BIBBA *Monthly*

What's all the Buzz about at The University of Wales Trinity Saint David ?

Buckley's Bees share their thoughts on September's BIBBA Conference.

October 2023

Article by Buckley’s Bees

BIBBA in Britain: Celebrating sixty years

BIBBA celebrated its 60th anniversary with a conference ‘Supporting Practical Beekeeping’ held at the UNWST in Carmarthen. Attendees received a warm and generous welcome from the Welsh Beekeeping Community and grateful thanks are extended to the WBA and all who made the weekend conference a success. An informative Town Walk lead by Philip Johnes in beautiful Welsh sunshine preceded a welcome by Caroline Mullinex, WBA Chair.

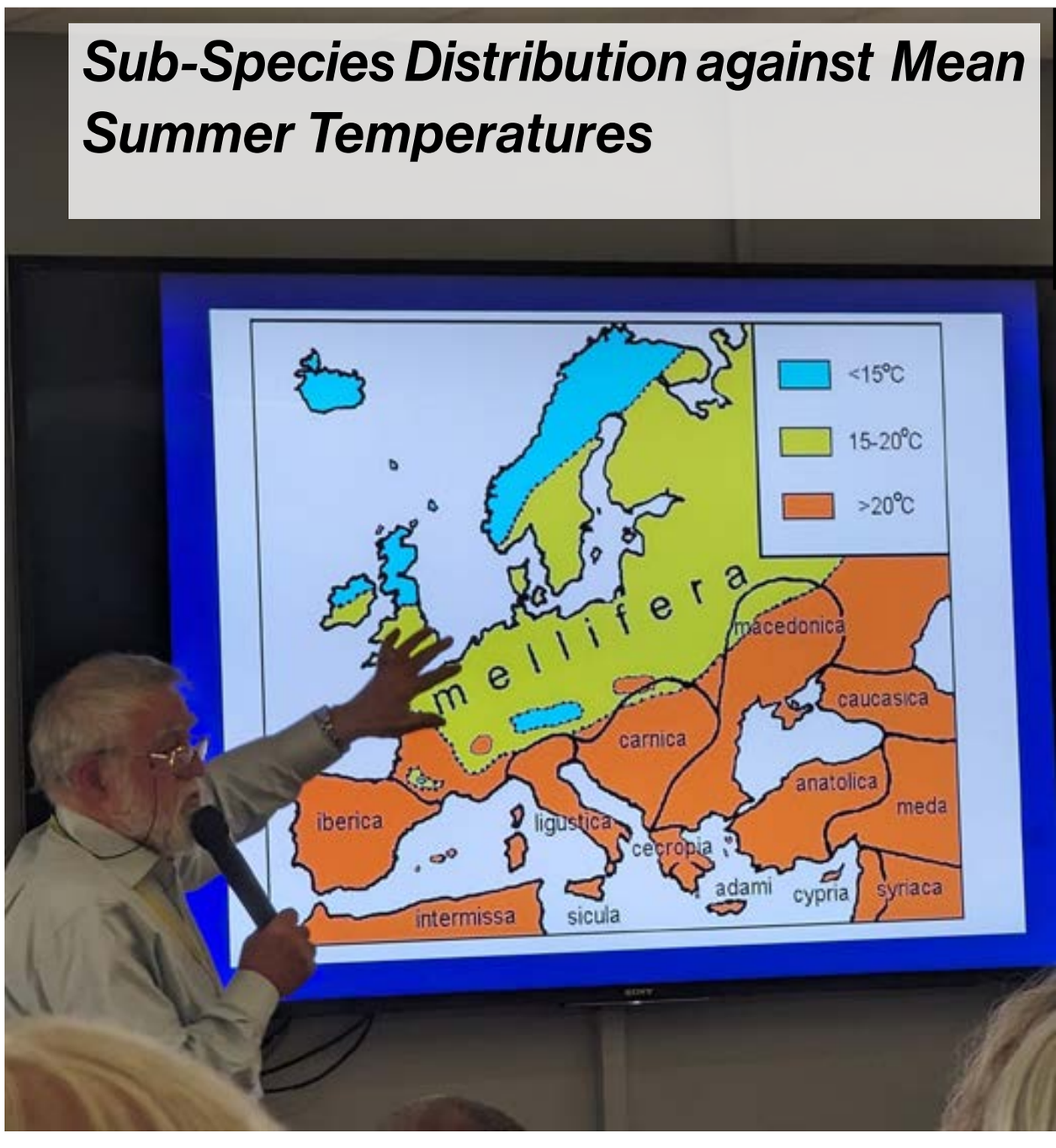
The event enjoyed a range of topics delivered by experienced speakers who spoke with authority on their allocated topics. The conference included beekeeping at all levels from hobbyists to commercial and semi commercial beekeeping and successfully drew on experience from commercial and academic members managing their locally adapted bees. The conference format enabled delegates to interact directly with speakers with most presentations being followed by a panel discussion and exploring further relevant issues raised by the audience

