



# WHATSTHEBUZZ

September  
2021

*Hello to September, to the twilight of the season, and to you all*

The local butcher asked me if the bees were still hard at work when I brought in some jars of honey last week. It's understandable that he should connect the availability of honey with the bees still foraging for it. That's because I ran out quite early last year and tried to put a brave face on this by saying that honey was a seasonal food. Of course, we know that, unlike all other seasonal foods, honey comes with its own preservative. 'Best before' dates on our honey jar labels are a bit of a joke, with local honey producers plucking dates out of the air, always keeping an eye on the refractometer, of course!

Many of us will be (or recently have) extracted the summer honey crop, but our beekeeping now has to address winter preparations. John Chapman, our chair, has something to say about that in this issue.

Briefly, this is a time to feed the bees and treat for varroa. Some use syrup, some fondant. Some feed a 12.5kg block of fondant, some feed little and often. Some measure hive weights with luggage scales, some with their fingers (how does lifting with 3, or 2, or 1 fingers feel). Most agree that syrup should not be fed when the temperature drops and so aim to complete liquid feeding by the end of September.

Varroa treatment and monitoring are also essential. Some people monitor before and after treatment, some after treatment only. The bee population will start diminishing, yet the varroa population will continue to rise unless checked. David Evans's article, *Rational Varroa Control*, in the August issue of BBKA News, was very clear about the possible harm to the winter bees in a colony if the varroa population is not controlled around this time.

So much for the role of the beekeeper. Inside the hive, the workers stop feeding the drones. In their weakened state, the drones are physically ejected from the hive. A honey bee colony is one of only five examples of a eusocial species. According to Robert Pickard, humans are still a 'herding species, aspiring to be social.' Of course, eusocial is not the same as benevolent. Honey bees are eusocial, but in their treatment of their sick and elderly, ruthlessly so.

Depending on her race, the queen's laying rate slows sooner or later. But a brood break can occur any time now, not necessarily in winter. In our City Way apiary, all colonies had a brood break in September.

Forage at this time? Michaelmas daisy and ivy – and some garden flowers.

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# From our chair

*John Chapman, our chair, speaks to the members each month, sometimes about the Association, sometimes about the bees. Today he tells us a little about preparing our colonies and hives for winter.*

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** How was your holiday?

**John Chapman** It was good, thanks. Sue took this picture at Blickling Hall Gardens in Norfolk. The Lime or Linden tree was one in an avenue of trees and was full of honey bees with a few bumbles. The rest of the avenue was in flower but had either finished full flowering or had stopped producing nectar. It was quite a remarkable sight which drew a small crowd of onlookers.



*Photo by Sue Chapman*

Lime trees provide a significant crop in July. The honey is light in colour with a distinctive taste.

**WTB** We're here today to talk about winter preparations. First, varroa monitoring and treatment.

**JC** Yes, we do both. Monitoring by examining the debris on the board, but also studying the frames for damage to the brood. There are sometimes little holes in the cappings where the bees have opened the cells because something is wrong, and that can be the presence of mites.

We treat with MAQS strips at this time of year. These can cause problems with distressed bees and queens going off lay. They were designed for Langstroth hives with their bigger brood boxes, so we just use one strip per National brood box, and insert the monitoring tray about two-thirds only, to improve ventilation. And



MAQS is the only treatment you can use with honey supers on.

**WTB** And in winter?

**JC** ApiBioxal when the colony is broodless. I think it's okay to have a very quick look at a frame in winter to check for brood. You can also examine the debris on the board under the open mesh floor and try to interpret the particles.

**WTB** Can you tell from the colour of the cappings debris whether they are from stores being opened or brood emerging?

**JC** I haven't thought about that! You'll need to ask Bob (Smith).

**WTB** What do you do with partly filled or partly sealed honey frames?

**JC** If the nectar isn't capped, we give it back to the bees. Usually we leave a super with each brood box. If there is capped honey in a frame but also some empty comb, then we'll extract that.

**WTB** What about autumn feeding?

**JC** We feed syrup in autumn. Kay (Wreford – Bee Inspector) said to me years ago she fed as much as she possibly could get into them! My feeling (totally untested scientifically) is that feeding syrup when ivy is coming in helps prevent the ivy setting like concrete.

**WTB** There seems to be two schools of thought about autumn feeding: some split open a 12.5kg block and placing it on a queen excluder inside an empty super, and others, worried about filling up the brood box with nectar, prefer a little and often approach.

**JC** I think there's nothing wrong with putting a big block of fondant on. It's just that we prefer syrup – with the ivy coming in.

**WTB** What about insulation and ventilation?

**JC** Anyone (and I have) who has ever put matchsticks under their crownboards knows that the bees don't like the draughts. They will block the gaps with

propolis, but because you've made a bigger gap, there will be a whole lot more propolis.

