



WHATSTHEBUZZ

December
2021

Hello to December from this 'Highly commended' newsletter to you all

You might be puzzled by the above opening!

I'm delighted to say that WHATSTHEBUZZ was 'Highly commended' in the National Honey Show class for BKA newsletters. It was great to see the range of entries from other associations and some were very special indeed.

Huge thanks to all who have spoken, written, and sent pictures over the past months telling stories and describing ideas and experiences. An association newsletter is nothing if it doesn't include contributions from the members about themselves and the activities of their BKA.

The format of this column these past ten months has been to list, appropriate to the coming month:

- actions required of the beekeeper
- the goings-on inside the colony
- the forage available outside

My source for this apiary calendar suggests that in December beekeepers check stores and damage to hives; plan new kit and materials requirements, and make or buy what's needed; spend time and effort in winter study courses; keep entrances clear of thick plants; and take the chance to relocate hives, particularly in the same apiary, when few bees are flying.

Which is all fine, but why is there no mention of the main task these days: to find out for certain if and when your colonies are broodless – or with minimal brood? Because that's when you treat with oxalic acid.

Many people don't like to open hives in winter. If that includes you, remember that the varroa board is not just for counting mites. Use it to monitor the debris of

cappings. Biscuit-coloured particles indicate brood is being reared.

Inside the hive, the bees are in a cluster, with little or no brood. Flying is restricted to sunny days for defecating and collecting water to dilute honey stores. There is little else to forage on.

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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 talks about... well, this and that.

WHATSTHEBUZZ Hi John. Can I start with a quick question from Bob's talk the other night on *Botany for Bees*. I forgot to ask Bob at the time. Bob listed some surprising flowers as important forage resources. In the Honey Monitoring Scheme report I've received, there's apparently a lot of cabbage in my honey. How can that be? Farmers don't let cabbage flower!

John Chapman The cabbage family is brassica. It includes oilseed rape, charlock, radish, stock and many more. It's a very big family. Bob only had time to scratch the surface. Obviously people don't normally let their cabbages flower but there are other brassica flowers which do get the chance to bloom. We got caught one year when a farmer put in some stock for cut flowers and we got set honey in the middle of the summer, which, because of the time, definitely wasn't oil-seed rape.

WTB How do the Honey Monitoring Scheme people identify honey sources? Pollen analysis?

JC They use DNA profiling of the pollen grains in honey. They extract DNA from the nucleus in the pollen. *Pollen analysis* is studying the shape of pollen grains with a microscope under certain lighting and shading regimes.

WTB Thanks John. Moving on, can I ask you a little of the history of MBKA? Have you been a members for the 40 years you've been keeping bees?

JC Not quite. We moved here in 1987. I found Pip (Richard Blaxland, our president) and various other people, joined Medway BKA, and the rest is history.

WTB So Medway BKA was separate from Kent BKA then. Was there ever a time when they were together?

JC Good question. I think there are some documents from around 1922 which show our association as separate from Kent, or the Mid-Kent branch at that time. The story is that there was a row about some competition trophies – but there's no one around to verify it now.

WTB Was the name Medway used in the early days?

JC Yes, by beekeepers anyway. Our original name was Medway and County Kent BKA.

WTB Has there ever been any move to bring us back into Kent BKA?

JC No. Until some years ago, relations with Kent were sometimes 'interesting'. The Kent situation has always been a bit odd, because some areas, Thanet and Dover, were always separate from Kent. We do work together with some projects now. But it doesn't matter that we're not all in one county association because we're all part of the BBKA.

WTB I've wondered if we might be better off in Kent because of the larger resources and personnel that would be available.

JC Well, we would have to pay a portion of our subscriptions to them, and we would need permission to do some things. We have a lot of latitude in what we do and it does seem to work. We do work together with the Kent Agricultural Show and we do offer our facilities and courses for people who want to do BBKA exams. We have built lots of links with Kent but, it has to be said, much of what we do is above and beyond what Kent could offer.

The geography of Kent doesn't help create a Kent county identity for branch BKAs. Medway is the biggest conurbation in the area, and the Kent branches near London have an affiliation in both directions, towards London and towards Kent.

WTB I suppose I was hoping, in the context of publicising our winter talks, that there might be a way of contacting the whole county with a single email.

JC (Laughs) I don't think much would change! Many of the branch BKAs feel quite independent and like to tread their own path. Communications among beekeepers outside your own area are notoriously difficult. Sometimes speaking to people in person is the only thing that works!

Now we'll talk about the National Honey Show. 



The National Honey Show 2021

John Chapman chats to Archie McLellan to find what impressions he took away from his days at the National Honey Show this year.

John Chapman I'd like to turn the tables and become the interviewer. Since this year was your first time in getting involved with the National Honey Show, tell me, what did you think of it?

Archie McLellan I absolutely loved my two days there. I was sometimes frustrated that I couldn't be in two places at once, and I can't wait for some of the talks that I missed to go up on YouTube.

JC Tell me about the honey show in particular. The exhibits of honey and other competitive entries.

AM All these rows of honey jars make a great photo! Seriously, I did spend time studying exhibits here. I was surprised by the class for nine jars of honey and a frame of comb in which none of the entrants received any award. *Speak to the judge if you want to know more*, the display card said. So I did. I was taken into the judges 'common room' and found myself facing lots of unsmiling faces. To cut a long story short, after an unpromising start, the judge in question took me to these exhibits, and gave me a guided tour of his thinking and criteria for that class. Of course, the public are not allowed to touch exhibits, but he opened jars and removed the lid from the display case for the frame of comb. He talked through his judging process, and his personal beekeeping story. It was an illuminating time.

I think the best thing about competing in honey classes is that the effort to achieve excellence can carry over to producing your own honey for sale. And I suppose it would be nice to be able to say your honey was award-winning, and be able to tell your customer that the award was actually at *national* level.

JC At this point I should congratulate you on your first prize for your essay and the highly commended award for the newsletter.

AM Thank you. I have seen the subsequent editions of some of the prize winning newsletters and they have demonstrated their excitement very fulsomely!

JC Yes, you should have seen the one of the winners when she saw her result. We almost had to restrain

her! But the award for WHATSTHEBUZZ, fifth out of ten in a national competition is a real achievement, showing that we've produced a newsletter that is very good.

Now, tell me about going round the trade stalls.

AM Well, the big thing for me was trading in wax for foundation. I couldn't understand the difference between 'straight swap' and 'conversion'. So the chap said to me, if you don't mind parting with a bit of money, you get a far better rate for 'conversion'. So I gave him nearly 10kg of wax and he gave me the same weight of foundation. The monetary cost was £46 for £220 of foundation – which I was pretty pleased with.

JC Did you spend time at Northern Bee Books stall?

AM Trade shows are always about resisting temptation to buy things. I have lots of experience of succumbing completely at Model Rail shows. And I couldn't resist spending just a little at NBB. I mean I'm studying for Module 6, so it was a necessary purchase, right? Ultimately, I was only able to walk away by making a Christmas present list.

