



Farnham Beekeepers

A Division of Surrey Beekeepers

Chairman's Report for 2022

After a couple of difficult years, it is very good to report that during 2022 the activities of the FBKA returned to normal. Membership numbers remain relatively stable, and our financial position is healthy.

I hope that you will see from this report that a lot of people work very hard to make things happen for the Association and they all deserve a massive thank you.

Winter Talks and Workshops

Over the winter we had our usual series of excellent talks. This year they included two particularly informative talks given by Ken and Dan Basterfield, two pre-eminent beekeepers, on 'Preparations for a better season' and 'Reading bees'.

New for this year were two workshops held in February and March: 'Working with wax' and 'Cooking with honey'. Feedback from both was very positive.

Thanks are due to Jacqui Sellers for organising the winter talks and to Jacqui, Elizabeth Knight, Hazel Sharples, Greg Cobb, Richard Knight, and Sean Williams for running the workshops.

Apiary

After a challenging couple of years, we did not start the year with as many hives as we wanted in the apiary. However, colonies built up strongly during the spring and we managed to increase numbers so that by early summer there were plenty of hives to support training courses and members' sessions.

During the spring normal apiary meetings resumed on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings. Saturday morning meetings have been particularly well supported (possibly due to the excellent tea and cakes) and as well as training for beginners and less experienced members, the meetings generally included sessions aimed at more experienced members, covering for example: the Demaree method; making and using nucs; and dealing with angry bees.

Many thanks are due to Rosalind Clague for managing the apiary and for organising the Saturday and Wednesday sessions.

Thanks are also due to:

- Jacqui Sellers, Victoria Billiard, Julie Trice, Nichola O Sullivan, Gwen Hall, Anita Winn, and Michelle Rickets for providing the tea and cake at the apiary sessions; Jacqui also organised the annual picnic at the apiary on 3 September;

- Oliver Chadwick, Greg Cobb, David Christian, Mo Herbert, and Chris Grace for their help in keeping the apiary and its infrastructure up and running.

We are also grateful to Sabine Reyersbach, Hans Weijman, and Chris and Barbara Rushton for donating colonies to the Association apiary.

Education

There was plenty of demand for our Introductory course for new beekeepers which this year took the form of a combined theory and practical course for 24 beginners starting in the spring and continuing throughout the summer on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings.

A short refresher course focussed on the Basic Assessment was held via Zoom with 14 members attending. 9 people put themselves forward for the assessment: all passed, most with Credit or Distinction.

Thanks are due to David Clague for all the hard work he puts in organising our excellent educational programme and also for maintaining our website and email system.

Thanks are also due to Chris and Barbara Rushton, Greg Cobb, Neil Gumbrell, Victoria Cowling, Oliver Chadwick and Geoff Redwood for providing essential support to the beginners.

Events and Public Activities

Over the spring and summer, we resumed our support for activities at the Rural Life Living Museum and our visits to schools to talk to children about bees. We also provided a stall at the Tilford fete but were unable to support more fetes due to a lack of volunteers. These activities are important in allowing us to promote the importance of bees to a wider audience and it would be great to see a few more members getting involved, especially as those that do really enjoy the experience.

Thanks are due to Elizabeth Knight, our communications secretary, for organising our support to these events.

Greg Cobb continued to coordinate the collection of swarms, an important public service, and this year around 25 swarm calls were received, slightly fewer than last year. Members of the public were prompt in reporting the swarms and in most cases we were able to respond within the same day, much to the appreciation of the callers.

The year started with the first call out in December, from a tree surgeon about a felled tree with a colony split in half. The first prime swarm was collected on 26 April and the last (a cast) on 16 September. Swarms were reported in Godalming, Normandy, Ash Vale, Grayshot, Frensham, Hindhead and Farnham. One of the Association colonies took up residence in the Rural Life Centre Chapel building and was successfully extracted using a bee vacuum device with minimal damage to the building.

Most of the swarms collected were viable colonies and about 17 were passed on to our members; all those who had requested a colony were accommodated.

Members Services

Elizabeth also continued to produce our monthly newsletter which was always interesting and informative.

This year Janine Sparks produced the popular 'This Month in the Apiary' article which, although aimed at less experienced beekeepers, I am sure helped most of us to be better prepared for each month.

The Asian Hornet remains a threat to the UK and Julie Trice continues to monitor the overall situation on behalf of the Association. There was a sighting near us in Ascot but fortunately the nest was too immature to produce queens and there was also a sighting in Portsmouth, but it seems unlikely that it produced viable queens. Nonetheless these two sightings highlight how important it is for all of us to remain vigilant.

Julie is also our committee secretary and I would like to thank her for all the work she does behind the scenes in keeping the committee running smoothly.

Greg Cobb continued to arrange the bulk purchase of foundation and fondant which allows members to benefit from discounted prices and Ian Clifton arranged the bulk purchase of varroa treatments (Apiguard and MAQS).

Finally, Neil Sellers and Lisa McPherson organised our extractor hire.

Finance

Our finances remain healthy: at the end the year we had cash in the bank of £24,057 compared with £17,796 last year. The major contributors to the increase were gift aid – a one-off sum following several years discussion with HMRC – and training course fees as training resumed following the lifting of Covid restrictions. Details are provided in the Treasurer's Report and Accounts.

Thanks are due to Chris Rushton for his work as our Treasurer. He is also our Membership secretary and together these roles require a lot of work and we should be very grateful for his efforts.

Thanks are also due to Graham Sharples for performing an independent check of our accounts.

Membership

There has been a slight decline in membership numbers since 2021 which I believe is largely due to the lack of a beginner course during the pandemic resulting in fewer new members this year.

Finally

So, after a couple of difficult years things are back to normal and with all the hard-working members of the committee willing to stand for re-election, and with your continued support, I am confident we can look forward to enjoying and improving our beekeeping in 2023.

John Fail

4 November 2022