



Reigate Division of Surrey Beekeepers Association

Chair's Report to the SBKA AGM for the Year 2022/23

Summary

A busy year that seems to have passed very quickly ... once any actual beekeeping had been allowed by the extremely wet spring weather to commence.

Mixed fortunes in beekeeping have been experienced by our apiaries and by individual members alike, due in large part to the quality of queens and colonies going into the 2022/23 winter, another mild winter, a prolonged cold and wet spring and erratic summer extremes of temperatures and forage.

Meanwhile, a major distraction has been the incursions into Kent and fringes of Surrey of the Asian Hornet.

Membership

Closing membership for all classes for 2022-23 was 218 members (208 for 2021-22). 2022-23 BBKA membership included 183 Registered, 16 Partners, 2 Juniors & 1 Country. Local Membership included 1 Associate, 13 Social and 1 Honorary. New/Renewed Membership as of this November for 2023/24 stands at 175.

As noted in the Reigate Division's report to the Surrey 2022 AGM, our membership classifications have been simplified to align with the eR2 system and reflect BBKA Insurance cover provided.

Consequently, our Local class of 'Associate' has been redefined to be only for Registered, Partner or Junior beekeeping members of other BBKA Associations or Divisions.

Finances

Overall income has been down slightly at £42.42k vs £42.45k in 2022. However, we have also experienced expenditure increasing to £46.40k vs £32.2k in 2022. This has resulted in a rare loss for the year of £4k.

Income was notably affected by Retail Honey Sales being lower than anticipated, reduced to £5.55k vs £7.99 in 2022. This was, in large part, due to needing to withdraw from supplying a Garden Centre when we could no longer satisfy their rate of stock replenishment needs that had been increasing in both frequency and quantity.

Expenditure has increased significantly for Apiary Consumables, Maintenance and Utilities. Notable amongst the maintenance items has been the necessary exterior repainting of the pavilion. A £2k cost was incurred just to necessarily strip back the surface to bare wood. As an association we have our financial reserves to draw upon when needed to tide us over loss making periods, either planned or unplanned. It is however recognised that this should ideally not continue.

Education & Training

Education continues to be delivered in-person or on-line, via combinations of presentations and discussion groups.

Training is provided, at hives allocated to Beginners, Basic and Improver level groups at the Henfold apiary. Additional experience and practice at Basic+ levels is also being provided at our Vigo and Bletchingly out-apiaries, and by a network of Member Mentors.

Our annual **Taster Day** event during June was well attended by twenty four guests. Several emails were received thanking the organising team of six members and two helpers, for a very instructive and enjoyable day. We already have a waiting list of people eager to book for next year's event.

The Education program commenced in January 2023 with our fully booked '**Introduction to Beekeeping**' theory course, presented on our behalf by David Rudland and returning to the Woodhatch Centre venue in Reigate with in-person weekly sessions. Attendees are then able to continue with practical training during the Summer around four '**Beginners Hives**' at Henfold being managed by **Janet Kay**. Take-up of places on the 2024 theory course has been steady since September, with only a handful of places remaining available.

Basic Assessments were successfully passed by twelve members this year, four with distinction and seven with credit. Another five members had also joined and participated in the preparatory on-line Basics Study Group sessions and apiary practical's around their allocated hives at Henfold, but not taken the assessment. **Colin Clement**, will be running the Study Group again in 2024, but will be looking to pass its leadership onto one of his support team thereafter.

Improvers have been able to extend their experience, including running a production hive; nursing a sick hive; successfully making increases using splits and Apidea's; applying Demaree swarm prevention; setting up bait hives. A dedicated and very active Improvers WhatsApp group, managed by **Keith Mackie**, also provides support, helpful hints and generates interesting discussions.

Module Study Group collaborations have continued between Reigate & Croydon Divisions with the running a Module 3 Study Group - Honey Bee Diseases, Pests and Poisoning over the 2022/23 Winter. There was a high attendance and participation in the online Zoom meetings by members from both divisions. Not all who participated intended to take the Module 3 exam, but of those who did, a 100% pass rate was achieved. A Module 5 Study Group - Honey Bee Biology, commenced this November.

Apiaries

Managers of our Training Apiary and five Out-Apiaries have completed winter preparations following a challenging but generally positive season. Planned objectives have been met or sufficiently progressed to ensure good foundations are in place for 2024. Honey harvests exceeded prior years in some apiaries.

We are taking 52 colonies including nucs, into this winter across the six apiaries that have varying objectives to underpin RBKA's goals.

These are; the provision of training for beekeepers; queen rearing; honey production, and introduced in 2023; the development a varroa resilient bee with careful management of treatment free colonies.

All apiaries are well supported with terrific volunteer effort, much appreciated by our apiary managers.

Honey Stock, Yields and Retail Sales

We commenced 2023 with ~ 900kg of 2022 Honey remaining in stock. The number of retail outlets being supplied had been reduced during 2022 to ensure adequate stocks remained for 2023 Local Show sales. Subsequently, harvests from our two main honey producing apiaries this year have been exceptionally high. However, it has proved difficult to recommence re-supplying larger outlets due to our inability to commit to packing honey at the quantity and frequency of supply required. Consequentially, we end 2023 with ~ 4,000 lbs of honey in stock. Outlets for bulk honey, in buckets, are now also being sought for 2024.

Local Public Events

RBKA attended 14 local events in 2023 (21 in 2022) having received a total of 23 invitations. 7 invitations had to be declined due to inability ensure adequate volunteer leadership or help with stalls. 2 events were cancelled. Honey sales income from events contributed £3,400 to RBKA funds with minimal operating costs.

