

# WHATSTHEBUZZ



We don't have a Chair, but Mark B is standing in for *Chat with the Chair* today.

*Getting to know you:* a chat with new committee member, Jez Davies

Jen Ferry continues her series with a survey of *the many uses for nuc boxes*.

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers Association.

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

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

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

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

*Picture above: Meresborough, Rainham, 28 April 2023. Photo Archie McLellan*



# Hello to May, to extravagance, and to you all

*Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –*

*When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;  
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush  
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring  
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;*

Spring is a time to wander and wonder, and we are indeed fortunate to have the poem, *Spring*, by Gerard Manley Hopkins to express some of that beauty in words to open this issue of our newsletter.

Of course, beekeepers time for wandering is somewhat curtailed by the extravagant expansion taking place in nature: specifically, flowers outside the hive, and brood inside.

Winter came later this year, but at least it did come. The cold season has been a bit half-hearted in recent years! Some April flowers seemed to be a little later than expected. It may be that brood rearing is a little later too. Regardless of the cold outside the hive, the air temperature in and around the brood nest is stable. However, the queen's laying rate is affected by the ability of the bees to forage for pollen and nectar.

Perhaps only a little, though. The bees have been gathering pollen for months, and they seize every little period of sunshine to collect nectar, even in temperatures as low as 8°C. Does nectar flow in such cold air? Like the bees, the flowers will be warmed up by the radiant warmth of the sun. We are told that nectar flow is reduced by cold, and dries up in heat, or in a breeze. (That didn't seem to be the case last summer, when the flow continued through the heat and drought.)

Back to the present! There's no time to waste. Being able to keep on top of things is about having a clear picture in your mind about the steps for whatever you expect to do as the season progresses. The timing for pre-emptive swarm measures such as Demaree varies with individual colonies. That's not easy to judge. It needs about seven frames of brood, but should not have begun raising queens. For reactive swarm control, you need to have, not just a clear picture of the steps in your mind, but the extra kit needed for whatever method you choose.

And if you plan to raise queens, timing is so finely judged that spreadsheets with automatic dates are available online to help you keep a clear mind.

Everyone can (and should) raise queens by selecting from their best stock. You don't need to graft larvae if you don't want to go down that route. Simply harvest queen cells from your best colony(ies) and either create nuc colonies, or replace poor queens by culling them and replacing with a queen cell.

If you haven't already done so, at least some of your colonies will need supers now. In a month's time, you may well be harvesting honey from the spring flowers.

The spring build-up is also a time of disease build-up. Look out for the foul broods and the general health of the brood. The adults are vulnerable to viruses, especially CBPV and DWV. Check varroa levels regularly. The natural mite drop is very unreliable. Consider shaking some bees in icing sugar.

Inside the hive: the queen laying strongly, drones hatching and maturing, queen cells appearing, swarming, and virgin queens on mating flights. Outside; where to start! In May the profusion of flowers is sheer extravagance!

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# CHAT WITH THE CHAIR

*Our Association does not have a chair (or vice-chair) at the moment. The business of chairing committee meetings is being rotated around the committee. At WHATSTHEBUZZ, we thought it appropriate to rotate the Chat with the Chair columns around the committee too. So following his chairing of the last committee meeting, we invited Mark Ballard to chat with us about the committee's vision and work on behalf of the association.*

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** You chaired the last committee meeting, Mark. Are you getting a taste for it?

**Mark Ballard** I don't know about that! Anyway, I'm going to Somerset soon to visit my son and grandchildren, so I'll miss the next meeting. Someone else will step up – I'm sure!

**WTB** Why do you think no one has offered to be the Chair? Isn't the job simply chairing the committee meetings.

**MB** If that was all, I don't think we'd have any problem finding someone. Sometimes other things go along with being Chair. But I'm already Apiary Manager and on the Education Group, so my time really is at a premium.

**WTB** How did the English Festival go?

**MB** There were just four of us: John C, Nigel R, Hilde, and me. But it went well, and the rain stayed off. Candle making was a big hit, especially with children. We each sold some of our own honey, as well as honey from the Association Apiary.

**WTB** That was a lot of setting up and dismantling work for just four of you. What can be done to engage more people in the activities of the association?

**MB** We have to encourage people to come to the Association Apiary more. It will mean that being a member is a more social thing, for a start. Perhaps we could have little events for newer beekeepers such as frame-making, queen clipping and marking, honey extraction – and so on. Getting your queens marked early in the season makes life so much easier. If you don't get it done, it can be a daunting task finding a black queen in a colony of fifty thousand bees!

**WTB** Do you use any holding or catching device?

**MB** No, just my fingers. I'm right-handed so I get the queen to go from right to left across the frame, so I can track her with my right hand. I pick her up by the wings and put her on my left finger left index finger. Invariably they will put three legs on either side. You can then pinch them with your thumb, and you can squeeze them very tight without damaging them. Never squeeze the abdomen!

