

West Wilts BKA News

News, the planned activities and some advice for members of West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association



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What a scorcher!

Hopefully you and your bees have been coping with the weather over the last few weeks. It always amazes me how they can cope with such extremes of the climate from deep frost to temperatures that are well above the temperature of the brood nest...perhaps it just demonstrates how poor humans are accustomed to such temperature swings!

This month's newsletter is moderately quiet, we have one lecture coming up in August and we also have an article on the County Honey Bee Health Day in September – you need to register for that, but it is a chance to hear about the latest changes and challenges from the key advisors to the government on British Beekeeping.

We also have a couple of articles, including the continuing saga of the 'naughty hive' at the apiary!

Diary of events

August 2022

Branch Lecture – 12th August (Friday), Showing, Bratton Jubilee Hall, 7.30pm

September 2022

Wiltshire BKA Honey Bee Health Day – 3rd September (Saturday), Market Lavington Village Hall

West Wiltshire BKA Honey Show - 10th September (Saturday); Bratton Jubilee Hall

October 2022

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day – 8th October (Saturday); Corn Exchange, Devizes

National Honey Show – 27th-29th October (Thursday-Saturday); Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher

Need to know

Lecture

Showing and exhibit preparation – 12th August, Bratton Jubilee Hall

Honey Bee Health Day – 3rd September

The Honey Bee Health Day is now just five weeks away! This is a free event that is organised by the county and is held approximately every four years. This is the perfect chance to hear the latest developments from the National Beed Unit (NBU), Animal and Plant Health Agency and the national experts on the challenges that are facing beekeeping. The format will be similar to the last such day in 2018 but there have been significant developments since then, especially in the challenges facing beekeeping in the UK.

We now know so much more about the Asian Hornet and no doubt the NBU Contingency Planning and Science Officer will cover this, Small Hive Beetle and Tropilaelaps in his opening talk.

He will be followed by our Regional Bee Inspector. After lunch there will be three workshops covering Apiary Hygiene, Varroa and the foulbroods. There is European Foul Brood in the county so this is the best opportunity you will get to see and handle infected frames so you know what to look for (unless you are unfortunate enough to get it yourself).

Date: Saturday 3rd September 2022

Location: Market Lavington Community Hall, St Mary's Road, Market Lavington SN10 4DG

Timings: 09.30 for a 10.00 start. Finish by 16.00

Register: We asking everybody to register so that we have an idea of numbers attending. The link is: <https://bit.ly/beehealthwilts>. The event is free.

Refreshments are available but please bring a picnic lunch. It doesn't matter whether you are new beekeeper or very experienced you will learn something at this important event.

Good to know

Apiary Sessions - June

At the apiary session on 9th July, we undertook the routine examination of the hives as well as varroa testing a couple of the hives. Various methods of testing for varroa levels were discussed, however we decided to use the Véto-pharma Varroa EasyCheck system. This is three-piece pot in which bees can be collected and the varroa levels can be tested by a variety of methods (alcohol wash, sugar roll or CO₂ injection). Each method has a different accuracy level reported and each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

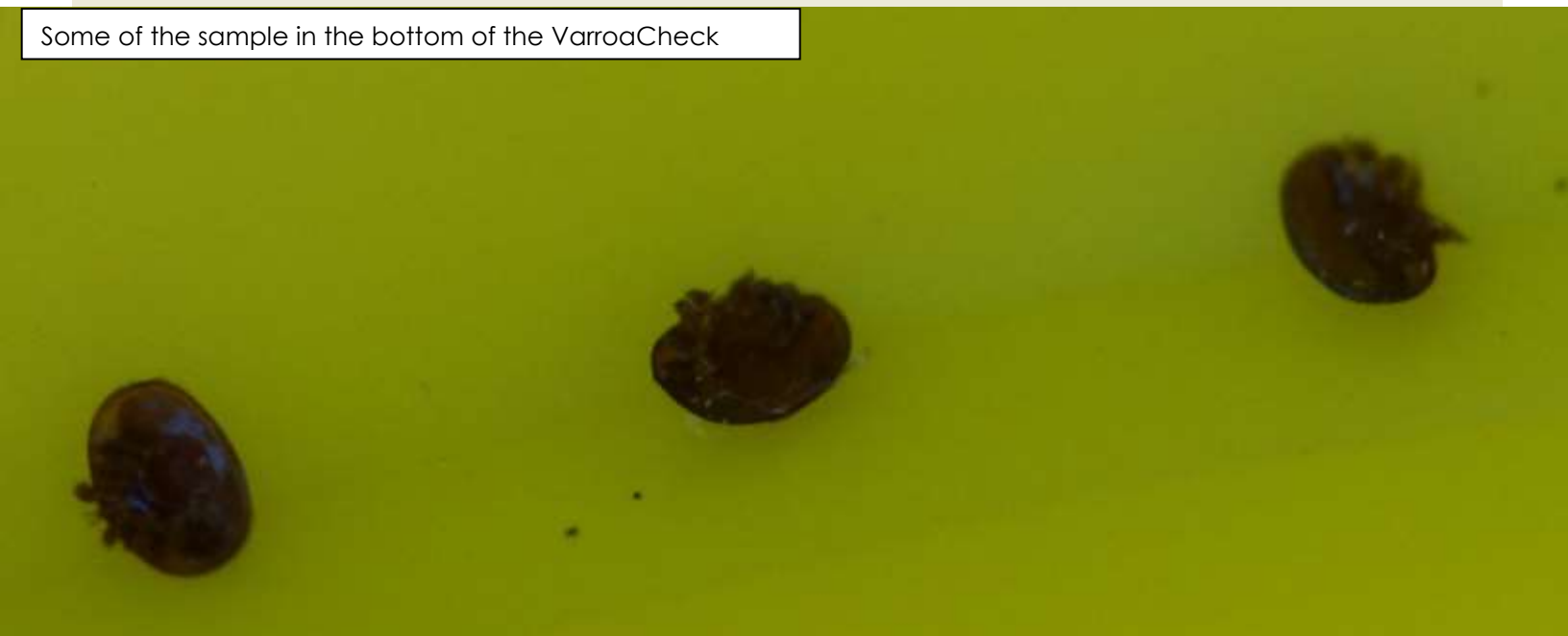
We tried the CO₂ injection method because it is reported to have a high level of accuracy and doesn't kill the bees that are tested. A demonstration was given on taking the sample of bees and how the final level is counted. You can see from the images a sample of bees being collected from a frame (right) and the resulting varroa mites collected in the pot afterwards (below).

