at the same time being covered with flour. The roof was then replaced.

Before leaving Box Wood, Frank took a call about a swarm at Pat Veasey's in Gosmore. Derrick declined the offer of helping with the second swarm (he'd probably had enough tea and biscuits) so Frank attended on his own. The swarm was collected and was housed in a spare hive.

The marking of the queens and the collection and dealing with the two swarms had taken three and a half hours. Frank demonstrated the skill of an experienced beekeeper, looking through frames with an eye to spotting the difference between brood that is hours old, and brood that is days old, and doing this quickly enough to find the queen before she disappears onto a different frame. Thanks to Derrick for recounting a busy few hours in the life of the Queen Marking Team.