

WHATSTHEBUZZ



The Queen's bees: musings on the tradition of 'telling the bees', on our queen bees, and on beeswax candles.

Oxalic acid: it's organic, effective against mites, and even found in our food. What else do we need to know!

Music and bees: a world premiere at the BBC Proms this summer, Lars Chittka's band, and a piece by Ligeti

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

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>



Photo above: North Norfolk, early September 2022

Hello to October, to cooler days, and to you all

The temperature dropped just a few days ago, and with it perhaps our resolutions not to put the heating on till November. We'll see.

The bees are still flying and foraging actively on what they find. They were working the roses in my garden today. There's no rush for us to complete winter preparations yet, but it makes sense to know what needs to be done and when we're going to fit it in.

Depending on the floor and entrance system on your hive, you might need a mouseguards over the entrance. If you keep the entrance block in place and turn it so that the small opening is being used, you have all the mouse protection you need. If you have a floor with an entrance from underneath, then you're protected from mice. It's normal to put protection from woodpeckers over hives. You'll only know if it was necessary if you get caught out. But why let that happen? I drape hessian over the hive, held in place by the roof. Other make chicken wire cages.

Did you make a diary note for the removal of amitraz strips? These are left *in situ* for 6-10 weeks. That period should not be exceeded as it increases the possibility of the mites developing resistance.

And finally, winter study. You could join a course run by the association, or you can set a project to work through on your own. Or maybe you feel you know it all already!?

Inside the hive, the bees will fly less as the temperature drops and start to form a cluster. By then, bulk autumn feeding should be completed. The bees are unable to invert syrup and concentrate it into honey when the temperature drops. The area in the frames filled with brood will be smaller as the queen's laying rate reduces and the winter bees populate the nest. In cold weather, excursions from the hive are likely to be for water, with cleansing flights on sunny days.

There is still a lot of ivy in flower. In north Norfolk at the start of September, huge areas of ivy were flowering earlier than in other parts of the country. The nectar sets quickly in the comb and is white! My first sight of it this year led me

to wonder if perhaps fondant was being *transported* to the cells without passing through the bees!

Michaelmas daisy as a major forage for bees at this time of year is not quite the same as the cultivated garden version. But even so, that is the deep colour in our garden just now, and it goes on and on.

In this issue, we have our own beekeepers' piece about the Queen, with some glorious pictures.

The sounds of bees may or may not be music to your ears, but there was a significant event in the London Proms this summer which we just couldn't ignore. Yes, there's an article on *Music and bees*. You have some listening to do!

And in the slot, *What's in the post*, where we look at recent posts on blogs or forums, we find that the BBKA annual survey of winter losses comes in for some devastating criticism. A well-known scientist and beekeeper writes that, although these surveys are important, the data in this one is worthless.

IN THIS ISSUE

The Queen's bees	3
MBKA news and events	5
MBKA Apiary	7
Committee deliberations	8
What else is happening?	8
Oxalic acid	9
The Beekeeper's Checklist	10
Holes in the Crownboard	12
What's in the post?	12
National Honey Show	13
Music and bees	14
Words	15
Moment of joy	16
Recommended reading	17
Shopping	18
BBKA	19
Comments	19
Bee Inspectors	20
The Committee	21
Photo credits	22

THE QUEEN'S BEES

The story of John Chapple, the beekeeper of the bees at Buckingham Palace, *telling the bees of the death of the queen*, and alerting them to their new master, was told all over the world. 'The mistress is dead, but don't you go. Your master will be a good master to you,' John said.

As beekeepers, 'queen' is a word on our lips so frequently that its wider significance can be all but forgotten. Recently, of course, we have been reminded of the more general understanding of what the Queen means to people.

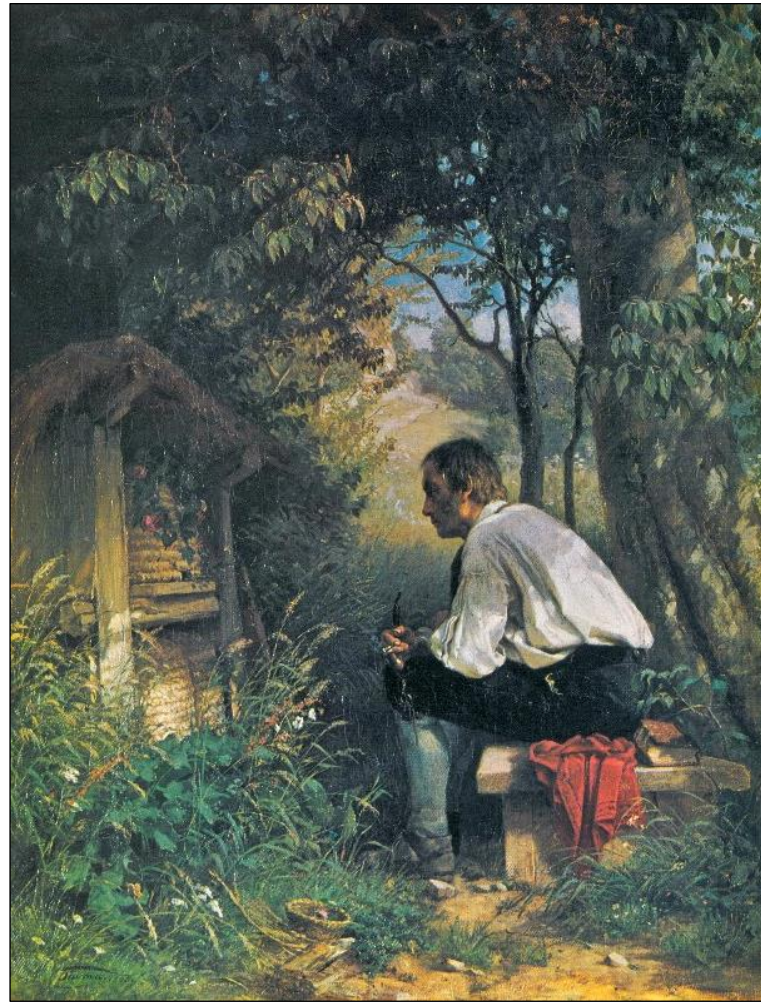
It may seem a little odd to compare the monarch of the realm to a winged insect, but there are some interesting contrasts which we might ponder on.