For insulation at the top, I use a couple of layers of carpet all year. Carpet shops are always wanting rid of old carpet samples. At one of our apiaries, the cold wind is a concern so we leave the board in underneath to give a little protection from draughts.

**WTB** What would you do if you saw one or perhaps two charged queen cells around now indicating supersedure?

**JC** If there are drones around, and the weather is still good, I'd let them get on with it. If there are no drones, I'd consider uniting.

**WTB** The fact that late supersedures occur at all suggests that the bees are *not* always the experts.

**JC** Indeed. The bees do what they do for *today*, and don't always know what's ahead. It can create a horrible situation for the beekeeper. However, in an

ideal supersedure, the old queen will continue in her role until the new one is able to take over.

Often you have to guess, to make decisions based on a hunch. It's one of the joys of keeping animals.

**WTB** Woodpecker protection?

**JC** I use wire cages, loosely shaped around the hive with the edges folded over the roof. They usually work, but on one occasion, the snow was deep enough to give the woodpecker a platform to gain access under the wire to the hive.

*We recorded this chat just after John had returned from a local cemetery where he is sexton. He had been digging a hole to inter someone's ashes. As anyone who has a garden in this area knows, the soil is clay with flint over chalk. Apparently the chalk is lined with flint too. The geological term for this structures is: (new word for this month) PAVEMENTS. Thanks John for this – and all your chat.*



## MBKA news and events

***Congratulations to Kaya Joyce** who passed the Basic exam with credit. WTB asked Kaya to say a little about her experience of taking up beekeeping.*

This season was my first full season of beekeeping, having started in that strange year – 2020 (dare I mention it!).

As a lock-down learner, I hadn't had chance to meet many of the other association members, but that changed a little this season as I took my Basic examination. I was taken aback how many people gave up time for the preparation of this one exam (just for me!): Sheila for her on-going mentoring, Bob for the much-needed revision sessions, Sonia (and family!) for expertly organising the exam, and Tony for allowing us permission to use his hives. I have no doubt there were others that I was not fortunate enough to meet, also working to support it.

It occurred to me that the MBKA works much like our honey bees – working together for the good of the colony.

I'm really grateful for everyone's support and have really enjoyed meeting a few members this season. I hope next season brings more opportunities to meet new friendly faces! *Kaya Joyce*

## Medway BKA Honey Show

Our Honey Show is almost on us! It will take place at [Elm Court Garden Centre](#) on **Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 September**.

Download [the schedule](#) and see which classes you can enter. Honey, mead, craft, photography... yes, especially photography! Class 21 is for photographs about bees and beekeeping. This year, the top 12 photos will be turned into a calendar for 2022 to be offered to members to purchase.

Entries forms must reach Sue Chapman, the Show secretary, **within the next few days – 26 August** at the latest. [[Susan.Chapman@care4free.net](mailto:Susan.Chapman@care4free.net)]

Are you able to help to set up the show on **Friday 3 September** in the late afternoon and on Saturday and Sunday to staff the show and sales table? All offers of help gratefully received!

## Association library

We now have a library of books available to borrow on the members area of [our website](#) – and more books are coming soon!

## BBKA module Exams

The closing date for the November module exams is **30 September**. The exams will be held online or in a local venue on **Saturday 13 November**. Those who applied to sit Module 3 pre-Covid should have been contacted a few months ago regarding your preference for online or local venue. There's no need to reapply. Please email me for an application form. *Sonia Belsey*  
[Sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk](mailto:Sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk)

## National Honey Show (NHS)

There is another honey show that you might be interested in, and it takes place in the month after ours in Esher, Surrey on **21-23 October 2021**.

You can become a [member of the National Honey Show](#) for £19 pa. (Go to the bottom of the page, past the 'download form and pay by cheque' option to the online application.)

It really is good value for money. For instance, free admission to the show at all times, free admission to the convention lectures, no registration fee or entry fees for exhibiting, and much more.

Note that the entry date for classes for essays, videos etc is **6 September 2021** and submissions for these classes must be in by **20 September**. Entries for other classes must be submitted by **6 October**.

Download the latest show newsletter [here](#).

## Do you know your bees? A talk at the CABK

Of course, we all recognise a honey bee and we may be reasonably good at identifying some of the 25-ish species of bumble bees, but what about the 200+ species of solitary bees found in the UK? The leaf-cutter bees, the mining bees, the mason bees, the sweat bees and the plasterer bees – all with their unique contributions to the diversity of wild pollinators in our landscape. Well, Mike Edwards, an author of several definitive books on these bees, will be the speaker at a **free CABK talk, via Zoom, on 16 September**.

As well as discussing the various families of bees, Mike will talk about the winners and losers – those struggling to survive and those doing remarkably well, including a pretty mining bee, the Ivy Bee, *Colletes hederæ*.