And then I walked straight into a stand with a large Dadant smoker for £54. People rave about it. I think its legendary properties (apparently it never goes out when you don't want it to) might have something to do with the pipe at the bottom bringing the ventilation right into the heart of the fire. But I have a smoker already that doesn't go out, so I told myself to *get a grip*.

It looks like a massive effort for the traders, bringing lorry-loads of stuff.

JC Indeed. It's the back end of the year for them. I think more people now stock up for the following year in the autumn rather than waiting for spring.

Did you go to any of the lectures?

AM I went to two of Torbin Schiffer's. He is very committed to his cause, of a natural kind of beekeeping – the usual thing, but on steroids: no swarm prevention, no honey crop, no man-made hives except those which mimic tree cavities. He says, honey is not *liebenmittel* – it's a luxury food, so we can manage without it. His is a very political position – fundamentalist, really, because he wants government

legislation to enforce all this. Not that I wasn't interested in his work or what he had to say. Nothing is gained by closing our ears to others.

JC Anyone else?

AM Kirsten Traynor was the star of the show this year with four lectures. She is hugely knowledgeable and versatile. I only heard her first talk which was a beautifully presented... scientific paper! But two of her other talks were on very practical beekeeping, including a survey of queen rearing methods, so I'm looking forward very much to seeing that on YouTube eventually.

JC Yes, that's the trouble with my job on the floor of the show – it's not easy to get to the lectures. But sometimes I meet up with them and chat informally, and, on occasion, I feel as if I've had the whole lecture presented to me in a chat!

So would you say it's a worthwhile exercise? Would you go again?

AM I liked it a lot. I met some new people, and I had a nice lunch with a group from MBKA. It's such a varied experience, and much of it you miss because you can't be in two places at once. Yes, I'll definitely be going again.

JC Good. It's important for us to get feedback from new people. Over the years the modernisers have been trying to make it more appealing to the average beekeeper rather than just appeal to 'fanatics' for whom showing is the only thing in life.

I was a bit sad that the Irish contingent didn't make it over this year. They are such lovely people, and so enthusiastic, especially if a newer member of their group wins any award. It's all very encouraging.

That's one of the things I like about MBKA too: people are enthusiastic and very encouraging to new people. That doesn't happen everywhere. 

All about our Winter Talks series

We started with David and Celia Rudland at Wainscott, then Bob Smith on Zoom. (You can read about Bob's talk further down.) What other goodies do we have in store for the rest of the series?

At 7.00pm, Wednesday 8 December, at St Stephen's Church, Maidstone Road (at the Walderslade Road junction), CHATHAM ME4 6JE, Philip Argyle will drive up from Hampshire – a mere 100 miles – to give us '*An evening with a wayward beekeeper*'. Philip says, 'I've been an unconventional beekeeper for 11 years... although I don't consider myself a 'proper' beekeeper. I'll tell you a little about my wayward ways and you can make your own mind up.' If you think this is natural beekeeping, same old, think again. Philip works hard (and depends on luck too) to manage his bees without chemicals, but he knows more than most about varroa treatments. Expect your assumptions and cherished positions to be challenged. **NB 7.00pm start at St Stephens, Chatham**

David Evans makes a welcome return on **Zoom at 8.00pm on Wednesday 19 January**. David's blog now makes him possibly Britain's best known beekeeper and bee scientist *across the world* (as Nicholas Parsons used to say on Radio 4's *Just a minute*). His scientific

work combined with his beekeeping experience make him authoritative. His communication skills mean that he has a huge audience worldwide.

On Wednesday 16 February, 8.00pm at Wainscott, Murray McGregor will visit us from Perthshire. Murray is Britain's largest bee farmer with, this season, 4,588 hives at hundreds of sites for heather honey. Murray won't be using PowerPoint, but will chat about his work, and answer questions on anything for as long as people want to ask them. His visit on Zoom to Cambridgeshire BKA a couple of nights ago went on for three hours! He's not comfortable with Zoom and is looking forward very much to spending an evening with us. To describe him as engaging is to seriously undersell him.

Adam Leitch, NDB will visit us at **8.00pm on Wednesday 2 March at Wainscott**, and his talk will be on Zoom too. Adam's talk is 'Why anatomy matters to practical beekeeping'. Adam's beekeeping has to be packed around a busy job, and teenage children. He is always looking for efficiencies and improvements to minimise the amount of time beekeeping takes. His talk will cover topics ranging from amazing anatomy of

bees to understanding why some methods of swarm control are often unsuccessful.

Sarah Wyndham Lewis, honey sommelier and writer of a monthly column in BeeCraft, will be at **Wainscott at 8.00pm on Wednesday 16 March**. Her talk is *Honey in its many complexions and my work as a Honey Sommelier with chefs, bartenders and honey producers all over the world*. The special feature of this event is a **honey tasting!**

The series winds up with **Richard Rickitt's** follow-up to his immensely entertaining talk about his bee-oriented travels around the UK at the end of last season. His talk on **Zoom will be at 8.00pm on Wednesday 30 March** and it is called *From Rolls Royce to Rajasthan*. He will tell us about his experiences of 'Traveling in style from the jungles and deserts of India to the birthplace of the theory of evolution, stopping off at the site of some illegal beekeeping skulduggery and taking a peek at a little local royalty along the way.'



She's leaving home

What happens when honey bees swarm

This article was written for a class in the National Honey Show. The brief was to describe an aspect of honey bee life that would be of interest to the general public. All of you who have spent time collecting swarms might agree that this facet of beekeeping is as much about public relations as anything else. Remember, the audience for articles in this NHS class was to be the public, not beekeepers!

'Hello, this is the Honey Bee Swarm Collection Service.'

'Hello!' (breathlessly) 'A hive has just flown into my garden... thousands of bees are going on a tree... maybe they're not bees... maybe they're hornets... they don't look like bees...'

We can forgive the misappropriated collective noun in the drama of the event. (Bees living together form a *colony*; they are housed in a box called a *hive*.)

After all, there's no doubt that this is the real deal: this person is watching honey bees swarming.

Many people are both alarmed and excited at the sight of a group of bees. Even some bumble bee activity can trigger a call to a swarm collector.

Honey bee swarms are commonplace in spring and summer. Yet, most people have never seen one. That's probably because the bit when the bees are on the move happens rather quickly. But if you're in the right place at the right time, there's no mistaking what you're seeing.



You might hear them first. Once, I was using a vacuum cleaner in the house. The back door was open. When I switched it off, the noise stayed on. Outside, the air was full of thousands of bees.

It is spectacular. But for something even more amazing, let's look inside the honey bee colony to understand what swarming is about.



The honey bee colony has one queen whose sole function is to lay eggs – which, during the warmer months, she does at a rate of many hundreds a day. With her long abdomen, the queen is a magnificent sight, yet in no sense does she rule the colony. The workers feed, protect, and control her. If she loses her ability to lay fertile eggs, they will replace her.

