

# WHATSTHEBUZZ



*Getting to know you:* a visit to Michael and Alison Bucknall's house in Cooling.

*Being controversial:* should we all have signed the BBKA Petition on honey fraud?

*The Beekeeper's Checklist:* on making soft-set (or 'creamed') honey

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.

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

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



*Photo above: Jane Wheeler*

# Hello to September, to packing things away, and to you all

And still the rain hesitates. It worries me a lot because I'm going on holiday in Norfolk soon, cycling, and I fear the weather will finally get its act together.

Your honey extraction may well be complete now. Perhaps you're wondering how you're ever going to be able to shift it all. Maybe we shouldn't worry. If we've done things correctly, the honey will keep. Who's to say what the weather will be like next spring and summer.

If your brood boxes are light (try lifting them) and you've removed the honey, you won't need any reminder to feed quickly. As a rough estimate, it is said that a colony will need around 15-25kg of stores to see it through to spring. That means bulk feeding now, so that the sugar is processed and stored in the frames beside the brood nest. Food in the frames is best. Bulk feeding is the way to achieve that. No pussyfooting around with a pound or two here and there. You have to get the stores up to about 20kg. Estimate how much is there already, and make up the difference with granulated sugar, or fondant, or syrup. You might find you need to put about 10-15kg on the hive. You'll need deep ekes (or empty supers) for feeders, or bags of sugar, or blocks of fondant. If you've worked out a sensible way to store super frames during this process please share it with WHATSTHEBUZZ!

Some beekeepers record hive weights from now through to spring. Luggage scales with a 6mm bolt on a string (which you insert into a predrilled hole on the side of the floor) is one way to do this. It's more accurate than 'hefting', but maybe you've found you don't need that degree of accuracy.

Late summer varroa treatment should be started by now if it is to achieve its main purpose – to ensure a healthy population of truly long-lived winter bees. Make a dairy note when to remove the strips. It's not good for the bees or the future effectiveness of the treatment (because of resistance developing) if they are left in the hive till spring.

Inside the hive, you may have noticed any remaining drones hiding (cowering?) on the outer frames. Bees are one of the few eusocial species (that sounds, and is, very unselfish), but they are ruthless in looking after the greater good of the colony. When the drones have served their

function, they are weakened by being starved and then cast out of the colony. (Incidentally, humans have been described as a herding species, aspiring to be social.)

It's likely you may have noticed that in most colonies the queen's laying rate has slowed significantly. A swarm building up for winter may be an exception to that rule.

Ivy is generally available for forage at this time of year, like Michaelmas daisy. Every year in this area, bees can be seen gorging at this time on Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos*), on the tiny flowers *on the same stems as the berries*. Depending where you live, there's heather too, but not in Medway. In his article in this month's BeeCraft, Marin Anastasov talks about the availability of heather in different parts of the UK, but fails to mention Scotland. What! Britain's largest bee farmer has a crop of 100 tons of heather honey in the Scottish Highlands in a good year. Is it possible that no one reads BeeCraft north of the border!

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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.*

**John Chapman** I thought the Opening of the MBKA Apiary went very well! And it was nice to see a little piece in BeeCraft with a photo about our event.

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** Now we have to put the apiary to best use!

**JC** In a sense the Opening was the easy bit. Now I really hope that the apiary will be well-used by our members. Mark has a great team of workers who have turned up time and time again to do all the work of upgrading the buildings and grounds.

What we need now is that same commitment and urgency from people to do things for the running of the Association. Keeping wheels turning in the Association is really down to a small number of people on the committee.

**WTB** Have you got any plans?

**JC** Later in the season, perhaps in autumn when the ground is more 'receptive', I hope we can do some more planting. We'll replant the hedge, this time with rabbit protection, and use meadow seed 'bombs' to see if we can get some wildflowers established. It will help to give the grass a good

cut later to give the flowers a chance. We've also got Yellow rattle seed.

Hopefully it will manage to gain a hold over the grass. It's a semi-parasite on the grass because it suppresses growth. But remember, this was a cricket pitch. The grass is well-established, so it might not be easy for

flowers to get a hold. Ideally, locally adapted flowers will re-emerge, and be able to cope with our particular weather conditions. This is not our first serious drought, but droughts do cause problems for plants.

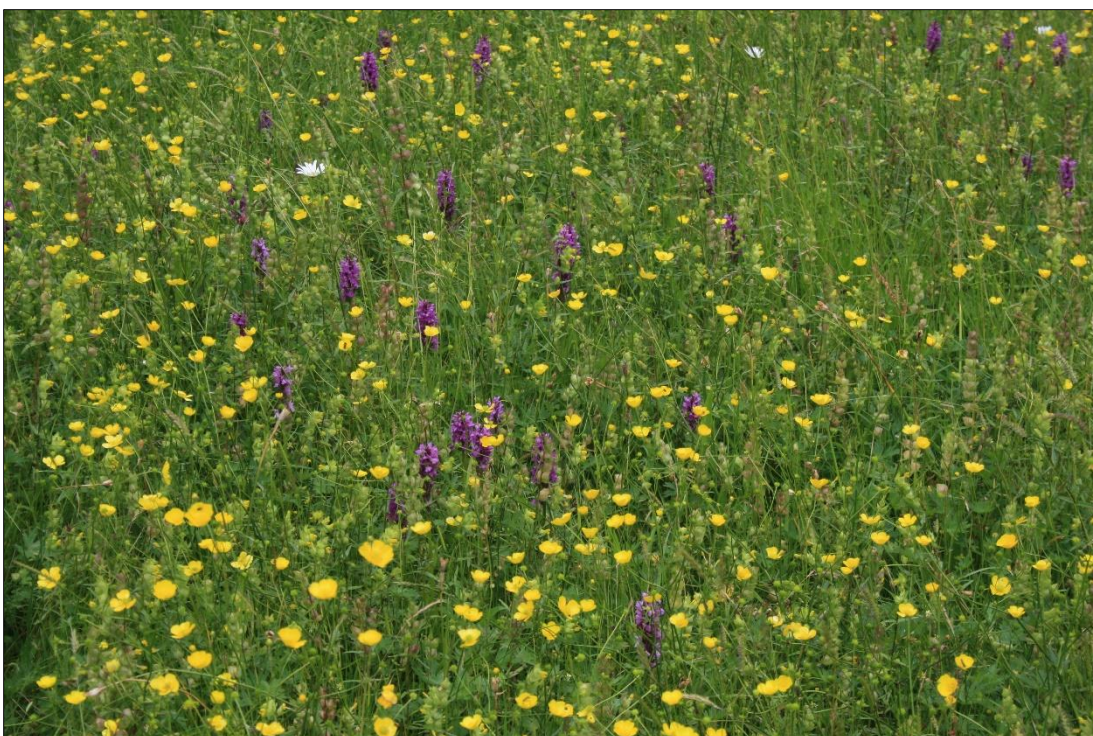
**WTB** It was too bad the BBQ didn't take place.

