



Kent Bee-Keepers Association

County Newsletter No 90

Christmas 2020

We need an alternative word for 'unprecedented'. This has been a strange year for Beekeepers and their clubs. At least our bees, and their constant attempts to provide us with new puzzles, have given us an escapist island of normality in a world so suddenly and so greatly changed.

As we think of Christmas, and how different this year's will be, as beekeepers we would also be thinking about a Midwinter treatment against Varroa. That much, at least, can be normal. Some thoughts on that treatment are included in this newsletter (at page 6).

The Winter is also a normal time for beekeepers to study for the BBKA exams. The March and November 2020 sittings were cancelled as a result of the virus situation. But the good news is that the BBKA have made arrangements for exams to be taken, firstly online in Spring 2021, then both on-line and traditionally in Autumn 2021, so you might yet consider using the quieter times to do some studying. You can see some notes from KBKA Exam Secretary John Hendrie on Page 4 explaining the plans.

This year, beekeeping meetings having been impossible in person, they have all migrated online.

KBKA's annual "Lenham Lectures" are being rescheduled for February, online and - as is becoming usual - will be using Zoom video conferencing.

Julie Coleman, Chair of the KBKA Education and Exams committee, has provided some information about the plans which can be found on Page 5.

Video conferencing, particularly using Zoom, has become *the* way to hold meetings, whether lectures or branch committees, during the pandemic and yet that still seems to be foreign territory for many beekeepers. Because of that I have included some hopefully *helpful notes on Zoom **specifically** for those who have not (yet) tried* to use the software that 'everyone is talking about'.

Indeed, the after-Covid future 'normal' will undoubtedly continue to include online meetings as an unremarkable part of the way things are expected to be done. And that is another incentive to get up to speed right now on this important communication enabler - ideally *before* our upcoming KBKA 'Not at Lenham' lectures!

My reason for volunteering to restart the KBKA County Newsletter is my desire to foster a greater feeling of members 'belonging' to the County Association, rather than simply one's local branch. But if the Newsletter is to continue and thrive, then it needs submissions from you, the members. If there's something you have to say that deserves an audience beyond your branch, send it in. I certainly don't want to have to write the whole thing myself!

I wish you a happy Christmas, and hope for a New Year that is much better than the last one (not too much, surely?)

Dougal

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Module Exam Plans

from John Hendrie

*the KBKA Exam Secretary
and a member of the
BBKA Exam Board*

As you may know the BBKA cancelled all Exams and Assessments in 2020 due to the Covid-19 situation.

The BBKA is not expecting a rapid change to normality and is making arrangements that will enable people to sit Modules in 2021.

No announcement has yet been made regarding practical Assessments in 2021.

The BBKA is setting up an on-line system so people will be able to sit modules in Spring 2021. There will be no option to sit the modules in Spring 2021 by writing answers at an Exam centre. The Modules in the Spring 2021 will **only** be by on-line and the date will be **Saturday 24 April 2021**. This gives time to get the system operational and to check that candidates don't have technical problems and can have a practice beforehand.

You will only be able to take a maximum of 2 modules on this occasion. You will be allowed **1³/₄ hours** for each module using the on-line system. The structure of the module exams will not change and will be the same for the on-line system as for handwritten papers.

The last date for April Module Exam applications from KBKA members to reach me is **31 January 2021**.

Candidates who have deferred from 2020 and who do not wish to sit modules on 24 April, will be given the choice of a free transfer to November 2021 or having their application fee returned.

In November 2021 candidates will have the option of on-line or traditional handwritten at an approved centre. BBKA anticipate that Covid-19 restrictions will not be so severe in November, but we will need to comply with any Government guidelines.

More information will be given in the January 2021 BBKA News and there are FAQs on the BBKA Web site.

see <https://www.bbka.org.uk/module-exam-faq>

And <https://www.inspera.com/product/remote-exam>

*Remember that KBKA
reimburses the exam fees of
all members that pass!*

KBKA Lectures

but not at Lenham!

The 2020 Lenham Lectures having fallen victim to Covid-19, the KBKA Education and Examinations Committee are arranging two lectures to be given by Zoom on Saturday February 6th 2021.

Mark Ballard will talk on “Removing Bees from Buildings”.

Mark writes -

“As with most beekeepers I collect swarms but soon realised that people also needed bees removing from within buildings – roofs/chimneys/walls. I have spent all my working life in the construction industry and therefore, have the ability to take buildings apart – and if necessary, rebuild. Although I try not to do too much of the latter!

The talk will be about my experience of removing bees – Bumble Bees as well as Honeybees from buildings with power point text and photos showing kit needed, in-situ colonies and before and after photos.”

Mark has been keeping bees for about 20 years, having been initially enthused by the late and greatly missed Terry Clare. Currently Medway Beekeepers Apiary Manager, Mark is looking to take the BBKA’s Advanced Husbandry assessment once that again becomes possible.

There will also be a talk, titled “The Changing Seasons”, by Professor Tim Sparks.

