

WHATSTHEBUZZ



News and events past and to come in Medway BKA

An easier way to requeen a defensive colony? And a new Picture Supplement

Jen Ferry and Jane Wheeler with their latest thoughts and experiences

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers' Association.

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

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

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

Photo above A McLellan

Hello to July, to an easing-off of inspections, and to you all

You might not have been interested in gardening before, but one of the things about becoming a beekeeper is that you start to pay attention to the flowers on trees and plants which your bees will forage on. You might insist that you're still not particularly interested in gardening. It's flowers and plants wherever they are that you connect with.

We'll sidestep the question of what gardening truly is. But look at how your attention is now focussed not just on the main flowers for honey bees, but all flowers wherever they grow, and how all trees actually flower too. Your attention is no longer restricted to honey bees, but all bees, and from there to insects, some of which are so striking that you can't fathom how you haven't noticed them before.

Glancing back through photos of spring this year, we seem to have been on an incredibly long journey. So many plants have grown and flowered and fruited and are now just biding their time till autumn.

At the end of this issue there is a Picture Supplement. Spurred on by his new phone, your newsletter compiler has been taking pictures in his garden, fields, observation hive, and just about anywhere he could observe nature alive.

Anyone can have a go at submitting a Picture Supplement. You need to be able to take clear and sharp pictures, and including thoughtful captions and comments will take us on a journey through your pictures.

July is traditionally regarded as the time for THE MAIN SUMMER NECTAR FLOW. Those of us who are still getting to know the patterns of the seasons in some detail might struggle to think what is left to flower; how can the best be still to come, in terms of nectar flow.

Perhaps the traditional view has to change, and our seasons are now noticeably different with this present-day version of climate change. Did the summer flow start a few weeks ago? Some varieties of bramble bloomed in mid-June. How we longed for rain for the ground, the plants, and the nectar.

We'll see what July brings. Beekeeper tasks include feeding if the weather is poor; requeen colonies if need be with mated queens; reduce entrances when / if wasps and robbing become a problem; and swarms you collect should be prepared as best as possible to over winter successfully.

Inside the hive, the queen is still laying worker brood, and the colony at maximum size. Swarming and queen cells can still occur, though less in those which had swarm prevention measures earlier. There are still plenty drones and virgin queens will go out on mating flights.

Prof Robert Pickard's flowering periods card lists these for July: Sweet chestnut and Knapweed, bell heather, Blackberry, Privet, Willowherb, Clover, and Lime. Other you could add might include Hebe, Lavender, Michaelmas daisy, Ragwort, and Old man's beard (*Clematis vitalba*)

Archie McLellan, WTB compiler

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MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING COURSE 2023

The Education Team has been very busy in the last month or so sharing expertise with folk who attended the Taster Day in May and then later, in June undertaking an intensive training for beginners in our Introduction to Beekeeping.

This year was a new departure for us, in previous years we have provided six two-hour sessions over a period of six weeks, but it was agreed that this year we would try to do an intensive course over two days with a third morning of practical – inspecting the bees.

Saturday and Sunday of 10/11th June brought 10 eager people to the apiary ready to get going. We were happy to see one person who had attended the taster day and had decided to go further. There is no denying that six hours of theory albeit broken up with tea breaks and lunch, was hard going. At the end of the first day we all looked and felt tired! However, day 2 was fully attended so we carried on.

We had a mixture of people, four had their own bees so had a level of understanding for some of the content. There was positive verbal feedback at the end of day two.

Saturday 17 June dawned slightly cloudier than the previous week and we all kitted up hoping that the bees were behaving. Those of you who read the report of the taster day will remember that the bees had swarmed on the Friday before. The effect of this was to limit the number of colonies we could inspect. We wanted to find a queen and brood, so we went to the bees that had been split. Our bees never disappoint. Hive 6 had the most beautiful, unsealed queen cell and one or two others so Mel felt we had to do a split. So instead of three groups we all crowded round to see how it's done. The queen was found quickly and placed in a nuc box and all but one beautiful queen cell were taken down and the rest of the colony checked for cells. Mel populated the nuc with a couple of frames of sealed brood cells and some stores. Job done. The main colony was reduced to 6 frames and left to complete the process of re-queening. A very good experience for our potential beekeepers!

Meanwhile Bob had moved on to a nuc which had been a swarm at the beginning of the course. In his view it needed a bigger box so again – full audience while Bob found the queen and moved her into the new box and then moved all the other frames across while explaining that interspersing the brood nest with foundation will encourage the bees to draw comb and expand the brood nest at this time of the year.

