



WHATSTHEBUZZ

February
2022

Hello to February, to planning time, and to you all

Is there anything to say about the beekeeping year in February that wasn't said in January? It's just a bit more of letting the bees get on with raising brood, with occasional foraging, and cleansing sorties when the weather allows.

As I write this, temperatures are still very low, and the bees balance the need to cluster for warmth, with the need to spread out to keep brood warm. We can't watch it happen of course; we just look at tell-tale signs in the debris on the varroa monitoring board.

The real risk of starvation, assuming you left your bees with adequate stores in late autumn, is in late spring, when the colony has built up, but limited forage is available. So do keep checking the weight of your hives with scales or by hefting, and be ready to slip in some fondant if needed. You might need an eke or empty super, and perhaps a piece of foil insulation to seal off the cold space in the eke.

If you're going to boost brood rearing, you might lay pollen patties on the hive around this time of year.

Have we moved from pandemic to endemic yet? Perhaps that is a difference in how we think, and may change only very gradually through the entire population of the country.

But it would be great if we could have person-to-person events this year: meeting at the Association apiary, or at some of our members' apiaries; demonstrations and mentoring for new beekeepers in the association; social events like BeeChat, a BBQ, and the various Shows. And of course the Annual Dinner.

Do you ever ask, Why keep bees? For an in-depth answer, read this: it's one of [David Evans's best posts](#) – funny, wise, and hugely engaging.

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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.

WHATSTHEBUZZ Did you hear David Evans's talk a couple of days ago?

John Chapman Yes indeed! I thought it was very good. Lots of things I would endorse. I wanted to ask if his varroa treatment plan would change at all if he had ivy coming in at the end of the year. I liked the way he used fondant almost always instead of syrup. But I do wonder when you've got a load of ivy coming during autumn feeding, if getting a little bit of water into the mix by using syrup might help in the spring. That's just one of my little pet theories!

WTB Have you been to your bees recently?

JC Yes, I check on the hives, but much more interesting was seeing lots of bees foraging for nectar on New Year's Day. It was at Owlets National Trust and they have xerophyte plants there. Some were in flower. Usually these plants are spiny like cacti and succulents. There are loads of others.

WTB Yes, our wintering flowering cherry had lots of bees on 1 January.

JC David Evans stole my thunder a bit for this chat. I was going to talk about equipment; checking over what you've got. Is it enough? Does any of it need replacing?

I'm not sure that I need an extra box for every one of my colonies to cover swarming. But nuc boxes are very useful, both wooden or poly. Depending where your apiary is, you might need to watch out for woodpeckers having a go at poly hives. I've had to put a board over the roof of poly hives because the birds had worked out what was inside the boxes.

WTB On another topic, we have an AGM on 19 February.

JC Yes, usual time, but at St Stephen's in Chatham. We very much hope people will come and join the committee and help with the running of the Association.

Speaking for myself, I'd like to see the new apiary up and running, and then I'd like to retire as Chair. I've been doing this for some years, and I've done as many things as I can. Hopefully the Association is in better shape now than when I took over. So I hope somebody will be able to take over in the next year or so.



We also need a new Treasurer as John Hendrie is moving to Scotland. And although Mark Ballard is doing a great job as Apiary Manager, I think it would be good for him to have an assistant.

We don't want a massive committee, just eight or nine people, but we could do with more people becoming active in the running of the Association. I hope that some new people will come forward. They can speak to me before the AGM if they'd like to know more about what's involved. And I'd be very glad to hear what sort of things they might be able to contribute to the Association.

WTB Managing anything has been more difficult over the last while with Covid.

JC Indeed. I find it difficult to approach people I don't know well on the phone – and I haven't got to know people just by seeing them on Zoom. I'm looking forward to being able to meet properly in the summer. It really is the only way for beekeepers to chat and have a proper exchange of ideas.

WTB What about bee safaris, where members meet at a person's apiary?

JC Yes, we've done that in the past. And also with Mark, Tony, Bob, Jen... Twice a month was too difficult to maintain but it would be good if we could manage something like that once a month.

We had a social event at our apiary site at Owlets, Cobham. It included a little tour and talk about the National Trust property there.

WTB I've heard that you used to have social events in Pip Blaxland, our President's garden.

JC Yes we would meet up in Pip's large garden where he had a variety of colonies, some more even-tempered than others!

We've not done much of this sort of thing recently, except for this summer when Paul Newman invited us to his apiary at [Loddington Farm, Linton](#).

WTB Yes, I was there that day. James, the owner showed us around. It is a very special farm and we had a great visit.

JC We did manage to do something this year at the Kent Show, and lots of our members were there. And at the National honey show too; that was really nice.

JC I hear you've had a chat with Dave Hopper.

WTB Yes indeed. It's in this issue.

JC He does have a huge depth of interest in and understanding of this area and the history of it. I remember being on a paddle steamer trip on the Medway organised by the association and when we came to the dockyards, it was like having a tour guide with us. He had so much to say, it was amazing. 🐝

Future talks in our Winter Series

Adam Leitch, NDB (right) 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 the 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 distinctive 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.' 🐝

The Regional Bee Inspector's report

Many of you will have seen the [Annual Report of our Regional Bee Inspector \(RBI\)](#) which was published recently. Dan Etheridge is currently RBI for South East England, standing in till Spring 2022 for Sandra Gray who is away. Incidentally, Dhonn Atkinson has been temporarily appointed as the *National* Bee Inspector (NBI) whilst the current NBI Cristina Ruiz is on maternity leave.

Dan's report is interesting, comprehensive, and readable. I'll refer here to some points in it – but that's no substitute for the real thing, of course. The work of

Bee Inspectors is about maintaining bee health. We all have a vested interest in knowing about the reality of foulbrood and pests in this part of the country.

Dan's report begins with a marvellous survey of the strange and rather difficult beekeeping season that we experienced in 2021. It is not easy to summarise because, although the climate was the same for us all, the effect on our bees and our honey crops was not. Dan begins 'The beekeeping season began with a reasonable April...' Really? That wasn't my recollection. I'm not here to take issue with the content of the



Foulbrood inspections showing European Foulbrood found in SE England in 2021. *National Bee Unit*

Report, but I had to check out his memory of last April. A quick look at the [Met Office website](#) showed that last April was the coldest and driest for 99 years.

The Healthy Bees Plan 2030 is underway! ‘Over fifty actions have been developed ... to protect honeybees from a variety of pests, diseases and environmental threats over the next 10 years.’

The number of BeeBase registered beekeepers in the SE is slightly down in 2021. No one can know, of course, what proportion of beekeepers is actually registered on BeeBase. Dan points out that apparently some beekeepers think that joining a local association – and therefore also the BBKA – means that they are automatically registered with the National Bee Unit (NBU) – or BeeBase, which is the name of the website of the NBU.

[Registration on BeeBase is simple and worth doing.](#) The more beekeepers who register, the better the picture of the location and density of colonies, and the greater likelihood that the NBU will contact you if foulbrood is discovered in your area.

Foulbrood is a reality for us. European foulbrood (EFB) is much more prevalent in the SE than elsewhere in the

Instead of a book review

I haven’t got a bee book to recommend this month. In the car, Esther and I have been listening to [Billy Connolly reading his autobiography, Windswept and interesting.](#) We felt we had to hear the man himself deliver it. What joy, and laughing out loud.

UK. It is notifiable, so we have to know how to recognise it (be alert if you see larvae which are not pearly, curved and segmented) and be ready to notify the NBU.

Dan writes in his report that Bee Inspectors find that beekeeper knowledge about varroa and its management is poor. Varroa can be effectively controlled if colonies are monitored and treated as required, following the instructions about dosage and ambient temperatures.

There were two reported sightings of Asian hornets in October 2021 using the *Asian Hornet Watch* app, and, amazingly, two nests were found and destroyed shortly afterwards.

