

Happy New Year!



Photo A McLellan

Every best wish to all in Medway BKA

for a happy and peaceful year, from

John (Chair), Paul (Vice-Chair), Sheila (Secretary),

Mark (Apiary), Sonia (Exams), Tony (Mentors), Robert, Ian,

Nigel, and Archie (WTB)

WHATSTHEBUZZ



Theft – bee rustling. How widespread is it in the UK?

Richard Andrews – an appreciation.

Honey in cooking. Try it in Scottish fudge (aka tablet)

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers Association.

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

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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>



Picture above: Richard Andrews, who died in December 2022, at his hives on the Hoo Peninsular.

Hello to January, to possibilities and optimism, and to you all

It can be hard, getting out to do bee-related things at this time of year. You might not agree with the stipulation in this month's BeeCraft to check your hives *every week*, but there is nevertheless a 'Seize the day!' element to beekeeping activities at this time of year.

It is so easy to put things off. Longer days, and better weather are the kind of vague excuses we make in a passive sort of way. But by April, the colony population will be exploding, and every inspection will be accompanied with a moment of anticipation: am I going to find queen cells?

Of course, there are jobs to be done at the hives in winter: varroa treatment if you've not yet got round to it; weighing the hives, and, if they don't feel heavy, placing a 2kg block of fondant on the top bars (in an eke) or above a hole in the crownboard; checking for blocked entrances; and moving hives to better positions in the apiary.

Take the chance in January and February to get all your equipment and kit up to scratch. Do you have enough deep boxes for double brood hives or manipulations such as the Demaree swarm prevention – if these things are part of your plan? Do you have enough supers for a season of good nectar flows? Do you have nuc boxes for swarm control splits? Do you have enough frames (and foundation – unless you use BBQ skewers!)?

In other words, do you have a plan?

I remember a talk from Bob Smith some years back on that very subject. The impression and memory of that talk is still fresh, not least because I find it difficult every year to pin myself down. Planning means that you'll do this one thing only, and ignore all sorts of other options, at least for this coming season.

I saw the bees flying in numbers at one hive a few days ago. I lifted the roof and looked through the Perspex crownboard. The bees were dead. The colony had become very small before the last occupants died.

This is my first experience of a colony dying in this way. The flying bees outside were robbing the plentiful remaining stores. The bees in the colony had been unable to reach the stores just a couple of frames away from them. Known as

isolation starvation, this is usually assumed to be as a cause of death, but I think it's a symptom of something else which had caused the colony to weaken and diminish, and because of that, become unable reach their stores.

In the case described above, there's no doubt what caused the colony's demise. I changed all my colonies from 12x14 boxes on to standard Nationals last August. I was able to give them drawn comb, but it was a mighty upheaval for them. For a while it seemed that the balance between bees, brood, and stores was out of kilter. It's sad to lose any colony but this was a favourite and I'd used the brood for queen rearing. I'll be relieved if there are no further colony losses before April.

You may well have found queen wasps as you clear up your shed and boxes for winter storage. I found one on our bedroom curtain! The significance of this is that even at this time of year, one should be alert for Asian hornets. If a queen wasp or Asian hornet queen is found and contained, that means one less nest in spring. Mostly, we kill honey bee pests – such as varroa. One might be more ambivalent about wasp queens.

What will the bees find when they venture out on brighter days? There's hazel everywhere of course, and willow, and later there will be snowdrops and crocuses. These are pollen sources, but you may decide to feed a pollen substitute in February if you want to give brood rearing a boost. Hope you enjoy this issue!

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FROM OUR CHAIR

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

WHATSTHEBUZZ I know you are going to talk about Richard Andrew who died recently, but we'll include that in a piece about Richard, below. Looking ahead, what do you have in mind for the Association in 2023?

John Chapman We're going to need new people! John Hendrie's three-year term as President comes to an end, I'm retiring as Chair, and Paul Lawrence is retiring as Vice-Chair.