Even though all the bees in a colony have individual lives with a beginning and ending like all other life forms, the colony itself can seem immortal. The colony is an entity, and, as such, it must have its own way of reproducing. This is what honey bee swarming is: the colony reproducing itself.

When the colony expands in spring and summer, it is able to divide itself in two, and form a second colony at a new location. There are enough workers (females) and drones (males) to provide for two viable colonies. But there is only one queen.

For the old queen to leave the hive with, perhaps, 30,000 bees, a new queen must be created if the remaining bees are to be a viable colony.

Raising a new queen is the most important part of the colony's preparations for swarming. Queens are reared from the same fertilised eggs that produce workers, but intensive feeding of a larva produces a biologically different bee – a queen, in a specially elongated cell. Once the cell is sealed, the swarm will leave the hive as soon as weather permits.

Meanwhile, around 500 workers scout the surrounding area within a radius of around 3 miles. That's 30 square miles! They are looking for a new home, typically a cavity in a tree, or a bin, or a building. It's likely they will find a dozen or more possible sites. When each scout returns to the hive, she tries to recruit support for her choice. The famous waggle dances performed by honey bees are a symbolic means of communicating the whereabouts of forage or water – or a new nest site. They indicate the direction and distance of travel. The energy and duration of each dance convey the bee's enthusiasm about the quality of the discovered treasure. Other bees check these sites. Gradually some options gain popularity, while others are dismissed, until a 'quorum' of bees shows its preference for one site.

Sometimes the choice will be made before the bees swarm, and they can fly straight to their new home.

More commonly, the selection process continues after the bees have departed the hive.



This may be why bees form a cluster – usually not far from the hive. This is a bivouac stage. The bees don't need rest, but they do need time for the scouts to choose just one option for a new home. The scouts continue their dances, now on the surface of the cluster. Gradually, one site gains more support and becomes the favoured choice.

Then the bees are off again. The queen will be in the middle of the flying swarm which is being guided by the scout bees.

Swarming is fraught with danger. The new colony is very pressed for time. If a bee has emerged from a cell just before swarming, she might live for six weeks. Many will die sooner than that. With the honey they have carried within them, the bees generate wax from which they will construct comb. Without comb, they cannot rear brood. Within a few days, the queen will be able to start laying, and after 21 days new bees will emerge.

So why do beekeepers interfere in this natural process, and collect swarms?

The European honey bee is managed by beekeepers, so the species itself is not in danger; but one hazard, the varroa mite, now makes its survival in the wild very precarious.

A swarm moving into a cavity in a school or house can be alarming and make normal life impossible there. The removal of the bees can involve costly building work.

If the bees are in a location which causes nuisance, pest control companies provide a cheap and efficient option. They kill the bees.

No-one wants to see bees die needlessly, so beekeepers step in.

The time to collect a swarm is when the bees are clustering. They might stay there for a day or two while they decide where to go, but they might have decided on their final destination before emerging from the hive, and be ready to leave in minutes.

If you see a swarm, Google ‘swarm collection in [your area]’ and phone a beekeeper.

Make the call straightaway!

The insulation-ventilation article in November’s BeeCraft

I have a huge list of articles, forum posts, research papers, and blogs on the insulation-ventilation debate. I’ve been planning for ages to write some kind of summary or synthesis of the current thinking on the topic for best practice in this part of the world. And I’ve got very bogged down. So I was cock-a-hoop to see (as many of you will have done) the article by Guy Thompson, *Rethinking the box*, in the November issue of BeeCraft (p9).

For me, this article is a godsend. Guy is a thermodynamics engineer and has an interest in developing hives which mimic what a colony would choose in the wild. Even so, much of his thinking is applicable to conventional beekeeping.

Read the article for a fascinating survey of how moisture is controlled (by condensation, not ventilation) in a natural cavity. A long-standing maxim in beekeeping is that it is dampness, not cold, which kills colonies. And so, ventilation regimes were developed early on, promoted particularly by Wedmore in *The Ventilation of Beehives*, and CC Miller (‘I heartily believe in the doctrine of pure air and plenty of it for man, beast and bee.’)

Bees in today’s world have to cope with mites, with diseases, with pesticides etc, and with reduced availability of forage. And to compound that, we sometimes keep bees in hives which are more ventilated than cosy, meaning that the bees have to work hard to replace lost energy. So it makes sense to see if it’s possible to modify modern beekeeping with the principles at work in natural cavities.

NOTES

Text and photographs by A McLellan

‘She’s Leaving Home’ is the title of a Beatles song from their 1967 album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band

REFERENCE

The astonishing behavioural versatility of nest-site scouts, Thomas D. Seeley. BeeCraft May 2021. (In this article, Seeley updates his findings about the role of scout bees in swarming, previously described in his 2010 book *Honeybee Democracy*.) 

The first recommendation is to insulate the hive at a level that mimics the protection given by the wood surrounding a tree cavity. A block of 50mm Kingspan permanently over the crownboard or fixed inside the roof is adequate. It should be kept on the hive even in hot weather so as to isolate the interior, much like houses in hot countries are kept sealed and dark during the hottest parts of the day.

The insulation above the hive ensures that the moisture in warm air condenses and drips down the interior walls. It provides a much-needed source of water when bees have to dilute honey stores in winter. Those who have clear polycarbonate crownboards can see this process as it happens.

The second recommendation is to have small entrances, so that the atmosphere is retained rather than ventilated. Combined with insulation, this kind of draught-proofing allows the hive to be kept at a higher temperature. Warmer air has a higher water carrying capacity.

Thirdly, Guy Thompson recommends a ‘cool, condensing sump area’ at the bottom of the hive. At face value, this appears to make the case for solid floors rather than open mesh floors. The real-life situation is not so simple though. Perhaps that is why those of us who make our own floors with under-floor entrances now opt to sit on the fence. As we construct the floor we can choose what proportion of the floor to fill with mesh and what proportion to make solid. Having cake and eating it? 

The M&S bee blog

The [M&S bee blog](#) may have come in for a bit of stick some months back but, now that I've finally got round to visiting it, I can tell you it's lovely. I recommend you give it quick whirl. It might raise your spirits.

The video has some gorgeous photography. David, the beekeeper, explains that the honey is particular to each farm it is on. 'It captures a particular moment, never to be repeated.'

That's why you shouldn't leave your spring honey on till August and mix it all up! 

Meet beekeeper

David

Experienced beekeeper David Wainwright has been producing top-quality honey for M&S for more than 10 years. After visiting the M&S Select Farms back in February, David and his teams placed their cedarwood beehives – many of which date back to the Thirties – in carefully chosen locations, ensuring they have plenty of shelter and sources of nectar nearby. 'The farms grow crops that benefit from the bees,' says David. 'Such as courgettes, apples, berries, beans and more. The farmers get a higher yield and better quality, since the plants will have been properly pollinated'.