Tim says this of his lecture -

“This talk will discuss the recording of phenology, the timing of natural events such as leafing or flowering, and how this has evolved into a network of voluntary recorders coordinated by the Woodland Trust. Along the way we will meet some of the characters that have been involved in recording. How the weather affects phenology, and how phenology has changed will be illustrated with examples drawn from the Nature’s Calendar’s database and elsewhere.”

Tim is a visiting Professor at both the Poznan University of Life Sciences and at the University of Liverpool. His research covers a wide range of topics that he broadly describes as environmental change, including Biogeography, Zoology and Ecology.

*Fuller details, including the registration process for this event, will be circulated nearer the time, but for now, put the date in your diary!
It is Saturday February 6th*

Varroa, Oxalic...

*and the best time
for treatment
— a KBKA
citizen (member) science
project?*

All beekeepers should know that the midwinter broodless period provides a window of opportunity to attack the Varroa parasite with an Oxalic Acid-based Authorised Veterinary Medicine.

Varroa spend most of their lifecycle hidden and protected beneath brood cappings. No brood means no cappings, and so no protection!

The fewer Varroa in Spring, the healthier the bees, the better the colony build-up, providing an advantage that should last all season, compared to a colony enfeebled in Spring by a heavy Varroa infestation and consequently higher virus levels.

Oxalic is the weapon of choice for midwinter, and there are five authorised products employing it - four solutions and one sold as powdered crystals. While beekeepers will debate whether 'vaporising' crystals or trickling acidified syrup is the better method, there seems little actual difference in the effectiveness of the two methods. I doubt that there is any dramatic difference between the effectiveness of the products either.

However, something that does make a really major difference to treatment effectiveness is the presence (or absence) of brood when treating. Short of doing a (not generally advisable) full frames-out inspection and brood cull (as performed at LASI to standardise their testing), how can we determine the time when the colony is most likely broodless, and therefore the most effective time to treat? If you have suggestions, please send them in to kbkanews@gmail.com so that we can all learn!

Meanwhile, falling back on calendar reliance, it would be interesting to know when people were treating, and to tie that together with the Varroa drops they measure at the start of the season, and see if we in KBKA can compile a large data set that might indicate the most effective treatment time.

So, we will keep a note of our actual treatment date (in our Veterinary Medicines Record, of course), and then if we can all try to measure our Varroa drops seen at the beginning of March, KBKA will come up with a simple webpage (details in the next newsletter) where you can input your data... and, with lots of your results, we can hope to see whether or not there is any significant correlation between treatment date and Spring Varroa levels.

*Some authorities indicate
maximum broodless likelihood to
be rather earlier than the British
beekeeper's supposed traditional
treatment between Christmas
and New Year.
It will be very interesting to see
what we can find.*

OK Zoomer!

*an introduction to Zoom
specifically for
the uninitiated,
the reticent
or even the resistant*

*Sadly, this is the way
things are going to be for
a while yet, so lets try and
make the best of it!*

With the current awful disease situation, even before “Tier 4”, meetings have increasingly gone online. The present situation is sadly likely to last for many more months. There are actually some advantages to online meetings (starting with the removal of geographical constraints like travel time, and costs like hall-hire) which means that online meetings will be a significant part of all our futures. And that even goes for beekeepers’ meetings!

Apart from KBKA and its various branches, you can attend online beekeeping meetings ‘hosted’ by the BBKA, BIBBA and the CABK, as well as other Associations such as Somerset and Medway - and even Yoga classes have gone online!

Therefore a basic ability to join in this new world becomes an important part of even a beekeeper’s personal toolkit.

I know some are resistant to “video conferencing” because they don’t want to ‘appear’ on-screen themselves. You don’t have to appear as you can turn off your camera and microphone - so you can just watch and listen. In fact, for a passive participant, your computer doesn’t even need to have a camera or microphone!

The pre-eminent ‘tool’ for online meetings (for now, at least) is “Zoom” - not least because it is easy to use, works well and is free. Consequently, Zoom is the focus of this piece. Other software ‘platforms’ differ in detail, but work broadly similarly.

Everybody in a Zoom meeting needs to be running the free Zoom software. Only the meeting ‘host’ pays a subscription, which is where Zoom makes its money!

It really is very easy to ‘attend’ a meeting that uses Zoom. The internet-connected computer, phone or tablet that you are using to read this should be able to handle it, and you really don’t have to do much.

Even if your internet connection is poor, Zoom will adjust itself to compensate. One major reason Zoom has become so successful is that it works both well and simply - constantly adjusting itself for every participant’s internet connection to automatically deliver the best ‘experience’ to every individual in the meeting. You don’t have to concern yourself with the technicalities and can focus on the meeting itself - although the very fact of being online does introduce its own manners and mannerisms.

Another reason for Zoom's success is that it has lots of features - but for now I want you to ignore most of them, keep it simple and just get started! *Those features (and optional preferences) risk confusing what can be a delightfully simple-to-use piece of software.*

When you are invited to a Zoom meeting, you will be sent a 'link' (that looks just like a web-page link), and all you have to do is click on that link when you want to join the meeting.