Generally, the queen bee doesn't leave the colony after mating whereas the monarch has travelled to many, many countries – though most that she visited could be said to be part of her colony.

Though we think of our monarch as ruling over us, in truth that is done by government. And though the bees value their queen immensely, she is not their ruler either.

But perhaps the biggest difference is that though the bees care assiduously for their queen, they are quite ruthless in replacing her when she becomes old; whereas we have gloried in the longevity of our Queen, and cherished her all the more as she has aged with beauty, great dignity, and increased wisdom.

Esther Cohen



The Bee Friend, by Hans Thoma, 1863/1864
via Wikimedia Commons





There wasn't much the media didn't include in its coverage of the ten days from the Queen's death up to her funeral. But apparently no one spotted these four magnificent beeswax candles.

How could all these journalists and commentators fail to notice?

Within hours of this photograph appearing, two people said excitedly to me: 'Did you see the candles around the coffin!'

It's rather lovely to think that the flowers on top of the Queen's coffin were not flown in from abroad, but were chosen from those currently blooming in the gardens of Buckingham Palace, Clarence House, and Highgrove House. Among the plants included was myrtle, rosemary – a symbol of remembrance – and English Oak – a symbol of strength. There were also garden roses, hydrangea, sedum, dahlias, scabious, and pelargoniums – many of them the flowers our bees are depending on for forage at this time of the year.



MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

WINTER STUDY

The group for the Winter Study course will be meeting fortnightly from 17 October, 7.30-9.30pm, at Wainscott Hall. This year we will be looking at BBKA Module 2, *Honeybee products and forage*. This module looks at plants, how to harvest and produce honey, beeswax, and much more. [The syllabuses for all Modules can be downloaded here.](#)

We will follow the usual pattern for our Winter study courses, namely a self-taught group with guidance from group leads. Over the ten sessions you'll be expected to present a couple of topics to the group. However, the idea is that we all read up on every topic so we can help and support each other's learning. Don't panic! You're not expected to know everything. (Do you ever know everything in beekeeping?!?)

You have the opportunity to sit the Module 2 assessment in March but this is optional. You are welcome to be part of the group if you simply want to expand your knowledge. Cost is £20 for the whole course, which will go towards the hire of the hall.

Dates are 17 and 31 October, 14 and 28 November, 5 December, 9 and 23 January, 6 and 20 February, and 6 March. Whether on Zoom, or, as now, back in the hall, these courses are stimulating, friendly, and fun. And perhaps just a little daunting, especially on the evenings when it's your turn to present the topic. If you are interested in taking part, please contact Sheila on admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

The Education Group

MBKA HONEY SHOW 2022

We had a large honey show this year with 113 entries staged. How appropriate to have over 100 entries in our 100th year as a beekeeping association! Thank you to everyone who took the time and trouble to prepare entries and get them in on time.

A large space was prepared for us by the staff at Elm Court Garden Centre. As usual they made us very welcome and publicised the show to their loyalty card holders. This, as well as posts on social media, brought people to Elm Court specifically to see the show.



The show was staged in a busy 45 minutes. Look at the before and after photos above and below.



Roger Thompson from Thanet Beekeepers was our judge. Many people will know Roger from the Kent County Show where he talks about bumblebees – his other passion. Sonia Belsey was Judge's Steward and made sure all the results were recorded. [Details of the results and show awards are on our website.](#)

Congratulations to Tim Higgins who won the Novice Cup – although, as the photo shows, he couldn't quite believe it at first. Archie put a huge amount of time and effort into his show entries and was rewarded with five trophies.



We had strong entries in the photography and craft classes, and also in class 2 – won by Paul Lawrence with his lime flower honey. Sheila won the cake class. We're accustomed to the excellence of the cakes we often enjoy at meetings – though we never take them for granted!



TIMES AND DATES

Please note there are some changes to the dates for the Module 2 Winter study course.

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

1 October	Sat	9.00-1.00pm Work Party at the Association Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
10 October	Mon	Closing date for entries to National Honey Show
12 October	Wed	Mark Ballard, <i>Winter preparation</i>

We had lots of visitors over the two days who chatted and asked lots of questions. The show is a great way to meet the general public. Our visitors also spent money on the stall; sales of honey and hive products totalled £648.

Lastly, thank you to those people who volunteered to set up on Friday afternoon, 'man' the sales table, chat to visitors, and last but not least take the show down on Sunday afternoon. *Sue Chapman*

[Honey Show photos by Sue Chapman]

ALL CHANGE IN 2023

Old beekeepers don't die. They get clubbed to death.

Perhaps all amateur activity associations have difficulty persuading members to give of their time and talents – and always just for love. So it's not surprising that those who do sign up find it difficult to sign down, often waiting in vain for a replacement to take over.

Well, our chair and vice chair have no intention of waiting around for the fate described in the old saying above!

At the next AGM (2.00pm 22 February 2023), both our Chair, John Chapman, and our Vice-Chair, Paul Lawrence, will be stepping down. As Chair, John has found that his job seems to include anything and everything that no-one else is doing. As Vice-Chair, Paul perhaps had less to do. But he has additional roles: he runs the website, is Membership Secretary, and is Manager for the Association in the BBKA and BDI national database, eReturn2. Finally, and most onerous of all, he supervises WHATSTHEBUZZ!

Perhaps it's not too soon to ask if you have something to give the Association, whether by joining the committee, or doing a job within the Association without joining the committee.

