

Croydon Division Chair's report 2018-19

It's been another year in which Croydon Beekeepers has moved forward. We have a lot to be proud of.



Honey shows

Our Honey Show was again very successful this year. We had over 87 entries from around 20 members – a number of which were new to our show. It was great to see the novice class being contested this time.

Training & Education

For the first time we ran two beginners' courses in parallel during the winter attended by 20 people. This supported our diversity policy by allowing us to deliver the training in two different locations and make it available both in the evening and during the middle of the day.

There have been sessions in the club apiary on Saturdays as well as Sundays this year, a total of 19 sessions, which has made them available to more people. The Thursday team have not only handled the maintenance of bees and facilities, but have encouraged and taught a number of beginners.

Our Basic candidates were very successful with all four of those who entered being awarded a credit for the second year running. A taster day run at the apiary attracted 10 people and gave them an excellent start to their understanding of the craft.

We've continued to strengthen our relationship with Good Food Matters in New Addington using it as a venue not only for one of our beginners courses, but also two other training events. There was a workshop on candle making, and another on preparing entries for honey shows.

Our new WhatsApp group linking mentors and new beekeepers has got off to a great start, with autumn feeding and winter insulation hot topics of discussion.

Events

There were four talks at our winter meetings and the AGM, all of which triggered lots of discussion, especially about alternative methods of varroa control.

Educating the public is also an important part of our mission. This year we've had a stall with an observation hive at four external events in addition to our own honey show. Our asian hornet banner has been out at each of these helping us get the important message to the public. Separately, there have been talks on beekeeping to five different organisations.

In the spring we had a visit for around 30 people to the garden and apiary at Chartwell, and during the summer we enjoyed a garden party in a member's garden.

The Croydon Division Christmas dinner was again a highlight. Only in its second year, it already feels like part of our tradition, and was very well supported with over half of our membership turning out for an evening of great food and company.

Apiary

Our Hartley Down apiary has hosted 19 weekend training and members' meetings this year. Our Thursday working team, which does the bulk of the work to maintain the apiary has met on 40 days and attracted visitors who have subsequently become members.

One set-back this year came when the owner of a neighbouring property employed unscrupulous workers to cut back two adjacent trees who threw the arisings into our apiary. The problem was turned into asset with a lot of hard work that created both logs for burning and "insect hotels".

We received a generous grant via our local Purley and Woodcote councillors for improvements to the apiary and installation of a new hut is underway.

It has been agreed that the primary focus for this apiary is as a teaching facility. We are pursuing other possibilities to help new members find locations for their hives.

Honey yields

The yields reported by our members have varied considerably. It was, as we know, a very swarmy year and so members have spent a lot of time running around after their bees. Those colonies that have stayed put have generated good honey crops, some members have taken no honey.

Although not focussed on honey production, our club apiary still produced around 60lbs of honey. This provided a learning opportunity at our club extraction day, and will provide valuable income for the division.

Future strategy

We are now more seriously exploring the possibility of starting a club apiary in the North of the borough, and ways in which we can better support new beekeepers, for example with mentoring and finding locations for their hives.

Concluding remarks

Finally, I'd like to thank the Croydon committee and all of those who have contributed to the division's activities over the last year. There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes by a lot of people, who as always I won't name individually for fear of missing someone out.

Bob Barnes, Chair