



Sustainability:

Can we all Work Together?

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SICAMM Conference

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# “Sustainability: A Future Without Imports”

- England February 2018
- Message is probably appropriate to you all
- It's really a journey
- Why is it needed?
- We don't work together well
- I want to change that

# The journey.....

- I have to consider .....
- Cultures
- Beekeeping organisations
- Beekeeping politics
- Geography
- etc
  
- Highlight problems
- Suggest possible solutions
  - Relevant to beekeepers
  - In a form that can be implemented

# Implementation.....

- We need changes
- Someone has to drive them
  
- That means you
- Not the person sitting next to you.....
- .....or those who aren't here
- I mean every one of you
  
- Don't forget it on the way home
  
- I need you all on this journey.....

## .....SO

- Absolutely no excuses
- Navigate past beekeeping barriers
- You can help influence change
  
- We need leaders
- I ask for your help
- Anyone not on board?

# My beekeeping

- Started in 1963
- Practical beekeeper
- Travelled widely - seen a lot of different...
  - Bees
  - Beekeepers and BKAs
  - Local conditions
- Know some of beekeeping's problems
- They are people – not bees!



- I am seen as controversial
- Genuine examples - I won't identify anyone or a BKA
  - They may not be alone
- This may be hard hitting
- I won't blame anyone
- My opinion
- If I offend anyone, it's their fault!



# But.....

- I'm interested in bees and beekeepers
- Not stupid beekeeping politics.....
- .....or ego's

# “Sustainable Beekeeping”

- Is it possible?
- UK had 10,000 years without imports
- Still closed populations
- Yes, so no argument
- We may be without imports in the future

# EU Queen Imports into UK

- 2017 17,005
  - 2016 15,748
  - 2015 13,068
  - 2014 11,774
  - 2013 11,385
  - 2012 8,259
  - 2011 4,568
- 
- How many imported illegally?

## .....and in 2017.....

- How many queens imported from Argentina?
- 525
- How many samples examined?
- 1
- Nosema and varroa
- What benefit are queens from Argentina?

# Why do we have imports?

- Reasons often given.....
- Increase genetic diversity
- Need queens early in the season
- Negative comments about native/near native bees – need something better
- Commercial interests
- More prolific
- Make up winter losses
- Higher yields
- Let's look at them.....

# Increase genetic diversity

- Do individuals really import queens for that reason?
- Around 250,000 colonies in England and Wales!
- Official queen imports <20,000 P/A
- How many are bred from in large numbers?
- 100 or less?
- Own goal?

# Queens early in the season

- Why?
- Change management
- I want, I want, I want and I want it now
- Overwinter queens/colonies

# Commercial interests

- Happening for 100+ years in UK
- Heavy advertising
- Some may be dubious
- Short term gain – warning
  - Sell what people want
- People in influential places selling/promoting imported queens
  - BKA officials?
  - Teachers?
  - Bee Inspectors?



# Prolific.....

- Breed year round – varroa?
- Need much more food - cost and work
- Pressure on forage
- City beekeepers
- Starvation – summer and winter?

# Make up winter losses

- Why do we have losses?
- Can't survive winters?
- Starvation?
- Why replace bees that don't survive winters with more stock that don't survive winters?
- Put more colonies into winter

# Lets look at productivity.....

- Hybrid vigour - unsustainable
- Beginners luck
- Good robbers
- Condition of colony
- May have swarmed
- Management
- On the end of a line
- Number of patrines
- All variables
- Bees aren't lazy
  - unless they are Italians!