[Discover Fresh Market Update →](#)



MBKA news and events

Exam fees

The committee has decided that the exam fees of any member sitting for BBKA practical or theory exams **will in future be refunded by the association to the individual.**

Winter Talks

The third talk in our series is at 7.00pm on Wednesday 8 December at St Stephen's Church, Maidstone Road (at the junction of Walderslade Road and Maidstone Road), Chatham ME4 6JE

Note change of start time and venue!

The talk will be given by Philip Argyle: *An evening with a wayward beekeeper.*

Philip writes: 'I've been an unconventional beekeeper for 11 years – although I don't consider myself a 'proper' beekeeper. I'll tell you a little about my wayward ways and you can make your own mind up.'

I came across Philip on Beekeeping Forum where he is a huge presence. Although still working full-time, he writes frequently and at length. His posts are lucid, logical and frequently make you laugh. Most of all, they spring from a desire to encourage and help new beekeepers. Philip is not a conventional beekeeper, but he is fully informed about beekeeping in all its guises. Although many will not want to emulate his particular



style of beekeeping, his reasoning and decision-making are a model for all beekeepers.

Do please join us for this talk if you are able. Philip will be driving from Hampshire to speak to us and meet us in person. This is sure to be an engaging occasion!

Sonia will carry a heavy box to St Stephen's so that **the MBKA Library will be available**. Please make use of this service!

Finally, honey show prizes and recent exam certificates will be awarded. 

Times and dates

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| 30 November | 7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 4, on Zoom (leaders Veronica, Sonia) |
| 4 December | 10.00-1.00pm Work group (fortnightly) at the Pavilion Apiary. See article above for info. |
| 8 December | 7.00pm, Winter series talk 3 by Philip Argyle at St Stephen's Church, Maidstone Road (at the Walderslade Road junction), Chatham ME4 6JE |
| 14 December | 7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 5, on Zoom (leaders Simon, Archie, Andy) |
| 18 December | 10.00-1.00pm Work group (fortnightly) at the Pavilion Apiary. See article above for info. |
| 4 January | 7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 6, on Zoom (leaders Andy, Paul, Sue C) |
| 18 January | 7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 7, on Zoom (leaders Simon, Sonia, Sue V) |
| 19 January | 8.00pm, Winter series talk 4, David Evans on Zoom |
| 1 February | 7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 8, on Zoom (leaders Sonia, Chris, Paul) |
| 15 February | 7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 9, on Zoom (leaders Simon, Chris, Jen) |
| 16 February | 8.00pm, Winter series talk 5 at Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG, given by Murray McGregor |
| 1 March | 7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 10, on Zoom (leaders Chris, Sue C, Paul) |
| 2 March | 8.00pm, Winter series talk 6 at Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG, given by Adam Leitch, NDB |
| 16 March | 8.00pm, Winter series talk 7 at Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG, given by Sarah Wyndham Lewis |
| 19 March | BBKA Module exams |
| 30 March | 8.00pm, Winter series talk 8 on Zoom, with Richard Rickitt |

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:

Hefting or weighing: checking the bees have enough stores in winter

We don't usually open hives in winter if we can help it. So we estimate the quantity of stores by either:

- hefting: lifting the hive a few mm off the stand, once on each side, to assess the weight; OR
- weighing: attaching [luggage scales](#) to each side in turn to take a measurement of the weight of the hive.

And if we find the colony is running low, we will give fondant as emergency feed.

- HEFTING This works if you do it regularly to get a sense of what a heavy, medium, and light hive feels like. Though hand and finger strength varies from person to person, the three-finger test can be useful: raise the hive from under each of the sides in turn with one, two, or three fingers:
 - if you can lift with one finger, the hive is too light; feed now
 - if you can lift with two fingers, the colony may be running low; keep an eye on things
 - if you can barely lift with three fingers, the colony has plenty stores

- **WEIGHING** If you feel hefting is too vague a guide, possibly because of little experience, or because your boxes, or floors, or roofs all come in different weights, then consider regular weighing the hives with luggage scales. It helps to have a **screw eye** inserted in to each side of the floor.
- Depending on the size of the colony, you might be aiming to have about 18kg of stores to see the bees stocked from October to March.
- The weight of the empty hive depends on many variables but may be around 14-18kg. Weighing the two sides and adding the figures might give a total weight of c.35kg in autumn after feeding. Keep a note of the weights every 2-3 weeks and notice the level of consumption.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT WINTER STORES

- Don't drop your guard in spring. The colony can starve in April* even with forage available because it is building up so fast. (*or any other time!)
- So-called isolation starvation occurs when the bees cannot break the cluster to reach the stores. Some say that this is a sign of disease and will not occur if the colony is strong and healthy.
- Insert varroa boards (if not kept in continuously in winter) to check the debris dropped through the open mesh floor (OMF). Biscuit coloured cappings show that brood is being reared, and the location of the brood nest.
- If there are excess frames of stores in spring, remove them and replace with drawn comb (or foundation) to give space for brood rearing.

REFERENCES

pargyle <https://beekeepingforum.co.uk/threads/how-much-honey-will-colonies-bring-in-from-oct-march.51784/post-795755>

oliver90owner <https://beekeepingforum.co.uk/threads/how-much-honey-will-colonies-bring-in-from-oct-march.51784/post-795866>
John Humphreys <https://www.conwybeekeepers.org.uk/new-beekeepers/measuring-beehive-stores-in-winter/> 

Bob Smith, Botany for bees

As many beekeepers in Kent know, there are two versions of 'Bob Smith', so the name often carries the suffix *Sidcup* or *Medway*. The judge in our honey show in September was Bob Smith (Sidcup). The second talk in our Winter Series, given on 10 November on Zoom, was by Bob Smith (Medway), or, for those of us who like to bask in the reflected glory of having one such in our membership, Bob Smith **NDB**.

In this talk, subtitled *A Whistle-stop Tour of Flowers Valuable to Bees*, Bob began with a section devoted to bees as livestock which impose responsibilities on their keepers. Honey bees are vegetarian, and, although individually small, a colony might be equivalent to a 5kg animal, and it consumes, in a year, 30-40kg pollen, and several hundred kg nectar.



Beekeepers need to be aware of the plants nearby, if they are of any use to the bees, when they flower, and if they provide pollen and/or nectar.

It's the start of an endless study, and more than anything else, Bob's survey gave us a hint of the magnitude of the task of acquiring a degree of familiarity with local plants.

Bob has, over the years, carried out pollen analysis on many of the plants in this region. Each page of this talk contained pictures of flowers, of pollen grains, a summary of the particular features of the plant, and its relationship with pollinators, particularly honey bees.

Pressed to choose just one page as a sample, I found myself choosing one, then another, then another, and so on, always replacing the previous page. Talk about spoiled for choice!

