

Croydon Division Chair's report 2021-22

We have consolidated the cohesion we achieved last year, and this year have increased the number of active members leading activities.



**CROYDON
BEEKEEPERS**

Training & Education

This year we have run face-to-face beekeeping sessions at both of our apiaries. The addition of a Training Coordinator, Debbie Burney, to the team has allowed us to hold a programme of education activities rather than just sporadic events.

We held three winter meetings in Purley which included: Bee Genetics (Bob Barnes), Dyce Method (Anna Slade), Mead Making (Barbara Barnes), Finding Varroa Resistant Bees (Steve Riley).

We ran a Beginners' course in the winter, with Mags Scott and Kathy O'Toole coordinating sessions delivered by a number of our experienced beekeepers. We did not run a Basic course this year, we had too few candidates (a knock-on effect of the lockdown year we think).

Our partnership with Mrs Burney's Bee Club (aka. MBBC), a Community Interest Company (CIC), has continued to be beneficial. MBBC is specialised on providing bee experiences and education for children. The partnership brought young people to our Croydon Honey Show, and allowed us to offer a range of activities to schools beyond simple presentations to assemblies.

Paul Borfiga has continued to lead our *Treatment Free* group, acting as a conduit for information from Steve Riley, championing the principle, and providing pragmatic advice to those able to go down this route. Information gathering from a small group of our members has been coordinated. There have been workshops on various relevant techniques, for example queen frame trapping, and identifying un-capping behaviour.

Bob Barnes delivered a workshop on "Preparing for shows" with practical tuition on honey and wax classes. Graduates from that session went on to achieve success at local, regional and national level this year.

Keith Williamson brought back knowledge from the Stoneleigh Queen Rearing course, and has been passing that on through workshops at both our apiaries.

We have had study groups running to support those studying for the BBKA modules. This year we tackled modules 1, 2 and 3 (lead by Keith Mackie, Debbie Burney, Anna Slade, Alexandra Collins, Keith Williamson). These have been run in conjunction with Reigate Beekeepers, and we have had many exam successes.

Events

In August we marked the one year anniversary of the opening of the Mark Stott Apiary with an open afternoon. This was also an opportunity to remember the contribution that Mark made to Croydon (and indeed Surrey) beekeeping. It is hoped to hold this event on an annual basis.

We returned to our now traditional Christmas celebration with a meal in December attended by around 40 members. There was still a need for careful planning because of COVID, but it was a very enjoyable event.

There were two garden party apiary sessions hosted by Anthony Carter-Clout, and Debbie Burney.

We started attending shows again with Joyce Atkinson in the lead supported as ever by Harry & Edward Parker. This included the Sanderstead Horticultural Fair, and the Selsdon Woods Fair.

Honey shows

We were pleased to secure Bill Fisher and Sue Carter as our honey show judges and pressed hard to get more members to enter. In total we had 134 entries from 32 members and so the Blue Riband was awarded. A special guest Darcy-Mae, our young member who appeared on the BBC TV series "Show me the honey" presented the awards. We had a stall selling honey (run by Mags Scott, Sally Grenville).

Our members competed at the South of England Honey Show and also the Surrey Honey Show. Although we did not retain the Douglas Cup (for points in the NHS Surrey classes), our members did especially well in the national classes, including Alex de Salis gaining the highest place in Class 1.

Communication

Alex de Salis has taken over the maintenance of our website with great skill.

Our newsletter has continued to cover the division's activities and items of broader interests. Highlights this year have included an article by Darcy-Mae about her BBC TV experience, an extended tribute to Dennis Scott, Alex de Salis' witty diary as a first year beekeeper, and reports on beekeeping in Portugal by Martin Cavett.

Apiaries

This has been the first full season when we have operated with two club apiaries. This has been important for providing equal access to training and support for members in the North of the borough (our own kind of levelling up!). Planned training was delivered at both sites including Queen rearing (Keith Williamson), Queen Frame Trapping (Nick O'Toole), Hygienic Bees (Paul Borfiga).

Our newer apiary, based in Crystal Palace Park has been managed by Gavin Matthews. Although it doesn't yet have much by way of facilities in place, it has a crew of supporters who have done a lot of work to make the site more suitable, get all the equipment into good shape, and establish healthy colonies there. The apiary helped 14 cub scouts achieve their Environmental Conservation badge.

Our existing Hartley Down apiary has continued to be managed by Derek Read, and now has a large team of members who assist with the beekeeping, and site improvements. Work on the new shed was completed and it now offers working facilities as well as storage. This year the team ran a programme of intermediate beekeeping activities, including queen rearing (Keith Williamson). A further team has now been established to work on the gardening.

Honey yields

Some members, particularly in the South of our area reported heavy winter losses, near total in some cases. However, as in the South East region generally, most of our members have had a good (or even record breaking) year for honey crops. Our Hartley Down apiary produced 240lbs of honey, a splendid achievement given all the training that was going on there.

Member news

Our membership numbers have reduced a little since last year, most probably a post-lockdown effect.

Joyce Atkinson has retired from her position as division Secretary after 21 years. She has done so much for the division, and was also our Show Secretary (for 14 years), our swarm coordinator, and events organiser.

One of our longest serving members, Dennis Scott died in November at the age of 91. Although he had moved to Devon, he kept up his Croydon membership. We got to know Dennis during our lockdown Zoom calls, and coined the phrase “What would Dennis do?”. He is much missed.

We also lost another long-standing member John Lunn, a larger-than-life character who was described as “a gentle giant amongst beekeepers”.

Future strategy

As last year, I would like to see CBKA continue to build on its strength of being a close-knit division, and have more members take on activities to increase what we are able to offer. The creation of a Deputy Chair role, and expanded committee will help with this.

Concluding remarks

I would like to thank not just our committee but all those members who have made an active contribution to CBKA this year.

Bob Barnes. Chair, Croydon Beekeepers Association
November 2022