We have continued to refine and improve the organization and infrastructure required for RBKA stalls. Two new heavy duty gazebos with branded roofs and printed side panels were received, made possible by grant funding from the Gatwick Airport Community Trust. Volunteering by the membership remains a critical issue in running events.

Honey Shows

Having recommenced our annual public Beekeeping Show in 2022, for 2023 we recombined our Honey Show with the Beekeeping Show, again at the United Reformed Church Hall, Dorking at the end of September. Disappointingly, the Honey Show element failed to attract the same level of Show Bench Entries that we had been achieving in the three years of it being held in the Henfold Pavilion. We also struggled, until just a few days before the event, to attract sufficient support to set-up and run the Beekeeping Show element. Public footfall was also less than we would have liked, prompting discussion about the merits, value and costs of a large annual show-case publicity event versus multiple local show 'pop-up' appearances throughout the year. Going to many ready-made audiences, rather than attempting to attract a single audience, is likely to be our approach in 2024, in order to present RBKA, Beekeeping and to sell honey. Returning to Henfold for a separate annual Honey Show.

For the Surrey Honey Show, when, at short notice, the Painshill Park venue became unavailable due to A3 Roadworks, for a third year Reigate hosted the event at our Henfold apiary. We were delighted that our star member won the **Composite Cup** for 'Surrey member with Most Points', for a third time, and that Reigate itself also retained the **Vincent Challenge Cup** for the 'Surrey Division with Most Points' for a third consecutive year.

Reigate contributes in close collaboration with Croydon in the managing, setting up and operation of the South of England Beekeeping Displays and Honey Show events at the Ardingly Show-Ground. Reigate providing demonstration equipment, information displays and a number of volunteer stewards during the shows.

Reigate members were also present in some number at this year's National at Sandown Park as: entrants, stewards, attending lectures or workshops, partaking in retail therapy and managing the Honey Sales stall in the foyer ... selling honey to beekeepers!

Swarm Team

It has proven to be a particularly 'swamy' season with over 90 swarms/removals attended by our team of 13 collectors. This year, many of the call-outs were to cast swarms, with one location being visited 5 times.

All members requesting swarms were able to be supplied, with the remainders being retained by collectors.

For ease of handling, the preference by the collectors now is to use polynucs as swarm collection boxes, transferring the swarms into final recipients equipment at a later stage. The Division will be providing a supply of polynuc's to the Swarm Team members for that sole purpose, rather than relying on collectors needing to use their own equipment. We do receive some notable donations from schools, Gatwick Airport and the general public, although not everyone requesting our help actually follows through with a donation!

House & Grounds Maintenance

Another busy year keeping on top of the grass and hedges, cleaning gutters, clearing leaves from car park and filling potholes in the access track. Unfortunately, there was need to cut down and remove a further number of Ash trees due to Ash Die-back disease. A small shallow pond was created, providing permanent on-site water supply for the bees. Equipment maintenance included mower servicing, repairing wheelbarrow & trailer tyres.

After consultations with the manufacturer of the original failed exterior fire protection treatments on the pavilion, half the full cost of an alternative paint treatment from a different supplier remained to be paid and the new system required original coatings to be fully removed by sand blasting, costing £2,500. The primer and the first two of three coats of the fire-retardant paint was applied by our two Grounds persons, helped by volunteering members. The cost of finishing sandpaper, brushes and the new treatment paints added a further £1,200 to the exercise. The third top coat is planned for 2024, as soon as the weather improves, and complimentary re-varnishing of window and door frames and doors will also be completed.

Asian Hornet Awareness Team

Our Reigate AHAT Leader has also stood in as the Surrey BKA AHAT Coordinator for most of the year.

RBKA AHAT established connections within itself and with all eight divisions of SBKA AHAT via dedicated WhatsApp groups, organised meetings every 4-6 weeks. Monthly newsletters to all divisions summarised progress made, how SBKA members could help, what to look out for, and provided links to supporting references. In total the AHAT's have responded to 10+ NBU/BBKA direct requests for assistance & concerns from the public about suspected AH sightings or nests (that all were found to be wasps or European Hornets) and responded to hundreds of queries to do with sightings and what to do next.

Officers & Committee

I thank again our Officers and Committee members who have all contributed directly through their often-multiple roles, providing advice, guidance and support, during the past year, with five full meetings having been conducted, all on-line via Zoom.

At the close of our year, **Celia Perry** has stepped down from direct involvement on our Committee. I am delighted that Celia will continue to help our members with their BBKA Assessment and Exam bookings, serve as our Honey Show Secretary, and of course provide us with the benefit of her experience as one of our four Master Beekeepers.

Neil Holden was persuaded to accept being nominated to join the committee at our 2023 AGM. Neil has been effectively managing our divisions stocks of honey, arranging for its being jarred and labelled as needed and ensuring supplies to our retail outlets and our sales stalls at local events and fairs. Neil was duly elected as Committee Member.

With no other changes, **Mike Hill** remains as our President, **Richard Bradfield** as Chair, **Liz Jackson** as Hon Secretary, **Vince Gallo** as Hon Treasurer, **Simon Ford** as Hon Membership Secretary, with **Bob Maurer, Colin Clement, Gill Simpson & Janet Kay** as the other four of five Committee Members.

Gill Simpson has been re-elected as Reigate Division's Representative on the Surrey Council, and **Richard Bradfield** is nominated for re-election at the SBKA AGM as Reigate's Trustee of SBKA for 2023/24.

Richard Bradfield
26th November 2023