

# WHATSTHEBUZZ



John and Sue Chapman on their many decades of shared beekeeping

Jen Ferry continues her series: Beekeeping – one hobby or ten?

Treating varroa is a must – but decisions on how you do this are a personal choice.

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers Association.

Please send your PICTURES, ARTICLES, and IDEAS by 25th of each month.

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

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

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

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

*Picture above: On Raspberry Hill Lane between Lower Halstow and Iwade, 8 February 2023.*



# Hello to March, to burgeoning colonies, and to you all

I wonder if any of you are wondering if this is really me, Archie, the compiler or WTB, writing these words, or if the whole newsletter this month has been produced by the world's most famous AI bot, ChatGPT.

Perhaps you've never heard of it? That's absolutely fine.

Well, this is me, though I've let ChatGPT have its head and produce the quiz for this issue. Interesting results!

I did ask ChatGPT 'What does a beekeeper in England do for his colonies in March?' The recommendations were somewhat bland, though I could imagine a whole army of beekeepers on Beekeeping Forum getting very hot under the collar at the suggestion that you should 'Provide extra ventilation to the hive to prevent condensation from building up inside.' I think posters on BKF care much more about ventilation (there should be none, apart from a small entrance) and insulation (50mm over the crownboard, all year round) than the bees do. In fact for 30 million years, bees have been just making do, and that's why they're still here!

I've been using the same little calendar from Dunblane Beekeepers' Association for these columns since I started WTB. It describes actions for beekeepers, the activity of the bees, and the available forage for each month. For March, it suggests that beekeepers should make a quick check to see if bees are present inside. This is just a peek below the crownboard to see if there are bees between the frames; no opening up the hive for a month or so yet. It may be necessary to feed the bees, and it can be difficult to know if they need sugar or not. The abundant brood in the colony does have its own weight, so hefting or weighing the hive is not necessarily an indication that there is adequate food in the frames. March is often referred to as starvation month, but so too are several other months! Check to see if pollen is being gathered. Robbing bees may disguise a dead colony with their activity at the entrance, but they are unlikely to be bringing pollen in. Remove mouse-guards etc if you have them. Clear entrances and cut branches and grass if you need better access to your hives. It's a good idea to mark and clip queens as soon as inspections start, when there are fewer bees. Monitor for varroa. Perhaps you check debris on the board below the mesh more or less continuously.

Inside the hive, the cluster has broken up, the queen is laying, the bees are foraging for nectar and pollen and using up stores, and the winter bees are dying. For the next four months, the weather can make a colossal difference to the bees' lives and their ability to survive the coming winter.

It was a frosty morning today, and cold weather is here again for a while. There are now so many flowers available for the bees if the weather is warm enough for them to emerge from the hives. Most noticeable are the sprays of flowers drenching the blackthorns (*Prunus spinosa*).

Because you can still see through the trees, it's easy to see the dark trunks which give blackthorn its name. It produces blue-purple berries called sloes – some of which might later become sloe gin. Apparently, the counterpart is whitethorn – aka hawthorn. There are lots of other flowers available: crocus, snowdrop, primrose, willow, and, soon, flowering currants. If you see a bee on a daffodil, then it's a case of beggars and choosers. The flowers I've noticed most are *Viburnum tinus*, great spreads of it at the roadsides, with their small, aromatic flowers that bees are so attracted to. They're just like privet, cotoneaster, ivy and so many more.

## IN THIS ISSUE

From our president and his wife	3
MBKA news and events	5
What else is happening?	7
Words	7
Recommended reading	8
Shopping	9
Handy hint	9
Zapping the Mites	10
From the NHS, BBKA, NBU, NHMS etc	11
Beekeeping – one hobby or ten?	12
Scum: Creamy foam on honey	13
Recording the signs of the seasons	14
The BBKA Honey Labelling Petition	14
Treating Varroa with Heat	15
Welcome to new members!	15
Quiz	16
Answers to the quiz	17
Comments	17
Photo credits	17
The Committee	18

# FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND HIS WIFE

*John Chapman, our new President and his wife Sue, talk to WHATSTHEBUZZ about their beekeeping over several decades.*

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** You've been keeping bees for a lot longer than varroa has been around. How did you manage when varroa arrived?

**Sue Chapman** We learned to treat! In these days, you either treated or you had no bees. It was that simple. Pip Blaxland lost every single bee. It was a tragedy because these were bees he had been selecting for about 50 years.

**John Chapman** I remember going to the Spring Convention in the 90s, and we spent a lot of time reassuring people further north, where varroa had not yet arrived. They thought that would be the end of beekeeping, that there was no future.

**Sue** There were a lot of losses within the association. I remember one afternoon at the old apiary where there were some strong colonies. People brought nuc boxes and left with splits from these colonies to get themselves started again. Bob Smith organised this. We spent a long time equalising these colonies and people took these precious bees back to their apiaries to get going again.

**John** Bayvarol was the treatment then. It worked very well initially, till resistance built up. We made splits to share our bees. Our nucs were used more that year than ever before or since.

**Sue** In general, people who still had bees were generous to those who were without – which is what Medway Beekeepers Association is all about.

**John** When Bayvarol and Apistan became ineffective, people tried other things.

**Sue** There was a phase of drone culling, but that upset the balance of the colonies. We stopped that pretty quickly.

**John** Some of us tried queen trapping, to induce a brood break. It works but is very labour intensive.

**WTB** So what was your next miticide option?



**John** Apiguard. I would go for a walk while Sue put it on the hives. The smell of thymol is not good for me!

**Sue** Now we use MAQs. The strips are quick and suit people who have out apiaries.

**WTB** You managed to buy MAQs last year?

**Sue** Yes, just before it became unavailable. Now there's Formic-Pro. Same basic product, different instructions on the label. You have a similar situation with the different

products using oxalic acid. We use trickled oxalic acid for a winter treatment. Because we're both from a science background, we're not comfortable vaporising oxalic acid. You've got to have the right protective mask etc. You absolutely must treat for varroa – unless you're very lucky and live in an isolated place which has a very small varroa presence.

**WTB** Do you have a preferred kind of hive?

**Sue** We started with Nationals and haven't changed except for some WBCs on National Trust land, where they appreciate that 'beehive' look! We like extended floors (alighting boards) where you can spend a lot of time watching the bees come and go; you learn so much about bee behaviour. You can see if the bees are young by their general condition. Watching orientation flights is good fun, especially those who overshoot and fly over the roof.

**John** We use the small entrance, the so-called winter entrance, all-year round. With a mesh floor, all that ventilation is good in the summer, though we're concerned about draughts in the winter.

