

# WHATSTHEBUZZ



The June Gap. Is it a reality in your location? Four of our contributors share their thoughts and experiences.

*A sunny day in May at the Association Apiary: Sheila Stunell writes about progress at the Apiary and a surprise visit from one of our older members, George Ponder.*

What should you charge for your honey? It is an artisan product, and should be valued and priced accordingly. But how do you decide on a figure?

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers Association.

Please send your PICTURES, ARTICLES, and IDEAS by 23rd of each month.

If you'd like to comment on anything in or about this issue, please email me.

Archie McLellan, WHATSTHEBUZZ compiler [archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk](mailto:archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk)



Follow us on Facebook. New posts appear all the time.

The MBKA website is kept completely up-to-date about the Association.

<https://www.medwaybeekeepers.co.uk>

# Hello to June, to the 'gap' (maybe), and to you all

As the beekeeping season races on, the end of March, our last Winter Talk, and that strange early summer, seem to have been in a past age.



There are many and various beekeeping demands on our time. Some of us have extracted a spring crop, and possibly have outlets eagerly waiting jars of our new honey. We still have to manage our bees for swarm prevention, or swarm control, if the bees get ahead of us. And although it's fashionable not to admit it, this writer has been caught napping by the speed at which things can change. One day, all is calm in the hive, and life is glorious. Ten days later, it turns out that a swarm has left two days previously. There are still eggs. Queens can keep laying right up to the moment of departure. But the colony is less than half the size it was. Oh the pain and regret. You know you should do seven-day inspections. But the bees hoodwinked you into thinking you could wait a few extra days.

It's worth checking all colonies for varroa. Your levels might be low, and you're wondering how effective your monitoring is – until suddenly you find one colony with a significant infestation.

Everyone needs to raise new queens. You can do this actively or passively, so queen cells are a valuable resource.

Inside the hive, the queen is laying strongly, and colony is at maximum size – unless of course, half the bees have departed in a swarm, and possibly thrown up a cast or two as well, leaving a scarcely viable remnant. *Chronic bee paralysis virus* is increasingly common. You might worry when you see dead bees on the ground, and trembling bees inside with some shiny, hairless black bees – but you are not alone. It's why something like Beekeeping Forum can

be such a support, because you discover that many others have similar experiences and problems. There is no cure for CBPV, or any virus, but giving extra space and removing the floor for a while can help. Don't forget the option to replace the queen. It's the first remedy to try for all bee ailments.

Raising queens is initially about queen cells – but it is also about getting virgins mated. There are many and various approaches to the whole, engaging challenge.

Out in the world, the bees are, or soon will be, feasting on borage, dead nettle, bramble, privet, rapeseed, white clover, cotoneaster.

Re-reading that, it feels like that list may be from an old source, or possibly a different locality. The world is changing and part of that change is in the seasons. Like the bees, it seems that plants and their flowers no longer read the books.

## IN THIS ISSUE

From our Chair	3
MBKA Apiary	4
<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
MBKA news and events	5
Getting to know you: this month, Paul Lawrence	6
Winter talks in March	7
The Beekeeper's Checklist	8
Words	9
It's in the post – tidbits from blogs and forums	9
BeeChat is back	9
Kent County Show	10
Spring harvest	10
Committee deliberations	12
The June Gap. What gap?	12
Swarms	13
National honey Show	14
Bees for development	15
What to charge for honey	15
Hive size	16
Handy Hints	16
For sale and wanted	16
From the BBKA	16
Shopping	17
Comments	18
Contact details	18

# FROM OUR CHAIR

John Chapman, our Chair, speaks to the members each month, sometimes about the Association, sometimes about the bees.

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** Tell us something about *The June Gap*

**John Chapman** The June gap is a very variable thing, especially in an urban area. Perhaps it's not as significant as it used to be. In rural areas it probably still is a reality, where forage is limited to what farmers grow. I don't know what you feel about it.

**WTB** I've seen such a profusion of flowering in May that I wonder if there's anything left! Even the hawthorn and horse chestnut are almost over. But in a fruit tree field where I have hives, wild flowers are allowed to grow. There are acres of yellow rattle and hawksbeard.

**JC** I'm interested to see what happens with the lime trees, to see if they start early. The flowering period of many wildflowers seems to have extended and the rains after the very dry spell might coerce many plants to start flowering.

**WTB** Has swarming been an issue for you?

**JC** It's quite odd when they decide to go. They sense that conditions are right. It is quite a trick to see what's going on. Perhaps swarm control is more difficult than it used to be. It's a matter of constant monitoring.

**WTB** Can you sense when a colony might swarm?

**JC** There is this thing about being able to walk up to an apiary and look at the front of the hive and to sense what the bees are doing. You get an eye for it, but it's only acquired over many years. Even after beekeeping for 40 years, I'll never finish learning about bees.

**WTB** you went out to a special lunch last week!

**JC** Yes, a World Bee Day lunch held at and sponsored by the Wax Chandlers Hall in London. It was to relaunch the *Bees Abroad* programme, *Relieving poverty through beekeeping*. They mainly work in Africa and their idea is that if you get



*Acres of yellow rattle and hawksbeard – and, somewhere, the dog!*



somebody doing beekeeping, then they can make an income from that. They don't need to actually own land to do it. It's something which is available for people who are land poor. They're not the only bee charity. There's Bees for development but they work in different areas. They are trying to encourage and increase the awareness of the Bees

abroad programme. Not that they feel they don't get a lot of sponsorship and help from beekeepers.

**WTB** Were there any presentations?

**JC** We had a talk from Professor Phil Stevenson, from the Royal Botanic Garden. He is very concerned with the levels of some pollinating insects. Even so, some pollinators are doing extremely well. The ivy mining bee is a

classic example. Many of our members who have had swarm calls in September will be well aware of it. Richard Glassborow who is the chair of the London Beekeepers Association gave a talk, *The London Bee Situation*. There are too many beekeepers in London. The forage in London is really stressed because of it. Actually 47% of green areas in London is grass. And that's not much good for bees. But pollination does seem to be working and people seem to get a lot of new crops.

