

WHATSTHEBUZZ



Diary of a Newbee Keeper, in which Jane Wheeler finds so much happening in so short a time.

Sonia Belsey on amazing Kent orchids, with her photos.

Jen Ferry on the fascination of queen rearing – and taking it a stage further to selective queen breeding.

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: Hawthorn behind, beans in front – and cow parsley in the middle. Photo A McLellan

Hello to June, to warmer days (oh really?), and to you all

Earlier this year, it was blackthorn. I thought I'd never seen so much before. In recent weeks, it has been the turn of hawthorn. There have been miles of it, dripping with blossom beside our roads and fields, and it has been wonderful. Was this year special, for either of these plants? Or is it simply that becoming a beekeeper makes you hyper-aware of flowers that might be forage for bees? Or perhaps just more alive to seasonal activity in all nature around us?

Spring in the south east has been rather cold. The last few weeks a little less so, but not yet particularly warm. Swarming was delayed, but only for a while. The backlog created something of a profusion, so much so that [the BBC thought it worthy to be a news item](#). Even so, it wasn't sufficiently attention-grabbing by itself, so Professor David Chandler, a microbiologist and entomologist at Warwick University, was invited to comment. He stated, controversially: 'We only have honeybees now because of beekeepers. There are no wild honeybees in this country because honeybees are affected by a parasitic mite which feeds on their blood. It's an invasive species.'

No wild honey bees? There are some who would disagree passionately with that statement! Blood-sucking? Sounds much more gruesome than 'fat body consuming'. And is 'invasive' really the right term here? Professor, one would almost think you had an *agenda*!

I lost all but one of my mini-mating nucs to a badger or fox or dog. Obviously they were too close to the ground. As if to restore my spirits, today my dog caught a badger on the farm where my bees live, and badger and dog had quite a roll around till I was able to pull the dog away. 'Be fair, Buster', I said, 'You don't *know* that it was *this* badger that destroyed my nucs and ate the contents.'

On to our monthly survey of life for the beekeeper, the bees, and nature around us.

June tasks will be like May's for beekeepers and perhaps you'll take a spring honey crop. So much is in flower now, you might ask if there will soon be a gap. Keep an eye on stores, and check mite levels. Ensure that colonies that have swarmed, or have been split to pre-empt swarms, are queen-right.

Colonies are now nearing maximum size with queens laying strongly. Swarming continues, and virgin queens will be on mating flights. Let them get on with it, undisturbed.

How to select for a list of available forage? My cotoneaster is almost over, and I haven't seen bramble yet. There's borage, dead nettle, privet, white clover, and so much more.

In this issue, we have a veritable army of correspondents: Sonia Belsey, on her passion for finding orchids in Kent, and her plans for an MBKA entry to a new class in the National Honey Show; Jane Wheeler, with extracts from her diary as she embarks on her beekeeping journey; Jen Ferry on queen rearing; Ray Copeland on losing his colonies to foulbrood, and how to recover from such a devastating experience; contributions from Melvyn Belsey, Rob Frost and Hilde Koets; items for sale, including freebies; and a video on making frames at a rate of several dozen per hour. There has never been a WTB issue like this! I hope you find there's something for you. *Archie McLellan, WTB compiler*

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CHAT WITH THE (ROTATING) 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. Sonia Belsey is used to chairing meetings and, no doubt, will be taking a turn at a Medway BKA committee meeting soon. Here she chats about her vision for the association and the activities that particularly engage her.

WHATSTHEBUZZ Welcome Sonia. Have you chaired a committee meeting yet?

Sonia Belsey No, but I thought I'd ask if I could next time. I chair meetings at work. It can be difficult, especially if you're doing it all the time. So we should take it in turns.

WTB What's the first thing that jumps to mind about your engagement with the Association?

SB I've recently taken over the website. Paul Lawrence has been a very good teacher! I'm hoping to change a few things such as having a calendar for our events. People ask where they can find local honey. I'd like to put up a map like the BBKA swarm collectors map.

WTB Is the Events list up to date on the website?

SB I've updated it. We've got some new evening sessions on Wednesdays at 6.00pm. We're doing apiary hygiene at the first one. I hope people will come. It will be nice to see each other.

WTB It might be the first time some of our members have been to the Apiary.

SB Yes, and they'll be able to see our set-up and the equipment we have – including the honey room with the extractor for hire.

WTB You wear a Social Media hat on the committee.

SB I wonder if there's a place for an Association-wide WhatsApp group. We already have a few WhatsApp groups for Module exams or queen rearing. It's an easy way to communicate with people and share pictures and what's happening with your bees. You get responses almost immediately when you're a bit stuck.

WTB We used to have something called BeeChat.

SB I live in Sittingbourne, so it was a bit far for me to drive to Upnor. Maybe we can set it up again, possibly with individual members choosing a venue, a date, and sending an invite. I'm more of a food than drink person, so I'm looking forward to the summer BBQ at the Apiary. Obviously that involves a lot of organisation compared to just turning up at a pub!

WTB Do you think we could do more to get people to be more active in the Association, especially helping to run things?

SB We could do better! But it's not easy to find out who those people are and what their ideas are. To anyone reading this who has an idea for something, please speak to a committee member.

WTB You don't even need to join the committee!

SB Indeed not. Ideas come out of social gatherings when people start talking to each other.

WTB What's the Association for?

