

WHATSTHEBUZZ



‘Too late. They’re gone.’ It could only refer to swarms!

Wally Shaw has a novel suggestion to help you and the colony get going again.

Paul Newman on paddling at the World Championships in Portugal, with an unexpected triumph, and how it nearly didn’t happen at all.

BBKA or EBKA? The result of the vote among our members, and why there will be no Proposition at the ADM of the BBKA.

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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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: Honey bees are late risers, but others have put in a full day’s work by sunrise.

Hello to November, to dark mornings and evenings, and to you all

In this mild October, it's pleasant to see the bees out and about still. For the next five months or so, it's unlikely we'll be opening hives, and for much of that time there will be precious little sight of any bees. Nor sound! I'm sure it's not a good idea to knock the side of the hive just to hear the bees stir so that you can go away reassured that they're alive!

This column usually gives a little survey for the month ahead looking at 1) the life of the beekeeper, 2) the life of the colony, and 3) the life of the surrounding plants. With reduced activity in all three areas, expect some padding for the next few months!

For November and the months ahead, there are some plain and boring, but necessary, jobs that you should see to. Weigh or heft hives regularly. If you've fed your colonies as needed, this is probably not a concern till early spring. At the apiary, check that all hives are strapped to stands, so that if they are blown over, they'll stay bound together. The bees will be unharmed. Entrances should be no more than 10mm to keep mice out. That's the diameter of the holes in a mouseguard, so if you are using a small entrance which is a slot, perhaps 8 or 9mm would be safer. If there are green woodpeckers in the area (there almost certainly are), use chicken wire, black plastic, or hessian to deter them. Cut the grass and chop away branches. It's much easier to do that now than in the growing season. Clean and repair all equipment which does not contain bees.

Indoors, review your notes (maybe), and make plans for next year. If you have a lot of honey, you might want to consider a Christmas market stall. [There's some hints and suggestions on that here](#). Do you plan to build any equipment? Floors with under-floor entrances are easy, and becoming quite popular.

In theory, the bees will be in cluster. In practice, we'll need to wait for cold weather for that to happen. The queen's laying rate is reduced, but if you want a broodless period for treating with oxalic acid, starting looking at varroa board debris in the next few weeks. By early January, the queen may well be in full egg-laying swing! Stores will be relatively untouched for some time yet, but when early spring brood arrives, the stores will be consumed at a noticeable and increasing rate.

There are still lots of flowers everywhere just now but I don't see bees on them. Are they still working the ivy?

Yesterday, I and other members of MBKA went to the National Honey Show. As always at events like this, bilocation, is a problem. You make your choices about which talk or workshop to attend, and wander around the Honey Show and the Trade Show in between times.

And perhaps meet up with people in the Coffee House or restaurant. I was fortunate to meet up with a few people that I knew on a Forum, but had never met in person. The microscopy workshop in the afternoon was just the leg-up I needed to get started. Now it's about getting down to practice.

In the evening, the Central Association of Beekeepers held a talk by Grace MacCormick on Honey bee genetics (technical!) followed by an improvised exchange between the President of the CABK, Robert Pickard, and the speaker. Two brilliant communicators at the top of their game. Stunning! Then we had a buffet and social time with each other and the speakers. A splendid occasion.

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FROM OUR CHAIR

John Chapman, our Chair, talks about association and beekeeping issues that come to mind.

John Chapman I'm looking forward to the National Honey Show next week.

WHATSTHEBUZZ Yes, me too. I hope we meet up with some of our members there. This issue will be going out on Friday 28 October – the middle day of the Show. I see on the lecture schedule that Jeff Pettis, the President of Apimondia is giving talks on all three days. I guess if you're going to fly someone over from the US, you want to get value for money!

JC Indeed. People do seem to have a high regard for the National Honey Show and are more than happy to travel to be there. I'm hoping our Irish visitors will be back this year. We've missed them over the past few years. Not just because of the pandemic, but Brexit too, causing difficulties bringing honey over to show. For some strange reason, they call it The London Show.

WTB Why? Where did that come from?

JC I've got no idea and neither do they. They are a very enthusiastic group.

WTB Just to keep you up to date, I approached two of our neighbouring associations to ask if they would second my proposition about a name change for the BBKA. They both declined. But we got 409 votes for, 9 against and one abstention from our members.

JC That's 50 responses! That must be the highest response we've ever had by email!

WTB I didn't ask for reasons why people voted as they did, but you said you rather liked the British connection. Could you explain what you mean by that?

JC I have a hope that sometime in the future there will be an umbrella organisation for the four national BKAs in the UK. That organisation would be the BBKA, and there would also be a separate English BKA. At the moment, none of the UK national BKAs (BBKA, SBA, WBKA, and the two Northern Ireland national BKAs) are allowed to be members of Apimondia because they are not separate geographical nations.

WTB Hmm. I think the individual nations in the UK might have something to say about that!

JC The only organisation here that is a member of Apimondia is [COLOSS](#), and it is international. They are focussed on global bee health and do surveys of colony losses and much research on bees.

WTB Back to the BBKA. I believe it was founded in 1874 and was probably the only national BKA at the time. Even if it did have aspirations to be a UK wide organisation, that didn't happen so it makes sense now that it should call itself by the name that reflects its area of work: England.

JC It was very ad hoc in the early days. BKAs in any part of the UK might choose to feed stuff into the BBKA. It wasn't till later that boundaries were drawn more clearly, but it's a confusing picture. You can lose the will to live trying to sort it out.

WTB Well I certainly haven't lost the will to live. As my first effort at correcting this BBKA name issue hasn't come to anything, I'm now going to move on my Plan B – which (obviously) I think is a more appropriate name than Plan A!

JC You'll need to be serious about it, and keep the idea in people's minds throughout the year with articles etc. A country like Germany has many separate states like the UK, but the fact that one of our nations is so much larger than all the others put together can cause problems.

WTB I can understand non-UK people equating England with Britain or UK. But I find it surprising that some English people seem to do the same!

JC A long time ago I worked in Papua New Guinea, all white people were called 'Europeans'. I worked there with my limited English agricultural training on VSO. I was a farm manager. When I returned, I worked in a school in Finchley which had some beehives – and nobody to look after them. That's how I got started in beekeeping.

