

Croydon Division Chair's report 2023-24

This year we have started an important initiative – to develop a strategy for CBKA for the next 3 years.

The committee is good at taking decisions about the immediately pressing issues, but these fill our regular committee meetings and we wanted to create space to think about the longer term. We held a strategy day in February 2024 which took our charitable objectives as a starting point and looked at how we might better fulfil them. For example, what can we better do to educate the public on the importance of bees and what they can do to help? ...and how can we better serve our members so that more of them have an active relationship with the division? We also carried out a survey to try to find out what some of our less-engaged members would like from the division.

Having a clearer view of this enables us to set our policy on financial reserves, communication and how we can develop our training programme. Some of these things we have started on, including a programme of planned replacement of apiary equipment and more targeted use of social media. Others, for example creating a new “followers” programme for members of the public interested in bees but not wanting to become beekeepers, will have to wait until resources become available.

Training & Education

Our programme has continued to expand thanks to the effort of our training coordinator. Our winter course attracted 18 participants, and our membership secretary has been great at maintaining contact with the beginners so they can then take advantage of the learning opportunities at Hartley Down Apiary.

The One Year Supported Beekeeping scheme at HDA has been very successful in its first year, providing hives and mentors for three pairs of beginners.

Four members took the Basic Assessment, three members took the Honey Bee Health assessment. All candidates were successful.

Our Winter meetings were reasonably well attended.

Our module study group, organised jointly with Reigate BKA, has achieved great results. 5 of our members tackled module 5 gaining 1 credit and 4 distinctions. Work on module 6 is underway now.

Events

We have re-invigorated our approach to providing a CBKA presence at local events. There is now a coordinator, and the work is being better shared. Our target for 2023-4 was to attend 4 events, and this was achieved. We are working at being more organised at selling the HDA and members' honey at these events.

We organised two purely social events: our Christmas meal, where we tried a new venue in 2023, and the Summer BBQ at Hartley Down.

As well as our usual bi-weekly Sunday apiary sessions during the season where we presented several different topics, we held a Microscopy session and relaunched our kit cleaning day as ‘Soup, Scrape and Scorch’, an afternoon to thoroughly clean the club's equipment followed by soup and mulled wine. All were well attended by members.

Honey shows

Our Croydon honey show moved into a much bigger hall this year. This was caused by the non-availability of our usual space, but has triggered us to recognise some more opportunities and a new enthusiasm to build a stronger and more inclusive show for future years. It is brilliant that the show now



has its own sub-committee who have already started planning the show for 2025 which will be on 13th September and be judged by Bill Fisher and Sue Carter.

At a time when some divisions around us find they are unable to put on a honey show at all, it is excellent that ours is thriving. Our show is acting as great encouragement for members to go on to compete at regional and national level, we were very well represented at Sandown Park, the Douglas Cup remained with Croydon, four of the other Surrey cups were won by Croydon members – well, actually, one Croydon member!

Communication

For internal communication, the quality of our excellent newsletter has been maintained with interesting content issued every month. The newsletter is a key part of our identity and binds us together.

Externally, we now have a more coordinated approach to social media, with (as at early September) 46 posts, a reach of 357, followers at 54, and around 1500 views.

The Croydon team have been active communicating about the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet, displaying the new AH banners at various roadshow events and member meetings. We also undertook an AH trapping exercise in Spring following last year's sighting in Oxted with luckily nothing found.

Apiary

We have a brilliant team at our Hartley Down apiary looking after the bees and making the site look beautiful. It has proudly hosted members' meetings, assessments, a summer barbecue, and many training sessions. The team has been operating without an apiary manager, a role which they currently share between team members.

Honey yields

Following the wet summer, members have reported a range of results this year. For some, it has been their best year ever, for others crops have been about 60% of usual quantities, or even zero. On average the honey has a light appearance compared with other years.

Member news

Membership levels are stable with (in July) 94 registered members, 6 partners, 3 schools, 3 juniors and 29 friends.

Future strategy

We will aim to increase member engagement, continue to expand our education opportunities, and reach more members of the public.

Concluding remarks

We do have a wider group of people now involved in running the division's activities. This year three new committee members brought new life and ideas to the team. Further energetic members are always welcome.

I would like to thank again our committee, and all those members who have made an active contribution to CBKA this year.

Bob Barnes, Chair
November 2024

