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NEWS

East of Scotland Beekeepers' Association

ISSUE 10, AUTUMN 2014

For your diary

ESBA DATES

AUGUST 23Heather picnic at Glen Clova,
directions to be sent by email**SEPTEMBER 5, 6, 7**Dundee Flower & Food Festival,
Camperdown Park.
Entrants and volunteers required.
Contact Andrew Masson
(see also News In Brief on page 2)**OCTOBER 1**2014 SBA lecture tour: "Are Current
Problems Really That New?" by Pam
Hunter, Dalhousie Building, University
of Dundee, 7.30pm. (see page 3)

OTHER DATES

SEPTEMBER 9Perth & District Beekeepers'
Association (PDBA) lecture:
"Bumblebee Conservation Trust" by
Anthony McClusky, St John's Episcopal
Church Hall, Perth, 7:30pm.**SEPTEMBER 20/21**Fife Flower Show: Dobbies Garden
World, Duloch Park, Dunfermline,
Saturday 11am to 6pm, Sunday 9am
to 5pm.**September 27**SBA Autumn Convention: SRUC Barony
Campus, Dumfries.**OCTOBER 14**PDBA lecture: "Pollination" by
Margaret Lear, St John's Episcopal
Church Hall, Perth, 7:30pm

ESBA contacts

President: Gavin Ramsay
Vice President: Derek Uchman
Secretary: Colin Smith
Treasurer: Stan Franklin
Flower Show Convenor: Andrew Masson
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Welcome

Well, I hope you've all had a busy summer, harvesting plenty of honey.

If so, why not enter some of your finest jars or comb for the honey judging at the Dundee Flower and Food Festival? See the "News In Brief" column on page 2 for more details.

This issue opens with the results of the ESBA's survey of losses over winter. Members seem to be doing a great job taking colonies through to the spring. Well done to you all.

We also have some sad news with the death of Andrina McCormack. She was well-known member of the ESBA, and attended many lectures, wrote for the ESBA News, and helped out with the association's stand at the Flower and Food Festival.

Elsewhere, Gavin Ramsay brings us the second installment of his series on wild bees (page 3), and Bill Hunter recounts two visits to the association apiary in spring.

Derek Uchman

ESBA survey of colony losses during winter



Photo courtesy of Vita Gallery. Vita (Europe) Ltd.

The ESBA has conducted its second winter losses survey with a view to informing members on how well our bees are faring as an association. Bill Hunter and Gavin Ramsay have collated the results.

"There are two kinds of people in the world, observers and non-observers..."
 — John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*

Recurring themes at association meetings are the importance of treating for the *Varroa* mite and of preparing colonies for winter.

We carried out a poll of members to establish winter survival rates covering the 2012/13 winter, a particularly harsh season in terms of weather. However,

here on Tayside we appeared to get full sized colonies through reasonably well (20% loss rate) and the problem appeared to be with loss of weaker nucleus colonies (50%)

We have repeated the survey again this year. Members were contacted by email or phone to gather data on the survival rates

for winter 2013/14. We collected reports from nine members and also covered the ESBA website. A total of 84 strong colonies went into winter and the loss of 11 were reported (13%). Of nine nucleus colonies (five frames of bees or less) six

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www.eastofscotlandbeekeepers.org.uk

The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the ESBA

Sudden death of Andrina McCormack

Former ESBA member Dr Andrina McCormack died suddenly in May, aged 63.

She was an active member of the association contributing to the newsletter, and helping out at the ESBA's stall at the Dundee Flower and Food Festival.

Andrina had more than 30 years' experience in the field of psychology and most recently worked out of Brook House, in Broughty Ferry.

She was also a prominent figure in Monifieth, where she lived, and held a number of key roles in community groups, including the Monifieth Area Partnership, of which she was chairwoman for a number of years.

Andrina graduated from Edinburgh University with an MA in Psychology and French in 1972 before going on to complete a

postgraduate diploma in education at Dundee University.

She worked as a special education teacher in Edinburgh and as a principal teacher of learning resources in Dumfries. She later worked as a psychology lecturer at Stevenson College in Edinburgh, Queens College in Glasgow and Dundee's Northern

College, and wrote a number of books.

Andrina also completed a PhD in Education/Social psychology at Glasgow University and held a Masters degree in Child Development.

In 2007, she graduated from York University with a Masters degree in Applied Forensic Psychology.

Since 2001, Dr McCormack worked as a clinical psychologist in Broughty Ferry, specialising in stress and depression in children and young people, and psycho-legal assessment.

Andrina was not married and is survived by her younger brother John and sister Katherine.



ESBA winter losses survey (continued)

survived with loss rate of 33%.

Substantially fewer nucleus colonies were taken forward to winter compared to last year, which appears a sensible strategy given that a 50% loss rate was previously observed.

The statistics are influenced by four of our more experienced members who all maintain nine colonies or more. The loss rate of those beekeepers is around 12%, whilst for the others it is 20%. Seems that experience really does count.