Seasonal Bee Inspectors (SBIs) do not come on duty till the end of March. Kay Wreford (a member of MBKA) covers Medway along with Danyal Conn. Kay tells me that the areas SBIs cover may change in 2022, so if anyone needs to contact a Bee Inspector, they should go to Beebase (the **Contact us** tab) and then enter their postcode to find the contact details for their SBI. 🐝

I can’t wait to see and hold *Honey Bees* by Arndt and Tautz. Audio and Kindle books are great, but real books will never disappear when they can be as beautiful as this. 🐝

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:

Moving bee hives more than 3 feet and less than 3 miles

- the 3 feet, 3 miles rule is a **guide** based on some assumptions. The first is a 3 feet distance beyond which bees will not recognise a hive as their own and will behave as if they were homeless. The second is a foraging range (1.5 miles) which will put them in sight of a landscape which they recognise from before their move.
- bees can be moved at any time of year. In winter there is a risk of loosening the cluster. In very cold weather this could result in the death of bees if they are not able to rejoin the cluster; though the colony may not die immediately, the reduced numbers could result in a failure to build up). In summer the risk is that bees continually fly back to their original location.
- changing the orientation of the hive should be done in increments, possibly no more than 45° at a time.
- if moving a short distance within an apiary, the hive can be moved 3 feet each day (more if the hive is being moved backwards), possibly by placing it on a hive barrow.



Carrying hives like this is a lot more jolt-free than using a hive barrow. But these PINE brush handles look a bit bendy. Traditionally they are made from RAMIN which is a much stronger wood.

- a hive barrow works well, but may not be ideal over bumpy ground in winter; two people can carry a hive in 'Ark of the Covenant' style by strapping it between two broom handles.
- if you can't manage a bump-free journey in cold weather, leave it till later in the season.
- during the flying season, close the hive entrance after dusk before the day of the move.
- the bees will die if you don't provide adequate ventilation and prevent the temperature heating up; often it is appropriate to replace the roof with a mesh screen.
- double strap the hive boxes; two parallel straps are much more secure than two crossed – less likely to twist apart.
- some people advise placing a leafy branch or a sheet of glass in front of the entrance (not too close) to alert the bees to a new location and the need to reorient – before they disappear in search of familiar territory.
- another option is to stuff the entrance with fresh grass leaving just a small hole for bees to slowly exit the hive.
- for short moves, if the bees are flying, place a nuc box with some drawn comb at the old location to collect up returning bees; after a day or two, move it next door to the hive in the new location.
- in winter the bees are flying less, so less likely to return to their original location; hives are lighter



Perhaps carrying a hive between two brush handles was inspired by the way Ark of the Covenant was transported by the ancient Israelites. If you are inspired to carry your hive this way, don't feel obliged to do so at shoulder level!

too; but bees are more vulnerable to cold if they fall off the cluster.

- in summer, bees will return, occasionally over a large distance, to their original location; hives are heavier, and bees are at risk of heat and suffocation during a move.
- to calculate crow-flying distance between two locations, you can use Google Maps:
 - click to create a starting point
 - right-click on your starting point
 - select 'Measure distance'
 - click at your other location on the map

- at the bottom, you can find the total distance in miles (mi) and kilometres (km).

- two-person hive carriers (not cheap) are available [from Bee Equipment](#) and [Thornes](#).
- one simple way [to make a hive barrow](#) is to remove the plastic bowl from a garden barrow and replace it with a wooden platform.
- unless you're moving a hive into a quarantine area, don't move a diseased colony.
- ideally your move will be uneventful and suiting up will turn out to have been an unnecessary precaution. 🐝

MBKA news and events

The AGM

Saturday 2.00pm, 19 February 2022 at St Stephen's Church, Maidstone Road (at the junction of Walderslade Road and Maidstone Road), Chatham ME4 6JE.

Please come to this meeting, and also consider if there's any way in which you could contribute to the running of the Association. It is not necessary to join the main committee to take on a job. It is possible to do a specific job for the association without being part of the main committee.

Sitting a Module exam?

Important message from our Exams Secretary, Sonia Belsey:

Any full Medway BKA members who wish to sit a module exam in February MUST let me know in the next few days! Applications need to be sent by email and the deadline for submission is **7 February 2022**. If you plan to sit an exam, please email me (Sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk) and I will send an application across.

Sonia Belsey

Annual subscription

If you haven't yet renewed your annual subscription, and don't have the renewal form to hand, you can

download it from the members' area of the MBKA website, or [click here](#).

If you do not intend to renew, it would be helpful if you would contact John Hendrie to say so: bibba26@talktalk.net.

Please email or post a breakdown of your payment to our Chair, John Chapman, showing the number of hives you've included for BDI (disease insurance).

The next talk in the Winter Series

On **Wednesday 16 February, 8.00pm at Wainscott, Murray McGregor** will visit us from Perthshire.

Murray is Britain's largest bee farmer with, in the 2021 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 few weeks ago went on for three hours! He's not comfortable with Zoom and is looking forward very much to spending an evening with us. An engaging and authoritative speaker. 🐝

TIMES AND DATES

1 February	7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 8, on Zoom (leaders Sonia, Chris, Paul)
5 February	10.00am Work party at the Pavilion Apiary, weather permitting. Details below.
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, Murray McGregor, <i>on managing Britain's largest heather honey operation</i>
19 February	2.00pm MBKA Annual General Meeting St Stephen's Church, Maidstone Road (at the junction of Walderslade Road and Maidstone Road), Chatham ME4 6JE NOTE CHANGE OF VENUE
26 February	10.00am Work party at the Pavilion Apiary, weather permitting. Details below.
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, and also on Zoom, Adam Leitch, NDB, <i>Why anatomy matters to practical beekeeping</i>
16 March	8.00pm, Winter Series Talk 7 at Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG, Sarah Wyndham Lewis, <i>Honey in its many complexions and my work as a Honey Sommelier (includes a honey tasting)</i>
19 March	BBKA Module exams
23 March	Introductory Course 1, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
30 March	8.00pm, Winter Series Talk 8, Richard Rickitt on Zoom, <i>From Rolls Royce to Rajasthan</i>
30 March	Introductory Course 2, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
6 April	Introductory Course 3, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
24 August	Introductory Course 4, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
31 August	Introductory Course 5, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
7 September	Introductory Course 6, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG

MBKA Apiary

Mark Ballard writes: We had an excellent session working at the Pavilion Apiary on Saturday 15 January with 11 people stepping up. Unfortunately the track down to the Pavilion from the top is wet and slippery, so cars cannot get close. However, Terry Trot managed to get his Range Rover down – and back up again!

Work is progressing! The metal fencing has been completed and the fence panel bases have been sunk into the ground so that the tops of the bases are level with the ground. This will make mowing much easier. The wooden gate that was the entrance to the bee area at City Way has now been installed between the



metal fence and the concrete Garage (No 1). This now makes the bee area secure.

We have laid weed suppressant membrane alongside the boundary ditch and c.40 plants, shrubs, and trees have been planted. Some of these might not survive. We think there are rabbits in the area.

The side walls to the second Garage are now upright and we've bolted the left-hand wall to the right-hand wall of the other Garage. This now gives us an open, covered area to assemble frames and hives and to clean brood boxes and supers.

We're building a stand for a 1000L tank with the gutters draining rainwater into it. That means we have to level and realign the gutters.

Our next project is to remove the broken door and side panel to Garage no 1 and install either a new door and brick side panel or a pair of double doors. As there is no window to this Garage it might be better to have a pair of doors that can be fully opened (to let more light in) rather than a single door. It's not possible to fit windows to any of the buildings because of the risk of vandalism.

Both the Ladies and Gents toilets have been thoroughly cleaned.

The Kitchen has been deep cleaned and is fully operational, with teas, coffees and bacon rolls served up for the work parties! I have a sneaking suspicion that the work party turns up mainly for the refreshments rather than the work!

