



# BURTON and District BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

*From the Newsletter Editor*  
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## 26th March

and it is definitely Spring! The thermometer reads 20 degrees and there isn't a breath of wind. Opening the bee shed, a folded up peacock butterfly sits on the top of my super stack. After coaxing her outside into the sunshine, she soon warms up and flies away.

Definitely a time to peep into my bee hives so off come the straps which are keeping the hives from blowing over. There is brood, nectar, pollen and a little winter honey in them all. The correx sheets under the open mesh floors need to come off and be examined to give me an idea of the varroa situation.

## 28th March

and we are back to what seems normal for this winter, icy cold winds and the air temperature is down to 7 degrees. Brrr. I will have to brave the cold and return the correx sheets to reduce cold draughts and put the straps back on! Will the colonies survive on their tiny amount of food? A little fondant and perhaps pollen substitute on each hive will make me feel happier.

## Corona virus lockdown

We are all in the grip of the strangest spring ever, with the pandemic affecting every aspect of our lives. Although our monthly meetings, talks and courses are cancelled, the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) has issued the following guidance: You should continue to care for your bees in the normal manner, whilst maintaining social distancing, unless you are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, when you should be self-isolating at home.

## *In Self Defence*

**Keith Thomas, BADBKA member** reports on a talk by Celia Davis at a BADBKA Monthly Meeting held on Monday 16 March 2020.

With UK confirmed cases of Covid-19 at 1,391 on 15 March, we were undecided about going to the monthly meeting. The attraction of hearing a talk from Celia and the need to pick up some brood frames from Dave won the day and we turned up at the last minute.

The meeting was a little subdued, with about half the usual attendance, as people sensed the gathering storm. We all sat a little apart from our fellow beekeepers and tried desperately not so much as to clear our throats, never mind cough.

Dave started the meeting with an update on the BADBKA training apiary. Sensibly, work on the site has been delayed to avoid the heavy machinery turning the very wet and soft ground into a quagmire for the RSPCA who need to walk dogs in the area.

Celia's talk was on how bees keep themselves healthy and how beekeepers may hinder this and what we can do to help.

She started with colony level immunity. This includes disease in winter bees which disappears in spring due to rapid expansion. This can "outbreed" some infections, such as nosema. Clean comb is always important to give your bees the best chance. Old dirty comb will contain many pathogens.

Hydrogen peroxide is present in the bees' salivary secretions and is antimicrobial. Propolis is antibacterial and may be antiviral – yet we see it as a menace and are constantly scraping it off!

For nosema, Celia gave a "recipe" to check your bees:

1. Kill 30 bees (collect in a zip-lock bag and place in the freezer for 2 days).
2. Remove their abdomens.
3. Mash the abdomens vigorously with 30 ml of water.
4. Look at the results under a microscope at 400x.

Lots of oval spores visible indicates your bees have a bad dose of nosema.

If you do a Google search for "**Nosema ceranae** National Bee Unit", you will arrive at an early **Bee Craft** article which gives more detail. Note that fumagillin, which is mentioned in the article, is no longer available.

Celia went on to talk about each bee's individual immunity. Their defences include the cuticle (the bee's "shell"), the wall of the ventriculus (the bee's gut), and the haemolymph (the bee's "blood"). The latter is like our blood in that it can repair the external parts of the bee and contains antibodies that attack microorganisms.

What many beekeepers do wrong that interferes with these natural

protections? The list includes

- rough handling
- loss of heat
- stress
- transfer of pathogens
- removal of propolis
- unbalancing colonies

So how can we help? Fortunately, there are lots of things we can do as good beekeepers to avoid the pitfalls above. Celia's list included the following

- keep strong colonies
- use young queens – they lay more prolifically

- ensure that your equipment is clean, including hive parts, bee suit, gloves and tools
- provide clean comb
- ensure good nutrition, i.e. pollen, but it is best that this is natural, rather than a supplement
- control varroa and nosema
- minimize stress by avoiding unnecessary hive opening and inspecting gently but quickly.

Concluding her excellent and very informative talk, Celia took a few brief questions and we departed, fearing this was the last time we will meet for many months.

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For those of you who are on Facebook, and aren't already aware, we are proud to say we have our very own Facebook page. To join please search for Burton and District Beekeepers on your Facebook search bar and send a join request.



The site is monitored by our club website manager, Alan Ambler, and posts are screened before going live, which will reduce any spam or unwanted advertising. You can post any items of interest, share photographs or ask Alan and other club members any questions about the club or beekeeping in general. He will always do his best to find an answer for you.

You will also find feedback from members on recent events, videos, pictures and discussions on a wide variety of topics and links to other sites of interest. Like the newsletter, the more we all put into it, the more we will all get out of it. There are also links to beekeeping sites that specifically support candidates who are studying for the BBKA Modules.

**Penny Ward** has produced the newsletter for the last three years and has retired due to work commitments. Thankyou Penny for all your hard work and all the best for the future.

**Margaret Cowley** has taken over and would be pleased to receive contributions for future newsletters: articles, photographs and reviews of events (when there are any!). You can email her at [newsletter@honeybee.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@honeybee.org.uk)

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**Diary: All meetings are cancelled due to the Corona virus pandemic.**