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Medway
Beekeepers
Association

Medway Beekeepers Association

Celebrating over 95 years of support for beekeeping
and beekeepers in and around the Medway Towns



Newsletter January 2021

Happy New Year!! This is a quiet month but we do need to check the mite drop on our colonies and treat if necessary. Also, don't forget to heft and check the stores. Feed fondant if you think your bees are getting low on food.

Sorry to remind you all again, but, please note that **it is subscription renewal time!**

If you haven't yet renewed, you can find a 2021 renewal form in the member's Area under the **'Membership Renewals'** Tab. If you are having problems logging on, then please do get in touch.

Lastly don't forget to put the **AGM** date into your diary for details see below.

A Past Zoom Presentation:



Monday 14 December 2020
Nicola Bradbear



The work and philosophy of Bees for Development – values for a sustainable future.

Nicola Bradbear is an expert in apicultural development. Having worked at the International Bee Research Association and the Bee Research Unit of Cardiff University, Nicola founded Bees for Development in 1993. Nicola works as Apiculture Advisor and Consultant to UN and other international organisations, and has worked in more than fifty countries of Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and Central and South America. Nearer to home, Nicola is of course a beekeeper, as well as President of her local Gwent Beekeepers' Association.

Bees for Development aims to reduce poverty and increase biodiversity by giving humans the incentive to improve the environment around them. Tom Seeley and a number of high-profile personalities are patrons and the Duchess of Cornwall is their President. Bees for Development has proved to be a great tool for alleviating poverty as it produces real incomes from honey and wax production. People want local produce and wherever there are flowering plants people know effective ways to keep bees using local bees, skills and materials. They use locally made equipment and operate at very low cost. By keeping things simple people are able to exploit the fact that local bees are freely available and have evolved naturally and that bees are very good at feeding themselves and as a bonus they have their own transport!

As they work in 50 different countries the type of hive used varies widely, however frame hives tend to be the norm. In tropical areas beekeepers are seen as the 'guardians of the forest'.



Here, they use 'log hives' which are hung from the trees. These hives are carried into and out of the forest as there are few roads which provide access. Colonies are very mobile within a forest environment, they swarm freely and not all of the hives will be occupied at any one time. There are no diseases caused by humans; gene pools are wide and natural selection protects the population. The beeswax produced from these hives is the cleanest in the world as they are chemical free. L'Oréal and Body Shop are just two manufacturers that use this much sort after product.

The work has changed over the years and now concentrates on the distribution of information in the form of leaflets and guides which are made available without copyright and in numerous languages. Then the necessary skills, such as how to harvest and render beeswax are then shared and improved by groups of local beekeepers.

The majority of their work is presently centred on Ghana, Uganda and Ethiopia where the motivation is to increase local earnings in a sustainable way. This often involves working on marketing. Local retailers say that local honey is not available and beekeepers believe that there is no market for their products. By bringing together the 'marketing chain' beekeepers are able to sell their products locally. The increased availability, and use of mobile-phones has greatly improved the communication that this approach requires.

This all takes money of course and the foundation has a number of revenue streams including their online shop which is gaining in support they also receive donations via direct debits, which are particularly useful as it enables them to plan ahead as they know what monies they have available. They run an annual fundraising event and this can earn up to £100,000. Other more creative options include beekeepers putting 'Bees for Development' security tags on their honey jars, adding an extra 10p to the cost and sending this to the foundation. This is of course just a potted version of Nicola's talk which had much more detail.

Nicola is an engaging speaker who talks with a quiet passion and deep understanding. A thoroughly enjoyable hour spent listening to a talk that could have gone on for much longer. Our thanks go to Nicola for talking to us and to the team for putting the event on.

For more information on **Bees for Development**: [Click here](#)

Paul Lawrence

The Next Zoom Presentations: More information is available on the websites.

Members will receive personal invites and registration details for the following event soon:

Wednesday 27 January 2021
Wally Shaw

Simple methods of making increase – making one hive into two and making a small number of nucs (up to 4) from a colony.



8.00pm Monday 8 February 2021

David Evans

This is a gentle introduction to queen rearing. Covers the importance of the quality of the larvae and drones, the practicalities of grafting larvae (much easier than most people realise), cell raising, and getting queens mated from nucleus colonies.



ADM Meeting for all members:

Wednesday 6th January 2021

A meeting via Zoom details will be sent out soon explaining how to register and join this meeting.

Please don't forget to put this one in your diary:



Saturday 20th February 2021

MBKA Annual General Meeting

Time: 2 – 5pm

Venue: Wainscott Community Hall, 16 – 18 Holly Road, Wainscott, ME2 4L

Please note, we may have to change this to a Zoom Meeting.

Beekeeper's Bazaar:



Please note: Sheila our Secretary receives a number of enquires every year asking for the details of local beekeepers who will sell their honey a jar or two at a time.

If anyone has honey that they are happy to sell honey in this way please feel free to contact Sheila with your details and she will compile a list. Please contact Sheila at: admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Something A Little Different:



Mushrooms for All - Paul Newman

With the opportunity to research and read more during this pandemic year, with little else to do, there appears to be good news on the horizon. No, not just the creation of many vaccines against the virus us humans are enduring, but also possible solutions to viruses in honey bees.

