

July/August 2014

# Wealden Apiarist

Newsletter of the High Weald Division of the Sussex Beekeeping Association

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## **EDITORS BUZZ....**

With all the lush growth the mild spring and warm weather has produced, it's worth remembering the fabled June gap. On a recent apiary visit, it was found that one colony had actually starved. Admittedly, this was largely due to rape seed honey which had solidified to such an extent that the bees were unable to extract it. However, it would be worth checking that the bees are still bringing in stores and are not suffering from the June Gap, although this year seems to have seen a fairly constant supply of forage.

*John Lyte*

## **High Weald Beekeepers Events Diary**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Address</b>
Thursday 10 <sup>th</sup> July	Bee Banter	White Hart Crowborough
Tuesday 29 <sup>th</sup> July	Bee Banter	Rose & Crown Mayfield
Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup> August	Bee Banter	White Hart Crowborough
Tuesday 26 <sup>th</sup> August	Bee Banter	Rose & Crown Mayfield
	Apiary Visits during this period will be announced via email	

## **Tree Bees**

There's been a lot of talk in the media about Tree Bees, with many panic calls from people thinking they're a swarm of honey bees. Brian Hopper provides a very interesting insight into this intriguing animal.

## What Bee Is It?

Brian Hopper



thewaspman.com

As one of the registered BBKA local swarm coordinators I get many phone calls from members of the public with a 'bee' problem but who have no idea of the difference between honey bees and wasps, let alone bumble bees, solitary bees and even hornets.

A few calls are about honey bees but this year over 90% have turned-out to be bumble bees under the eaves of houses, in sheds and bird boxes with around twenty to thirty calls a week during late May and early June – which is far more than usual concerning bumble bees. Having visited a proportion of the calls to check for myself I gradually came to the conclusion that I was dealing with the same species of bumble bee namely the Tree Bumble Bee, *Bombus hypnorum*.

This insect is a new addition to the UK's fauna having been first reported as recently as 2001 and being a dweller in trees rather than holes in the ground as with most other bumble bees, it has attracted growing attention. However, in urban areas it has largely forsaken trees for eaves of buildings, bird boxes and even the outlet pipes of tumble driers!

It is distinctively marked being the only bumble bee with a black head, brownish-orange thorax and black abdomen with a white tail. The reason for such an increase in sightings is probably due to the mild winter and warm spring which has allowed more than the usual numbers of hibernating queens to survive the winter and build-up early rather like honey bees have this year.

If you get questions about such bumble bees explain that unless provoked they are not aggressive and are useful pollinators in gardens and for crops. Some people expect them to be removed from buildings which as beekeepers we don't and cannot do, but patiently explain that they will only be in residence for a few months of spring or summer and will die-out naturally following which their entrance hole should be blocked to prevent future entry.

A fascinating behaviour, characteristic of this species, is 'Drone Surveillance' in which a cluster of males fly around in front of the nest entrance waiting for virgin queens to emerge which are instantly pounced upon by the waiting drones. This activity often leads to the general public assuming it is a swarm of honey bees and thence to the inevitable phone calls! A short video of this activity can be seen if you follow this link:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW2XfrKuIVk&feature=player\\_detailpage](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW2XfrKuIVk&feature=player_detailpage)

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*As an addendum, Jonathan Coote, President of the Sussex Beekeepers Association explains the insurance implications with regards to Tree Bees.*

I encourage people to leave them 'Bee' but there is a useful item <http://bumblebeeconservation.org/about-bees/faqs/moving-bumblebee-nests/> to direct people to if they insist that the bees are causing a nuisance, as they can if they are being subjected to vibration or shocks which makes them a bit grumpy. This is better than leaving people to reach for the wasp killer.

It might also be timely to remind everyone that under the BBKA Public Liability Insurance Policy the first £500 of a claim, ( the excess) is payable by members themselves in the event of a claim against them. This applies only to claims against the beekeeper for damage caused to another person's property (e g a house, a tree or a car etc.) arising out of beekeeping activities, but this does not apply to claims for injury caused to someone (not the beekeeper themselves) for which at present there is no excess.

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### **Apiary Visit to Coopers Farm**

June 15<sup>th</sup> saw a group of us visiting Jane Howard's apiary of five active colonies in the beautiful setting of Coopers Farm, Stonegate.



It was quite a lengthy session under gathering storm clouds. Four of the five colonies are in WBC hives which take a bit of extra manipulation. As normal, as each hive was opened, the frames were checked for health, eggs and brood.



In one colony, it was decided to remove the queen as she was around three years old and laying was falling off. She was located and put in a clip catcher and a frame of eggs and brood introduced to the hive. This will be checked in two weeks to see if they've successfully raised a new queen.



Examinations of all the colonies was conducted with only one showing some signs of deformed wing virus as a result of varoa. Treatment on this colony will be stepped up. By the time that all hives had been opened and examined the bees of one colony were becoming especially bad tempered. Clouds were gathering and we made our way back to the house for a tea and cakes. Perfect.



I've not been able to include all items in this edition, but plan another supplementary feature shortly including a nerve racking tale of hive moving by starlight and another letter from Michael Moss.

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**ARTICLES FOR THE NEWSLETTER ARE ALWAYS WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS!**  
**Please send them to the Editor [jlyte@btinternet.com](mailto:jlyte@btinternet.com)**  
**Next newsletter out at the end of August**