Like everything in beekeeping, the further you go, the more aware you are of how much you still don't know. For instance, trees which provide early pollen for bees,

like hazel, birch, and alder, don't depend on the bees for pollination. They are anemophilous or wind-pollinated. (I took the chance to use the word here in the hope that I might retain it a little longer!) I can't make sense of the evolutionary advantage in this situation – but one thing at a time!

With so much detail being imparted in a short time, Bob has kindly forwarded me a pdf of his presentation. If you wish to have it, please email me and I'll forward you a link to download it.

I recommend dipping into it from time to time: little and often is best. 

Getting to know you: this month, Kaya Joyce

A series in which WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with MBKA members about beekeeping and life in general. This month, WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with Kaya Joyce



WHATSTHEBUZZ What gave you the nudge into beekeeping?

Kaya Joyce My mum and I had talked about it vaguely for a long time. Then we met Sheila at the Ploughing Match in 2019. Before we knew it, we had signed up

for the Introductory course. In the event we did the course on Zoom because of the pandemic.

WTB A course is definitely the way to start.

KJ As things turned out, we did get bees quite early in the journey of learning. Sheila has been a really major part of our whole beekeeping experience. She took us under her wing and mentored us. Sheila's been incredibly generous with her time, her knowledge, and even equipment, and has really looked after us through our whole journey. In early summer of 2020, during the course, Sheila offered us a swarm of bees. We could keep them at her apiary learn on the job. So we did 18 months of beekeeping with Sheila, travelling to her apiary every week.

WTB We? Who is your beekeeping partner?

KJ My Mum and I do inspections together.

WTB Where are the bees now?

KJ Since the end of the summer, they've been in my garden. I have two 14x12 Nationals. I'm really hoping that we can get them through the winter. I like having them in the garden but I'm already thinking I quite like the sound of having lots more hives.

WTB I'm sure Sheila will have told you that if you have bees in your garden you need a Plan B. Is your garden isolated from neighbours?

KJ Although I live in a tiny, terraced house, I have this extraordinary garden. I think I've got two of my neighbour's gardens plus somebody else's at the back. We don't have any plans to expand yet. But we know a

farmer and he's offered us a site for bees, not too far away, and with good access.

Right now though, we're focussed on getting our bees through winter, and when we should treat with oxalic acid.

WTB It's nice to have someone to share decision-making with.

KJ Yes. We're still learning so much from other beekeepers or online forums or books and things like that. It might be easier when we've been able to observe enough seasonal cycles ourselves and learn from experience.

WTB You're getting an appetite for expanding?

KJ Absolutely. I'd have ten colonies next spring if I could! I think that the more you have, the more experience you gain. And the faster you learn.

WTB Are you interested in practical exams and modules?

KJ Yes, I did my Basic in the summer. But I'm still not always confident that I can bring the knowledge to the forefront of the mind. Perhaps studying Module one would be worthwhile.

WTB What do you like most – and least – in beekeeping?

KJ I find it a bit hard to describe, but there's a sense of calm that comes over me when I'm inside a hive. And as busy and as loud as it may be, it's a feeling that I can't replicate myself. It just gives me a sense of calm. It's still so exciting and new. And, yes, it is sticky and it is messy but I can't say there's anything that I don't enjoy.

WTB Have you found yourself in a situation where the bees are really, really unhappy with you being there?

KJ I've had experience of being around angry bees from very early on, which I guess was a good thing really.

WTB What do you think of natural beekeeping, rewilding, that sort of thing?

KJ Very early in the beginners course, Bob Smith said 'I really recommend you get a few years of experience under your belt first, and then see where you want to go

with it.' It is good advice and I'm very much sticking to the conventional route – at the moment.

WTB Do you like honey?

KJ I do. One of the things that I really like to do is a honey tasting experience. I'd like to recommend that the association sets one up.

WTB Good timing! Sarah Wyndham Lewis, who writes every month in BeeCraft, is coming in a couple of months to do a talk on honey and it will include a honey tasting.

KJ That's brilliant! My next suggestion would be to publicise things as far in advance as possible. I feel bad that I've not been able to help at the Pavilion. With more notice, I would have been there to help out.

WTB Thanks Kaya. I'm noting that. Regarding the Winter Talks series, it hasn't been possible to get the info from the speakers promptly this year. But I've decided to include what we've got in this issue of the newsletter.

WTB You've mentioned your Mum who is your bee partner.

KJ Yes. In fact, the whole family is not far away. There's Mum and Dad, my twin sister, a younger sister and a younger brother. And a niece and three nephews. There's quite a few of us!

WTB Other interests?

KJ Pottery. I have a pottery studio with a pottery wheel and a kiln. I take weekly classes at a local pottery school. The house is full of my pots.

WTB I can't think of a way to combine earthenware and beekeeping kit.



KJ No, but I had a local blacksmith make my hive tools for me. He hand forged them. I think they're a thing of beauty. That's my special kit. It's personal to me. I like that.

WTB Thanks for making time for me, Kaya. I wasn't expecting you to be free during the day.

KJ That's because I work for myself. I work in product development of furniture, fabrics and lighting with interior designers. I work with people like artisans and craftsmen, blacksmiths, and especially fabric printers. Beekeeping is a craft too, so I feel something of a connection with them. 

Propolis – maybe not what we thought?

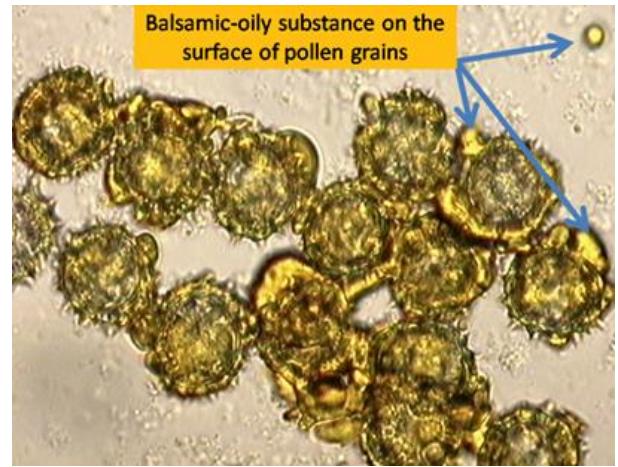
Sonia Besley shares a little discussion at a recent Module 6 study group.

At a recent session of our Module 6 study group, we found ourselves thinking differently about propolis. Firstly we were brought up short when someone pointed out the absurdity of saying that bees forage for **propolis**. ‘It’s a bit like saying they forage for honey!’, they said. Of course, bees collect **resin** which they then convert into propolis by adding wax. One of those things that is obvious when you think about it, but often isn’t noticed in our lazy use of the language.

Then I threw into the mix the work of Küstenmacher in 1911 who claimed that bees themselves produced propolis from pollen! So I dug a little deeper.

Küstenmacher claimed that propolis was formed through extraction of the pollen from the husk. A balsamic-oily substance is formed in this process which bees regurgitate onto honeycombs and then mix with beeswax, thereby producing propolis.