It turned out to be a very informative day giving our students the experience of some fairly complicated manipulations.

Our thanks to Bob Smith for stepping in for inspections and to all the team for providing such an informative and enjoyable weekend.

Sheila Stunell

BOB SMITH ON VARROA IN 2023

'Our' Bob Smith (there are two well-known figures in the SE with this name) gave an engaging and comprehensive talk on Varroa in 2023 to an audience of about 40 last week at Wainscott. Everything, from varroa mite biology, through a survey of 30 years of treatments, to the philosophical questions that beekeepers have to face in making decisions on this issue, was covered in more or less depth. Bob has given talks on varroa for many years, and draws on his own experience as well as current research.

With so much to take in, Bob devised a post-interval session in which we sat in small groups and reacted to a range of scenarios that were typical of the situations in which varroa present themselves in our colonies. It was an opportunity to react to what we had just heard, and hear a range of possible reactions to what is now an everyday problem – although hopefully a diminishing one.

Bob's PowerPoint slides, plus two papers giving detailed notes on the available chemical and non-chemical options, [are available to download from the MBKA website here.](#)

BEECHAT AT THE APIARY!

26 July, 19:00, BeeChat at the Apiary. BYOB and snacks. Families welcome.

A return to the routine of the fourth Wednesday of the month social evening. The Pavilion building – or the space outside – will be a pleasant environment in the summer evenings.

MBKA HONEY SHOW 2023

[Download the schedule here.](#)

Our own Medway BKA Honey Show is on Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd September at Elm Court Garden Centre ME7 3JQ this year. Bob Smith from Sidcup will be our judge. Bob is making a welcome return to judge our show and we hope to have lots of entries to keep him busy.



The schedule will be on the website very soon so please have look and think about what entries you can put into the show. Exhibiting in a honey show is a rewarding way to

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

5 July	Wed	18:00-20:00 Session on queen marking at the Association Apiary
6 July	Thu	10:00-18:00 Set-up day for Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
7-9 Jul	Fri-Sun	08:30-18:00 Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF Judging Friday morning Clear-up on Sunday afternoon after close at 17:00
15 July	Sat	BBKA Basic Assessments
26 July	Wed	19:00 BeeChat at the Apiary. BYOB and snacks. Families welcome.
12 August	Sat	14:00-16:00 BBQ at the Association Apiary
23 August	Wed	19:00 BeeChat at the Apiary. BYOB and snacks. Families welcome.
24 August	Thu	Closing date for entries for MBKA Honey Show
1 September	Fri	14:00-17:00 Set up MBKA Honey Show , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ

focus your efforts as you harvest honey, make candles or finish that special craft project.

Entries to the show have to be displayed in a uniform way to make the judging fair. It also makes the show / exhibition more impressive and interesting for visitors. That is why we have rules about using particular jars, display cases etc. but we are keen that this doesn't deter anyone from entering. To help with this we have supplies of 1lb squat honey jars and the association owns several frame cases which can be borrowed if you fancy entering classes 6 or 7. Please get in touch if you need jars or want to borrow a frame case.

Having our show in Elmcourt Garden Centre for the weekend is a superb opportunity to meet the general public, talk to them about bees, and maybe sell them some honey.

Please contact me if you are able to help during the Show, either by manning the sales counter, or with assembling and dismantling the tables and stands. Then I'll make up a rota.

[Download the schedule here.](#)

Sue Chapman Susan.Chapman@care4free.net

2-3 September	Sat-Sun	09:00-18:00 Sat, 09:30-17:00 Sun, MBKA Honey Show , Elmcourt Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham ME7 3JQ Judging Saturday morning Take down 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
20 September	Wed	18:00-20:00 Session at the Association Apiary, topic to be arranged.
23 September	Sat	09:00-16:00 Ploughing Match , Lillechurch Farm, Lower Higham, Rochester ME3 7HW
27 September	Wed	19:00 BeeChat at the Apiary. BYOB and snacks. Families welcome.
14 October	Sat	18:00-22:00 Fish/chip supper/ Quiz / Presentation of show prizes evening
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 (AND SUB-COMMITTEE) DELIBERATIONS

The Pavilion Apiary sub-group consists of Mark Ballard, Sheila Stunell, Sonia Belsey, Tony Edwards. Only the first two were able to be at this recent meeting, but what they lacked in numbers, they made up for in content.