All CABK Zoom events are free to all, member or not. Please visit the website for more information and to book your place for this fascinating talk by, probably, the foremost authority in the land.

Go to the [CABK website](#) to register for this and other talks and events. *Bob Smith*

**Ron Miksha**, in a recent blog post, alerted us to a booklet which is helpful in knowing more about our 'other' bees. Although it specifically relates to the bumble bees of Calgary, it is full of information on how to study, photograph, and better identify bees.  
[Download free here](#).

## Randy Oliver speaking on Zoom at Cambridge BKA

Many of us feel we know Randy Oliver from our frequent visits to his website and videos / podcasts of his talks and interviews. But there's something special when the man himself is there, right now, to tell us about his latest beekeeping research. Randy has kept bees for most of his life, and he views beekeeping through the eyes of a biologist, researcher, and nature lover. You can register (free) [here](#) for the talk on **Wednesday 8 September at 7.00pm**.



## Times and dates

<b>26 August</b>	MBKA Honey Show entry forms to reach Sue Chapman
<b>28 August</b>	Clean-up day at the Pavilion Apiary, 10am – 1pm
<b>4 and 5 September</b>	MBKA Honey Show at Elm Court Garden Centre
<b>8 September, 7.00pm</b>	Randy Oliver Zoom talk from Cambridge BKA
<b>16 September, 7.30p</b>	Mike Edwards Zoom talk from CABK
<b>30 September</b>	Closing date for the BBKA Module exams to be held on Saturday 13 November
<b>21-23 October</b>	National Honey Show in Esher, Surrey. Entry forms due by 6 September or 4 October



## Honey bees as pollination bullies?

Way back in January 2018, an article was published in Science which caused a bit of a storm. Entitled [Conserving honey bees does not help wildlife](#) the authors claimed that wild pollinators were struggling, and this was partly because of the large number of managed honey bees. Keeping honey bees is not necessarily a GOOD THING. It was a bit shocking because the widely held assumption had been that it certainly was, and that in serving humanity and the planet in this way, beekeepers were GOOD PEOPLE.

The issue hasn't gone away. At a recent Cambridge BKA Zoom talk, the speaker, Robert Pickard, was asked about the bad press now surrounding honey bees. He could not have been more forthright. 'I don't know how anyone could develop a bad press about honey bees. To me that's a ridiculous notion because we don't have enough wild honey bees to perform all the pollination that we require.' He then went on to talk about the different roles for different species of pollinators, that he didn't know anyone in the scientific community that shared this feeling, and that the real problem is the damage that humans are doing to the environment which is the problem, not the numbers of honey bees. (See the July issue of WTB, *The spoken word* for the full text)

[An article in the Guardian](#) just a few weeks ago focuses on the problem of urban beekeeping. Because of unsubtle campaigns to 'Save the bees', many city people with a flat roof or a small garden bought a hive or two and took up beekeeping.

Although it is now generally known that the bees that need saving are wild bees, not managed bees, even the [BBKA still has a donations page](#) on its website with that misapplied slogan. Although most of you will already have heard this analogy, I'll say it again because it

dramatically encapsulates the message: *Keeping honey bees to 'save the bees' is a bit like keeping chickens to help save endangered birds.*

Many beekeepers understand this now, but reducing the number of hives in our cities isn't easy. Although many give up beekeeping within their first year, those that stay are generally in for the long haul.

Honey bees are the only bees which do not hibernate. This makes them highly attractive to humans because they make honey for us – and so that they can stay alive and keep warm in winter. Dale Gibson of Bermondsey Bees in London says, 'Honeybees are very efficient, almost omnivorous consumers of nectar and pollen; they are voracious. There is no off button. They will carry on consuming what's out there as long as it's out there.'

You can see that with such an appetite it's possible that in some places honey bees really do outcompete other pollinators. And that situation is exacerbated by the lack of 'random' forage caused by farming practices. (The pandemic has seen local councils reduce their verge cutting activity. That might be a start.) I travelled by train through the length of England a couple of months ago. The route followed a nation-long strip of chamomile. Of course, it extended only to the edge of the Network Rail property, but it was an indication of what can happen if the land is made available and uncontaminated for wildflowers.

For many generations, beekeepers have been spreading the message about their craft, and about the wonder of bees. Now, that message has been subtly, but unambiguously, changed. If you want to do something to 'save the bees', then PLANT FLOWERS.

Some people can't help themselves and will plant things wherever they will grow. I remember when on

holiday in the Loire, every bit of soil at the edge of the road or pavement had flowers. It was the custom. If there was empty ground on public land in front of your house, you planted and tended colourful flowers.

Sometimes people need a bit of encouragement. Beekeeping courses give people the chance to see if beekeeping is for them. Perhaps it's time to create a more positive spin for those who decide not to keep bees. Perhaps people on these courses are there because they want to do some good. Perhaps fewer will actually take up beekeeping when they see that *gardening* is actually the way in which they can have most positive effect.