**WTB** We're lucky to have the Apiary and its buildings.

**MB** Yes, it's an invaluable asset. Many other associations don't have anything comparable.

**WTB** Is the BBQ happening on 13 May?

**MB** No, we'll have to reschedule. We need to do more to get people involved in the running of it.

**WTB** I found the Kent County show website last night. Do you take part in it?

**MB** I always take part. I love it! I help setting up on the Thursday, and steward for at least one day. I take part in the Kent Show Honey Show too. It's a great opportunity to talk to people about bees and honey. When Terry Clare was about, we used to do live bee inspections. We'd have half a dozen hives, netting all round, a microphone so we could explain what we were doing, opening the hive up and taking a frame of bees with the queen on it to the netting so people could see.

**WTB** We'll need to make sure that our members are aware of this Honey Show! Separately, is the Taster Day on 20 May booking up?

**MB** Yes, though we could do with more. We're hoping that some people will decide to go on to the Introductory Course in July.

**WTB** Is there an 'energy crisis' in MBKA?

**MB** Perhaps an interest crisis! All small associations can expect to have only a small proportion of their members really engaged in the activities of the Association. But we do what we can; the more people we are able to interest in beekeeping, the more people will become engaged in the Association, and in sharing their interest with others.

**WTB** Thanks Mark, good to talk with you.



# MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

## TIMES AND DATES

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

<b>29 April</b>	Sat	<a href="#">Annual Lecture: Lynne Ingram, Somerset BKA – The truth about honey?</a>
<b>13 May</b>	Sat	14:00-16:00 Barbeque, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX <b>DEFERRED</b>
<b>20 May</b>	Sat	<a href="#">10:00-15:00 Beekeeping Taster Day, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX</a>
<b>20 May</b>	Sat	<a href="#">World Bee Day</a>
<b>22 May</b>	Mon	19:00 <a href="#">Bee Diseases Insurance (BDI) AGM streaming via YouTube</a> , 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 ( <a href="#">Click here to take part in the Honey Show</a> ) 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

## ASSESSMENTS AND MODULES

*Sonia Belsey is our Exams Organiser. Not surprisingly, she recommends exams as a useful tool in learning about beekeeping.*

If anyone is interested in doing the Basic Assessment, please let me know. This is likely to take place in the second or third week of July. The Basic Assessment is a great way to consolidate your knowledge. When you are being assessed, you are just doing what you usually do

when you are attending to your bees. The only difference is that someone is watching you do it. I usually hate practical exams, but when I did the Basic a few years ago, I really enjoyed it. I felt that passing the assessment made me more confident in my beekeeping. It turned out I did know what I was doing!

The syllabus is [here on the BBKA website](#).

Modules can be a great starter for expanding your knowledge. Syllabuses can be [viewed or downloaded here](#). You might like to prepare one over the summer for the November exam (date 18th). You don't have to sit them in any particular order, but I would recommend starting with the first two modules. The later modules are more demanding though there is some overlap with earlier course material.

Even if you don't want to sit exams, working through the syllabuses can help increase your knowledge about bees. We have lots of books in the library which you can borrow for exam study or just reading for interest. Do contact me and ask! I'm also happy to answer any queries about the modules or practical assessments.

Sonia Belsey, Exams Organiser,  
sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

## COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

The Committee met last on Wednesday 5 April 2023 at The Bridgewood Manor Hotel. Sheila Stunell, Ian Halls, Mark Ballard (Chairman), Karon Thomas-West, Tony Edwards, and Nigel Rawlins were there. Here is a summary of the reports and discussion.

**The Treasurer / Membership Secretary's report** states that we have 117 members at present. This is c.20% lower than last year. Eleven members have written to say that they do not intend to renew their subscriptions, and a further 27 have not renewed.

**At the Association Apiary**, Hive 4 has gone, and Hive 9 may be on the way out. Mark has accepted the quote of £243.61 from the NFU for insurance of the Apiary buildings. We are into grass cutting season now. John Chapman is taking up the matter of the full-bore water leak in the land behind the pavilion building with the landowner. Work programme in the next few months includes hard core to the access road, and installing a key safe for the keys so that multiple keys do not need to be issued to apiary inspectors.

**The Education Group** reported that there are nine candidates for the Taster Day. So far only two have signed up for the Introductory Course. Four members plan to sit the Basic Assessment.

## ASSOCIATION APIARY

### FROM MARK BALLARD, APIARY MANAGER

We currently have 5 active hives.

- H1 14x12 National + QE and 1 super. 9 seams of bees and 4/5 frames of brood
- H3 14x12 National + QE and 1 super. The queen was found laying in the super – lots of drone brood. The drones will have to be let out at next inspection. 9 seams of bees and 4 frames of brood.