**Sue** We usually leave the board in place throughout the winter. It's also good for giving you an idea of what's happening inside the hive, by reading the debris.

**WTB** Swarm control?

**Sue** We make nucs nowadays, taking the queen out of the hive, especially with colonies that we like.

**John** Our other option is vertical splits with a divider board.

**Sue** Having done all this, we then look very hard at every colony in the autumn to see whether it's going to go through the winter, and we end up doing a lot of uniting. Because we both need to stand by each hive, all our hives are on individual stands. This makes it possible to shuffle hives closer together before uniting.

**WTB** Did you make your stands?

**John** They're just cut down pallets, resting on bricks on the ground, and with another brick under each corner of the hive.

**Sue** We dig the ground and use a spirit level to get the hives properly level. And we angle the hives differently to reduce drifting. I'm not sure if that has any effect.

**John** We have one hive that is always stronger, so I guess it milks bees from other hives. Or perhaps it's because it gets more sun.

**WTB** How do you unite colonies in autumn?

**John** Over newspaper, with the stronger colony on the bottom. If both colonies still have queens, we might leave the bees to choose. No queen excluder.

**WTB** Queen rearing?

**Sue** Queen selection. We're pretty ruthless with sorting out colonies that don't measure up. On very rare occasions, we've had to destroy colonies because we have some hives near people. You can't say to people the bees will be better some weeks later. You need a solution now.

Livestock management can involve some hard decisions! You have a duty of care to the animals, but your duty of care also extends to those people in the vicinity of your hives.

**WTB** How many apiary sites do you have?

**John** Four. We can just about get round them in a day. Sometimes we can't get enough equipment in the car and the work spills over to a second day.

**Sue** People talk about record-keeping, but the most important record is The Next Time List.

**John** It's useful to look back over your records. Perhaps you might spot a pattern from one year to the next with a colony that hasn't done well.

**WTB** Honey extraction: a pleasure or a chore?

**Sue** We're lucky we have a long thin kitchen with two full size sinks. The motor on the extractor is nice too. We store honey in bulk in buckets and jar up as needed.

**John** We have a warming cabinet to liquefy the honey. After the jars have been filled, I put them back in the warmer for a while to clarify the honey and extend the time before it crystallises again.

**Sue** Honey jarring is another area where you need decent records for traceability.

**WTB** Do you do other hive products?

**John** We've sold candles for over 20 years. People like them as Christmas presents. I also sell small wax blocks which are used in a variety of crafts and hobbies. I also make wood (furniture) polish. I keep lighter wax for candles and darker for polish.

**WTB** I know you make mead too, but not for sale of course.

**Sue** Comb honey and sections are my department. I put three sections or five 999 sections in one frame. There's a lot of luck involved. You need strong colonies and a good flow. And not all flowers are suitable. OSR is not suitable! But when comb honey works, it's absolutely brilliant.

Cut comb is a much easier option than sections. The second super up usually has at least one cut-comb frame (no wires) in it. Any further down and you're likely to get pollen in the cells. Some bees are determined to put poppy pollen just where you don't want a cell full of black pollen. I really enjoy producing cut comb and even making up section frames. I use a comb cutter for cut comb, and I sharpen it. I get six pieces from each comb if I'm lucky. When depressing the cutter, you have to remember to hold up the plate that you'll later use to push out the honey block from the cutter. I put the honey straight into the containers, then weigh and record the details, and finally give 48-72 hours in the freezer in case there's any wax moth.

**WTB** What helped you most when you took up beekeeping?

**John** There weren't that many books or beekeepers, but we did have some good contacts.

**Sue** Both of us have a background in biology. That means you start with a fair amount of knowledge. The anatomy of bees and the way their systems operate wasn't a closed book to us. That helped more than anything.

**WTB** Thanks Sue, John. Lovely to talk to you.

# MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

## MENTOR / BEE BUDDY ROLE

Would you like to offer your services to accompany a fellow beekeeper at their inspections – or vice versa? Send your name to WHATSTHEBUZZ and I'll post your details here for people to contact you. To start the ball rolling, I am happy to come along to anyone's hive inspections. You have my email already! (Archie)

## WHAT HAPPENED AT THE AGM

Nothing bad! [Draft minutes of the AGM can be read on the website](#). Alternatively, what follows is a flavour of what happened on the day – Saturday 18 February 2023.

Twenty members attended. John Chapman, our Chair at the time, in his opening remarks, remembered one of our long serving beekeeper members, Richard (Dickie) Andrews, who died in December.

Apologies, acceptance of the minutes of last year's AGM, and the Annual Reports were all given and accepted. The Treasurer then proposed that the MBKA component of the annual subscription be increased by £4.00 from 2024. However, members who renewed by the end of January would benefit from a prompt renewal discount of £2.00. This discount would also be given to new members joining during the year. The proposal was carried.

John Hendrie, our President till the AGM, now lives in Scotland. As John Chapman has retired as Chair, a proposal that he be elected President for a three-year term was carried unanimously.

Now we do not have a Chair or Vice-Chair as Paul Lawrence has also retired. The job of Chair will be rotated around the committee till a replacement was in place. Sheila Stunell remains Secretary and Archie McLellan will continue as Treasurer.

Previously 'expenses' were paid to the main officers at the start of each year following the AGM, though these were in fact more of a gratuity than a reimbursement of actual expenses. This practice has been modified in that a reduced sum of £100 will be paid individually to the Treasurer, Secretary, Website manager, and Apiary manager as an annual honorarium. Permitted expenses, back by a signed claim form and receipts, will always be reimbursed. These proposals were carried.

In his closing remarks, John thanked the Treasurer and Secretary and gave particular thanks to Mark Ballard and his team for their achievement in establishing the new Association Apiary.

Then, after the tea and cake (thanks as always, Sheila!) we had the QUIZ, organised by Paul Lawrence. It was a real fun event (just one round on beekeeping), with the four teams all achieving close results. There are some really knowledgeable people out there!

The next committee meeting is on Thursday 16 March at 7:30pm at Bridgewood Manor Hotel.

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 Sonia Belsey.

[sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk](mailto:sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk)

## WINTER EVENTS

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

Sadly, the Film Night has been cancelled. The plan had been to play something from YouTube but that is not feasible.

So, instead, why not make your own bee-themed Film Night? Maybe even have some friends round and make a social occasion out of it. Here's my suggestion for viewing:

*The Monk and the Honey bee*. It's the story of Brother Adam's time at Buckfast Abbey and his quest to breed the perfect honey bee. The Buckfast strain today is descended from queens reared by Brother Adam.

The film is available on YouTube, though it has been divided into five parts.

