

Croydon Division Chair's report 2020-21

As lock-down has eased the Croydon Division has emerged as a more cohesive organisation.



**CROYDON
BEEKEEPERS**

Training & Education

We ran our usual Beginners training course in its Zoom format at the start of the year, and were then able to provide practical sessions face-to-face in the spring.

The lock-downs really brought us together to talk and study on Zoom. Our regular Monday Zooms continued by popular demand even after the lock-downs ended and the apiaries could reopen. They give an opportunity for more detailed discussion on topics that come up in our WhatsApp support group. The Monday zooms spawned a separate Module 1 study group which ran through the winter culminating in the exam at the end of April. When the module results were published in BBKA News in September, thirteen of the Surrey results listed were Croydon members. Some of those successful at module 1 are now continuing their studies with a joint initiative with Reigate Beekeepers working towards module 2.

Tracey Carter ran our Basic course. Our candidates were already relatively experienced, not having been able to take the assessment in 2020. There were four credits, and one distinction.

One of our members, Debbie Burney has now established Mrs Burney's Bee Club, this is a Community Interest Company (CIC) which provides bee experiences and learning for young people, and it is a partner for Croydon Beekeepers. The arrangement is working well, with a flow of opportunities passing both ways. We received a request for beekeeping experience to the company producing a CBBC series *Show me the honey*, and Debbie mentored Darcey-Mae who went on to win the series.

Paul Borfiga has taken the lead in establishing a *Treatment Free* group, learning from the good work done by Steve Riley at Westerham beekeepers. We conducted a members' survey, which shows that there is a strong pull for this. There has been a lot of information transfer, and a plan is emerging for how CBKA might support and facilitate our members ultimately not to need to use chemicals to control varroa.

Events

Regrettably, we were not able to do our usual round of external summer events this year due to COVID.

In June we held a tribute to Mark Stott, previous CBKA chair who died unexpectedly in 2020. We gathered to remember him at an opening ceremony in our new Northern apiary during which a new bench was unveiled by Mark's wife Cindy. It was a very moving occasion which also marked the opening of our new Northern apiary at its naming after Mark.

We are very much looking forward to the return of our Christmas meal this December.

Honey shows

We were pleased to hold our Croydon honey show pretty much as normal, just with some extra COVID safety measures in place. The show was well supported, although the number of entries in some classes (for example frame for extraction) was down due to the poor weather. Our judge John Chapman encouraged a number of entries to be put forward to the national show, and indeed Juanita Isaacs was the only entry to be given an award in the National class for *Two Round Sections*.

Croydon did well at the National Honey Show, with a number of members achieving results in the Surrey and National Classes. We are proud of our new member Nadia, who won class 80 *Display of Home-produced Products*, Meriel who collected a number of trophies for mead, and Tracey Cater who won two trophies in the Surrey classes. Our monthly newsletter was given a Very Highly Commended award in class 107 Branch Newsletter, a great achievement given that most of the entries were from county-level associations.

Apiaries

This was the year when we finally reached our goal of establishing a second club apiary. Our existing apiary is well equipped, but located at the Southern end of the borough, so it is hard for some of our members to travel there.

Our new site has been named the *Mark Stott Apiary*, Mark was passionate about beekeeping education, so it is a worthy tribute to him. We have a lovely position in a secluded part of Crystal Palace Park, which is a place where Mark kept his own bees. Gavin Matthews is the apiary's manager, and has already created a strong team looking after the bees and the site. He has established a strong relationship with our hosts, the Friends of Crystal Palace Park.

At our Hartley Down apiary, much work has been done by Derek Read and his team to make improvements to the site and our stock of bees. A new gardening team has been meeting each week and create areas of bee-friendly planting. Following the break for COVID, it was pretty much business as usual this season from June, with the apiary hosting our members' meetings and various training groups.

Honey yields

For most of our members it has not been a good year for honey due to the weather. Yields are reported as being at between a third to a half of their usual levels. However this is not universal, members towards the North of our area especially have reported good crops. This is an interesting pattern which we have seen in previous years, and could be related to the higher urban temperatures in early spring.

Member news

Our membership has continued to increase. Many of those who took our Beginners' course at the start of the year have gone on to be members, and we have had a steady flow of people join us throughout the year.

Future strategy

I would like to see CBKA continue to build on its strength of being a close-knit division. We can further increase engagement, and have a more coordinated approach to learning.

Concluding remarks

This has been a year when Croydon Beekeepers has built on the sense of community we developed during the lock-downs and achieved many successes.

I would like to thank not just our committee but all those members who have made an active contribution to CBKA this year.

Bob Barnes. Chair, Croydon Beekeepers Association
November 2021