Most modern research has blown his theory out of the water and his ideas are rarely heard now. However I did find some papers, articles, and books in support of his theory that bees produce propolis from both pollen and tree resin. In one particular paper, [1] they agreed that the appearance of the colony nest during the flowering dandelion, goldenrod, and sunflower seemed to support Küstenmacher. at such times, a yellow layer of propolis can be seen inside the hive. The pollen grains from these flowers do have a balsamic oily substance (as seen in the image below). To purify the nectar in the crop from these sources, this oily substance is regurgitated on to honeycombs and hive



Pollen grains with a balsamic oily substance

walls. It is then used to produce a sticky, light coloured propolis!

There have also been experiments where bees deprived of resinous material still manage to produce propolis. Perhaps a rise in propolis production when pollen is plentiful is not so coincidental! Whatever the answer, it’s interesting to see some different theories. Maybe that there are two types of propolis after all. Either way it’s always sticky!

Sonia Besley

REFERENCE

[1] Propolis in Livestock Nutrition Mohammed Jard Kadhim, Aleksandra Łoś, Krzysztof Olszewski and Grzegorz Borsuk*
Department of Biological Bases of Animal Production,
University of Life Sciences in Lublin, Akademicka 13, 20-950 Lublin, Poland

OTHER READING

Bee Propolis by James Fearfully
Kustenmacher cited in Cizmarik, J Macicka, M and Matel, 1978, *Analysis and considerations on theories concerning the production of propolis*. Apimondia Publishing House 

Kent's Plan Bee

PROVIDING FOR POLLINATORS IN LINEAR FEATURES

Register [here](#) now for this webinar on Tuesday 23 November 2021, 10.30am-1.00pm

Are you familiar with the term *Linear features*? It refers to man-made structures such as roads, rail tracks and waterways, and, in this context, to the edges – the verges and embankments – of these features. Apparently more pollinators are found on well-managed verges than in the neighbouring countryside and nearly 45% of our total flora is found on verges. This was brought home to me powerfully in a train journey north through England in July. For much of the journey we raced through a continuous line of camomile. It only extended to the fence at the boundary of the railway land but was non-the-less striking for that.

There are ten speakers at this ~~webinar~~ summit and the list of topics is tantalising. Here's a sample:

- Changing our approach to grass verges for the benefit of wildlife – Steve Bolton, Butterfly Conservation
- Greening the railways – Mike O'Connor, Network Rail Southern Region
- Creating a new circular green economy with roadside grass – Bethany Pateman, Kent Wildlife Trust
- Pint-sized pathways: garden features to help pollinators – Maureen Rainey, Kent Wildlife Trust 

My story, part 2: readers write about their bees – and themselves

In early October, WTB invited a random selection of our readers to write about their current beekeeping activity, and we received a gratifyingly large response. Enough for two issues of WHATSTHEBUZZ in fact. Here's the second instalment.

From Mark Ballard I currently have 15 of my own hives in 3 out apiaries and I am also looking after 3 hives which have been donated to the Association at an apiary at Stockbury.

This year has been the worst year in 20 years for honey production and queen rearing. The lack of honey was mainly due to weather conditions, especially the cold wet spring. Colonies just did not build up in Spring and entered Summer as small struggling colonies. Any nectar taken into the hive was consumed and not stored. However, some colonies did pick up in late summer.

My poor queen rearing results were partially due to bad weather conditions, but mainly down to me getting two queen rearing programs mixed up (!) as well as taking time off to visit my family in Somerset. I eventually bred one queen who hatched earlier than the other queens and with the aid of the workers killed all the unhatched queens. That queen has survived and

is heading an extremely strong colony on two 14 x 12 brood chambers with plenty of stores, so may be a contender for queen rearing in 2022!

During this year, honey production was very sporadic with most of my colonies producing little or no honey. They will need feeding throughout winter. However, three have produced an extraordinary amount and have sufficient stores to get them through to March.

The hives at the City Way Apiary also started slowly. However, they produced sufficient honey for the rent and some (about 70lb) to sell at the Kent County Country Fair at Detling. Honey was in such short supply we only had honey for sale from three sources at the Show.

I had taken off some honey from my colonies in late Spring and thought that, as usual, there would be a crop later in the year. How wrong could I be! In August and September, out of 15 hives, I could not find one suitable frame for entry into our Honey Show. Not one frame was completely capped.

Like many beekeepers I hope that the weather conditions in 2022 will be a bit more favourable and make beekeeping less stressful and more enjoyable.

From Robert Frost Heretic alert!! Let's get this out of the way from the start. Two reasons for raised eyebrows, and strange looks:

- I have Langstroth hives.
- I use only Plastic Foundation, and also – whisper it quietly – some all-plastic frames.

(As per a line from a poem by my more famous American namesake, I do tend to take 'the road less travelled'.)

OK, so ¾ of the audience have stopped reading now.

I always harvest honey from my two colonies in early-mid September. For 2020 & 2021 my harvesting of honey has entailed scraping the super frames all the way back to the plastic foundation, putting the scrapings into the top of a large un-capping tank (aka straining tank) and letting the laws of physics move the honey, and admittedly some small pieces of wax, through a grill into the lower part of the tank, ready for pouring into buckets a week or so later. Hence when I put the wet supers back onto the hives (above a crown board with a CD covering the hole as per the books) for the bees to clean the frames in the supers, there is no comb, just residues of honey on the foundation and frames.

What I experienced this year, was that when I returned the wet supers to the hives, the bees were noticeably more aggressive than usual, resulting in multiple stings to my hands. I guess they thought I was there to take honey from the brood chamber, as opposed to the reality of me returning some small amount of honey to them.

And, equally of note this year – as opposed to my previous five years of honey extraction – was that two weeks later when I went to remove the supers from the hives for storage, I noticed that in both colonies the bees had drawn comb in all of the supers, and both colonies had filled and capped 8+ frames in the lower super with what I presume to be honey from ivy (as it has set like concrete).

So, to me this adds further evidence to the considered opinion which says that this beekeeping year has been 'unusual'.

And in case anyone is interested; I have bottled 45lbs of honey this year.

From Sharon Millar I am a bee novice with a very big capital 'N'. My husband thought bees would bring me joy. And they do... so much joy, but like with children, that joy comes with responsibility and for me, as a novice, a tinge of worry. There comes a time every winter when the hive is so still and so silent that I become convinced my bees have died, that I have done something wrong and I get on my knees and pray :) So for me, autumn preparations weigh heavily.

This year, my beautiful first queen was superseded. Now this bee (according to Sheila) was as good as a queen bee can get and I take heart knowing that my new queen is from good stock, but there has been a different feel to the hive. But then, it's been a peculiar summer. It has been wetter and colder than my two previous years as a novice beekeeper and the abundance of honey that we are usually gifted, was sparse. The knock-on of this shortage was that my usually calm bees have been ferociously defending their honey. A whole new dynamic to my beekeeping!