Shopping list

Mark has a shopping list for the Apiary. It includes

- heated uncapping tray
- small foldable screen for presentation of courses
- new outside door for the outside store room
- repair / service of the Sony projector

Refurbishment still to do

Most of the refurbishment work has been completed. Items outstanding include

- work on the track and a gate at the top of the track onto the road (discuss these with the farmer, John Myatt)
- work on the roof – not urgent; we might be able to get help from National Grid when we are ready to work on this
- installing a washing machine to clean bee suits; Mark will donate an old one.
- repair to the leak in the mains pipe on the path

- small leak in the gents' toilet from the inlet pipe

Maintenance

The grass needs cut weekly. It would be good if someone would take this on! VOLUNTEER PLEASE! John Chapman has planted a strip of yellow rattle. we wouldn't want that to be mown!.

Our facilities for members

The extraction room is complete and is equipped for use now, and can be hired out to members for a fee.

Peter Pavley has donated his brand-new equipment which he no longer plans to use. This is a very generous donation.

We have equipment available for loan, including an extractor and an observation hive. Bookings should be made through Mark and Sheila who are always at the Apiary on Saturdays.

Use of the Pavilion socially

We have had a request to provide a Corporate Day at the apiary. We will work out the details of how to provide this speedily!

BEECHAT This has always been on the fourth Wednesday of the month. During July, August and September we will open

the Apiary for a couple of hours in the evening. Members would be able to bring children if they wished. BYOB and snacks.

The dates are **26 July, 23 August, and 27 September 2023.**

ASSOCIATION APIARY

INSPECTIONS

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

The rota on the right covers the period 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 07956535654.

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.

There are lots of dates for events at the Association Apiary. Please make a diary note of these from the Times and Dates table above.

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?

BEE HEALTH DAY, AT WISBOROUGH GREEN BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

In conjunction with Bee Inspectors from the National Bee Unit, South East Region

9:30–16:30 Wednesday 26 July 2023 at Kelsey Hall, Chalk Road, Ifold RH14 0UD

This all-day event will comprise of four sessions:

1. Varroa control options
2. Asian Hornet. The current situation and best advice
3. Specimen brood frames. A chance to see and handle brood frames exhibiting the signs of the notifiable diseases American Foul Brood (AFB) & European Foul Brood (EFB). Also frames with minor brood disorders

such as chalkbrood and sacbrood that may be confused with AFB and EFB

4. Pest and disease inspection techniques. This session, in the apiary, will demonstrate the methods used by Bee Inspectors in their work.

Please bring clean protective clothing for the session at the apiary. Drinks available during the day. Bring a packed lunch.

The cost of the day is £11.55. Booking is essential. The total number will be restricted to 60 participants allocated on a first come, first served basis. [Book your place on Eventbrite](#). Enquiries to honeybee@wgbka.org.uk.



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

The [Kent County Show \(6-9 July\)](#) is almost here. It's a fun day for all, (the website is worth a visit itself!) and the Kent Honey Show takes place during it. Perhaps some of you might meet up there.

Trivia: The Kent Show, founded in 1923, is one year younger than MBKA.

WORDS

A mish-mash of the Words and Quiz columns this month. Strictly for pedants!

1. What is 'nuc' short for? Nucleus box | Nucleus colony | Nucleus colony in a nucleus box?

2. What is the word which rhymes with procedure and describes the process of seamless queen replacement in a honey bee colony? Supersedure | superseizure | supercedure?

3. Circle the correct word/s (eggs/pupae) in each line:

- hatching is what eggs | pupae do.
- emerging is what eggs | pupae do.
- eclosing is what eggs | pupae do.



This photo (above) is of a frame of honey just before being uncapped by Esther, Head of Extraction Operations at Meresborough Honey.

4. Which two words correctly describe the box this frame was in? Super | Deep | Brood | Shallow?

[Answers on page 17](#)

BEEKEEPING – ONE HOBBY OR TEN?

Jen Ferry continues her monthly survey of the many facets of beekeeping, especially the ones that interest her. This month, she writes about her adventures in reclaiming wax and producing attractive products.



When running my hives, I like to keep the tops and bottoms of the frames free of all those little bits of comb that the bees just love to put there. As I work through my apiary, I collect this brace comb in a small container, and by the end of my inspections it can be quite full. These weekly scrapings of wax, together with the wax cappings that I remove from the super frames prior to extraction and the occasional broken frame from the spinner, amount to quite a volume of 'dirty' wax each season.

Bees produce wax as scales from four pairs of glands located on the underside of their abdomens. It takes over 1000 scales of wax and 8 grams of honey to produce 1 gram of wax, so wax is very precious stuff. However, it is a time-consuming and messy job to process the dirty substance into the beautifully clean, golden wax that we use to make candles and ornaments.