**WTB** What did you have for lunch?

JC Well, because bees are vegetarian, it was a vegetarian lunch. It was a very nice menu and very well presented as you would expect in Wax Chandlers Hall.

It would be good to ask some of the people who were there

whether they might be available as a speaker in one of our winter talks. I'll make a list of people that Sonia, as our new Winter Talks Organiser, might approach.

WTB Thanks, as always, John.

## MBKA APIARY

Work party sessions are at 10.00-1.00pm fortnightly on Saturdays (wp). Call or text me if you have any questions (07802 762121). The Pavilion Apiary is at Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX. The entrance to the field is 2nd left off Lee Green Road.

### A SUNNY DAY IN MAY AT THE PAVILION APIARY

The Pavilion Apiary is taking great shape. We have come such a long way from the days of wondering whether we could make it vandal proof without making it look like a fortress!

Thanks to Mark and the team of willing volunteers we now have secure doors, gutters, fencing to secure the bees, one garage with doors and another open to be a sheltered work space.



*The sheltered work area*

Doors have been painted, lighting fixed, rooms made secure, security cameras installed, the grass mown, and trees and plants planted.

The difference in such a short time has been phenomenal!

Today was a day to see the real potential.

We had a visitor!

George Ponder, who will be 97 in July, was brought for a 'run out' by his daughter. He sat with us and had a cup of tea, reminiscing about the days they used to have a weekly meeting in his large garden at Cliffe. Any names that didn't immediately come to him were helpfully supplied by Dave Hopper who seems to know all the 'old boys' and many stories to go alongside them. Thank you Dave for filling in the gaps. George went away a happy man. He hopes, if he's well enough, to come along to the official opening of the apiary in July.

During the afternoon Mel Henbest did a practical session with one of our beginners and Mark and Dave Waddle made frames so that we could house the morning's swarm!



*Mark collecting the swarm, which obliging waited till the work party arrived!*

It was a busy day, with people coming and going and just a glimpse of things to come. The bee inspector said we had a palace! She's not wrong. Come and see for yourselves.

Sheila Stunell



*A practical session on the Introductory Course. Mel Henbest with Rob Hygate.*

# MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

## MODULE EXAM RESULTS

MBKA is delighted to report a 100% success rate for the MODULE 6 GROUP. This was a self-taught group on Zoom who studied the Module 6 syllabus from October 2021 to March 2022. Four of the group decided to sit the exam and all passed.

Congratulations to Veronica Owen, Chris Farrell, Sue Viner, and Sonia Belsey.

## TIMES AND DATES

<b>11 June</b>	<b>10.00-1.00pm Work party at the Cliffe Apiary, weather permitting.</b>
<b>18 June</b>	10.00-1.00pm Work party at the Cliffe Apiary, weather permitting.
<b>22 June</b>	7.30pm BeeChat at The Pier pub, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA
<b>23 June</b>	Committee meeting at 28 Wallace Road, Rochester, ME1 2TB
<b>25 June</b>	2.00-5.00pm Visit to Tony Edwards apiary at Noke Street Farm, Higham Rd, Wainscott, Rochester ME3 8BJ. Higham Road is a continuation of Bunters Hill Road. Car park just behind the Farm house. Toilet on site.  Tony will speak to members about the running of the farm before we walk up to the cherry orchard and apiary. Strawberries will probably be in sale.
<b>2 July</b>	10.00-1.00pm Work party at the Cliffe Apiary, weather permitting.
<b>3 July</b>	Basic Exam
<b>7 July</b>	7.30-10.00pm, Basic exam revision, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
<b>9/10/11 July</b>	8.30am-6.00pm Kent Show, Detling Showground
<b>14 July</b>	7.30-10.00pm, Basic exam revision, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
<b>17 July</b>	Basic Exam
<b>23 July</b>	10.00-1.00pm Work party at the Cliffe Apiary, weather permitting.
<b>27 July</b>	7.30pm BeeChat at The Pier pub, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA
<b>30 July</b>	2.00-4.00pm Opening of the new Association Apiary
<b>24 August</b>	7.30pm BeeChat at The Pier pub, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA
<b>24 August</b>	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 4, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
<b>31 August</b>	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 5, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
<b>7 September</b>	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 6, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
<b>9-11 September</b>	MBKA Honey Show, Elm Court Garden Centre, Gillingham ME7 3JQ
<b>24 September</b>	Ploughing Match, Ringshill Farm, Wouldham ME1 3TP
<b>28 September</b>	7.30pm BeeChat at The Pier pub, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA
<b>27-29 October</b>	National Honey Show, Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT

# GETTING TO KNOW YOU: THIS MONTH, PAUL LAWRENCE

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

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** How and when did you get into beekeeping?

**Paul Lawrence** It's sort of a story. About 20 years ago, Cas (my wife, Carol) and I went to Dutch Floriade in Amsterdam, a floral festival that's held every 10 years. At one place we visited, I saw a massive observation hive. There was a wall of acrylic and all you could see was bees. I said to Cas, Look at this, it's amazing. So a seed was planted. After I retired, I met a very nice lady called Sue Chapman (!) at the Kent County Show. I told her about Floriade and she said, We've got a one day course coming up. Why don't you come along? I signed up to the 12-week course run by Terry Clare. Then I discovered that a friend was actually a beekeeper – I hadn't realised. I shadowed him for a year before I got my own bees. In ten years of keeping bees in my garden, I've never lost a colony. And I think it's because the forage round here is so fantastic.

**WTB** How on earth have you managed to keep bees in your garden? Over 10 years you must have had some experiences of colonies that turn nasty.

**PL** I asked my neighbours firstly if they objected and they said no. And I explained about swarming, that it will probably happen. I've had very few swarms, but when it did happen, I used it as a PR exercise. I gathered the swarm and the neighbours thought it was fabulous.