Part of the left-hand room is being partitioned off to provide a storage area for the farmer.

The 'Basic' Assessment

The BBKA, and our other national beekeeping bodies in the UK, run practical and theory exams for all levels of beekeepers. But there is one exam which stands alone from the others, and is generally regarded as worth sitting, even by those who never sit any other beekeeping exams. It's THE BASIC. Tony Edwards, our Education Leader, writes about his own experience, and why he thinks the exam is valuable for all.

Those of you who have been keeping bees for just a year or two have already acquired a huge store of knowledge and experience. When I first started beekeeping in 1997 an elderly beekeeper who was

We still have to convert the old Shower Room into a Honey Extraction Room. The walls and floor are tiled and there are no windows. There's no way the bees can get in!

At the moment the cold water supply has been turned off to prevent pipes freezing and bursting. Once the temperature rises and frost is less likely, we can turn the water on again.

Warmer days will also give us the chance to start painting again. Right now it's possible paint might not dry at all because there's no heating in the Pavilion.

The track down to the Pavilion is still a problem. Whenever we get wet weather it becomes impossible to get vehicles close to the Pavilion. We are planning to lay hardcore, road stone or crushed concrete but this will have to wait for warmer, drier weather.

As we will be relocating the bees and equipment from City Way to The Pavilion Apiary at Cliff Woods this Spring, maintenance on City Way has been kept to the minimum. We hope to move the bees once the winter cluster has broken up and the bees are flying. Some of the empty hives are there already.

A note for the all gardeners: we would be glad if you were to give some climbing plants to grow over the metal fence panels. All donations gratefully received.

The next work party is on **5 February**. Call or text me if you have any questions (07802 762121). **The Pavilion Apiary, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX. The entrance to the field is 2nd left off Lee Green Road.**

Mark Ballard, Apiary Manager 

helping me get started said, 'You know, providing you reflect on all your failures, silly mistakes and successes, you will learn more in your first year than in all the years to follow.'

I think that is probably true. Obviously, I have gained a lot more confidence, knowledge and experience over the thirty years of my beekeeping but that first year was a very steep learning curve. At that time I didn't have an overview of what is required to be competent – everything was in bits with no joined up routine or reason. I happened to voice this to Terry Clare, now deceased. Terry advised me, 'Have a go at the Basic! –

It will put you straight and you'll enjoy your beekeeping much more.' I followed his advice and completed the Assessment in 2006 and Terry was right in every respect. John Hendrie was my assessor which made me quite nervous and I started off mumbling some pretty incoherent answers to his simple questions. I soon realised that my assessor wanted me to pass – he began teasing the responses out of me. I was told later by Terry Clare that he was 'looking for success'.

The Basic Assessment, possibly the most important exam set by the BBKA, is for beekeepers who have had one year or more keeping bees.

In this January's BBKA News Sue Watling (Yorkshire BKA) has written an excellent article (the first of four) describing the Basic Assessment. This article describes her experience doing part 1 of the exam: Manipulation and Equipment. This is a practical assessment of your ability to handle bees and beekeeping equipment and your ability to talk about what you're seeing.

The other three parts of the exam consist of oral questions. Part 2 assesses your knowledge of natural history and beekeeping. Part 3 is on swarming, and swarm control, and Part 4 assesses your knowledge on diseases and pests.

You have to achieve at least a 50% pass rate on each section to pass.

I recommend you to read this article in BBKA News as it confirms that many find preparing for this exam encourages the beekeeper to reflect on their own approach to beekeeping. It gave me a great deal of confidence and also an overview of what is required of a competent beekeeper. I still make silly mistakes usually caused by forgetting what I'd learnt. This tends to happen quite a lot as you grow older!

Full details of 'The Basic', including the syllabus and how to apply, [are on the BBKA website](#).

The BBKA offers a correspondence course for £75.00. There's no particular need to sign up to this. Just study the syllabus and join our own MBKA study group.

The Basic Assessment Course will be four sessions and the assessment in July or August will be held in one of our members' apiaries.

Sheila Stunell has already contacted those of you who completed the Beginners' course. If you are interested in working towards this exam, please contact Sheila (admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk).

Tony Edwards, Education Leader 

Getting to know you: this month, Dave Hopper

A series in which WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with MBKA members about beekeeping and life in general. This month, WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with Dave Hopper. Dave has huge local knowledge and if you get the chance, it's good to listen to him talk about his life and the people he has known.

WHATSTHEBUZZ Welcome, Dave. Were there beekeepers in your family when you were young?

Dave Hopper Yes, my dad was a beekeeper. After being invalided out of the Navy in WW2, he worked in Chatham dockyard. He read books on beekeeping when hunkered down during a raid. He had an orchard with some hives, and I grew up helping him with the bees. After the orchard was sold in the 1960s, my friends Ken and Audrey Beevor gave me two out-apiaries and storage space. They ran a bee farm and were at one time secretaries of MBKA.

They also looked after my bees while I was at Teachers College, and during the Easter holidays, I was able to help Ken with his pollination contracts.

WTB That was a while ago! Do you still have some hives?

DH I was unwell last spring, so I downsized from two apiaries to one. I now have four colonies at the community orchard in Stockbury.

WTB What's the forage there?

DH A mixture of chalk downland wildflowers, deciduous woodland, orchards, and sometimes far too much oilseed rape!



WTB How does beekeeping compare now with the past?

DH Definitely much harder now. I think beekeepers should keep no more hives than they can comfortably manage. As well as swarming, keep an eye out for disease and treat appropriately. Honey from oil seed rape can be challenging if you don't get to it on time and it sets in the comb.

WTB What's your advice for a simple beekeeping life?

DH Keep to one design of hive and get rid of worn out equipment.

WTB How do you suggest people get started in beekeeping?

DH When you feel confident, get a couple of nucleus colonies – or a nucleus and a swarm. They will build up. You need a good location for an apiary where the bees will not upset anybody. Good access is important, possibly with a vehicle to bring your equipment. Attend apiary meetings and ask advice from fellow beekeepers.

WTB What's your plan for swarm control?

DH As soon as I see open queen cells containing larvae, I make up a nucleus colony. From the hive, I take the queen, a frame of brood, and a frame of honey, and put them in a nuc box. I shake in about 4-5 frames of bees. Many will return to the original hive as they are still in the same apiary.

You have to go back to the original colony a week later to remove the queen cells, and leave just one, or you'll get cast swarms.

Making splits for like this for swarm control is a good way to remove honey frames from the main hive to make space for the queen to lay when the colony should be building up. You should always have some drawn comb frames available, not just foundation. In winter, I keep drawn combs well-spaced in a brood box and sealed in a plastic bag to keep out wax moth.

In September, I reunite the splits I've made for swarm control back with their original hives so that I don't have too many colonies to take through winter.

Keeping a grip on colony numbers can be difficult!

WTB What about varroa treatments?

DH I use MAQS strips (formic).

WTB Give us just one tip to remember please.

DH If you have an out-apiary, always plan ahead. Check very carefully you have all the relevant tools and equipment with you *before* you leave home.

WTB What the least pleasant thing for you in beekeeping?

DH Extracting honey, when I'm faced with several supers of severely granulated oilseed rape honey. No joke.

WTB Okay, can we have something to smile about then.

DH When I was a Dockyard apprentice welder, my instructor was Ken Beevor, the bee farmer. One day he told me to get my gear and follow him. We drove over to the locks, where there was a Royal Navy frigate ready to depart. But it wasn't going anywhere because a swarm had settled on the superstructure of the ship. A large crowd of dockyard workers and ship's crew stood by to watch as we got the swarm into Ken's box and moved it to the dockside. After a shout of thanks from the ship's captain, the ship left and steamed off down the river.