WTB Okay. A new President, Chair, and Vice-Chair. Is that all? (Laughs)

JC Actually no! We haven't had a winter or summer events organiser for the last year either. We do really need people to think about how they might do something for the Association. It is thriving, but right now, we need people to take on jobs and roles to keep things going.

WTB You've been clear about your intention to stand down for a while now.

JC I think it's time for a fresh approach, time for someone else to take over and bring in new ideas and ways of doing things.

MBKA APIARY

Mark Ballard writes with his update of life and activity at the Association Apiary.

For the next two and a half months the Pavilion Apiary will be in winter mode. We just have to make sure all colonies have enough stores to get through the winter period, check that hives do not get blown over and make sure the entrances are kept clear.

Oxalic acid treatment was carried out on the 2nd of January. I had to go to the Apiary to check on the alarm. One of the neighbours reported that there was a flashing blue light on the external alarm box, but there was nothing untoward. Whilst there, Simon Woods and I carried out the varroa treatment to all seven colonies.

The winter cluster in all hives had broken up and many bees were flying even though the temperature was low. A couple

WTB Presumably you're hoping that something will happen at the AGM!

JC I really hope that there will be lots of people at the AGM. It marks the end of our centenary year and is something we can be very proud of. The AGM is the launchpad for the future, and I hope we generate some energy and enthusiasm for the year ahead.

WTB It was a shame that The Quiz night didn't happen because of the weather – and possibly the football.

JC Yes, that was a pity. I hope we can have it after the AGM. Perhaps we might persuade people to turn up with this added attraction. The AGM and The Quiz in one afternoon! Unmissable!

WTB Thanks for the chat, John. I'll see you on Zoom at David Evans's talk on swarms and bait hives. This is the third talk he has done for us, and always in the third week of January. I'm looking forward to it!



of the hives may struggle to get through to March. They seem lower in numbers of bees, compared to the other colonies even though they have adequate stores.

The tracks to the Pavilion are too wet to attempt to drive down to the Pavilion these days and we need a long period of dry, windy weather to gain vehicle access. Fortunately, we do not have any heavy articles to transport to the Pavilion other than the blocks of fondant, and these can be taken down one at a time.

Mark Ballard, Apiary Manager

The MBKA Apiary is at Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX. The entrance to the field is 2nd left off Lee Green Road.

RICHARD ANDREWS



John Chapman, our Chair, wrote to the MBKA members on 30 December after hearing of the death of Richard (Dickie) Andrews, one of our long-term members. John has added this memory:

Dickie's beekeeping can be mapped by looking out for his name on the MBKA trophies over a period of around forty years, ending with his final award in 2011. When he retired, he managed up to sixty hives. Later he was very busy with his work as a Councillor. He was a very good local councillor (as well as Mayor – twice - and county councillor) and people had a very high opinion of him and his work. Despite this workload, he always managed to be there for any MBKA events. He was very supportive, and keen to spend time with new beekeepers. He collected swarms well into his seventies – sometimes alarming me with his free tree-climbing antics.

He became President of MBKA about the time I became Chair, eight years ago. His interest, energy, and support for the Association meant a lot to us all.

Laurence Andrews, Richard's grandson, writes:

Richard's love for bees started when he was given his first hive in 1942 by his father. He was aged just 13 and in the middle of wartime Britain. He kept his bees at the bottom of the family garden in Southborough. His passion continued and by 1948 he was keeping many more hives at home. Beekeeping was put on pause briefly while Richard completed national service in the RAF, participating in the Berlin Airlift as an instrument engineer. He returned from service taking up work in Grain on the Hoo Peninsular, for the Medway Oil Storage company (which later became BP). He was quick to resume his hobby, stepping in to collect swarms, even some discovered on the refinery!