Like all beekeeping tasks, there are several different ways to render dirty wax, and I have tried most of them! I find

that cleaning wax needs to be done in stages. I don't extract wax from old brood frames, as what little there is rather dull and dirty, so it can spoil the colour of the candles.

The important thing to remember is that processing wax is very messy! You need dedicated old utensils for the job. Once you have used a pan for wax processing, there is no returning it to the kitchen.

In a good summer, with reasonable temperatures, I use a solar wax extractor for the first stage of the rendering. This is a box with a metal tray and collecting reservoir that can be closed with a sealed, glass lid. I have found that the one I have needs bright sunlight and temperatures of 25°C plus to work well. I place the dirty wax on the metal tray and angle the solar wax extractors to catch the full sun. Once the temperature of the wax reaches melting point (62°C), the liquid wax, and any honey mixed in with the wax, run down into the reservoir leaving the larger part of the debris behind. This debris, or 'slum gum', needs to be removed from the tray of the extractor before it cools and sets solid! Once the temperature drops, the wax in the reservoir will





also set solid, while any honey remains liquid. The wax now looks much cleaner and is quite bright – but not yet candle quality. It needs to be rinsed to remove the waste honey. The resulting block of wax is now ready for the second stage.

two layers of kitchen paper as a fine filter, I place the crude blocks of wax on top. The steam melts the blocks, and the liquid wax flows through the filters to be collected in small takeaway containers. These cleaned blocks can now be stored ready for making candles.

The final part of the process is a much cleaner affair. The solid blocks of wax are melted again, this time in the top of a small double saucepan. When the liquid wax reaches 70°C, it is poured through one final filter made from a single layer of J-cloth stretched over the one end of a can, such as a baked bean can with both ends removed. The wax is collected in a jug ready to pour into pre-prepared candle moulds. This final filter removes any last flecks of dirt. Candles made from wax containing debris tend to spit and splutter as they burn, so it is worth this extra effort.



It is fun to make candles; they look good, burn well, and smell lovely. Silicon moulds of all kinds are readily available and can be used many times over. There are numerous other uses for clean wax, but that's for another day.

Words and photos by Jen Ferry Jen_ferry@hotmail.com



To refine the wax further, I use a 3-tiered steamer. The water in the bottom produces the steam, there is a collecting pan in the middle with a drainage tube, and there is a perforated steamer pan at the top. Using a J-cloth and

SOME SWARMS DO IT THEIR WAY!

A passerby saw bees coming out of a post-box in Foord Street in Rochester and alerted the Royal Mail that they had a problem. The post-box is in full sun for several hours each day and the bees were too hot in there so on several days a heat swarm emerged and took up residence on the wall of a nearby house.



A manager from Royal Mail got in touch with John and I and arranged for a couple of the local posties to meet us one evening so we could remove the bees, it's not every day you get given the keys to a post-box! (Carefully supervised of course.)

We had gone prepared with all the gear to remove combs and tie them into frames but in the event, there was just a small cast in the box and another small group of the wall of the nearby house. So, the job was quickly done, and the

inside of the post box sprayed with pine disinfectant to discourage return visits.



Our activities caused a lot of interest with people in the nearby houses watching from their windows and asking questions.

The last photo was taken by one of the posties for inclusion in their in-house magazine.

Words and photos by Sue Chapman

FEEDERS – A SIMPLER WAY?

The latest BBKA News has a detailed answer from Gareth Morgan on the different kinds of feeders available for feeding sugar to bees. Contact, Rapid, Frame, and Entrance feeders are all covered.

However, one type isn't covered. It's so simple I don't think it has a name. I saw it in a photograph (which I can't trace

just now) of a hive at one of Murray McGregor's apiaries. (Murray has around 4,500 full size hives, and about 1,500 nucs.) It's a big plastic box (such as you might find in the kitchen) inside an empty shallow or deep hive box. It simply sits top of the frames. It has no lid and is filled with lots of straw and syrup. That's it!

DIARY OF A NEWBEE KEEPER

Jane Wheeler began her journey as a beekeeper earlier this year – and she is keeping a diary which she will share with us each month. Already this journey has been something of a roller-coaster ride!

28 May 2023 – Where is she?

Checked on the cast swarm living in the nuc box in my neighbour's garden. Three frames already drawn out with a full mix of stores. No sign of the queen, but they were fanning at the entrance. Was she out on a mating flight or just hiding from me?

