

**MID-KENT BRANCH
KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER**

February 2011



February is a great month! Only 28 days between monthly paydays, Valentine's Day for the amorous (and kissing day on the 27th), Shrovetide – a time of feasting and revelry. Over millennia this was the time of year that saw recognition of the strengthening sun and the start of the lengthening day. In pagan times the 'feast of lights' took place on the 2nd. It was replaced by Candlemas. Look out for catkins - pollen triggers brood rearing.



Next Meeting

Tuesday 15th February @ 7.30 p.m.

At East Malling Research Centre

Dr Michelle Fountain

**Will talk about her recent experiences in New Zealand with black currant pollination
'To bee or not to bee'**

Early flowering plants herald the arrival of spring in just a few weeks. The mild weather puts hives at risk of starvation with a mild autumn and only Ivy available to replenish, resulting in the depletion of food stores. This has been the coldest winter for many years; although it is not cold that kills bees but the damp and ingress of water. Woodpeckers have been a problem with some colonies and even with wire mesh and plastic sacks as a protection, one enterprising bird managed to penetrate both albeit into an empty super being used as an eke – obviously only a beginner at the job. The continual hammering brings out the bees, disturbing the cluster, and during the snow and low temperatures and, if the bees fly, they soon chill, fall onto the snow and die. Having seen what was happening I watched some bees fly, fall onto the snow and within 15 seconds they succumbed to the cold and were unable to lift off from the snow. Gathering some of the bees scattered over the snow (earlier on) I brought them into the warm and within a fairly short time they revived sufficiently to fly. Those that had been on the snow for longer periods, although revived, they had obviously suffered some neurological damage and wandered around in an unusual way and were unable to fly – a subject for some entomological PHD! During the summer the resilience of apparently drowned bees, providing they have not been in the water for an extended period, is also similarly demonstrated. Do not be alarmed at the large number of dead bees on the ground in front of the hive after a spell of warm weather as this gives bees a chance to remove dead bees from the floor.

Before activity increases make sure that entrances are clear and when the bees are active remove the mouse guards. Check food levels:

Where there is any doubt about the hive food reserve it is a very worthwhile precautionary measure to feed fondant which can be purchased from Asda (as previously emailed) in very convenient packs. If you feed syrup in any form, don't stop until there is a flow of nectar.

Notes from the Chair

The Basic Bee course is now underway with 15 members learning about beekeeping. This year the BBKA have introduced a Course in a Case – a training aide to ensure course content includes BBKA's Healthy Bee Plan. Our trainers Brian, David and Peter will use it to enhance the presentation of the Course. We will keep you updated.

At our last winter meeting we were fortunate to have an excellent talk by Terry Clare. It was very enlightening, informative and well attended with 42 members. It was good to see the return of some old faces and welcome the new members too. (NB. One mnemonic that reminds us of the colours for queens – Will You Rear Good Bees- giving **White** (1 or 6) **Yellow** (2 or 7) **Red** (3 or 8) **Green** (4 or 9) **Blue** (5 or 0))

The move to East Malling Research Centre is happening. It is of course with some sadness that we move from the kind hospitality that Mrs Jan Morris, The White House, Hunton has afforded us for the past 17yrs or more. However, the new location will provide easier access and accommodate more members at apiary site meetings. There will also be the opportunity to increase the number of colonies and types of hives in use to give an all round overview of beekeeping and to develop new projects in 2011

Lastly, it is my aim to encourage those who have not been to winter meetings or the apiary for some time to come and join us. Mid Kent Beekeepers Association is for all members and during the next few months I would like to take the opportunity to meet with you. If that is not possible or practical then you are welcome to email me at cullen5316@btinternet.com or ring me 07980 683565 I welcome your comments and suggestions relating to beekeeping and our Association.
Dick Cullen

A HELPING HAND

Can existing members bear in mind that new members may need a helping hand in the coming year with basics such as providing them with a swarm. I'm sure all members that have bees can remember the experience and excitement of that first day of having bees in a hive.

Editor: David Wood (david.wood63@tiscali.co.uk), Distribution: David Wood and John Wood

PS. If you live close to a member not on email and are willing to print and pass on a copy, please let us know. It is very helpful to know if you have received any electronic communication, and is a check on the accuracy of addresses.

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For those who wish to enter the Basic Assessment Beekeeping, Michelle Fountain has sent this message:-

Dear Members,

(Please reply to michelle_t_fountain@yahoo.co.uk with your BBKA membership number, contact details and name)

I am coordinating the Basic Beekeepers exam for our club (Mid-Kent) for 2011. This usually takes place in April-May. If there are enough of people we can organise a date for the exam to be taken at the branch apiary.

Please can you let me know if you would be interested in doing the exam by **February 15th 2011**. I can then contact the examiner for dates and get back to you all for availability. It is easier for all concerned if you can be tested by the examiner on the same day.

Please read this information before replying;

The *Basic Assessment in Beekeeping* is the starting point and entry requirement for all other examinations and assessments. It is a practical assessment and tests the basic skills and knowledge of the craft. To take the Basic Assessment you **should have managed one colony of bees for at least 12 months**. The Basic Assessment Syllabus http://www.britishbee.org.uk/files/syllabuses/basic_all.pdf looks daunting at first glance but closer inspection will show that it merely lists the basic things which all beekeepers should know. The assessment is completely practical/oral and takes place at the hive (see attachments). More information is at;

http://www.britishbee.org.uk/examinations_and_assessments.php

Application form http://www.britishbee.org.uk/files/syllabuses/app_form.pdf

Current fees <http://www.britishbee.org.uk/files/syllabuses/FEES2010.pdf>

There is a recommended reading list at <http://www.britishbee.org.uk/files/booklist-2009.pdf>

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