SB To support people. And beekeeping in the public's eye as well. I love learning and I love education. It's about inspiring the next generations of beekeepers, not just about bees, but about the environment and how we care for the planet.

WTB How should we be asking? I would guess that 20% of our members read the newsletter.

SB I love your reminder emails. They work for me.

WTB How was the Taster Day last week?

SB You could feel the excitement of people being close to bees for the first time. They were all very receptive. We had different stations set up, so they did a little bit each on biology, pests, other bees, equipment, and different hive types. And then a practical session afterwards.

WTB What's your day job just now?

SB I'm a quality and performance assistant in the NHS, for the criminal justice liaison. I organise a team which deals with people coming into police custody that might have mental health issues or social vulnerabilities.

WTB How are your bees just now?



SB The bees have gone crazy. We had massive colonies going into winter, and they've done really well. We lost one but we tend to let our queens live their lives out, so it wasn't surprising that one who was four or five years old didn't make it.

Our bees (I work with my dad) are on a farm. They had been abandoned when we were asked to take them over. They'd lived there for years in awful conditions, yet somehow survived. I'm a firm believer that the bees will sort themselves out eventually. Sometimes, they need a hand, and they need help. I think they're incredibly clever.

My dad started beekeeping 15 or 16 years ago. I watched him at the bees through the patio door – keeping a safe

distance. When my dad had a knee operation, I started helping him. My dad had taken a course. He taught me as we went along. We lost bees often: over winter, swarming, and simply not doing things right. It's really important when you're a new beekeeper to persevere. You will lose bees. But don't lose your passion or your drive to do it. My dad and I used to call ourselves bee-losers rather than bee keepers. But you will learn to read the bees and pre-empt them although they'll still surprise you. It's easy to despair. Stay with beekeeping because you'll love it. And you'll become obsessed like the rest of us.

WTB Thanks Sonia. Good to talk to you.

MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

TALK AND DISCUSSION SESSION WITH BOB SMITH, NDB

20:00-22:00 Thursday 22 June, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG

Varroa represents one of the key challenges in managing colonies to be healthy and productive. Although some groups are now finding it possible to keep bees without treatment, the majority of us are still in a situation where, without some kind of intervention, varroa will seriously impact the growth of a colony and reduce the likelihood of it surviving over winter. However, compared to the early days, we now have multiple treatments, chemical and non-chemical, that we can utilise to manage this exotic pest with some confidence. In fact, with so many VMD Approved varroacides, it can be difficult to know which one to use.

- This talk will look at that multitude of chemical possibilities and also some non-chemical, husbandry options, their advantages and disadvantages, and attempt to identify safe and effective control measures.
- In the second part of this workshop we will look at some examples of situations that could arise, and discuss what our best options might be.
- The overall aim is to provide some guidance in a quite complex array of possibilities and to give you confidence in managing this destructive parasitic mite.

TASTER DAY

Sheila Stunell, one of the team running the session, writes about the day.

What a wonderful day we had at the Association Apiary on Saturday 20 May. We held our first ever taster day and were delighted to welcome 11 people to this event.

The Apiary itself looked spectacular, the sun shining, the grass cut, and the bees almost behaving!

We had watched a swarm leave a colony on Friday. Let the fun begin! We had clipped all the queens in the previous weeks, so the first job was to find her – and there she was crawling around on the floor. We picked her up and took

her to a new box. Simple? Not so, I'm afraid. (When is it ever?) We dropped her!

Back at the hive the bees were calming down and going back in but also, in a tree hanging over the muddy ditch, a cluster was forming. We searched for the queen without any success, then the bees at the hive became very excited again and, against the odds, the queen was back. Meanwhile Mark had recovered the swarm from the ditch and put it in a skep. We put the queen in a nuc box and watched them follow her in.

During the day, we divided into four groups. We did three sessions before lunch, one after lunch, and then a session

with the bees in two groups. Before we finished, we had a time for Q&A and the day ended at 3.00pm.

During the inspections we had noted that at least two colonies were making swarm preparations, so before we went home, Mark and I went through those colonies to make splits. Having started the weekend with seven colonies we finished it with ten. Those on the Taster Day

were able to see hives of bees with healthy brood, sealed and unsealed, but also bees making preparation to swarm, with sealed and open queen cells. All in all it was a very good educational day.

The Education Team consists of Mark, Mel, Sonia, Tony, and me. My thanks to my colleagues for all they did.

Sheila Stunell

TIMES AND DATES

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

The Association Apiary is at **Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX**. The entrance to the field is 2nd left off Lee Green Road. Any questions about the route from the road down to the apiary to Mark Ballard 07802 762121