I've once had a colony turn nasty. My neighbour came to see me with stings on her face. I opened the colony and they roared at me. And they were up round me. When I found this queen, she was enormous. It was an F2 Buckfast. I thought that's the key to what's happening here.

It's one of the worst things I've ever done, but that evening I shook the bees into a large garden trug of soapy water late one evening. In a couple of days things went back to normal. I split one of my other hives and went back to



three. I have this thing about managing bees. You cannot leave things. You've got to be proactive.

**WTB** I'm asking people about the June gap for this issue.

**PL** It doesn't affect me because my bees are in a garden. And also not near a big monoculture like rape. I'm near Ito Way in Gillingham which in March has blackthorn, and a range of other plants. After that come the fruit trees. Acres of apples, cherries, pears. Up in the Business Park there are sweet and horse

chestnut trees. I've seen the burgundy pollen from the horse chestnuts. When they're gone the bees turn to the lime trees – there are 24 on the main road and others nearby. Beautiful honey! On top of that, there's blackberry, and people are growing all sorts of things: beans, sweet peas, tomatoes and so on.

**WTB** You're very sociable, Paul. Do you do beekeeping with friends?

**PL** I've got two bee buddies. The first is John Belfield, who was a friend before I got into beekeeping. I just didn't know he kept bees! He has an apiary in an allotment in Rochester. The other is Peter Kimber. I mentored him and gave him bees to get started. Neil Byhurst was a buddy too, but he's in Devon now.

**WTB** Any particular challenges you face in keeping bees?

**PL** Managing them in my garden. I don't want an out apiary because you have to take your kit with you. I like being able to nip into the shed to fetch anything I need. But I have to work at controlling the size of my apiary. Four is the maximum, so I have to find something to do with the excess.

**WTB** What do you like most, then?

**PL** Beekeepers generally work on their own. It's quite a solitary activity. I like working with other beekeepers.

That's my favourite thing. So I go to John, and he comes to me. I go and see Peter occasionally. I love mentoring. I'm involved in the Chatham Historic Dockyard. Two years ago, Tony Edwards and I put two nuc colonies down there. There are two ladies keeping bees there now. They're fabulous. It's really lovely, watching people develop as beekeepers.

**WTB** Tell me a little about yourself – nothing to do with beekeeping.

**PL** I left school at 17 and did a four year engineering apprenticeship. I worked for a local company designing paving equipment. About 24 I moved to Croydon, and I worked for a contract office, doing press tool work. After four years, I left that and went to Goldsmiths College in London. I did a Bachelor of Education honours degree and I became a teacher, started at age 32. I was in teaching for 31 years in design and technology, with electronics, computer control etc. It was great fun. So I had two careers before I came to beekeeping and they left me with a love of making things. I do my own DIY. I built my own kitchen, and I've done jobs for other people. I've done bathrooms, and I do all my electrical work – but I get it tested by a friend. We love gardening. And walking, reading, the usual things. But we also dance – we're dancers. We've been married 50 years now. I've got two children, both in their forties; a son and a daughter, and I've got two grandchildren. Ella, who is 8, is a dancer.

**WTB** What do you want from the Association?

**PL** I'd turn that question on its head. I don't really want anything from the Association except for

companionship, help, discussion, that sort of thing. I joined the committee because I wanted to help and then two years later, Alex left and I took on the website and the newsletter. I knew nothing about these things but in time I got sorted out. Some members pay a subscription and expect to be entertained. But the Association is about people. And what you need to do in an association is not say what can it do for me, but what how can I contribute?

**WTB** Do you have a guiding principle for your beekeeping?

**PL** The trouble with beekeepers very often is they can't keep their hands off the bees – they have to go in there, regardless of the weather. John and I often talk about beekeeping in general. You have to learn what people call Reading The Bees. You almost have to try and think like a bee because they are a wild animal and you have to work with them, not against them.

**WTB** A single piece of advice for someone thinking about starting with bees?

**PL** The first thing is to train yourself properly. The second thing is to work with a competent beekeeper for 12 months and then get your bees. And please don't buy them from a pub and expect to learn from a book because you've got to look after yourself, your bees, and your neighbours. Have a bit of common sense. I never really panic with the bees. I just sit back and say, Well, what can I do?

**WTB** Thanks Paul, great to talk with you.

## WINTER TALKS IN MARCH

### RICHARD RICKITT

Richard's talk, *From Rolls Royce to Rajasthan*, was on Zoom on 31 March, which feels like one-and-a-half seasons ago. Why bring it up now? In fact, I haven't written about it before. We had three Winter Talks in March, so it has taken three issues of WHATSTHEBUZZ to revisit these.

Richard has a wonderful array of stories, partly arising from his life as co-editor of BeeCraft. He is also a beekeeper with about thirty colonies, father to three teenage children, and married to a lady from India. Opening his talk with their first family trip to his wife's family in India, Richard told how



he spotted an *Apis dorsata* bee just as he arrived at his parents-in-law's home. He raced to unpack a camera from his luggage, and captured three stunning pictures of this glorious and huge (1½ inches) bee, before the most

incredible thing happened – and he caught it on film. No spoiler here, because you can watch Richard’s talk on YouTube; the link is private and is [on the members’ area of our website](#).

There’s lots more about this trip to India. Richard visited some projects run by Bees for Development using local beekeeping methods, as well as conventional beekeeping with *Apis cerana* bees. These bees are smaller than our bees and bee suits or veils are not needed. At one apiary the air was full of bees, but they paid no attention to the visitors.

Suddenly we were much closer to home, at [Down House near Bromley](#). It is Charles Darwin’s home, now a museum and well worth a visit.

We learned about *driving bees*, which used to be a competitive sport. The late David Charles gave a demonstration in which the bees move up from a skep full of comb to an inverted skep above – as a response to rhythmically hitting the sides of the lower hive. Richard says he has used this method successfully to clear a brood box, though the scientific basis is unclear.