My job in teaching included an outdoor pursuits programme doing courses like the Duke of Edinburgh awards. On one occasion, my headmaster gave me an afternoon's teaching off so I could rush over to the bishop's residence in Rochester. The new bishop was having a tea party so he could meet with all of his vicars. However, while everyone was enjoying their time in the garden, a swarm descended and settled on a branch. Everyone retreated into the nearby conservatory, and, like the dock workers, watched me climbing a ladder and get the swarm into a box. While waiting for the bees to gather inside the box, I met the new bishop who thanked me and I was given an excellent tea.

WTB What's the best bee-time for you?

DH A warm sunny day in the spring when I go through the hives for the first time after winter.

WTB Is your equipment unusual at all?

DH Not really, but I like my hive tool painted yellow so I don't lose it in the grass. I also use three inspection cloths so that only a couple of frames are exposed at a time, and I like a good smoker with a hook.

WTB Any favourite books or speakers?

DH My dad's old book, *The Practical Bee Guide* by Rev JG Digges (1941), and *Honey Farming* by ROB Manley. I once heard a talk by the manager of Brother Adam's bees at Buckfast Abbey. Interesting to hear about Brother Adam and his work.

WTB Did you like travel? Any other interests?

DH I have fond memories of Alpine meadows and forests in summer and skiing in winter. And the honey

from the Mallnitz mountain region of the Hohe Tauern in Austria is very special. The beekeeper had a chalet-type bee house selling honey.

I'm a single fellow and a retired teacher. I've enjoyed sailing on the Medway and the estuary, walking, and I have an interest in steam railways.

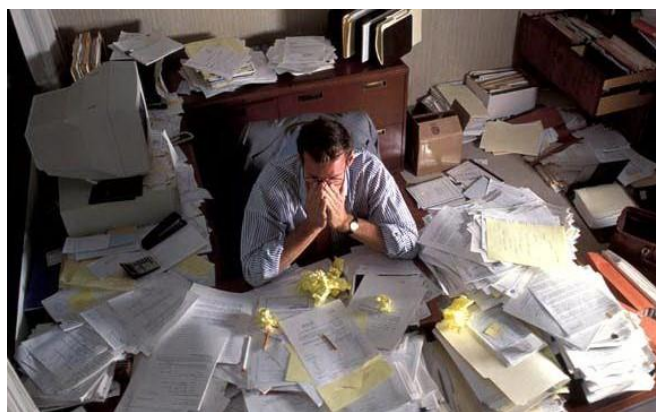
WTB Thanks Dave. Very interesting to talk with you.



MBKA communications questionnaire

Last month I mentioned an article in BBKA News suggesting that newsletters had had their day and should be replaced by proper use of websites and social media. So I sent out a questionnaire to ask you what you thought.

There were 59 responses to the questionnaire – about double what I expected, so thank you!



Naturally I was more than a little delighted to see that more than half of respondents read at least 90% of this newsletter.

I was less happy with something I discovered in the responses to the second question where respondents were asked to indicate which of various groups of articles in WTB were of interest to them.

The Beekeepers' Checklist and the *MBKA News* scored highest by far. But I was devastated to discover that *The Quiz*, the part of WTB which I, your compiler, most enjoy putting together, was the section of least interest – also by far. However, I picked myself up and continued with the questionnaire analysis.

Most people think the length of the newsletter is 'about right'. For the few for whom it is too long, all I can say is, *Please don't feel you have to read any more than you want to!*

Nobody was of the opinion that we stop the newsletter. (Phew! John, our chair, didn't want that question put in, presumably in case he had to face an uncomfortable reality.)

There was a space for suggestions for new items for the newsletter, which prompted one person to say that there was already too much information. Other suggestions included

- a place to welcome new members (*absolutely right! sorted now*)
- all stages of practical beekeeping – BBKA stuff deals with the research side
- a problem page? (*Tried that. Not easy to get any kind of contributions, and that's not peculiar to WTB!*)
- Bee of the month! (*Wonderful idea! There are c.25 UK bumble bee species and c.250 solitary bee species. That will keep you going for a while. You are offering to write it, aren't you?! Seriously, please do.*)
- 'Text Response' (*Sorry, I don't know what this refers to; please contact me to clarify*)
- section with for sale/swapping (*I do that as needed and it does get responses*)
- recommendations for good blogs and websites, not necessarily too connected to beekeeping (*I like that one – and I do it already, a bit*)
- 'I don't know what I don't know' (*true, we all have a problem with unknown unknowns*)
- a number of other comments saying that WTB covered what was needed

The next question asked if the association could use social media better. Almost half think that this is fine as it stands, but ten people thought it could be done better. The majority of members have a smallish

engagement with social media, which means that finding people who know how it could be done better is not easy. If you have ideas and are prepared to give some time and effort to this, please PM Sonia. (PM: send a Personal Message)

Two thirds of us visit the MBKA website less than once a month – and only when we need to.

The questionnaire next asked about communications within the association and invited comments. There were lots of encouraging and positive messages about WTB – which modesty prevents me including here.

Others comments included:

- I thought it would be more welcoming becoming a member, but other than emails with the newsletter there has been no interaction. Covid has not helped, so becoming a new beekeeper during covid, having no support, or someone to turn to, has meant I've learnt as I've struggled on. Bees are still alive, so it's not all bad.
- Facebook and WhatsApp are more immediate
- Keep it plain and simple, not everyone is a computer whizz. Give new to the beekeeping world a chance to shine, not only the higher positioned. Bit off-putting.
- What's App or Facebook could be used as reminders for events, task days etc as I've often forgotten once I've read the newsletter and I'm not that organised to put them in my calendar! *(Most of you will have noticed that I'm not shy about sending out email reminders for our events. We do have WhatsApp groups which work well for study groups, but are less appropriate for whole membership communications.)*

- As a beginner I have actually found communication to be quite poor. I know things have been difficult with Covid over the past year but apart from the newsletter I have not received any other real contact or communication from the club and have had no practical experience or offer of a bee buddy after my course even after expressing interest in both.
- Beekeeping can often be a solitary hobby, so WTB is a regular reminder that I am part of an association; I'm not alone.
- Not sure how to encourage people to contribute or respond to the newsletter. Maybe best not to expect too much.

That last comment is probably my favourite: I'm never done encouraging people to write for WTB but I am fairly realistic in my expectations. It's asking a lot for people to make time just to read it. I don't forget that you probably want to find time for BeeCraft and BBKA News too.

When I started the newsletter, not all responses were encouraging and three VERY IMPORTANT people in our association let me know that they were not happy about such a long newsletter. I resolved to do something about that, and my resolve has not gone away. Every month, without fail, I delete or defer items. WTB is always less long than it might have been.

Someone once said: 'The newsletter is the glue that keeps 90% of the less involved members of the association feeling that they still belong.' If WTB manages that at all, I'm happy. 🐝

The BBKA Annual Delegates' Meeting

There's a YouTube video open in a tab on my browser just now. The most striking thing about it is the duration: just two minutes short of eight hours! It's the video of the BBKA Annual Delegates' Meeting (ADM) which was held today, Saturday 15 January. It was a meeting in hybrid format: 10 people in the room at the BBKA in Stoneleigh, and about 60 on Zoom. That was for the delegates. Observers and other curious people like me were able to watch the proceedings streamed on YouTube. And it was a whole day affair, though I hung around for just a while in the morning.

Margaret Wilson, the retiring president, chaired the meeting, but Martin Smith, Director of Communications at the BBKA, was the super-hero of the day. The chair may have been running the meeting, but the pilot was Martin, the man in charge of the Zoom team, who had to manage the technology with all the complexity of screen-sharing, voting, and promotion of people to speak, as well as co-ordinate this virtual activity with the real life meeting going on in the room at the BBKA.

The hybrid meeting saved the BBKA nearly £10k in expenses, but the cost in terms of poor communication, and frustration at the pace of managing procedures, was not inconsiderable.