**Website:** Paul and Sonia have agreed a hand-over date. Everything is up to date.

**Future Events:** ENGLISH FESTIVAL: Tony went to see John with candle wax. Fortunately our location this year is not alongside the food stalls. Tony has a kit list for the day. A huge list of tasks has been allocated to Mark, Sheila and John. The price list for selling our honey is £8 1lb. £6.50 12oz, 4.50 8oz. Rolled candles £1 and £2. ANNUAL LECTURE: 26 people have bought tickets. Sheila to contact Lynne. SUMMER MEETINGS: The BBQ for early May will have to be deferred because we don't have people to organise and run it. At the open day on 15 July at the Apiary we might have a session on queen marking.

**Any other business:** MARK will contact one of our members to explain the renovation needed for the pavilion roof. Concrete Brett Aggregates charge £22 per tonne. Pindens Longfield are half the price. We might need 100 tonnes. JEZ's wife will do logos for sweatshirts. Other topics included merchandise for sale – particularly for children pencils pens etc; our badge-making kit; levels of equipment at the apiary; and the value of bulk purchasing.

- H5 14x12 National. Brood box has 2 standard 14x8 frames which need to be replaced with 14x12 frames. 9 frames of bees and 5 frames of brood.
- H6 Now in a 14x12 poly nuc box. 4 frames of bees with a marked queen, eggs, unsealed and sealed brood.
- H8 14x12 National brood box. 6 seams of bees and 4 frames of brood. May need more frames put in.



The Seasonal Bee Inspector will make a site visit on Tuesday the 2 May to inspect all the colonies.

Now that the chances of a heavy frost have passed, the drain down valves have been closed and the water turned back on.

The track leading down to the Pavilion is still causing problems when it rains.

We have not suffered any

vandalism for some while now. It is thought that all the time members are using the Apiary and the Apiary is well maintained this helps deter the temptation to vandalise the Pavilion.

Some of the residents from the bungalows also keep an open eye on the Apiary.

We will be starting maintenance work parties, on Saturdays, once the finer weather arrives to do the following tasks:

## 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.

- Paint the rear wall of the Pavilion.
- Cut the grass and weed around plants/shrubs.
- Clean brood boxes, supers and hive components
- Make up frames and fit foundation.

Any offers of volunteering will be welcome.

*Mark Ballard – Apiary Manager*



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

# WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

## WORLD BEE DAY – 20 MAY

Visit the [World Bee day page](#) on the United Nations website here. Here's a tiny extract:

### We need to act now

*Bees are under threat. Present species extinction rates are 100 to 1,000 times higher than normal due to human impacts. Close to 35 percent of invertebrate pollinators, particularly bees and butterflies, and about 17 percent of vertebrate pollinators, such as bats, face extinction globally.*

## KENT COUNTY SHOW

Did you know, there's a Honey Show at the [Kent County Show \(6-9 July\)](#). Full details of the classes to enter, and [how to apply online, can be found here](#).

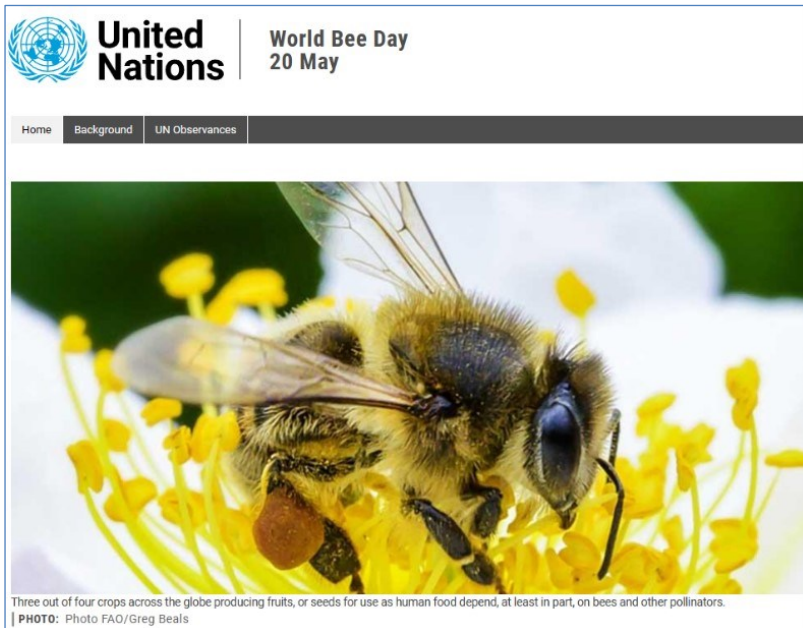
The schedule and regulations are behind the green button on the right marked 'Download documents'. Mark Ballard wrote above about how much he loved taking part in this show, including helping with stewarding. You might want to consider getting involved, either by showing honey, or by stewarding – or both!