- [Part 1](#)
- [Part 2](#)
- [Part 3](#)
- [Part 4](#)
- [Part 5](#)

If that doesn't appeal, what about the Peter Fonda film, *Ulee's Gold*, (1997). It's a lovely film in itself, but beekeeper viewers may be interested to know that the Florida Beekeeper's Association awarded Peter Fonda their highest recognition for the authenticity of his beekeeping in the film. (Unfortunately you may not be able to stream this film

at the moment. It's sometimes possible to buy the DVD from eBay.)

### 29 April Sat 14:00-16:00 Annual Lecture at Wainscott Hall

*Lynne Ingram – The truth about honey?*

Lynne has kept bees for over 30 years and runs 15-20 colonies in Somerset. She is a Master beekeeper and holds the National Diploma in Beekeeping. She is a knowledgeable and engaging speaker.

## TIMES AND DATES

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

<b>6 March</b>	<b>Mon</b>	<b>19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 10, Module 2</b>
<b>15 March</b>	Wed	20:00-22:00 Tony Edwards, <i>Film Night</i> <b>CANCELLED</b>
<b>16 March</b>	Thu	19:30, Committee meeting, Bridgewood Manor Hotel
<b>22 March</b>	Wed	19:30, BeeChat at The Pier pub, Upnor
<b>15 April</b>	Sat	09:00-17:00 English Festival, Riverside Park
<b>29 April</b>	Sat	14:00-16:00 Annual Lecture
<b>13 May</b>	Sat	14:00-16:00 Barbeque, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
<b>20 May</b>	Sat	10:00-15:00 Beekeeping Taster Day, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
<b>10-11 June</b>	Sat-Sun	<i>Introduction to Beekeeping Course</i> at the Association Apiary
<b>6 July</b>	Thu	10:00-18:00 <b>Set-up day for <a href="#">Kent County Show</a></b> , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
<b>7-9 Jul</b>	Fri-Sun	08:30-18:00 <a href="#">Kent County Show</a> , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF Judging Friday morning Clear-up on Sunday afternoon after close at 17:00
<b>xx July</b>	Sat	14:00-16:00 Event at the Association Apiary (Theme?)
<b>12 August</b>	Sat	14:00-16:00 Event at the Association Apiary (Theme?)
<b>1 September</b>	Fri	14:00-17:00 <b>Set up MBKA Honey Show</b> , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ
<b>2-3 September</b>	Sat-Sun	09:00-18:00 Sat, 09:30-17:00 Sun, <b>MBKA Honey Show</b> , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ Judging Saturday morning. Take down and pack up show at 15:30 Sunday
<b>9 September</b>	Sat	14:00-16:00 Event at the Association Apiary (Theme?)
<b>16 September</b>	Sat	14:00-16:00 Event at the Association Apiary (Theme?)
<b>24 September</b>	Sat	09:00-17:00 <b>Ploughing Match</b> , Ringshill Farm, Wouldham ME1 3TP
<b>18 October</b>	Wed	20:00-22:00 Event at Wainscott Hall (Theme?)
<b>26-28 October</b>	Thu-Sat	09:00-18:00 (Sunday 09:00-16:30) <b>National Honey Show</b> , Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT

Honey fraud is the third biggest food fraud in the world.

This talk lifts the lid on the how, why and wherefore of honey fraud and adulteration, and the way that it impacts on the livelihoods of beekeepers around the world.

The price is £5 per person and includes tea / coffee and cake afterwards. There will also be a raffle. [See here for booking.](#)

# WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

## CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF BEEKEEPERS

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



**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 14 March 2023, starting at 7.30pm. Details of how to attend this online event have been 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!

Somerset BKA also has a library of speakers' talks available to Associate members.

## BIBBA WEBINARS



Bee Improvers and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) have several 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.

## SOMERSET BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

Like Cambridgeshire, Somerset has a large library of talks given over Zoom. And also like Cambridgeshire, these talks are available for Associate members to view at any time. Membership costs just £8.00

## WORDS

### RAW – AGAIN!

We covered honey descriptions quite thoroughly last month, so this is just a postscript.

@Judy12 posted on [Beekeeping Forum](#): *I'm wondering why 'raw' is such a boo word when used to describe honey. To me it means 'not pasteurised', (please correct me if I'm wrong) which, I believe is what happens to most store-bought 'pure' honeys.*

Into the lions den (Murray McGregor) [replied](#): *I don't know of ANY pasteurised honey. It's a largely false accusation usually made by beekeepers, and those who listen to them, to create an artificial distinction. Raw is deliberately used to*

*imply other people's honey is inferior. I don't know of any cooked honey that can legally be sold as honey, so it is negative marketing against others dressed up as positive marketing of your own. This is a revolving subject which comes around with amazing frequency. Raw is a meaningless term as technically ALL honey is raw.*

Well! Raw and cooked are opposites. Murray says *I don't know of any cooked honey that can legally be sold as honey.* I suppose it might be a good idea to gen up on what is going on with honey, and where the boundaries between legal and illegal honey are, if we're to make the most of Lynne Ingram's visit here for the Annual lecture on 29 April.

# RECOMMENDED READING

## The Year 1000: An Englishman's Year, by Robert Lacey and Danny Danziger

*Paul Newman on why he recommends this book.*

A part from keeping bees, my main interest (which has endured since 1956 – 67 years and counting!) is paddle sport: canoe, kayak, racing, touring, whitewater, and just bumbling around in the sun in good weather.

As a result of stepping into the water of the River Medway while climbing from my boat at the end of an afternoon's paddling, I managed to absorb bacteria into my lower left leg. Apparently there does not need to be a wound or open skin to invite them in. These are clever little (minute, actually) things which are able to ingratiate themselves into the human body fairly easily, despite our flexible waterproof skin covering. The nasty creatures which I ingested caused an affliction I had heard of but knew nothing about – cellulitis. My lower leg began to swell and coloured bright red. If left untreated, it can be deadly. I was admitted to hospital for intravenous antibiotics and observation, just in case.

One totally unexpected week in hospital gave me loads of time for reading, and I soon ran out of books. Fortunately, my wife was able to replenish my supply, and then my doubles paddling partner, Keith, brought me this book: *The Year 1000: An Englishman's Year* by Robert Lacey and Danny Danziger

With its intriguing title, I found it to be a fantastic read; light enough to relieve hospital boredom, and full of fascinating facts. It follows the Julius Work Calendar, which was produced in Canterbury Cathedral around 1020 CE, and in the chapter for the harvest season in September, I came across a snippet of interest on honeybees.