Realised that I had forgotten to put the bung in the feeder hole and a few bees were up there reading the instruction leaflet, which I'd also forgotten was in the nuc!

31 May 2023 – Girl power

Two girlfriends came over to 'see the bees' and enjoy the fun of dressing up in bee suits. When they had stopped taking selfies (acting like excited kids/grown women) we



checked both hives, with me trying to impart impressive bee knowledge and sound like I know what I'm doing.

Hive #1 had no queen that we could find. Was she out galavanting with drones?

Come across a single sealed and ready to pop queen cell. What? Why? Where's the nice queen who ran across my hand? Close them up – nothing to see here – and move on.

Hive #2 was making a really weird noise, a sort of high-pitched excited buzzing. No sign of the queen on the first look through. Notice some bees with bums up at the entrance and decide to have another look through the frames.

As I'm holding up a frame my friend on the other side says, 'what's that Jane?' It's the queen! Looking much fatter than last time and sporting white mating threads which drop off as she moves across the frame. The weird noise has stopped so it looks as though we just caught the return of a mating flight. Wow!

She's still as wriggly as ever and it takes all three of us to pin her down, get her into a tube and plant a neon pink dot (much easier to see than red). I pass the tube to my friend to hold while the paint dries, and we watch as the queen pushes aside the mesh at the top and crawls out.

I really have got to come up with a name for this one.

1 June 2023 – I name you...

Visit [Wildwood](#) for the day and discover that they have a substantial apiary. Quite impressed with their set up, which includes an observation hive, and it prompts the discussion on what to call my feisty queen.

As we 'exit through the gift shop' my husband sees a book on display – Phoebe the Bee. Perfect. Not only is this my



daughter's name, but it suits the queen as they both have similar characters!

Hive #2 is now being ruled by Queen PhoeBee with the neon pink crown. The real Phoebe is chuffed to hear this.

4 June 2023 - Second time lucky

Check on the cast swarm. Not much has changed since last time. Bees are so beautifully calm I don't need to use any smoke. Found the queen and caught her on the second attempt. This one didn't crawl out and I had time to let her pink dot dry before returning her to the frames. Take note Queen PhoeBee.

11 June 2023 – All hot and bothered

Very hot day, 28C, so check on hives while they are still in the shade.

Hive #1 has nearly every brood frame stuffed with stores. The queen cell has been broken down and there's no brood of any sort. Can't find a queen. Hive is so sticky I have to change my gloves. Probably a good habit anyway when working between hives – mental note to self to always do this. Will need to ask Archie about this hive as it's been three weeks now since they swarmed and the new queen was installed.

Hive #2 has made a start on the super and this is because there are four frames of brood in all stages. Go PhoeBee! Pleased to note that the pink dot is still in place as I wouldn't put it past her to rub it off.

Get stung on the hand (first one!) but decide to press ahead with a sugar shake test as I've noticed a few varroa on the bottom boards. Suddenly my husband, who's supposed to be helping with the sugar test, runs off down the garden screaming and swearing in equal measure. It turns out he has two bees inside his suit (how?) and one has already stung him on the neck. As a loving, caring wife I ignore him and carry on with the bees.

Struggle to get enough bees into the pot, but persevere and to my horror watch as the icing sugar melts leaving the bees in a wet, sticky mess. This was not what happened in the YouTube video, and he was in Australia of all places. Tip

the glued-together mass of bees back into the hive to be cared for by their housemates and hope they survive the ordeal they've just been through.

Retreat to the house for a cool drink and administer first aid to the patient who I'm relieved to see is still alive.

16 June 2023 – The jewel in the hive

Decide to move the cast swarm from the nuc to a hive. Lug various hive parts across the road and realise I've left the entrance block behind. Go back for this and return. Then realise I don't have the crown board. Go back for this and retrieve it from under some bags of compost in the garage and return again!

Finally with everything I need, move them into a hive. Queen has already laid up two frames of brood and all looks good. She's a little gem, so I have decided to name her Queen RuBee. Joke to my neighbour that I will swap the bees with my dud hive #1 while they are on holiday.

Seriously wonder if I can actually do this without them noticing.

17 June 2023 – There all along

Archie has suggested I put a frame of eggs from hive #2 into hive #1 and see what they do.

The queen excluder is so sticky with propolis that some bees are getting stuck in it. Will need to do something about this as they are starting to block up all the holes as well and have made no inroads on the super as yet.

Work my way through the frames looking for a good one to swap out

when, lo and behold, a frame of capped brood! Can't quite believe what I'm seeing. A few frames of brood further on and I see the queen. She's huge, how on earth did we miss her last time? Nab her straightaway (getting the hang of this queen trapping now) and mark her with her own pink dot.

