

Farnham Division Chairman's Report 2021

It was hoped that 2021 would see a resumption to normality but this proved not to be the case, with Covid restrictions and lockdowns continuing through to Spring 2021. In anticipation of the apiary being able to reopen, the fostered colonies were returned at the beginning of the season, but the ongoing restrictions coupled with the discovery of EFB in an apiary colony meant that the apiary had to remain closed to members until 17th July. After an initial tidy-up in March, access became difficult and the apiary became something of a sad sight until restrictions were lifted towards the end of June and it was possible to arrange a working party to carry out some maintenance.

Over the winter months Jacqui Sellers arranged some great talks delivered by Zoom and these were followed by 'virtual' weekly meetings arranged by the Colonies group led by Rosalind Clague. To help keep people connected during the lockdowns and beyond, Chris Rushton launched five geographically based WhatsApp 'bee bubbles' for 54 interested members. These enabled members to seek help and advice from other members living nearby and have been a great success. Thanks go to Jacqui, Rosalind, Chris and all those who helped deliver these online events.

Plans for our 2021 winter talks and activities programme are already well in hand and these start with the talk to be given by Roger Patterson on 20th November ahead of our AGM. Details of the other talks will be given in future Newsletters sent to members. To help inform the topics to be covered in the talks and other member activities, Jacqui arranged a member survey during the summer. Apart from informing preferences on talks, the survey also gave some useful information in other areas, which the Committee will be considering further.

Until restrictions were lifted, the pandemic continued to bring our community involvement to a standstill but Elizabeth Knight and her team were able to resume school visits and Rural Life Centre activities in the summer, details of which will be given by Elizabeth in her Events report. In addition to Events, Elizabeth also took on the role of Communications Secretary at last year's AGM and has kept the membership up to date through her regular newsletter emails and events circulars. Thanks go to Elizabeth for the hard work that comes with these two roles.

Unfortunately, two strong contributors to FBKA have decided that it is now time to hand over the reins of what they do. The first is Lynn Cox, who has been writing the 'This month in your apiary' Newsletter article for six years. This is a popular article giving us all a thorough reminder of what we should be doing month by month as well as providing a helpful monthly checklist. If anyone, or any group of members is interested in taking this over from Lynn please do get in touch. The second is Hilary Welton, who in 2019, after redesigning our logo, gave our website an overhaul and who has been looking after it since then. We are very grateful to Lynn and Hilary and I would like to thank them for all they have done for the Association.

On the education front we were unable to run the Beginner theory course over the winter months but it was possible to run the practical sessions for those who took the course the previous year. Apart from this, the only course that ran during the year was the practical Bee Health Certificate and thanks go to David Clague for not only organising and delivering this but also for managing the higher than usual number of enquiries that came in during the year, the uncertainty brought about by lockdowns making this quite a challenge.

Despite the Covid constraints we were able to continue with the provision of a range of member services including fondant, foundation, varroacides and extractor hire. Thanks go to Gregg Cobb, Ian Clifton, Neil Sellers, Lisa McPherson and Sabine Reyersbach for organising and assisting with these.

Finance. The Treasurer's Report will follow but in terms of bank balance the Division ended the year a little ahead of 2020, with a balance approaching £18,000.

Membership. At the time of writing, the numbers for the 2021/22 renewal are not yet finalised but at the end of the end of our financial year the total membership stood at 203 compared to 205 at the same time in 2020. It was decided that the BBKA electronic system would be used for the 2021/22 renewal as this system has now been operational for a while and seems to work well. Chris Rushton

already uses this system as part of his Treasurer role and he kindly agreed to also administer the system's membership renewal process. Until this year, Ellie Kibble processed our paper-based membership renewal process and a very big thank you goes to her for undertaking this very time-consuming task for many years. Thanks also go to Chris for his role as Treasurer and taking on the extra work associated with the new renewal process.

Honey. As with most years, honey harvest reports have been mixed, with one member getting nearly 70kgs from one hive while another reported next to nothing. Apiary honey is sold mainly through the shop at the Rural Life Centre, so sales stalled throughout each lockdown but have since resumed. A small stock of 2019 heather honey was sold through the village shop in Tilford. These sales provide a useful source of income for the Association. On the honey show front the Surrey County Show was cancelled for a second year so Surrey Beekeepers Association arranged its own honey show, which was held in September. With the lifting of Covid restrictions we have been able to resume the FBKA honey show, to be held as usual in parallel with our AGM. Thanks go to Daphne Thomas for taking on the role Events Secretary for the SBKA show and for organising our own show.

Last year I reported that a yellow legged hornet nest had been confirmed in Gosport. This year nests have recently been found in Ascot and Portsmouth, which like Gosport are uncomfortably close to home. Whilst the nests have been destroyed, these sightings show how important it is for us all to remain vigilant and be ready to photograph and report any possible sightings. Our Asian Hornet Action Team led by Julie Trice continues to monitor the situation closely and will be ready to assist if called upon. Julie has also worked as our Committee Secretary this year and I would like to thank her for her work in these two important roles.

Covid cases continue to stay stubbornly high but, despite this, life is now slowly getting back to something like normal. Let us hope that the winter months prove not to be too challenging and that we can look forward to a resumption of our usual beekeeping activities in 2022.

Geoff Redwood

8th November 2021