Again members were asked about possible reasons for colony losses. This can be a difficult question to answer, notwithstanding that there may not be a single obvious reason but a combination of factors might contribute.

But members consistently noted issues of isolation starvation and queen failure as factors.

All members reported *Varroa* treatments in the autumn (e.g. Apivar or Apiguard) and winter

(oxalic acid dribble) were being employed.

So overall, members appear to have done well, treating for *Varroa*, preparing and mainly taking strong colonies through to the spring.

With an almost perfect spring then the colonies have had optimal conditions to build up.

If this keeps up then there will be a bumper crop on display at the Dundee Flower Show. We look forward to seeing you all there.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Flower show appeal

As you may have seen in the Dates For Your Diary (page 1), the Dundee Flower and Food Festival is fast approaching.

Andrew Masson has put in a huge amount of work organising the ESBA's presence, but he needs help to man the various stalls during the event. If you can volunteer your services, please get in touch. His details are at the foot of page 1.

The ESBA would also like to encourage as many entries as possible for the honey competition. If you are new to beekeeping, please submit an entry into the novice class. It's great fun, and, who knows, you may come away with a cup.

Committee members will be happy to give advice on showing honey.

New Beemasters

The following members of the ESBA have passed the SBA's Basic Beemaster module: Bill Hunter, Derek Uchman, Gavin Ramsay and Kelly Callwood.

You can't fool honeybees

New research suggests honeybees use 'mental maps', and are able to recognise familiar landmarks in order to find their way home.

It had previously been believed bees primarily use the sun to help them navigate but a new study indicates their ability to build 'cognitive maps' and remember specific elements of a landscape could also play a part.

An international team of researchers 'confused' a group of bees, causing them to misinterpret the position of the sun. They did this by putting them under general anaesthetic for six hours, thus scrambling their biological clocks.

However, rather than send them way off course, the confused bees returned to the hive with similar speed and accuracy of those that hadn't been disorientated, suggesting the building of 'mental maps'.

<http://tinyurl.com/q6j93sf>

Neonic link to birds

The neonicotinoid pesticides are blamed by many for having a role in the decline of honeybees.

Some researchers, however, controversially think they may also be harming other creatures, perhaps catastrophically.

In a study of neonicotinoids and bird populations in the Netherlands, biologists found that as neonicotinoid levels rose in streams, lakes and wetlands, populations of insect-eating birds declined. The pesticides may have reduced the insects on which they rely.

<http://tinyurl.com/omuocqx>

The beekeeper's calendar

AUGUST

1. Move hives to the heather (weather permitting)
2. If not, feed your colonies
3. Treat colonies with Apiguard (or Apivar).

SEPTEMBER

1. Bring back from the heather and harvest
2. Reduce hive entrances
3. Go to the Dundee Flower and Food Festival

OCTOBER

1. Add mouse guards
2. Heft hives and complete feeding early in month
3. Attend ESBA lectures

Wild Thing

2. The Common Colletes

Plastic bags are an environmental menace. In fact, the Scottish government is about to start charging us 5p for each one we use. However, there is a bee which makes its own. Gavin Ramsay explains.

This issue's tale is about a bee that makes transparent polyester bags for its babies, a bee that drinks and makes its plastic bags with a forked tongue. Have I gone bonkers?! No, read on.

This wild bee is the common colletes or mining bee, *Colletes succinctus*. The Colletes bees are also known as the polyester bees, following the discovery that they secrete lactones from their Dufour's Gland to create a transparent plastic to line and stabilise the burrows in which they raise their young.

Keep a look out for this fairly common neat little solitary bee in heather areas. You may see it on flowers or possibly on daisy family plants such as ragwort or creeping thistle.

Peaking in July and August, it flies throughout September too in some years. It is not unlike a diminutive honeybee in colour and shape, with neat whitish stripes on the dark abdomen and a rich brown thorax. Like several other solitary bees it often nests colonially, sometimes with thousands of individuals at favoured sites such as cuttings and eroded river banks.

Colletes bees have areas of hairs on their hind legs (the scopae) rather than hair-fringed baskets of honeybees (the corbiculae) to assist the carrying of pollen masses. The pollen appears spread over a larger area than is seen in honeybees.

Clearly, making burrows in unstable habitats



Photo courtesy of Steven Falk.

is a risky strategy for a bee. However, that neat trick of lining the cavity with waterproof polyester before provisioning with pollen and laying an egg will reduce the risk and protect the developing offspring to some extent. It may also discourage predation as extracting the juicy morsel will be difficult. The ability to produce a natural linear polyester is only known in this group of bees.

There are other Colletes bees around. A couple of weeks ago there was one feeding off creeping thistle in my Kingoodie garden, just metres from a steep sandstone slope ideal for making burrows. This one could have been *Colletes daviesanus* although there are other possibilities.

Explore the BWARS website if you'd like to know more. One excitement in the solitary bee world which you can read about there is the discovery of a new species, the ivy bee (*Colletes hederæ*), in southern Europe in 1993. This species, like the tree bee reported in the last issue, was first seen in the UK in 2001 and is rapidly extending its range. It has now spread right across southern England and maybe one day we will see this late season bee here too.