According to their records, sugar (in the form of sugar cane) arrived in Venice from Persia or Egypt for the first time in 996 CE and did not progress further until the end of the Middle Ages. We had to wait until the 17th century for Caribbean sugar. The only other sweetness was provided by the pulp of grapes left over from winemaking. It was a

warmer world. As remarked in the book, Anglo-Saxon skeletal remains are notable for the relative absence of tooth and jaw decay.

Honey was the main, and very precious, source of sweetness in the year 1000. People paid taxes with it and a swarm of bees landing in your thatch was indeed provident. The church devised a prayer to help the faithful take advantage of this opportunity:

*Christ there is a swarm of bees outside, Fly hither my little cattle, and so on, until it became a lengthy prayer.*

Claiming a swarm was done by a pagan charm where some earth was sprinkled under the claimant's foot while saying 'I hold it under foot; I have found it!', a bit like rugby players calling for a *mark*. The next stage was to throw a handful of grit or gravel over the swarm and cry out,

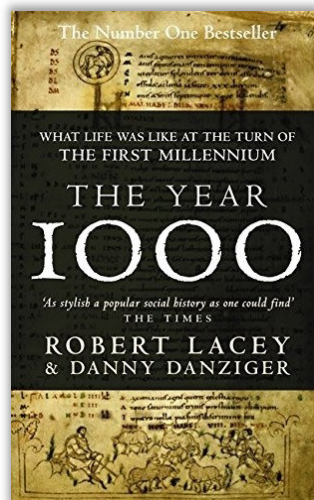
Stay victorious women, sink to earth!

Hive products were also very much valued.

Propolis was used for the treatment of wounds, and of course, beeswax was considered more valuable than honey with its myriad uses, including candles for light. The alternative – smelly candles made from mutton fat – could not compete with the aroma and clean bright light of the candles made from beeswax. The wealthy and the clergy used beeswax candles while the rest had to put up with a guttering, smoky pong.

It appears that the Anglo-Saxons had deciphered some of the features of the colony; they had worked out that the chief bee in every colony was a female, and that swarming was for proliferation.

It was interesting to hear about the different kinds work which were done as the seasons changed, and I enjoyed reading about a world lit only by the fire of candles, tapers, wicks, lanterns and lamps. I did not enjoy having to hand back such a captivating book to its owner. *Paul Newman*





# SHOPPING

## RATCHET STRAPS

Many beekeepers have an aversion to [ratchet straps](#). ‘Too many moving parts’ says David Evans. ‘Too strong; they will crush my nucs’, say others. Or even: ‘I can’t figure out how they work.’

To take these objections in turn: David, the parts are reliable and can be restored for a whole season with a quick spray of WD40. Too strong? You decide how tight you want them. Nobody’s forcing you to tighten them to the limit. And finally, learn how they work the way we learn anything practical these days: watch a YouTube video. [Here’s a good one](#). Have a strap in your hand as you watch it.

Ratchet straps tie your boxes securely to each other and the stand that they are on. If they are knocked over, everything stays together. Cam buckle straps might hold everything together, but you need strength to fasten them securely enough, and they can be prone to slippage. (If you are using them, get into the habit of forcing the cam back into the fabric when you’ve tightened it, and this will reduce the likelihood of the strap slipping through the cam.



## WATERPROOF PAPER



You need your hive records to last for at least a season. Dan Basterfield suggests using [Rite in the Rain waterproof paper](#) for all-weather record-keeping.

## TOMBOW AIRPRESS BALLPOINT PEN

[The Tombow pen](#) can easily cope with writing upside down, or on wet or dusty surfaces.



# HANDY HINT

On days when the bees are flying, you might be delighted to see that all your hives are busy. You might also be reassured that all are reasonably heavy.

Perhaps all is well. But not necessarily. It might be that a colony has died and that the activity around this hive is bees robbing all the stores. And until all the stores are gone, the hive may be surprisingly heavy! There may be plenty debris on the board. But the fragments of cappings might be from cells containing stores, not from emerging

brood. The only way to really know what’s going on is to have a peek under the roof on a relatively warm day, and check that you can see plenty bees between the frames.

**From Adam Leitch:**

- you can drink from a water bottle through a veil!
- use Posca fluorescent-coloured queen marking pens
- always cage the queen when seen; it keeps her safe for the rest of the inspection

# ZAPPING THE MITES

New mite treatments and devices for administering them appear all the time. The *InstantVap* is much talked about these days, but Paul Newman is doing his level best to stick with an inexpensive tool that has been around for a while.

In the February offering of 'What's the Buzz', the delectable, erudite and informative Medway Beekeepers Association newsletter, Archie McLellan wrote about the problems and successes he has had with the *GasVap* device for sublimating oxalic acid.

I too investigated alternative methods of applying oxalic acid to subdue the pesky mites. I used 'dribbling' initially, but only applied it to collected swarms or used it during broodless periods in midwinter. I had tried other chemical treatments but wasn't confident that they were effective or still effective against the mites.

Carrying the heavy equipment involved in some of the sublimation / vaporization equipment was discouraging, so when the *GasVap* device appeared, at a not unreasonable price and a portable weight, I decided to get one. I had the same problems as Archie. When the gas torch supplied with it worked, everything was fine. Refilling it with butane cigarette lighter fuel was a pain, and intermittently it stopped functioning.

I did think about replacing the gas torch with something more substantial, but my searches were half-hearted.

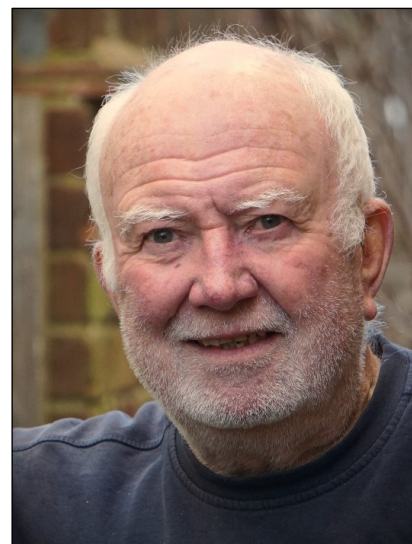
And then, eureka! Archie had found a solution. The torches sold by Screwfix had the same diameter as the socket on the *GasVap* and used the longer-lasting portable screw-in gas cylinder. In classic beekeeper mode, I tried Toolstation for a cheaper version, but, sadly, they do not stock 22mm nozzle torches.