In the August issue of BeeCraft, the cover story was an interview with Dave Goulson. Dave is a quietly positive person. In his book, *The Garden Jungle*, he shows how to delight in *everything* that lives in our gardens. (I must read again the chapter on slugs.)

He regrets that the debate on honey bees vs wild pollinators has become so polarised. 'Many beekeepers love their bees, are pretty keen on nature and the environment, and are reasonably clued up about wild bees. Not all, of course...'

## Getting to know you: this month, Bob Bruno

*A series in which WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with MBKA members about beekeeping and life in general. This month, WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with Bob Bruno – shortly before he flies to The Azores for some sailing in the Atlantic. A couple of weeks ago, I helped Bob take the honey supers off his hives. It was a slick and expert job. Although he didn't use clearer boards, the air was not filled with bees, there was no robbing, and I left with the feeling, 'This is how it's done.'*

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** How and when did you get started in beekeeping?

**Bob Bruno** By being in a walking group! Greg Farmer, a friend that I used to play rugby with, suggested we join up for long walks. And then Greg got interested in bees. Another of our rugby playing friends had some land at Meresborough, and he kindly let us put our hives on his land. It is a 25-acre farm filled with fruit trees, so the trees and the bees benefit each other. I

If you missed the article, read it soon. It is so sensible.

In a [podcast interview](#) in the US, an interviewer suggested to Randy Oliver that there's so much attention that goes to this non-native species (*Apis mellifera*) that it seems like the natives are getting completely ignored.

Randy replied: 'Oh, absolutely. And invasive. The honey bee is an incredible invasive species. But the thing is, if we look at the big picture, anything that benefits the honey bee, or benefits deer, or benefits birds, or benefits forests, or benefits Monarch butterflies, all those benefit the native bees too. So if we just look at wildlife as a whole, we can all work together and that's why we beekeepers need to work with *Pheasants Forever* and all sorts of other groups. We need to find a spot within agriculture that pollinators can exist. That's the long term view here. ... So the world is not perfect, but we're going in the right direction.'

*Thanks to Bob Smith for suggesting this topic and forwarding the Guardian article.*



was Greg's assistant but when he died, about six years ago, I think, I was left to look after the bees.

**WTB** In at the deep end?

**BB** Yes. I was lucky with the Association in these days. I did a course with Terry Clare. He was very helpful, always ready to take a phone call, and come round and help if needed.

**WTB** Do you look after the bees on your own now?

**BB** Another chap called Glynn was interested and he and I work together. The farm owner, Graeme, also has bees, and we work together a bit, especially with honey extraction. Especially, as there's no motorised extractor!

**WTB** The bees are valuable pollinators for all these fruit trees.

**BB** Absolutely! There are cherry trees, plums, apples, and lots more. No spraying or fertilising. When we started the fields around were rapeseed. Now it's all apples and pears. Maybe we should be charging that chap for all the pollination by our bees on the farm!

**WTB** Did you get a decent crop this year despite the cold spring?

**BB** Yes, though it was down a bit on last year. I don't know if the weather was to blame. Some colonies are better than others. Maybe we've got some lazy bees – or greedy bees!

**WTB** You mentioned that you played rugby with Greg and Graeme.

**BB** Yes, we go back nearly 50 years. We all played for Gillingham Anchorians, a sports club for rugby, cricket and hockey. At that time it was for former pupils of Gillingham Grammar.

**WTB** You're still working at a time when many others have said 'enough'!

**BB** Yes. I'm at a certain age where I still feel I could do something. I have to use my brain, and naturally, the salary is useful!

**WTB** You've got a holiday coming up.

**BB** I'm going sailing again. I have a friend – also a former Anchorians rugby player – with whom I was lucky enough to sail across the Atlantic in 2016. I'm meeting him on his boat in the Azores next week and we're planning to sail down to the Canary Islands.

**WTB** Have you always had an interest in sailing?

**BB** I've never really taken it up fully, but I've crewed for various people. I suppose it's a bit like my beekeeping. I'm not an expert but I'm a reasonable helper. I get stuck in.

**WTB** Great to talk to you Bob. Hope your ~~trip~~ voyage goes well!



## Queendown Warren, 21 August 2021



Many honey bees and other insects energetically working swathes of marjoram on Queendown Warren – in the rain.



Anyone care to write in with their identification of the bug on the right, photographed on the same flowers?



The photo on the left demonstrates a reliable way to identify a honey bee. Look at the wing veins. At the top left of the bee in the picture, you can see a marginal cell in the wing which is very long, running along the outer edge of the forewing. The end furthest from the body is rounded. That means it's a honey bee. (Thanks to [Rusty Burlew](#) for this.)