**JC** It was a real shame that we had to cancel the barbeque. I hope that more people will make themselves known and be able to help, or even organise, the things that we ought to be doing as an association. They don't need to be on the committee. It works well to have a small committee with non-committee volunteers and helpers simply keeping in touch with a committee member as they find a job to do or something to organise. Events (summer and winter, indoors and out), publicity, internet and website work, education, all these are areas where we are going to need new people becoming active in the work of the association.

**WTB** You've already told us you're retiring as Chair at the next AGM.

**JC** Some of us have been doing MBKA work for a while. Even though we've enjoyed it, there comes a time when you start running out of ideas and the time has come for new people to come with fresh ideas, and new ways of doing things.

For instance, it was you organised the series of winter talks over the last two years. Now you're treasurer, so it's right that someone else should



*Orchids and buttercups in a formerly mown grass lawn. Photo John Chapman*

take on the Winter Talks. In the meantime, we've arranged a series of winter events using mainly in-house speakers!

Our education activities will include another winter study course this year, on Mondays in the Hall at Wainscott. Here again, the team will need new people sooner rather than later.

**WTB** I'm looking forward to our Honey Show next weekend!

**JC** Yes, next weekend, Saturday and Sunday, 3-4 September. We'll be very glad for help with setting up on Friday at 4pm and clearing away on Sunday at 3.30pm.

**WTB** Even though lots of beekeepers everywhere are not in their local



*The effect of Yellow Rattle in a meadow, with an orchid. Photo by John Chapman.*

associations, BKAs are a good thing.

**JC** Association activities and events are important, but I don't think they tell the whole story. Being in a BKA is social as much as anything else. Tea and cake are important – not forgetting that cake doesn't magic its way onto a table in the hall, and the tea doesn't serve itself or clear up afterwards.

And it's out of chance conversations at occasions like these that people find ways to help each other, perhaps by handing on unwanted kit, or perhaps by sharing experiences and ways of doing things.

Lots of people – including me – value that.

## BEES IN THE NETHERLANDS

*The cover picture this month is by Jane Wheeler. She writes:*

During our holiday this summer we visited Kasteel De Haar in the Netherlands. Not only is it an amazing fairy-tale castle straight out of Disney, but they keep bees.

We came across the hives in a semi wild area of the gardens where the bees had a marvellous view across the lake to the castle. It was idyllic.

Not surprisingly, the entrances to the hives sensibly faced away from the path, but opened directly towards the lake. I had thought that bees did not like to fly across open water. However, the lake was completely covered with a tiny pond weed (duckweed?) that gave the impression of grass from a distance. I guess the bees thought so too. There were no

fences or barriers to keep bees and the public apart and we could have walked right up to the hives. Needless to say as good beekeepers we didn't do this and kept our distance.

The castle shop sold their own jars of honey for €9.95 which seemed a reasonable price given the recent discussions on honey pricing. The colour of the honey was pale to golden and did vary from jar to jar showing that they possibly collected each hive separately. The castle is surrounded by acres of mature trees and shrubs which must make up the majority of the forage available to these very lucky bees.

## MBKA APIARY

The next work party session is at 10.00-1.00pm on Saturday 17 September (wp). Should other work parties be scheduled, an email will be sent given details. 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.**

*Mark Ballard*

# MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS



of honey and hive products we all produce. Being in the Garden Centre gives us a steady stream of visitors who stop to look, chat, learn more about bees and often buy a jar of honey or a candle or two.

As usual help is needed to 'get the show on the road'. Here is a list of the times:

- Friday 2nd September 4pm -5.30 to set up tables etc.
- Saturday 3rd September 9am – 12noon and 12noon – 5.30pm
- Sunday 4th September 10.30 – 12noon and 12noon to about 4pm when we dismantle the show.

Please let me know if you can help. Thank you.

Sue Chapman (Honey Show Secretary)

[Susan.Chapman@care4free.net](mailto:Susan.Chapman@care4free.net)

## HONEY SHOW 2022

The show is a wonderful opportunity to have friendly competition for our trophies and show case the huge range

## TIMES AND DATES

Unless stated otherwise, all events are at Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG

31 August	Wed	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 4
2 September	Fri	4.00pm. Volunteers please to set up the Honey Show. Address below.
3-4 September	Sat-Sun	MBKA Honey Show, Elm Court Garden Centre, Gillingham ME7 3JQ. Details <a href="#">here</a> .
7 September	Wed	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 5
12 September	Mon	Closing date for essay, video, microscopy, and photography entries to National Honey Show
14 September	Wed	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 6
17 September	Sat	10.00-1.00pm Work party at the Cliffe Apiary, weather permitting.
24 September	Sat	Ploughing Match, Ringshill Farm, Wouldham ME1 3TP
28 September	Wed	7.30pm BeeChat at The Pier pub, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA
10 October	Mon	Closing date for entries to National Honey Show (but see 12 Sep above).
12 October	Wed	Mark Ballard, <i>Winter preparation</i>
17 October	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 1, Module 2
27-29 October	Thu-Sat	National Honey Show, Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT
31 October	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 2, Module 2

<b>14 November</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 3, Module 2
<b>17 November</b>	<b>Wed</b>	Sonia Belsey, <i>100 years of MBKA</i>
<b>28 November</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 4, Module 2
<b>5 December</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 5, Module 2
<b>15 December</b>	<b>Wed</b>	Christmas quiz
<b>12/19 December</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 6, Module 2
<b>9 January</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 7, Module 2
<b>18 January</b>	<b>Wed</b>	8.00pm David Evans on Zoom: <i>Swarming and Bait hives</i>
<b>30 January</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 8, Module 2
<b>1 February</b>	<b>Wed</b>	John Chapman, <i>Simple showing</i>
<b>6 February</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 9, Module 2
<b>18 February</b>	<b>Sat</b>	2.00-4.00pm AGM
<b>6 March</b>	<b>Mon</b>	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 10, Module 2
<b>15 March</b>	<b>Wed</b>	Tony Edwards, <i>Film Night</i>

## COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

*Sheila Stunell, our Secretary, gives a summary of the main points talked about at the last committee meeting.*

**The Official Opening of the Pavilion** apiary was a great success. Cllr Elizabeth Turpin cut the ribbon. Tree ceremonially planted by Pat Clare and the plaque in memory of Terry Clare was unveiled. About 70 people attended.

