

Patterson's Page

by **Roger Patterson**, Wisborough Green BKA

If you are new to beekeeping or if you have not yet been to many beekeeping events, Roger Patterson may tempt you to venture out and about and visit some of the key beekeeping events this year.

Learning has become much more important so we must be better and more knowledgeable beekeepers than we once were. This is for a number of reasons including legislation, litigation culture, introduction of pests and diseases and the nearness of neighbours. We also need to understand and care for our bees more, just to keep them alive, something the older beekeepers did not have to do. Beekeeping is both practical and theoretical; the first is largely learnt by experience and observation at the hive, the latter from books, courses, the internet and presentations.

When I started beekeeping in the early 1960s many counties had County Beekeeping Instructors (CBIs) who did much of the teaching. These were all experienced beekeepers who not only taught locally, but were invited to lecture or demonstrate at events in other counties, such as one day or weekend conventions or summer schools, adding to the spread of knowledge.

Cost-cutting meant many CBIs, who often had extensive teaching apiaries, lost their positions or their activities were severely reduced. This transferred the responsibility of teaching from paid experts to unpaid volunteers in local BKAs, who have dealt with it in different ways. At Wisborough Green BKA we have an extensive teaching apiary, winter meetings that are always on beekeeping, information on our website and a number of winter events, often full day events. We have tried to cover all aspects of teaching to suit all our members, whatever their interests and ability. Other BKAs have chosen to do their teaching in different ways and I see no reason why not, because we all have different resources available to us, whether it is finance, facilities or knowledge. In addition there are a number of national or regional events, all being good opportunities to hear both national and international lecturers. These can be found on event calendars such as BBKA, BeeCraft and Thorne's, or BKA websites.

There are many events varying in length from one day to a week. For those who work, there may need to be a bit of juggling to satisfy work or the family, but if enough notice is given, most people can manage the odd day. For those who are retired or semi-retired there may be an opportunity to visit another part of the country and take a few extra days exploring the area.

Many event organisers publicise their programme several months in advance, together with a description of the content of the presentation and the presenter. This will give you an idea of what to expect. If you are not sure if it is for you, perhaps because you think the level may not suit your ability or knowledge, then do not be frightened to contact the organiser. A quick email is far better than a wasted day or weekend.

Some events have 'workshops' on a variety of topics, often on practical things that are better done as a demonstration than a lecture, such as candle making or microscopy.

In the last few years there has been an increase in the number of larger events and I would like to single a few out that you might like to consider in 2014. I will be going to all of them, so that is a

good recommendation for you! At the time of writing the full programmes have not yet been published for all of these events, so please check online.

BBKA Spring Convention, being held on 4, 5 and 6 April, at Harper Adams University, Shropshire; you will find more details on the BBKA website at: http://www.bbka.org.uk/news_and_events/spring_convention_2014. There are a number of lectures and dedicated workshops, the latter usually needing pre-booking. There are other attractions including a good trade show where you can visit the stands of some of the leading suppliers.

The Federation of Irish Beekeepers (FIBKA) has run a summer school for over sixty years and further details about this can be found at <http://www.irishbeekeeping.ie/gormanston/gormprog2014.html>. It is currently held at Gormanston College, just north of Dublin. This is a week-long event, 27 July to 1 August 2014, either full board or day ticket. There is always a guest lecturer and this year it will be Tom Seeley from the USA. There are many other speakers, mainly from Ireland, but from elsewhere too. There are three lectures and a choice of workshops at any one time, satisfying different interests and abilities. At around €300 full board this is incredibly good value for a full week of beekeeping. Not only do you have the opportunity to learn from the presenters, but there is always someone to chat to and I have picked up some good ideas over the years. This event is a permanent entry in my diary. Travel is quite good, either by ferry or air, with a courtesy bus from Dublin airport.

The Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) will be holding their 50th anniversary conference in conjunction with the SICAMM biennial conference in Llangollen, North Wales from 26–28 September 2014. Both BIBBA and SICAMM are dedicated to the native and near native bees of Northern Europe. Before I get found out, I had better admit to having an interest, because I am helping to organise this event. There will be three lecture streams to suit everyone, including bee improvement/breeding and queen rearing, general beekeeping and the more scientific topics. To date there are over 25 speakers booked from all over Europe, giving beekeepers the opportunity to listen to a wide variety of topics from speakers they may not normally have a chance to hear. This promises to be unmissable, so do not miss it! Details, with updates, can be found here http://www.bibba.com/conference_2014.php or you can pre-register to receive information as it becomes available here www.eventbrite.co.uk/event/8429168871.

The National Honey Show, <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/index.shtml>, has a number of lectures and workshops from a variety of presenters. This is toward the end of the active season, 30 October – 1 November 2014, with an opportunity to see the competitive classes and trade stands.

These are all events that are open to non-members and they will be well worth travelling to, so why not share transport with other local beekeepers? If you run out of things to talk about on the journey you could always talk about – well, bees. 