### John Chapman, our President, is Secretary of the Kent Honey Show. He sends this message:

We are again in the Maidstone Hall which is in the middle of the Detling Showground for the three days of the Kent Agricultural Show from Friday 7 July to Sunday 9 July with a set-up day on Thursday 6 July. We will need your help to make this event a success both with stewarding for one of the days, helping to set-up the displays on Thursday and in packing away on the Sunday. If you are able to help, please contact Bob Smith (Sidcup BKA), our Chief Steward.

Email [bsmith12@ntlworld.com](mailto:bsmith12@ntlworld.com). His contact details are on the front of the Kent Honey Show Schedule, [which you can download here](#), along with [a paper entry form](#), for those who would rather not use [the online form](#).

Stewards work on one of the displays for half a day and have the other half to go round the show. Our displays include observation hives, plants for pollinators, hive-to-jar, information and 'what the new beekeeper needs', bumble bees and other insects, badge-making and candle rolling (for people of all ages). You do not have to know lots of information as you will be briefed on the display. These displays are all provided for at the *general public* so the



emphasis is on basic information. If you don't know the answer, either Bob Smith or I will be around to suggest somebody to pass them on to for help.

We would very much like to have your honey and hive products for sale. We intend to sell 1lb of honey @ £8, 12oz @ £6.50, and 8oz @ £5. Wax blocks are £1.50 as a guide to pricing your candles. To help cover the expenses of the show, Kent BKA will take 10% commission (just like we do at MBKA events).

*John Chapman, Secretary, Kent Honey Show*

## 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!

Their next talk is from [Jane Medwell, Swarm control – beyond the nucleus method on May 3, 2023](#)

## SOMERSET BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

[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.

## NORFOLK HONEY COMPANY

[Stuart Spinks has a large series of videos](#) clearly (painstakingly?) demonstrating the orthodox ways of doing everything in small scale beekeeping.

## BLACK MOUNTAIN HONEY

[Lawrence Edwards's many videos on his channel called 'No Nonsense Beekeeping'](#) cover everything he has and does.

He is an engaging presenter. Like other able people, you

can but marvel at how he manages to fit in so much activity.

## UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH HONEY BEE RESEARCH CENTRE

[These videos, presented by Paul Kelly](#), are, by a country mile, my favourite beekeeping videos. Not that one would necessarily want to adopt Paul's methods – but I would die to have his bee handling skills.

## BEEKEEPING FORUM

[BKF is a family](#). And, as you would expect, there can be a bit of squabbling from time to time. Just ignore it. Here you will find wonderful beekeepers who are endlessly generous with their time. My favourites include a couple of vets (@Erichalfbee and @wilco) who, because of their training, are well versed in biology, and hugely insightful in diagnosing problems and prescribing remedies or ways of dealing with a 'situation'. The one huge advantage of BKF over anything else you'll find online is that as soon as someone posts anything inaccurate or unwise, there will be a clamour of voices setting things right. YouTube doesn't have that. anyone can post anything and get away with it.

# REGISTER AS A FOOD PRODUCER?

There is NO REQUIREMENT as a small-scale beekeeper to register with Medway Council as a food producer. The law does not clearly state any requirement for registration by beekeepers who sell through local retailers. (See *Food Safety for Beekeepers*, Andy Pedley, pp71-72).

However, I have quite a lot of colonies, and got a fair crop of honey last year. I thought it might be a good idea to apply to be registered. A Food Safety officer from the Council visited me to inspect the premises and ask some questions. (Mostly the latter.) Now I am registered. I have no document to say so; just a yellow carbon copy of the notes made by the officer during her visit to my house. The officer was quite open during her visit that she didn't know if I should be registered. But we had a long chat, during which she asked about every aspect of my honey producing business. After a discussion with her boss, they decided that I should be registered, that my production facility (kitchen) and procedures were adequate, and that my labelling was correct. And that someone from their

department would visit me again in three years' time. That's it. No more documents, and no information about anything the council expected of me now that I was a registered Food Producer.

### How much honey makes you a 'food producer'?

I'm not saying – really not! – that because one official decided I should be registered, that other officials would necessarily take the same view of other beekeeper's requirement to be registered. What I think tipped the scale towards deciding that I should be registered was my answer to her question: 'How many jars of honey a year do you sell?' I didn't see her jaw hit the floor – but I suspect that figure changed her perception of my honey production as small-scale.