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
10 November	Thu	7.00 for 7.30pm Annual Dinner, Bridgewood Manor Hotel
14 November	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 3, Module 2
16 November	Wed	Sonia Belsey, <i>100 years of MBKA</i>
28 November	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 4, Module 2
5 December	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 5, Module 2
14 December	Wed	Christmas quiz
9 January	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 6, Module 2
18 January	Wed	8.00pm David Evans on Zoom: <i>Swarming and Bait hives</i>
23 January	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 7, Module 2
1 February	Wed	John Chapman, <i>Simple showing</i>
6 February	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 8, Module 2
18 February	Sat	2.00-4.00pm AGM
20 February	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 9, Module 2
6 March	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 10, Module 2
15 March	Wed	Tony Edwards, <i>Film Night</i>

MBKA APIARY

Mark Ballard writes with his update of work completed, and planned for the near future, at the Association Apiary.

The extraction room is now almost complete. The small hand wash basin is fully plumbed in with a soap dispenser above.

We need to install either a door or plastic curtaining between the extraction room and the area behind the Farmer's Room where the large water heater stands.

The wooden trestle table (used for stacking supers ready for extraction) needs to be replaced – hopefully by a

stainless steel table as required by Environmental Health regs.

The next work party session is at 9.00-1.00pm on Saturday 1 October (wp). Details were sent in a separate email. 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

COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

Paul Lawrence, our Vice-Chair, gives a summary of the main points talked about at the committee meeting on 27 September 2022.

FINANCE We are ok financially. We noted that the balance is down but we know this is due to expenditure that has been planned for.

CORRESPONDENCE Circulars from BBKA re Honey Day on 21 October, New dropdown menus on the '[Find beekeeping near you](#)' map, and the upcoming webinar with Lynne Ingram on fake honey. All are now on our website and on the eR2 system.

PAVILION APIARY We now have 8 colonies (2 were united last week). Mark's lists of recent work done, and planned work for the near future are listed under the MBKA Apiary column above.

PLOUGHING MATCH Good event although the site was a little spread out. We had nine members on the stall.

FUTURE EVENTS Annual Dinner will be on Thursday 10 November 2022 (it is much cheaper to hold this on a Thursday evening) Time 7.00 for 7.30pm, finishing no later than 10.30pm. Venue: [Bridgewood Manor Hotel](#), Hogarth Suite (capacity 150). Details will be circulated soon

including menu choices which will have a vegan option. The speaker will be [James Smith of Loddington Farm](#), who will speak for no more than 10 minutes, and present our honey show awards and examination certificates.

WINTER MEETINGS All events are on the website.

EDUCATION Next Education Meeting is on 10 October. At present, 10 members have enlisted for the Module 2 Winter Studies.

WEBSITES All up to date. The Apiary Tab in the Members' Area now has a downloadable Word document for use when taking notes at the hives during inspections.

A.O.B: Sonia to explore the cost and response to hiring a minibus for members to visit the National Honey Show.

NEXT MEETING 1/11/2022 at John's 7.30pm. There will be a single agenda item, The Annual Dinner.

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)

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF BEEKEEPERS

Bob Smith writes with news of the CABK events

27 October on the first evening of the National Honey Show at Esher, CABK will be hosting a Social Evening with a finger buffet and wine, following a brief talk from NHS Keynote speaker Prof Grace McCormack. After her short talk she will be in conversation with CABK President Prof Robert Pickard, exploring some of the background to her research and other interests. A relaxed way to end the day. Tickets £20 from the website, £25 on the day at the NHS

10 November Zoom again and one I'm really looking forward to. Breno Freitas will talk to us from Brazil on the wonderful array of stingless bees and solitary bees to be found in the South American tropics.

7 December The return of *Beekeepers' Question Time*. Your chance to pose those tricky questions to our expert panel of Lynfa Davies NDB, Prof Robert Pickard, and practical enthusiast Roger Patterson

Fuller details of all events are available [from the CABK website](#) and registration for all events is now open.

OXALIC ACID

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

You might know that oxalic acid is a good cleaner of wood. It is sold to clean wooden hive boxes, and also boat decks.

Recently, I heard about someone cleaning the deck of his yacht who had a bucket of oxalic acid solution accidentally tipped all over him. Cue much hilarity – but everyone raced to hose the man down and wash the pernicious chemical off him.

People know that oxalic acid has to be handled with extreme care. [The label for oxalic acid use by beekeepers in the US](#) has a skull and crossbones. It is unambiguous in its precautionary statements: *Fatal if swallowed. Corrosive. Causes irreversible eye damage. Causes skin burns. May be fatal if absorbed through the skin. May be fatal if inhaled. Do not get on skin, in eyes, or on clothing. Do not breathe vapor or spray mist. Wear protective clothing, eyewear, and respiratory protection.*

DANGER POISON



And yet... isn't oxalic acid in our food; rhubarb, for instance? (Perhaps this is where the idea of using rhubarb leaves as a varroa treatment comes from.) Isn't it in honey? And many other foods?

And now the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the US has granted an exemption (for oxalic acid used as a varroacide) from the requirement of a tolerance when honey supers are on the hive. On page 4 of the label, it states: 'Oxalic acid can be used when honey supers are on the hive'.

I mention this, not to suggest that we can pretend we are in a US legislative environment, but as a possible explanation for why the hazards of using oxalic acid are not always taken seriously.

We have to keep in mind the old saying: *the dose makes the poison*. A rhubarb leaf contains roughly 200 times less oxalic acid than the powder we use to treat mites.

WHEN TO USE

Oxalic acid, like almost all miticides, has no effect on mites in capped brood cells. As the majority of the mites in a colony are in brood, this is a serious limitation on the effect of a treatment. Miticides using amitraz or thymol are

placed in the hive for several weeks. The chemical is released throughout that period and the mites in brood are caught when they emerge.

But oxalic acid, in whatever form it is administered, is not slow-release (though attempts are being made to develop something on these lines). This means that repeat doses are required if there is brood in a hive. A minimum of three doses at five-day intervals is recommended. Particularly if applying in late summer, more applications might be needed. Continue repeating treatments till no more mites fall in the day after treatment.

One more complication. We don't really know when a mite re-enters a brood cell. The usual estimate is 5-15 days. But if a mite re-enters after four days, then you've missed that mite with repeat treatments of OA every five days.

DOSAGE

In the US, the dose is 1g. (In California, oxalic acid is not permitted at all on bee hives.) In Canada, the dose is 2g, and in the UK, it is 2.3g.

