

# WHATSTHEBUZZ



What's happening soon, and what the committee are discussing and planning.

Are you confident about the first inspection of the year? The Beekeeper's Checklist lists what to keep in mind.

No less than 16 other articles, some very small, vying to capture your attention.

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

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

*Picture above: Sunday 12 March was overcast and windy but the bees from hives in more sheltered spots were out in force and bringing in pollen. I looked to see where the pollen might be coming from. There was blackthorn in flower but the source that I thought most likely was some goat willow trees in clear view just beyond the next field. It's windy in this picture. I saw no bees.*



# Hello to April, to first inspections, and to you all

In recent years, we've had mild winters. And cold springs.

This year, we had a long, warm autumn, followed by a reasonably – by modern standards – cold winter.

So cautionary advice about not opening up hives too soon has seemed rather irrelevant. Even though the bees have seized every hint of sunshine to load up with pollen and drink nectar from blackthorn flowers, temperatures have remained low enough to make it easy to resist any temptation to do anything more than pop in a block of fondant or a feeder with litre or two of syrup.

From my random – and possibly unrepresentative – sample of spoken and written words on the topic, it does seem that winter losses have been severe for some this year. Varroa / DWV is usually said to be the culprit in 80-90% of cases, but perhaps something different is at play. I've heard of a couple of instances of bees absconding – or just clustering outside and dying – as a result of a mouse taking up residence. Finding a dead colony can be tough – or worse! We just have to learn what we can from the experience and move on.

Following this column's usual summary of monthly beekeeping activity, we start with jobs for beekeepers: If you have hessian, or black plastic sheeting, or chicken wire for woodpecker protection, that won't be needed any more. Similarly, you can remove those metal entrance covers with 10mm diameter holes to keep out mice. (Many beekeepers never need these because they permanently keep the entrances small – and it's more akin to a natural nest.) When the temperature is typically at least 14°C, it's time to start weekly inspections. How is the colony faring? Does the queen have room to lay? If not, consider removing frames of stores and replace them with drawn comb or foundation. On the other hand, the colony may not have a reserve of stores. It could starve and die within just a couple of days if the bees can't forage for nectar. Check the brood box for disease – the foulbroods in particular. If you're not confident about identifying these, study images of what to look for in diseased brood at the different stages of development of the disease. Be aware also of the look of false alarms such as mouldy pollen. Add supers in good time. If the frames have foundation, not drawn comb,

consider leaving the queen excluder off for a few days – but know that the queen will preferentially lay in fresh comb as soon as it becomes available! Finally implement a plan for swarm control, possibly a pre-emptive method such as Demaree. Or be ready to take the queen out into a nuc (or mini-nuc) as soon as you see charged queen cells. If any are sealed, you might be too late – but not necessarily!

Inside the hive, the queen is (or should be) laying strongly, particularly in a nectar flow. Drones are being laid, the colony is building up, and something is amiss if queen cells are not being built and charged.

In the world outside, the bees are, or soon will be, visiting cherry, apple, dandelion, currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), pulmonaria, forget-me-not and so much more. Daffodils, like millet (flax), make a dazzling display to our eyes, but the bees will ignore them if anything else is available.

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# MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

## THE ANNUAL LECTURE

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

Lynne Ingram – The truth about honey?

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.

This subject is never far from the news. A few days ago [this appeared in the Guardian](#). The headline (All UK honey tested in EU fraud investigation fails authenticity test) is a bit misleading, though the author clarifies this in the first paragraph: ‘Ten honey samples from the UK all failed the tests. They may have been blended or packaged in Britain, but the honey probably originated overseas.’

Although the honeys being tested were probably not produced in the UK, the situation is nevertheless a comment on the UK government’s control of food imports.

The price is £5 per person and includes tea / coffee and cake afterwards – what our organisers describe as HIGH TEA! There will also be a raffle. [See here for booking](#).

Please consider buying a ticket for this event NOW! Lynne will be travelling nearly 200 miles to give us this talk. The committee would be very reassured that she was going to have a sizeable audience if our members could be persuaded to buy tickets now.

## 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)

## TIMES AND DATES

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

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15 April	Sat	09:00-17:00 <a href="#">English Festival</a> , Riverside Park, Lower Rainham
29 April	Sat	Annual Lecture: Lynne Ingram, Somerset BKA – The truth about honey?
13 May	Sat	14:00-16:00 Barbeque, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX

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## THE ENGLISH FESTIVAL

11:00-17:00, Saturday 15 April, Riverside Country Park, Lower Rainham.

[Info and Transport Options here](#).

The English Festival has been organised by Medway Council for the last four years and is a hugely popular and successful event. Last year thousands of local families enjoyed the event. In the past the Festival was held in three areas at the Park. The car park outside the Visitors’ Centre hosts the band stand, leisure and entertainments; the first field holds all the food stalls, craft and children’s entertainment – a roundabout, Punch and Judy etc; and the next field hosts all the livestock – shire horses, birds of prey, dog handling and other interesting displays.