3 June	Sat	10:00-13:00 Clean-up day in the Apiary
7 June	Wed	18:00-20:00 Session on beekeeping hygiene at the Association Apiary
10-11 June	Sat-Sun	<i>Introduction to Beekeeping Course: Theory</i> at the Association Apiary
17 June	Sat	<i>Introduction to Beekeeping Course: Practical</i> at the Association Apiary
22 June	Thu	20:00-22:00 Bob Smith on Varroa control. Talk followed by discussion session.
23 June	Fri	23:59 Kent Honey Show Entries close
29 June	Thu	19:30 Committee meeting at Bridgewood Manor Hotel
6 July	Thu	10:00-18:00 Set-up day for Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
		08:30-18:00 Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
7-9 Jul	Fri-Sun	Judging Friday morning Clear-up on Sunday afternoon after close at 17:00
5 July	Wed	18:00-20:00 Session on queen marking at the Association Apiary
15 July	Sat	BBKA Basic Assessments
12 August	Sat	14:00-16:00 BBQ at the Association Apiary
1 September	Fri	14:00-17:00 Set up MBKA Honey Show , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ
		09:00-18:00 Sat, 09:30-17:00 Sun, MBKA Honey Show , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ
2-3 September	Sat-Sun	Judging Saturday morning Take down and pack up show at 15:30 Sunday
13 September	Wed	18:00-20:00 Session on beekeeping hygiene (part 2) at the Association Apiary
23 September	Sat	09:00-16:00 Ploughing Match , Lillechurch Farm, Lower Higham, Rochester ME3 7HW
26-28 October	Thu-Sat	09:00-18:00 (Sunday 09:00-16:30) National Honey Show , Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT
31 January	Wed	19:30 David Evans , Queen rearing, Part 2, on Zoom
17 February	Sat	14:00-16:00 MBKA AGM

COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

The Committee met on 10 May 2023 at The Bridgewood Manor Hotel. The car park is always full, but, surprisingly, there is plenty of space in the bar – and it is quiet. It suits us fine!

FINANCE Expenditure £6,884.97, Income £4,825.46, Bank balance £7,486.08

There are 118 members in the Association on 8 May 2023 (Registered 97, School 1, Partner 1, Associate 18, Junior 1).

ENGLISH FESTIVAL Payment from the Council plus takings at the English Festival totalled £704.78. After reimbursement to members for their sales, and payment of £135.95 for wax, the total to MBKA was £212.13.

ANNUAL LECTURE The fee plus expenses for the Annual Lecture was exactly as expected: £239.10. The expense for catering was £56.56. The ticket sales totalled £185.00, and the raffle returned £72.00. Total: £257.00. The final figure is a loss of £38.66.

The talk by Lynne Ingram on Honey Fraud had been well received. Adulterated honey is a big issue at the moment and Sonia suggested making a display for the Ploughing Match and the MBKA Honey Show as a way of informing the general public.

ASSOCIATION APIARY There are five hives at the apiary at the moment. Mel did a split on hive #3 during her inspection. We may well lose hive #6 although there is a possibility of uniting it with an existing one at the apiary.

Mark reported that the water leak just above the Pavilion is not yet sealed. John Chapman will speak to the tenant farmer and the land owner.

ASSOCIATION APIARY

FROM MARK BALLARD, APIARY MANAGER

We are having a 'clean-up / workshop' day at the Apiary on Saturday 3 June, 10:00-13:00. Here's what we're going to do:

- Clean up the Apiary area: cut the long grass with shears/trimmer/scythe, cut down or pull up the

SUMMER EVENTS We will schedule some events for Wednesday evenings at 6.00-8.00pm. These, and the Kent Show, the MBKA Honey Show, and the Ploughing Match are now in the events calendar above.

EDUCATION (See calendar) Plans were made for

- Taster Day: Sonia, Sheila, Mark, Tony, and Mel
- Introductory Course
- Basic Assessment: four responses and provisional date 15 July
- Bob Smith would like to give a talk on varroa treatments.

WEBSITE Sonia has almost taken over. Minutes for the committee meetings and Apiary inspections are to be sent to Sonia and be available in the Members' Area of the website. Later Sonia will ask for suggestions for what people might want to see.

AOB Actions for

Sonia: National Honey Show schedule Centenary Class for associations for a shop display. Medway Beekeepers' labels for everyone to put products in. See Sonia's article on page 8.

Sheila: to sort out the logo for Jackie and for Michele

Jez: Stuart Spinks Norfolk honey company prepared to come to talk if we give him some dates Jez will set dates for winter meetings. Jez agreed to take on the role of creating a Winter Talks programme.

Mark: Contact Freeman Harding to re purchasing a half pallet of honey jars.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING Thursday 29 June at Bridgewood Manor Hotel at 19:30

weeds at the edges (under the Harras metal fencing and along the ditch line).

- Check that brood boxes, supers and equipment are clean and ready to use.
- Remove wax from old brood and super frames.

- Clean old frames and immerse in a hot soda crystal solution; wear safety glasses and nitrile or Marigold gloves.
- Make up deep and shallow frames.
- Burn old timber in the lean-to. Pyromaniacs take note!

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Mark Ballard – Apiary Manager

INSPECTIONS

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

Please see below the inspections rota for to the end of September. 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.

3 June	Mark and Nigel
10 June	Sonia and Darren
17 June	XXX and Lee
24 June	Tony, Simon M and Jez
1/7/2023	Mel and Simon
8/7/2023	Peter and David
15/7/2023	Karon and Margaret
22/7/2023	Mark and Jez
29/7/2023	Sheila and Lee
5/8/2023	XXX and Darren
12/8/2023	Simon and Lee
19/8/2023	Peter and Jez
26/8/2023	Sheila and Nigel
2/9/2023	Sheila and Margaret
9/9/2023	Mel and Simon
16/9/2023	XXX and David
23/9/2023	Mark and Neil
30/9/2023	Karon and Nicky

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?



