

NHBKA October 2016 Newsletter



Gary welcomed us to our first winter meeting and in the small but attentive audience it was a pleasure to see a few members whose faces have been absent for a while. Gary opened with a brief review of the recent season. If you cast your mind back, last winter was unusually warm; it seems from the recent forecasts and the dire predictions of the erratic movement of the polar vortex (whatever that is), a similar winter is unlikely and instead it will be extremely cold. Gary experimented last year with polystyrene wrapping for some hives and found a reduction in the take up of fondant, and will continue the experiment this winter on the hives at Hillbrow. After a dismal spring and early summer, the weather finally picked up and Gary was impressed by the speed his supers filled towards the end of the season. In fact the summer seemed to linger on with lots of nectar being brought in through October. Chris Mercer mentioned that he'd even seen drones around which is unusual for the time of year. Gary reported that his bees had given him his first honeydew honey, almost jet black in colour. The mild end to the season has meant that wasps have continued to be a problem and as I write there a few continuing to run the gauntlet of the guard bees. This of course bodes ill for next year when we are likely to see an increase in the number of wasp colonies because of the increased number of queens.

Gary ran through the various events where North Herts had participated over the season; Walsworth Common Fête, Bee Disease Day, Triangle Gardens Open Day, Stevenage Day, Kew Gardens, Willian Village Fête, Hitchin Market, Hitchin Apple Day. If you fancy helping run a stall, let us know, we are always looking for volunteers!

The main event of the evening was a presentation by Dave Fewell entitled Bee Morphology and Bee Characteristics. Dave guided us through the several races of the European Honey Bee (genus *apis*, species *mellifera*) and their various positive and negative attributes; the Carniolan (race *carica*), the European (*mellifera*), the Caucasian (*caucasia*), and the Italian (*ligustica*).

Under the heading, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, Dave started with Brother Adams' Buckfast Bee. Karl Kehrle joined the monastery at Buckfast Abbey as a Benedictine monk and was known as Brother Adams. He began beekeeping but in 1916 the majority of his colonies were wiped out with the Isle of Wight disease (*Acarapis woodi*). The following year he created a productive bee that was resistant to the parasite, the bee became known as the Buckfast Bee. The average yield of his Buckfast colonies was 66lbs with some colonies producing several hundreds of pounds of honey. Today there are no bees at Buckfast Abbey and the Buckfast breeding programme continues in Denmark. I found this quote about Brother Adams –

'He was unsurpassed as a breeder of bees. He talked to them, he stroked them. He brought to the hives a calmness that, according to those who saw him at work, the sensitive bees responded to'

An aspiration for us all! So Much for The Good. The Bad being the African Honey Bee and The Ugly, The Killer Bee, or the Africanised Bee. The later being very aggressive and defends in large numbers.

In his discussions of Bee Characteristics, Dave identified the headings used to compare the characteristics of his bees; docility, honey harvest, swarming, and hygiene, scoring each with a value from 5 (most desirable) to 1 (least desirable). For example, for docility, 5 would be scored for bees that didn't sting during manipulations, and 1 for bees that were aggressive, the aim being to produce colonies where no score for any heading was less than 3.

Morphology is the scientific study of structure and form in animals, and for bees the main defining characteristics are Body Size, Colouration Pattern, Wing Venation and Hairiness (Pilosity). Although these are important Dave did mention that the morphology of the bee keeper, and how the bees were handled was as important!

Many thanks to Dave for an absorbing and interesting discussion.

Gary mentioned the various training courses in North Herts and the other Herts Divisions. We are running another Bee Awareness Day in January following further interest after the one we ran in October. We are rerunning the Beginners Course in March through into April. The course is over 5 Sundays, with an apiary visit, and costs £65 with each participant receiving a copy of the BBKA Bee Manual, so good value for money.

Welwyn and St Albans are running Basic Assessment Courses, and there is also a New Season Preparation and a Swarm Collecting course in Herts. Details of all courses are on our web site.

Chris Mercer brought us up to date with various propositions being raised by Herts to be submitted to the BBKA ADM in January. There have been suggestions that to make BBKA more accountable, individual members should vote on issues (OMOV) rather than them being left to delegates and trustees, even though the response from members in the recent BBKA survey was extremely poor.

Our next indoor meeting of the winter season is on Tuesday November 22nd at the Mrs Howard Memorial Hall in Letchworth. Our guest speaker will be Phillip Harkness of Harknesss Roses who have been breeding roses in Hitchin since the 1950s. Harkness have won numerous gold medals at the Chelsea Flower Show and many of their roses are national favourites. Phillip will talk on how they breed and select new strains of roses from the tens of thousands that they grow, a process not dissimilar to the selection of queen bees to breed from.