Bees are under threat and beekeepers need to mitigate many problems to preserve their colonies and raise awareness of the issues posed by the possible arrival of Tropilaelaps and the continuing challenge of Varroa.Although Tropilaelaps is notifiable and fortunately not yet found on our island Dan Etheridge’s presentation was acutely informative. Potentially this mite is a greater risk to our bees than varroa so all efforts are needed to prevent its arrival.

Steve Riley offered an illustrative account on how to identify varroa resistant traits in our own bees with positive practical advice. Selecting from colonies showing resistant traits and breeding from them

will ultimately remove the requirement to treat. Education and research are vital in this process.

David Parker's talk on 'Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus (CBPV). One BKAs experience.' was incredibly interesting and informative. Identification of the virus and management are still in their infancy, but some ideas have demonstrated that there are technics that can assist colony recovery.
The subject of queen rearing frequently comes up in beekeeping discussions and Lynfa Davies' brought into focus the need for queen rearing coupled with the value of drones. If the drone population is desirable then queen improvement follows. One without the other does not work! Similarly her commitment to the Healthy Bees Plan integrates and reflects her work in Biodiversity.



Dorian Pritchard presented an academic but practical talk which helped in understanding how 'bee genetics' work. The necessity for several queen lines ensures genetic diversity and is an essential requirement in the propagation of local bees.

Jo Widdicombe, Ceri Morgan and Kevin Thorn presented talks and illustrations about the value of locally adapted bees with valuable advice on the way forward to maximize the potential of the bee genetics in our separate localities. The importance of indigenous colonies was frequently referred to as a genetic pool of naturally localised bees. Breeding and promoting the local bee has seen increased honey crops for some members by as much as 100%.

Talks about queen rearing, honey production, developing varroa resistance and colony assessment demonstrated how important record keeping is in bee improvement. Thanks to Colm O'Neill for sharing the development of his record keeping system and its use as a tool in selecting the best bees to propagate.

Dan Etheridge updates us on Varroa's exotic housemate: Tropilaelaps mites

The new panel format gave a fresh new way to discuss any points raised in the presentations

Karl Colyer's guidance on beekeeping on a budget was enlightening especially his ability to recycle and repurpose materials that would become scrap but instead are turned into first class hives and other beekeeping equipment. He shared his methods on how to keep the costs of beekeeping equipment down to keep the hobby enjoyable.

"The Conference was a great success "

Helen Tworkowski's talk demonstrated an empathy for the bee. Her lessons from the bee shed were based on practical experience gleaned through many years. Rarely are beekeepers prepared to admit their mistakes but Helen gave an honest account of her experiences and how she learned from them.

Roger Patterson is probably one of the best-known beekeepers in the British Isles. His commitment to BIBBA goes back many years and he is a driving force for the future in developing locally adapted and near native bees. His massive contribution to this conference ensured its success. Thanks go to Roger for the multitude of responsibilities he carries on behalf of BIBBA. His innovation and drive have led to a new group known as CaSCA - Commerical and Semi-Commercial Apiarists being developed and his presentation on this wasn't too bad either!