# Why do we have imports?

- Other reasons
- Greed/selfishness
- Lack of knowledge
- Grass is greener
- Just to try them

# What are the objections

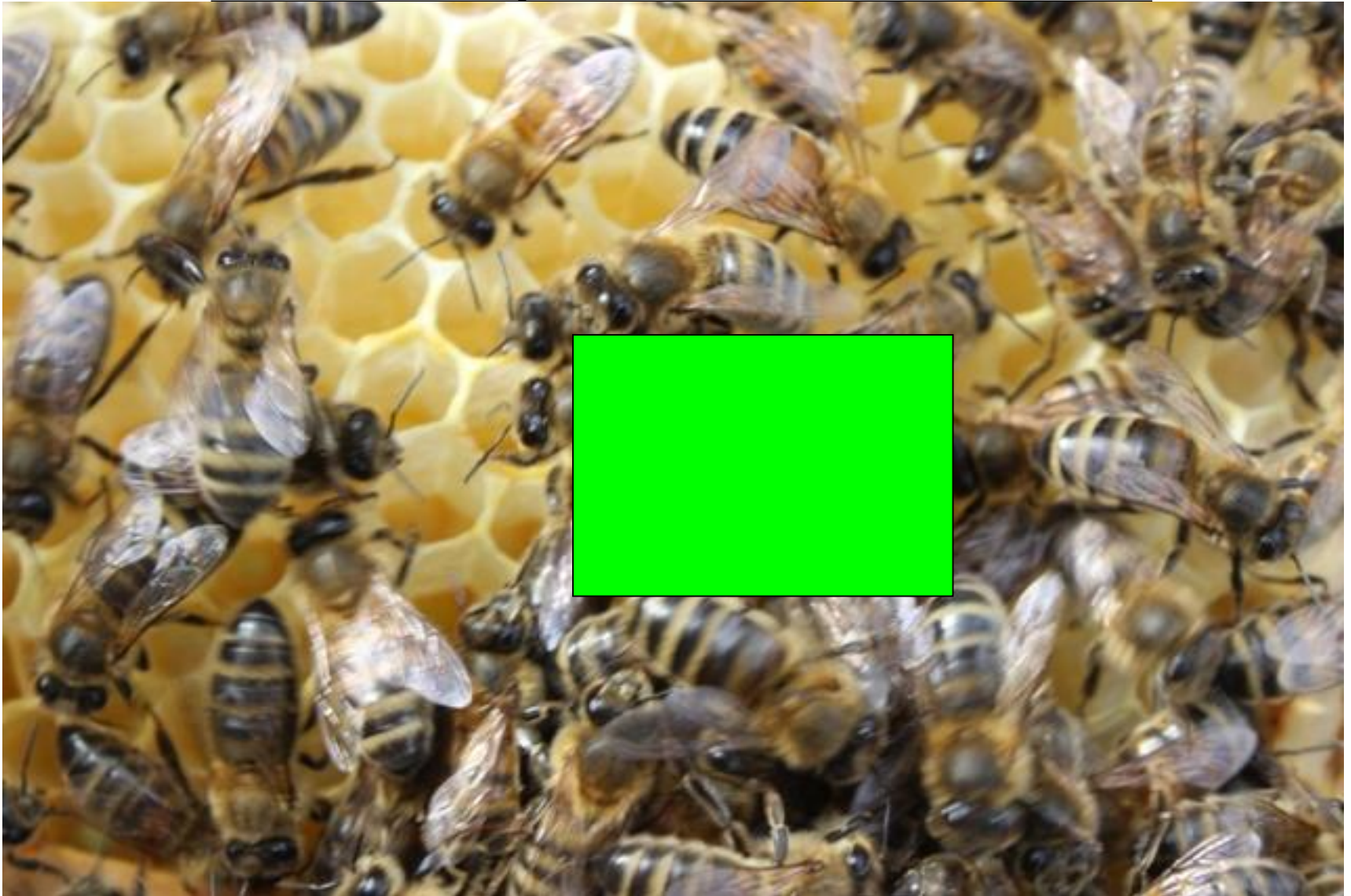
- Possibly unsuited to conditions
- Possible introduction of pests/disease
- Possible aggression

- 15 June
- Double brood
- Empty super
- Feeder inside
- Arable area
- Carrots
- Corn
- Potatoes
- 4lb honey
- 2 previous years
- 6 colonies





# Told they were “Buckfast”





# What are imported?

- Italian
- Carniolan
  
- “Buckfast”
- Let’s have a closer look.....

# What are Buckfast genetically?

- They vary - just see photos
- Native *Amm* x Italian?
- Italian x Carniolan?
- Mixture?
  
- Hybrids or mongrels?
- Is there genetic stability?
- Do beekeepers know what they are buying?
  