Photos by A McLellan



## What does it take to keep healthy bees?

You might have seen on videos on YouTube of bee farmers plying their trade. Images of workers carrying out super-quick inspections in filthy bee suits, lifting and dropping hive boxes like bags of rubble, clearing bees from supers with powerful blowers, loading and unloading hives with fork-lift trucks as if stocking warehouse shelves...

You get the picture. It seems a far cry from the small-scale beekeeper who lifts a frame out ever so slowly to avoid any kind of jarring, and reassembles the hive with utmost care to avoid crushing a single bee.

Maybe it's just like the difference between farming and gardening. Everything is on a completely different scale.

Or perhaps there's a completely different *raison d'être*?

After all, do you aim to support your family with your beekeeping, or your gardening? Do you have staff wages to pay? There's no doubt that the need to make a living, or turn a profit, focuses the mind on the essentials.

For the bee farmer, that means keeping bees which are productive, manageable, and, above all, healthy.



*Clearing supers with a power blower*

So perhaps it's not unexpected that the findings of [this study](#) from 2017 show that the healthiest bees are those managed by professionals – bee farmers. The researchers looked at beekeeping in 17 European countries. Not surprisingly, honey bee colony survival depends on beekeeper education and disease control.

'Hobbyist beekeepers with small apiaries and little experience in beekeeping had double the winter mortality rate ...than professional beekeepers.

'Furthermore, honey bees kept by professional beekeepers never showed any signs of disease during the visits, unlike apiaries from hobbyist beekeepers that frequently had symptoms of heavy Varroa infestation. In the group with the highest winter



mortality, the beekeepers were over 65 years of age. ... They did not attend any beekeeping training during the past three years, did not register beekeeping management in an apiarist book, and had no qualification. They were not members of any beekeeping organisations and did not participate in any cooperative treatment against Varroa.

'In the group with the lowest winter mortality, beekeepers between 30 and 45 years of age had large apiaries. ... The beekeepers attended beekeeping training during the past three years, used an apiarist book, had a qualification in beekeeping, were members of a beekeeping organisation, and had an experience in

beekeeping higher than five years. The apiaries did not suffer from any disease at the autumn visit.'

Reinforcing the importance of proper winter preparation, the researchers found that 'size of the operation, apiary and the clinical disease (varroosis, AFB and nosemosis) observed during the previous autumn were significant risk indicators of overwinter honey bee colony survival.'

In a seemingly tangential claim, the authors stated that the 'most important result of this study was a significantly higher survivorship of the local genotypes compared to the non-local ones.'

*Thanks to Jen Ferry for suggesting this study for WTB.*



## The Beekeeper's Checklist: a pot-luck series on almost any beekeeping topic

*Sometimes you don't need to read an article. Glancing down a list of bullet points is all that's needed to bring things back to mind. This month's topic:*

### Chronic bee paralysis virus

- as with all viruses, there is no cure
- two types: 1 and 2 and some of the signs are common to both types

#### SIGNS

- trembling bees, paralysis, unable to fly, crawling on ground
- shiny black hairless abdomens
- wings may be spread or dislocated ('K' wings)
- the bees may be refused entry to the hive
- in a serious outbreak, there will be many dead bees in front of the hive; a bit like a poisoning incident
- smoking the top bars can cause sick bees to stay on top, trembling, after the healthy bees have gone down



*Hairless, black, shortened abdomen, 'K' wings: Type 2 CVP virus*

#### SPREAD

- spread by contact, mainly housekeeper bees dragging out sick bees
- in large populations confined by bad weather
- trophallactic exchange of food, virus in faeces, and feeding of larva by young bees can also play a part
- apparently does not readily spread from hive to hive unless infected bees enter other hives

#### REMEDY

- give more room, eg by adding a super
- prevent contact between housekeeper bees and infected bees
- remove to another apiary if possible (though see the last point in SPREAD above)

## TRIALS OF A NEW APPROACH

- until recently, the standard remedial practice was to remove the brood some distance, and shake the bees into the air; the infected bees would fall on to a board and be destroyed, and the flying bees would return to a hive on the original site
- shaking out is no longer recommended
- Bee Inspectors are now monitoring trials of a new method; many now think that confused and distressed bees shaken out and scattered around could actually help spread the virus

## WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

- remove the floor and place the hive directly on to the stand or above an eke
- infected bees will now drop out of the bottom; they will not be handled by housekeeper bees
- to stop robbing, it may be necessary to construct 'walls' of plastic sheet or wood under the hive to prevent entry by robbers from below
- leave the hive for about 10 days before restoring the floor
- clear away dead bees from below.