We hope that the MBKA bee stand will be with the livestock!

Our stand provides a great opportunity to communicate with the public about our craft. We can talk about the fascinating hobby of beekeeping, while at the same time putting to rest the many misconceptions the public have of bees and honey.

Mark Ballard and his team will be on hand all day, talking to the public, selling honey and wax products, and engaging the children with candle rolling.

Please come along, say hello to the team, and maybe stay for a while, giving your support.

Parking is restricted to stall holders and helpers. Please [check the website for transport and parking options](#).

We look forward to seeing you.

*Tony Edwards*

<b>20 May</b>	Sat	10:00-15:00 Beekeeping Taster Day, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
<b>22 May</b>	Mon	19:00 Bee Diseases Insurance (BDI) AGM streaming via YouTube, followed by a talk from Maggie Gill, Regional Bee Inspector for Wales
<b>10-11 June</b>	Sat-Sun	<i>Introduction to Beekeeping Course: Theory</i> at the Association Apiary
<b>17 June</b>	Sat	<i>Introduction to Beekeeping Course: Practical</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
		08:30-18:00 <a href="#">Kent County Show</a> , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
<b>7-9 Jul</b>	Fri-Sun	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
		09:00-18:00 Sat, 09:30-17:00 Sun, <b>MBKA Honey Show</b> , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ
<b>2-3 September</b>	Sat-Sun	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

## ASSOCIATION APIARY INSPECTIONS

Full info about the Association Apiary inspections [is on our website](#). (You may have to sign in after clicking.)

Please see below the rota for the first 13 weeks starting 1 April. Inspections are normally scheduled for noon on Saturdays. Please email reports to [Karon Thomas-West](#) and the [Website Manager \(Sonia Belsey\)](#)

The website apiary records will be updated weekly and should be viewed prior to attending the apiary for details of any action to be taken.

Any problems please contact Karon Thomas-West on 07956 535654.

The reports must be legible and whilst photos of the reports can still be submitted, please ensure they are

accompanied with a brief summarising paragraph highlighting action for the next inspection. This will provide a quick guide for the following week's inspectors.

1 April	Archie and Simon Woods
8 April	Mark and Neil
15 April	Sonia and David
22 April	Tony, Simon M and Jez
29 April	Sheila and Mark
6 May	Mel and Lee
13 May	Peter and David
20 May	Sheila and Nicky
27 May	Karon and Margaret
3 June	Mark and Nigel
10 June	Sonia and Darren
17 June	Archie and Lee
24 June	Tony, Simon M and Jez

# COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

The first committee meeting since the AGM was held on Thursday 16 March at The Bridgewood Manor Hotel. Karon Thomas-West and Jez Davies, both new committee members, were present.

The draft minutes contain so many details! A lot of ground was covered.

## The Association Apiary

Sheila has created a new rota for the inspections by the volunteer team from April through June at the Association apiary. Karon will keep this updated for the rest of the year.

The water pipe that serves the bungalows and the pavilion has had a full-bore leak for a long time. Mark has been in touch with Southern Water who claim that it is on private land and is the responsibility of the land owner. He has written to the nearby residents and asked to contact their supplier if they are experiencing reduction in pressure. If the residents don't take it further with the water board we will move to publicity through social media through Sonia and Archie.

Mark has negotiated insurance for the Pavilion building through the National Farmers' Union for £243.61 (down from £600!) for buildings and some personal items and odd things like cash in transit. Mark will email the policy to all committee members for comment.

The track behind the bungalows to the Pavilion is the favoured route for creating a hard road that will ensure access all year. Mark will talk to John Myatt about timings for getting this done. One of our members knows someone who may be able to get scalplings (the waste material from planing a road prior to resurfacing) for the roadway. Jez will enquire about the cost for road stone or crushed concrete.

## Education

- Introduction to beekeeping course: Mark is re-organising the content for 10-11 June (theory) and 17 June (practical). We have enough bee suits. We had bought some from Sherriff and also took advantage of the Simon the Beekeeper closing down sale, so we have a good supply.

- Taster Day: 20 May: 9 have signed up so far.
- Basic Assessment: 6 signed up so far and Bob Smith has agreed to do a revision session.
- Module 2 exam on Saturday 18 March and two of our members are sitting it.

## Future Events

- Annual Lecture: 29 April 2023. Lynne Ingram is speaking on Adulterated Honey. She is coming from Somerset (!) so we have decided to charge entry to help cover the costs which include an afternoon tea. We will need to sell 50 tickets to break even.
- English Festival on 15 April: Volunteers to help so far are John Chapman, Tony, Mark, Karon, and Sheila. We can set up from 9am and it opens at 11am.
- Summer meetings: We hope to hold many of these meetings at the Pavilion to show members and to encourage its use. Mark suggested queen marking in May or June, and we hope to have a barbeque on Saturday 13 May. It might be possible to have a speaker at this event.