WTB Are your bees prepped for winter?

JC Yes, more or less. Hopefully everybody's got enough stores in their hives to see the bees through till spring. And



I hope also that we get some winter temperatures! Even if we treated for varroa in August or September, it's a good idea to do an oxalic acid treatment when the hive is broodless, or nearly so. Reading the debris on the varroa board can give us an idea of the state of brooding in the colony. And we need to keep checking the weight of the hive and if necessary give fondant as emergency feed.

WTB There are various association activities running now.

JC Yes, the Module 2 course has started. Mark gave an excellent talk on Winter preparations, and Sonia will be talking about the MBKA story – our first hundred years – in the next talk. But before that is



Nafis's daughter wrote: Her love for bees and honey became well known at the hospice. She gifted them honey and advised them, as Terry used to remind mum, that the Quran states that honey is a healing for you.

the Annual Dinner on 10 November. I'm looking forward to that!

JC You wrote about this last month, but I'd like once again to remind everyone that I'm stepping down as Chair at the next AGM in February. I hope people are thinking about that and the next steps for the Association.

JC Finally, It is with great sadness that we learnt from her daughter that Nafis Hasan died on 17 October at Wisdom Hospice. She was one of Terry Clare's beekeeping students. We wish to pass on our condolences to her family and remember her as a kind and friendly person with a great love for the environment.

MBKA APIARY

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

We are nearly there!

Since the last update, we have almost completed the internal painting ((ceilings, walls and woodwork).

REMAINING JOBS

- New door and frame to rear room (room behind Farmer's Room containing the large hot water cylinder) has been installed. Both door and frame need painting.
- The original damaged alarm system has been removed and a new control panel has been fitted. We are still waiting for it to be commissioned.
- A 9-frame electric honey extractor has been donated and is on site.
- We are looking for a stainless-steel table to go in the Extraction Room next to the sink unit. It will be for stacking supers that are ready for extraction.

- Once this is installed, we will contact Local Authority Environmental Health to get a food grade certificate.

There are still two major works to be carried out: 1) Reroofing the Pavilion, and 2) laying hardcore on the track behind the bungalows.

APIARY

We currently have seven colonies. Unfortunately we lost a queen in one of the poly nucs so it was united with a poly nuc – hive no. 3.

ROUTINE WORK

During Autumn we will clean and scorch brood boxes, supers, crown boards, floors and queen excluders. We would like volunteers to help on Saturday mornings.

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. Apiary Manager

MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

NATIONAL HONEY SHOW

Today is Day 2 of the National Honey Show. There's a full day tomorrow and the show finishes at around 4pm. Some of our members submitted award-winning entries. Full results below.

	CLASS NO. AND DESCRIPTION	AWARD
Sue Chapman	37 Two Matching Square Sections	Very highly commended
Sonia Belsey	82 Design for Centenary Bunting. Three different designs to fit triangular bunting	Second
	83 Design a Flag for the Centenary. The finished flag size will be 600x1600mm	First
	84 Design Logo for the Centenary Medal. The medal size will be 40mm diameter	Third
MBKA	87 Newsletter. Three latest editions of an association newsletter	Very highly commended
Archie McLellan	103 A Short Article. Not more than 1000 words, describing an aspect of honeybee life that would be of interest to the general public	First
John Chapman	61 Mead, sweet. One bottle	Second
	206 One Frame of Honey, any size, suitable for extracting (Kent County classes)	Second
	209 Dry, one Bottle	First
	210 Sweet, one Bottle	Second
	331 Two Jars Liquid Honey (National Trust class)	Third

WINTER TALKS

12 October, Mark Ballard, Winter preparations.

Mark's talk was comprehensive! To give you an idea, here is a list of some of the topics that got an airing:

- the declining population of the colony through the autumn and winter months
- broodless periods, and the usefulness of identifying these for effective varroa treatment with oxalic acid
- reading the debris on the varroa board, not just for mite counts, but for an indication of the brood rearing activity of the colony
- mice: how they get in, how to keep them out, the debris they leave, and the consequences of living with an animal that does not have a bladder
- monitoring for varroa in winter
- condensation and ventilation (the audience shared a range of opinion on this!)
- insulation and ventilation (ditto!)
- entrance blocks: so-called winter and summer apertures, and whether to insert them with the opening at the top or bottom (strong opinion in favour of both options)
- mouseguards; and memories of a ridiculous and exhaustive discussion at a past winter study course which concluded that mice cannot get through an opening smaller than 10mm – or was it 8mm?
- straps, stands, and badgers
- chicken wire, polythene, hessian – and green woodpeckers
- cleaning stored equipment
- preserving drawn comb and beating wax moth
- assessing hives in winter for stores by weighing or 'hefting'
- feeding pollen or pollen substitute in February to support brood
- water forage in winter
- March: crisis time, when stores are most likely to be insufficient for the expanding colony
- losing colonies in winter, through starvation or viral disease transmitted by varroa
- profitable ways of filling one's time in winter: thinking, studying, planning, reflecting on past errors, all while doing mindless jobs like making frames, floors, roofs, hives, stands etc.

See what I mean! We had a great evening, with, as always at BKA meetings, tea and cake at the interval (thank you , Sheila!), and a lively discussion afterwards.

The next meeting is on **Wednesday 16 November at 8.00pm when Sonia Belsey will tell the story of 100 years of MBKA.**

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

27-29 October	Thu-Sat	National Honey Show, Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT
31 October	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 2, Module 2
10 November	Thu	19:00 for 19:30 Annual Dinner, Bridgewood Manor Hotel
14 November	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 3, Module 2
16 November	Wed	20:00-22:00 Sonia Belsey, <i>100 years of MBKA</i>
28 November	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 4, Module 2
12 December	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 5, Module 2
14 December	Wed	20:00-22:00 Christmas quiz
9 January	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 6, Module 2
18 January	Wed	20:00 David Evans on Zoom: <i>Swarming and Bait hives</i>
23 January	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 7, Module 2
1 February	Wed	20:00-22:00 John Chapman, <i>Simple showing</i>
6 February	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 8, Module 2
18 February	Sat	14:00-16:00 AGM
20 February	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 9, Module 2
6 March	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 10, Module 2
15 March	Wed	20:00-22:00 Tony Edwards, <i>Film Night</i>

THE DUNNING-KRUGER EFFECT

The Dunning-Kruger effect occurs when a person's lack of knowledge and skills in a certain area cause them to overestimate their own competence.