Work on the Pavilion continues. A hand sink will be installed in the extraction room and the tiling completed.

Intruders were caught on CCTV and the police notified. No damage done and the PCSO will keep an eye on the building.

**The Honey Show takes place on 2,3,4 September.** Any help appreciated especially 3:30pm Friday for set up and from 3:30 pm Sunday to take down and clear.

**The Ploughing Match** is on 24 September at Ringshill Farm Wouldham. Always a good day out

**Introduction Course** sessions 4, 5, 6 take place on 31 August, 7, and 14 September at Wainscott Memorial Hall from 8.00pm

**Winter Studies Module 2** begins fortnightly from 17th October. Encourage members to sign up for this exam at the end (March 2023) optional. Contact Mark Tony Sonia or Sheila for details.

Planning is underway for our winter talks. More information to follow.



Minutes of past meetings and past editions of WHATSTHEBUZZ can be found on [the MBKA website](#).

**If you have any difficulty signing in to the members' area of the website, please contact Paul Lawrence.** (paul.lawrence@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk)

# 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 Soft-set – also known as Creamed – honey.



*A bucket of soft-set honey, seeded and set, ready to warm up to pour into jars.*

You sometimes hear about 'reserved descriptions' for honey (descriptions listed in the 2015 Honey Regulations), and in the same breath, a warning that 'creamed' is not permitted description. The verb 'to cream' is to make food into a smooth, thick liquid. Some say that the term has been banned because there's no cream in honey. Of course there isn't, but it's doubtful there has ever been any such ban.

True, 'Creamed' is not a reserved description, but neither is 'Soft-set'. It is permissible to add honey descriptions to the name on a label, such as 'clear', 'natural', etc (but apparently NOT 'raw') – always assuming the aim is to inform truthfully.

- Most honeys granulate sooner or later. Soft-set honey is honey which has granulated with extremely small crystals which give it a creamy texture.
- Procure a 'seed' honey, which could be something like Gales set honey. You will need 5-10% of the bulk.
- Liquify the bucket of honey to be seeded in a warmer at c.45°C, stirring occasionally.
- Allow to cool to 35°C, and warm the seed honey to the same temperature. Not higher or the grains will melt!
- Stir the seed honey into the bulk and store at c.14°C. In summer you'll need a chiller of some kind. Picnic freezer pouches can work.
- Stir every few hours to keep the crystals fine. It will set in 2-4 days.
- Rewarm to 35°C so that it just flows through the honey gate after stirring.
- Pre-heat jars and pour honey in down the sides.
- The honey will now finish setting, changing from semi-transparent to opaque.
- At honey shows, judges will discount any soft-set honey which runs out of a jar when inverted. But it might suit yours and your customers' expectations of 'creamed' honey.
- Save some of your final product for making your next batch of soft-set honey.

If you have a working freezer as a warming cabinet (and there are always many being given away), then you can use it as a chiller as well as a warmer. A thermostat like [this inexpensive unit](#) has two outputs. One will switch the freezer on to chill the compartment, the other will switch the tubular heaters on to warm it up.

## QUIZ

1. At roughly what rate do bees beat their wings? a) 230 beats per minute b) 50 beats per second c) 230 beats per second
2. What is 'egg marking' in a honey bee colony?
3. Hair on a bee's body is described as plumose. What does that refer to?
4. What and when are cleansing flights?
5. What is *Ascospheera apis*?

Answers on [page 17](#)

# NATIONAL HONEY SHOW

There are hundreds of classes which you can choose from if you want to enter the [National Honey Show](#) which takes place at Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, Surrey, KT10 9AJ on 27-29 October. But there's not just a Honey Show. There's a lecture programme with a range of international speakers, and a trade show where you can buy from all the regular beekeeping retailers at sale prices, and where you can trade in wax for foundation.

Right now, you might want to have a look at [the schedule](#) and decide if you want to enter any classes. The closing date for entries is 10 October, though you don't actually deliver your items till the day before the show. But items for the essay, video, microscopy, and photography classes have to be completed and submitted by 12 September.

You can become [a member of the National Honey Show](#) for £25.00. It's probably worth doing if you're interested in the NHS. It includes admission to the classes, the show, and the lectures. You can very quickly recoup the cost of membership.



## WHAT'S IN THE POST?

*A look at a recent web post or blog.*

*This month: On getting stung*

You don't need to have experienced something to be able to write or talk about it, but boy, it helps. So if you're a beekeeper you'll be able to talk about stings, and it's never long till a conversation with a non-beekeeper turns in that direction. Even in my chat this month on Zoom with John, our Chair, the subject came up, though it was not intentional. John saw that I was sporting pads of tissue taped on each of my lower arms and asked about them. I find vinegar gives almost instant relief from the pain or itchiness of a bad sting, so a soaked tissue held in place with a long piece of tape does the job – and draws attention to itself!

Bob Bruno and I had a bit of a battering when removing honey supers that morning. He got stung through leather gloves (so much for the super deluxe extra protection) and I got stung on each arm through my suit just above the top rims of the nitriles, where the suit gets pressed right on to the skin. Perhaps I should have worn lower arm gauntlets!

Have you ever noticed a pattern to the little black dots that appear on your fingers if you get a partial sting through your nitriles? There's definitely a message being sent about your bee handling skills if you notice, for instance, that you've got four little black dots on the tip of your left thumb.