## Ideas

Summer talks could be held at the apiary. A bee safari might be held again this year. Suggestions for apiary sessions might be practical sessions for making hive parts, frames etc. We might open a regular buy, sell, swap corner on the website. Now that we have space at the Pavilion, bulk purchase buying would be possible. Delivery of some items might present a problem, but Jez offered to take delivery and transfer goods to the apiary. Embroidered T-Shirts, sweatshirts etc. which we have had in the past require a minimum order of £120. Jez suggested that his wife Michele, might do this if we can set up the logo. There will be a cost, but we might be able to get smaller numbers.

**Suggestions** for events and activities are all gratefully received! Please speak to any committee member.

# WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

## CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF BEEKEEPERS

Saturday 11th March was the weekend of the Central Association of Beekeepers' Spring Conference. This was also the weekend of the expected severe snow and I had spent Thursday expecting a call to cancel the weekend. This did not come so we set out travelling north (I know!) to Runcorn in Cheshire. We had packed blankets and a flask of hot soup so were prepared for the cold and probably snowy north, only to arrive to bright sunshine! Some drizzle and cold (well it is the northwest) but a very cheery aspect and the lovely location of Norton Priory.

Professor Stephen Martin (University of Salford) opened the session with a warning about the impact of moving indigenous bees to a new location. He gave the example of the Cape Bee (*Apis mellifera capensis*, a South African subspecies of the western honey bee). *A. m. capensis* workers have the ability to lay diploid eggs thus producing potential queens. In a normal colony laying workers lay drones and other workers police the egg laying and consume worker laid eggs. *A. m. capensis* worker-laid eggs smell like queen-laid eggs so are not policed in other colonies. They are mixed easily with *A. m. scutellata* (an East African honey bee subspecies) causing eventual colony collapse. Problems arise when *A. m. capensis* workers drift into other colonies or are moved in equipment and spread further. *A. m. capensis* do not work so eventually the colonies will collapse. The only solution is to kill the colonies.

It seems that *A. m. capensis* has incidentally solved the varroa problem. The worker cell is small, but it is a very large bee. In order to flourish, varroa needs space to get around inside the sealed cell and in this situation the male cannot get to the daughters to mate.

We were given a guided tour of Norton Priory during the lunch break. A great deal of archaeological work has taken place over the last 40 years and is still on-going.

The afternoon held talks on stingless bees, *Tropilaelaps*, and warrior wasps. We followed the progress of a gut

parasite in *Bombus terrestris*, and drone tracking (mechanical drones) of honey bees and particularly large and complicated termite colonies in a dry forest in Brazil.

Altogether, as always at the CABK, a great learning opportunity. If you want to join the Central Association, visit the website at [cabk.org.uk](http://cabk.org.uk). Membership is very reasonable. Look for them at the Spring Convention where they will have a table and you will be able to buy lectures from previous meetings. *Sheila Stunell*

## 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.

# THE BEEKEEPER'S CHECKLIST

A pot-luck series on almost any beekeeping topic. Sometimes you don't need to read an article. Glancing down a list of bullet points is all that's needed to bring things back to mind.

## FIRST INSPECTION OF THE SEASON

### Know what you want to do (Hooper). Check that

- that the queen has room to lay
- that the queen is present and laying as expected
- that the colony is developing: eggs, larvae and sealed brood cells
- that the colony is healthy; look for any indications of disease, especially in open and sealed brood cells
- that there are sufficient stores till the next inspection

### What to bring

- smoker, tool in soda bucket, fuel, lighter, record-keeping book and pen
- bucket for comb, debris, and any rubbish
- feeder or eke with syrup or fondant
- frames of foundation or drawn comb
- camera or phone-camera

### When to open up for the first time

- not too soon! If the hive is light, feed – no need to inspect if conditions don't allow
- when weather is warm enough (c.14°C for a period?)
- when bees are flying

### First of all, observe, weigh, read, and smell

Outside hive before opening, observe

- the activity of the bees
- if they are bringing in pollen
- if there are dead bees at the entrance or on the ground

Remove any hive protection including a mouse trap

Weigh or heft the hive

Read the board under the mesh floor; look for

- brood particles (darker); may show location of the brood nest
- stores particles (light)
- dead varroa mites
- other small debris (from wax moths?)

- larger particles (could indicate mouse activity)
- notice significant odours

### Opening up

- smoke below floor or at entrance
- lift off roof
- crack crownboard open and smoke lightly into gap
- remove crownboard and check for queen on underside
- if required smoke across the top of the frames
- scrape top bars clear of wax and propolis (optional)
- remove first frame (nearest you)
- move the next four frames towards you one at a time till you come to frame six (or another if you have an idea of the location of the centre of the brood nest)
- ensure there is space on both sides of it and withdraw it smoothly

### Making a record of the status of the colony

Read this first frame carefully. Look for

- brood: eggs, larvae, sealed brood
- honey
- pollen
- nectar
- drone brood

Check more frames as need till you have a picture of the brood and stores status.