The Conference offered the additional benefit of meeting socially where gems of wisdom were shared during breaks and at mealtimes. Conversations and discussion continued throughout the day and into the evening and David Parker, as quiz master, entertained attendees with many and varied bee associated questions and as in all things beekeeping, more than one answer to the question was given! A good fun activity for everyone to enjoy in a social setting.

In summary this conference was a great success and thanks again to all those who made it possible and to all those who attended.

David & Emma Buckley or Buckley's Bees

Introducing CaSCA

Support for semi-commercial bee-keepers and beyond

by Roger Patterson

I gave a presentation to the BIBBA Conference in Carmarthen that was based on CaSCA.

I explained that it was a new initiative from BIBBA, being an acronym of Commercial and Semi-Commercial Apiarists, that is intended for BIBBA members who sold hive products through one or more regular outlets.

The volume of sales doesn't matter, as those who sell products often have similar issues to deal with, although perhaps they will be approached in different ways, depending on scale.

Two people have told me they hadn't registered because they didn't consider they qualified, one with 20 colonies, the other 35, both with several outlets.

Oh yes, they do!

They are well qualified, but perhaps it's the word "commercial" that makes them think they aren't.

Jo Widdicombe - Raising locally adapted queens to sell

CaSCA is only for BIBBA members and is intended to fill the gap between other organisations who may not encourage the use of locally adapted bees. There was a lot of interest at the conference, several people congratulating BIBBA on providing such a facility.

It will take a little time to run efficiently, but already there have been two meetings that have been fruitful. How far it will go will depend on the needs of the members, so if you sell hive products and you want to receive information and be involved, then you need to register.

We are only contacting those who do so, to avoid members who don't want information from receiving it. Registration is simple here https://bibba.com/casca/ There is no cost and you can de-register at any time.

Many beekeepers, when they increase their number of colonies, only seem to think of increasing honey sales, but there is a need for bees, especially for local BKAs to supply the constant stream of beginners. With good management, nucs can be produced quite quickly, probably giving a higher return per colony than producing honey.

This is one example of how CaSCA can help members. It will also provide sources of locally adapted bees throughout the country.

Bee-Breeding Brilliance

How to start a Bee Improvement Group

When it comes to Bee improvement I believe the suggested approach offered by BIBBA's NatBIP programme is worth careful consideration. It is a programme of bee improvement for all beekeepers of all the nations that make up the UK plus Ireland. The more that sign up to it the more successful it is likely to be.

It encourages beekeepers to work together in Groups. Eventually the Groups circle of influence can gradually be widened to include other Bee Groups, BKA's and Beekeepers in your area and carries the full support of BIBBA.

Bees developed using local stocks of the native sub-species will offer a more sustainable type of bee than those brought in from other regions. By working with the best of our locally adapted bees and not resorting to importation, we can start on the gradual path of improvement rather than one of constantly having to deal with the merry-go-round of undesirable traits and reoccurring problems that importation presents us with.

The development of a strain that will breed true is desired if progress is to be made. This means through selective queen breeding, using the best and culling the worst to establish a line of continuity in the subsequent generations of your bee stocks.

The NatBIP way to achieve this is to work with the strain which is naturally dominant in a given area, or would dominate in the absence of further imports. DNA analysis, carried out on random samples from colonies in England and Wales indicated that the largest proportion of genes were derived from the native subspecies Apis mellifera mellifera which natural selection will bring to the fore; this is of great advantage to us when looking for sustainability in our stocks.

So how can we implement the above policies and be effective if we are a beekeeper operating on a small scale with limited bee stocks and equipment? One way to do this is to come together and pool your resources...this in essence is Group activity.

Teaming up to co-operate and work with other like-minded beekeepers enables you to share resources, labour and skills.