*Photo by Waugsberg, free to share from Wikipedia*

The risks of stings related to honey removal don't stop at the hive. Have you ever been stung when extracting honey by a sad-looking, apparently lifeless bee on a comb? For some reason these are very painful. Perhaps the frequent hand-washing and soft skin during extraction session has something to do with it.

I have a friend whose husband used to keep bees many years ago. She was stung once and warned that the next sting could be lethal. Ideally that first sting would work like a vaccine. It primes the immune system and usually further stings are not serious. But in cases of allergy, the system doesn't work that way. [@Sutty](#) on Beekeeping Forum explains it like this: *In allergy there is an imbalance between different types of antibodies produced against the substance, which causes them to stimulate some cells to release histamine. For some people repeated exposure*



*makes the imbalance worse and their reactions get worse. For most they become more protected/tolerant, but even that can change.*

This, he says, is a gross simplification, but it's enough to be going on with. Apparently there's a study which shows that getting at least 200 stings per season will almost certainly guarantee against an allergic reaction. Like many on

Beekeeping Forum, @suttly obviously has professional scientific knowledge to back up his posts. But when it comes to beekeeping, that's no defence. He reckons he's close to the 200+ stings target for this season!

PS My friend whose husband kept bees told me that he moved them further down the garden after she got a warning never to get stung again!

## WORDS

In recent months I've mentioned here my plan to move to Standard Nationals (14x8.5 inch frames) away from large Nationals (14x12inch) frames. I liked the idea of being having double or even triple boxes to allow the brood nest to be tall and pear-shaped, rather than the cube of brood that I would sometimes get from a prolific queen in a 14x12 box.

I've been greatly helped in my thinking by a timely set of articles in BeeCraft by Ken and Dan Basterfield.

What has this to do with the WORDS slot?

Sometimes we can be a bit casual in our use of everyday terms. In Britain, when speaking about music, we might use the word 'note' to describe a sound, or a sign on a page of music, or a key on the piano. A European English speaker would never be so casual.

- A *note* is something notated on a page
- A *key* is something on an instrument to make a sound
- A *tone* is the musical sound itself.

I'm sure you're very glad to know that now!

A bit nearer home, let's think about the words *super*, *deep*, *shallow*, and *brood*. You might think that it's a bit insulting to bring this up among beekeepers. But only last February, Murray McGregor, the Scottish bee farmer, had to stop in the middle of the Q&A after his talk to MBKA and guests

from Kent, to define terms over these very words, such was the level of confusion in the audience.

Boxes are at the upper or lower sections of a hive. Usually the ones at the top are called *supers*, which is short for the *superstructure*. And boxes which contain brood are *brood*



*A nuc box is a nuc box, but it's less easy to describe a hive box using terms such as super, deep, shallow, and brood*

boxes, and they are usually at the bottom. But what if you nadir a super, ie place it under the brood box, in autumn for the bees to bring up the honey for winter stores? Should that still be called a super? I think I'll pass on that one!

Whether a box is a super or a brood box tells you **nothing** about its size. Often brood boxes are deeper because they don't need lifting so much, and supers are shallower so that they're not frighteningly heavy

when it comes time for removal for extraction. So the rough terms for the size of the box are deep or shallow, and you can have *any size of box in any part of the hive*.

As Dan Basterfield suggests in this month's BeeCraft article, it might suit you to have brood in multiple *shallow* boxes (not 'supers'!) or, alternatively, you might decide to have brood and honey all in the same size of *deep* boxes.

Just be sure to use the right words when telling anyone about your plans! Archie McLellan

# INCOME TAX

(This article is about HM Revenue and Customs, not how Murray McGregor refers to chalkbrood!)

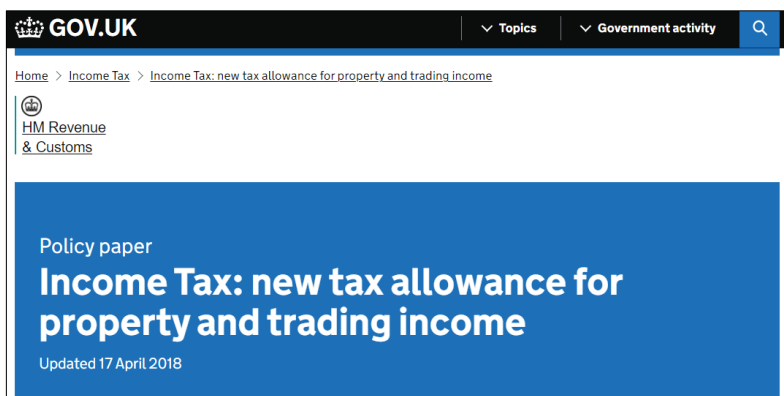
Do you need to pay tax on your sales of honey?

Do you even need to declare this income to HMRC?

Well, if your **sales** (ie *gross* income, not profit after expenses) are under £1,000, you don't need to do anything. So if you sell 200 jars at £5 in a year (total sales income, £1,000), you don't have to even mention it to the tax office.

But if you sell 210 jars, you have a sales income of £1,050. In this situation you have exceeded the £1,000 threshold, and so should declare this, along with all allowable expenses, to HMRC. You have the choice, when calculating taxable profits, of deducting the allowance from your receipts, instead of deducting the actual allowable expenses.

[Here you can read the full text](#) on the HMRC website that outlines everything in more detail.



## GETTING TO KNOW YOU: THIS MONTH, MICHAEL BUCKNALL

*A series in which WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with MBKA members about beekeeping and life in general. This month, Archie McLellan chats with Michael Bucknall about his life and family, and 67 years of beekeeping.*

Satnavs are not at their best when there are no street names and numbers. Postcodes can cover a large area where there are few houses. Michael had given me full directions over the phone. Not being familiar with the area in the north – the Peninsular – I made little sense of his directions, except to memorise the final approach to his house. ‘When you get to the top of the hill, before you go down it, you’ll see a bungalow at the top of the opposite hill. That’s us.’ Sure enough, just at the projected arrival time, I see a white house at the top of a hill. As I near the house, with hope in my heart, Michael appears and beckons me to drive in.

He ushers me into a bright room which is both a lounge and dining room. There are windows on three sides. ‘You can see from Canary Wharf to Southend from here’ Michael says. ‘Thirty-five miles of the opposite shore of the river.’