When reading brood, always be alert for signs of disease, in both open and sealed cells

### What NOT to do at this first inspection

- clip and mark the queen
- split brood
- equalise colonies by swapping frames among hives
- add a super
- treat for disease
- feel you have to find the queen

### Best practice

- be quick, smooth, and efficient in your movements
- observe and record what you see; don't rely on your memory
- don't do anything unnecessary
- don't handle the queen
- check for adequate stores

### Other actions

- Close up a dead colony, prior to examining it for a cause of death
- Replace some frames of stores with foundation or drawn comb if a colony does not have any room for brood
- Provide sugar (fondant in an eke, or syrup in a feeder) if there are insufficient stores.

## SHORTHAND FOR COLONY INSPECTIONS

If you have a number of hives, you need to keep records. You need to keep records even if you have just a couple of hives because you can't remember everything. Some beekeepers feel they only need to know the status of the colony at the previous inspection. They manage with a brick on the roof orientated in different ways.

Others record what they see on a Dictaphone or phone voice recorder. They transfer these notes later to paper records or a spreadsheet (Excel).

And some write everything down as they go, with a sheet to each hive, possibly using a waterproof pen and paper (see last month's WTB). If you do that, you might develop a vocabulary of abbreviations. Some are well known already. Here's a selection partly from the list in 'Sixty Years with Bees, by Donald Sims (pp89-90).

This might be a start for you to develop your own list of terms. A simple + or - is useful for adding or removing something from the hive. I like to include weather and temperature info such as 'c 20' (cloudy 20°C), or 'r 14', or 's 24', or 'w 4' (windy, Force 4)

s	saw
q	queen
g	give
t	take
vq	virgin queen
qc	queen cell(s)
em	emerged
eg	eggs
cap	capped
br	brood
y	young
bs	bees
sw	swarm(ed)
cl	clipped
c	comb
dr	drawn
f	foundation
fd	fondant
fr	frame(s)
qe	queen excluder
cl q	clipped queen
3 br	3 frames at least half full of brood
br in 3	brood in 3 combs, less than half full
d	deep box
s	shallow box

## MITICIDE RESIDUES IN WAX

It's well known that miticides leave residues in wax. This is a concern because of the risk of honey contamination. It also matters because there is a possibility that the mites' resistance to miticides is enhanced by long term exposure to small amounts (non-lethal doses) of substances these residues such as Tau-fluvalinate (Apistan).

Fortunately, it's likely that miticides based on organic acids (thymol, formic and oxalic) don't leave residues.

This is worth highlighting. It comes with a suggestion to avoid using foundation any more than you have to. Foundationless frames are cheap and easy. My method is to use tongue depressors and barbecue skewers. I've used these successfully even in 12x14 frames. [More here.](#)



# SINGLE STANDS

Lots of us have double hive stands. They look like triple stands, but we tend to keep the space in the middle for, well, anything except a full-size hive.

These long stands shout one thing very loudly at us: **straight lines**. So if we have several, we'll probably line them up in a row. That is especially true of hives at the side of a field. It's not possible to turn a 2-metre stand sideways. It will seriously stick out into the field, and that was definitely not what the farmer envisaged when he agreed to having your bees in his field.

Strangely, at least three times in recent weeks, people have talked to me about the great advantage of single hive stands:

*single hive stands can be oriented in any direction.*

At the side of a field, they will take no extra space no matter which direction they face. In an open site, like a clearing or paddock, you can dot them around randomly in any vacant space.

You can see how the location of each hive location is now more distinctive. I guess (no evidence!) that this might well reduce drifting. Many bees find their way into other hives. Who can say if they simply misjudged the location of their parent hive, or whether something more devious was at play.



*sides and legs cut and ready to be glued and screwed.*

If there's a chance that more 'singular' hive locations will keep more bees in their own hives, then I think it's worth trying. I like the idea of my beekeeping being more like flower-gardening (aesthetic choices of positioning) than vegetable growing (everything in straight lines).

I've just made four single hive stands. I recently acquired an amateur table-saw (a fearful beast!) so I was able to cut rebates for the sides to sit in.

Incidentally, cutting rebates with a table saw is a noisy and time-consuming affair. Each pass through the saw removes just the thickness of the saw blade. My ears were well-protected, but Esther (my wife) said that she was glad when the job was over, and that in future I should go round the neighbours' houses and offer them all mufflers too!

In future, I'll use plain treated timber rather than fence posts for the legs. There's not much difference in price but I think the grain is closer than in the fence posts.