Fortunately, I had some books for Christmas 2019 waiting to be read, and also surveyed my bookshelves for books I wanted to re-read. One of the re-reads happened to be a book I acquired some years ago, regarded as one of the standard textbooks on the subject, on another of my interests, trees. "Woodlands" by Oliver Rackham, a professor, ecologist and historian with a very wide interest in woods and woodland, kept me ticking over. It is, after all a reasonably big book with over 500 pages, tables, references, illustrative figures and wealth of information to absorb and digest. By chance, casting around for future reading material I happened on a reference to a book by the superbly named Merlin Sheldrake. It looked appealing so I ordered it from the dark demon, Amazon. It was superb: exceeding my expectations, and illuminating in a different way a subject I had previously touched upon in books by Peter Wohlleben, a forester in Hummel, Germany. He popularised the notion of the "Wood Wide Web" – the interconnectedness of things in woods and forests, including

communication between trees. Merlin Sheldrake had been an undergraduate under Rackham, and things seemed to be joining up. Sheldrake's book "Entangled Life – How Fungi make our worlds, change our minds and shape our futures" deals with what he describes as a "spectacular and neglected world" where fungi, amongst other things have given us "bread, alcohol and life-saving medicines". He also offers a negative example of fungal influence where the variety of banana, the Cavendish, which accounts for 99% of worldwide production is afflicted by a fungal disease and could be extinct in a few decades. Uses of fungi are not new. The "Iceman", a c5000 years old corpse, found at the top of an alpine pass in glacial ice was carrying a pouch with wads of the tinder fungus, used to start fires, and fragments of the birch polypore mushroom, probably used as a medicine. More recently "magic mushrooms" have been used recreationally and also contain an active component used to lift severe depression and anxiety.

Paul Stamets, a largely self-taught mycologist, before enrolling at Evergreen State College, inventor of novel uses for mushrooms and author of "Psilocybin Mushrooms of the World" (the magic mushrooms), has admirable references in Merlin's book. He has collaborated with various academic institutions and the US Department of Defence, the latter interested in the potential of fungi to break down neurotoxins like VX gas, deployed during the Iran-Iraq war. Incidentally some fungi can degrade explosives like TNT.

Paul Stamets was consulted by the creative team behind Star Trek, and the "Trekkies" among you will have identified a brilliant, fictional, astromycologist hero in "Star Trek: Discovery" called Lieutenant Paul Stamets, working out how to travel faster than the speed of light in the mycelial plane. When Merlin visited Stamets' home in Western Canada he found a prototype bee feeder dribbling sugar water laced with fungal extracts. Stamets' latest collaboration and study, with Washington State University, and accepted by Nature Scientific Reports, shows that extracts of certain white rot fungi (polypore mushroom mycelia) "could be used to reduce bee mortality dramatically. Stamets had been extracting compounds from wood rotting fungi for several years and these had been found to have strong activity against viruses including smallpox, herpes and flu. Using them to treat bees was a more recent inspiration. "Adding a one percent extract of amadou (or Fomes) and reishi (Ganoderma) to bees' sugar water reduced deformed wing virus eighty-fold". Fungal additives (Fomes) have also reduced Lake Sinai virus nearly ninety-fold and Ganoderma by 45000-fold. A professor of entomology at Washington State University said that he had not met any other substance that could extend the life of bees to this extent.

Stamets, in the 1980's, observed one of his honeybees visiting a pile of rotting wood chips in his garden to feed on the mycelium underneath, bees appearing to self-medicate themselves. Bees presumably made their own discovery in the millennia they have been around the planet. This remembered incident, and his other work produced the "eureka" moment that viruses in bees might be treated with mycelial compounds. Merlin Sheldrake advises caution. Development and adoption of fungal treatments for bees may be a way off, but the future is bright.

I have also found field mushrooms, delicious to eat for breakfast, on my apiary. No need to fight off the bees, yet!

References and suggested future reading?

- "Entangled Life", 2020. Sheldrake, Merlin. The Bodley Head
- "Mycelium Running", 2011. Stamets, P. Ten Speed Press.
- "Psilocybin Mushrooms of the World", 1996. Stamets, P. Ten Speed Press
- "Extracts of polypore mushroom mycelia reduce viruses in honey bees", 2018. Stamets et al. In Scientific Reports, 8, 3936.
- "The secret network of nature", 2017. Wohlleben, P. Penguin Vintage
- "Woodlands", 2006. Rackham, O. Harper Collins

A Message from The National Bee Unit:

Observations from beekeepers and Bee Inspectors across the UK suggest that some colonies of bees are becoming short of food.

Please monitor your colonies throughout the coming months and feed as required to ensure your bees do not starve. A standard full size British National colony needs between 20-25 kg of stores to successfully overwinter. If they need feeding at this time then fondant should be used. This should be placed above the brood nest so that the bees are able to access it easily.

For further information, please see the '[Best Practice Guidance No. 7 - Feeding Bees Sugar](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167)' on the following BeeBase Page: <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>

It has also been observed that Varroa levels in some hives are starting to increase again. This may be due to a number of factors, but the exceptionally mild weather this autumn has encouraged some colonies to produce more brood than usual which has allowed an increase in mite reproduction. Please monitor mite levels and treat accordingly.

For further information, please see the 'Managing Varroa' Advisory leaflet on the following BeeBase Page: <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>

Kind regards
National Bee Unit

Facebook also carries up to date information.

Join our Facebook page for information, updates and events:

<https://www.facebook.com/medwaybka/>

And Finally:

Many thanks to all who have contributed to the newsletter. Please remember if anyone has any news, ideas, amusing stories or comments or indeed suggestions about the websites or for any future newsletter, please get in touch with me, Paul Lawrence at the address shown below, we really do appreciate your input.

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Newsletter and Website Enquiries

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