He is about to sit at the dining table, then thinks to check first. ‘Business-like or comfortable?’ he says. I opt for the latter, and we move to the soft seats. Alison brings in tea.

They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in May this year, a time which coincided with considerable worry about Alison’s health. Now fully recovered, she says it feels wonderful. In fact, their visit to the Opening of the new apiary was her first real outing since her illness.

Michael’s grandfather and father were both farmers. When Michael and Alison married in 1962, his grandfather retired, Michael took on the farm, and they moved into his cottage. ‘People ask how long I’ve lived here. Sometimes I tell them I’ve lived here for 84 years! My grandfather lived in this house before us, and we visited all the time. I was just one year old when the war began, and we slept in the air-raid shelter in the garden throughout the war. Because of the location, there was always a possibility of an air attack.’ The air-raid shelter is still there, with a colossal fig tree growing over the steps down to the entrance. The shelter is an all-concrete



structure, just one item of a lot of farm infrastructure built by the crews of three ships being repaired at Chatham.

‘These sailors had nothing to do. They jumped at the chance to do some concreting.’

Meanwhile Michael is rummaging in the fig tree. There is a lot of fruit. He hands me four soft ripe figs. ‘That’ll do,’ he says. It is the reverse of me telling my 4-year old grandson, ‘Only four plums,’ as we walk the dogs in the local orchard.

I ask how and when Michael started keeping bees. ‘My time in boarding school ended rather suddenly,’ he says. ‘I got a message. “Bucknall Senior, Headmaster’s office in half an hour.” I didn’t know if he was going to tell me that I was expelled! In fact, the headmaster said he and my parents had been discussing my future. I was dyslexic, so I wasn’t going to pass my O-Levels. He said that, if I so wished, I could leave school– and in three days I was gone!’

Back home, Michael started work on the farm. ‘I was seventeen. Someone on the next farm had some hives, and he asked me if I’d like to help him. All that summer I worked with him, going to the bees every week. In the autumn he had a heart attack. He had to give up

honey... just give it to friends and family. I don’t have any honey labels,’ he says, laughing.

Michael, Alison, and I walked down to a secluded apiary in woodland behind his house. ‘The land beside mine is now owned by the RSPB, which is ideal for bees. Brambles, wild flowers, and trees everywhere. There are so many varieties of bramble that there are still some in flower. There is a long and varied forage here. Jen Ferry will say so too. Her bees are not far away.’

Recently, he has had to hastily erect a fence to protect his hives from badgers. ‘There’s a sett nearby, and with the RSPB on the land next door, people are observing the badgers constantly,’ he says. ‘Badgers are strong, with particularly powerful jaws. I was once struck by one while opening a gate and was knocked completely flat. The dog seemed to be saying to me, What do you think you’re doing down there?’

After some years farming, Michael worked as a landscaper for a year. It was a requirement for access to the landscaping course which he took in 1979 at the Agricultural College in Guildford. ‘The government paid for

everything to make it possible for me to do that course,’ he says. He set up a landscaping company and is still Chairman, with his older son running the company. ‘Our younger son lives in Galashiels in the Scottish Borders and works for the Forestry Commission. He likes the work.’

There was a time when Michael was a governor at Fort Pitt School. Thinking that the grounds were perfect for keeping bees,

he approached the Head mistress. ‘She asked if I could put them all around the boundary! I laughed and said No, but if we could fence off an area near the boundary, that would work. So I kept bees there for a while. Bob Smith invited Dover BKA to visit us, and we all gathered at Fort Pitt and my hives. It was a good day. But you need facilities to have



*Michael and Alison, showing part of their apiary with ancient WBCs, and a new fence for badger protection.*

beekeeping and I inherited his bees, equipment, everything. I still have the boxes, WBCs, and even some frames.’

Michael has three colonies now but although sometimes his colony numbers were in double figures, he never increased his beekeeping to the level of a business. ‘I don’t sell my

a day like that. And calm bees. And somewhere to make tea and serve cake!

Michael had been keeping bees for about 30 years when varroa arrived. I asked what happened. Did he lose all his hives?

'I did lose some but not all. Being in the Association, we knew fairly early on what was happening so I was able to take action.' And how long have you been in the Association, I asked? 'Since 1956 – my second season with the bees.'

Alison talks about the recent afternoon at the Grand Opening. She says, 'The new apiary should allow the Association to grow and expand its activities. It's a lovely space with a versatile building that will make it possible to do lots of things with the members. Mark and the team of workers have done very well.'

## BEING CONTROVERSIAL

– with the usual warning about any opinions expressed anywhere in this newsletter not representing MBKA, BBKA etc! 😊

The BBKA Petition to the Government and Parliament closed on 7 August. After a last-minute push to encourage members to sign, a total of 15,301 signatories was reached, well in excess of the 10,000 required for the Government to give a response. You can read The Response [here](#). It is, as you would expect, substantial and considered, but does not contain anything that will lead to any changes in the near future.

After the BBKA Annual Delegates Meeting earlier this year, the BBKA was mandated to 'take action to address the issues of adulterated/fake honey'. Titled 'Honey Labelling Petition', the petition asked that the government *Fully review the honey market and Honey Regulations, to review evidence of honey fraud*

Time is up but leaving can't be rushed. On the way out to see the bees, I glance at a display case in the porch, with objects I can't quite fathom. Michael is about to tell the whole story but there's a sort of nudge from Alison. Keep focussed, you're on the way to the apiary, she seems to be saying.

And after the apiary proper, Michael shows me some bees in a stack of empty hive boxes. They are crowded around the little entrance, but seem to be calm and healthy. 'They've been there for two years,' he says. But aware of all the comb the bees will have created in this empty space, I suspect it might be some time before Michael dares to crack these boxes open!

Thank you, Michael, Alison. It has been a delight being here with you.

*within the honey market, and reform regulations and arrangements for enforcement, to prevent future fraud.*

On the one hand, some felt there was nothing not to like about this petition. So much honey that is sold in the UK is adulterated (for instance with corn syrup), or fake honey (in

that is not a substance produced by the bees). The Honey Regulations 2015 require that the country of origin be stated on the label. Typically we read on much supermarket *honey A blend of EU and non-EU countries*. In other words, the honey could have come from *anywhere*. Surely this isn't right?