And then to what must be the best story in the entire history of beekeeping: a visit to the bees at the Rolls Royce factory. Richard is a born story-teller, and this tale is so astonishing and at times hilarious that no one with the chance to see it should miss it. [Click here for the recording of the talk](#). You won’t regret it!

## 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 we’re looking at ultra-brief descriptions of some common manipulations.

**Pagden swarm control** condensed by [Erichalfbee on Beekeeping Forum](#):

- The hive with swarm cells is moved away
- Place a new hive with foundation on the old site with a frame of brood and the queen, plus supers
- Old hive queen cells to be reduced to one open cell ; mark the frame
- Go back in a week to remove all other QCs

**Nucleus method of swarm control.** David Evans ([The Apiarist](#)) has become the go-to writer for many beekeeping topics, but on this occasion I’m turning to the Dave Cushman site where [Roger Paterson has written a fine account of the Nucleus method](#) of swarm control. I have condensed it into a few words here, but I’m relying on you to check the Roger’s original before you do anything serious.

When you find charged queen cells in a colony:

- Take the comb the queen is on, plus one of sealed brood and one of stores, plus bees, and place in a nuc box.

- Remove QCs on these frames and add young bees.
- In the parent hive, remove QCs *leaving only those with very young larvae*. Fill up the brood box with drawn comb or foundation.
- Seven days later, select ONE good queen cell and destroy all other queen cells.

**Sieving the bees** When you can’t find the queen, you might try this. Here’s [Dani Akrigg \(Erichalfbee\)](#) again. (If you look it up, you’ll find, in a reply, a very amusing comment on a typo. I’ve left the typo in the quote below for you to spot.)

- Move hive aside. Have an empty brood box on a new floor.
- Go through all the frames and shake every bee into the box. Put on a QX and replace the old brood box.
- Look in the next day. All the bees bar the queen and stones will be above the QX
- Some people leave one frame of brood in the bottom where they hopefully find the queen.

I said last month that spotting unmarked queens has been something of an awakening for me this year. But sometimes, for a variety of reasons, they are not visible. I’ve tried the above sieving method. It works.



# WORDS

## FRUIT SET

My house backs on to a large apple field. I've noticed that spraying by the farmer continues even during flowering. There are many different kinds of spray of course and I was fascinated to know what was in the spray during flowering in particular. I asked the farmer. It's for fruit set, he told me. I was none the wiser. In fact, I was more confused than ever. I thought fruit set was the process of pollination, where pollen grains from the anther (male part) of a flower are transferred to the stigma (female part) of another flower. How could a spray help achieve that? Was this some kind of forced self-pollination?

Well, that was of course a ridiculous thought. 'Fruit set' is a *process* that begins with pollination, as seen by a swelling of

the ovary (sometimes called initial fruit set) and reaches completion when the fruit and seeds are mature.

It is affected by temperature, wind, and rain. Pollination can be hampered because weather can impact the activity of flying insects. Weather conditions will also affect the development of the fruit, for good or ill.

I still haven't found out what exactly is in the spray (my farmer contact has left the area) but John, our Chair, tells me that it is likely to be a foliate spray to give the flowers extra food: minerals like nitrogen, phosphate and potassium salts. Thanks John.

*Archie McLellan*

# IT'S IN THE POST – TIDBITS FROM BLOGS AND FORLIMS

## ARE YOU A GRAZER?

'Grazing is a pattern of eating that involves consuming multiple meals throughout the day.' That's what came up in a web search for 'grazing'.

Are you a grazer? Before you go hotly denying being on any fad diets, I should say that I was referring to eating grass.

Rusty Burlew, in a merciless quest to rid beekeeping of misunderstandings and plain fallacies, has focussed her sights on the claim that 'bees are responsible for producing

one-third of all the food we eat.' As always, the article is massively edifying and entertaining. [Read it here.](#)

What has this to do with grazing? Grasses are air pollinated. Insects don't figure at all. And grass accounts for a h-u-g-e amount of what we eat. Rusty lists wheat, rice, corn (maize), barley, oats, rye, millet, teff, sorghum, and sugar cane. And a lot of the meat humans eat is from grass-fed animals.

Yes, I think we all have to own up to being grazers.

# BEECHAT IS BACK

The Pier, Upnor, 7.30pm on the FOURTH Wednesday of the month. Around a dozen of us met for the first time in over two years and it was good to be back. Covid experiences were quickly replaced by Chronic bee paralysis virus experiences. All three of us in this conversation had afflicted colonies. We were a noisy bunch. It might have been easier to hear the conversation in a night club. One snippet went like this:

Me: Did you get Covid?

Him: Yes, I think so.

Me: You think so? Did you not get a test?

Him: Is there a test for Chronic bee paralysis virus?

It was good to meet up. Sometimes we put a face to someone for the first time.

All members are welcome. An email reminder will be sent a few days in advance of each meet-up and we'll let the pub know how many to expect. They might even reserve a table

for us. It's one of the life-style patterns adopted during the pandemic which might be here to stay, like booking to deliver rubbish to the tip.

## KENT COUNTY SHOW

The Kent Bees and Honey Show takes place within the [Kent County Show](#) run by the Kent County Agricultural Society at The County Showground at Detling on Friday to Sunday, 8, 9, and 10 July 2022.

There are opportunities to compete in the honey classes, and to be a volunteer steward at the Show. Click on the links below for full info.

- [Schedule](#)
- [Entry Form](#)
- [Junior Schools Class Entry Form](#)
- 

## SPRING HARVEST

Googling [Spring Harvest](#) does not take you to honey or bees at all. But honey is very much on our minds just now. The top-fruit flowers have yielded a lot of nectar this year. We read that dry weather – and cold temperatures – can be death to a nectar flow. You might have been concerned in April. March had been like summer, but April, after a cold start, had a very drying breeze much of the time. Anyway, we needn't have worried. Those colonies of mine which did not produce much honey were either in an apiary which wasn't near any forage, or were simply not well managed. (Sadly I have far too many of those!) Even so, I got a substantial spring crop which Esther and I extracted last Saturday.