Much of the meeting was about procedure – confirming personnel on boards, reports from finance, exams and so on, but the main business was discussing and voting on propositions that the BBKA adopt as policy.

Some delegates took the opportunity to comment on the changes to the exam syllabus. Module 1 came in for particular criticism. A considerable amount of beekeeping history has now been added to this particular module syllabus, which seems at odd with the title of the module, *The management of honey bees*. The delegate from West Norfolk, a science teacher, pointed out that some syllabuses required more memorising than would be needed for a GCSE paper 1 – and students doing these exams have two years to prepare. He suggested that the BBKA exam board should consult more widely, perhaps forming a working party of beekeepers who work in education, as well as engaging with exam secretaries of BKAs, on the content of module syllabuses, and whether the new additions are feasible and useful.

Another delegate suggested that ‘in this day and age with our instant access to data we should be testing application of knowledge, not ability to regurgitate names and terms.’ This is a modern version of an argument that has been going on all my life and probably much longer: how to make exams better reflect real learning, rather than measuring the ability of examinees to cram and retain facts till the day of the exam.

John Hendrie responded on behalf of the Exam Board, and certainly was sympathetic. He promised the Board would heed these comments, confirmed that the exam

Cooking with honey

Do you feel uneasy at the thought of using honey as an ingredient in cooking? We spend so much time indoctrinating ourselves that heating honey is a BAD THING – except for a little warming to extract it or clarify granulated honey. Beekeepers – and cooks who specify ‘raw’ honey in their recipes – feel uneasy about

fees increases would stand, and reflected on the difficulty of testing for knowledge in any exam format.

Later the delegate from Devon spoke in support of three propositions from her BKA to address the problem of the adulterated honey sold in the UK. The effect of her message was dissipated in a tangle of points of order and amendments which might not have been so disruptive in a person-to-person meeting.

No doubt there will be a transcript of the ADM and minutes. It is how such meetings work and they contribute to the gradual work of making improvements in our areas of concern. I’ll wind up these impressions of my first ADM with this little excerpt from the spoken contribution by the delegate from Devon BKA:

Honey adulteration is a worldwide, highly complex problem. Our first proposition is to ask the BBKA approach National Trading Standards, to inquire, firstly, what action is being taken to investigate the importation of adulterated honey into the UK; secondly, will the National Trading Standards assure BBKA, that the methods currently used to analyse and identify adulterants are fit for purpose; and thirdly, what action is being taken to ensure that consumers are made fully aware that any products sold in the UK as pure honey could in fact contain ingredients that are not itemised.

Research has shown that honey adulteration is the third biggest food fraud committed worldwide. There is much news in the press and other media that Chinese honey is harvested before ripe and is adulterated and bulked out with cheap rice, corn or other plant based sugars. Much of Chinese honey is exported to intermediate countries and then sold on as EU or non-EU honey. Cheap blended honey from EU and non-EU countries is flooding the market, often being sold at less than a pound a jar. 

using it at the high temperatures that it can easily achieve, being almost completely made up of sugar.

Our first concern is HMF. It’s toxic, isn’t it? Yes it is, but to bees, not humans. HMF is very much part of our diet, at least the *cooked* part of what we eat.

Next, we fuss about losing all the good things in honey, the 3% that’s not glucose or fructose, the constituents

that make honey special, and give different honeys their particular qualities. And then there's all the health benefits, antioxidants and so on. What's going to happen to all that when we cook honey?

True, boiling is not going to do your honey much good, but it may not do it much harm either, particularly if it's not done for a long time. I make orange or lemon marmalade with honey rather than sugar. It is on a 'rolling boil' for 15-18 minutes. I love it.

In fact you can substitute honey for sugar or golden syrup in almost any recipe. A family favourite is my version of the Indian dish, butter chicken. The recipe specifies a lot of sugar, but I use honey, and do lots of tasting to get it right.

Several decades ago, Esther created her own version of *chocolate sauce*. There are two things to be said about

it: first, although Esther doesn't like it, and never has, the recipe has spread through my vast extended family, and remains as popular to this day. And the second thing? There's no chocolate in it! Don't bother calling Trading Standards. We've never sold it. But I'm happy to share it with you now (even if Esther has reservations), because I use *honey* instead of the golden syrup in the original recipe and I find it creates yet more variety of flavours.

Because this is a home-grown recipe, the quantities have never before been spelt out, and after making it for several decades, I still expect it to be slightly different each time. Like the honey bee, it's very forgiving. However, I weighed the ingredients when I made the sauce today. Remember these figures are not engraved in granite.

INGREDIENTS (approx quantities)

- butter – 30g
- honey – 100g
- cocoa powder – 20g
- vanilla – half a teaspoon
- instant coffee – 1 teaspoon
- single cream – 150g, to taste (normally single cream, but instead you could use double cream, or Elmlea cream substitute, or soured cream, or Greek-style yoghurt). Vive la difference!

METHOD

- Melt the butter in a saucepan with the honey over a medium heat.
- Add the cocoa powder (I sift it), and stir till smooth. Don't let the heat rise to the extent of separating the butter in the mix. Add the coffee and vanilla and stir.
- Add the 'cream' and stir till smooth. Don't overheat.
- I've started using a hand blender at the end to make it a little airier, but that's optional.

Most people take this sauce, warmed, with vanilla ice cream (Mackie's is best), but if you are imaginative, there are other possibilities... 🐝

Zoom

ALT+TAB and F5 are your friends.

Some of you may know what that heading means and others may think my computer has spewed a load of gibberish.

Once I made a lot of admirers – briefly – with ALT+TAB. I was at a conference and we were watching a video in

the dark. Something happened during the presentation and the speaker lost the video. When the audience became restive, I headed to the computer to see if I could help. I'm no expert, and that's not false modesty. But I had waited as long as I could bear before offering my services. I scrolled through the windows that were



Luke, how did you separate the chocolate sauce from the ice cream?!

open on the computer and sure enough the video was there, just not at the front. So I brought it to the front and the show continued. Of course there was much applause as I returned to my seat. I took a bow.



Part of a keyboard showing the ALT, TAB and F5 keys

Afterwards, the speaker rushed up to me and said: How did you do that?? I showed him ALT+TAB. Hold down the ALT button (bottom left of the keyboard) and tap the TAB button (possibly left & right arrows rather than 'TAB'). You'll see that you scroll through the open windows. Stop when you come to the one you want. It will now be in front of the others. (If you hold down

the TAB button, all the windows will whizz by at lightning speed.)

Here's another hint for when you're struggling to get your PowerPoint presentation to fill the screen (on Slide show mode) when sharing your screen on Zoom. With the PowerPoint editing window open, press the F5 function key on the top row of your keyboard. That will take your presentation into *Slide show* mode. You can do this before or after pressing the green *Share screen* button on Zoom. When you click that button, you'll see a window showing tiles of all the programs that are open on your computer. Click on the one you need for your presentation. If you've already entered *Slide show* mode (perhaps by pressing F5), be sure to select *that tile exactly*, and not the PowerPoint editing window.

This is not stuff just for public speakers. Lots of us now take part in group study sessions on Zoom, and everyone has to take a turn at presenting a topic. It makes sense to rehearse screen sharing before the session starts, and remember your pals, ALT+TAB and the F5 function key. 🐝

Preparing for the season ahead

A talk on Zoom by David Evans, January 19, 2022



'There are known knowns, things we know that we know; and there are known unknowns, things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns, things we do not know we don't know.' Donald Rumsfeld

He had nothing to say about unknown knowns!

David Evans, Professor of Virology at St Andrews University, and writer of [The Apiarist](#) blog, made a return visit on Zoom for a talk on *Preparing for the season ahead*. I can't remember if he called his talk *Planning for...* or *Preparing for...* – and there is a difference. Some time ago, and I remember it well, Bob Smith gave a talk on PLANNING for... It was about

organising your thoughts, clarifying your objectives, making lists, and being aware that the season is short – so grasp the nettle, and don't dither around.