Rory Stewart, who once stood in a Tory leadership election, tweeted a link to the Encyclopaedia Britannica's article on the Dunning-Kruger Effect just three weeks ago. I wonder if he had someone in mind?!

Even if he did, WHATSTHEBUZZ is a politics-free zone, so we won't be going there.

Instead, we're going to ask if it can be seen in beekeepers at different stages of their careers.

Recently I asked a student of mine who worked in computer sales how much he actually knew about computers himself. 'Enough to be dangerous', he replied. I

liked that. We all know that a little information can be a dangerous thing. The difficulty is in being able to assess the depth of our knowledge and information at any particular time, particularly after a year or two of study.

It can be a shock when starting out in beekeeping to discover how much there is to learn. But after a year of keeping bees, of attending the practical and theoretical parts of the association's Introductory Course, of endless browsing on YouTube, and of questioning your mentor more relentlessly than a four-year old, it's understandable that you think you have learned a lot! It has been a steep learning curve, and sometime in year two, possible with a BBKA Module or two under your belt, you might feel you're getting there and can start to relax a bit.

Time to read the first sentence of this piece again.

The problem is not the body of information to be absorbed, and goodness knows, there's a lot of that. No, the real difficulty is understanding the bees. All this learning has to be applied. And it takes the experience of opening hives many, many times before you feel you're gaining confidence.

Gradually, you become aware that reading the bees now, and being able to predict what they'll be like in the coming one or two weeks, is enormously difficult. The comfort you once felt from the peak of that learning curve in your first

years in beekeeping is becoming less reassuring. You don't feel so confident about giving concise, clear answers. So much seems to depend on this, or that, or the next thing. In fact, the view from this peak is now giving you vertigo, and you can't wait to descend to *terra firma*.

As in most areas in life requiring expertise, the more you learn, the more you discover there is still to know. Many a wise and clever person has said: 'It's very difficult to really know anything.'

The authors of the original Dunning Kruger study write that people with limited knowledge of a subject 'not only reach mistaken conclusions and make regrettable errors, but their incompetence robs them of the ability to realize it'.

In beekeeping, this is a space that probably all of us inhabit at some time or other. It means that one can admit to very limited knowledge, and be quite comfortable doing so.

It's okay not to know the answer, to say you need more information, and to go away and think before making a decision. In our desire to be helpful, we just have to remember that sometimes the picture is bigger than what we can see right now.

You can read the original [Dunning-Kruger paper here](#), and there's a lovely article [here on what D-K Effect looks like in beekeepers](#).

EFFICIENCY – DOES IT MATTER FOR YOU?

Do you need to be efficient and use time economically in your beekeeping? Do you have family demands at weekends and a job during the week, so that you have to manage a lot in very little available time? Do you have more colonies than you intended and now you're finding that other things you'd like to do just don't get a look in?

Unless you have just a couple of hives in your garden, and you and your bees are happy if your inspections are slow meditative affairs, then it's likely that you think a lot about how you could have got through your beekeeping properly and yet finished that little bit earlier.

I recently took the chance to ask a number of very experienced beekeepers, some of whom have managed large numbers of colonies, about practices that shorten the time beekeeping takes, and at the same time make for better beekeeping. Efficiency is not all about saving time.

For instance, shorter inspections are less intrusive, which is a good thing, provided you can find out what you need to know.

The comments I collected can be divided into a number of categories. But there is one message which sits above all others: *keep things in proportion; this is not your livelihood, and family comes first*.

PLANNING AND RECORD KEEPING

- Plan your journeys, and what you need to take with you.
- Make notes of what you need to remember, so that you are prepared for the following inspection.
- Recording rather than writing will probably save time at the hive. Apps on some phones will print out what you've recorded when you get home.

INSPECTIONS

- Focus on the task. Know what the purpose of the inspection is, and stay with that.
- Keep inspections short. Pull out only the middle five frames, or possibly just one or two.
- Double brood boxes allow tipping the upper one to look for swarm cells. Not foolproof!
- Use dummy boards; they are the best way to give yourself some room quickly.
- Make splits from the fastest growing colonies and use for replacing 30-50% of queens annually.
- No inspections after June.
- Spread honey harvesting out; separate spring and summer crops at least.
- Combine jobs: eg in early August, summer honey off and Apivar on; then in mid-late September, Apivar off and feeders on.

SWARM CONTROL

- Have set routines for situations that develop. For instance:
 1. Demaree hives for proactive swarm control (ie before queen cells), when the colony has at least seven frames of brood, plenty of drones, is full of bees, and there is a nectar flow.

2. If you see queen cells, nuc the queen and prevent cast swarms by removing all but one cell a week later.
- Try to keep less swarmy bees and change queens at least every two years
 - A honey bridge (the arc of honey at the top of brood frames) can cause congestion and lead to swarming
 - Add two supers, not one.

KIT

- One hive type only with fully interchangeable kit, and keep spares on site.
- Simplify and keep gadgets to a minimum; eg 8mm entrances don't need mouseguards.
- Insulation glued inside the roof means one less thing to handle.

Is there one thing in that list that would make a real difference for you? For me, it's knowing the purpose of each inspection and keeping focussed. Don't get carried away with watching the bees, and looking through all the frames. It might be great fun for you, but it's certainly not bliss for the bees.

LEARNING BEEKEEPING ON THE WEB

There is a vast store of information about honey bees and beekeeping on the internet. It's not quite like a library, though, and I'm not referring to the fact that it has videos as well as text and images. No, the difference is the lack of publishers behind a lot of material on the internet. By and large, libraries are populated with books which are largely commissioned and created by publishers. A book published by a reputable publisher will have met high standards affecting content, presentation, accuracy, and authority.

All of which is a very roundabout way of saying that the ease with which anyone can present their stuff on the internet means that there is a lot of garbage sitting cheek-by-jowl beside some truly wonderful material. How can you tell the difference if you're not already well-versed in the subject?

To start you off, here's a little survey of what I believe is the best available. I don't promise that you'll enjoy or agree with everything I've selected. I certainly find that some of it is not my style at all. But there is a general feeling that these are good, authoritative sources, and I think you won't go far wrong heeding what they say.

