

Croydon Division Chair's report 2019-20

As we all know, it's been a challenging year, but one in which Croydon division has come closer together.



**CROYDON
BEEKEEPERS**

Training & Education

Training and Education are our key charitable objectives and we have strived to continue them while physical meeting has been restricted.

Our regular 8-week winter theory course was running at the time of the first lock-down led by Mark Stott. We delivered the final two sessions via Zoom, but were not able to continue with the practical sessions. In the autumn Mark planned and started another of his courses, this time using Zoom from the outset.

At the start of the season we had a number of beginners, both from the training course, and new members. Some already had bees on order when lock-down hit. We took the difficult decision not to provide training in our Hartley Down apiary, but have done our best to give guidance by other means.

As government guidance allowed, several of our more experienced members stepped in to provide 1-2-1 assistance at beginners' own hives. Our WhatsApp support group, already actively supported before COVID-19, came into its own, and was busy throughout the active season. It has now reached 36 members. Although initially mentoring was provided by just a couple of identified individuals, it has now evolved into a support network where everyone can contribute their thoughts on how to solve a problem. It was good to see our second-year members grow in confidence and provide support to our less-experienced members.

With the impact of COVID-19 being felt just as the active beekeeping season was starting, we were swift in starting Zoom meetings to support members. Our first took place on 23rd March. Members quickly took to the new way of working, with on average 26 people present each week throughout the season until October. Some weeks there was a specific topic, at other times we discussed topical issues of the week led by what members had seen in their hives.

For the winter season, Mags Scott and Kathy O'Toole are now leading bi-weekly Zoom sessions based around BBKA module 1. They have also stepped in to host the Beginners' course that was started by Mark Stott.

With the cancellation of the BBKA exams this year we did not run our Basic assessment instruction course.

Events

Events in the 2019-20 season started with our AGM, for which we adopted a new format on a Friday night that included cheese, fizz and a honey & mead tasting. This was well supported and turned out to be a sociable evening.

The Croydon Division Christmas dinner in December 2019 was again a success. Our third year with the format of an evening dinner was well supported.

We continued with winter meetings that included guest speakers including Steve Riley on Treatment Free Beekeeping, and John Chapman on Showing before the programme had to be cancelled. Summer events were not possible this year.

Honey shows

We took the difficult decision not to go ahead with our 2020 honey show in September, but are making plans to hold a reduced honey show in late February. We will have fewer different classes, but focus on the core hive products in a COVID-19 secure manner.

Apiaries

The Hartley Down apiary has been led this year by Derek Read, as apiary manager. In order to work safely, the regular Thursday team reduced to a skeleton staff which has focussed on consolidating our bee stocks and as government guidance allowed continued with infrastructure projects. The shed has progressed due to a truly magnificent effort by one person. Derek has been a stalwart in continuing to provide practical support to members.

This was to be the year when we intended to establish a training apiary (known as the JDS apiary) in the North of the borough. A team lead by Heather Smith with support from Mark Stott started clearance work on a site at Spa Hill allotments. With regret we had to put this on hold.

Honey yields

Some of our members started the active season with heavy winter losses. Those who had strong colonies benefited from warm and settled weather in the spring that brought an unusually good spring honey crop. Summer was a lot more tricky, with a very dry period followed by poor weather during the peak summer nectar flows. The weather was favourable in autumn for the bees to collect much ivy nectar.

Member news

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Mark Stott, our previous Chair and the driver of much of our training work. He was well known to many of our members, especially our newer beekeepers who attended his many courses, and across Surrey for his work on education at county level. A tribute to Mark was published in the October edition of our newsletter.

Future strategy

I would like to see us continue to build on the benefits that greater communication has brought us this year, extend our training, and COVID-19 permitting, press ahead with the JDS northern apiary as Mark Stott envisaged.

Concluding remarks

We have been well tested this year and many people have worked really hard to maintain our critical activities. Our number of full members has increased from 78 to 94, and we are continuing to extend our Friends scheme so that individuals can be part of our organisation at a low-cost before they have their own bees.

The use of Zoom has in fact brought us much closer together. Without the 30 minute plus drive from one end of the borough to the other, we've got to know each other far more closely this year and we have a higher proportion of members who are actively engaged. I feel that Croydon Beekeepers has become more cohesive as a result.

My thanks to the Croydon committee who have remained positive and been really creative in looking for new ways to do things. I would also like to extend my thanks to all of those active members who have contributed to the division's activities over the last year. Everyone has been so flexible in stepping in to fill gaps, or to help other members.

Bob Barnes. Chair, Croydon Beekeepers Association
November 2020