It is as simple as that. But you really should install the software before the meeting, grant Zoom the necessary permissions to do its stuff, and get a basic familiarity with the controls before the time comes.

It is a truism, but the bigger your screen, the better your experience can be. A smartphone or tablet will work, but a computer screen makes things easier and allows you to see much more of what is happening.

Sounds good...

About the only thing you might currently lack is a means of getting sound out of your computer. If you can hear the sound on a YouTube video (for example), you will be fine for Zoom. You may only need to plug in some headphones to get the sound - Zoom doesn't require headphones but it can be a simple and cheap way to get some sound from a silent computer. A discarded set of mobile phone earplugs could even fill that bill. You can also check your Sound settings within Zoom to ensure that it is sending sound correctly to your speaker or headphones (but we aren't there yet!)

There is a little bit of jargon - the 'host' is the person who sets up the meeting, and 'participants' are the ordinary attendees. The host gets additional controls to actively run the show, while participants may only control what they themselves see and do (and the host has power to restrict that).

Well before your first meeting, you should download and install the free software. For computers, get the "Zoom Client for Meetings" from <https://zoom.us/download> whereas for Android and iPhone/iPad, look for "Zoom Cloud Meetings" in your App Store.

Having installed it, if you (optionally) 'register' with Zoom, you can then (still for free) host a short or small meeting - this is really useful for practicing or even chatting with friends and family. For more than 2 people in a meeting, as a free user your

meeting is limited to 40 minutes, but you can blether for ages on a 2 person call. (Zoom are relaxing the limits for Christmas.)

When you first run Zoom, it will ask for permission to access your camera and microphone - best let it (even so that you can later tell Zoom to turn them off!)

Who?

At some point before entering your first Zoom meeting, it will ask you to give your name, so that it can be displayed to others in the meeting. Since this may even be used by the meeting 'doorman' to check that you are a member and so allowed in, it makes sense and keeps things simpler for everybody if you use your recognisable real name, rather than some witty but obscure screen name.

Zoom has an optional (host's choice) 'Waiting Room' facility, where you may have to wait until the 'doorman' admits you to the meeting itself.

Once in, Zoom offers you various controls, of which only a few are really important. These controls may be hidden until you tap the screen (on a phone or tablet), or move your mouse pointer to the bottom of the screen. I think it is easiest to have the preference set to make those controls always visible (settings coming soon!)

A good way to begin learning Zoom is to start your own meeting (with just you) so you can discover the controls. You can do that by registering (its free), then in the Zoom app clicking the "New Meeting" button.

Mute and Unmute

The most important control (at least to others in the meeting) is your microphone control (you'll see why in a minute). To avoid broadcasting whatever random sounds may occur around you, do keep your microphone off (Jargon - "muted") unless you are trying to say something!

Zoom makes this easy, so do it! There's a microphone symbol at the extreme bottom left (of a computer Zoom window), and clicking it changes between microphone on and off (the red stripe indicates Off).

Zoom labels buttons with *what they will do* if you click them, rather than their current state, so, with Microphone Off ("muted" and showing the red stripe), the button is labelled "Unmute" - as that is what happens if you click it!

When the microphone is off, you can turn it on by holding down the keyboard spacebar for as long as you want it on - using it like the Talk button on a walkie-talkie!

For iPad users, the controls are at the top and the microphone is at the left of the group, and you may have to tap before you see the controls!

Alongside the microphone control is the camera one, which works similarly (but with a more obscure keyboard shortcut!)

While looking at the microphone and camera buttons, we should notice that there are small arrowheads alongside them. These pop up menus provide an easy way into Settings - so let's select Audio Settings. Here you can ensure that you have the right microphone and speakers selected (or change them) and adjust volume levels. It is worth checking over the other settings, I'd suggest that it is good to have 'set' the four options to auto-use 'computer audio', mute on entering, the spacebar shortcut, and for headset users - 'sync' its buttons.

Moving to General Settings (at the top of the list), this is where we can ensure that the controls are kept on view. (iPad users have that in "Meeting Settings" found from the "... " button.)

The other thing to know is that Zoom offers you two different views of the meeting - 'Gallery' and "Speaker" views - and allows you to choose between them (with a button at top right on a computer screen).

Gallery shows up to 25 participants on-screen simultaneously (49 on a quick computer, but only 4 on a mobile). I think Gallery view is ideal for a participatory discussion meeting - like a committee. If there are more people than will fit on the screen there are arrows to access another screenful.

Speaker view gives most of the screen to the speaker, with a smaller gallery. Which is ideal for a lecture, concentrating on the speaker. But anyone that "speaks" - or makes a noise - gets switched into the prime spot! That is the main reason that your microphone should be muted almost all the time - you don't want to be thrust onto the stage because the doorbell rings, the dog barks or someone nicely offers you a cup of tea! There is good sense behind the etiquette that you should be muted always, except when trying to say something to the meeting!

So, come on! Let's see you online - there are no excuses now!

Zoom has lots more 'depth' of features and controls, but the main thing I want to do is to get "the uninitiated, the reticent or even the resistant" to join in and not miss out!