Richard grew the number of hives he maintained and, following his retirement in the early 80s, a part-time hobby became something that generated an income. Richard enjoyed talking about the time he was pulled over by the police while driving a van. When the officer insisted on checking what was in the van, Richard took great pleasure in telling him that he was quite welcome to check but it was full of bees! On his way he went!

The Beekeeping community was an incredibly important aspect of Richard's life and he loved to share and educate others on the topic whenever possible.

The funeral service is being held at Medway Crematorium East Chapel on Thursday 19th January at 12.00. MBKA members are welcome to attend. Richard's wish was for no flowers at the service other than family. Charity donations are welcomed to Alzheimer's Research UK.

MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

WINTER EVENTS

18 January Wed 20:00 David Evans on Zoom: Swarming and Bait hives

1 February Wed 20:00-22:00 John Chapman, Simple showing

18 February Sat 14:00-16:00 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by the MBKA quiz, hosted by Paul Lawrence.

15 March Wed 20:00-22:00 Film Night with Tony Edwards

COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

Next meeting: 19:30, 17 January 2023 at 28 Wallace Road.

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)

TIMES AND DATES

PLEASE NOTE THAT SOME EVENTS AFTER THE END OF APRIL ARE NOT YET CONFIRMED.

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

9 January	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 6, Module 2
17 January	Tue	19:00 Committee meeting at 28 Wallace Road
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, followed by the MBKA Annual Quiz
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>
15 April	Sat	09:00-17:00 English Festival, Riverside Park
13 May	Sat	14:00-16:00 Barbeque, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
20 May	Sat	10:00-15:00 Beekeeping Taster Day, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
5 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 1/6
12 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 2/6
19 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 3/6
26 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 4/6
3 July	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 5/6
6 July	Thu	10:00-18:00 Set-up day for Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
7-9 Jul	Fri-Sun	08:30-18:00 Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
		Judging Friday morning Clear-up on Sunday afternoon after close at 17:00
10 Jul	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 6/6
1 September	Fri	14:00-17:00 Set up MBKA Honey Show , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ
2-3 September	Sat-Sun	09:00-18:00 Sat, 09:30-17:00 Sun, MBKA Honey Show , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ
		Judging Saturday morning Take down pack up show at 15:30 Sunday
24 September	Sat	09:00-17:00 Ploughing Match , Ringshill Farm, Wouldham ME1 3TP
26-28 October	Thu-Sat	09:00-18:00 (Sunday 09:00-16:30) National Honey Show , Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

WEST SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION

A one-day Beekeeping Convention with a programme of lectures and seminars.

9:30am-4:30pm, Saturday 25 February 2023 at Lodge Hill Centre, Watersfield, Pulborough, RH20 1LZ

Speakers:

- Professor Francis Ratnieks
- Bob Smith NDB
- Graham Royle NDB

Seminars:

- What the Heck is That? – Graham Royle
- All things Queens – Christine Coulsting
- The Diverse World of Honeybee Communication – Dr Elli Leadbetter
- Pollen, Propolis, Water, the other things bees collect – Bob Smith NDB
- Instructions for building the Honeycomb – Vince Gallo
- Adult Bee Diseases – Christine Coulsting



Refreshments and a simple lunch will be included and there will be many opportunities to meet up with fellow beekeepers from around the county and beyond.

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF BEEKEEPERS

Bob Smith writes with news of the CABK events. Members and non-members welcome to attend. There is no fee.

19 January 2023, 7.30pm Wood Ants – a talk by Jacob Podesta.

We tend to forget that Hymenoptera includes bees, wasps and ANTS. This talk will highlight the similarities and differences between the lives of bees and ants and move on to examine the impact of forestry plantation management upon the establishment of new nests, on the North York Moors.



13 February 2023, 7.30pm The Perilous Life of a Drone – a talk by Alison McAfee. Drone honey bees get little attention from workers, queens or even researchers! Yet they are clearly a vital resource for a healthy colony.