Decision made! I emptied my piggy bank and cycled to Screwfix (cheaper than driving) to buy one. I already have a *Rothenburger* self-igniting (with piezo) blow torch which I use to light my smoker and to sterilise boxes, so I decided to buy the *Rothenburger* torch with the bigger nozzle, as mine works well – at least the original did. I arrived home, out of breath and a bit sweaty... I eagerly opened the box... I found I had to wiggle the *GasVap* device socket to get it to fit (I had

knocked it out of shape while hot)... I attached the butane... I hit the piezo button... and nothing! The piezo did not work. So back to Screwfix I

pedalled for another workout. The shop changed the unit without quibble but could not get a replacement until the following day. I decided I had completed my fitness training for the week and collected it next day by car.

I am pleased to say that all works perfectly now. I took the setup over to my bees for a trial and found that lighting the torch works well. I have made a small modification to the operating procedure. To add the oxalic acid cap, it is necessary to invert the torch, but it won't light when inverted. A slight lean to one side when the device is inserted in the hive, and a thick pair of gloves to add the cap before righting the device, dropping the acid into the vaporizing chamber, and Bob's your uncle. At the moment I still vaporize through entrances but may drill holes in the side or back of the boxes to make things easier; the only concern is to place holes where there is a clear point inside with no frames in the way.



By sheer chance *BeeCraft*, March 2023, has an article by Duncan Simmons extolling the virtues of another device, the *InstantVap*. It looks attractive but is more expensive and needs a battery (also expensive). Another device to drool over. I saw an *Andermatten* battery device at Stoneleigh. It's also attractive, and also expensive.

For now, until there is more information, I will stay with the

*GasVap*. But who knows, I may inherit a legacy from a wealthy relative and splash it on a super-duper sublimator.  
Paul Newman

# FROM THE NHS, BBKA, NBU, NHMS ETC

## A BBKA JOB FOR YOU?

It's called *Friend of the Honey Bee Liaison Officer*. Leigh Sidaway, BBKA General Manager, writes:

One of the main aims of the BBKA Education & Husbandry Committee for 2023 is to encourage schools to become more honey bee friendly and aware of the importance of pollinators. *Friends of the Honey Bee* is a BBKA scheme to reach out to schools.

BBKA is seeking a self-employed FOHB Liaison Officer who will work from home and be the link between the BBKA office and schools. The successful person will be an excellent communicator responsible for reaching out to schools. To encourage and maintain school participation the Liaison Officer will create and distribute termly newsletters.

This role will be on a self-employed contract at £12 / hour. Hours will be flexible but will be mainly during term time and we anticipate no more than 150 hours per annum.

The successful candidate will be a BBKA member, have kept bees for a few years and will be a friendly and accurate communicator. Good administration skills and proficiency with IT will be essential.

For more information and an application form please email [gen.manager@bbka.org.uk](mailto:gen.manager@bbka.org.uk)

Closing date for applications: 10 March 2023. Interviews (zoom) will be held 23 March 2023.

## ROUNDUP - NATIONAL BEE UNIT'S REGIONAL FORUM

As this was a person-to-person meeting, attendance was low, and most people came from the South East. Five speakers from the NBU, FERA Science and the Jersey Government addressed topics such as EFB strains, exotic pests, and Asian hornet.

The NBU carried out 5,350 inspections across the country looking at 27,542 bee colonies from which they discovered 609 cases of EFB and 29 cases of AFB (these were destroyed). The NBU keeps 51 sentinel apiaries and volunteers provide a further 147.

The number of unregistered beekeepers in the UK remains a concern. Apparently, there are no plans in place for DEFRA to tackle this problem.

10-15% of animals and plants in the UK are non-native (exotic). The Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) should be notified when these are found. For beekeepers, the most notorious is *Vespa Velutina*, the Asian (yellow-legged) hornet. Most of the calls that the NNSS receives are turn out to be sightings of the European hornet. Small hive beetle (SHB) is still confined to Italy.

For more, visit [BeeBase](#) – and sign up if you haven't already.

## BBKA WORKSHOPS

There is a wide range of courses and workshops on offer from the BBKA. [Visit the website for more.](#)

## NATIONAL HONEY MONITORING SCHEME - AN UPDATE

The latest [newsletter from the NHMS can be read here.](#)

There are several take home messages in this newsletter. One is that the Scheme needs honey collected directly from freshly capped cells on the comb that represent nectar collected in the last few weeks, rather than extracted honey.

Members of the team published [an article in Nature](#) in 2022 which contains much on insecticides and bee diseases. This paragraph on the foraging preferences of honey bees in England is informative.

Brassica crops (Brassicaceae), in particular oilseed rape, turnip and cabbage, have a close genomic relationship and their separation is unreliable. Considered as an aggregate, the Brassica group were the dominant forage plants across the 527 samples (85.7%), followed closely by the common hedgerow species aggregate *Rubus* spp. (80.2%) as well as *Trifolium repens* which is ubiquitous in improved and other GB grasslands. The non-native flowering shrub/tree *Ligustrum ovalifolium* (Oleaceae), which is widely grown in gardens, was the next most dominant forage plant found in 57.3% of honey samples.

# BEEKEEPING - ONE HOBBY OR TEN?

There are so many ways to be a beekeeper. Over the next few months, Jen Ferry will explore some of the many facets of beekeeping with her own experiences and stories Today, Jen writes about the steps she undertook to ensure that her honey was a good product, and something she would be proud to sell.

After a few years of beekeeping in Kent, I found that the number of hives I was keeping had crept up to fill the space available in my apiary. So then I took on a second apiary – and then a third. I went from having no honey at the end of the season, to having a surplus even after my family and friends had been saturated with jars. I needed to find outlets for my honey. But first, I wanted to be sure that I had a product that was good enough to sell.

Good honey is in high demand and can command a good price, but there is work to be done to ensure that what you are offering is *good* honey, and that your target audience is reached and comes to appreciate your honey as much as you do.



Information on producing a good product can be garnered from many sources. Entering the annual MBKA Honey Show enabled me to compare my honey to that produced by other beekeepers. Preparing the exhibits for the Show is quite daunting for a novice, but the experienced beekeepers who have been showing for years are a rich source of information and are usually more than willing to share their knowledge. The Show schedule itself gives pointers on how to present your wares, and the Association gives useful talks on the topic.

Seeing all the exhibits side by side at the show and getting feedback from the judges is invaluable. I soon learned that my ‘cloudy’ honey would not win prizes, and I became expert in the use of a warming cabinet at just the right temperature to rid my honey of ‘incipient crystals’! I no longer show honey, but I do try to ensure that what I produce is as close as I can get it to show standard.