### A good or a bad thing?

I'm glad they decided that I should be registered. If the opportunity presents itself, I'll be able to say to anyone buying my honey that I'm overseen (to a degree!) by the



Council. Sadly, I've not been awarded a Food Hygiene Rating. The email I received stated: *As a producer/packer your food business is excluded from the scope of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, and you will not receive a FHRS sticker.*

In Medway, the official who visited me said that their Food Safety Dept. had just been given the Trading Standards role in addition. She was aware that a steep learning curve lay ahead! I kept quiet about the endless discussion on honey labelling, particularly about descriptions not listed in the Honey Regs (2015).

## BBKA NEWS

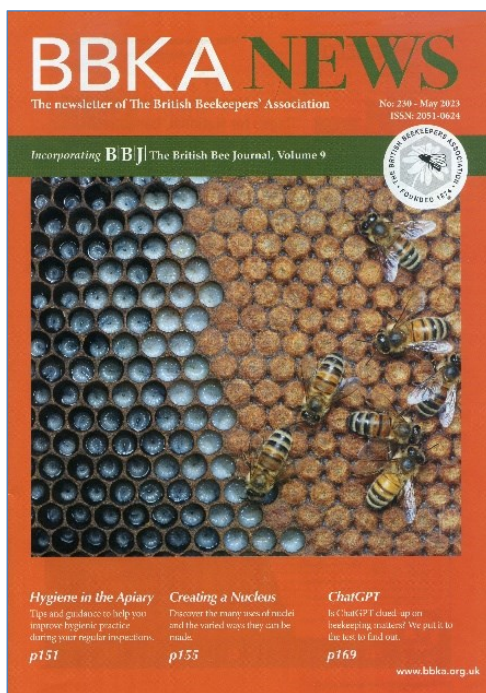
Yes, I know you'd rather have a paper copy delivered to your door so that you can read it wherever you take it (even to a small room!) and not need to fiddle about with a phone or be at a computer to read it online. It is easier, of course it is. But does that make it right? What is sustainable about the production of over 28,000 paper copies of BBKA News, and how much carbon is released into the atmosphere delivering these to all of us individually?

### The cost of paper BBKA News and delivery

I've looked at the BBKA accounts from the last Annual Delegates Meeting. BBKA News costs over £250,000 but brings in a lot in advertising revenue. Postage costs are around £10,000. The accounts don't give much detail. It is not clear if BBKA News staff costs (which are very small) are included, or if this figure relates to production only. Advertising from all sources including BBKA News brings in around £110,000. The figure for postage seems rather small for 12 month's delivery of 28,000 magazines. Perhaps the quarter-million figure for 'BBKA News' includes delivery / postage. The accounts are not fully clear.

### At least offer a choice

Isn't it time that the BBKA ask members if they want paper or digital copies and charge a little less for those who opt for digital. This would of course be done at association level. Renewals (online, like we did this year in MBKA)



would include an option for paper or digital, just as presently exists for BeeCraft subscriptions. (BeeCraft also has an option 'No BeeCraft' which probably wouldn't be available for BBKA members.) The subscription to pay is automatically calculated by the database software.

There really is no excuse not to implement this. Read the first paragraph above again.

In Medway BKA, people opt to pay less and read online. Our member's BeeCraft subscriptions have increased hugely this year because we offered the (much cheaper) option of a digital

subscription. Members chose to buy the digital subscription where they'd not subscribed at all in the past.

### Imagine!

What would happen next is a truly delicious moment for the BBKA. They can sit around committees and meetings and decide how they're going to spend all the money they've saved by not producing and delivering so many paper copies of BBKA News. I'm sure many would opt to continue with paper magazines, but a sensible price reduction would guarantee that many would opt for digital. (BeeCraft is £20 for digital, £33 for paper.)

### What next?

I suppose the next step is to make a proposition at the next ADM. Any takers?

# WILD ISLES - ATTENBOROUGH

Did you watch the latest BBC David

Attenborough series on wild life in the British Isles?

These programmes are hard not to like. Stunning photography, beguiling music, and the most recognisable voice on the planet, all in the cause of generating a worldwide

effort to stop the devastation of a host of species of plant and animal.

## Insect decline

Twice in this series the great man told us that in the UK we have lost 60% of our insects over the last 20 years. Insect loss is well-publicised. Few dispute it. Everyone over a certain age recalls the splatter of insect corpses on cars after a journey. Rarely is such a massacre seen nowadays. This is terrible news. There may be several reasons why our cars are clean of insects nowadays but, regardless, it is accepted that this points to the reality of catastrophic insect decline.

I looked around the web to find the study that Attenborough was referring to. It looks like it might be [this one](#). The title is: *The Bugs Matter Citizen Science survey: counting insect 'splats' on number plates reveals a 58.5% reduction in the abundance of actively flying insects in the UK between 2004 and 2021*. It is a paper from research sponsored by Buglife, The Diocese of Oxford, and Kent Wildlife Trust.