# MBKA apiaries

## The Pavilion Apiary – where we are on 16 August 2021

*Mark Ballard, the Apiary Manager, writes about the plans for developing the new apiary at the old cricket pavilion near Cliffe Woods. He includes the present state of things, how the association plans to develop the building and surrounding ground, and the possibilities which this will open up for us.*

The Pavilion is a single storey, rendered blockwork building with a corrugated asbestos roof. It has mains electricity, water, and drainage. There are also two adjacent concrete panel garages.

The Pavilion itself has four rooms, along with ladies and gents toilets accessed from outside, and a small external storeroom. The rooms include:

1. An away-team changing room with separate entrance. (Part of this space will be required by the farmer for the storage of plastic punnets.)
2. A fully fitted kitchen with a stainless-steel sink, an electric hob and oven, and a refrigerator. There is a large seating area.
3. A home-team changing room. This will be converted into a secure locked room for the storage of valuable equipment.



*Working at the Pavilion last week. We meet again for more on Saturday (28 August).*

4. A large, tiled shower room. The clean nature of this room recommends itself as a honey extraction room.

Both ladies and gents toilets are functioning and have hot and cold water. One garage will be converted into a secure building for storing the mowers, hives, and hive equipment. The other garage is beyond repair and will be demolished.

Our beehives will be placed on a grass area, 30m x 12.5m, in front of the garages. A ditch between our land and the adjacent field will form one boundary. The other boundaries will have 1.8m high secure mesh fencing with a lockable gate.

### Refurbishing work for the buildings

- replacing the corrugated asbestos roof
- decorating internal and external walls

- creating internal stud walls
- upgrading the shower room to a honey extraction room
- installing a security system
- fitting a secure door for the garage.

#### Improvements to the grounds

- planting a hedge along the ditch boundary and erecting fencing on the other boundaries
- upgrading the access track with hardcore to form a hard surface for vehicles

All this work will be costly. We are seeking sponsors. If you have any ideas or contacts, please let me know!

As you can see, our new apiary has enormous potential. If you have any skills or ideas which could be useful, please don't be backward about coming forward!

**We are having a second clean-up day at the Pavilion Apiary on Saturday 28 August, 10am till 1pm.** Please make a diary note now. I hope to see as many as possible of you then.

**The Pavilion Apiary, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX. The entrance to the field is 2nd left off Lee Green Road.**

Mark Ballard, Apiary Manager



## How has this season been for you?

*Do write and tell us about what's going on in your beekeeping please. Thanks to all those who wrote in for this issue to give us an account of their beekeeping season.*

**What a year!** writes Paul Lawrence. My three hives came through the winter in very good health and quickly built up in the Spring and all seemed good. Then the weather turned and so did my hives! The honey crop was slow to build because no sooner did they collect nectar than the weather became wet, and they couldn't get out so had to eat the food. By the end of May I had very little honey available to extract: 30 lb as opposed to 100 lb last year. But then the swarming started! Despite my best efforts I had three this year. That is one more than in the last 9 years! They seemed to be going early. Anyway, it was good PR for the neighbours. Despite all the drawbacks, the season has turned out ok, as I have 3 healthy, strong and well-behaved colonies, all with brand new queens. It looks as though I will get around 120 lb of honey as well. I can't say this year has been enjoyable, but it was certainly a challenge. *Paul Lawrence*

**This has been a strange year,** writes Graham Olley. My two hives came through the winter strongly, but the wet weather really affected them, and it took some management when they both decided to swarm so late in the season, and I missed the signs: due to the weather I made fewer inspections. Fortunately, they didn't go far and remained in the garden. In fact, one

swarm flew again three times when I tried to introduce it to a new poly hive, but eventually settled with the addition of a used empty super. The other has settled in an old hive I was given. The honey crop is much less than usual but the two re-homed swarms seem to be strong and are building stores now, giving me four hives to manage. I took the supers off at the end of July before flying Canada to reunite with family. I'm hoping all is well when I return in September. No disease or signs of wax moth when I last looked. *Graham Olley*

*Chris Farrell, an associate member, lives near Folkstone. She writes: I started the year* as the proud owner of just one hive, a terrifically strong colony in an Omlet Beehaus. I had great plans for expanding my empire and purchased two bargain flat pack cedar 14x12 hives in the Thornes January sale and watched and re-watched the YouTube instruction videos and spent days and weeks putting them together. (I'm not a DIY god.)

My Beehaus colony overwintered extremely well; they were warm, well-fed, medicated, cossetted and loved... and then the queen stopped laying and the colony died out. I admit I cried.

I purchased a new colony from a nearby beekeeper who has become a good friend and teacher. Her teaching methods comprise a combination of shouting, swearing, bullying, fear, and humiliation. I used to be in the army. It was like the good old days were back.

I carried out an artificial swarm on my new colony by performing a split in June. All went well and although the weather was miserable, the queen managed to go out on her mating flight(s). She is a prolific layer, and her brood pattern would win prizes. Unfortunately, the workers have had no inclination to draw out comb in the supers.