As well as the local knowledge available, the BBKA module 2, ‘Honey Bee Products and Forage’, covers the theory of producing honey and also discusses the [Honey Regulations 2015](#) which govern the production and sale of honey. Studying the module as a winter activity with others in the Association enabled me to underpin my growing practical skills with knowledge. The lively group discussions and debates helped us all to get to grips with details of the regulations. The reading list, available on the BBKA website, includes many useful titles; I found the National Honey Show .pdf leaflets were the most useful, particularly [The Preparation of Liquid Honey](#).

Although a good general standard of hygiene was sufficient for me when producing small quantities of honey, once I began to sell honey, I felt I needed to be aware of potential hazards and how to avoid them. I wanted to be confident that the honey I was selling was of the highest quality. I also wanted to be able to assure purchasers that knew what I was doing! So one year, I took the *Level 2 Award in Food*



Safety for Manufacturing as a workshop at the BBKA Spring Convention. Similar courses are readily available online, and, although not essential, such an award gives confidence to both buyer and seller.



Unless planning to sell honey, a beekeeper does not need to register with the local council as a Food Producer. At first, the council told me that I did not need to register, but when I insisted that I would be selling to local shops, someone was found who agreed that this should be in place. After several email exchanges when I was required to supply evidence, I was granted registration under the *Food Premises Registration* regulation. No inspection of my house was undertaken but the council have reserved the right to do so.

All I had to do then was to find and print off the *Public & Products Liability Insurance* provided as part of our BBKA membership, and then I was good to go.

Having mastered the skill of producing saleable honey, and having gained the assurances that I was fit to sell it, I then had to explore the best ways to present and market my honey. Next month I will tell you about that. *Jen Ferry*

Photos: Jen Ferry, Gill James

## SCUM: CREAMY FOAM ON HONEY

What's this foam layer over the honey in this bucket?

I liquefied four buckets of honey last week and was surprised to see a layer, around 3-5mm thick, of smooth foamy cream on top of the honey. There was no foul smell, no hint of yeast aroma, no signs of fermentation. Water content was 17%.

This was the only bucket of the four that looked like this, and it had not come from my own hives. I don't say this defensively! It's just that I think this was not random, and there must be an explanation, possibly related to what the bees foraged on. And it was particular to that one bucket of honey.

Beekeeping Forum has discussed this at length in a few threads over the past couple of years. It is a common occurrence apparently, and many beekeepers are quite partial to this 'honey' and keep it for themselves rather than discard it. It's sometimes called *Beekeepers' Honey!* There was even a

picture of jar that one poster had purchased, labelled 'Honey Mousse'.

But what is it? What's in it?

There is a huge amount of information in [this comprehensive article](#) on producing honey by Bob Binnie. He is in the US, so there are differences in some details. Nevertheless, it really is worth a read. Or you can relax and take a bit more time to [listen to him in this video](#).



Unfortunately, he never gets round to actually saying what's in scum.

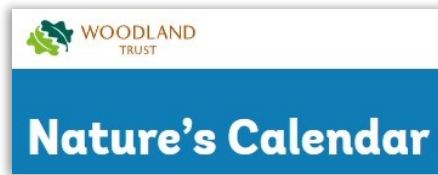
The best answer I've found was from [@Mint Bee on BKE](#), where he wonders 'whether it is some form of emulsion of fine wax, pollen and trapped air.'

Do you have any ideas? Can you improve on Mint Bee's arm-waving guess? It sounds very plausible to me, but perhaps the chemists among you will come up with something more authoritative.

Photo: Dani Akrigg

# RECORDING THE SIGNS OF THE SEASONS

The Woodland Trust website features *Nature's Calendar* where anyone can record what they notice of the signs of the changing seasons. This includes everything from leaf buds bursting to birds arriving and blackberries ripening. It's very much the kind of thing beekeepers do anyway, as they observe the flowering of trees and plants, and how the timing and duration of these change each year. [See more here](#).



Register for a free webinar: 19:00, Tuesday 7 March 2023, *Exploring Nature's Calendar*, with Kate Warriner.

The Trusts resident experts explain how climate change affects the season and its knock-on effects on wildlife. Become a citizen scientist and help produce the data needed to track these changes.

# THE BBKA HONEY LABELLING PETITION

The BBKA Petition to the Government to *Require honey labels to reflect all countries of origin of the honey* has now garnered around 12k votes. When the number reaches 10k, the Government, in this case, DEFRA, gives a response. If / when the number reaches 100k, the issue will be debated in Parliament.

You can read [the response from DEFRA here](#). It has already been dismissed by beekeeper groups as predictable, with hints that it says nothing of significance. However, it is a considered and substantial document, and raises questions about the objects of the Petition which cannot easily be dismissed. As a taster, you might be tempted by this excerpt: *The optional provisions that apply to the labelling of 'blended' honey by no means allow for, enable, or encourage food fraud. The provision of origin labelling, whether denoting specific countries, or denoting a blend from multiple countries, is to provide the consumer with information on the provenance of the product. It is not a suitable means for providing consumers information to determine whether a*

*food has been adulterated. Enforcement authorities take actions to determine the authenticity of a food on a case-by-case basis using objective evidence. The provenance of that food is not relevant in determining its authenticity.*

However, you could be forgiven for thinking that a country-of-origin label stating that a honey is *a blend of honeys from EU and non-EU countries* (in other words, Planet Earth) is not worth the paper it is printed on.

Do honey jars still state that? It's so long since I've shopped in a supermarket, never mind bought a jar of honey in one, that I'm really not sure if that is still the case!

A screenshot of the UK Government and Parliament Petitions website. The page has a green header with the text 'Petitions' and 'UK Government and Parliament'. The main content area is white. At the top, it says 'Petition' followed by the title 'Require honey labels to reflect all countries of origin of the honey.' Below the title is a short description: '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 link for 'More details' and a prominent green button that says 'Sign this petition'. Below the button, it shows '12,020 signatures' with a progress bar that is about 12% full, and a target of '100,000'. There is a link 'Show on a map'. At the bottom, it says 'Government responded' with a crown icon, and a date 'This response was given on 31 January 2023'. A quote follows: 'The Government takes food fraud seriously and is working to ensure honey meets our high standards. Country of origin labelling is not a suitable means for determining if a food is subject to fraud.'

# TREATING VARROA WITH HEAT

Honey bees can kill predators by balling them and generating heat. An online talk last year (I can't find the link at present, though there are lots of online references to this activity) showed honey bees in Vietnam overcome a predator (a particular species of hornet) in this way. The bees could survive the increased heat. The hornet died.

The theory has been tried with varroa in hives. The hive is warmed up to the extent that the varroa die, but the bees survive.

The latest application of this theory was unveiled at the Beekeeping Show on 25 February. It is called [ThermoMite™](#), and the manufacturers claim that it is 'the world's first and only power-free Thermotherapy treatment for Varroa.' Heat pads are heated beforehand in hot water and then placed on the floor of the hive. Treatment takes a couple of hours, and the reusable pads are costly.