David's talk certainly did include these elements but its scope was different. With the season already underway inside the hive, this is the time to check that we are fully prepared for what it might throw at us, and be able to turn events to our advantage. It was hugely comprehensive, in that it dealt with virtually everything that you might have to think about and address during a season of beekeeping, and, as we have come to expect, it was lucid and easy to follow.

David covered five practical categories of beekeeping – record keeping, equipment, swarm prevention, Varroa control, and feeding colonies. Then he concluded with two more 'philosophical' sections: Practice makes perfect, and 'Try something new'.

It was a huge challenge to cover so much in one talk, yet there was never any sense of hurry or of glossing superficially over any topic. Record keeping is about


'looking back to look forward'. What you've noted about the past can inform where you are now and guide what you'll do in future. Mostly we use a notebook and pen with the occasional note on the roof/lid, but we might find that we're leaning to recording notes at the site, and entering the details into a spreadsheet at home – or even in the car if you have a bee-laptop with you!

We know that beekeepers tend to run out of equipment and miss out on bees or honey or both because of shortages. So keep an inventory of what you do actually have. That might not be easy with stuff in sheds, on hives and possibly stored on site. For each colony you will need – a hive with a couple of supers? Wrong! Unless you feel that your 12x14 are always going to be big enough, you need a second brood box, and 3 or 4 supers if there's a half decent flow. *Any* colony might swarm, so that means they *all* might. At the minimum, you need a nuc box and frames for every colony if you are to control swarming. Foundationless frames have all sorts of advantages from being cheap and reusable, to being free from miticide residues, and allowing the bees to draw *their* chosen ratio of drone comb.

When it comes to swarm control, stick to one method till you master it – and that will probably be your version of The Nucleus Method, if you want to avoid

the complication and expense of Pagden. If you have any significant Varroa presence in your colonies, the critical time to treat is after the summer honey harvest, probably around mid-August, in order to protect the winter bees. And, when you have a broodless period after that, mop up the mites that got through with an oxalic acid treatment. Often this is around early November. Almost certainly the bees will be raising brood if you wait till late December. It occurs to me that Slide 34 in David's talk ('Many beekeepers...'), in which he lists common attitudes to varroa treatments, may be the most important take-home message of the entire talk.

David managed to include lots of useful suggestions on queen rearing, bait hives, and feeding with 12.5kg blocks of baker's fondant. For the past ten years, he has placed a full block on the hive (in an empty super resting on the queen excluder), as soon as he takes the summer honey off. At £10 a block (a quarter the price of the fondant sold in bee shops), it is cheap (though not quite as cheap as granulated sugar) and needs no feeder – just an big eke or empty super.

There was SO MUCH in this talk, for beekeepers of all levels of experience. If you missed it, or if you want to revisit it, you can access it on the MBKA website Members' area, or simply click [here](#). 

My plans for the season ahead...

Huge thanks to those of you who wrote in with your plans for the season ahead.

From Jane Wheeler Despite not yet having any bees of my own I do have huge plans for the year ahead:

- Attend the introduction course and absorb as much as I can. I'll try not to be too annoying with a million questions!
- Raise and plant out a selection of bee favourite plants (thank you to Bob Smith for his talk). I have the seed packets at the ready.
- Landscape the bottom of the garden into a perfect spot for a hive – or hives, as I've been warned.
- Re-organise a space in the garage for all the paraphernalia of beekeeping.
- Continue to read, watch YouTube videos, and talk to experienced beekeepers.
- Keep adding to my list of bee essentials in readiness for a shopping spree once I'm trained enough to own bees myself. I must admit I'm looking forward to this one the most.

From Simon Whybrow I have two 8-frame Langstroth hives: a cedar flow hive (2020) and a poly hive (2021) both with 6 flow frame supers. I am still very much a newbie and if I can achieve the following this year I will be happy with my progress.

- To be able to spot/identify a queen. I still haven't seen her!

- To recognise swarming signs and be able to implement a swarming plan other than the nucleus method and accumulating more hives (yet!)
- To generally increase my bee knowledge and better recognise what the bees are telling me.
- To understand and interpret my bee records rather than just recording numbers of frames/stores /brood etc.
- Hopefully to watch and learn from other beekeepers inspections and attend some bee keeping courses.
- To beat last year's 11kg of honey .

From Darren Prentice This is a big question for me as a new beekeeper with little experience so far!

- To try and get the colony I was given late last year through the winter (fingers and everything else crossed).
- Gain some practical experience in handling the bees, using the smoker correctly, inspections etc.
- Take the practical assessment in the summer.
- Expand the number of hives I have.
- Possibly sit the Module 1 exam.
- Keep reading more books etc to hopefully build up my knowledge.
- Hopefully manage swarming using the Wakeford method.
- ENJOY the whole experience!!

From Sarah Sutherland Below is a rough plan, but subject to change as ever! I think 3 out of 5 hives have survived the winter so far. Jobs to do:

- (Immediately!) Move one hive along to the next bench, as the back support legs are sinking! (see picture, right)
- If it is a warm spring and the bees are prolific, make an early split before the swarming season on our best colony
- Do some maintenance of equipment that is not in use to stock up on spares
- Improve documentation, possibly use an app for records
- Try and re-queen one colony that was so aggressive last year that it was almost impossible to inspect!

Here's hoping for a better season for the bees this year! (and, hopefully, a bit more honey) 🐝



Sarah writes: Over winter we give the bees the first super, ie the brood and a half approach. On top of the brood, a QE, and then there is (was!) a super of honey, then the top two supers housing the fondant sugar and insulation blocks.

Insulation or ventilation?

People ask, what's more important to bees, insulation or ventilation? Or, in similar vein, what's more dangerous to bees in winter, cold or moisture?

Are insulation and ventilation incompatible? Most houses in the UK have insulation above the top floor ceiling, but not under the roof. In some other countries, the inside of the roof is insulated. The difference (I'm no expert) is different attitudes to ventilating the roof structure, and probably differences in house construction too. Without ventilation, there will be a build-up of moisture. It would seem that there are (still!) differences of opinion and approach in the best way to deal with this reality.

Which brings us to very familiar territory in beekeeping: different answers to the one problem, varying with region, climate, fashion, and individual beekeepers' information and experience.

It's a much discussed subject, so let's deal with easier bits first. In his book *The Ventilation of Bee-Hives*, E B Wedmore advocated top ventilation of hives to promote a flow of air through the hive. This led to the practice of keeping a little gap in the crownboard in winter by placing matchsticks in the corners.

'Matchsticks' have now become a source of mirth and even ridicule, on the basis that the bees will propolise any gaps in the hive walls and roof; and of course in a natural cavity like a hollow tree, there is no such thing

as a ventilation chimney. A continuous flow of warm air out of the top of a hive means that the bees have to expend considerable energy in winter keeping warm, as they lose warm air out of the roof, and cold air is drawn in from below.

Dave Cushman, on his ultra-comprehensive website, wrote [an article on ventilation](#). He said: 'Deliberate ventilation at the top of the hive will cause some of the moist air to be lost, giving the appearance of improving the situation, but it will destroy the natural circulation of air within the hive, replacing it with a chimney effect.'

On the other hand, American beekeepers – for example Michael Palmer – do use top ventilation. Without it, the hive interior would become damp and mouldy – an unhealthy environment. Michael explains this divergence of approach by the different climates in the east of the US and western Europe. He describes theirs as a Continental climate, and ours, as an Atlantic climate. His bees are in the NE of the US, in Vermont. Winters are long and cold. Our Atlantic climate protects us from the low temperatures of many regions at similar latitude. Latitude is not everything! Moscow and Glasgow share the same latitude, and London is much further north than French Hill Apiaries in Vermont where Michael Palmer keeps his bees.