A hint that this is not a problem which can be easily solved is in the Government's response: 'We are confident the honey regulations and enforcement of those

regulations are fit for purpose but acknowledge honey is a complex natural product. Analysis to determine if honey has been adulterated can often be challenging.'

**Petitions**  
UK Government and Parliament

Closed petition

### Review honey authenticity and current regulation of the honey market

Fully review the honey market and Honey Regulations, to review evidence of honey fraud within the honey market, and reform regulations and arrangements for enforcement, to prevent future fraud.

[More details](#)

**This petition is closed**  
All petitions run for 6 months

**15,301** signatures

[Show on a map](#) 100,000

For further evidence of the ‘challenging’ work of detecting honey fraud, read [this 2020 news story from Government chemist](#), *GC team publishes scientific papers on honey authentication*.

Why were the members of the BBKA so dilatory in signing this Petition? For weeks, the number of signatories sat around 7,000, a mere quarter of the membership. Was this just a marker of how all of society works, with a small number of activists, and the bulk of the population largely inactive? Or did some have misgivings about the Petition?

Posts on Beekeeping Forum [show the wide range of opinions among beekeepers on this subject](#). One has to bear in mind that BKF and the BBKA are not partners working to achieve the same goals. There are historical reasons for antipathy between the two groups, but although some on BKF take what chance they get to deride BBKA, for the vast majority of posters on the Forum, this is an irrelevance. Here is a brief survey of posts on this topic, some showing a different way of thinking about fake and adulterated honey.

@JamezF, succinct as ever, thought that the Petition could be shortened to read that ‘the current regulations are sufficiently well enforced to ensure that what is sold labelled as honey actually meets the legal definition of honey.’ He thought it might be interesting to require that the label stated: ‘Contains no syrup and 100% produced by honey bees’.

@Turls2201 wrote: ‘This affects us all and the practice is driving down prices. General public are unaware of the situation and the adulteration/ mass production of “Honey”.’

@Wilco commented that ‘This is all well and good but the issue is that it’s almost impossible to detect faked honey accurately at present. The government isn’t going to make a change which is absolutely unenforceable (I’m temporarily stifling the cynic in me) so we need to focus our efforts on getting an accurate testing modality first or this petition is wasted effort.’

@Peabee agreed: ‘The current regulations are probably adequate but the testing and enforcement are not in place.’

@Beebe was uncomfortable about where this was heading: ‘Although I hope that I’m correct in trusting that almost all amateur beekeepers will do everything possible to avoid sugar contamination of honey, purchasers need to trust us

as they trust commercial honey bottlers. We should be careful about what we wish for; when applied to amateur honey production, certificates of provenance and purity would be a killer to our doorstep trading.’

@Apiarlan is puzzled: ‘what baffles me most is how can a jar of blended honey from either Non-EU sources or a mix of Chinese and Vietnamese sources be “fully traceable back to the beekeeper” as quoted by Sainsbury and Asda alike?’

@JamezF again: The cynic in me suggests that the likes of Sainsbury’s or Asda perhaps have a requirement in their supply contract that the honey be “fully traceable back to the beekeeper” and the supplier claims that they can do so. The buyer is then careful not to ask any questions...’

@jenkinsbrynmair suggests that there are two kinds of customer for honey, and that they will never cross over: ‘The people who buy that honey, will still buy cheap supermarket honey; they don’t want our type of honey and never will. Tresco, Waitberry’s, whatever could sell their honey for a penny a pot but it would make no impact whatsoever on the sales of our ‘proper’ honey.’

@PeaBee has a warning: ‘Are BBKA members struggling to sell honey because of imports? Let’s face it home produced honey is less than 10% of the market; of that a big chunk will be produced by a few of the big players [in bee farming] so BBKA members represent maybe 5% of the honey placed on the market. ... Interesting to see if anything comes of the petition but the potential for an own goal and making it harder for the hobby beekeeper should not be ignored; anyone fancy sending of samples of honey from a bucket purchased from a mate for testing?’

Perhaps @PeaBee has the 2019 Apimondia debacle in mind? You’ll remember that [40% of entries at the world’s greatest honey show were rejected after laboratory testing](#).

@Erichalfbee suggests that some things are not going to change: ‘I sent a jar from Sainsbury to my local Trading Standards. It was tested and found to be adulterated but the reply I got was that there was no reliable test that could not and would not be challenged by a supermarket with much legal and financial clout. No prosecution would proceed as a result.’

@Ian123 brings up local honey being sold too cheaply: ‘Cheap imports are not the market for the vast majority of UK beekeepers; their energy would be better spent with

friendly press educating the public... Then they could also do the same with some who sell at silly prices.'

To sum up:

- The Regulations are not the problem but enforcement is difficult. The Government is not going to exacerbate that situation.

- There are two different markets. People who want local artisan honey, and people who are happy with supermarket honey.
- Take care with what you wish for. Further regulation could make life harder for local honey producers.

## WHAT TO CHARGE FOR HONEY

For many beekeepers, this season has produced a bumper crop. Will supply and demand – in this case a glut of local honey – bring the price down?

Is there a general perception of what the price should be for local honey? Much depends on how the product looks, and how it is displayed in the shop. Jars on shelves in a local general store may be cheaper and yet sell much more slowly than the same honey at a higher price displayed on a butcher's counter with nothing else competing for attention.

It is often said that you cannot sell an artisan product too cheaply. If you do, it's no longer regarded as artisan.

Setting a price for your own services or goods can be awkward, especially if you've never been self-employed. It's one thing to make a calculation to undercut a competitor, but quite another to sell something for less because you're worried about that people will think you avaricious.

Don't be concerned. People understand that valuable product should be priced accordingly. Don't worry about the much lower price of supermarket honey. That is a completely different market. It's unlikely that you will sell to people who are happy with an Asda squeeze bottle for 80p or even £1.60.

Many beekeepers have now moved from 454g (1 pound) jars to 340g (12 ounces). It's possible that this change occurred because of some alarm (on both sellers' and customers' part) about the price of a 1 pound jar. For just a little less, it was possible to sell in 25% smaller jars, and increase the price to volume ratio.

But 340g (12 ounce) jars come in many shapes and sizes, and some look as if they hold much more than others. That might make a difference.