My first (cynical?) reaction was to wonder if the manufacturers are trying to get something past us by adopting the name 'Thermotherapy'? Steve Donohoe wrote on [his blog](#): 'Although I'm all for knocking down varroa mites, I have reservations about heat treatments because of the potential to [damage sperm in drones and the queen's spermatheca](#).'

[@JamezF wrote on Beekeeping Forum](#): 'I believe the principle has been shown to be fundamentally valid. The margin for error seems quite small though. As far as I recall, even a degree or two too cold and the kill rate is too low to be useful, but a couple of degrees too high and it impacts the bees. I imagine it will be very difficult to be sure their system (Thermomite) will work in many real-world cases.'

The idea that the mites might die with no harm to the bees, or chemicals in the hive seems attractive. I wasn't at the Show last weekend because I was at the West Sussex Convention. We heard Bob Smith (there are two; I'm speaking of the Medway Bob Smith, NDB) give a talk on *Treating for varroa in 2023*. I well remember Bob Smith's varroa talk from a few years ago and I was keen to hear

how Bob's ideas had developed. In a very comprehensive and captivating talk, Bob suggested that we are moving to a time when we should increasingly be able to manage varroa without chemicals. In some ways, we have no choice in that, as the mites continue to develop resistance to chemical treatments. Amitraz (eg Apivar) is now resisted by the mites in many parts of the world.

But there was no mention of heat treatments in Bob's talk. I mentioned this to him in an email that evening. His reply was unambiguous: *There was another of these 'heat up the brood box' contraptions at the Spring Convention a couple of years ago; Graham Royle talked this morning about temperature regulation – the bees collect litres of water to try to maintain 35°C and get very stressed.*

True. But aren't all treatments stressful and a cause of disruption to a degree? Brood breaks induced by shook swarms, queen caging etc are very effective in controlling varroa. And they are free of chemicals. But they are certainly not stress-free. I have never been able to bring myself to do a shook swarm on my bees. The idea of depriving a colony of all its brood is not something I can countenance. It is not made any easier by beekeepers telling me that if it is done only with strong colonies during a nectar flow, the bees get back to their status quo very quickly.

As John and Sue Chapman say at the beginning of this issue, you MUST treat for varroa. How you do that is something that will emerge from your life experience and attitude to risk. Mark Ballard will not accept any swarms near the Association Apiary because of his previous experience of EFB. Bob Smith will not vape (sublimate) his hives with oxalic acid because of his life experience working in chemistry. I'm not happy driving a car if I can take the train because of my awareness of the associated risks.

As in all of life, all methods of treating varroa come with their own risks to the bees, and sometimes to your person, and your life experience will at least partly affect how you decide to do things. *Archie McLellan*

# WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS!

Hello to Peter Marsh (associate member) from Orpington, to Vince Lewis (associate member) from Strood, to David Lloyd (registered member) from Rochester, and welcome back to Peter Pavely (associate member) from Gillingham.

# QUIZ

I thought of asking ChatGPT to write the whole newsletter this month, but it quickly became apparent that it wasn't up to the task. For one thing, it doesn't know anything after 2021. (I guess it doesn't actually *know* anything at all, but you know what I mean.) So I asked it to create the quiz. Here's its first attempt:

1. What is the scientific name for the Western Honeybee?
  - a) *Apis mellifera*
  - b) *Bombus terrestris*
  - c) *Megachile rotundata*
  - d) *Anthidium manicatum*
2. Which of the following is not a benefit of beekeeping?
  - a) Increased crop yields
  - b) Pollination of wildflowers
  - c) Production of honey and beeswax
  - d) Decreased risk of bee stings
3. What is the term for the process of bees collecting nectar and pollen from flowers?
  - a) Hive building
  - b) Honey production
  - c) Pollination
  - d) Foraging
4. What is the role of the queen bee in a colony?
  - a) Collecting nectar and pollen
  - b) Producing eggs
  - c) Guarding the hive entrance
  - d) Building honeycomb
5. Which of the following is a common pest that beekeepers must control?
  - a) Honeybees
  - b) Ladybugs
  - c) Wax moths
  - d) Bumblebees

Answers on [page 17](#). I then asked it six (!) more times to increase the difficulty of the questions. This was interesting. ChatGPT does not want to offend. It writes non-offensive material, often with a left-wing bias. It wants to be liked. So it was very reluctant to create difficult quiz questions. Here's the final set, more worthy of MBKA readers!



1. What is the name of the specialized gland in worker bees that produces royal jelly?
  - a) Hypopharyngeal gland
  - b) Mandibular gland
  - c) Salivary gland
  - d) Malpighian tubule
2. What is the process by which honeybees convert nectar into honey?
  - a) Enzymatic hydrolysis
  - b) Acid fermentation
  - c) Alcoholic fermentation
  - d) Oxidative phosphorylation
3. What is the name of the parasitic fly that lays its eggs in the abdomen of honeybees, leading to their eventual death?
  - a) *Varroa destructor*
  - b) Wax moth
  - c) *Nosema ceranae*
  - d) *Apocephalus borealis*
4. What is the name of the process by which a queen bee lays unfertilized eggs that develop into male drones?
  - a) Parthenogenesis
  - b) Mitosis
  - c) Meiosis
  - d) Binary fission
5. What is the function of the alveoli in honeycomb?
  - a) To store nectar and honey
  - b) To incubate developing larvae
  - c) To house the queen bee
  - d) To provide ventilation for the hive

Answers on [page 17](#)



# ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ

Answers to the first quiz – if you need them – are a, d, d, b, c

Answers given by ChatGPT to the second quiz are:

1. a) Hypopharyngeal gland
2. c) Alcoholic fermentation [Really!? a) 'Enzymatic hydrolysis' seemed more promising, with the reference to the action of enzymes, though I don't think hydrolysis is the word to describe the removal of moisture from nectar.]
3. d) Apocephalus borealis [I looked this up. Completely new to me. Must be true. It's in the papers.]
4. a) Parthenogenesis [Is this okay? Technically, drones are an example of parthenogenesis because the eggs from which they develop are unfertilised, but perhaps this case would usually be qualified as haploid parthenogenesis.]
5. a) To store nectar and honey. [I think this is completely wrong. I don't think alveoli have anything to do with comb made by honey bees. Correct me if I'm wrong.]

By my reckoning, ChatGPT has got two wrong (nos. 2 and 5) out of five, and a third (no. 4) which stretches the normal meaning of the word. But my education was largely devoid of science, so I welcome comments from more knowledgeable readers.