And now, as my bees prepare for their first winter with their new queen, the drones ousted from the hive, there is a sense of purpose. Even though numbers are smaller, as they work within the hive storing up their winter supplies, it is all 'legs on deck' preparing the hive for the season that looms. There is less coming and going from the hive, just a hand full, like the stragglers from a late-night party, as the once abundant food supplies dwindle.

Within me, a sadness lurks because I know that it won't be long before my beautiful bees stop leaving the hive altogether and I face the long wait until I see them again. But this year I feel more confident that they will emerge victorious, having conquered the winter, to once again embark on the mission set before them – maintaining their hive, and the entire ecosystem whilst they're at it.

From Sean D'Alton Mmmm, what to write and how to put it down on paper about my experiences with our bees over the last month or so.

I suppose I could say how the bees have been with us, as we are totally new at looking after them.

The last 15 months has been a new adventure in understanding the seasons' behaviour, and how to understand what nature has given us in the miracle of

one of the most admirable insects on the planet – the honey bee.

I have seen them clear out their hives, swarm, help each other, defend, and, only this morning, gang up on a yellow hornet. Not to mention going out in all sorts of weather, seeking out pollen, and coming back late in the evening to the splendour of their queen.

Do we feed them? We all ways check them. It is like having children; the last month or so I've been up out of the arm chair putting down my large brandy just on dusk to ensure the last one has come home safely and they are all ok for the following day.

Our last month can only be described as a blessing and a pleasure to share what nature has given us at the bottom of our garden. After all, 90,000 blessings is not bad, and we get to see them every day.

I can only assume they must be thinking ‘nice garden but its chilly when they lift the lid of our space craft.’

From Simon Jenner I checked my bees in my one hive this morning. They where not happy to see me! I got sting through my veil. Only the second time I been stung this season. They been a joy to work with this season but have not produced a lot of honey. They manage to swarm this summer and I have left the supers on for the winter. They have taken down 12.5kg of baker fondant. They where out foraging bringing in small amounts of pollen. They seem to cover about the same amount of frames in the brood box and a lot was in the supers which was the same when a checked last time. They where more aggressive then last time I inspected them and after removing the apivar strips I closed the hive up. 

Quiz

1. Bees forage for nectar, pollen, water, resin, and ... ?
2. Roughly how many generations have bees been evolving for?
3. Which is the odd one out: Dadant, Warré, Smith, Sun, Langstroth?
4. Why do bees forage in winter when there's no pollen or nectar?
5. How do the bees show you that they don't want matchsticks making a gap at the top of the hive? 

Words

Ethology is the scientific study of animal behaviour, usually with a focus on behaviour under natural conditions. (This word appeared in Module 6 and sounded familiar. I was thinking of ethos. What's the connection?)

Ethos (from Greek, ἡθος ‘character’) describes the guiding beliefs or ideals that characterize a community, nation, or ideology. (It's a word that used to be bandied about in schools, an example of the us-them jargon of ‘educationalists’.)

* * *

Super I sat for three hours last night in a Zoom talk and Q&A from Cambridgeshire BKA with Murray McGregor. It was fascinating, but I want to share just one little gem where Murray stopped the proceedings to ask everyone to get their terminology right. His

exasperation rose from questions about using brood boxes as supers. He explained: a *super* is a honey box but that does not make it necessarily a shallow box. It's a box in the **superstructure** (hence the name) – the boxes at the top, above the brood box. Supers can be deep or shallow. Most of us use shallow supers, but he often uses deep supers, which led some people to think that his double brood boxes had four brood boxes!

So supers are honey boxes – but they can be any size.

And, a bit like ‘plastic metal ends’ (see elsewhere in this issue), the superstructure does sometimes get placed at the bottom.

That's annoying. We were almost achieving a little clarity there. 

Christmas time!

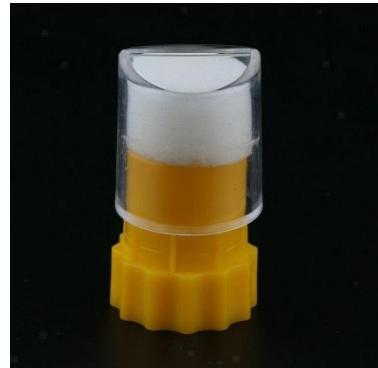
Here are some items to put on a Christmas wish list for any of your nearest and dearest who think you've already got everything. You need to sort out that misapprehension asap!



Roger Paterson recommends [this wedge](#) (left) to avoid squashing bees. You can use it when lifting a box just a little to smoke inside. This is not the cheapest way to get a wedge. But it's a gift – and a doorstop isn't. £13.90 from *Two Brooks Bees*

[Queen marking cage](#) (right) With the queen inside the cage, wait while she walks around to a suitable position, then close the plunger slightly so that

she is aligned with the slot in the top – through which you mark her. Queen marking always involves a bit of pinning the queen down, or grasping parts of her body. No doubt it's a bit uncomfortable, and you hope that's all. I did have a queen faint on me once. I know it was fainting because you don't recover from death. £4.67 from Ebay.



[Gauntlets](#) (left) These are worn over the join between your cuffs and gloves. They do NOT have leather gloves attached, though some so-called gauntlets do (have gloves attached). These give extra protection from determined bees that work away at your cuffs to get access to the inside of your wrist – and that's never a nice place to get stung. This version is high quality. £16 from B.J. Sherriff.

[These here](#) are cheaper and might do the job equally well. £4.30 from Beekeeping Supplies.

[Torch for grafting](#) (right). A head torch is useful for grafting. You need your hands for other things. This one is powerful – 12,000 lumens – and is rechargeable by USB. The bees might not like such a strong light, but there shouldn't be any around when you're grafting.



[Small LED torch](#) (left). Powerful, but not painfully so. Convenient to carry and use, it will help you see into the blackest cells.

A jar of [Scottish heather honey](#), perhaps from John Mellis in Dumfries. You know that Scottish Heather honey is the best in the world, yes? (Well, most people say their own honey is the best, so we can claim what we like.) Until I moved here, Scottish heather honey was the only honey in the world I ever bought, and it was available in the supermarket, reasonably priced. Ah, the days. 🐝



Trivia

I'm grateful to John Hendrie for this little gem, unique to the world of beekeeping, which he shared with us in his Module 1 session on the online Kent BKA course.

Some frames for combs are self-spacing, like Manley and Hoffman types. Others have to be spaced apart by

devices of one kind or another – such as little metal ends clipped over the lugs of the frames. In early days, these 'metal ends' were made of lead; later, tin was used, and later still, plastic. These were called 'plastic metal ends.' Obviously.

* * *

The more effort goes into providing answers, the more people will dream up questions. It's like this with research into honey bees. Despite the fact that no insect has been more studied, there will always be more to find out. Yet, instead of focussing on how much we do know, a negative frame of mind takes hold and says 'can anyone tell me what happens when...?' I found myself in this exact position this week. I was preparing a presentation for our Module 6 study group

on the relationship between water, nectar, and honey in the colony. In times of dearth, bees consume their honey stores, but first the honey must be diluted with water. I asked myself 'is the water applied to the surface of the honey in the comb, or is some honey ingested and mixed with water inside the bee – in the mouth parts or the crop?'