This study is professional and thorough – as far as I can tell. Insect splat on cars might seem a rather crude way to measure such insect decline, but a study had been done in 2004 so repeating the research in 2019 and 2021 would, it was hoped, allow direct comparisons to be made. The headline result of the research – in the title so you wouldn't miss it – caught the attention of the BBC for their Wild Isles series, and the BBC literally broadcast it.

## Not so fast, now

In fact, the study tells a far more nuanced tale. The researchers are at pains to point out the limitations of their



Damselflies fanning wings as they mate on a Wiltshire river

research, and the very limited scope for extrapolation from their results. They wrote:

*'Whilst there is growing evidence of potentially catastrophic declines in insect diversity and abundance, care must be taken to not extrapolate too far, with potential*

*consequences for undermining public confidence in research. We recognise and stress that the results we have reported here do not constitute a trend, and advocate strongly for data collection over extended timeframes to enable conclusions about trends in insect populations to be drawn.'*

## Follow the data...

I remember a talk given by Mike Edwards to the Central Association of Beekeepers a couple of years ago. In the context of the Ivy mining bee (*Coletes hedera*) which arrived recently in England and has flourished, to some acclaim, he said it was important to always follow the data – especially when making pronouncements.

## ... and let it speak for itself

Do you remember the panic in 2019 after the Guardian and others published the findings of a [study by lead author Francisco Sánchez-Bayo](#) claiming that 40% of insect species were likely to disappear within a few decades? Despite the fact that this study had been peer-reviewed, many criticised the lack of data for the claims being made. In an interview on Radio 4's *More or less*, Sánchez-Bayo admitted that that he and his co-author didn't have the data to prove their claims statistically. But that didn't mean they shouldn't make these claims, he said. 'We know that this is happening. So it's better to do it now and not ten years later when we will have a more serious problem. We think that the world's insects could be wiped out in a century from now.'

Scientists demonstrate facts from data. The authors of the Buglife / Kent Wildlife study were aware of this, and that

bad research – or selective quoting – ‘can undermine public confidence in research.’

### Streamlining?

Incidentally, there is one finding in this study that I find unexpected. Although people often say that the reduction

in the number of insect splats on our cars may to some extent be a consequence of efficient streamlining of modern cars, it was the **newest** models of cars that had the highest rates of splatter in the 2021 survey!

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU – JEZ DAVIES

**A** series in which *WHATSTHEBUZZ* chats with *MBKA* members about beekeeping and life in general. This month, *WHATSTHEBUZZ* chats with Jez Davies, now in his second season of beekeeping and a new member of the committee.

**WHATSTHEBUZZ** Welcome Jez. How are your bees now at the start of your second season?

**Jez Davies** They're good! I took eight colonies into winter and they're all bursting at the seams now. I've got two on double brood and two supers already, and the bees are across all the boxes. I've inspected only twice because of the weather, and one has already swarmed.

**WTB** How do you know?

**JD** There was lots of sealed brood but no eggs or larvae. I put a frame of eggs in and they started drawing cells immediately. The weather is playing havoc with them. One that one minute they're happily foraging and next minute they're all boxed up and can't get out.

**WTB** Where do you keep your hives?

**JD** In my garden in Sittingbourne. I've spoken to the neighbours and they're happy. On one side is a keen vegetable grower – almost a silent beekeeper. On the other side, he loves his flowers. So he's quite happy.

**WTB** How did you have eight colonies by the end of your first season.

**JD** I bought three nucs. When they started producing queen cells, I did some splits, and expanded up to eight. Last year was great for everyone, so I managed to get a good honey crop too.

**WTB** What's the forage in your area?

**JD** Everyone's back gardens. I'm not really sure. I'd like to get my honey analysed by the National Honey Monitoring Scheme to see if they can tell me what's in my honey.

**WTB** Have you sold your honey?

**JD** Mainly to friends and work colleagues. We now have one retail outlet – a farm shop.

**WTB** You must be thrilled with how your beekeeping has worked out.

**JD** It's a challenge! I didn't anticipate that, nor quite how stressful it could be too!

**WTB** How did you and beekeeping meet up?

**JD** It was lockdown. I was driving the wife absolutely mad being stuck indoors. I do a lot of scuba diving for World War 1 and 2 wrecks out of Dover. Lockdown killed that temporarily. So my wife bought me a beehive at Christmas. I then started watching and reading everything I could, and it's just now become an obsession. I have never known anything that could be so absorbing.

**WTB** How's your DIY?

**JD** My father was a builder. I enjoy DIY and have tools in the garage.

**WTB** Was diving your job as well as a hobby?

**JD** No. I've done it for 25 years, but beekeeping is squeezing it out. I want to keep it going though.

**WTB** Presumably you dive with others?

**JD** Yes, my wife dives too.

**WTB** Family?

**JD** Four children between us. The oldest is 30 and they have a daughter. Next daughter is 28, and then our two are 23 and 21. They're both at uni in Canterbury. Because of lockdown, they missed out on a lot of the student experience.