Your hive stand legs don't need to be rebated, of course, nor you don't need the generous timber dimensions I've adopted. I have some single stands from bee retailers, and they look and feel very flimsy. But I have never had one collapse, even though they have supported some hefty hives in the past. Now I use these stands at the side of each hive I'm inspecting – so I don't have to bend so far to lower or pick up roofs and boxes. I've been lucky so far, but beekeepers and back problems go together far more often than we'd like.



*(right) Four completed single hive stands. The legs are just 300mm tall. Each fence post gave eight pieces.*

# HONEY FERMENTED GINGER AND LEMON

Here's a traditional way of enjoying honey with, you've guessed it, the promise of relief from symptoms too.

## The principle

- Mix some slices of ginger and lemon in a jar with honey.
- Leave to ferment for a couple of weeks. Or more.
- Enjoy as a tonic or a tea.  
Apparently it's good for reducing cold symptoms and it makes a tasty addition to meals, dressings, marinades, and drinks.

You can drizzle it over anything that you might pour some honey on. Breakfast dishes come to mind but also deserts, ice cream, and pancakes.

## Some details

The *doubling twice* figures in the life cycle of a honey bee egg, larva, and pupa, are useful here: three, six and twelve days from egg to adult. (Yes, I know it's probably nearer 3, 5 and 13 days, but let's not let the facts get in the way of a good recipe mnemonic.)



Start with sliced root ginger, say 40g. Add *double* the quantity of sliced lemon: 80g. Mix in a jar with *double* the quantity of honey: (160g).

It's on my kitchen window sill just now, but is only one week old, so I can't tell you from experience what it tastes like. I invert it for a few seconds every day. The water in the lemon and ginger made the honey almost watery within a few hours. It's that extra water which causes the fermentation. The bees dehydrate nectar till it contains only c.18% water. That's not enough to

allow the yeasts in the honey to become active. But with just a little extra water, fermentation will begin. You're not making mead, though. It won't become alcoholic.

I've already mentioned using it as ginger tea. The next step would be a Hot toddy: add some whisky and perhaps a dash of cinnamon.

Finally, you can drizzle it over anything you would pour some honey on. Breakfast dishes come to mind but also deserts, ice cream, and pancakes.

# A NEW STUDY ON THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF HONEY

There is no shortage of claims of the wonderful benefits to health from honey. And all of these are, or should be, qualified by a cautionary note that further research is needed to be able to give any degree of certainty that these benefits are real. This shouldn't surprise us. The passing of the years, and the completion of yet more scientific papers on honey bees and honey, is unlikely to change this state of affairs. This is in the nature of food and diet research. It is very difficult to make real comparisons. Real-life, verifiable controls are almost impossible to set up. Ideally, you need the same person to be, at the same time, taking and not taking the substance under review. Otherwise, you open up the possibility of variables.

Nevertheless, an ambitious paper, [Novel Insights into the Health Importance of Natural Honey](#), was recently peer-reviewed and published. Written by Abdulwahid Ajibola of the Department of Human Physiology, in Kaduna State University, Nigeria, it is a comprehensive and startling document. Its material is pre-existing research: 'This manuscript documents the ancient medicinal uses of honey and provides evidence-based data demonstrating its benefits in animal models, patients, and healthy individuals.' (my italics)

I have not attempted to check any of the references and am not qualified to make any authoritative assessment of this piece. Am I allowed to mention a couple of little things that jumped off the page when I started reading? 'Natural

honey' is defined at the outset. Within a few paragraphs, honey is described as 'raw' – without any definition. It may be that the author is unaware of the hot debate in the UK (and elsewhere?) on the meaning of 'raw' when attributed to honey. I think he regards 'raw' as a synonym for 'natural'. He certainly seems to take for granted that his readers are familiar with and agreed on the meaning of the term. How wrong he is!

I've had an interest in honey for ever. I've read booklets on its health benefits. They sometimes feel like a missionary's tract, in that they only speak to you if you're already inside that way of thinking.

## BLENDING HONEY

**D**o you blend your different honeys? I'm not talking about accidental blending which happens if you don't extract supers from different apiaries, or even hives, separately.

No, I'm referring to carefully considered actions to mix this particular honey with that one because of the separate properties of each. This is not something I've come across in any beekeeping conversations or reading. Yet, the concept of blending honey is familiar. We see on many supermarket honey labels: 'A blend of EU and non-EU honeys'. It gives 'blending' a bad name.

But let's not throw out the baby with the bath water. [David Evans recently wrote in reply to a comment I posted:](#)

*'I'm not a great fan of heather honey; too strong generally and, over here on the west coast, the yields aren't great. Making blended, heather mix honey both tones down the flavour and makes it go further. An OSR + heather mix can be excellent.*

## BEEKEEPING MYTHS

**J**ust one this time. We've had loads in previous issues.

Apparently, some beekeepers claim: 'My bees never swarm, they just supersede.'