Further reading: www.bwars.com



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Early

Pam Hunter lecture

The ESBA is hosting a talk by Pam Hunter, who is the SBA touring lecturer this year.

Her subject is "Are Current Problems Really That New?" and the talk will be held in the Dalhousie Building, Dundee University, on October 1, 7.30pm. The lecture is open to all, including non-ESBA members, and is free, but donations will be welcome.

Pam is, by profession a microbiologist who has spent about three decades in the pharmaceutical industry. She is also meetings secretary of the Central Association of Beekeepers, a member of the exam board of BBKA and a member of BIBBA.

Furthermore, she has written several articles about beekeeping, especially

scientific aspects, and the interaction of plants and bees.

Her talk discusses many of the peculiarities claimed to be new – drone laying queens, supercedures, difficulties in mating etc.

Although some of these problems are more acute now, she suggests that many are explainable and can be found in the literature.



The Dalhousie building



On both days Dorothy looked after us with tea and coffee in her garden and as always, the best biscuits.

May in the ESBA's apiary

By Bill Hunter

"The world's favorite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May."
Edwin Way Teale



How many beekeepers do you see? Check again —one is very well camouflaged.

There were two events at the association apiary in May —an ESBA apiary visit and a beginner's session.

After a mild winter and then a glorious spring, the bees in the association apiary, surrounded by the fruit trees, meadow flowers and a few fields of oil seed rape have absolutely thrived.

On the apiary visit they gave us opportunities to spot queen cells and virgin queens, brood at all stages and to consider the decision making for colonies at different stages of

build up.

There was lots of bee-chat and, as ever, a great opportunity to get the thoughts of our most experienced beekeepers and to see them working and reading the colonies.

For the beginners session it was a chance to get hands-on experience and to recall some of the details given earlier in the year even to assemble a frame or two.

Gavin supervised both sessions and took copious notes — as least that's what he said.

Beekeeper under the microscope



I am Lizzie Potts and live in Auchterhouse at 800ft on the edge of the Sidlaws. I have a largish garden from which I took down over 36 leylandii . That was 10 years ago and I have been breathing life back into the garden ever since.

My passion is the outdoors and I enjoy walking and climbing in the Scottish hills and abroad. I also enjoy the adventures provided by sea kayaking and can't get enough of Scotland's stunning coastline and wild islands which are great for a remote camp.

In my spare time I work for a local authority in staff development — a long way from my original training.

1. How and when did you become a beekeeper?

I first took up beekeeping when I was in my 20s. I was studying at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and someone was leaving and wanted to hand his bees on.

A fellow student and I took them on for the next two years. The honey tasted rich with many layers, no doubt from some of the exotic species available to the bees.

We collected a few swarms in the gardens. There can't be many beekeepers who collect a swarm with their own constables, lots of tape cordoning off the area and a crowd!

I learnt a lot then but it was another 30 years until I came back to beekeeping.

2. What do you think is the best reason for being in the ESBA?

The learning, which I have found invaluable. It is definitely an art not a science so there are no 'answers' when, how often, how much. So that sharing of knowledge has been vital for me. You can't find that in a book or website.

Also the support I have received has been invaluable, sorting out my swarms and learning to do routine inspections.

The passion of established keepers is infectious and motivating. There is also the consistent message of caring for your bees appropriately so they thrive.

3. How has beekeeping changed since you started?

Varroa was a threat when I started. It was something people were aware of but it had not yet arrived. It is now part of what you have to do.

4. How much time do you spend with your bees?

As I have them in my garden I visit them every morning before I go to work. Just to say good morning. Then again in the evening.

In between I do try not to go in too often, though I am curious to know what is going on ... Are there eggs? Are there drones yet? Have they gone now? Is that brood or stores under those caps? Where is she? So I have to stop myself looking.

5. How many hives do you have?

I had one hive at the start of the season. That was the maximum number I set myself. Now I have three.

6. Which hives do you prefer? And why?

I have Nationals because Iain Lily says they are the best!

7. What is your most important piece of kit?

My bee veil! Have been stung on the face three or four times this year. It is not pretty.

8. What precautions do you take to beat disease?

I monitor *Varroa* and have used Apivar which seemed to help. I used thymol (very smelly) in feed last year too.

I use a washing soda dip for my hive tool between hives and have a flame gun for sterilising my supers (that is fun).

9. What do you like the most about beekeeping?

The learning journey has been fascinating. I am really interested in how the bees interact with their environment both inside and outside the hive.

I love seeing the bees at work in my garden and enjoy discovering what the bees like. I am learning to develop a bee garden for all seasons.

10. Are you optimistic about the future of beekeeping?

I think you have to be. The alternative cannot be contemplated.

11. What one piece of advice would you give to people starting out?

When the experienced beekeepers laugh at you when you say you want to have only one hive ... there is a good reason.