

Alnwick and District Beekeepers Association

Chairman's Report

Reported to the Annual General Meeting of the Association, Swarland Village Club, December 14 2016

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the 2016 AGM. Thank you for making the effort to attend. I hope that your season has been a fun and productive one. I sincerely hope that it has been more productive than mine. We have been reminded, yet again, of the affect that weather has on our bees, and how challenging beekeeping can be in this part of the world, something that I am sure that Peter Rose will touch on in his apiary report.

It is gratifying to see the association going from strength to strength, with another nett increase in membership, as we shall hear later.

Sadly this year we tragically lost one of our members. Neville Hamlin lost a brave battle with a brain tumour in the summer. He is remembered by us all as a cheerful soul with a ready wit and great intelligence, who was always willing to muck in and help. In addition to our commiserations, thanks should go to Lisa who has stepped back in to the role of secretary and baker of extraordinary mince pies, two activities she clearly excels at. Thanks also go to Ben Hopkinson and Sandra Carrott for covering for her in her enforced absence.

Apiary

The apiary remains the jewel in our crown, an outstanding resource of which we should be proud. Lance Adkin, who did a huge amount of work in the relocation of the apiary, has sadly decided to retire from beekeeping due to health issues. We thank him for his contribution to the association and wish him well.

We will hear from Peter Rose later more detail on the apiary year but I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Peter, Bryan Cole and Brian Ripley, for their colony management activities this year. Managing 20 colonies in challenging circumstances is far from a part time activity. The fact that the apiary has rebounded this year after catastrophic winter and spring losses is a testament to their hard work and expertise. The fact that we sold no excess honey or nucs this year is further evidence of a difficult year.

Thanks also go to Sandra Carrott who has organised weekly work groups to keep the place tidy and the rampant undergrowth under control, and to Glyn Scott who continues to beaver away quietly organising work parties and, this year, completing the fitting out of the container with storage spaces, power, and laboratory facilities. Of course we couldn't have done so much without the help of all the volunteers who turn up to help, and occasionally bring cake, I thank them too.

The shop is an important feature of the apiary site, and a major contributor to association funds. Sue Hathaway has continued to do an excellent job managing the shop, and we'd also like to thank the volunteers who have opened and served customers during the summer.

Of course our thanks go to our excellent landlord, Steven Hogg, for his continued support and help, and to our fellow tenants on the site, for accommodating us cheerfully.

Training

Having a dedicated training officer in the shape of Ian Robson has continued to pay dividends for the association. This year we managed the hands on training of twelve complete novice beekeepers, with the able assistance of John Hobrough. In addition ten of our members were coached through, and passed, the Basic Certificate in Beekeeping. George Eames, as ever, was invaluable in achieving this.

In a new departure for us, Brian Ripley organised the training, on site, of four of our members on the complex process, dare I say art, of artificial insemination. We hope that Jan Broderick, Helen Wright, Bryan Cole, and Peter Rose, will continue gaining experience and confidence and, in the fullness of time, pass some of that knowledge on.

One of the highlights of the apiary training this year was a visit by Ian Molyneux, our regional bee inspector who gave 35 of us a fascinating discussion on inspecting for exotic pests. He also taught me how to keep my smoker alight for more than ten minutes.

Next year we will be expanding on the idea of training days for specific topics; for example, swarm control, varroa management. We also hope to repeat our Nosema monitoring day, which was highly successful in 2015.

Social Media

Our Facebook page has 68 members, but is in need of more traffic. Please share your experiences, comments and questions with us.

The BBKA, a couple of months ago, withdrew their website support with very little prior warning. Fortunately Jan Broderick had already built for us a far superior site on www.alnwickbeepers.co.uk so the disruption was minimised. Sharon Spurling has kindly volunteered to edit the site, but we need input from our members. It is your site so please help Sharon by volunteering photographs, articles, tips, anything that may be of interest to our members.

Shows

As we do every year, we have attended country shows up and down the county. These shows are an important showcase for the craft of beekeeping and thanks go, once again, to Sandra for all the effort she puts in to these events, and to the volunteers who turn up every year to educate the public and very often to correct misinformation.

Youth Involvement

One of our stated aims this year has been to engage with schools and youth groups in order to perpetuate the craft. For various reasons this has been somewhat of a challenge but we are gaining traction. Following an apiary visit from staff and pupils of NunnyKirk School, three of their staff have attended Brian Ripley's autumn course and we will be helping them set up an apiary next year.

New Challenges

You will all know that the Asian Hornet has finally arrived. Although the summer sightings were down in Gloucestershire, it would be well worth your while to familiarise yourself with it. Similarly, the Small Hive Beetle. Although not yet here, it is surely only a matter of time.

This year we had the first report I can recall of a hive theft. Please site your out apiaries with a view to security.

Finally a reminder that the association exists for the benefit of all members, not just a few regular activists. Please get involved and don't hesitate to make suggestions that you think could benefit us.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who has been involved this year in any capacity, and hope you have a trouble free winter.

Keith Grimes

Chair