**WTB** And your job?

**JD** I'm an IT analyst for an energy trading company in London.

**WTB** Have you done any modules or assessments?

**JD** After the Intro Course, I did Module 2 and sat the exam recently. I'm going to do the Basic this summer. I've found the *BBKA Special* series very helpful. I've read them on honey, on flowers and forage, and am now looking at queen rearing and swarming. YouTube is my friend, now that I've found some channels that I trust and are reliable. Stuart Spinks and Lawrence Edwards are very good, and David Burns in America. Richard Noel in Brittany too. I like the clarity of David Evans's blog posts.

**WTB** Do you read WHATSTHEBUZZ?

**JD** Yes I do. It's quite interesting. There's a lot of different stuff in there.

## HANDY HINTS

### Hive security

If you have long wooden stands, screw the floor to the stand. It makes things just a little harder for thieves. Bees are valuable – and expensive to replace!

### Cleaning wax filter material

Do you use voile or muslin when reclaiming wax? It can get pretty filthy with slumgum, bee bits and wax. You might feel it's not worth trying to clean the filter material for reuse. But that's not very 'sustainable' so we should at least see what can be done.

Vegetable oil is a solvent\* for *liquid* wax. As soon as you have dumped all the detritus from filtering in the bin, and

## HONEY RECORDS

**T**here is a range of opinion on the extent to which record-keeping is required for honey bee colonies. On the one hand there are beekeepers who note everything about life in the hive, and the weather and forage outside. They might store this information on paper, or a phone app, or an Excel spreadsheet. And on the other there are those who simply want to be reminded of the state of the

**WTB** And opinionated!

**JD** You're just trying to stir the hornet's nest!

**WTB** You've joined our committee.

**JD** Yes! Sheila hoodwinked me. I'm happy to help and do stuff. I want to learn but I'm not going to get embroiled in politics. When I'm ready, I'd like to give something back, and help new members.

**WTB** Sounds great – what you've what you've achieved already and what's been happening for you. I'm sure there's been a bit of luck as well and no doubt you'll have to pay later with a bit of bad luck too!

**JD** Undoubtedly I've been lucky. And it's been very enjoyable too.

**WTB** Thanks Jez. Great to talk with you.

before the wax hardens, submerge the voile in a little container with vegetable oil. Use a wooden spoon to agitate it and leave for a while. Then add a spoon of washing powder, fill the container with hot water from the kettle, agitate again, perhaps lifting the material in and out of the container, and leave. When you rinse out the voile later, it should be fairly clean. Certainly you shouldn't have any qualms about putting it in with a regular wash in the machine.

\* Apparently solvents for wax include 'ether, acetone, xylol, benzene, chloroform, and tetrachloromethane'. Turps is also mentioned, but I found that vegetable oil worked fine and was the nearest thing to hand. Whatever you use, **the wax must be liquid.**

colony at the last inspection, and store that information with a brick on the roof oriented in different directions.

There is not so much divergence of opinion about record-keeping for honey – at least if you are selling to retailers or the public. Every jar you label must have a Lot number or a 6-figure Best before date. With either of these you should

be able to refer to your records for that batch and have certain information instantly available.

### What to record

When you harvest and extract honey, make a note of the apiary, date, weight, and % water content. Label or mark this info on the honey bucket.

When you jar the honey, complete your record with the information on the bucket, plus the number and weight of jars, your estimate of the colour (light to dark) of the honey, and the date of jarring. You might choose to use your date of jarring to calculate your 'Best before' date. (Mine is 2.5 years after the date of jarring.)

### Best before...

A friend told me that he'd received a call from Trading Standards about his honey labels. He had printed: 'Best before June 2024'. This was wrong! He should have stated 'Best before **end** June 2024'

I don't think this would apply if you use a 6-figure 'Best before' date (such as 01/06/23). And if you do that, there is no need to include a *Lot number* on your label.

## BEEKEEPING – ONE HOBBY OR TEN?

*Jen Ferry continues her exploration of the craft of beekeeping through her own experiences and stories Today, Jen writes about the various uses she finds for nuc boxes.*

**M**y favourite piece of equipment is the six frame, 14 x 12 poly nuc (a National nuc with an eke to convert it to a 14 x 12) which includes a Miller feeder.