'You need to get out a bit more', a wise inner voice said to me.

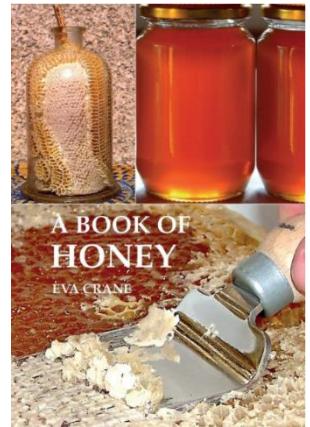
'Buster!' I called out. 

Book review

A Book of Honey, Eva Crane

This is NOT the same book as *Honey: A Comprehensive Survey*, by Eva Crane and others, 658pp, £90 hardback.

Even so, it took me a while to get round to reading this relatively small book, even after I had bought it. I mean, the great Eva Crane, founder of IBRA, and a hugely celebrated bee scientist. I thought it would be heavy going. In fact the opposite is the case. The writing style is very inclusive, and the book has some quite everyday content, on cooking and mead making, for instance. But the science is so well presented. I wish I had known about this book when I was preparing for Module 2! 



Handy Hints

Oxalic acid treatments have zero effect on mites in sealed brood. If there is any sealed brood, the effectiveness of the treatment is seriously reduced. Furthermore, if you trickle (rather than vaporising) OA, you risk killing open brood.

From all that I've read, broodlessness is the sole criterion for the timing of a winter OA treatment. Study the debris on your varroa boards. Biscuit-coloured particles mean brood is being reared. And cold temperatures have little correlation with cessation of brood rearing. For the bees, rearing brood is about timing, not outdoor temperatures.

In mid-October I saw that almost all my colonies (not the small ones) would be broodless by the beginning of November. I treated them then. Many others do the same. You might be too late if you leave it later. But only you can know.

If your colonies are never broodless, then try to find the time when they have minimum sealed brood.

* * *

Do you need a mouseguard? If you use an entrance block, almost certainly not. There is a Module 1 exam question about the smallest gap through which a mouse can squeeze. I'm not sure what the correct answer is (I don't think anyone is!) but I do know that the diameter of the holes in metal mouseguards is 10mm. We can take it, then, that it's impossible for a mouse to get through either the large (summer) or the small (winter) gap in an entrance block. And is there any sense in taking the entrance block out for winter, just so you can put a mouseguard on? Ventilation comes through the open mesh floor. Perhaps if you have a solid floor, things are different, but no natural cavity EVER has an opening the size of a hive entrance without any entrance block in place. 

MBKA apiaries

The Pavilion Apiary

Work day, 20 November. Team: Mark, Sheila

We might have been a small team, but we managed to get through a lot of work (and bacon rolls!).

- The door to the Gents was sticking so we removed the door and I took a couple of mm off the closing edge. Sheila gave it a coat of red oxide primer on the bare wood.
- We hung the gate removed from City Way, between the new fence and garage no.1 (the one nearest the Pavilion).
- We managed to fix the small Harras style fence panel between the corner of garage no.2 and the ditch.

Work completed so far is a long list (!) and includes

- grass strimmed and cut over the whole area
- removal of the door on garage no.2
- the weed suppressant fabric was laid and fixed down alongside the ditch
- approx. 40 saplings/bare rooted trees/bushes have been planted round the perimeter
- approx 95% of the Harras style fencing, to fence off the Apiary area, has been erected.
- repairs to the kitchen ceiling and walls
- and much more.

We meet again on Saturday 4 December at 10.00am (weather permitting) and plan to:

- finish the fencing
- straighten up the side walls to garage no.2; we will use 4 Acrow props and **at least four people** to do this job
- then garage no.2 will be bolted to the side wall of garage no.1
- erect a new stud wall between the shower room and the 'away team' changing room
- paint the toilet doors.
- decorate internal walls

We would appreciate it if members could donate a selection of climbing plants, such as honeysuckle, clematis, dog rose, and hops, to cover the metal fencing.



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

Mark Ballard (Apiary Manager) 

*

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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.

In this issue I have included a number of items which may be controversial. Although I have used only sources which I respect and believe are authoritative, I know that some of you will disagree with what you've read. Please do write and tell us what you think, and what your experience is. After all, this is a politics-and-religion-free zone, so we're unlikely to fall out over a difference of opinion! 

Answers to the quiz

1. Honeydew. Perhaps this is not normally included in the honey bee-forage-shopping-list because it gets subsumed into the category of nectar. Certainly, like nectar, carbohydrates make up almost all of the solids, and these are mostly sugars. But nectar is derived solely from plants, and although honeydew, like nectar, is sourced from the phloem sap of plants, the product which bees actually forage has been altered, and can no longer be said to be wholly of plant origin. This is because it has made a rapid journey through a plant-sucking insect (such as an aphid) and has, *en route*, picked up enzymes from the saliva and gut secretions of these insects. So honeydew honey is not the same as nectar honey, and this difference is represented in the legal description of honey. [The Honey (England) Regulations 2015. cf part 1, 2, (1)]
Finally, it's worth noting that the description of honeydew as *aphid poo* (aiming for cheap laughs?), is not entirely accurate. Admittedly it is voided via the rectum of the insect, but it travels directly from fore-gut to hind-gut, bypassing the mid-gut where digestion takes place. [Reference: *The Book of Honey*, Eva Crane]
2. Three or four generations per year would make c. 100m generations. (Humans have been evolving for about a quarter of a million generations.)
3. Sun. They are all hive types, but the others are named after their inventor.
4. They need water to dilute honey stores. For this reason, you are more likely to see bees foraging for water in winter and early spring than any other time.
5. They gum up any such gaps with propolis. 

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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 

Indulge me...

I'm no gardener, and, at best, merely a competent photographer. Thankfully, often all you have to do is point and shoot.

I took these pictures early on 3 November in the back garden. The temperature had dropped to minus 1°C during the night and the melted frost still lay in droplets on the flowers.



(above and right) What a year for *verbena*! These flowers have been in bloom for months. The new flowers squeeze through the dead remnants of earlier blooms. Like many small flowers (ivy, cotoneaster, privet etc), the bees find them irresistible.



(right) Our *rhus* (sumac) has gone crazy. We had one in Glasgow for years but this Kentish one has outgrown itself and its site in just a couple of seasons. Something will have to be done – but in the meantime, we can enjoy the autumn display.





(left) Chrysanthemums – known as late-flowerers. These have been going since mid-summer. The heads are relatively small and less full – almost daisy-like.

(right) This is *linaria* – like a tiny snap-dragon. These appear in the garden throughout the season wherever they choose. The water droplets give an indication of how small these flowers are. 

