

Healthy Bees are Happy Bees

Recently I was reading an article reporting on research into whether bees had emotions or not. Without anthropomorphising my bees, I know that one day they can seem calm and content while another day they appear annoyed or even angry. I also know that 'unhappy' bees make a very unhappy beekeeper!

There may be a genetic element to a colony's bad behaviour but, putting that aside, most changes in the way they act are likely to relate to changes in circumstances. For example, wasps may have started preying on the hive; the nectar flow may have ended unexpectedly; or some workmen may have been digging up the road nearby sending random vibrations through the ground.

There is not a great deal beekeepers can do about such events but we can manage our bees so that they do not suffer from long-term stress. And one thing that does cause stress to bees is physical illness. If beekeepers are able to pick up early signs of disease and other afflictions caused by conditions in the hive, they would be able to prevent serious consequences. Many beekeepers, however, do not know enough about honey bee health issues to care for their bees adequately when illness strikes.

If you find yourself in this position, you may like to join me for a course in Honey Bee Health being offered in the new year. It will be held fortnightly by Zoom and open to beekeepers across Devon. It is intended to supplement the work being done by branch education teams who often do not have the personnel or time to offer training in this more specialised aspect of beekeeping.

Course content

There will obviously need to be a theoretical element to cover topics like viruses, brood diseases, statutory requirements and pests but the emphasis will be on how this knowledge informs our practice. For example, when and how to feed bees; improving handling skills; record keeping; the importance of hygiene and biosecurity; treating and storing equipment.

The content and methods of the course would be of most interest and relevance to those who:

- have completed a beginner's course and kept bees for at least a year.
- want a broader yet structured way of learning rather than the traditional route taken for the written modules;
- are nearly ready to take their Basic Assessment in the near future and want more background knowledge;
- have passed their Basic Assessment and may be thinking of gaining their BBKA Honey Bee Health Certificate.
- would appreciate some group support as they prepare for module 1 or module 3

How to apply

1. Decide if you want to commit to attending a series of six Zoom meetings and if you can spend 1-2 hours a fortnight to carry out study tasks.
2. Register your interest with me by email at anemone1975@talktalk.net stating:
 - your name;
 - the branch of DBKA you are registered with;
 - a brief summary of your beekeeping experience to date.;
 - what has motivated you to learn more about honey bee health.
3. Contact your branch Education/Training Officer to discuss what support could be offered locally at a practical level when the active season starts in April.

Finally, I'm sure that you agree that good health is vital to both bees and beekeepers. Here's to a happy, healthy winter for all of us!

Kathy Lovegrove
Devon Education Officer
anemone1975@talktalk.net
October 2022