If you're lucky, you might find a shop which doesn't already have a honey supplier. But don't assume that they'll welcome you with open arms. Even if they agree to giving honey a try, they might say that counter top sales such as chutneys have not done well in the past. Try to assure them that local honey is different – and more expensive – but that there is a demand. And that you'll take it back if they don't get sales. If they've not sold local honey before, they're unlikely to be aware of the market.

If you have a jar that is distinctively labelled, and eye-catchingly displayed in a shop with a sizeable number of customers, you'll almost certainly sell your honey, and in normal years, sell out long before the new season.

## THYMOL AND NOSEMA

It is seasonally appropriate to talk about Nosema just now. That's because **thymol** figures in our beekeeping at this time of year. If we use Apiguard in controlling varroa, we are introducing thymol to the hive. If we feed with syrup, we might use thymol to prevent mould growing in the syrup.

Treating bees with thymol is the only method shown by a number of studies to be effective in reducing Nosema spores. However, Nosema afflicted bees will not consume syrup, so they are treated by spraying. The dosage is higher than that used in mould prevention in syrup, and it has been shown to be beneficial to bees with Nosema disease.

The National Bee Unit conducted a random apiary survey in 2010/2011 and found that 46% of colonies studied contained *Nosema apis* and 40% contained *Nosema ceranae*.

A major study in 2009 summarised the position thus: 'Nosema used to be treated with an antibiotic called Fumagillin, but its use is no longer authorised in the UK. Treatment with thymol (at 100ppm) in syrup increases the lifespan of bees infected with *Nosema ceranae*, slightly reduces the number of *Nosema* spores, and slows the rate of infection.'<sup>1</sup>

In BBKA News, November 2018, Dr Kirsty Stainton, then at the NBU, wrote about the beneficial effects of treatment with thymol (at 100ppm) in syrup, referencing the paper quoted above.

The late, great Peter Little (@Hivemaker on Beekeeping Forum) has written about use and dosage of thymol for both preventing mould

in syrup and for treating *Nosema*. In a nutshell, to prevent mould in syrup, use 1ml of a thymol premix to 1 litre of syrup. To treat a *Nosema* infection, use 5ml per litre *sprayed on the bees on the frames*.<sup>2</sup> *Nosema* infected bees will not consume syrup so the thymol treatment has to be applied in a *light spray*.

His full instructions for using thymol can be found [here](#). Note that thymol does not dissolve in water. It *can* be dissolved in surgical spirits or isopropyl alcohol, but tends to float to the top in syrup. The recipe using [lecithin granules](#) ensures that the thymol mix is spread evenly throughout the syrup.

Assessing the extent of a *nosema* infection is usually done by squashing 30 bee abdomens in a little water and counting spores under a x400 microscope. Some beekeepers say there are difficulties and shortcomings with

this method. Those who are inclined to research this further might read [Randy Oliver's Quick Squash Method](#) of determining the prevalence of *Nosema*.

Finally, a note of caution. In a recent study, we read that '...results indicate that in *Nosema*-free bees, thymol itself could cause certain disorders ... showing that one should be careful with preventive, uncontrolled, and excessive use of thymol.'<sup>3</sup>

However, some have dismissed this as unhelpful

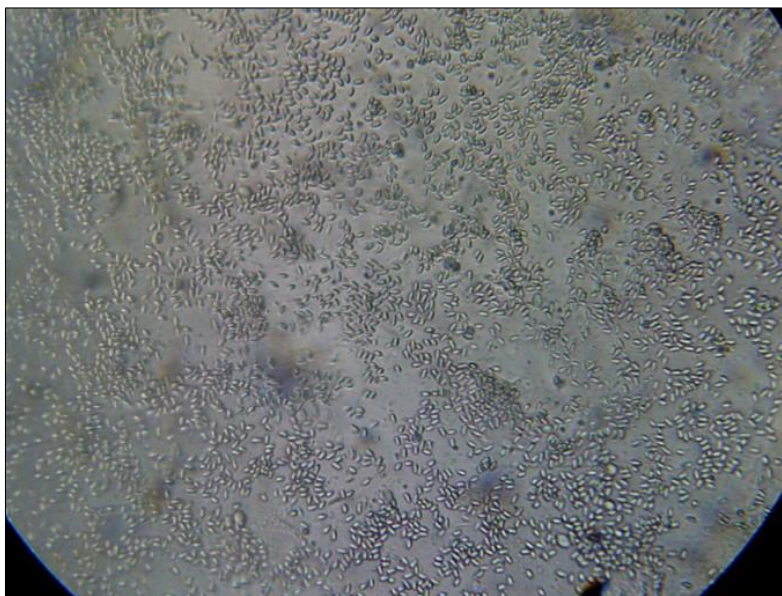
speculation ('*could* cause certain disorders'... 'further research is needed').

Postscript. There was a blog post on the BBKA website by past president Margaret Murdin, in which she states: 'Thymol is not approved for the treatment of *Nosema* and is ineffective against it.' This appears to have been taken down recently, possibly indicating that this is a grey area regarding approval, and

certainly indicating that the evidence of numerous studies over the last 15 years shows that thymol certainly is effective in the treatment of *Nosema*.

#### REFERENCES

1. Costa C, Lodesani M, Maistrello L. *Effect of thymol and resveratrol administered with candy or syrup on the development of Nosema ceranae and on the longevity of honeybees (Apis mellifera L.) in laboratory conditions*. Apidologie 2010; 41:141–150.
2. <https://beekeepingforum.co.uk/threads/thymol-syrup-uses.47116/post-713668>
3. Uros Glavinic et al, *Use of Thymol in Nosema ceranae Control and Health Improvement of Infected Honey Bees*



*A serious infection of Nosema; photograph of a x400 microscope slide by Randy Oliver, printed with permission.*

# VARROA: DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

One of the best sources for information on treating varroa infestations are the booklets and videos produced by the [Honey Bee Health Coalition](#) in the US. Their booklet *Tools for Varroa Management* has just been released in its 8<sup>th</sup> edition.