There is a wealth of research on the effects of different dosages of oxalic acid. [This study](#) found that over a period of 35 days, treating colonies with 1g of vapourised OA was ineffective. 'OA did not reduce *V. destructor* numbers; at best, it held them static.' However, other studies have found that higher doses are effective in reducing mite numbers. Francis Ratnieks at the University of Sussex *Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects* (LASI) has published results of tests on oxalic acid, finding that a dose of 2.5g is the optimum amount for any size hive. Others have found that significantly higher doses (up to 8g) do not harm the bees. It is fortunate that the UK legal dose is in line with LASI findings.

Various scoops and mini spoons are sometimes provided for dispensing oxalic acid. It is worth checking the weight of OA actually dispensed by these measures. For instance, the weight of oxalic acid in the Gas-Vap measure is 1.5g – though it might be higher depending on the pressure used when loading the measure. So, the UK dose with the Gas-Vap measure is just under two spoonfuls.

RESISTANCE

To prevent mites developing resistance to OA, or any miticide, rotate treatments.

However, it can be difficult to persuade people to do this in the case of oxalic acid. That is because no one really understands how oxalic acid works, and it has been used as a miticide for nearly 50 years without varroa resistance so far. [Sutty on Beekeeping Forum](#) writes about how resistance is built up with any organisms over time. Read his post in full if you want to understand this. He ends: *Of course some agents may work in a way in which resistance cannot occur because the changes required in the target organism would have to be too massive... eg EFB bacteria haven't managed to evolve to survive being burnt! We can only hope that oxalic acid is in the latter group, until the mechanisms of action are properly understood we won't know for sure.*

Indeed we don't. Randy Oliver, no less, fears that the mites will find a way in time. Fortunately, most of us probably rotate treatments anyway, for the simple reason that it is convenient to do so. We might use thymol or amitraz in late summer, and oxalic acid in late autumn. Formic is available if we have a serious outbreak during the season.

Finally, apply a treatment to the whole apiary, as per the label in miticides. The mites are mobile!

FURTHER INFORMATION

[Laurence Edwards and David Evans: A conversation and Q&A on Zoom.](#)

Bob Binnie, University of Georgia, (YouTube three-part) discussion on varroa treatments

- [Part 1](#)
- [Part 2](#)
- [Part 3](#)

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 a topic about which, even by beekeeping standards, there is a wide range of opinion.

AUTUMN AND WINTER FEEDING

WHEN TO FEED

If you are taking a honey crop, this cannot be tainted with sugar given as feed. So the usual time to start feeding is after the honey supers have been removed. But how long after? Immediately? At the end of September?

Not surprisingly, it depends. If there is still a nectar flow, then you don't need to feed straightaway. Provided the bulk feeding for winter is completed before the temperatures drop (mid to late October?), then it is possible to delay feeding. If the bees are active, it is safe to continue feeding.

What is the state of the hive? If the brood box has scant stores, it may be necessary to start feeding as soon as supers are removed.

If properly done, there should be no need to feed in December and January.

WHAT TO FEED

Homemade syrup (2:1. That's twice as much sugar as water by weight). This is the most popular (and cheapest) option. It is possible to buy [Inverted syrup](#) which is more concentrated, will not go mouldy, and does not require the bees to 'invert'. (This option is expensive so should be ordered in bulk.)

[Baker's fondant](#) can be used any time, though it is the only option in winter. That is because bees cannot invert the sugar and reduce the water content of the nectar to below 20% in low temperatures. If they do store it like that, it will ferment and possibly cause dysentery later.

It is a common but erroneous idea that bees will not store fondant. Ask anyone with experience of using fondant.

HOW MUCH TO FEED

It is estimated that bees need 15-20kg of stores in the frames to get through winter. Estimate what's in the

combs, then bulk feed. [Get to know the weight of your hive](#) (boxes, floors, roof, frames etc) and deduct that from the weight you read from luggage scales. (Weigh each side of the hive and add the two figures together.)

Autumn feeding is bulk feeding. Assuming your hive is light, then give 5L of syrup, (or a whole or half 12.5kg block of fondant) and repeat once or twice till the hive is heavy. It is important that the bees store this feed, rather than consume it. Feeding large quantities will encourage them to do this. There is no benefit in using the small packs of fondant supplied by beekeeping retailers.

YOUR ATTITUDE

You can of course leave honey on the hive for the bees. Your decision on this will depend on whether you keep bees as a stockholder or for interest and affection? Despite what many people would like to claim, there is still no evidence that bees *overwinter* better on honey rather than granulated sugar.

If leaving a full super, it should remain over the brood box (where the bees store it anyway), but with no queen excluder in place! If the super is partially full and uncapped, place it *below* the brood box. The bees will bring it up to store.

TOO MUCH HONEY IN THE BROOD BOX?

There is no clear opinion on how to avoid this, or even if it is a real concern. Some beekeepers are concerned that too much feed in early autumn will fill the brood box at a time when the queen needs to lay the winter bees. They are also concerned that there will be insufficient space in spring for the growing colony.

Although this is something to think about, it is less of a priority if the other option is starvation. One should be as aware as possible of what is happening in the brood nest without disturbing the bees in the closed season. Regular hefting or weighing will make starvation much less likely.



There was a huge (and early?) flowering of ivy in North Norfolk in early September. The noise of bees was almost at swarm decibels!

HOLES IN THE CROWNBOARD

Lots of crownboards (AKA cover boards) have two oval holes to accommodate Porter bee escapes. Although these devices have been discredited (they frequently jam with propolis or get clogged with bees that don't make it through), and most beekeepers use clearers with no moving parts such as rhombus clearers, changes are slow to take effect in beekeeping. So the oval holes remain.

To be fair, a crownboard with a hole is sometimes used for feeding with a contact feeder – though the feeder can be placed directly on the top bars. The important thing is that the hole is never left open. Think of leaving a window open upstairs in your house. The heat that you pay for so dearly will rise and flow out and your heating system will fight to make up the loss.