The Central Association of Bee-Keepers
Bringing Science to the Bee-Keeper

[The Central Association of Beekeepers](#) draws its members from across the country, and the audience for its talks on Zoom from across the world. Membership is open to all, and the annual subscription is £15.00

The CABK is an educational charity whose aim of *Bringing science to the beekeeper* is achieved by organising lectures and producing publications to enable beekeepers, bee scientists and others interested in bees to keep in touch

with the latest research and ideas about bees and other social insects, as well as related topics such as pollination.

You can become a member now by completing a simple form on the [CABK website](#).

With the recent retiral of the Chair and the Lectures organiser, the CABK are now seeking new members for their committee. If you would care to offer your services, please contact the Association through the website.

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 closing date is 23:59 on Friday 23 June. That is just round the corner, the way the beekeeping season races on!

NATIONAL HONEY SHOW

Sonia Belsey writes about a new opportunity at the National Honey Show this year.

The Show Schedule is out now and there's a special Centenary Class open to all associations. It's called *A Shop Window Display* (Class 83) and we are going to enter! I would love to have contributions from as many as possible to represent our members (without making our 'shop' look too crowded!). I'd like contributions of any of the following:

- a jar of honey (set or clear)
- cut comb or sections

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!

- candles or wax blocks

I plan to design a Medway Beekeepers label, but your name will be on your own entry as you are the beekeeper. If you are hoping to contribute candles please let me know the design so we don't all have the same! Do get in touch if you are interested.

Let's see if we can win!

Sonia Belsey sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

DIARY OF A NEWBEE KEEPER

Jane Wheeler has recently begun her journey as a beekeeper – and she is keeping a diary which she will share with us each month. What an event-filled start she has had!

27 April 2023 – Bees arrived today!

After a long year of completing the Introduction Course, reading masses of books, watching even more YouTube videos, waiting for the weather to improve, still waiting for the weather to improve, and last-minute road closures (water main repairs), a 6-frame nuc colony was installed in the new hive while we all got soaked by the rain. (Jen very sensibly wore her raincoat over her bee suit.) The nuc was fit to bursting so we really couldn't wait for better weather.

29 April 2023 – Flying in circles

Topped up their syrup and watched them on their orientation flights. They seem very happy, if not a bit dizzy, in their new home. Realised how little I know and persuaded Archie to become my mentor.

5 May 2023 – No more free lunches

Removed the feeder. Time to get your own groceries ladies!



First inspection of the frames. Lots of brood in all stages, plenty of stores, happy queen and four fat queen cells. Arghhh! Try not to panic and contact Archie instead.

6 May 2023 – Calm before the Swarm

As we were going to be away all weekend, woke the bees up at 6:30am (they weren't very happy about this, but it was the only chance we had) and carried out a 'Pagden Split'. Thank goodness I watched Jane Medwell's talk this week. I now have two hives with the original queen in one and a nice queen cell in the other. Leave for the weekend with fingers and all appendages crossed.

14 May 2023 – Disappearing acts

Inspect both hives. Despite looking thoroughly there is no sign of the original queen. She was clipped so I can only assume she has perished, and the bees returned home without her. The bees have replaced her with more queen cells.

In the other hive the nice queen cell has gone?! Instead the bees have built four new queen cells.

I now have two hives with plenty of bees in both and no queens.

Decide to leave them alone and see what happens. They have their own agenda right now and seem to want as many queens as they can get.

Do make your minds up among you, princesses!



20 May 2023 – Swarmageddon!

Get an odd text message from my neighbour asking if they were my bees in his garden yesterday?

Reply that bees can travel wide distances and wonder what his problem is with a few bees visiting his flowers. Honestly, some people!

That afternoon we're about to go out when I see millions of bees in the garden. THEY'RE SWARMING! Realise that there was probably a swarm yesterday too as neighbours' cryptic text is now making sense. Oops! Sorry!

We watch as they sail over the fence into my neighbour's garden and onwards to next-door-but-one. Urgent phone call to Archie. Husband rushes off to explain what is happening and calm down freaked out neighbours.

Knight in a shining bee suit appears (Archie) in his car containing a just-collected swarm – as if we didn't have enough bees already!

The swarm settles in the hedge and, after a bit of pruning (don't tell the neighbour), we have them filling up a nuc. Leave them to it and go back to check the hives.

Hive #1 has an opened queen cell and several more sealed ones. Cut out all but one saving them in a closed box. This looks like where the swarm came from, but it still has a large colony of bees.

Hive #2 has several queen cells and suddenly Archie hears piping. We track the queen down by hearing rather than sight. She refuses to be caught and wriggles off piping loudly as she goes. We cut out all the queen cells and close them up with their new noisy queen.

The box of queen cells has movement, and we find a newly emerged queen. This one is happy to run across our fingers and is accepted back into hive #1. Cut out the last queen cell, putting it in the box only to find another queen had emerged.

I have no more room for any queens, so Archie is rewarded with a box of 'insurance policy' bees.

That evening I collect the swarm nuc, now much fuller, from the neighbour's garden, and take them across the road to my other neighbour who has an empty hive and is delighted to have a new colony. What a day!

I've gone from a single 6-frame nuc to two hives, a nuc, and a box of queens. All are virgin queens looking for a sunny day and some good time drones.

Hive #1 has the gentle queen whom the bees took to straight away.

Hive #2 has the noisy wriggler queen running rings around the bees.