VIDEOS

Some people are watchers, others are readers. If you learn by watching and listening, these YouTube channels cover everything you could want to know about basic practical beekeeping.

[The Norfolk Honey Company](#) Stuart Spinks has produced hundreds of videos on every imaginable beekeeping topic over a number of years. He is orthodox and tells a clear story.

[Black Mountain Honey](#) Lawrence Edwards makes popular beekeeping videos under the heading *No-nonsense Beekeeping*. Like Stuart, he is clear and comprehensive, and, despite a faster delivery, presents his material in a step by step way.

[Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association \(BIBBA\)](#)

The BIBBA website contains videos of talks given on Zoom during the pandemic – and BIBBA probably held more than any other beekeeping organisation – as well as how-to videos, and recordings of the *Live at the hive* sessions. Roger Patterson is the star of the show here.

[University of Guelph Honey Bee Research Centre](#). Finally, a beekeeping education channel which is a sheer delight to watch because the presenter, and apiary manager, Paul Kelly, is such a charming person, and charismatic beekeeper.

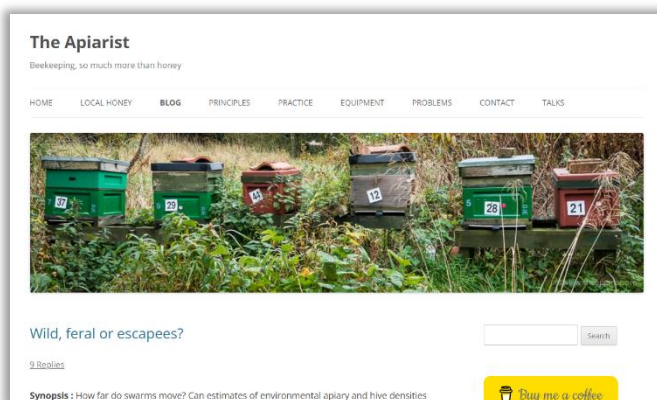
As you'll see in these videos, bees in some parts of the world are much calmer than others. Here in the UK, possibly because of the changeable weather, our bees are typically of a different, and less docile, temperament. So don't try the kind of unprotected beekeeping you see in these videos with your own bees! You have been warned!

In Canada, the bees are the same as ours. Allow for differences in climate and beekeeping style, and you will learn important principles of handling and managing bees from an undisputed master, with an engaging personality and beguiling delivery.

BLOGS

[Honey Bee Suite](#) Rusty Burlew from Washington state in the Pacific northwest corner of the USA is the world's most prolific and celebrated beekeeping blogger. Her writing is vivacious and engaging but most significant is her passion for accuracy. She knows what she's talking about, possibly better than anyone else. Try a couple of posts and judge for yourself. [This one on small hive beetle](#) is as gripping as a thriller, including a truly astonishing relationship between the beetle and the spores of a yeast called *Kodamaea ohmeri*. And another: [The first 11 days of a worker bee's life: egg and larva](#). This is all stuff you can read elsewhere, as you can see from the references. Scientists do the research. It takes gifted writers to present their findings to ordinary beekeepers. Rusty's work is truly a treasure chest.

Another gifted communicator is the virologist David Evans. [His blog, The Apiarist](#), is now established as the go-to source for reliable answers on almost any beekeeping topic. David is a scientist, and a lecturer at St Andrew's University.



He is obviously an enormously gifted teacher, and his writing is humorous, lucid, and thought-provoking. Mostly he deals with topics of interest to 'lay' beekeepers, but sometimes he urges us to buckle up for a journey through some serious science. David always replies to comments and questions and these are sometimes an even greater delight than the original post. His writing on [Rational Varroa Control](#) and [Irrational Varroa Control](#) are now regarded as setting standards by which we can measure our care for the health of our bees.

[Here we bee](#) Although on a much smaller scale, this website by Janet Wilson has a number of interesting posts, and a wonderful, complete introductory beekeeping course from the material Janet has used in real-life teaching. Like Rusty Burlew, she also lives in the Pacific northwest, but on the Canadian side of the border.

Just this week, Janet posted a blog on colony death by varroa with [a video showing the dramatic decline of a large colony after a large infestation of mites](#).

INFORMATION RESOURCES



[ScientificBeekeeping.com](#) – Beekeeping Through the Eyes of a Biologist. This is Randy Oliver's site which is famous the world over. Randy straddles the boundary between beekeeper and scientist. His website contains a vast array

of research and studies, most of them on issues that affect practical beekeeping. Like many very able people, he seems to combine several lives into one.

[Dave Cushman's website](#). It's quite likely you've been on this site already. Regarded by many as the world's most comprehensive and authoritative beekeeping website, it pops up frequently in searches on almost any beekeeping topic. It is now maintained by Roger Paterson who indicates where he has made any changes to the original text.

FORUMS

There are a number of forums, and of course Facebook groups. There is really only one I'd recommend but it is VERY good.

[Beekeeping Forum](#) (BF) Many would say it is the best of its kind in the world. Forums are only as good as their contributors, but BF has a number of very experienced and knowledgeable writers whose generosity in answering questions, and sharing information and experience seems almost boundless. And the best thing is that you can rely on

what you are told. If someone posts anything doubtful or plain wrong, we'll all know about it pretty quickly! You don't get that with YouTube or anything else posted on the internet which doesn't have a lively and authoritative audience giving feedback. Occasionally there can be a bit of sniping or straight talking – but much less than in the past. And you can easily ignore it. It won't be directed at you unless you make a very unfounded claim. Ask a question, and you will receive many useful answers from people who simply want to help and support other beekeepers.

[BEE-L Archives: Informed Discussion of Beekeeping Issues and Bee Biology](#). Apparently this isn't a forum, though it looks like one to me. The names of the contributors tend to be the big names in beekeeping and bee science across the English speaking world. There are much stricter rules about how you communicate here than on BF. I dip in occasionally.

Reading is only vicarious beekeeping. Be sure you have enough time for the real thing!