- Supporters are often very defensive.....
- .....so can second generation “Buckfast”!

# Buckfast breeders website





Hoverfly

*Eristalis tenax*

# From a Buckfast Breeder

- “The drones from F1 queens are always pure Buckfast because of parthenogenesis”
- How do you get pure mongrels?

.....and more

- They are the ideal new beekeeper's bee.

## .....and more

- They are the ideal new beekeeper's bee. Where things can get a little unravelled is if subsequent generations hybridise with local non Buckfast bees beyond the first generation.

## .....and more

- They are the ideal new beekeeper's bee. Where things can get a little unravelled is if subsequent generations hybridise with local non Buckfast bees beyond the first generation.
- An admission they can be aggressive?
- What if one "Buckfast" is crossed with another "Buckfast"?
- Buy more – unsustainable!



## .....even more

- We buy the best quality Buckfast **pure-bred queens** and breed from those in an **open mating** situation.

## .....even more

- We buy the best quality Buckfast pure-bred queens and breed from those in an open mating situation.
- We flood our mating apiaries with pure bred Buckfast drones but cannot guarantee pure Buckfast bees as a result. Our queens are first generation and broadly speaking that makes them at worst F1 mated queens. We never let our queens become F2 as that would generate impure drones and be closer to the more unpleasant characteristics of the hybridised form.

## .....more

- “.....it is our goal to maintain a healthy and self-sustaining population of Buckfast bees”
- You decide if Buckfast.....
  - are mongrels
  - cause aggression
  - are sustainable

.....yet more

- Welcome to Native Irish
- Oh dear!
- No they are called “fastbuck”

**Unchallenged**

# An easy solution

- Ban imports
- Let nature take it's course
- Job done
- Simple
  
- But is it?

# My view of import ban

- Will probably cause resentment
- Big backlash
- Drive importation underground?
  
- Bans should be left to Governments
- With harsh penalties
  
- Why was smoking ban accepted?
- Shame. You will affect someone else

# A few thoughts.....

- Overall standards and advice are poor
- Need culture change
- Provide good sound information
- Regional
- Negate poor information
- Think about bees not people

# I favour.....

- Educate
- Demonstrate
- Persuade
  
- From a position of experience and knowledge
- Persuasion is much more powerful than force



# Where?

- Bee press
- Websites
- Leaflets
- Books
- Exams
- Beginners courses
- Lectures, demonstrations, etc.....and...

# Local BKAs

- Where most learning is done
- Too many teaching from books
- Beginners teaching beginners
- Some don't teach past first year
  
- Teaching apiaries.....

# Teaching Apiaries

- Good knowledgeable demonstrators
- Management and handling skills
- Good docile locally adapted bees
- Raise queens
- Provide bees for beginners

# We can all work together.....

Beekeepers

Researchers

You

Magazines

Demonstrators

Social media

Local BKAs

Bee Breeding Groups

Us

Me

Conferences

Examinations

Bee Inspectors

Websites

Speakers

Honey Shows

Media

National BKAs

# How about us doing it?



S I C A M M

*Societas Internationalis pro Conservatione Apis melliferae melliferae*  
International Association for the Protection of the European Dark Bee

# This Journey to Sustainability.....

- I need you on it.....
- Are you passionate?
- Are you with me?
- If not, please stay seated
- If you are, get up out of your seat now
- Let's start this journey - together

# Beekeeping is fun!



Any questions?

# BIBBA Conference 6-9 Sept

- Cirencester
- Over 50 presentations
- Over 30 presenters
- Lectures and workshops
- Online booking [www.bibba.com](http://www.bibba.com)



- NBU advice leaflets on importing bees in Roger – Bees
- Look at nhs videos – seeley and mattila
- The word “cull” is objected to
- See P8/9 BIM No 50
- Prolific bees take more pollen and nectar – stress?

- BBKA 23.8lb per beekeeper! Why? I averaged over 100lb in a middling district.