So what is to be done about the moisture or condensation which collects on the hive walls. Aren't bees more likely to die of damp than cold in winter?

The problem is that bees need water at all times, though perhaps less in spring/summer when their forage might include weak (watery) nectar. In winter, foraging for water is mostly not an option, so the bees rely on condensation to provide them with a water supply. This fits in nicely with the practice of insulating the roof (perhaps with 50mm Celotex/Kingspan). Not only will this help provide condensation / moisture, but it will raise the temperature of the water. If you have a clear crownboard, you can see that condensation generally gathers at the edges and then drips down the walls.

[Derek Mitchell](#), who has studied the bees' requirements for water and warmth, puts it very succinctly: 'To make sure (the bees) can get water, don't top ventilate. To make sure the water is warm, insulate.'

During the season when the bees are rearing brood, they control temperature in the hive very precisely. In winter, with less brood, their energy is spent on controlling the temperature in the cluster, rather than the hive. But they do control humidity all-year round. This is called [hygroregulation](#), and is a key ability for eusocial insects.



Rethinking the box

from BeeCraft, November 2021

Guy Thompson, a thermodynamics engineer, wrote in the November 2021 issue of BeeCraft about how to modify hive design according to the ways natural cavities work for bees, in providing warmth (insulation) and not too much moisture (ventilation). Guy suggested three ways in which we can go some way to mimicking natural cavities with our 'modern' hives.

First, insulate all year round to stabilise the temperature. Preventing too much heat in summer is as important as keeping the interior warmer in winter.

Secondly, always have a small entrance. Think of retaining the interior atmosphere, rather than ventilating the hive through the entrance. Warmer air can hold far more moisture than colder air. With insulation and a small entrance, the interior of the hive will be warmer and the air more able to hold water.

And, thirdly, provide ‘a cool, condensing sump area.’ Guy is not prescriptive about how to achieve this, and so more’s the problem for us. How do we best provide the bees with an environment in which they can dry honey in the summer, and collect water from condensation in the winter?

From what I read about hive floors, these days people seem to be having their cake and eating it. Those who make their own floors leave an area with open mesh,

You’re asking me??

Randy Oliver [once wrote](#): When people ask me a beekeeping question, I tell them that if they want a short answer, to ask a second-year beekeeper. Otherwise, there are only two legitimate answers: (1) ‘I don’t know for sure’, or (2) ‘this answer may take an hour.’

I remember watching an online Q&A with three well-known Scottish beekeepers. Generally, they had little to say, and were reluctant to say it. Speaking as a Scot myself, I hasten to say that this was not people being their typically dour, and taciturn selves – the very opposite of those other Celts just across the water to the west.

No, this was a vivid demonstration that sometimes the more you learn in beekeeping, the harder you find it to be definitive about anything. Perhaps you’ve heard the words of Charles Martin Simon: *The more I studied beekeeping, the less I knew, until, finally, I knew nothing. But, even though I knew nothing, I still had plenty to unlearn.*

A good mentor just might be able to save you from some of the horrendous mistakes that will occur in your beekeeping career. But their way may not

FAQ

Yes, FAQ, not FAQ

This is about the *Food and Agriculture Organisation at the United Nations*, not *Frequently Asked Questions*.

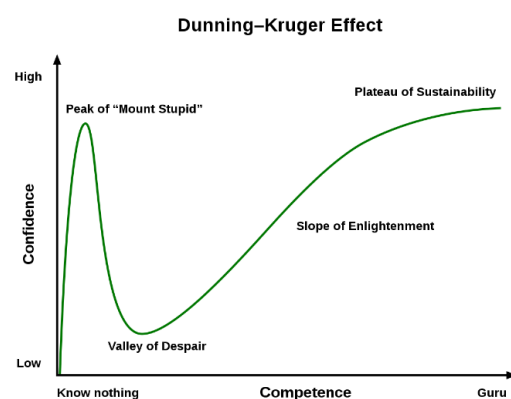
Do you remember Dr Nicola Bradbear, founder of the charity *Bees for Development*, who gave a talk in our Winter series last year? When I introduced her, I mentioned that she had a connection with the UN.

I came across her again a few days ago. An email from the FAO invited me to download (free) a 267pp book

but also fill a third to half with solid wood. Those with full open mesh floors leave the monitoring boards in situ all the time, or certainly more than they might have if they were used only for monitoring varroa.

I have a number of hives and there are different set-ups. I think my approach might be called ‘feeling your way’. Scientifically-minded people wouldn’t have a clue what I’m talking about. 🐝

ultimately be your way, as you travel on, reading, questioning, and observing.



When does the peak of ‘Mount Stupid’ occur for beekeepers?

For a hilarious and wise read on beekeepers’ learning habits, read Rusty Burlew on [Beekeepers and the Dunning-Kruger Effect: Unskilled and Unaware](#).

[If you wonder why I write all this stuff here about what to do and what not to do, please know that I’m almost always passing on guidance and info from well-regarded sources. Only occasionally do I talk about my own experience, and I say so if that’s the case.] 🐝

called [Good beekeeping practices for sustainable apiculture](#).



How do you write on beekeeping and make it

applicable to people in every continent? It's such a huge topic, and this book is addressed to beekeepers of all kinds, across the whole world.

Does it contain useful guidance? Or is everything so generalised that you would be better looking to national or at least regional sources for useful information appropriate to local conditions.

I've read just one chapter, and it's worth downloading for that alone. Nicola Bradbear writes about working to improve the practice of and benefits to beekeepers in Africa. I last heard about cylindrical hives at Torbin Schiffer's first talk at the National Honey Show. In the context of Africa, it makes sense. Nicola says that the concept of introducing *modern* hives (ie anything since Langstroth) sometimes needs to be turned on its head. 'It is their low-cost, easy-to-make, widely available and efficient local-style hives that should bear this name.' The widespread practice of beekeeping in Africa has much to do with the availability of materials to make simple cylindrical hives (without frames) using materials like logs, reeds, grass and clay. Beekeeping projects are popular with donors and NGOs in Africa, and they generally start with a budget and delivery of hives. This kind of activity is easy to document and

New members

Welcome to **Ian Pope** (62), who has joined MBKA with a view to doing our next Introductory Course. He lives in Gillingham and works at BAE Systems, but has been off work with Long-Covid. Having been interested in beekeeping for a long time, he is very much looking forward to the course and getting started.

Also, welcome to **David Wattle**.

And finally, welcome to father and daughter **Erik and Ela Uebel**. Erik writes: 'I started in beekeeping when

Words

Some to avoid


- DIUTINUS simply means long-lived. In the case of honey bees, this almost always refers to workers living from autumn till spring. Better, then, to call them 'winter bees'. That ordinary phrase conveys more meaning.
- ECLOSE can be used for *hatching* (of eggs) or *emerging* (of new adult bees). Better, then, to say 'hatch' and 'emerge' which are not only in common use, but are more specific. Of course, if you can't remember if adult bees *hatch* or *emerge* from cells, maybe it would be better to say *eclose*...


Archie McLellan 

photograph and demonstrate that the project has been implemented. What is much harder to see and measure is the development of a new skill.

Whether the bees are in logs or Langstroths, the bees, the flowers, the location, and the weather are the same. What differs is the harvesting of honey. So-called modern beekeepers use frames so that the wax can be recycled. But in places in Africa, it doesn't make financial sense to recycle wax; it is a highly saleable commodity itself. As for foundation, if it's available, it may be prohibitively expensive. So beekeepers let the bees make their own wax – for free.

The problems with frame hives simply pile up. Tropical bees are often quick to abscond when manipulated. Using frames allows honey to be extracted – but an extractor is expensive, bulky (a storage problem), and will have to be shared and used centrally, which could involve difficult transporting of boxes of frames to the processing centre 'on foot or by bicycle, an expensive, time-consuming and dusty exercise.'