In a bee hive, a continual loss of heat will force the bees to work harder and eat more to sustain the temperature of the nest. Wax production in particular requires warm conditions.

Insulating the top of the hive with 50-100mm Celotex / Kingspan either fitted inside the roof or placed on top of the crownboard is a benefit to the colony all year round, enabling the bees to control warmth and humidity with less energy expended. Think of the insulation provided in a natural nest in a cavity in a tree. There is no ventilation above, and the thick walls provide far more insulation than even a poly hive.

Google Derek Mitchell's work for his research on insulation and ventilation of honey bee nests. See also [this article](#) *Winter management* by William Hesbach in *Bee Culture*.

WHAT'S IN THE POST?

A look at a recent web post or blog.

Do you wish that you didn't have to treat your bees with miticides? Do you avoid doing so in the hope that some will develop resistance? Do you despair that by endlessly treating with miticides, all of us are preventing the bees from ever evolving to a future where they can survive alongside mites, like their *Apis cerana* cousins?

If so, read just [the last reply to a comment in David Evans's \(The Apiarist\) most recent post](#). It's worth reading the whole post but you could simply scroll to the bottom and see his reply to *Dave from Virginia*. (There may be more comments since I wrote this.)

Here's a taster of what he writes:

Without mite management most colonies will die. We know this. It's reinforced every year when beekeepers either fail to treat or [treat irrationally](#). Sure, there are some resistant (or tolerant) bees already but – as noted above – many are in relatively isolated areas, or closed environments. Would these traits dominate outside a closed environment? Would beekeepers accept the losses? Bee farming would certainly be even more economically precarious (and it already is). What might the consequences be in terms of pollination, to say nothing of local honey production?

What are the benefits? Are the bees healthier? More productive? Better at pollinating? Calmer?

84% OF BEEKEEPERS WHO REPLIED TO SURVEY HAD NO WINTER LOSSES

So read [a headline on the BBKA website on Sunday 24 July 2022](#). WHATSTHEBUZZ missed this at the time. But it surfaced in comments made by [David Evans last week on his website](#).

In reply to a comment about treatment-free beekeeping, David wrote:

I would like to see some sort of independent verification of colony losses by treatment-free beekeepers averaged over several years (one is not enough) and – while they're at it – perhaps they could also try and validate the losses quoted by the national associations every winter. [Those from 2021/22 were very, very strange](#). With 84% of beekeepers reporting no losses at all, then about 16-17% represent the overall losses. Something doesn't quite add up. Did those reporting losses lose everything? Did those who reported losses run very large numbers of hives, whereas the 84% were all 1-2 hive owners?

I paused at that pointing in reading David's post. A memory of completing the BBKA annual survey come back to me. The cut-off date for losses to be included in the survey this year was 1 April.

At that point I had no winter losses for the simple reason that I hadn't opened any hives! I wrote to Diane Drinkwater about this, pointing out that I did have some winter losses, but I didn't know about them on 1 April. As I got no reply, I filled in the survey as specified. It was obviously going to produce nonsense and it wasn't my job to try to fix that.

David again:

Those surveys could be very useful if they were properly controlled and validated. It is important information. If the figures could be trusted, individual (large) associations or counties could compare their performance and see if more emphasis on Varroa management was needed in training. For smaller associations the 'noise' from small numbers of managed colonies and/or one or two very good or very poor beekeepers might make this impossible.

But instead we get a single headline figure and some additional – though perhaps even less trustworthy – data on the cause of the losses. In the 2021/22 results wasps were reported to cause as many losses as DWV (which also equalled Varroa). Weather-related problems caused more losses than the combined impact of DWV and mites. Almost 40% of reported losses were due to queen problems.

NATIONAL HONEY SHOW

Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, Surrey, KT10 9AJ, 27-29 October 2022

There are hundreds of classes which you can choose from if you want to enter the [National Honey Show](#). But it's not just a Honey Show. There's a lecture programme with a range of international speakers, a varied programme of workshops on a huge range of beekeeping-related activities, 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, or the morning of the first day of the show.

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.

Really?

Drill down further and it gets even messier ... 33% of beekeepers didn't treat in midwinter (that I can believe). Of those that did, as many used Apivar as OA (19% vs. 18%) and 13% used Apiguard. In midwinter?

Wales reported only 1% of colonies were lost.

As you remember, here in Scotland we're asked to report our winter losses in June ... winter is defined as the period between the start of July and the end of May 😊

Thank you David. I'll ignore that dig about the Scottish climate – except as useful for defining the period of the survey!

I don't think I'm misrepresenting David by suggesting he regards the data as worthless. One wonders if they were aware at an early stage that the survey was flawed with the 1 April cut-off date. And then they cherry-picked among the survey results to paper over glaring errors and contradictions. One such is the varroa treatment picture: if 13% of beekeepers are using Apiguard in winter (!) and 37% use an OA-containing compound, what do the remaining 50% who treat in the winter use?

As David says, such surveys could be important and useful if properly done. Let's hope that lessons learned this year will result in a better produced survey and questionnaire next year.



The Show is not far away now and Bill, the Chief Steward, is looking for volunteers to steward throughout the Show. He has provided [a brief description of the duties](#) and a [reply form for potential volunteers](#). Volunteers receive a free day pass.



It takes time and patience to prepare exhibits for showing. The process can't be rushed.

MUSIC AND BEES

A first performance of a new work at the BBC Proms in the Albert Hall in London is a significant occasion. And when that work, is called 'Hive', it behoves WHATSTHEBUZZ to investigate.

Is it possible for the sound of music to conjure up an image of something other than music: something you can see, or touch, or feel, or even hear? Can music unmistakably represent something other than what it is? Apart from songs, which have words of course, is there any piece of music that reliably suggests something non-musical, so that listeners can name that something without prompting?

I don't think so. But I don't deny many people enjoy finding visual or emotional references in music they hear. And when an audience is told that a piece of music is about something visual – for instance,



*Sally Beamish, composer.
Photo Ashley Coombes*

La Mer by Debussy – they will often find the imagery enhances their enjoyment of the sound.