We're gradually establishing a routine. The kitchen gets a through clean first. Then we carry the extractor in from its storage place outside. Strangely each time it seems to be a little lighter. We wear light overalls and hair protection. I think the overalls are a waste of time and in future we'll just wear clean, light clothes. Nitrile gloves are an absolute no-no. They give a false sense of security. Because you



*...gradually establishing a routine*

don't feel stickiness on your hands, you freely touch anything and everything, spreading honey everywhere. So hands are bare, and constantly being cleaned in hot water. We have a large supply of cleaning cloths and towels. Wiping up honey spills is not straightforward. A quick wipe just smears it over a larger area. It takes persistence to clean up honey!

We keep the honey gate open when extracting. That means that extracting and straining are done at the same time – and I can't deny we've had some honey spills on the floor. It's a problem which can occur with electric extractors



### Kent Bees and Honey Show

Organised by the Kent Beekeepers' Association  
in conjunction with Dover, Laddingford, Medway and  
Thanet Beekeepers' Associations

Friday, Saturday & Sunday  
8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2022  
(entries close 24<sup>th</sup> June)

Kent County Showground  
Detling, Maidstone

Judge: Mrs Claire O'Brien.

Show Secretary: Mr. John Chapman  
28 Wallace Road, Rochester, Kent ME1 2TB  
01634 400570

particularly. They don't stay put, gallivanting around the kitchen, even with caster brakes, unless held in check.

Sometimes, when you have a nice white perfect frame of honey, you feel more like hanging it on the wall as a picture than extracting it! We don't use an uncapping knife, but a hot-air gun. The latter has a reputation for making a mess from the spattering of spots of wax. It

happens with white wax (so-called *dry cappings* because they have an air space under the wax) but not to great extent. You will find more wax in the sieve / strainer because you haven't cut it off into the uncapping tray, so it's helpful to have more than one set of strainers.



*An object of beauty*



*Cling-film for air exclusion and scum removal.  
Scales for the ultimate truth.*

I say strainers, rather than filters. Strainers remove non-honey particles from the honey. They don't affect the honey in any way. Something with a smaller mesh might remove some pollen; this is why the process of producing 'pure' or 'natural' honey is often thought to preclude 'filtering'. By the way, avoid 'raw' and 'organic' in your



honey descriptions. Trading standards have already objected to the first when applied to any extracted honey, and the second is very difficult to prove unless you are in a very remote area.

Honey from the extractor is full of bubbles and usually a little froth on top. That's why 'settling', usually for a day or two at least, is a normal part of the process of producing honey. It is advisable to exclude air from stored

honey, so that no moisture is adsorbed. (Apologies if that word should be absorbed. Happy to be set right on that!) Some honey producers fill the buckets near to the top. But you get the same (or an even better) effect by placing a layer of cling-film over the surface of the honey. Before jarring the honey (and possibly transferring it to a bucket with a tap), remove the cling-film by pinching it in the middle and quickly drawing it up. This will lift off the scum. Despite the word, scum is perfectly good honey, so drain the cling-film into a bowl for your personal honey supply.

Finally, we clean the extractor by filling it with cold water. After an overnight in the garden, the wax flakes harden and lose their stickiness.

Lots of beekeepers say they don't care about honey. 'It's a bi-product.' It occurs to me to ask why they don't keep and study some other equally marvellous insect like ants. Prof Robert Pickard tells how his chosen insect for his university research was ants, but after encountering some difficulty slicing up the brain of an ant, he changed to honey bees because they were slightly larger. Much as I love and am fascinated by bees, I wouldn't keep bees at all if it weren't

for the honey.

At the end of a very long and exhausting day we relaxed with a feeling of enormous satisfaction.

*This would be better as a video. Beats the telly.*

# COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

Committee meetings are slick, good-natured affairs. There is a routine, and it's very predictable, with Matters arising, New members, Correspondence etc. Glancing at the Minutes (which you can read in full on our website), I'm reminded that although the new Apiary is now functioning with much of the up-grading work completed, security is an issue and cameras are being installed. The shower room is to be made into an extraction room. Some of you will have extracted a spring crop already – or are wondering what you are going to do about all that honey which has come from a fine spring for top-fruit trees. Hopefully the Association will be able to help before too long.

Summer events will include a visit to Tony Edwards apiary at Noke Farm and of course, the official opening of the new apiary. Later there's our Honey Show, the Ploughing Match, and an Annual Supper.

## THE JUNE GAP. WHAT GAP?

### FORAGE FOR BEES; MIND THE GAP

The Great British weather is always a factor in what may be available and when. This year we've had a dry spring and a very dry April in the South East, so some forage has been later than we might expect. However things normally catch up and this year is no exception. Following some welcome May showers things have really taken off. The bees of course will have loved the sunny mild weather and will have made the most of the flow available, especially from trees.

Locally there are many trees currently in full bloom (eg Horse chestnut) and many plants beloved of bees are now in full flower. Bees are visually much more aware of blues and purples so these colours will generally be first to be exploited (eg Alliums, Comfrey, some Magnolia, Rhododendron and Azaleas, Syringa / Persian lilac, and Berberis).

And already we are in June. So what about the June gap? Wikipedia describes it neatly:

The June Gap refers to a phenomenon in which a shortage of forage available for bees occurs (typically in June) and has been observed in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

We have seven candidates for the Basic Assessment, and Mark and Sheila are currently giving an Introductory Courses at Rochester Prison.

There was a discussion about jobs in the Association – not all of which could – or should – be done by members of the committee. Archie McLellan has handed the Winter Talks Organiser job to Sonia Belsey, and Nigel Rawlins has taken on the role of Welcomer at all our events. We still need someone to be the Summer Events Organiser.

John Chapman announced his retirement as Chairman effective from the AGM next year. Start thinking about this please!