This is the only queen without a name and, as she was the last to remain at unmarked liberty, decide to call her Queen LibBee.

All is good with the world.

Words and photos by Jane Wheeler



REQUEENING A DEFENSIVE COLONY

...while sidestepping the usual problems.

Much has been written about the difficulty of requeening a defensive colony. There are two problems. First, you have to find the queen, which might be tricky if you can barely see through the wall of bees trying to penetrate the front of your veil. Then you have to get these defensive bees to accept the new queen.

[Roger Paterson writes about an old trick](#) which beekeepers of the past employed. It deals with both problems at a stroke – when it works. Roger says he gets about 80% success. The beauty of it is that you have very little to lose by trying it.

In a nutshell, **induce supersedure by giving a queenright colony a protected queen cell.** The new queen emerges, gets mated and replaces the old queen. And how do you protect a queen cell? By wrapping metal (tin) foil round the sides, leaving the tip open and uncovered. Bees destroy

queen cells by opening them from the sides. If they can't access the sides, the virgin pupa will develop and emerge through the tip of the cell. Roger continues:

'The main benefit is there is no brood break, and you retain an old queen in case the new one fails. Vicious colonies are very difficult to handle. Smoke as heavily as necessary, remove supers and queen excluder, and put the protected QC between the top bars.'

The usual ingenuity is needed to ensure that the cell is to remain near the top of the frame and not fall on the floor. You might use extra tinfoil when wrapping the cell to create a length which can be laid over the top bars, or a cocktail stick, or a piece of wire...

I have more queen cells than I have available mating boxes at the moment. I've nothing to lose by trying out this technique. If you do, let me know how you get on.

Archie McLellan

HANDY HINTS

You can, and should, feed a spare virgin queen while you figure out what to do with her.

Have you ever wondered what to do with a virgin queen that has unexpectedly emerged when you touched a cell, or disturbed a frame? It's a commonplace occurrence because these queens are being kept inside their cells by the workers until they are needed. (This is about cast swarms, but that's a story for another time.) As soon as something happens in the hive that causes the workers to be distracted, these virgin queens will seize their chance for freedom and make a bolt for it. If there are a lot of mature queen cells, you might find the top bars suddenly littered with virgins racing around.

There's little you can do in a situation like that – except regret that you ever let your colony get into that state in the first place! But if the situation is calm and controlled,

and you are able to pick up and cage a newly-emerged virgin, what then?

The first thing you probably need to do is to buy some time. And it is lucky that, unlike mated queens, virgins are able to feed themselves.



This picture (left) shows a newly emerged virgin queen feeding on a drop of water and honey that has just been placed over the holes in this cage. She will be fine for a while, possibly even some days, although one has to ask if her chances of successfully getting mated are being affected.

You have some time to find or create a mating environment for her. It's not as simple as dropping her into a queenless hive, but you do have options.

Note: give only a tiny drop of honey and water. Otherwise she will become lathered and probably die!

BEEKEEPING: ONLINE READING

WESTERNWILSON

Before any queen cells appear, can you tell if a hive is about to swarm?

[Janet Wilson \(WesternWilson\)](#) writes this:

'In any crowded hive, if half the bee-filled frames are also filled with brood, the hive is poised to swarm.'

It's a carefully crafted sentence, and is perhaps worth posting somewhere convenient to reread regularly. Of course, you might not agree. Do send a message with your thoughts.

There is a scientific paper on a different method of predicting swarming. [If this might interest you, click here.](#)

NEW UK VARROA WEBSITE

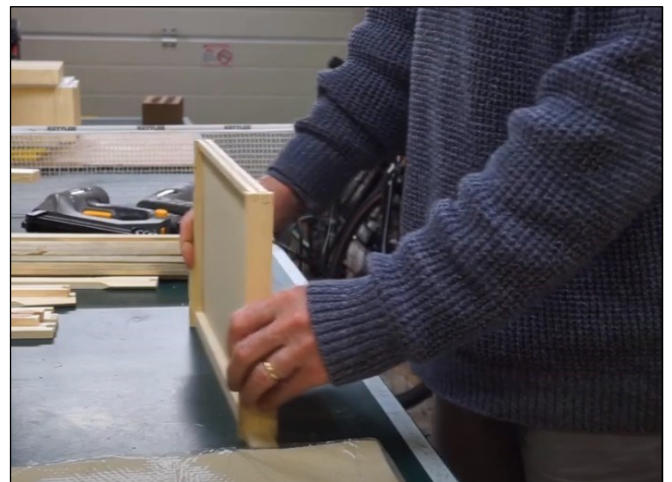
[A new website on Varroa in the UK](#) has appeared recently. It is the work of Stephen Martin, Rhona Toft, Joe Ibbertson, and Steve Riley, and it summarises the current experience and research on finding a long-term solution to the Varroa problem.