11 March 2023 Spring Meeting 2023, Norton Priory, Runcorn. The CABK Spring Meeting travels around the country – 2020 in Arkendale, North Yorkshire, 2022 in Nottingham and we are delighted to announce that the 2023 event will be held at Norton Priory, near Runcorn, Cheshire.

14 March 2023, 7.30pm CABK Annual General Meeting 2023. The 78th AGM of the Central Association of Beekeepers will be held, on-line, on Tuesday 14th March 2023, starting at 7.30pm. Details of how to attend this online event will be circulated to members during February.

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.

Their huge library of talks is available in their YouTube channel for members. You can become an associate Member for £7.00 – possibly one of the best buys in beekeeping!

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

BIBBA WEBINARS

Bee Improvers and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) have several more webinars available on their website.

BIBBA members can see the webinars live, and non-members can see all webinars, at the BIBBA YouTube channel.

Most of these talks are given by Roger Patterson.

THE BEEKEEPING SHOW

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

From the website: The Beekeeping Show is set to be one of the largest beekeeping and pollinator events in the UK, attracting suppliers and customers worldwide. Central UK location, within minutes of the national motorway and rail networks. Free on-site parking for event attendees.

THEFT – BEE RUSTLING

It's likely you will have heard of one or more instances of theft of bee hives in this part of the country. It's local news and a topic that draws everyone in earshot towards the person with a story to tell. We want to know everything. Was it theft or vandalism? How many hives were taken, what time of year, what time of day, were the culprits caught (or stung), and so on.

Then we go home and have a quick review of our own apiary security.

Beekeeping is a great social leveller. People from all walks of life take up the craft, and some become bee farmers. You find clergymen, scientists, tradesmen, shelf stackers, retired people, criminals... Actually, that last category isn't right. Criminals can be found in any of the previous groups.

The likelihood is that beehives are usually stolen by beekeepers. Vandals, like badgers, can knock over hives.

HANDY HINT

Have you ever tried to drive a car on wet grass?

I remember a Tomorrow's World programme in the sixties. I'm not sure what was being tested but an area of grass was being hosed with water, because, as Raymond Baxter told us, wet grass is like ice to a car.

Perhaps you have an apiary in a field. We have had a lot of rain recently, so if you casually drive on to the grass, you might find that you have to abandon your car till the ground dries out in spring!

MAKING GOOD USE OF YOUR BEESWAX

Wisborough Green BKA are running one-day demonstrations on 'Making good use of your beeswax'. 9.30am - 4.30pm on Saturday 11th, Sunday 12th and Monday 13th February 2023, Hampers Green Centre, Petworth. West Sussex. GU28 9NL

Cost: £15. Booking essential. [More info here.](#)

But it takes professionals – beekeepers – to successfully steal and transport hives.

I take a lot of consolation from the stories of hive theft. If it was commonplace, it wouldn't be news. And we wouldn't be so eager to hear about it.

An article in BeeCraft this month confirms that hive theft is indeed rare in the UK. From 2011-2017, there were 135 recorded thefts in the UK, mostly from just two areas – so possible multiple thefts by the same individuals. From 2011-2020 in Wales, there were 22 recorded thefts and 22 incidents of vandalism. (There's a strange parallelism in that!) Bee theft doesn't happen much. That's why it's news. We should choose our apiary sites with forage, access, and security in mind. But we shouldn't lose sleep waiting for the rustlers.

The trouble is, there's no way of testing this. If you drive on to the grass at all, the slightest upward slope may prevent you from getting off it again. You might not even have noticed that there was any rise on the ground. No amount of protesting that this was a trial, and not for real, will make any difference!

How do you think I know so much about this?!

HONEY AS AN INGREDIENT

Have you ever noticed that a dish is sometimes defined by the smallest ingredient it contains? Think of Butter Chicken, or Vanilla Ice cream.

Have you heard of Honey Fudge? That's the kind of fudge which tries to squeeze itself into a honey show class for foods made with honey.