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF BEEKEEPERS

Bob Smith writes with news of the CABK events

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.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

Cambridgeshire BKA has hosted the longest running series of beekeeping Zoom talks in the UK. Starting just a few months after MBKA (!), the audience size for their series has grown and continues to tune in even though the pandemic is over. I recommend the next talk in particular as it will be given by Paul Kelly, about whom I have written elsewhere in this issue.



9 November, 19:00 Paul Kelly [University of Guelph Honey Bee Research Centre](#) on the *Challenges of managing a research and outreach apiary*.

30 November *Varroa management in honey bee colonies*: A talk by Kirsty Stainton

7 December *My beekeeping year planner*: A talk by Stewart Spinks

11 January *Mutiny and other things that can go wrong*: A talk by Keith Delaplane

PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION WINNERS

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

This prize-winning photograph by Karine Aignerwas is of cactus bees in Texas and their frantic efforts to mate with the queen at the centre of the little cluster.

If they were honey bees, this would be balling, something I watched recently when I released a caged queen in a queenless colony. The bees immediately crowded on to her, trying to kill her by stinging or heat balling. I rescued her and put her back in the cage. Obviously this queen was definitely unwelcome. Obviously the colony wasn't queenless at all. This would definitely not fit the narrative accompanying the prize-winning photo above, which included a little spiel about insect decline caused by human activity!



NIKON SMALL WORLD PHOTOMICROGRAPHY COMPETITION

This picture of a Camponotus (Carpenter) ant by Eugenijus Kavaliauskas is not what it seems. Like bees, ants have two compound eyes and some also have ocelli on top of their heads. In this photo, the base of the antennae look somewhat like eyes, giving the ant a monstrous appearance.



BBKA OR EBKA? BRITISH OR ENGLISH?

You might remember a recent email inviting you to vote YES or NO on whether I should proceed with a Proposition to the BBKA Annual Delegates Meeting. My Proposition was 'That the BBKA change its name to the 'English Beekeepers Association' in line with the other national associations in the UK'.

I'd been puzzling over the word British in BBKA for some time. I decided I'd write John Hendrie, our President, and a central figure in the life and work of the BBKA for many decades. I wrote:

I wondered I might ask you about the name BBKA? It should of course be the EBKA, and nowhere is this more obvious than when people from other UK nations are reminded by the BBKA to go to their own national BKAs for various services and activities.

John replied:

Archie, You are quite correct! The topic does come up from time to time. No sure what is the best course of action, but it could be a proposition at the ADM.

I do not know if John would support a proposition to change the name of the BBKA, but he agrees that the BBKA would be more accurately referred to as the English BKA because its work is focussed on beekeepers in England.

And when you, members of MBKA, returned your YES / NO votes, you seem to agree too! You voted 40 votes in favour, 9 against, and 1 abstention. (This is the largest ever email response by our members on any subject.)

Because I wanted to make it as easy as possible to vote, I did not ask for any reasons why you voted the way you did. However, some of you have written, and spoken to me

subsequently, to explain your thinking. Those in favour largely agreed with the idea of my proposition, that it seemed reasonable, and would be difficult to argue against. The few comments I received against the proposition included comments that I must be joking, that they could find no reason to change anything, that they liked the idea of British in the name, and that it would be financially costly. In conversation, I discovered that for some people I had not been sufficiently clear about my plan and thinking, and that at least one person originally from outside the UK was unclear about the terminology and structure of the four nations that make up the UK.

I am beginning to form an idea of why people might be resistant to any move to change the name of the BBKA. I would still like to hear more about why some of you think this is NOT a good idea. You might feel that it is a pointless exercise but that does not in any way challenge the reasons

I've presented for making the change. Do please spell out why you think I should desist from taking this any further.

It is necessary to include an estimated costing attached to the proposition, and I have given this a lot of thought. However, I would suggest that this is not a reason in itself to object to the Proposition. Reasons for and against the Proposition in itself come first. Later, one might have to concede that the cost is prohibitive, at least in the short term.

It is necessary to find another BKA to support the proposition. I wrote to two of our neighbouring BKAs. Both have decided not to give their support. I did not ask for, or receive, any reasons.

I'm now working on Plan B. (Such an appropriate term in the beekeeping world!)

I'd be very glad to have you join the conversation and hear what you have to say. Archie McLellan

NATIONAL HONEY SHOW ESSAY ENTRY

*This is Archie McLellan's entry for the **Short Article** class at the 2022 National Honey Show. The specification for this class reads: **Not more than 1000 words, describing an aspect of honey bee life that would be of interest to the general public.***

BEES FOREVER: IS A HONEY BEE COLONY REALLY IMMORTAL?

A conversation at a swarm call-out.

SCHOOL CARETAKER Thanks for coming round. I think we have a swarm here. There's an awful lot of bees in a bush just beside the infants' playground.

BEEKEEPER Right, let's go and take a look.

CT There they are, lots of bees at that bush with tiny flowers. I forget its name.

BK Cotoneaster. All bees love it. These are bumble bees. It's not a honey bee swarm. Just bees foraging. But you've no need to worry. These flowers will fade soon, and even if the bees have a nest near here, the colony will die out at the end of the season. The queen will hibernate somewhere warm and safe over winter, and start a new colony next spring. If my granddaughter is typical, then lots of seven-year olds in this playground probably know all about the life cycle of bees, and will probably jump at the chance to tell you what they've learned.

CT So you just deal with honey bees? I take it they don't die at the end of the season, then?

BK No, honey bees don't die off or hibernate. They collect and store food – honey – during the spring and summer, to keep fed and warm in winter.

CT Do lots of insects do that?

BK No, it's rather special. It takes a massive team effort to keep a honey bee colony thriving. They are extremely social insects. The colony comes first, not the individual. They are uncompromising about this.

CT I suppose they have a queen too, like bumble bees?

BK Yes. The queens are the egg layers. The honey bee queen has that one job and she does it magnificently, laying one or even two thousand eggs a day in the warm season. She looks splendid – regal even – with her long abdomen, but she doesn't rule the colony. The workers – the female

bees – are the mind of the colony, and they make all the major decisions.

CT Government by the proletariat!

BK Indeed. Most of the time, life ticks over and the colony hums along nicely. But if something does go wrong, they have to act fast.

CT What might go wrong?

BK Perhaps the queen gets squashed accidentally by a beekeeper, or perhaps she's old and can no longer lay eggs.

CT And the workers can fix that?