That's a little taster of this FAO book. You might download it and simply browse the contents pages to see the scope of it. 

we moved here (Ashford) from Hong Kong in 2015 and am quite passionate about it. I also explored hive products – honey, candles, furniture balm, and lip balm – and have gone through the safety assessments for a small skin care range. I've recently started a [social enterprise for wood recycling](#). I look forward to meeting the Medway association virtually and hopefully also face-to-face in the near future.' 

Shopping

Most of your beekeeping kit can be purchased from bee retailers. But sometimes you have to go elsewhere because the bee shops don't stock something or charge too much for it. Here are some of these 'elsewhere' items.

- [Long Cuff Nitrile Gloves](#) (right) 'These gloves are the perfect beekeepers glove due to the colour, long cuff and sensitivity.'
- [80% Acetic \(ethanoic\) acid](#) – for winter protection of combs
- Nail guns (right) make working with wood in beekeeping much easier. A small electric one for 15mm nails or staples is ideal for frame making and [this larger one](#) can take 25 or 32mm nails. There are also models which drive both 15mm and 25mm nails.



- (left) [Bubble insulation foil 600mm 1.2m roll](#) – good for covering a block of fondant in an eke to avoid wasting heat in an empty space
- Mesh for open mesh floors (OMF) for those who make their own from The Mesh Company: [Beekeeping Mesh National Hive Varroa Floor - Galvanised Steel \(#8 Mesh - 2.48mm Aperture - 0.7mm Wire Diameter\) - 450mm x 450mm](#)



- (left) [Ammo box for carrying a smoker](#). Airtight and metal, and much cheaper than a 'proper' smoker box
- (right) [Stanley FatMax tote bag, 18" wide](#), for tools and bits




- (left) Fondant in 12.5kg blocks – order by phone (not online) from BFP (Lewes) 01273 476721. Price around £10.00, delivery free above £150. Sometimes you'll be quoted c.£17 but this will usually be adjusted down if you ask, or mention beekeeping, or say what others usually pay etc.

For sale / swap – or wanted

One of you suggested we should include a section devoted to exchanging equipment among members. We have done this already as the occasion arose, and are always happy to post your items for sale / swap /

freebie / wanted. To start us off:

Child's beesuit worn once by grandchild, price new £38. Available for £19. Contact John Belfield, email: johnbelfield@talktalk.net 

Trivia

David Evans in his Zoom talk recommended that with both swarm control and queen rearing, we stick with one method till we feel comfortable. Good advice! After all, 'Practice makes perfect'.

Actually, as someone for whom much of my daily work has been 'practice', I have to say that I think that old saying is a damned lie! Practice doesn't perfect things.

They have to be perfect from the *outset*. Practice makes them easier, more comfortable, less error prone, and slicker. That's as true of your golf swing as it is of your fingering for the scale of E flat minor.

Which is all good.

Archie McLellan 


Handy Hints

Reading the debris on the board under the mesh

Brood capping particles tend to be darker brown because they have propolis in them – as well as wax and recycled material from the nearby cells. This varies with different strains of bee, as well as the age of the brood comb.

Honey capping particles are lighter in colour because they are made entirely from wax.

When brood and stores are on the same frame, as they might be just now, you might find dark and light cappings on top of each other.

Finally, 'to complicate matters further, bees cleaning out cells can leave dark lines on varroa monitoring boards where cell debris is dropped.' (Dani on [Beekeeping Forum](#)). 

Quiz

1. Which very popular swarm control method is NOT in the BBKA module 1 syllabus?
2. Which is larger: the European hornet (*Vespa crabro*) or the Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*)?
3. Which has the greater number of species in the UK: solitary bees or bumble bees?
4. What's the point of the question: Will You Raise Good Bees?
5. Which two viruses most affect adult honey bees in the UK?

Answers on page 23 

What's in the post?

A look at (and link for) a recent blog post

Britain has lost almost all of its natural meadow land since the end of WW2.

Gardeners are encouraged to leave a patch of their garden mostly unmown, completely unfertilised, and perhaps sown with a mix of wild flowers. We're told it will take time, but the reward will be rich and colourful – eventually. I remember Dave Goulson showing a picture of his meadow or garden lawn, teeming with colour and wild flowers. Lucky him! I remember reading about his summers in France over a ten year period, all to change a field into a meadow. So, I bet he

worked very hard to achieve the colourful meadow in his garden.

I visited Highgrove, Prince Charles's home, last summer. I remember a stunning patch of colour: poppies, daisies, and all sorts of blue, orange, and yellow flowers. A meadow? Not a bit of it. You could see the bare soil between the flowers. It was entirely this year's planting, and pretty intensive too. Still, it was jaw-droppingly gorgeous.

However, the chances are that, much of the time, your meadow will be the most unattractive part of your garden, assuming the rest of your garden is intended to create season-long colour and variety.

What we need is a new way of looking at meadow, so that we can see beyond the flowers – or lack of them. In a blog post call [How to grow bees](#), Jen Murray guides us to new ways of thinking about – and being with – plain, colourless, and untended land.

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 (name withheld) There are beekeeping organisations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland which function in much the same way as the BBKA, running exams, providing public liability insurance for

'There is', she writes, 'a bit of an obsession with needing constant gratification from our outside spaces, perhaps an unwillingness to embrace quiet times and rest, despite our complaints at the pace of modern life.' 🐝

the members, and generally being the public face of the nation's beekeepers.

Why is this? Why duplicate the work of the British Beekeepers Association. Does the BBKA have a problem with Celts? Or vice versa? (Don't answer that!)

As I understand things, the BBKA operates in just one of the four nations of the UK, England. Perhaps the name should be EBKA (English BKA) but after all this time, perhaps that would create more problems than it would solve.

Any comments – or a short history lesson – anyone?



Last month's varroa board debris question



You might remember that I showed this picture in the last issue for thoughts/comments. The background story was that this hive was completely open at floor level for a while because of a case of CBPV. When the floor was restored, there was no entrance block in place for a week or so.

When you enlarge the picture to see the material in this image, it, the debris on the right consists of much bigger particles than elsewhere on the board. Isn't that the work of a mouse? And aren't these two dark brown oval shapes near top right mouse droppings?

There was no sign of any such culprit when I took a sneak peek though. And the entrance has been reduced to the minimum now. 🐝

Answers to the quiz

1. Nucleus method
2. European hornet
3. Solitary bees: c.250 species, about 10 times more than bumble bees
4. It's a mnemonic for the yearly order of the colours for marking queens: white, yellow, red, green, blue
5. Deformed wing virus and Chronic bee paralysis virus 🐝

From the BBKA

The 44th BBKA Spring Convention is back at Harper Adams University, Shropshire, on Friday 8, Saturday 9, Sunday 10 April 2022. With 20+ lectures and 40+ workshops, the programme offers topics for beginners through to experienced apiarists and something for non-beekeepers too. [More info and the link to the full Programme here.](#) 



Use of Neonicotinoids on Sugar Beet in 2022

A [derogation has been approved by the Minister for Agriculture](#) allowing the use of a banned pesticide (Cruiser SB: Thiamethoxam, a neonicotinoid) to be used on sugar beet in 2022. [Stephen Barnes, the new Chair of the BBKA](#), has written to BKAs to ask that their members consider signing one of several petitions to oppose the derogation. These can be found as follows: [Government website](#), [Greenpeace](#), and [The Co-operative Party](#). You might also consider [writing to your MP](#).

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Please send your PICTURES, ARTICLES, AND IDEAS for the next issue of WHATSTHEBUZZ by 23rd of each month. And if you'd like to comment on anything in or about this issue, please email me.

Archie McLellan, WHATSTHEBUZZ compiler 