The next committee meeting is on 23 June. Speak to any committee member if you have any thoughts about the Association and its activities.

Subsequent to the massive volume of pollen and nectar produced by trees and hedges in the spring, there is a reduction in the amount of nectar available to the bees due to long grasses and dandelions suppressing many wildflowers. Before the herbaceous 'summer rush' of July-through-September which reinstates the high level of nectar, the high hive populations brought around by trees in the spring struggle to produce honey and may lay fewer eggs. Beekeepers need to pay special attention to the levels of honey in the hive as well as the level of water the bees use during this gap. Annual weather patterns can cause this event to occur later or earlier.

There is often some pollen coming in to the hive but possibly not much nectar. If the dearth is severe and hives have built up strongly on the early season flows, the gap will result in less brood rearing. But the gap can be so serious that bees cannibalise their brood and may eventually starve. The solution? Mind the gap. Keep a couple of eyes on your hives at this time of the year.

This is not a time to ignore your colonies.

*Nigel Rawlins*

## AS IF SWARMING WASN'T ENOUGH TROUBLE...

The June Gap is something that beekeepers have to be aware of because it's right on top of the swarming season; the queen has been laying eggs flat out and if the 'Gap' happens the bees can become defensive.

This is because the nectar supply ceases. The spring flowers have stopped producing and are now turning their attention to becoming fruit.

The later season plants are yet to produce flowers and careful monitoring of the hive frames will show the honey stores are being used up.

There are variables which can mask this.

1. Location. Hives in the countryside (for instance on the edge of oilseed rape fields) will find their gentle bees suddenly become a box of devils. Hives in towns and areas with large gardens with a wide variety of flowers may not suffer from this.
2. Size of brood chamber. Large boxes where a lot of honey

is stored below the queen excluder should have sufficient stores to tide them over.

3. The race of bee. This is a complicated subject which might form one of the criteria when raising one's own queens. For instance someone may endeavour to breed *Apis mellifera mellifera* (the native bee which breeding groups like BIBBA aim for). Others such as bee farmers whose aim is to get maximum honey crops will re-queen every year, possibly with *Apis mellifera ligustica* – the so-called Italian bee. More generally, hobby beekeepers are usually concerned with keeping low swarming, gentle bees that don't chase the neighbour's dog.

How will we know if our bees are affected by the June gap? By regularly monitoring the availability of stores as part of weekly inspections.

Some beekeepers leave a super of honey on the hive for the bees. If the hive is getting short of stores and light to lift (or heft), feed sugar syrup in a contact feeder.

Derek Forbes

## SWARMS

### 1. IN BUILDINGS

Last week, I got a call to check on bees in a wall on a church roof. Internal access to the flat roof was easy. There seemed to be two distinct colonies in the same wall about 20 feet apart. The bees had discovered the wall cavity through ventilation gaps in the mortar between bricks. I was asked to write a report for committee, presenting the available options.

Naturally, my first move was to give Mark Ballard a call. Mark has a long experience of removing bees from buildings. His comments have informed what I've written below – but I take full responsibility, so direct your criticisms to me!

There are three options for dealing with swarms which become established in buildings.

#### 1. Do nothing and live alongside the bees, monitoring regularly

Many swarms do not survive when they set up their own nests. Often they succumb to disease, usually a virus transmitted by varroa mites. However, the colony can appear to be permanent because it is likely that a

swarm the following spring will find the remnants (comb) of a colony which has died out and take up residence. This is why people sometimes say they've had a colony of bees in their building for many years.

Two situations can make the option of living with the bees untenable. The first is if the bees gain access to the interior of the building where they could be a nuisance to the users. The second is if honey were to start leaking into the interior of the building. Honey is extremely sticky, but does not ferment, or become a health hazard at any stage. It may be unpleasant in the wrong place but it will cause no harm.

#### 2. Removal of the bees to an apiary

This is done by contacting a beekeeper with building experience to gain access to the cavity inside the wall to remove the bees and their comb, and then set them up in an apiary. A builder is then required to restore the building.

However, a company called BeeGone (<https://beegone.co.uk/>) will do the whole job: remove

the bees, relocate them to an apiary, and reinstate the building.

This option can be very costly. In deciding whether or not to spend money this way, it should be borne in mind that, numerically, honey bees are not endangered; compared to wild bees (bumble and solitary bees), their future is secure because they are managed by humans.

### 3. Destruction

A pest-control company will chemically destroy the bees. It is important that the nest is then protected to prevent bees from other colonies accessing the combs. Honey bees are strongly attracted to ready-made honey and, because they fly large distances and communicate sources of forage to each other, bees within a 3-mile

radius (an area of c.27 square miles) are at risk. I understand that some pest control companies use diatomaceous earth inside the cavity after the bees have been destroyed to ensure that other bees will be protected from contact with the lethal chemicals used.

Subsequently the church official came back to me and asked about the rate of colony death when a swarm is not removed from a building. It is not a great effort of deduction to realise the thought process here. If it is likely that a colony will die without management, would it not be more humane to save it from a slow diseased decline and so destroy it now.

Thankfully I won't be asked for an opinion or judgement on that ethical imponderable! Archie McLellan

## 2. PANIC CALLS

Sometimes you get a call from someone who knows that the bees in their garden are not honey bees, but their distress is real and they have no one else to turn to. You make reassuring noises about the life cycle of solitary and bumble bees, suggest that they place some insect mesh (easy to find online) over their doorway or window, and enjoy watching *their* bees till the end of the season.

But there's a positive trade-off for the beekeeper / swarm collector too. Learning the appearance of the hundreds of UK bee species can be a bit daunting. But you can make a start by learning just one at a time. I received this picture in a text this morning from a worried lady (she's allergic, has grandchildren visiting etc) and asked me to confirm what kind of bee it was. I daresay she'd have been happy to get

confirmation that it was a bumble bee, but I spent some time looking it up. My guess: a male red-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*). What do you think?