Riposte: 'I'm fairly sure evolution would select against that pretty rapidly.'

Thanks [James](#).

Is this paper a bit like that? That's what I asked myself when I read:

*'The oral use of raw honey can positively influence dental health and oral wellness... A very recent article indicates that the use of Asian polyfloral honey ... prevents oral infections, such as gingivitis and dental caries... According to Mohapatra et al. (14), raw and processed honey have a broad-spectrum antibacterial activity with high potential for the reduction of dental caries susceptibility (13,14).'*

Honey is 97% sugar, for heaven's sake. Would I have fewer fillings in my back teeth if I had brushed my teeth with honey? I ask you! But maybe I should look up these references after all.

*'The other time I've blended honey is if a bucket comes out that's borderline on the water content. If you do the maths you can work out what mix to make with a stock of really low water content honey – say 14% – and end up with something perfectly acceptable. This needs to be done soon after extraction obviously. Again, the blended honey flavour is often pretty good as well. I've done this a few times and it has always been a success.*

*'What does the label say ... ? "Heather mix" for the former and, since the latter uses two honeys from the same apiary, I just use my standard labels with the village name on.'*

What! David, are you not a fan of heather honey!? Don't you know that Scottish Heather Honey is the best in the world? Ah well, I suppose it depends on where you lived when you started developing a taste for honey.



# WHAT DOES THE BBKA MEAN FOR YOU?

Why are you a member of the BBKA?  
Are you there just for the Public Liability Insurance?

Or because the structure of MBKA membership makes it difficult for you not to be a BBKA member – if you have bees?

Or because you value the structured learning provided by the Theory module courses and exams, and the Practical assessments?

Or because you like to belong to an organisation that represents a large number of small-scale beekeepers, and makes representations on your behalf to public bodies?

For me, it's all about education. Although I read constantly (but not exclusively!) about the craft of beekeeping and research into bees and related topics, I would have to admit that studying the module courses has given me a solid body of knowledge which has been a good foundation for everything I've discovered since.

It's not easy to structure a course of learning such as the Theory modules. The Yates volumes attempted to contain everything that learners on these courses might be expected to know. It was a difficult, though laudable, ambition. But ideas move forward, and people have opinions. Examiners don't have to contend with candidates

answering back – at least not when they're marking papers. But plenty people have answered Yates back, and not always very politely!

There's an issue with the content of the BBKA Theory course / modules. Many find fault with its structure, and with the inclusion of information of little relevance. But trying to change it can cause even more argument, as the exam Board at the BBKA recently discovered.

Maybe the whole course has to be scrapped and built again from scratch?

What about BBKA News? Do you read it? I do, mostly, but never without feeling bad about the cost of printing and mailing 28,000 copies to our front doors. Sure, we might find a paper copy convenient, especially if we want to read at the kitchen table over lunch or whatever. But, if it was only available online, would there be a significant reduction in the actual readership? We get so much stuff to read from countless sources. We all have to make choices. If I choose to read something, I'll read it online if that's the way it comes to me.

Has anyone gone through the BBKA Annual Accounts from the ADM to see what the annual cost of BBKA News printing and mailing is? Drop me a line please if you know.

## QUIZ

I got this message in WhatsApp a few days ago:  
*Archie, quiz question tonight...*

*Which of these is the most accurate description of honey?*

- *Liquified pollen*
- *Regurgitated nectar*
- *Fermented beeswax*
- *Bee urine*

*.... the so-called expert got it wrong.*

*(Bez, drummer in Happy Mondays, now a 'celebrity' beekeeper, answered no. 1.)*

Tell me you don't need me to print the answer!





# RECOMMENDED READING

## OTHERLANDS: A WORLD IN THE MAKING, THOMAS HALLIDAY

Thomas Halliday, the author of this book, was brought up in Rannoch, in the Central Highlands of Scotland. He refers to this fairly early on. It is not irrelevant to the person and author he has become.

[Otherlands: A World in the Making](#) tells the history of life on this planet, in reverse chronology. We start 20,000 years ago and work back to the beginning. We read of species becoming extinct, and then read on to discover the lives they lived. I'm only a third of the way through this book. I keep re-reading bits. The accounts of the filling of the West and later the East Mediterranean are beyond imagining. Halliday is a paleobiologist – the study of biology in the deep past.