ChatGPT produces its answers as a stream of text, at the speed of a good typist. This gives the impression that it is thinking as it goes. It writes upbeat introductions, gives uncontroversial good advice when appropriate, and constructs sentences with perfect punctuation. It's quite beguiling!

However, the results from the quiz (though I'm happy to be informed by members who know more about bees and science than I do) are concerning:

ChatGPT: 2½ marks out of a possible 5.

Verdict: Room for improvement. And that, we can be certain, is what is happening to ChatGPT, by the hour.

## COMMENTS

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

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

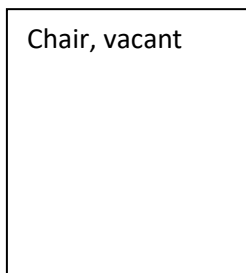
Was there anything that caught your attention in this issue? Perhaps you read something that you'd not thought of before or saw something that didn't feel right to you. If so, do please write a sentence or two for this Comments section. Items from readers are always good to hear.

## PHOTO CREDITS

Photos by Archie McLellan except where stated otherwise. This does not include product images and screenshots of web pages.

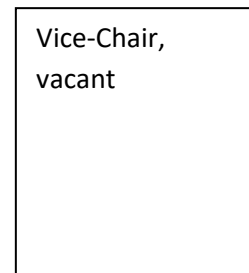
# THE COMMITTEE

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.](#)



Chair, vacant

Chair - vacant



Vice-Chair,  
vacant

Vice-Chair - vacant



**Sheila Stunell** Secretary  
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



**Archie McLellan** Treasurer and Membership secretary  
archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



**Tony Edwards** Education Organiser  
tony.ed@me.com



**Ian Halls** Committee member  
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



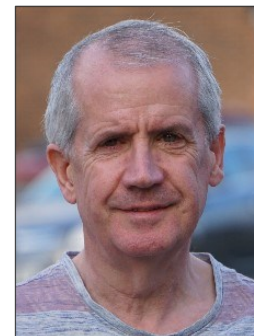
**Mark Ballard** Apiary Manager  
apiary@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



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



**Sonia Belsey** Exams Organiser, Website manager,  
Social media Co-ordinator  
sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



**Nigel Rawlins** Committee member  
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

## THE MARCH ISSUE OF BEECRAFT

... has me in its back page feature, *Drifting*, in the March issue. I hope I've done justice to MBKA! In fact it was BeeCraft, not me, who chose the person for the next issue (Robert Carpenter Turner). I hear he's quite a character!

# DRIFTING

**Like drones drifting from colony to colony, we interview beekeepers and ask them to nominate the next to be featured.**



### Archie McLellan

**Archie McLellan is a retired piano teacher who lives in Gillingham, Kent. He manages about 30 colonies.**

#### Why and how did you start keeping bees?

I grew up in the Northwest Highlands of Scotland. We always had a section of honey on the kitchen table, so honey has always been part of my life. We had a neighbour with a hive in their garden, but all I really remember was that my mother got very cross when I was stung in the ear at the age of five. My adult life has been spent in Glasgow where beekeeping wasn't an option for me, though I did always buy honey on my travels. When we retired to Kent, my wife suggested I took up beekeeping, so in 2018 I joined Medway BKA. I was going to take their beginners' course run by the late Terry Clare, a legendary local beekeeper, but, because of illness, the course was given by Bob Smith, also very highly regarded. It was a great start.

#### Were any other local beekeepers particularly helpful?

My mentor was a guy who rejoices in the name of Paul Newman. He taught me a lot about beekeeping but also how important it is to have someone on hand to help. He was very proactive and would call me every week to see how things were with my bees. We did many inspections together, both of his and my hives. Everyone in the association was very helpful and I spent a lot of time watching other people with their bees. The more bees you see, the better, I believe.

#### For a relatively new beekeeper, you seem to have expanded very quickly.

Well, I tend to get very enthusiastic and throw myself headlong into things. I started with two colonies in my first year. By 2021 I had my garden apiary, an apiary on a nature reserve, and bees in two gardens where I had hived swarms. However, after the very cold wet spring of 2021 some of the garden bees were a bit defensive, so I decided to move them out. I discovered a beautiful orchard nearby and the owner said I could

keep my bees there. I really landed on my feet with that location. Later I discovered the owner was also a beekeeper with hives elsewhere in the orchard. He didn't seem to have enough time to look after his bees and, when I offered to help, he turned their care over to me completely. In my fourth season, I was suddenly in charge of more than 30 colonies!

#### Has having so many colonies altered your approach?

Absolutely. Last year I knew I had to become more efficient. After a lot of reading and advice, I realised I had to keep inspections short and with a purpose. I have changed from using 14x12 brood boxes to a system using only BS deep boxes as advocated by Ken and Dan Basterfield in their recent *BeeCraft* articles. I do have a very efficient extracting system, devised by my wife, Esther. I do all the lifting and carrying while she directs the operation and does the uncapping and extracting with our Konigin 12-frame electric extractor. It worked well in 2022 when we had a huge summer harvest that took five long days to extract. Esther challenges me about every aspect of my beekeeping, which does keep me on my toes.

#### Do you have any beekeeping ambitions?

I'd like to be better at dealing with chronic bee paralysis virus (CBPV). At present I remove the floor to allow dead bees to fall to the ground. That seems to help, but I need to start rearing queens earlier in the year so I'm able to requeen infected hives.

I'd also like to keep trying different kinds of honey. I think it helps to have an interest in honey if you want to keep bees. As a gardener, you can choose not to grow veg but, if your bees are thriving, you can't choose not to have honey!

#### Next time

**Archie McLellan has asked us to interview Robert Carpenter Turner**

## THIS OR THAT?

#### Recommended books

##### Novel:

*The Beekeeper's Pupil* by Sara George

##### Practical:

*Bee time: lessons from the hive* by Mark Winston

#### Top tip

**Don't put off tasks – the season races by so quickly**

**Warm or cold way**  
Either, depending on situation

#### Hive tool

**The Jero hive tool – slim, strong and sharp**

#### Smoker fuel

**Wood shavings**

**Favourite honey**  
**Somalian honey**



Hazel has been in flower since December, yet vast quantities of it are still available for the bees to collect pollen from. Hazel pollens are carried in the wind, so they don't need insects for pollination. But, when the weather allows, bees will collect this pollen in abundance. For those of us humans not accustomed to living in such a pollen-drenched environment, hay-fever can be an issue. Pass me a tissue!



Such a reliable flowering plant from November through to spring: *Viburnum tinus*. It has an aroma that reaches you from the other side of the road.