## NATIONAL HONEY SHOW

If you've had anything delivered from a bee retailer, you've probably received a leaflet about the [National Honey Show](#) (NHS). If you're interested in taking part in the Show, it's certainly not too soon to be thinking about which classes you will enter. If your interest is in the Lecture series, it looks as if all (or most) of the talks will be given in person, not on Zoom. [The latest newsletter gives lots of info.](#)

In the meantime, catch up on [last year's talks which are available on YouTube](#). I've just had a look. There are some very tempting offerings!

**The 91st National Honey Show**  
International Classes and Beekeepers' Autumn Lecture Convention  
Thursday 27th – Saturday 29th October 2022

**Fantastic Programme of Lectures**  
by  
**Dara Kilmartin, Grace McCormack, Dave Goulson**  
**Jeff Pettis, Richard Ridler, Nicola Bradbear**  
**Willie Robson and Roger Patterson**

**Friday Bee Craft lectures**  
from early career bee researchers

**Great Saturday programme**  
for those in first years  
of beekeeping

Lectures from previous years are available to view:  
[www.youtube.com/c/NationalHoneyShowUK/videos](http://www.youtube.com/c/NationalHoneyShowUK/videos)  
[www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk) [showsec@honeyshow.co.uk](mailto:showsec@honeyshow.co.uk)

# BEES FOR DEVELOPMENT

'Bees take nothing, yet give so much. I can think of no better way than beekeeping to help people in a world where it is crucial that we take care of our fragile environment.' Bill Turnbull.

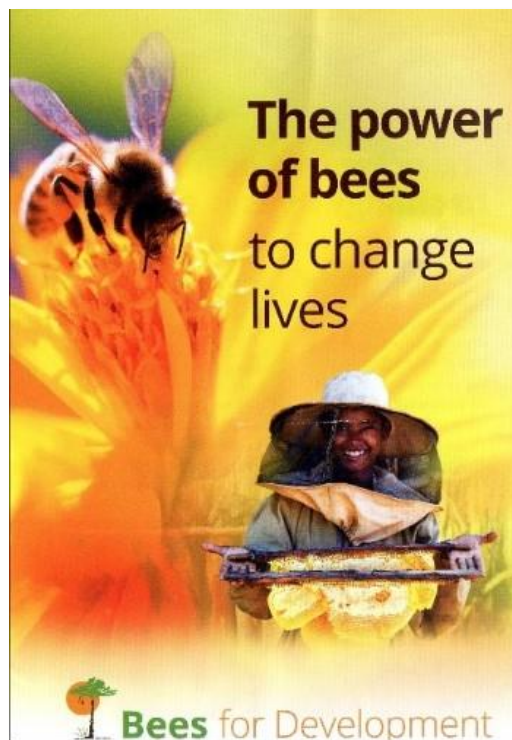
[Click here for more about Bees for Development.](#)

## THE LAST BEE

After the last bee  
had buzzed its last buzz,  
the birds and the butterflies  
did what they could.

But soon the fields lay bare,  
few flowers were left,  
nature was broken  
and the planet bereft.

Christian Ilston



# WHAT TO CHARGE FOR HONEY

It's decision time. If you have extracted a spring crop, you'll have honey for sale now, and it's time to set your prices. You might think of increasing your prices because inflation is a reality, and food prices have particularly been affected. But on the other hand, some of your customers may have less cash to spend.

It might be tempting to set low prices but don't sell your honey for too little (even if it makes you feel a slightly better person). If you have taken all the care that is expected of local honey producers, remember that you have an artisan product and it will only be regarded as such if it has a sufficiently high price. Similarly don't undercut other local honey suppliers. You will regret it later when you have none left, and your competitors are still selling theirs.

The actual price to charge varies with location. Tourist shops and visitor centres can charge much more – often because the goods bought there will be given later as gifts. I often wonder about Harrods selling a little jar of a

particular Manuka honey for £2499.00. These must have been bought as gifts, surely?

Here's a starter to open the conversation about what to charge (let me know what you think and how this compares to your prices):

- |               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| • 454g (1lb)  | £8.00 |
| • 340g (12oz) | £6.50 |
| • 227g (8oz)  | £4.90 |

If you are supplying a shop, you will charge c.10-20% less than these prices. Even though you might suggest a retail price, it's up to the retailer what he charges his customers. But having fixed a retail price in your mind, you can use that figure when deciding what to charge callers at your door.

A unique, well-designed label will make a huge difference. Some of our members have seen their honey fly off the shelves compared to jars with a standard Thornes-type label.

There was [a thread on honey prices last year in Beekeeping Forum](#). You might find it interesting to skim through.

## HIVE SIZE

Did you read Dan Basterfield in this month's issue of BeeCraft on the strange and narrow road that is the history and development of beekeeping over the last 150 years? Apparently, 'the choice of the Standard National frame (14x8½ inches) came about by adopting the hive (and management) in common usage in Kent'. Congestion was the key to getting bees to produce honey in little square frames – so-called 'sections'. So it's appropriate that MBKA has adopted the larger frame size of 14x12 inches as the recommendation for its members.

Of course, this is not the only way to expand brood space. Many beekeepers with Standard Nationals use double brood boxes.

I've noticed that extra space for *brood* goes a long way to reducing the urge to swarm – much more than adding supers does. I've started a hive with single size Standard National brood boxes and no queen excluder. I'll keep you posted if anything worth sharing comes up.

I know that we have readers with much more adventurous experiments in hive design and construction. I'm very much hoping to persuade them to write about their journey some time!

## HANDY HINTS

The ancient advice to remove the queen excluder to speed up the process of getting foundation drawn in supers should come with a caveat!

Be aware that the time taken from placing a super with foundation on a hive to getting eggs in that same comb can be as little as 24 hours!

Some would say that the bees will draw comb as and when they feel the need and not before. In the 24-hour situation

just described, I suspect that comb would have been drawn rapidly whether or not the excluder was in place.