The cast swarm is happily living across the road.

The neighbours have all been placated (for now) with the promise of jars of honey and I hope the hedge will regrow without them noticing!

In just three weeks I've installed a nuc into a hive, made up a gallon of sugar syrup, witnessed orientation flights,

HANDY HINTS

Keep a vinegar spray in your toolkit! If you get a particularly painful sting – perhaps on your face through your veil – dabbing a tissue soaked in vinegar on it may well quickly relieve the pain. It works very effectively for some people.

Swarm collecting aid: benzaldehyde is useful for moving bees away from places you don't want them. It can be bought from a chemical shop like [APC Pure](#), or as a proprietary spray called [Bee-Quick](#). Normally used for quickly clearing bees from supers when harvesting (perhaps when you can't wait a day for a rhombus clearer to do its job), it is also effective at stopping bees returning to the location of the cluster when collecting a swarm.

Queen includer entrance: the swarm you've just dropped into a nuc box might abscond if you leave it on the ground till evening to pick up the stragglers. However, that won't happen if you use the *workers-only* entrance. When you see

DON'T FORGET THE DRONES

Select queens AND drones to improve the quality of your colonies. Improving one's bees can be done by selecting from your best colonies. You can either indirectly raise new queens for colonies with less desirable traits, or you can actively raise queens using eggs and larvae from your best colonies. But a new queen's offspring are only half determined by the mother's genes. The drones she mates with will also pass on their traits to her offspring. So, *be proactive in raising drones from your best colonies.*

gained a mentor, inspected frames, panicked, observed all the different colour pollens on the foragers, added supers, executed a Pagden split, lost the queen in a failed swarm attempt, watched my bees swarm, panicked, collected a swarm, cut out queen cells to keep, saw queens emerging, heard a queen piping, held a newly emerged queen in my hand and many, many more other amazing things.

What a huge learning curve and I've only started keeping bees in the last month.

Jane Wheeler

that the queen is inside the box – because the bees outside are making a bee-line to get in – it's safe to rotate the entrance so that only workers can get through. True, some drones won't get in, but they seem to be in the heart of the cluster, and make it inside the nuc with the main 'drop'. The main thing is that you know that the queen won't get out before you return at dusk. The swarm will still be there.

Don't forget to put some frames with comb or foundation in the box so that the bees have plenty of surfaces to spread themselves over.

Of course, none of this is an option if your using an inverted box propped up on a stone!

The simplest feeder: a plastic box from the kitchen drawer, placed in an eke or empty super, filled with STRAW and syrup.

Either

- provide the bees with a frame of drone foundation, or
- provide a foundationless frame (with starter strip and wire, or [BBQ skewers as guides](#)), or
- insert a shallow frame and allow the bees to draw foundation underneath it. It will almost certainly be drone cells.

Given the chance, the bees will create drone foundation if you provide space. Because beekeepers tend to provide only worker foundation, the bees produce less drones than they would in a natural setting.

A PASSION FOR ORCHIDS

Sonia Belsey writes about her search for orchids, and how fruitful that is in this part of the world.

I love this time of year as, not only is beekeeping in full swing, but it's also orchid season! A few years ago my love of bees led me to volunteer with The Bumblebee Conservation Trust's *Making a Buzz for the Coast* project. The aim of the project was to help save the Shrill Carder Bumblebee, and it involved doing surveys and recording the plants the bees went to. We were offered the opportunity to go on a wildflower ID course run by one of the project leaders to help us with surveys and I jumped at the chance!

The course took place at Monkton Nature Reserve, a privately owned reserve in an old chalk pit in Thanet. If you've never been, it's well worth a visit. Although a fairly small reserve, the chalk pit has been rewilded and it is quite beautiful. There are bird hides, a museum on the natural history of the area, a big second-hand book shop, and a little cafe – good value for the £5 entry fee. The course



leader took us through basic flower identification, and then we were let loose on the reserve to test our skills!

As I walked on to the reserve I was greeted with the most magnificent field of wild orchids. I had never seen a wild orchid, didn't even know they existed, and I couldn't stop staring at them. They were lovely shades of purple with unusual, quite bizarre little flowers. And then, I turned the corner and saw a little fenced off area with an incredible bee orchid standing proudly in the middle.

The bee orchid gets its name from its main pollinator – a species of bee

which is thought to have driven the evolution of the flowers. It attracts the bees that pollinate it by having flowers that mimic their appearance. Drawing them in with a false promise of love, the bees attempt a mating. As they land on the velvet-textured lip of the flower, the pollen is transferred and the poor bee is left frustrated. Sadly, the right species of bee doesn't occur in the UK, so bee orchids are self-pollinated here. I couldn't believe something so tropical looking was on my doorstep! The course leader then told me she had moved from Wales to come and learn about orchids for a botany exam. Kent is one of the richest orchid areas. Our chalky soil suits them.

I began to think that if these orchids were so amazing that people move across country to see these beautiful flowers, why am I not out there looking for them? I scoured the internet and books to find their locations; many are kept secret to protect them from people who dig them up for their own collections. Kent has some of the country's most scarce and rare orchids, and some are at risk of being lost forever. We have the largest population of Man Orchids on Darland Banks. I love their names which are derived from things that the flowers look like – although I would have called them Spaceman Orchids! They grow here in their hundreds, if not thousands, and people travel miles to see them. Saphire Hoe, the reserve made from the spoil of the Channel Tunnel, is home to the Early Spider Orchid, which is found at only a handful of sites on the south coast.