There are some differences in details relating to varroa control practice in the UK and US: Checkmite and Hopguard are not licensed in the UK, and the dose for oxalic acid vaporisation is 1g in the US, and 2.3g in the UK. Nevertheless, this booklet is well written with clear charts and diagrams, and surveys the subject of varroa control from the viewpoint of the non-scientist small-scale beekeeper. There are sections on the seasonal development of mites, on control by Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and on using different methods of monitoring mite populations. There follows a section on how to select control methods, and a survey of both the approved available miticides as well as non-chemical methods of varroa control. Each is assessed in detail, giving details of each product or technique, instructions on proper use, and advantages and disadvantages of each.

The NBU has produced a booklet *Managing Varroa* for UK beekeepers. Both are worth reading and doing so will clarify available options and help in decision-making.



## HANDY HINT

### STORE SUPERS WET?!

Standard advice is to return honey supers to the hive for the bees to clean up after extracting the honey.

But what if they don't? What if they start filling them up again? Because they will, if there's still any nectar about.

Some beekeepers simply don't bother about so-called cleaning-up. They store their supers 'wet'. Yes, it might lead to a degree of honey fermentation over the winter, but the bees won't be put off in spring, and will quickly get the supers ready for nectar.

The same beekeepers usually say that supers stored wet are less likely to be a target for wax moth. That may be so, just as wax moth prefer brood combs to honey combs.

But in some parts of the country, wax moth are a serious pest and ALL your combs always need protection. It's likely that Kent is one such danger area. So, protect your combs when they don't have bees on them doing the job for you. Traditional treatments are acetic (ethanoic) acid or *Bacillus thuringiensis*. Pour a little acetic acid on to a lid or tray above a stack of about four supers, and be aware that it damages concrete and metal. Or spray a solution of



*It's hard to exaggerate the damage done by wax moth – or how quickly it can happen.*

But on to the combs. Since Certan B401 was withdrawn from sale in the UK, alternatives such as [DiPel DF](#), or [Bruco](#), or, for a smaller quantity (and less outlay!), try [Xen-Tari](#). More about this from [The Apiarist](#).



# ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ

1. c) 230 beats per second, a rapidity which the bee achieves in a similar way to beating a side drum: a single stroke rebounds creating many beats.
2. This refers to the coating that a queen leaves on an egg as she lays it. It has an odour which is identifiable as hers alone, so worker police are able to distinguish these from any eggs laid by laying workers – which they will consume.
3. Plumose means branched, like a tree, not single stranded like human hair.
4. These are the flights bees make to evacuate the contents of their rectum. After many weeks confined in winter, bees will exit the hive on a bright day to relieve themselves. However, though not often referred to in this way, it's likely that young bees exit the hive for the same purpose in spring and summer before they have become foragers.
5. The fungal disease which results in chalkbrood.

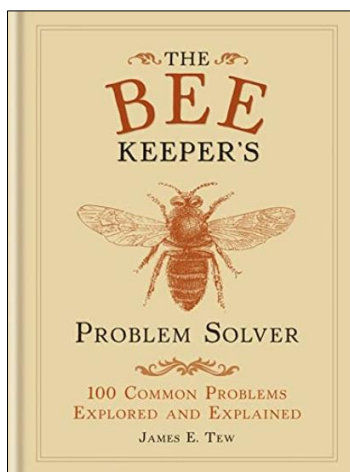
## RECOMMENDED READING

*The Beekeeper's Problem Solver: 100 Common Problems Explored and Explained, by James E Tew*

Unless it's a gripping novel, some of us have trouble reading a book from cover to cover. So it's nice to have a book that's not meant to be read from start to finish. You don't even need to start at the beginning. There's a feel of a past age in the cover and design of this book: hardback, with a yellow ochre tint, a retro design, and decorative emblems on the monochromatic cover. But don't be fooled. It was published in 2015, and I have the hard cover version because it's a third cheaper than the paperback.

The Q&As are arranged in nine broad categories including Beekeeping basics, Beekeeping equipment, Biology and behaviour of the colony, and others sections covering manipulations, queens, diseases, pollination, honey, and bees wax. Each

question and answer usually gets a two-page spread, with a colour photograph.



This is not a book with arcane detail, nor does it probe the depths of esoteric scientific studies. Experienced beekeepers will learn little from it.

But it is a delight to handle, to look at, and to dip into, anytime and anywhere.

Although James Tew is American, this book is a British creation, conceived, designed, and produced for UK readers. Norman Carreck and Andrea Quigley have had a hand in the text.

This is one of a number of beautiful bee books on my shelves which I'd be sorry to lose, because they invite being picked up and glanced through occasionally. Try it and see.

## SHOPPING

### STUFF FOR A WARMING / CHILLING CABINET

There are many ideas on forums and blogs on how to create a warming cabinet. Usually an old fridge or freezer is commandeered, but others make a box from plywood and line it with 50mm Celotex / Kingspan.

This leaves two essential requirements: a heat source and a thermostat. Both are surprisingly inexpensive – especially the thermostat! A small computer fan is sometimes added to ensure even temperature throughout the hive. For a heat source,

60 watt tungsten light bulbs were popular in the past, as were egg hatching heating elements. However, many now find greenhouse tubular heaters simple to purchase and install.

[Tubular greenhouse heaters for honey warmer](#)

[STC-1000 thermostat for warming and chilling](#)



You can read more about making a warming cabinet [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

## COMMENTS

**TO POST A COMMENT, PLEASE EMAIL WHATSTHEBUZZ.**

Beekeeping is fertile ground for opinions to grow, and there are lots of them in WHATSTHEBUZZ. 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.

Does what you read here fit with your opinions and experience? Do write to let us know.

## 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 <a href="mailto:daniel.etheridge@apha.gov.uk">daniel.etheridge@apha.gov.uk</a>   M: 07979 119376
<b>Seasonal Bee Inspector</b>	Danyal Conn <a href="mailto:danyal.conn@apha.gov.uk">danyal.conn@apha.gov.uk</a>   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.*

## PHOTO CREDITS

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# THE 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.  
The excellent [MBKA website](#) is here.



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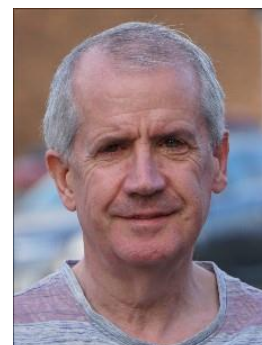
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