BK Yes. There's no royal lineage. The workers can raise a new queen from ordinary worker eggs. In the few days after an egg hatches, they will intensively feed the grub a special diet and then seal it in a specially elongated queen cell. After about eight days, the adult queen bee will emerge. Not only does she look different from the workers, but she has a different biology so that she is able to lay huge numbers of eggs for as long as five years.

CT It's incredible that feeding alone can change a bee completely. Presumably she will have to mate with a male though?

BT Yes, mating can't be skipped, though it only lasts for a few days, soon after emerging from the cell, and never again in her long life. Most of the eggs she lays will be fertilised, and will become females – workers. But she will also lay unfertilised eggs, and they will become males – drones. So drones don't have a father.

CT Odd, because I think you're saying that drones are fathers.

BT Indeed. It's a good quiz question. What creature has a grandfather and no father?

CT So is there a quiet corner of the hive where mating takes place?

BT I think the way this was described to Rose, my granddaughter, was that the queen and a drone would walk together! When she told me this, I got the feeling that Rose

seemed to know that there was more to this than she had been told. But actually, it's nearer the truth than your idea of a secret hideaway in the hive. Mating happens in the air, about 60 feet up. Drones from many colonies near and far congregate in the air and wait for a queen to turn up. That's how biological diversity is guaranteed. Drones are powerful fliers and race to catch the queen. She will mate with a dozen or more during several flights, over a few days. And that's it. She won't mate again, and drones which do succeed in mating die in the process. You know that workers who sting to defend the colony also die. It's a hard life.

CT Yes, and it's hard to make sense of some of these things. So the colony now has a new mated queen. If the workers can do this whenever a new queen is needed, can the colony go on forever? Is it immortal?

BT Theoretically, yes. But any organism might get preyed on or succumb to disease in the end.

CT I think I'm missing something here. Doesn't that mean that colony numbers will gradually diminish 'til there are none left?

BT Well, what was it you said to me when you asked me to come here today?

CT I said I thought I had a swarm of bees in a bush.

BT You know now that what you saw wasn't a swarm. But you've probably seen pictures of a cluster or large ball of bees hanging in a tree.

CT Yes I have. What's going on there?

BT That's a swarm of honey bees bivouacking on its journey. It's a complete colony, with a queen, workers and drones. They've left their old home – like colonisers – to set up a new one. About half of the bees in the old colony have stayed behind. They will raise a queen and life will go on. But the swarm which has left the hive has to find a cavity and set up a new nest. It's a perilous task, but if they succeed, one colony will have become two. It's not immortality, but the ability to reproduce that ensures the future of an organism.

WORDS

BELL AND LING

A honey can legally be called heather honey whether it is from the flowers of bell heather or ling heather. These two plants have different flowering periods and produce very different honeys. So if you have ever been pleasantly surprised – or disappointed – by your heather honey purchase, perhaps you were unaware of the range of honey flavours and textures within the title ‘Heather Honey’.

A huge landscape of purple in the Scottish Highlands, and elsewhere, in late summer and early autumn, is likely to be *Calluna vulgaris*, known as *ling*, or simply heather.



Erica cinerea – bell, or spring, heather

The other widespread heather (or heath plant) in the UK is *Erica cinerea*, known as *bell heather*. These two heathers can grow alongside each other, but *Erica* flowers in mid spring and early summer.

Calluna is differentiated from *Erica* by its corolla and calyx each being in four parts instead of five.

Erica is sometimes referred to as ‘spring heather’ to distinguish it from *Calluna* (‘autumn heather’).



Calluna vulgaris (ling heather) in Scotland

Only honey derived mainly from *Calluna* nectar is thixotropic; it looks gelatinous and does not flow. It is clear and medium dark, with bubbles suspended in it.

It has a higher water content than floral honey, and does crystallise after some months. It can be restored by warming.

However, much honey sold as Heather Honey is not clear, yet has the distinctive aroma and flavour associated with heather honey. Perhaps this is honey from *Erica* – bell heather?

At this point, WHATSTHEBUZZ needs someone to climb aboard and speak authoritatively! An internet search presents a confusing picture. Some suppliers do not mention ling or bell in their honey descriptions. Others do, but add to the confusion with statements like ‘collected in autumn from the flowers of bell heather’.

Do you know something that we should hear on this topic? Do please share! Archie McLellan



Scottish Heather Honey from the Edinburgh Honey Company: somewhere between clear and set?



From Latvia, this ‘Raw Heather Honey’ has a ‘creamy-jelly consistency that sets it apart from other kinds of honey’. Is the honey in this picture in a ‘jelly’ state?



Dorset Bell Heather Honey from the London Honey Company: clear and flowing like a floral honey.

PORTUGUESE VENTURE

During last year and early this year, we tentatively planned a trip to northern Portugal. Tentatively, because Covid restrictions were still in place in the UK and Portugal, and we were not sure which way the virus would go – increase or decrease.

Fortunately things quietened down, we were able to book a ferry from Portsmouth to Santander, and take my car with five occupants to the oldest village in Portugal, complete with a Roman bridge across the river and the pilgrim route north to Santiago de Compostela.

Crossing the Bay of Biscay, even in a large Brittany Ferry, is, for me anyway, a daunting prospect. The sea was mirror calm so that whale hunting through binoculars during the daylight hours was a popular activity. None were seen on the outward journey, but spouts, several, were caught on the return, much to our excitement.

The house we rented was just 12 minutes away from Ponte de Lima, the old village, and in the middle of the countryside. Quinta Miranda, our house, was just a short walk into the very small village. But it had a great butcher, a greengrocer, and a general store which seemed to sell literally everything, from wheelbarrows to wine. It also had a shelf full of local honeys. These were sold, not in small jars, but in 1 litre jars. Just as well we had seven people sharing the house so that the honey we bought did not last long, and we could try different offerings.

From a very dark, pungent, unusual honey, which we found was from bees foraging on chestnut trees, to two types of light floral honeys: lime tree and wildflower. There were other honeys too, but living on honey for two weeks was not an option, however hard we tried. Now Portuguese is not the easiest language to assimilate but we had the advantage of a visit from my cousin, who lives in Setubal, just outside Lisbon. She has lived in Portugal for over 40 years and speaks the language fluently. If she was with us

when we went to buy honey in the market in Ponte de Lima, she would spot a potential rip-off and insist on the right (cheaper) price.