Offering the possibility of developing a hardy, docile and productive bee that is conditioned to survive and thrive in your locality. When you are considering starting a group it is worth checking that there isn't one already established in your area. If there is, then it may be worth exploring this first.

One of the first tasks in bringing a Group together is to engage in the ongoing conversation about bee improvement with your local beekeeping community.

Use opportunities such as your Regional BKA's monthly meetings or social media to chat about your aims and the possibilities that NatBIP offers to achieve them.

Consider inviting those with a similar outlook on bee improvement into your nucleus Group. But remember in beekeeping for every question there can be many answers so don't expect to agree on everything.

"co-operate and work with other like minded bee-keepers"

by Brian Holdcroft

Patterson's Post

Q. Should BIBBA teach general beekeeping?

In the past it has been argued by a very small number of members that BIBBA shouldn't be teaching general beekeeping, but confining teaching to the objects as per the constitution, for that reason one going as far as to say it is ultra vires (illegal).

It is felt this task is the job of local BKAs and BIBBA would upset them by doing it. As BIBBA lead Trustee for Education, I'm happy to have a constructive debate, so I will give my view, that disagrees with the above, for the reasons I shall give.

Having taught beekeeping since 1972, I have seen many changes in the craft, some, such as the introduction of varroa, increased virus levels and issues with queens, needing more knowledge than was needed by beekeepers 30 or more years ago.

Gradually, it has become my view that overall, levels of knowledge and skills are lower than I believe they should be, this, when they need to be higher. Most beekeepers of a few years' experience have stories to tell about other beekeepers who simply don't know the absolute "basics", that I be-

lieve are relevant to, and should be learnt by all beekeepers, to help them manage their bees with care and understanding. So, what do I mean by the "basics"? Simple things, factual or reliable, not opinion, that, when learnt, will explain what a lot of management techniques like swarm control, colony increase and queen rearing are trying to achieve.

They should also ensure the highest chance of success and reduce colony losses. I include such things as life cycles, what happens in a colony when it is preparing to swarm, identifying queen cell types, what

happens when a queen is removed from a colony and disease recognition.

I give lots of presentations, many of them all-day courses, plus demonstrating at my own BKA teaching apiary and others I am invited to.

I have seen great variation in beekeepers, some keeping bees only a short time being much more knowledgeable and skilful than others who have kept them for 20 years or more. There are several reasons for this that I won't discuss here, but I will give a few examples I have experienced when tutoring queen rearing courses.

They include not knowing the life cycle of anything, asking what emergency cells are and a couple who had kept bees for over 20 years, but get others to introduce queens for them. These are all important when queen rearing, so what should I do when course attendees don't know them? They are all topics that many would term general beekeeping and appropriate to all beekeepers.

There is little point in not telling them, so I do, otherwise they won't understand what is being taught. They need to know why you do something after 2, 5 or 7 days. What is concerning is that attendees have been told what knowledge is required for the course.

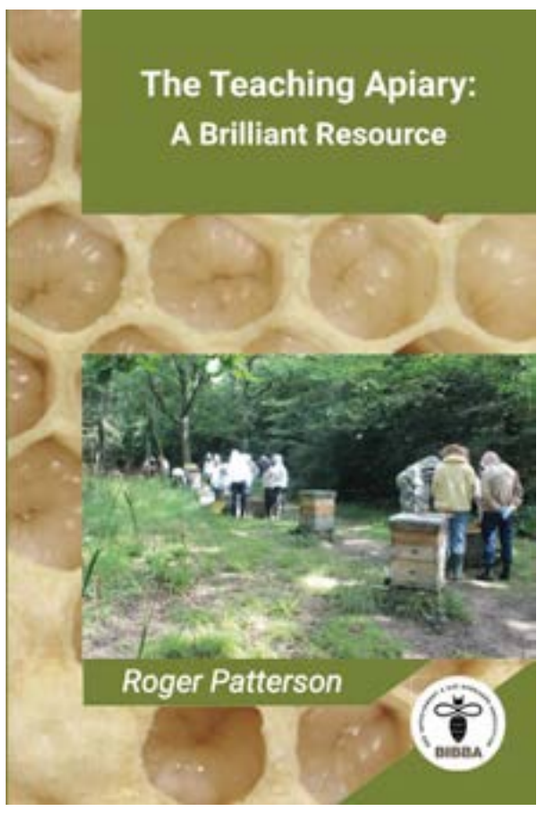
Do they not know the relevance? Are they not taught? Have they not learnt?