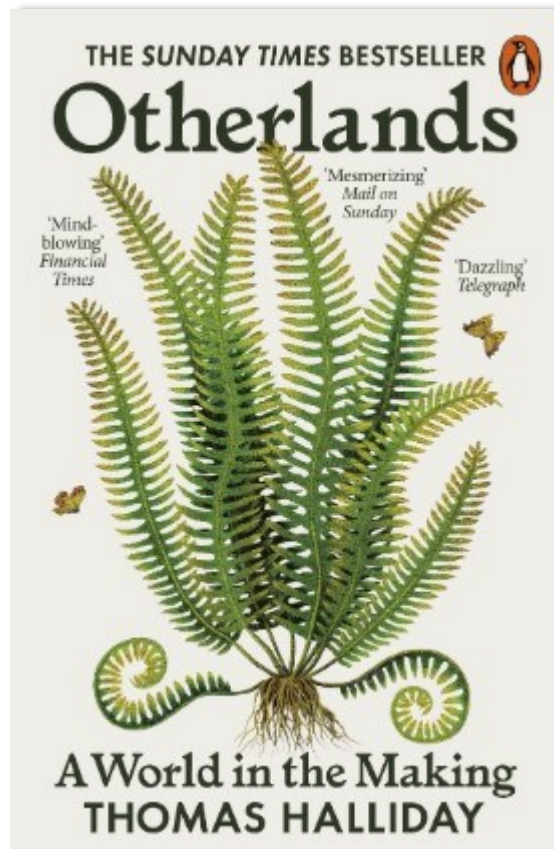
This is a work of immense imagination, yet deeply based in scientific research. Every paragraph ends with a reference number. Everything is informed by scientific research. There are 45 pages of references at the end. But you won't have time for all that. It is a thrilling read. I guess that's why the book is advertised on billboards at train stations.

Halliday writes in the present tense and takes us to these ancient periods in the best tradition of travel writing. He

looks around him and describes what he sees. It's colourful, exciting, and sometimes quite scary. I don't think there's ever been a book like it. With the movement of the continents throughout the ages, this is a subject that never stands still. Species are constantly on the move, whether island hopping, or ocean rafting.

I've just been reading about giant two-metre penguins in a forested Antarctica 41 million years ago where the temperature was 25-12°C. Humanity has dominated the Earth for a tiny fraction of its history. And that History is vast. We tend to lump all dinosaurs, for example, into one period in the distant past. But more time passed between the last diplodocus and the first tyrannosaurus than has passed between the last tyrannosaurus and the present day.

Halliday is our guide as our perceptions of the origins, present, and possible future of humanity are challenged. Without ever altering the tone or storytelling nature of the book, he quietly unpacks for us the lessons of this history for 21st century humanity.



## HANDY HINT

**Know this:** if, at a hive, you drop a drawing pin (a much-used device in beekeeping) then, sooner or later, you will stand on it. If the soles of your boots are thick, then you might not feel it prick your foot. But that depends where

the pin attaches itself to your sole. The sole is thicker in some places than others.

But no matter how long the grass, nor how much time you waste trying to retrieve it, it will, without fail, find its way, sooner or later, into the sole of your welly.

# SHOPPING

## THE MBKA BEES AND EQUIPMENT SALE

We don't have an auction or single geographical location for our annual sale of bees and equipment, but we have had an encouraging response to our request for items to include our sale. The list of items for sale is already very large and varied. Complete hives (National and WBC), individual boxes and hive parts, stands, frames, over-wintered nuc colonies, and more. If you're looking to get started in beekeeping, or to expand your operation, this could be a great money-saving opportunity.

There's still time to send in details of any items you'd like to offer for sale. Have a think about whether you could have a mini-clear-out, and put your redundant equipment back to good use.

The final list will be sent out in a couple of weeks – in mid-April – and the sale will be open. All transactions are private between buyers and sellers, and MBKA takes no commission.

## BEEKEEPING – ONE HOBBY OR TEN?

*Jen Ferry continues her exploration of some of beekeeping with her own experiences and stories Today, Jen writes about ways to sell honey, and how to find a market.*

Once you are able to produce a good standard of honey (as we explored in last month's article), there are a few more steps before you reach the stage of taking any money!

There are several local opportunities for selling honey that require very little effort from the beekeeper. The Association is always happy to put your honey on the stalls at the English Festival in the spring, the Kent Show in the summer, and, in the autumn, the MBKA Honey Show and the Ploughing Match. The Association takes a small percentage of the takings, and you get the rest. In return for the sales it's always good to help man these stalls. Time passes quickly chatting about bees with both members and the public.

To be successful in selling on the stalls, your honey needs to stand out from the rest. The legislation for labelling is tight and so the opportunities to be different are in the graphics, the name of your honey, and the shape of your jars. I use 1lb (454g) jars, but others choose 12oz (340g) and 8oz (227g).



Go for something unique, clean and simple for the graphics. Customers will start to recognise your label, and if they like your product, they will come back for more. Often people will be looking for honey from local apiaries, but with two or three beekeepers from the same locality, a distinctive presentation, with labels and jars, is still important.