Winners at the World Canoe Marathon Championships: Paul Newman and partner, bedecked in gold, after the awards ceremony.

The price of honey there compared favourably with prices in the UK, so that sampling jars of honey from our travels to bring some home was not a problem, but a real pleasure as the tastes were subtly different. With a car, weight is not the problem that it is in air travel, so tucking wine, Port and honey around the vehicle in enterprising ways worked well.

We had a racing double kayak on the roof rack of our car, and the couple sharing our house also had boats on their car roof. Filling the boats was an idea we considered and then discarded – the boats might be damaged or the load weight for the roof rack might be exceeded. After all, this was the main reason for visiting Portugal – the World Canoe Marathon Championships. We had

fond thoughts of entering, as we had done four years previously – also in Portugal, though in a venue further south.

However, despite the best laid plans, things did not go smoothly. I had to stay off the water from December after skin surgery due to sun damage. Immersion in the Medway – always a possibility – was considered to be an infection risk. And while recovering from the surgery I slipped and fell gracefully down the stairs. I was sober at the time, on my way down to the kitchen to make my wife her morning coffee. (I work hard on my Brownie points!) Endorphins must have kicked in, because after lying at the bottom of the stairs wondering what damage I had done, I crawled back to bed and then realised I could not move. A 999 call followed and an ambulance trip to Medway Hospital. A thorough check revealed broken ribs, which, as you will know, are painful in the extreme, precluding coughing, twisting, sitting, walking, sneezing, scratching, and generally any movement at all. The ambulance crew were

great, and gave me gas and air as a painkiller. The last time I had the gas and air was when my wife was giving birth to twins and I 'borrowed' the mask to try it. All this was not good for getting in a boat to prepare for a trip which was increasingly looking as if it would be a holiday without a paddle in the World Championships.

Combining slow and careful movement, and delegating lifting to whoever was around, I went back to my bees, and also managed to get on the river in a stable boat. With little time to catch up for missed paddling, I and my 84-year old paddling partner went to the river almost every day, getting better, but slowly.

By the time of the event, we could get round ten miles – still two miles short of the course. On the day, we lined up with the other boats, 28 of us on the start pontoon (races are age-grouped), and then we were off. A beautiful venue,

we passed under the Roman bridge a few times, completed the 12 miles (five crews did not finish) and triumphantly crossed the finish line, last.

However, while supporting another UK crew at the prizegiving podium and singing the new lyrics to our national anthem, one of the organisers buttonholed me to ask if we wanted our medals. We were the only 75+ year crew! We accepted bashfully, were escorted to the podium, and enjoyed the ceremony: the medals were carried to the podium on a cushion, and the President of the Portuguese Canoe Federation presented them to us. The Union Flag was raised behind us, though sadly there was no anthem. The commentator, on being told one of us was 84 said that so was his father – and he was in an old people's home.

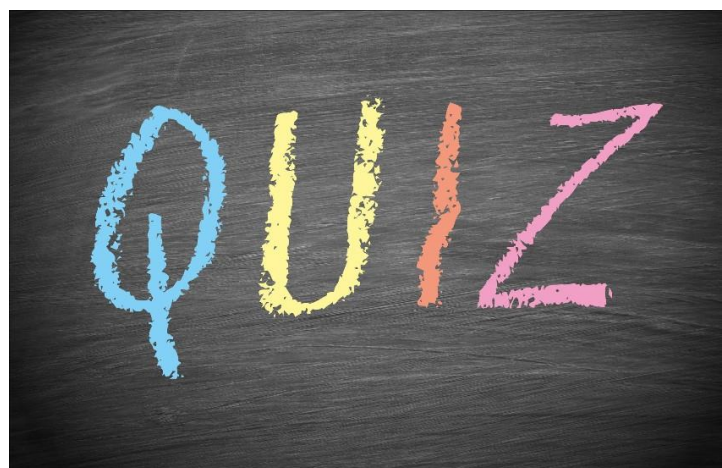
Beekeeping and paddling, a good combination.

Paul Newman

QUIZ

1. Which of these are ways of identifying a honey bee queen:
 - a) Wings extend only half way down abdomen
 - b) Leg colour: yellow to red
 - c) Thorax: not hairy
 - d) Peculiar gait
2. A number of famous beekeepers of the past shared the same profession. What was it?
3. In the anatomy of a honey bee, where can you find something with the outline of a sausage?
4. Apart from reproduction, name one benefit to a colony resulting from swarming.
5. How can you identify brooding activity in the closed season when you are not opening hives?

(Answers on page 19)



TOO LATE. THEY'RE GONE.

Maybe you thought it was safe to wait till day eight or nine before the next inspection. Maybe you missed a queen cell when knocking them back after putting the queen in a nuc. Whatever. We all lose swarms sometimes, and it's painful enough to admit it to yourself, never mind broadcast it across the association.

Wally Shaw has written comprehensively and extensively about swarming, and proactive and reactive swarm control. You might remember the wonderful Zoom talk he gave for us a couple of years ago. The Welsh BKA has published his booklet *There are queen cells in my hive - what should I do?* [You can download it free here.](#)

Step 7 in this booklet is called: *My hive has swarmed and there are emerged and sealed queen cells present*

For the most part when we open up a hive and find that the colony has swarmed, because there so few bees compared to a week ago, we have to shrug off our disappointment, and focus on preventing any cast swarms – or any further cast swarms! In this instance, the presence of emerged queen cells suggests that there is a new queen (probably unmated) in the hive, and therefore we would probably decide to knock down all the remaining queen cells. We can't be sure this is the right thing to do because it may be that a cast has already left, and if we remove all queen cells, the remnant colony will not have the resources to make a new queen. But if we leave just one, and there's already a queen running around, they might throw off a cast, or further cast!

Wally's solution is ... whacky!

You may have found in this situation that lots of virgins start emerging from cells as soon as you open a hive after the colony has swarmed. This is because you're causing the bees on duty outside queen cells to take their eye off the ball for a moment. And these virgin queens are raring to go!