I have been a member of my BKA for over 60 years, currently being apiary manager and demonstrator. I was also a BBKA Trustee and although I support them all, I certainly don't think either have a monopoly on teaching general beekeeping, in the same way as I don't consider BIBBA has a monopoly on teaching bee improvement and queen rearing. Of course, they have a role, but from what I see they are very variable and often change when personnel change.

There are many excellent BKAs, with good teaching, but others that have some distance to go, some of which I mention in my book “The Teaching Apiary: A Brilliant Resource”. In any case, there are many beekeepers who aren’t members of a BKA, so who teaches them?

BIBBA is concerned with locally adapted bees, but much BKA and online teaching is geared to passing exams and is more appropriate to imported bees than locally adapted ones, some teachers and writers being openly hostile to the sort of bees that BIBBA have traditionally been associated with.

I believe that if BIBBA has a relevant message, then it has a right for it to be heard. There is a long history of BIBBA teaching a wide range of topics that are of a general nature. We have published material that cover skeps, cookery, plants, etc.



Adrian Waring wrote a splendid book “Better Beginnings for Beekeepers” that was a general book aimed at beginners.

I have written “Beekeeping: Challenge what you are told”, “The Teaching Apiary: A Brilliant Resource” and “Colony Increase: The Roger Patterson Method”, all of which are general beekeeping.

Beowulf Cooper included general beekeeping in many of his articles. We have released many webinars and videos of a general nature. There have been no complaints and if we have operated illegally, then we have been doing it a long time and to the best of my knowledge nobody has been arrested.

Recently, BIBBA membership increased threefold in a short time. It is reasonable to think that it was largely due to the webinars and videos we produced, many of which were general beekeeping, showing that BIBBA gave beekeepers what they wanted and may not have been provided by other sources.

I firmly believe that BIBBA is the main organisation for enthusiasts of locally adapted bees, but that we should actively promote and teach general beekeeping to help beekeepers understand them and their different management needs that aren’t covered by “standard teaching”.

In conclusion, there is no one organisation that has a monopoly on any form of beekeeping teaching and it certainly doesn’t make it illegal for them to offer it if it isn’t an object in the constitution.

Indeed, if the main aim of teaching becomes one of passing exams, as some are, rather than helping beekeepers to become better and more “rounded” beekeepers or having better bees, alternative sources of teaching and education should be welcomed.

BIBBA aims to help beekeepers improve their bees, beekeeping and to raise their own stock that is best suited to their locality, wherever that is. This is very wide ranging and can depend on the locality.

It is unclear if many other organisations are offering this essential and rounded service. It would be nice for BIBBA to work with any who do.

Don't miss your chance to ask questions of experienced beekeepers

Mike Palmer, Randy Oliver and BIBBA member Andrew Abrahams will be amongst the speakers at the National Honey Show 26th-28th October. See the full programme here https://www.honeyshow.co.uk/lecture-convention.php. They will be speaking on topics that are relevant to all beekeepers, but there will be a bonus that you can take part in, even if you can't attend the show. They will be joined by Roger Patterson for a discussion on topics that are requested by beekeepers. There is well over 200 years of beekeeping experience between them and in that time they have been in many situations where bees have provided problems that books don't answer. Hopefully discussion will tease some of them out.

Questions and topics for discussion will not be taken on the day, but can be submitted a week or more in advance by emailing them to lectures@honeyshow.co.uk. Where they will be incorporated into the discussion. Nobody will be identified, so please feel free to submit your questions. All NHS lectures on the main programme are recorded.

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