Early spider orchid



Right, Fly orchid. Photos by Sonia Belsey

My hunt to find Kent orchids has taken me to many new nature reserves, some in hidden places. It's quite amazing how many wonderful small reserves we have in Kent.

I have ticked Fly, Lady, Chalk Fragrant, Common Twyblade, Early Spider, Common Spotted, Early Purple, and Man

ASSEMBLING FRAMES

There's one way only when sitting the Basic Assessment, but after that, you're on your own.

You'll learn the orthodox way to make up frames in any Introduction to Beekeeping Course. If you sit the Basic Assessment, you'll be shut away to assemble a frame, and it must be done just so. I seem to remember you have to use 11 nails.

It's a bit like learning to drive. You do what you're told initially, and what is expected of you in the test. When that is behind you, you're free to develop your own style, all the while retaining the most important aspects of your training, especially on safety.

Here is Dave Cushman's set of instructions, throughout which Roger Paterson makes comments in blue font.

<http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/frameassy.html>

orchids off my list so far, but the extremely rare Monkey Orchid still eludes me! It grows on only three sites in the whole of the UK; two are in Kent but one is kept top secret! So that's my Bank Holiday plans sorted!

Sonia Belsey

It's all a far removed from how I now assemble frames. I enjoy the task and always have music or an audiobook playing while I work. I don't use a hammer or nails. Instead I have an inexpensive nail gun one with 25mm brads, and a staple gun with 15mm stainless steel staples. The job takes about 90 seconds including assembling the frame and foundation.

[Here's a video showing my *modus operandi*.](#)

I've since discovered there's an informal race against the clock to assemble a frame. [Lawrence Edwards of Black Mountain Honey does it in 39 seconds](#), but he cheats a bit by removing the wedge first. I think he has already pre-fitted the parts. It's definitely quicker to slide the wax sheet down from the top of the grooves – provided they're clear of splinters, and the sheet is exactly the right size.

WATCHING THE BEES IN THE HIVE

Archie McLellan writes about having found a use for his little bee shed – to house an observation hive.

I installed a 6x4 foot shed in my garden when I first got bees. As the seasons went by, it became increasingly irrelevant – not because I didn't need storage any more, but because I needed vastly more storage.

There is one source only of good ideas in our house – and it's not me. Esther suggested I might use the shed for an observation hive. I found surprisingly little help on the web, or in books – even though I have a book devoted entirely to the subject. A post on Beekeeping Forum brought in a wealth of ideas and caveats. For instance, make the tier of frames only one deep. There's no point in not being able to see between side-by-side frames in an *observation* hive. Don't try to overwinter the colony unless it's inside your house. And be able to add and remove frames quickly and easily from your main stocks.

So I made a single tier of four National deep frames. It has toughened glass (not acrylic) sides. This was my only significant purchase @ £70. Skip diving for Kingspan gave me what I need to provide darkness and insulation. The clear pipe for the entrance is only 25mm diameter which means it can be very crowded at times (highly entertaining to watch!), but not, apparently, restrictive. Ventilation is through stainless steel mesh over three 40mm diameter holes in the floor, and this seems to be just right. There's no condensation or chalkbrood. There is a mesh-covered hole in the top for a small contact feeder. It's a little bottle, inverted, with small holes in the cap.

I moved in a couple of frames of bees with brood, a frame of stores, and a frame of foundation. There was no queen; just one queen cell. The queen emerged and announced her presence by piping. When the virgin emerged, she started piping. She made a *tooting* sound. If there were any virgins still in cells, they would *quack* (a lower tone) in reply. I could hear my virgin easily, morning and evening, even without removing the glass panels which are quite soundproof. I was confident she was the only queen, and that there could be no others. So the colony wouldn't swarm, I thought. But one sunny morning, they did swarm, and then there were half – half the number of bees, and no queen. I've since given a queen cell which was taken down, and a virgin, which I've not seen since. There's no brood. I'm waiting to see how things develop. At least I can see what's going on without disturbing them.

If anyone is interested in building their own observation hive, I'm happy to share the technical info.

Archie McLellan



With front cover off, but glass in place. Spot the mistake, anyone?



With front cover off, and glass removed. Note the +3.5 specs top right.

WORDS

Freebees – another word for swarms

Freebies – items in a sale at zero cost. [See here.](#)

BEEKEEPING – ONE HOBBY OR TEN?

Jen Ferry continues her monthly survey of the many facets of beekeeping, especially the ones that interest her.

One of my main interests in beekeeping is queen raising. It started when I was discussing swarming with a fellow beekeeper and he encouraged me not to take down all the swarm cells found in spring, but to cut them out of the frame, pop them in an Apidea, or any small mating nuc, with a cupful of bees and some feed, and try raising a new queen. It turned out not to be quite that easy, but I was hooked on seeing if I could make it work!

1. for swarming – to reproduce their colony
2. during supersedure to replace an old or failing queen
3. in an emergency when the queen has been unexpectedly lost.



As bee keepers we can capitalise on this and use any surplus cells to raise extra queens. The method briefly described above (using a small mating nuc) is correct, but to succeed, there are a few more steps needed. Dan Basterfield's book, *Using Apideas*, is very readable. He offers good advice, based on years of experience, on how to succeed with is method.