Fortunately this is perfectly fine for what you're about to do. Check all the queen cells carefully with a sharp blade and release ALL those that are mature. The more the merrier, Wally says. The bees may have had other plans which almost certainly included more swarming, but you are now forcing them to make a judgement about the available talent, and settle on one new queen to get mated.

What you now have to do is to take down every single remaining queen cell so that no further queen options exist.

Wally concludes: 'No matter how many queens are released (and we have released up to 18!) it does not seem to upset the colony and none has ever swarmed after following this procedure (yet!)'.

SHOPPING

The Jero hive tool, made in Portugal, is highly recommended. Okay, so are lots of things. However, it's not available in this country, post Brexit. Already, like something forbidden, I feel it's becoming more desirable!

The name rings a bell for me. Jero. Of course! It's the name of my son's partner's father. He is Spanish. Jero is short for Jeronimo. And Spain is in the EU! I fire off a WhatsApp to Cristhina, my son's partner. Yes, of course her parents will order one and bring it over the next time they visit.

Finally, the whole (!) family arrives in London for Cristhina's 30th birthday. Sadly there is only one Jero in the party, and he's not a hive tool. At the last minute, it seemed like a bad idea to take a sharp metal blade in hand luggage. And so my Jero arrives a couple of weeks later in the post.

Is it the long wait and anticipation? Or is it really that much



better than other hive tools? The first time I use it is to clean up some boxes that I'm going to sell. And, boy, that right angle scraper is stunningly good. I know because I've been using others for the same job. After cleaning a number of boxes, it's as sharp and unmarked as the day I got it.

It's not even expensive. About 7 euros. On the [Amazon page](#), where it's unavailable, we read:

'Jero Is An Actual Manufacturer And One Of The Oldest Beekeeping Tool Producers. Quality Construction Designed To Last.' (Their capitals!)

I'm very pleased with my Jero hive tool. Now I really must replace my smoker which, like much used black brood cells, is now constituted more from stuff that has been deposited, than the original material. How to choose between [Dadant](#) or [Rauchboy](#)? Number 1 criterion: It has to fit in my [ammo box](#)!

FROM THE BBKA

In its mission to represent and act on the propositions of the Annual Delegates Meeting in January this year, the BBKA has raised a second petition to Parliament relating to fake and adulterated honey.

Stephen Barnes, Chair BBKA, writes, *We want consumers to start looking at the labels when buying honey – does it clearly state the country of origin? If it seems cheap compared to the other honeys on the shelf, ask themselves why? Although supermarkets say every jar of honey is “100% pure” and can be traced back to the beekeeper, there is no requirement to identify the countries of origin of honey blended from more than one country.*

For the Government to debate an issue in Parliament, a petition must gather 100,000 signatures. The BBKA’s first petition reached the 15,000 target, and so received a [response from the Government’s Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs \(DEFRA\)](#). It indicated that there would be no change, perhaps hinting at the limitations of what could be enforced by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), given that the present Regulations already require very high standards for honey sold in this country, regardless of its country of origin.

Much supermarket honey is designated as a ‘blend of honey from EU and non-EU countries’.

In other words, anywhere on Planet Earth.

It does seem laughable that this is acceptable as fulfilling the requirement that the label should state the country of origin.

Whether a more accurate labelling (listing the countries of origin of the blends of supermarket honey) would make any difference to the honey itself, or to customers’ choices, is a moot point.

Some beekeepers point out that the markets for local (artisan) honey and for cheap honey are

entirely different. They claim that further regulation of honey might make life more difficult for local beekeepers and suppliers, and not improve their sales.

[If you would like to sign the BBKA Petition, click here.](#)

Finally the BBKA asks ‘*all members to share the petition link with family and friends and on social media to help us reach our goal of 100,000 signatures*’ The BBKA social media platforms are here: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

The screenshot shows a petition page with a green header that reads 'Petitions UK Government and Parliament'. Below the header, the title of the petition is 'Require honey labels to reflect all countries of origin of the honey.' The text of the petition states: 'Currently the country of origin on labels can be replaced, if the honey originates from multiple countries, with “blend of EU/non-EU/EU and non-EU honeys”. We believe this is insufficient to allow consumers to make an informed choice. All countries where the honey originated should be listed.' There is a 'More details' link and a green 'Sign this petition' button. At the bottom, it shows '5,566 signatures' with a progress bar and the text 'Only 94,434 to go.'

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.

ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ

1. All of them
2. Clergyman. Examples include William Mew (1602 – 1669), English Rector; developed one of the first modern hives in 1649. Lorenzo Langstroth (1810 – 1895), Congregational minister; regarded as the father of American beekeeping. Jan Dzierżon (1811 – 1906), Roman Catholic priest; is considered the father of modern apiology and apiculture. Gregor Mendel (1822 – 1884), Augustinian friar; he tried and failed to improve his bees but could not make sense of honey bee genetics – not least because it was not yet known that drones have no father. Karl Kehrle (1898 – 1996), Benedictine monk; developed the famous Buckfast Bee.
3. The large marginal (outer) cell in the forewing – long and curved, with rounded ends: just like a sausage. It's a good way of identifying a honey bee from other bees.
4. Control of varroa resulting from brood breaks in both the swarmed and the remnant colony.
5. The debris on the board under an open mesh floor: darker cappings debris indicate emerging brood.

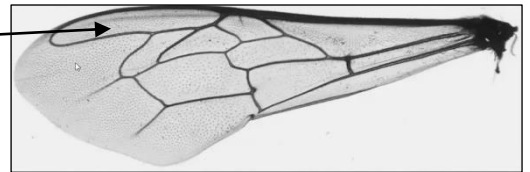


PHOTO CREDITS

Photos for cover and back page by Archie McLellan.



Is north Kent a problem area for wax moth? Listening to some people in other parts of the country say they don't have a problem makes me think that prevention of wax moth damage is difficult in this part of the country. Once the comb is separated from the bees, the moths have free reign. The above picture was taken from a nuc which I thought was empty but did in fact have two old brood frames in it. Free reign indeed!

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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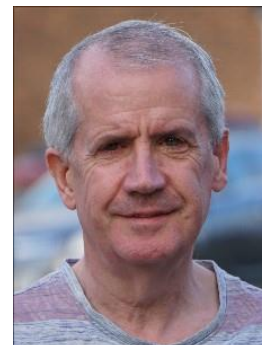
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