There is no doubt that an increasing number of areas of the UK are now finding that varroa mites are less a problem than they once were. It makes sense to keep abreast of news and opinion on this topic. The approach of the contributors on this website is honest and rigorous. Although some beekeepers would have you believe that their long-term success in sustaining colonies not treated for varroa is a result of their personal determination, and your failure to achieve the same is possibly a lack of that same determination, it is likely that non-treatment works in particular localities, and for reasons that are not all a consequence of beekeeper actions.

LUNE VALLEY COMMUNITY BEEKEEPERS

[Fred Ayres, of Lune Valley Community Beekeepers, gave a talk to BIBBA](#) last year in which he describes the approach of the beekeepers in Lune Valley. Although he slips in some contestable points rather surreptitiously, this is a stimulating talk, even for those who have no interest in following this philosophy, which might loosely be called natural beekeeping. He covers non-treatment for varroa, allowing bees to swarm, infrequent inspections, and minimal removal of honey. These are the choices of many beekeepers, and Fred addresses how it is possible to be a responsible beekeeper, and care for one's livestock in the context of this approach.

FRAME MAKING: DO YOU WANT TO SPEED UP THE PROCESS?



[Here's a short video made by Archie McLellan on making up frames](#), without the task taking over your whole life. You might find a hint or two that you could use. Or rather, you might enjoy entering into a meditative state when making frames and are happy for it to take as long as it takes.

QUEEN REARING – MY TAKE AS A NOVICE

I guess more has been written about methods and techniques for queen rearing than any other topic in beekeeping – including swarm prevention / control. It's a classic case of not being able to see the wood for the trees. In other words, one loses sight of the larger picture which

gets obscured by details. (The origin of the phrase is amusing: It refers to a row of houses that were designed by the architect John Wood. There was a tree planted directly in front of these houses, and it grew quite large. So people began to exclaim: You can't see the Wood for the tree!)

Make a choice – don't do nothing

You can manage your entire beekeeping life without actively raising queens. You simply select from your best colonies, and replace poor queens with genetic material from better colonies. This might be a queen cell, or simply a frame with eggs. It works, and you can improve your colonies by selecting for the traits you value most. Top of most people's list is *docility* – bees with a gentle, non-defensive temperament. We like our bees to be sweet. Yes, defensiveness is natural and good, but they are our managed livestock. They are a few degrees removed from the survival-of-the-fittest regime in the natural world. They will survive with a bit less defensiveness than nature might endow them with.

Write it down

A new but knowledgeable beekeeper said to me recently that she felt queen rearing was a distant prospect for her.

This is my second year attempting active queen rearing. A number of us studied and shared ideas in an online series during the pandemic. Jen Ferry was one of them, and her article last week was illuminating and encouraging. Why should I add to it? Perhaps because one of the most useful learning techniques is to write things down. But also,

because I do feel that if I can manage it, anyone can. Here's my brief outline of what to do to actively rear queens:

- Select the colony you want to raise queens from.
- Give some eggs or one-day old larvae to bees in a strong colony, making sure that the queen has no access to these cells. There are many ways to do this. One simple and quick way is to transfer (graft) some young larvae into Nicot cups on a 'cell bar frame'.
- Those cells which the bees accept will be drawn about 8mm within 24 hours, and sealed 4-5 days later. The bees have nothing more to do to these cells.
- In the next few days, no more than five, remove the cells to mating boxes: mini-nucs (Apideas) or ordinary nucs, populated with bees, but, of course, no queen.
- When the queens emerge from their cells, they will go on mating flights, return, and begin laying brood. You then transfer them to a new colony, or one that you intend to requeen – or give / sell to someone else who suddenly needs a mated queen.

If you're interested in a journey in active queen rearing, then clarifying your thoughts on paper might be a useful exercise. Thought-clarifying is a process that never seems to end in almost any aspect of beekeeping!