Queen cells – the start of the colony reproducing itself.

As beekeepers we all raise queens, either deliberately or accidentally. The bees will make queen cells naturally:



A cell-bar frame with partially drawn cells. It's rare to get 100% success at this stage.

Mini mating nucs (such as Apideas) are tricky, and I am still learning to use them consistently well. My first success with queen raising was achieved by removing the frame with the queen cells on, reducing the cells to one and setting up a six-frame nuc with this frame. I added another frame of sealed brood, two frames of stores and two new frames. I

fed the nuc and left it for three weeks. It's really tempting to peep in, but young virgins are flighty and can easily take off and be lost if disturbed. It's always 'fingers crossed' when I do open the nuc that there will be young brood and a new young queen.

If you want to raise queens and there are no queen cells, the Miller Method enables you to induce the bees to create queen cells. Using a frame of eggs and very young larvae, the comb is cut through in a zig zag fashion. Where the eggs/young larvae are on the cut edge, the bees will create queen cells hanging down from the zigzags. Once these cells are sealed they can be cut out the in same way as you would do with swarm cells, and put into nucs to mate.

Rather than take natural queen cells, you can induce bees to raise queens from eggs you have selected in small plastic cups.



The Nicot cage. The cage can be hung in an empty frame too.

The method I most commonly use to raise queens is the Nicot system. I have a 14 x 12 frame with a Nicot cage secured in it. I place the whole frame in the hive of the chosen queen, and leave it for a few days for the bees to get used to it. Then I remove the small cap on the front, and place the queen into the cage. Here she stays for 24 hours and lays in the small plastic cups (110). I then release her back into the hive. Four days later, I remove the frame from the hive with the small cups containing the now one-day old larvae, and I hang the cups from a grafting bar. This is placed in the middle of the top box of a double brood hive, with a queen excluder between the boxes and lots

and lots of bees and brood in it. I also feed the hive. This is the cell-raiser hive, and so long as you have no other queen cells present, the bees will quickly draw the now vertically hanging queen cells. The larvae are fed royal jelly, and the cells are capped at day 9. By day 14 you have mature sealed queen cells ready to move into your mating nucs of choice. They will emerge at 16 days and, mate soon after.



I occasionally graft day-old larvae straight from the comb using a 000 sable paint brush into the brown plastic cups. This saves caging the queen, but relies on good eyesight and a steady hand. The rest of the process is the same as for the Nicot system.

To take the practice from queen *rearing* to queen *breeding* is another step again. Breeding infers that you are paying attention to the traits of the bees, and that you raise from queens that display the behaviours you want to reproduce. I like docile bees that are steady on the comb, who are prolific brood rearers, and good honey producers. Others may pick other traits such as resistance to certain diseases or ability to over winter on minimum stores. The traits are identified by keeping good records of each queen (preferably over a couple of seasons) and of each hive's performance, and then using only the best ones to produce the eggs you want to raise. Of course, the queen is only half the story! The drones contribute half of the genetic material to the new bees, so I also pay attention to rearing good drones. I place frames of drone foundation in the hives of some of the good queens that I'm not using for egg production. I also cull hives with poor temper or low honey production. I do not want drones from these inferior hives flooding the area. As bees mate on the wing, there is a limit to the impact you can have but it is worth trying to skew the genetics in your favour.

Jen Ferry Jen_ferry@hotmail.com

MEMBERS WRITE . . .

From Melvyn Belsey We've done numerous artificial swarms although we had difficulty getting our queens mated and currently have two queenless hives from the splits. Experimented with a poly hive over the winter which gave us a much stronger colony going into spring. And we also had a talk to local pre-schoolers about bees to celebrate World Bee Day. They absolutely loved it and asked very sensible questions! We did try and lure a swarm out of a tree but with no luck!

From Ray Copeland I recently moved my bees out of Rainham to Sutton Vallance. I keep my record at BeeBase updated so I informed them of the new location of my colonies. I discovered only then that I had moved my bees into a RED ZONE for European Foulbrood (EFB). There's a curve of EFB from Cranbrook across that part of the Weald. I got a call from Lisa the SBI who wanted to inspect the bees. She found EFB in one colony and sealed it up, put on a notification etc. No movement of any bees or equipment.

The learning experience for me is to check an area on BeeBase BEFORE moving bees. Had I done that, I would have seen that the area I was planning for my move already had high levels of EFB – a Red Zone.

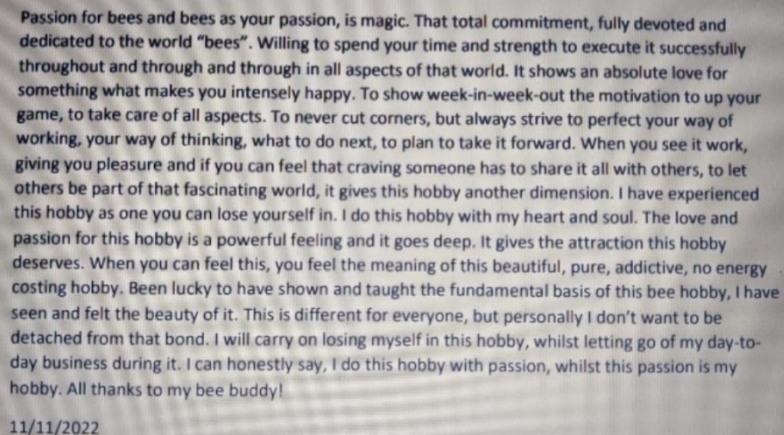
The SBI is chasing every colony she can to try to contain the problem. We had moved our bees on to a dairy farm. There