### Over-wintering colonies

At this time of year, I am always keen to open my over-wintered nucs to see how they are doing. These are the nucs which were established with the queens which I raised last July. The nucs were made up with two frames of brood, two frames of stores, two frames of drawn comb and a sealed 14-day queen cell from my last cell builder hive. There is time in late summer for these queens to hatch, be mated and lay a big enough colony to get them through the winter. I feed syrup while the queen is getting established and then leave them alone once the colony is stable. Brambles and ivy are plentiful in my area from August to October. Sometimes I need to put a super on to give more space for all the stores they collect. The colonies usually

### Labelling

It can be costly to print an economical batch of labels (usually 1000 minimum. Large label runs might not be appropriate if you have a range of different honeys:

different locations, clear / soft-set / comb etc. Bee equipment retailers sometimes offer honey jar labels with rolling Lot numbers. But their labels have very generic (to be polite!) designs and your honey will not stand out beside a custom-designed label.

One solution is to have only the constants (Brand name, your details, and country of origin) on the front label, and produce a simple text-only back label with the information that varies such as weight, date, Lot number.

Another option (instead of rolling Lot numbers) is to use 6-figure dates, and stamp these with a date gun ([like this](#)) on the base of your jar. The label itself will simply state 'Best before date on base of jar'.

come through the winter and are strong. I treat for varroa with oxalic acid when I think they are broodless in the winter; apart from that, I leave them alone. Some of the colonies are slower to get going than others. This year I lost one National and one 14 x 12 nuc but the other six came through strong and all



have four or five frames of brood. These colonies are a valuable resource; they can be used to replace any winter losses or to strengthen weak or queenless colonies. Any surplus nucs can be sold; there is a ready market for strong, healthy colonies.

### Swarm control

The next job for the nucs is to use them for swarm prevention and control. With hives housing very large colonies expanding fast on oil seed rape, I often choose to

split colonies. This is a pre-emptive move; leaving them to get congested in the brood box may provoke swarming. However, I only do these splits if there are drones in the hive. There is no point in forcing a new colony to raise a queen if she can't get mated.

### Splits

In years like this one, where it has been difficult to open the hives due to the weather, it is likely that we will find that they have started swarm preparation and a lot of queen cells are present. It is also possible that the old queen will still be in the colony as the weather has not been warm enough for her to leave with a swarm, even if there are sealed queen cells. In this situation, you need to act fast! I have several clean nucs ready with fresh frames in them. I split the colony. I put the queen, a frame of stores and a frame of brood (covered with nurse bee but with no queen cells) into a nuc. I move this nuc to a new location. The remaining stores and brood I leave in the original, now queenless box. I knock down the queen cells, leaving just one open cell, and the remaining nurse bees raise a new queen. The foragers will stay with this part of the split and provision the developing colony. The queen will carry on laying in the nuc and will establish a new colony.

### Collecting swarms

My next use for my nucs is to collect swarms. They are big enough with the frames removed to knock a swarm into. Being able to close the entrance, drop the frames back in and move the swarm to a better location is invaluable. If the swarm is not a big one, they can be left in the nuc until they build up.

### Queen rearing

In summer, I use a nuc as a queenless cell raiser. I set up a nuc with five fresh frames and the sixth frame as a grafting bar. I fill the nuc with nurse bees from three or four disease-free hives until the box is bursting with bees. I leave these bees shut in for a day and then remove the empty grafting bar that they have conditioned with their smell. I fill the bar with grafts of newly hatched larvae and then return it to the nuc. I feed the nuc, and in the queenless, but now open nuc, the bees concentrate around the grafts and start drawing out the queen cells. I move the grafts to a queenright cell raiser colony after 24 hours.

### Introducing a new queen

A nuc is invaluable for introducing a queen to a full-size, difficult colony. You are much more likely to be successful if you first introduce the queen to a made-up colony in a nuc before combining the nuc with the full-size colony.

### A cosy space for a small colony

Lastly, the nuc is useful to downsize any small colony that is struggling to expand in a full-size hive. By enclosing the bees in a smaller area and feeding them, you remove stress and may enable them to thrive.

These versatile pieces of equipment are in constant demand in my apiaries, and I now have more nucs than hives! Feel free to email me if you have any questions on the various ways I use nucs.

Jen Ferry [Jen\\_ferry@hotmail.com](mailto:Jen_ferry@hotmail.com)

## 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

## SWARM COLLECTING

Medway BKA no longer operates a swarm phone. If a member of the public finds a swarm, a web search will likely bring up the BBKA 'Find a local swarm collector page.' They enter a postcode which brings up a map of the area showing the location and phone number of local swarm collectors. If you would like to be on the map, contact [A McLellan, our Membership Secretary](#).

## COMMENTS

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

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.



*Sometimes a cherry tree seems to be stretching with joy at being alive. Photo Archie McLellan 28 April 2023*

# 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



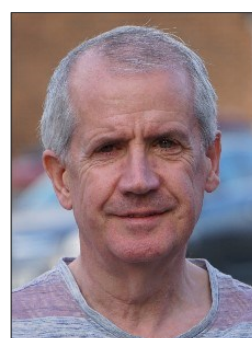
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