Many of us use drone foundation in supers, not for economy (ratio of honey to wax) but in the (perhaps forlorn) hope that the bees will put less pollen in the supers.

So if the queen gets to lay in your supers filled with drone comb, you will have a LOT of drones. Been there.

## FOR SALE AND WANTED

**From Jason Cakebread:** Easabee manual 6-frame radial extractor for sale, only used two seasons, paid £300. Offers please. 07977 148488

**From Jen Ferry:** 'Local 2022 queens and nucs for sale. I will have queens and 6-frame 14x12 nucs ready for sale soon. I have raised the queens from the best of my stock, so they are locally adapted bees. My apiary has just been inspected by the SBI and is disease-free. Queens £25 each (clipped and marked) and six-frame 14x12 nucs, £175 each. Other frames sizes can be made up to order. £70 deposit is required on the nucs, or new, painted, Maisemore nucs are available to keep at £70 each.' WhatsApp or text message to 07990 581858.

## FROM THE BBKA

### STEPHEN BARNES, CHAIR OF BBKA BOARD OF TRUSTEES, WRITES:

'I have signed this petition (*Require local authorities replace roadside grass with wild flowers*) and would ask you to also consider signing it. There are a number of advantages. Wildflower verges are nicer to look at. In the long term it will save councils money and reduce congestion caused by grass cutting but most importantly it provides habitat for wildlife including pollinators. I am



aware that some enlightened councils are investing in wildflower meadows as is the Wildlife Trust. Signing this petition is an opportunity to show support for this and put pressure on others to do the same.'

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/616394>

## MODULE EXAMS

The revised syllabuses are available now, and come in to effect from the March 2023 exams. No new modules are available yet but it is rumoured that there will be a stand-alone module (like microscopy) on BOTANY.

## SHOPPING

### HAVE YOU EVER BOUGHT SOMETHING YOU'VE SEEN IN THIS COLUMN?



If so, you might want to tell us if you were pleased or disappointed with your purchase.

I now have a [Swienty Breeze ventilated suit](#) which was featured in the last issue and I've used it a couple of times. Compared to a traditional suit, it is bulky, and a bit heavier. The veil is semi-rigid, so protection from stings to the face is virtually guaranteed, and visibility is excellent because there are no rims. But it does not collapse so if you usually drive to and from your apiary wearing your suit, you'll need to think again. The design and manufacture are terrific with wonderful cuffs, pockets and zips. My experience is that it gives total protection from stings. But because of its bulk, I wouldn't wear normal clothes under it. In other words, it's a hot weather suit. It takes a while to realise that the wind blowing through your suit is NOT an indication of a partly open zip! I wouldn't recommend it if you didn't have a traditional suit as well. But with that qualification in mind, I do recommend it very highly.



### HOT AIR GUN

The choice of many honey producers for uncapping combs before extracting. Little honey or wax goes in the tray (except for combs needing reshaping).



### INSECT AND BUTTERFLY NET

On page 17 of this month's BeeCraft, we read this remarkable piece of advice: 'If you visit the seaside, buy a child's fishing net ... to be ready for Asian hornets.'

Whaaat! If it wasn't for the context of Asian hornets, I would think I was reading something written a century ago. Every beekeeper should have a proper insect net. They are long (deep) so that when you entrap an insect or butterfly, you flip the net over, and the critter is contained and unharmed. You might need this for the odd bee that you bring into the house with you. Or you might have a follower (guard) bee that just won't leave you alone to get on with your gardening or whatever. Simply net it, flip over, and set aside till you're finished what you're doing. Then you can release it unharmed. Oh, and you can use it for an Asian hornet if you should be (un)lucky enough to see one.

# COMMENTS

## TO POST A COMMENT, PLEASE EMAIL WHATSTHEBUZZ.

Beekeeping is fertile ground for opinions to grow, and there are lots of them in WHATSTHEBUZZ. As we read last month, the compiler gets the blame for what's written here, though rarely are the opinions his own. He reads widely and tends to use material from writers out there with more experience than he has. It also should be said that he usually agrees with the opinions he includes, especially if they fit with his experience.

But you may find yourself at odds with much of what you read here. Perhaps the MBKA Education Team spend time and energy telling those on the Introductory Course not to believe everything they read in 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.

# CONTACT DETAILS

## BEE INSPECTORS

There are six Seasonal Bee inspectors (SBIs) covering the South East England. In Medway, it is likely that your SBI will be Danyal Conn. Go to [BeeBase](#), [click on Contacts page](#), and enter your postcode to find your nearest SBI. Do not assume you know before you have checked because the NBU have adjusted some areas for SBIs.

<b>Regional Bee Inspector</b>	Daniel Etheridge	daniel.etheridge@apha.gov.uk	M: 07979 119376
<b>Seasonal Bee Inspector</b>	Danyal Conn	danyal.conn@apha.gov.uk	M: 07584 202700

*If you have not yet done so, join BeeBase now. If you haven't got bees yet, you can still enter apiary details with zero hives.*

## COMMITTEE

Please do feel free to get in touch with any member of the committee. We would be very pleased to hear your comments, questions, requests and suggestions. Here are our email addresses. The [MBKA website is here](#).

<b>Chair</b>	John Chapman	john.chapman@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
<b>Secretary</b>	Sheila Stunell	admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
<b>Treasurer</b>	Archie McLellan	archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
<b>Website manager</b>	Paul Lawrence	paul.lawrence@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
<b>Education Organiser</b>	Tony Edwards	tony.ed@me.com
<b>Swarm phone, Social media, Exams</b>	Sonia Belsey	sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
<b>Apiary Manager</b>	Mark Ballard	apiary@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
<b>Other committee members</b>	Robert Frost	robert.frost@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
	Ian Halls	admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
	Nigel Rawlins	admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

### NON-COMMITTEE ROLES

<b>Apiary Co-Ordinator</b>	Elaine Laight	elaine.laight@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
----------------------------	---------------	--------------------------------------