One of the BBC Proms at the Albert Hall this year featured a new work by the composer Sally Beamish. It is called Hive, and is for harp and orchestra. You can still hear it on [BBC Sounds](#).

Sometimes, music is easier to hear if you have something to watch! So I think the audience at this Prom would have been thrilled by the sight of Catrin Finch playing the harp in this piece. She is an extraordinarily versatile musician, able to play in a wide range of styles. She describes how in all her years learning to play harp, she worked so hard to avoid making

any buzzing sounds – a harpist’s bugbear – but in this piece she was given free reign to buzz as much as she liked!

The piece paints sound pictures of the hive – the life of a colony – over the four seasons. Beginning in winter with the bees clustering for warmth, then foraging for nectar and communicating with each other in spring. In summer the bees swarm. New queens emerges and there is a fight to establish the one queen, and then follows the race to mate. In autumn the hive settles again in preparation for another winter.

Sally Beamish is from England. But until a few years ago, she was a familiar figure to many of us in the west of Scotland where she lived. During the concert interval, she talked about the process of creating ‘Hive’, of learning about the life of a honey bee colony from the bee scientist

bees are sentient, and that so much is contained in their nervous system. ‘Their little brains are masterpieces in elegant miniaturisation,’ he said. ‘We have an obligation to ensure they survive, that we conserve the environment that has shaped their unique minds.’

Aside from his scientific work, Lars is also a musician – singer and guitarist in the post-punk band *Killer Bee Queens*. He wrote the words (and the music along with the other two members of the band) for the song *Dying Killer Bee Queen*. Have a listen!

There are many instrumental pieces about bees, most famously Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumble Bee*. Mendelssohn’s *Bees’ Wedding* is a fantastic piano piece – but what is a bees’ wedding!? In fact, the title was probably added by someone else. The composer called it ‘Spinning Song’, which neatly makes the point I started with!

In the concert interval, we heard a harpsichord piece which possibly represents the sound of bees buzzing better than any piece with the word *bee* in the title. It is *Continuum* by Ligeti. I heard it in a concert around 50 years ago and the impression is still vivid. [You can listen and watch here.](#)



Lars Chittka, bee scientist and singer / guitarist in the band Killer Bee Queens. Photo from website

Lars Chittka and other beekeepers, and of exploring with the harpist, Catrin Finch, new sounds which could be found in unconventional ways of playing the harp.

Lars Chittka also took part in this interval conversation. Like many (all?) beekeepers, he relished the opportunity to talk about the amazing lives of the bees. His research has been published in a book, *The Mind of a Bee*. He believes that



Joyce Chen, harpsichord, performing Continuum by Ligeti
Screenshot of video

Archie McLellan

WORDS

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME

I was given a little tin of Greek honey recently. It came from a market in Greece. And is like Greek honey you buy in a plastic bottle in the supermarket, except so much more!

More dark, more dense, more viscous, and most of all, more strong in flavour. Dark honeys, like Polish forest honey, or Greek honey are sometimes recommended for use in cooking, the idea being, I guess, that the flavour is



too strong for most people to eat straight from the jar. While I was happily working my way through this treacherous stuff in porridge and on toast, I got to studying the packaging. The red letters on a greenish honey comb pattern were just the challenge my red-green colour blindness needed. I did study classical Greek at school but capital letters rarely featured so we didn't learn these.

And these muted red words that wouldn't stay still on the background of hexagons were all Greek capital letters. Does

MOMENT OF JOY

The readers of WHATSTHEBUZZ were invited to write something about something in their beekeeping season that had given them JOY. Thanks to Bob Bruno for telling us his story – even though on this particular occasion we have to wait some time to find out what he had to be so happy about!

Dealing with bees there are many moments of joy, many of which are manifest even before we open the hive. The beauty of a sunrise or sunset, and even a changing sky and the changing seasons. The sound of birdsong. The brief but beautiful display of blossom in an orchard. And the tranquil hum of a hive in action before we disturb the occupants.

The joy continues upon entering the bees world; the neatness of a well-organised colony and queen, all going about their tasks. The queen's precision in her laying pattern, close to the stores of honey and pollen.

Joy that all seems in order, joy that the bees are going about their business, and allowing you to enter their world, some curious but not aggressive.

modern Greek owe a debt to its past and write everything in block capitals to make up on lost usage?

But much of the knowledge held by the entire population of the planet is just a quick web search away – or in this case, a Google Translate away. The three bee images on the sides of the tin are recognisably a queen, a worker, and a drone. Some of the vowel sounds have changed from classical Greek to the phonetic transliterations given here. But then, aren't all accents really about the vowels? And have we not seen recently in the Queen's early broadcasts, a remarkable demonstration of how vowels can change over the decades even in the life and voice of one person.

In the event that you ever find yourself at breakfast puzzling over the text on a jar of Greek honey, here's the help you need:

- queen, βασίλισσα, vasilissa
- worker, εργάτρια, ergátria
- drone, κηφήνας, kifíνας

Archie McLellan

Then as we all know there is the other side, the not-so-friendly colonies. I call them the ingrates. I know they have to protect their colony just like the early Greeks protecting their city states – and with equal ferocity! I try to be kind, I talk to them, I don't over smoke, I try to cause the least amount of disturbance to them, but to no avail. The attack starts, the volume of protest increases from that initial gentle hum to a sound many decibels higher. The incessant Kamikaze-type attacks by squadrons of bees ping-ponging with force off my veil is a clear indication that they are not happy. The question becomes whether to continue with the task in hand or to pack up and beat a hasty retreat.

This was my experience with a really bolshy colony that was not only my nemesis, but also, in a strange way, a source of joy! The joy being... survival... but I shall explain.

I was carrying out an inspection; it was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, the birds were singing... oh what joy. I entered the apiary past some overgrown brambles and began my work. The pattern started, the rising sound of protest, the ping-ponging of bees. I was concentrating hard to get the task completed as soon as possible. The hive was in

some disarray, top and supers closed close by. I got the idea that a bee was on the wrong side of my veil... my side of the veil... then there seemed to be more bees... then... sheer panic ... they had found a way in. I had no idea what had happened; all I knew was that I did not want their attention. I knew I had to keep my mouth half shut, difficult when I all I wanted to do was scream in terror.