was already a beekeeper there with loads of hives. However, when we got there last Thursday, all his hives were gone – no surprise there! It's such a shame. It would be an incredibly good site for forage. I've read about EFB, done every tutorial under the sun, learn the traits of EFB, what to look for, what it smells like... but you never think it's going to happen to you. And suddenly it's there, without any warning. I say that, but I would have had a warning if I'd registered the site on the BeeBase BEFORE moving the hives. Then I would have seen it had been flagged. It's going to be a Red Zone for another two years.

My son has been keeping bees for just three seasons and he has done amazingly well. My fear is that this experience will make him give up. I've told him that we will be stronger coming out of this. It was helpful spending time with the SBI. I remember once doing a bee safari with Kay Wreford at Weald BKA. Maybe MBKA should think about trying to set up something like that.

From Hilde Koets Apologies for the delay, Hilde. I did not realise you were sending this for inclusion in WTB!

Hilde has sent her piece as an image from her screen. In her email, she writes: 'This is what I have written to my bee buddy. A summoning up, a thank you, but truly heartfelt.'



Passion for bees and bees as your passion, is magic. That total commitment, fully devoted and dedicated to the world "bees". Willing to spend your time and strength to execute it successfully throughout and through and through in all aspects of that world. It shows an absolute love for something what makes you intensely happy. To show week-in-week-out the motivation to up your game, to take care of all aspects. To never cut corners, but always strive to perfect your way of working, your way of thinking, what to do next, to plan to take it forward. When you see it work, giving you pleasure and if you can feel that craving someone has to share it all with others, to let others be part of that fascinating world, it gives this hobby another dimension. I have experienced this hobby as one you can lose yourself in. I do this hobby with my heart and soul. The love and passion for this hobby is a powerful feeling and it goes deep. It gives the attraction this hobby deserves. When you can feel this, you feel the meaning of this beautiful, pure, addictive, no energy costing hobby. Been lucky to have shown and taught the fundamental basis of this bee hobby, I have seen and felt the beauty of it. This is different for everyone, but personally I don't want to be detached from that bond. I will carry on losing myself in this hobby, whilst letting go of my day-to-day business during it. I can honestly say, I do this hobby with passion, whilst this passion is my hobby. All thanks to my bee buddy!

11/11/2022

From Rob Frost I don't currently have any bees (awaiting a nuc colony from Jen) so I don't have a beekeeping story. But I do have a bee-related story.

A colleague nabbed me at work today; he explained that he had observed a couple of honey bees taking an interest in a small gap above a downstairs window in the brickwork of his house in Strood this morning. He was certain that they were honey bees, and he said that they flew circling closer



*Burning my bees and hives following the discovery of EFB.
Photo Ray Copeland*

and closer to this opening. Then one of them ventured inside, and came back out a few seconds later. Both bees then circled in front of the gap a few times and flew off. He monitored for a while longer. No bees emerged, and no bees went inside. He wanted to know what these two bees were doing. I ventured to suggest that they may have been scout bees sizing up a potential home for swarm. So, I

suggested that he check for activity at the opening this afternoon and evening, and if none, to plug up the gap with something solid to prevent its possible use as a home for a swarm of bees, as that would be a very difficult thing to remove from the cavity between the walls of his house.

Hopefully the gap was not 'in use' by any bees when he got home!

KIT AVAILABLE

John Goffin is scaling down his beekeeping. He has lots of National hives and hive parts that still have plenty of serviceable life. Do please call him if you need any National kit. 07855 308144

Archie McLellan has [a list of FREEBIES here](#). All you have to do is collect them if you can put them to good use.

Also available, homemade, unused, 14x12 five-frame nuc boxes with crownboards, feeder ekes, and Kingspan roofs for sale. Built before deciding to switch from 14x12 to National. A bargain at £29.00 each – less than the cost of materials. (New Maisemore poly 12x14 nuc boxes cost £94.60!)

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We look out for new members at our events. It's always good to make new acquaintances through beekeeping.

Sharon Fitzjohn	Registered (Full) member
Vince Lewis	now Registered (Full) member
Thomas Belsey	Junior member
Jan Becket	Associate member
Victoria Nystrom-Marshall	Associate member
Michael Jones	School member
Charlotte Prior	Associate member

Varinder Bola	Associate member
Mike Potter	Associate member
Darren Winter	Associate member
John Hayes	Associate member
Lisa Scott	Associate member
Remigijus Radinas	Associate member
Eric Goodwin	Associate member
Nettie Goodwin	Associate member
Marc Beney	Registered member

COMMENTS

TO POST A COMMENT, PLEASE EMAIL WHATSTHEBUZZ.

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

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

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



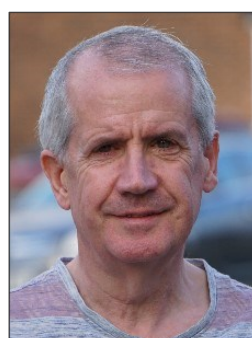
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Vice-Chair, vacant

Vice-Chair - vacant



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