Fudge is fudge, but recipes vary. The sugar might be granulated, caster, or demerara. It might call for evaporated or condensed milk. And so on.

Tablet is the Scottish version of fudge. Unusually among fudges, the recipe for tablet is more or less fixed, and so is the method. 92.457% of the population of Scotland over the age six can, and do, make tablet. Even though everyone uses the same method and ingredients, some people make much better tablet than others. It appears that I am such a person and so are all my siblings. When I sold my first flat, I had a two-day bridging loan. It wasn't a huge sum of money, but I nipped back to my parents' house in the Highlands for a couple of days and made a few double batches of tablet, three pots on the stove at a time. My father had a little crafts shop, and he sold our tablet, literally, by the ton. That paid for my bridging loan.

The ingredients for tablet are butter and all things sweet: 50g butter, 1kg granulated sugar, 1 tin condensed milk, 400g milk, and 50g golden syrup. Place all the ingredients in a large, thick-bottomed pot. Have a sugar thermometer handy. Over a medium-low heat, bring the mix gradually to the boil, stirring occasionally. This might take about 30 minutes. *Don't* change the heat setting and *do* watch as the mix comes to a rolling boil, light coloured and boiling high at first, gradually condensing to a rich brown mix. Stir a little as the temperature approaches 110°C so the mixture doesn't catch on the bottom of the pot. Remove from the heat when the temperature is between 112-116°C (soft ball). The hotter you allow it to become, the harder the tablet will be. Hence the name – though not quite of the order of Moses and *his* tablets!

As you might expect, I replace golden syrup with honey, and now is the time to drop the honey into the mix. You might also add a teaspoon of vanilla – or, my latest discovery, a teaspoon of hot chilli powder.

We have now reached the most crucial stage. Physicists or chemists will understand better than me what is going on while sugar cools. All you need to know is that you must beat it like hell for a few minutes. It's very tiring work.

Or you can use a hand-held cake mixer.

When the mixture starts to thicken and it feels grainy against the side of the pot – this will take about 3-4 minutes with the electric mixer, a bit more with beating by hand – then pour it into a greased tray (c.240x340mm) and score it lightly about 10 minutes later. I like it with a square of 90% cocoa chocolate. There is only so much sweetness that one can take.



BEES IN THE SNOW

This is a picture taken recently at one of Tim Higgins hives. Tim writes, 'Well known phenomenon with bees, snow and sun...'



Tim is of course referring to the theory that bees are fooled by the brightness of snow. With the expectation of the radiant warmth of the sun, they race out of the hive, only to perish in freezing temperatures.

Some beekeepers are not entirely convinced by this idea. They are unwilling to ascribe such a misreading of a wholly natural phenomenon to insects that have survived and evolved for so many millions of years. So what do such people suggest instead? Bees die all the time, they might say. The white snow simply makes it easier for us to see them.

Take your pick!

FROM THE BBKA

THE SPRING CONVENTION 2023

From the [BBKA website](#): Five good reasons to attend the Spring Convention:

1. Great lecture programme for all beekeepers
2. Practical workshops to learn new skills
3. Amazing bargains to be had at the trade show and maybe try on that new beesuit for size
4. Chat to other beekeepers and enjoy a break in one of the five conveniently located cafes
5. Listen and join in with the debates in Speakers' Corner

There will be limited overnight accommodation at Harper Adams, available for three-night dinner, bed & breakfast only, and likely to sell out quickly. If you plan to stay, there are many other opportunities in the surrounding area.

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 our readers know.

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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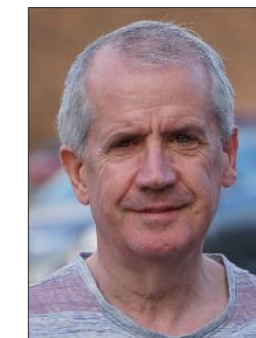
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