- Assumption that people with qualifications are better
- Same information for different parts of the country
- Large importations – 1963 and shiela berrett

- Inexperience people becoming bee farmers
- Chap in preston going to build up to 150 colonies by end of next year
- Steve bees 15 miles away
- Courses with people from Dorset, Aberdeen, Derbyshire, South Wales, Jersey. Man kept bees in New zealand. Told them their situations will all be different

- I want bees advert in magazine – winter losses
- Scientists, bee farmers amateurs working together
- Bees online website. No mention of what kind of bees
- Encourage beekeepers to have good bees so we have good drones
- Frightened of killing queens

# What is sustainable beekeeping?

# A native/near native honey bee



# Bad temper.....







# Keep them out



# Need understanding.....

- What are we dealing with?
- Two species of beekeeper
- Commercial >10 colonies
- Amateur <10 colonies

# Commercial

- Several sub – species
- Part time - full time job or augmenting income/pension
- Living for one person/family
- Larger – employing staff
- Some may not have great knowledge or experience

# Commercial

- Past beekeepers used mainly native/near native bees
- They produced large crops
- Raised queens
- Had good management skills
- Some still do
- W.W. Smith made a living from about 120 colonies in Scottish borders

# Amateur

- Also several sub-species
- Let alone
- Love fluffy animals, saving bees, etc
- Incapable of learning
- Never get above a certain level
- Partly understand “basics” and no more
- Good sound progressive beekeepers

# Amateur - excuses

- Small number of colonies
- Little to compare with
- Lack experience
- Often abandoned
- Need sound practical guidance and teaching

# But.....

- They all have bees
- They all have flying drones
- They all add to the mix
  
- Are they **all** sustainable?
  
- Let's help them



# My own bees

- Not used imported queens for over 50 years
- Selected from local stock .....near-native
- Single brood National – summer and winter
- Autumn 2016 averaged 1kg sugar/colony
- Spring 2017 no feeding – moved food combs
- Averaged just over 100lbs/colony
- Lost 1 colony – from 25 – queen problem
- That's sustainable

Beekeepers are taught standard  
twaddle.....

# Old chestnuts about “black bees”

- Wiped out by Isle of Wight Disease
  - Susceptible to disease – acarine
  - Small colonies
  - Bad tempered
  - Chase you up the garden path
  - Etc, etc
- 
- British Black bees are extinct

## .....and bees in general

- Queen lays 3000+ eggs a day
- 60,000 bees in a colony
- Colonies must be strong with large patches of brood
- Queens must be large
- Requeen regularly
- Single B.S. brood not large enough
- Feed, feed, feed, mentality
- NBU email advice feed during summer
- Raise queens from the best colonies
- Mollycoddle bees
- Mainly relevant to imports.....

# Why do these perpetuate?

- Cut and pasted
- With no reply
  
- Let's answer them head on
- We all sit back and laugh
- It's our fault!

# BBKA Exam System

- “Basic” – 97-98% pass rate
- Modules.....
  - Same questions repeated
  - Some questions inappropriate
  - Anything about avoiding imports?
  - Taught how to pass
- Does it improve beekeeping?
- Is it fit for purpose?
- Does it need a review?

# Challenge to Bee Farmers

- Think about the total operation
- Not individual colonies
- See if the profit improves by:-
- Having more smaller colonies?
- Reduced feeding and time taken?
- More honey to sell rather than bees turning it into brood they don't need?
- Might need to change management and culture

# NBU

- Concerned with disease
- Do they discourage imports?
- What bees do they have?
- Many comments about Bee Inspectors
- Now many complaints are made?
- Tuition for Bee Inspectors?
- Information on how to import bees
- Little on the dangers of doing so



# BIBBA

- Were ineffective for some time
- Politics and personalities
- Changing
- Rapid improvement in last 3-4 years
  - Breeding groups
  - Scientific/technical committee
  - Bee Improvement (BIFA) Days
  - 1 & 2 day Bee Improvement courses
  - Instrumental insemination courses
  - Open Days
  - Conferences
  - Website
  - Isolated mating sites
- Still more to do
- We need help.....

# My experience.....

- Good summer - prolific will probably do better
- Poor summer - non-prolific do better
- Take feeding into account
  - Non-prolific better over time
- Give crop in poor season - usually