The Beehaus colony was very slow to move into the supers, but they eventually drew out and filled about ten frames. These are still in the process of being sealed.

## Words

On a recent tour of gardens in the Cotswolds, the guide, who was primarily a tree specialist, told us that there are four distinct kinds of cedar trees. I listened carefully, wondering where Western Red cedar would come in the list. 'There's Atlas cedar, Cyprian cedar, Himalayan cedar, and cedar of Lebanon.'

What?! Surely he missed one out. Later I asked him about our well-known beehive cedar. It turns out he had been a beekeeper in the past, so he knew exactly what I was talking about. Western Red cedar is not a true cedar, in the *Cedrus* genus, he said. Despite its name, it's a cypress; in the family *Cupressaceae*. The difference is apparent in the evergreen needle leaves. In *Cedrus* trees, the needles are in clusters, whereas cypress trees have soft feather-like leaves.

This is a good demonstration of the advantage of the botanical names, the guide said. You always know exactly what you're dealing with. *Archie McLellan*

It fills me with delight to see my bees working the local wildflowers and I have become obsessed with photographing them. I recently passed my BBKA Basic Assessment and I plan to sit more exams in the future.

This year has had many highs and lows but I have learnt much about the vulnerability and resilience of my wonderful bees and I believe I end the season a better beekeeper and a more humble person.

*Chris Farrell*



*Western Red Cedar: a massive tree, but not a true cedar*



## Trivia

**Writing in 1903, C.C. Miller** had this to say about smoking bees: 'As soon as the cover is raised, a little smoke is blown across the tops of the frames, not down into the hive.' It's fair to say that this advice is not generally followed, at least regarding the direction of smoking. Beekeepers talk of 'driving the bees down'. And in following Miller's advice over this season, I've noticed that 'a little smoke blown across the tops of the frames' achieves very little. So I usually end up using more than a little smoke, or I angle the smoker down a little. Perhaps Miller's thinking derives from the fact that you're unlikely to get the best out of any sentient being, be it a horse, a human, or a bee, by *forcing* it to do anything.

\* \* \*

'**Honey has a host** of antimicrobial, antiviral, antiparasitic, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant effects, as well as being a guaranteed (☺) way to prevent hay fever.' [Prof David Evans](#)



# Quiz

Like every set in a tennis match, or gardening, beekeeping always asks us to start again with each new season. Mostly this is a good thing. No matter the disappointments of the season just past, there's always the prospect that things will be better next year. And with that in mind, here's a few questions relating to foraging in spring and how flowers do their best to attract bees. Some of these answers are VERY unexpected!



Apple blossom

1. How much nectar can a single cherry blossom produce per day? 2mg, 12mg, or 30mg?
2. How much nectar can a single apple blossom produce per day? 2mg, 12mg, or 30mg?
3. How much nectar can a single foraging bee bring home with each flight? 10mg, 40mg, 100mg?
4. How many apple blossoms are needed to fill a bee's crop? 1, 10, 20?
5. How many cherry blossoms are needed to fill a bee's crop? 1, 10, 20?

## Any Questions?

Answers cannot be guaranteed and will certainly not be coming from the desk of WHATSTHEBUZZ! However, if a reader does know the answer, it's a fair bet that they will not be able to resist dropping us an email, which will be included next month in a counterpart article called, unsurprisingly, Any Answers!

**Q:** We hear that partially filled supers, where the honey is not capped and fails the refractometer and shake tests, should be given back to the bees. A common way of doing this is to place the super under



Cherry blossom at Meresborough, 14 April 2021.  
Photo A McLellan

Questions derived from *The Buzz about Bees: Biology of a Superorganism* by Jürgen Tautz. Thanks to Jen Ferry for this.

Answers: 1. 30mg 2. 2mg 3. 40mg 4. 20 5. 1



Last month's quiz posed the question about the purpose of the bees fanning in the above photo. Tony Edwards wrote in: 'Bees on a hot tin roof? I've always assumed that it is because the metal roof is very warm from the sunshine. The bees would automatically start fanning if their feet/legs detected a high temperature?'



the brood box (nading). **Is there a recommended time to do this?**



I'm worried that if I do this after removing the supers in August, the bees will not be able to defend their stores this far below the brood nest from robbing wasps and

bees. And I also wonder if prolific queens which are still laying full-pelt will use this newly available space to extend the brood nest downwards.

**Q: My car alarm has started going off for no apparent reason. Is it possible that the bees in the car (there are sometimes quite a few) are setting off the motion sensor?** Sounds ridiculous but I'm talking about a lot more than one or two semi-comatose bees.