Local farm shops, butchers and bakers will often sell local honey and it's worth approaching any nearby if you have sufficient stock. Honey shows give you a good indication of the local price point, but retailers will also want a cut, so it's best to decide on the minimum you are prepared to take for your product and set up a sound contract at the start. Do discuss both supply and payment arrangements; cash on delivery is fairly normal for honey. It's worth remembering that most people do not appreciate that honey is only harvested over a few weeks in the summertime. Before

*(left)  
Different  
honeys,  
labels,  
jar sizes.  
Photo  
Jen  
Ferry*







*(left) My stall at a Christmas market. Lots of different honeys and wax products. Visitors are given the opportunity to taste a honey. There are also lots of gift bags, each containing one or two honeys, a wax product and a honey stirrer.  
Photo Jen Ferry*

making any arrangement, I always work out if I'll have enough honey to supply this outlet until the next harvest. It's not in your interest to build up demand in a shop and then run out of honey in December. The shop is likely to look for another supplier, and they won't be coming back to you next summer!

Christmas fairs are another prime outlet for both honey and candles. Most fairs charge only a nominal fee for a stall, and you can reach a local audience that may (once they see your phone number on the label) go on to be loyal customers. I often do candle rolling as an activity at these fairs. It's very popular and engages people, sometimes leading to conversation about bees and honey.

My final avenue for raising product awareness is social media. Beekeepers are not renowned for their tech skill. So if you can run a Facebook site, you will reach a market that is relatively untapped. Regular posts about the bees or the extraction process generate a steady stream of interest and sales throughout the year.

Many beekeepers use 30lb (c.14kg) buckets to store their honey, but I find that 15lb (c.7kg) is a more suitable weight

## WORDS

**Crossover:** The term for the time that the number of spring bee emerging exceeds winter bees dying. It's a bit like the spring equinox in honey bee colony life-cycle terms, and around the same time! I'm not sure if the opposite applies in autumn.

for me. It also gives me the correct quantities to warm and jar every 3-4 weeks. The buckets are labelled with the harvest and extraction dates, and the apiary the honey came from. I also record if the crop is from oilseed rape as I only use this for soft-set creamed honey. I stack these buckets on the garage shelves and there it stays until needed.

One final factor to consider is the variety of products you market. When running three different apiaries, I extracted and marketed the honey separately. Yes, it needs three different lots of labels, but you tap into three different markets, and the honeys are all different. There is also quite a demand for cut comb and it fetches a good price. Packaging is easy to obtain and some years the bees produce cut comb easily if they are given thin unwired foundation and there is a good nectar flow..

Honey is a premium, artisan product, which is very much in demand. Be proud of yours (and the bees' efforts in making it!) and ensure this is reflected in the price.

Jen Ferry

# FROM THE BBKA, NBU, BDI, NHS ...

## FROM BEE DISEASES INSURANCE

The Bee Diseases Insurance (BDI) AGM via Zoom will be at 19:00 on Monday 22 May 2023.

Martin Smith, President of BDI, has written to invite all members of BKAs associated with BDI (MBKA is) to observe the AGM which will be streamed on YouTube. Access will be through BDI's home page on the evening of the talk.

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

However, the main attraction of the evening is likely to be a talk by Maggie Gill, Regional Bee Inspector for Wales, on her trip to Thailand to study the *Tropilaelaps* mite and how beekeepers there deal with it. *Tropilaelaps* is a pest of honey bee colonies. It has not yet reached the UK:

Martin has sent the formal agenda for the Agenda for the AGM, the draft minutes from last year's meeting, and the 2022 financial statements. If you would like to see these, please email me ([Archie McLellan](mailto:Archie McLellan)) and I will forward them to you.

Martin writes in his AGM invitation email:

*Despite a reduction in investment assets of £106,000 during 2022, BDI remains financially strong. These investments are held for the long terms and enable us to fund research, as well as to build up a buffer in case of a major outbreak of disease, particularly any new 'exotic' pest that might arrive on our shores. They are in addition to the reserves we hold in cash equivalents to cover our insurance requirements.*

*The company continues to use some of the investment surpluses to fund research into bee diseases, with just under £20,000 invested in this area in 2022. Details of all the projects being funded by BDI can be found on the [research pages of our website](#).*

*Immediately after the formal business, there will be a talk by Maggie Gill, Regional Bee Inspector for Wales*

*Maggie and her NBU colleague Dan Etheridge recently visited Thailand to study first-hand the *Tropilaelaps* mite and how beekeepers there deal with it. This trip, that was part funded by BDI will enable the National Bee Unit to gain a greater understanding of the pest and help with the contingency plan should it ever arrive in England & Wales.*

*Martin Smith*

## 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 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.

Nevertheless, it's likely that your opinion differs to what you've read here. Do write and say so! The Compiler would much prefer that to his words disappearing into a vacuum.

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



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



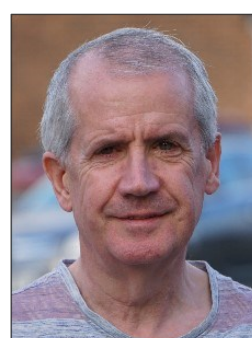
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Vice-Chair - vacant



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