I left the apiary asap, not sure of the best action to take, ran down the orchard with my eyes half shut, and colliding with a few trees. I ripped off my veil, waving my arms about my head like a windmill.

The bees had seen me off. I cannot say I got away scot-free (no, this is not a reference to our Archie McLellan). I had a few stings to the face, but nothing too serious. Most hurt was my pride when I discovered that the cause of the

invasion was a large tear in my veil, which was possibly caused by catching it on the brambles. I can think of no other reason other unless those pesky bees had sharp implements or scissors!!!!

I can smile now but it was an experience that I would not like to undergo again.

Of course I had to pick myself up, dust myself down, find another suit, and go back and reinstate the hive. They were still not being very kind to me, but they did remain on the right side of me – literally .

I got home, had a cup of tea and a lay-down and realised what a lucky escape I had.

Oh what deep, deep Joy.

Bob Bruno

RECOMMENDED READING

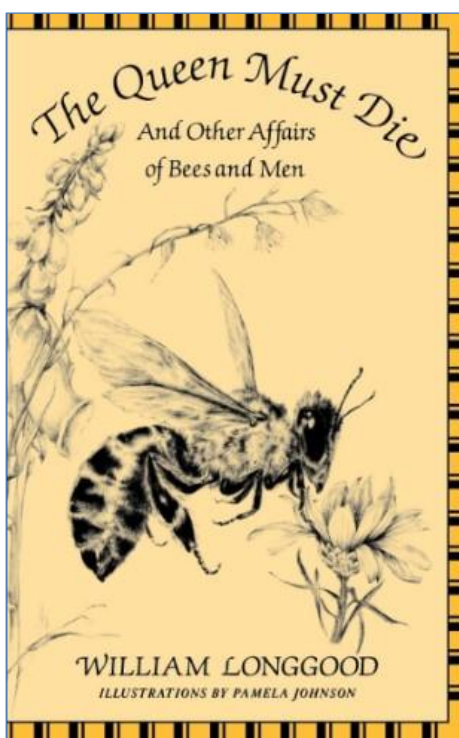
THE QUEEN MUST DIE: AND OTHER AFFAIRS OF BEES AND MEN, BY WILLIAM LONGGOOD

William Longgood (1917-2000) was an American journalist. His books include *Poisons in your food* (1960) about antibiotics and chemical additives being inserted into foods and *The Darkening Land* (1972) which documented how humans have polluted the land, sea, and air.

The Queen must die (1985) tells the story of the life of a honey bee colony in comprehensive detail without ever resorting to technical or jargon vocabulary. This edition is a reprint of the first edition, so it is unfortunate that some errors haven't been corrected, but, overall, the impression is that no matter how inclusive the language, the writer never needs to simplify or 'dumb down' the complexity of the *A.mellifera* story.

William Longgood is alert from the outset to the charge of anthropomorphism. So be it, he says, but in fact his reflections on the reasons why bees are what they are and do

what they do are never fantastical. Indeed, it is this thought process which explains the subtitle. In the 86 little chapters of this book, men (or humans) are never the subject *per se*. Rather we are drawn to ask what we can discover about our own behaviour from observing the bees.



The title comes from the chapter on supersedure. In the eusocial honey bee colony, *the queen must die* when she is old and of no more use to the colony. Like Lars Chittka (above, the writer of the recently released book, *The Mind of a Bee*), Longgood finds nature, as manifest in a honey bee colony, completely wonderful, but it is also neutral, and the bee colony is uncompromising when it comes to the ensuring a future for the species.

You may be interested to know that this book is the number one choice of Rusty Burlew, writer of the Honey Bee Suite blog.

SHOPPING

OXALIC ACID BY SUBLIMATION ('VAPING')

IMPORTANT Oxalic acid can be administered in other ways, principally by 'trickling'. There is no need to go down the sublimation (vaporisation) route if you have concerns about safety, or convenience, or cost.

REQUIRED EQUIPMENT FOR ADMINISTERING OXALIC ACID BY VAPORISATION

- protective clothing
- a device to heat and oxalic acid into a hive

PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

GLOVES: [Polyco Hot Glove 9010 250°C Contact Heat Resistant Gloves](#)



FILTRATION: [3M Filter 6059 ABEK1 for Gas and Vapour with 3M 5935 P3 R Particulate Filter P2R with 3M Filter Retainer 501 with SmartProduct Spark Earplugs](#)



FACE MASK [3M Reusable Half Face Mask, Large, 6300, EN safety certified, XA007702674](#)

EYE PROTECTION
[3m Goggles](#)



EQUIPMENT

[Gas-Vap](#)



I have used the Gas-Vap extensively for three seasons. I prefer sublimation over trickling because (I hope) it gives a quicker and fuller spread of oxalic acid among the bees (and mites) than with trickling. But that might not be true. The original butane torch supplied with my Gas-Vap is now not fit for purpose and I have ordered the more expensive option – the ReKrow 2121.

Electric options include the Sublimox and Varrox. These require a power source such as a car battery or a generator.

One should do one's own research to ensure that protective masks and filters are adequate for vaporising oxalic acid. Further reliable information on using oxalic acid

is on the [Apiarist \(David Evans\) website](#) and Black Mountain Honey YouTube channel (Laurence Edwards). Here are links to some of Laurence's videos: [On protective masks](#) | [On the gas-Vap](#) | [On the Sublimox](#)

BBKA

LYNNE INGRAM WEBINAR

One of the propositions that was passed at the 2022 Annual Delegates Meeting concerned fake honey. BBKA has asked Lynne Ingram to speak to members at a live webinar talk taking place **Wednesday 19 October at 7.30pm**. The event is free but you do need to pre-book a place via [this link on the website](#). Her talk is: THE TRUTH ABOUT HONEY?

Lynne explores the extent of honey fraud worldwide and how it impacts on the livelihoods of beekeepers.