**Q: Why do bee brushes get such a bad press?** I heard Roger Paterson say, while cutting and paring a little twig, that he couldn't understand why they were included in all beginners' kits. He suspected that a vast amount were manufactured in 1910 and they were still



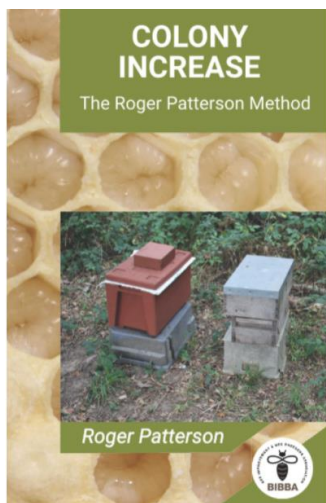
trying to get rid of them. Well, having tried every kind of plant in my apiaries, I find that none begins to compare with a horse hair bee brush for being able to remove bees gently and efficiently. I clean it between hives, and never brush downwards – cells are angled upwards so bees half-inside cells would not be well-served by brushing from the top of the frame down.

If you have anything to say on any of these questions, please share it with us.



## Book review

**Colony Increase: The Roger Patterson Method** 48 pages, [available from BIBBA](#) or [Amazon](#)



Roger is possibly the most well-known beekeeper in Britain today (though David Evans may be the best-known British beekeeper across the world). During the last 18 months Roger has delivered countless webinars on the BIBBA platform and during this summer has 'starred' in a number of 'Live at the hive' videos, giving demonstrations of beekeeping tasks and manipulations. He is hugely experienced and his handling of bees is a delight to watch.

In this little book, he brings together the material from many of his talks on how to expand one's beekeeping without active queen rearing, or, more importantly (for Roger), buying in queens.

Roger summarises the whole book thus: 'starting with a strong colony in spring, we take off one or two nucs at a time, giving each a queen cell and drawn comb, moving the parent colony to another stand in the same apiary, and then placing the nucs in the position formerly occupied by the parent colony. The flying bees from the parent

colony are distributed between the nucs when they return to the parent site.'

The method is simple and will normally produce good results. The book is full of good sense and practical advice. Some may find the writing style gets in the way of the message. Indeed, although this is a short book, it could have been a lot shorter with a good editor, and much better for it.

However, Roger is so well-known that there would be serious doubts about the authenticity of any work that didn't have his 'voice'. His work, both on his own account, and within many organisations, has been a huge support to beekeepers in Britain.



# Handy Hints

**After removing honey supers**, be sure that the bees have sufficient stores remaining. Unless the colony has stored lots of honey in the brood box (perhaps because of queen problems), it is likely you will have to feed. Many feed with home-made 2:1 syrup. Others buy invert syrup. And still others use fondant. People who speak with some authority say that there is no benefit in buying fondant from beekeeping retailers. Instead buy 12.5kg blocks of bakers fondant. One local source is BFP Wholesale Fondant, phone 01273 099364. You have to order by phone (how quaint!) and delivery is free for orders over £150. Sugar has gone up in price significantly so last year's price of £10 per 12.5 kg block may well not apply now. Perhaps you can join with one or two other beekeepers to combine orders?

**Have you registered yourself and your apiaries on BeeBase?** And, if you have, is your record up-to-date? The website may be creaking with age, but there's a lot of useful information on [BeeBase – the website of the National Bee Unit](#). You'll receive email alerts, especially



as soon as there is a suspicion that there is foulbrood in your area.

**Brood inspection** It is recommended to check the health of the brood in a colony once or twice a season. So, at this inspection, **get rid of the bees**. Shake or gently brush the bees off the frames into the brood box so that you are able to examine the health of brood by studying the cappings of sealed brood, and the condition of larvae in open brood. You are looking for these diseases: foulbrood (primarily), sacbrood, chalkbrood, bald brood, and drone brood in worker cells. There is no shortage of literature on brood diseases. You might start with the NBU leaflets on [foulbrood](#), and [other brood diseases](#).



# Comments

*TO POST A COMMENT, PLEASE EMAIL WHATSTHEBUZZ. Was there anything that caught your attention in this issue? Perhaps you read something that you'd not thought of before, or saw something that didn't feel right to you. If so, do please write a sentence or two for this Comments section. Items from readers are always good to hear.*

**From Graham Olley** I am somewhat dormant as a member, but I follow these newsletters avidly.

(Thanks so much, Graham, that's really good to hear. I'm never sure if people read any of this stuff! WTB)



# Contact details

- Chair** John Chapman, john.chapman@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
- Website manager** Paul Lawrence, paul.lawrence@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
- Social media** Sonia Belsey, sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
- Apiary Manager** Mark Ballard apiary@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
- Newsletter** Archie McLellan, archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Please send your PICTURES, ARTICLES, AND IDEAS for the next issue of WHATSTHEBUZZ by 18th of each month. And if you'd like to comment on anything in or about this issue, please call or email me.

Archie McLellan, WHATSTHEBUZZ compiler