The Véto-pharma website provides instruction on how to use the device, but it is always good to see it in person and as will all these things there are many methods to collect the sample of bees (there is also an example at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZQDbgWcBbE>)...the main thing is not to collect the queen, especially if using the alcohol wash!

The CO₂ method requires slightly more outlay than the other methods, but it does not harm the bees and is simple to do; it also provides a result there and then on the varroa level, rather than having to wait days with a sampling board and being concerned that the wind didn't blow away a load of mites or something has eaten them!



Some of the sample in the bottom of the VarroaCheck



At the second apiary session in July, we conducted routine checks and went searching for the queens in the 'troublesome' hives we reported in the June Newsletter. There was definite progress in the parent hive with some brood, but we decided to let it develop and see how well the queen had mated. The split, however was more promising – there was brood at all stages and a careful search and there was the queen. We took the opportunity to mark her and return her to the hive. Given the state of the hive at the end of May it is now doing well and so congratulations to all involved in addressing the challenge it presented.

Bees now in 'lockdown'

There was human lockdown due to Covid-19, then chicken lockdown (or 'flockdown') due to Avian Flu, but now there is bee lockdown...but luckily not for us.

You may have seen the BBC News that bees are in lockdown in Australia. This is to prevent the spread of varroa in New South Wales. There is an estimate that if varroa takes hold it will cost at least £39m.

The mites have been detected at several locations and very strict biosecurity measures are in place, whereby every hive in a 10 km radius of an infestation is destroyed and every hive within a 25 km radius is strictly monitored.

Just think if the UK had applied such a monitoring in the early 90's!

Q&A

I have heard a lot about keeping the bee space between frames, but what are the best ways to keep it constant?

There are many aspects about keeping the bee space constant between frames, especially brood frames, because the cells need to be a fixed depth to allow the brood to develop. If the gap between the faces of the frames is too small, the bees can struggle to tend the brood and there is the risk that when the frames are tightened up bees can get squashed...this can include the queen: I think we can agree that is it not what we want!

So, before we comment on the ways, we will highlight how the bee space can become 'interfered with' and then discuss ways in which you can avoid these.

The first way and most common way is that the frames are not put together with the correct spacing: self-spacing frames (Hoffmann, spacer bars and frame ends) alleviate this problem, but the spacing between the frames need to be assured.

The second way that the space can be 'out' is that the frames are put back in the brood box in the wrong order. Despite the movable frame hives having the option to provide a constant spacing, the bees often have a problem (or the beekeeper damages the frame!) so the frame faces are not perfect each side. If we put the frame back the wrong way round, then we can interfere with the spacing.

The third way is that the face of the comb becomes distorted when we are handling the frame, this is especially a problem with the bigger frames such as 14" x 12" frames. If the frames are held flat, they can sag so we interfere with the frame spacing when we put them together.

So how do we avoid these problems?

The frames not being put together with the correct spacing is avoided if we get very methodical in putting the brood box back together. If we replace the frame we have just inspected touching the previous one, then not only does it give us the maximum amount of room to examine the next frame, but it also means the spacing should be good and we won't crush bees when we tighten the frames together. At the end of the inspection if we use the hive tool as a lever to push the frames from one side, so they all move, we know they must be tight.

The second and third issues need us to be very methodical during our inspections. In order to make sure we replace the frames in the right order we have a number of options:

1. Mark the frames on which way they are in the hive...which is fine until we change the hive.
2. Get into a method so that the way we handle the frames mean that we always know which way they go. For example, when holding the frame don't swap hands (always keep the right lug in the right hand) and if we have to put a frame down, have a method by which we know how it is placed (for example, the lug that would go into your dominant hand is always upward or the lug on side you are resting the frame is always downward). It doesn't matter what method you use, just so long as you understand it.
3. Have a standard method for fitting your frames, for example one member always has the frames facing the same way, so that side of the top bar with the wedge face the same way in a brood box...ingenious!

The third option is a matter of care when handing. It is a case of handling the frames to minimise the chance of them sagging. Whilst 'pirouetting' the frame can be bypassed with some frames, I would recommend it for frames where sagging is a possibility.

Where is the best place to stand during a hive inspection?

The simple answer to that is not in front of the flight path! I deliberately say 'flight path', because at one of the recent apiary sessions, one of our members (no names, no pack drills) stood to one side of the entrance and thought they were out of the way of the returning bees, only to be pointed out his back was covered. By the time our eagle-eyed photographer was able to fully incriminate the beekeeper in question he moved and some flew home, but as you can see, a few minutes later there were still a few foragers confused on what had happened to their hive. I can assure you his back was completely covered and he was totally oblivious to the number of bees on ~~my~~ his back.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE SEND THEM IN OR ASK AT THE APIARY.