Lynne Ingram NDB has kept bees for over 30 years, and runs 15 – 20 colonies in Somerset. She is a Master Beekeeper, and has recently gained the National Diploma in Beekeeping.

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.

From Archie McLellan The BBKA is of course the EBKA – except in name. The four nations of the UK – Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales – all have national Beekeeping Associations. But there is an anomaly. The English national BKA is goes by the name BBKA – the British Beekeeping Association.

No doubt there are events in history which might explain, though scarcely justify, this state of affairs. No one would dispute that in our time, the BBKA functions as the English National BKA.

The UK is unusual, particularly compared to Germany, say, in that the nation states which make it up are not roughly equal in size and population. England is around ten to thirty times larger than each of the other three UK nations. This

ANNOUNCING NATIONAL HONEY DAY, FRIDAY 21 OCTOBER 2022

Anne Rowberry, BBKA President writes: *The British Beekeeping Association are celebrating the first National Honey Day on 21 October. We would like to invite you to share in this day when we will be encouraging everyone to buy a jar of local honey, produced by bees here in the UK.*

Not only do we want to ensure people are aware of all the benefits honey provides but we are seeking to celebrate the pleasure of eating honey.

[Read Anne's message in full here](#), where she also gives details of the plan to hold another government petition about honey fraud and honey labelling.

might explain why people all over the world refer to the UK as England. In the past, when travelling abroad, when people asked me where I was from, I would happily answer, Scotland. 'Ah, Scotland, in England,' they would often reply. Now, in search of a simple life, I describe my home country as UK, Britain.

I'd be the last to criticise anyone's knowledge of global geography. When I was at school, the options were Greek or Geography, and the choice was made for us. So I've never caught up, and my knowledge of world geography not much better than it was in primary school. Even so, when *English* people refer to England as Britain, or English as British, that's just embarrassing.

That's what is happening with the name British Beekeepers Association. I think if anyone cares to think about it, they will find it embarrassing.

Organisations change their names all the time. Mostly there isn't a problem, and people quickly get used to the change. It doesn't always work. The name Consignia comes to mind. But they were trying to change the name of the Royal Mail, a venerable and hugely important national organisation. The BBKA is not quite in the same league.

A change of name from the British BKA (BBKA) to the English BKA (EBKA) would remove a misnomer, and help focus awareness on the true role of the national Association.

Okay, that's the end of my spiel. Let me ask you: Should MBKA propose this for the Annual Delegates Meeting of the BBKA? I'd like to know what you think!

From Bob Bruno

MY REMOVED SUPERS DEBACLE / DEBATE

As we all know once honey extraction has been completed, there is still a lot of work to do with the supers and frames and their storage.

The volume of work will depend on how many supers we have got to deal with.

If for example we are talking 15 supers, as was the case that I have had this year, then we have got 15 boxes and 150 sticky frames to contend with.

In the past I have stacked 3-4 supers leaving access at the bottom of the stack, positioned these stacks in quiet areas in the orchard and allowed the bees to clean at their leisure. This has also been a free feed for wasps and other insects. However I have since learned that maybe that this is not a good idea as it encourages robbing, so I've had to consider an alternative.

One option is to store the sticky (I don't like the term dirty!) frames and supers in readiness for the Spring.

So this year after treating the extracted sticky frames with anti-wax moth solution, I then put the supers into plastic bags and stacked them in a shed. At the time of doing so there were a few bees around, in fact more than a few! But I thought that they would soon get fed up with trying to get access to what I thought were quite well sealed plastic

bags. How wrong I was! I think we all know what tenacious little b's that they are. They have to be for the wonderful work that they do and the resulting crop that they produce. Once they got the scent, they sent their messengers back to their pals, and then they were on their way...

That is exactly what happened and the next morning when I went back to the shed, it was full of thousands of bees. The shed is close to a habitation so I had to move the supers and decided to stack them in one of the apiaries not too far away. This proved to be quite a task. One of the problems was that there were a lot of bees in the plastic bags. First I had to remove the bags and then carefully make stacks of supers on a firm and secure base ensuring that there were no gaps between the supers where the bees could gain entry. This was not quite as easy as it sounds, but eventually with the aid of good old 'duck tape' three stacks were assembled. Still an awful lot of bees around, but fortunately they seemed more interested in getting to the dregs of honey rather than attacking me, for which I was extremely grateful.

I returned in the evening. The shed was empty of bees and the apiary was relatively quiet. So tranquil compared to the mayhem earlier in the day.

Having given the matter some thought since that interesting experience, in the future I think what I might do when removing supers for extraction is to number the super boxes and the individual frames with the hive number. Once frames have been extracted, and replaced in correct supers, I'll return them to their original hives for the bees to deal with. It will be a little bonus for all the hard work that the colony had done.

I suspect that this is what a number of colleges already do, but hopefully I have got to a solution.... eventually!

Bob Bruno

BEE INSPECTORS

Regional Bee Inspector

Daniel Etheridge

daniel.etheridge@apha.gov.uk | M: 07979 119376

Seasonal Bee Inspector

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.

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.



John Chapman Chair
john.chapman@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Paul Lawrence Vice-Chair, Website Manager, Membership Secretary, and eR2 Manager
paul.lawrence@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



Sheila Stunell Secretary
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Archie McLellan Treasurer
archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



Tony Edwards Education Organiser
tony.ed@me.com

Ian Halls Committee member
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



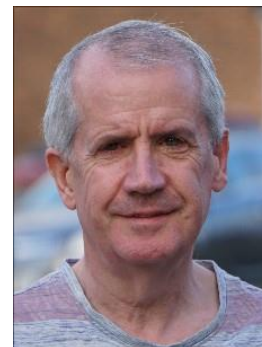
Mark Ballard Apiary Manager
apiary@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Robert Frost Committee member
robert.frost@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



Sonia Belsey Exams Organiser, Swarm phone, Social media
sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Nigel Rawlins Committee member
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



NON-COMMITTEE ROLES

Apiary Co-Ordinator | Elaine Laight | elaine.laight@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

PHOTO CREDITS

Photos by Archie McLellan, except where indicated. Product images are from suppliers' websites.