Archie McLellan

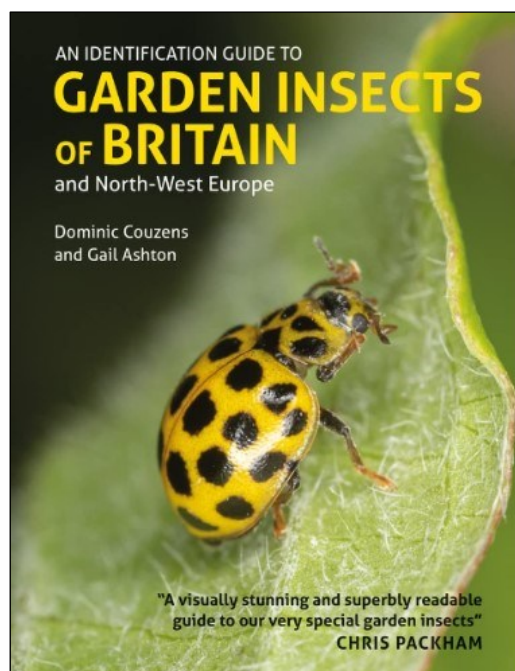
RECOMMENDED READING

GARDEN INSECTS OF BRITAIN

[Identification Guide to Garden Insects of Britain and North-West Europe, by Dominic Couzens and Gail Ashton](#)

Who needs a book now, when you can have an app which will even look up the insect you want to identify? Well, a book does a different job, and this one is something of a treasure. There are so many insects in our region (2,500 species of moths to start with) that it won't be long till you find that some are missing. I started paying attention to insects around me only very recently and already I've come across some which are not in this book.

The wonderful thing about this book is that you get a sense of the complete picture. Only 150 insects



are included, but for each is a description of the parts of an insect and details of the insect orders described. There is a concise description to help you identify even the smallest creature, as well as one or two photographs labelled with distinguishing features. There are details of its life cycle from egg to adult, a calendar showing the time of year when the adult can be seen, and some take-home facts which remind us that the life of just about any insect, not just the honey bee, is a truly marvellous instance of what happens in all nature.

SOMETIMES YOU NEED LEATHER GLOVES

Have you got colonies that really object to being handled?

You open the hive ever so gently, having smoked the entrance or below the floor, and into the top of the hive as you create an opening between boxes. The bees are reasonably calm. Mostly. You get the dummy board out without too much of a fuss. You gently free up a frame with your hive tool. You really are so careful. No vibrations or jerky movements. But it makes no difference. Clouds of bees spring up and wrap themselves around your hands. They might not sting. They don't always. But if one bee, just one, tries out her stinger, then you're done for.

This is not the place for thin nitriles. Probably not Marigolds either. You need a thicker glove with a smooth surface. Anything woven is useless because a sting will find its way through the material where it is thinner. There are many options. And some beekeepers have serious objections to some of these options!

Beekeeper education

Beekeepers' Introductory Courses (and subsequent BBKA modules) are very insistent on the need to spot disease, and to avoid spreading it. This is the context in which leather gauntlets are said to be A VERY BAD THING. The BBKA did at one time ask bee retailers to stop selling them. I guess the reply was that the retailers would stop selling them when customers stopped asking for them.

The objections

Leather gloves (usually called gauntlets because they have a long wrist extension, and also possibly because of the association with armour) are frowned on because

- they are difficult to clean
- it is not possible to have the fine control and finger sensitivity that nitriles offer.

In the whole of beekeeper education, there does not seem to be any mention of a situation which could justify the use of such gloves in beekeeping. And because it is something

you should never do, the difficulties that arise from using them are never addressed.

Are exceptions allowed?

Some beekeepers would say that there are times when it is permissible to say that you are not prepared to put up with stings to your hands from defensive colonies, and that you want to know more about how to manage beekeeping with leather gloves.

First, the problem of cleaning. Leather gloves can be washed clean, but they tend to be 'board-stiff' when they dry. To a large extent this can be solved by working in a leather conditioner to the glove. But a much simpler solution is to keep them clean so that they rarely need washing in the first place.

The remedy

Wear nitriles over your leather gloves. And clean them in your soda bucket between every hive. Buy a size bigger. And to keep the insides of the gloves clean and dry, slip on thin nitriles *under* your leathers as well as over them.

Wearing three pairs of gloves sounds like massive overkill. 'Massive' might be the word that comes to mind at the sight of the large leather gloves that are sometimes sold for beekeeper protection. But there are other options. [Some leather gloves are slim, soft, and tight-fitting.](#)



Touchy-feely

Which brings us to the second objection frequently raised about leather gloves: the lack of fine control and finger sensitivity. Although this is undoubtedly true of some gloves, it is possible to find gloves which work well, giving protection from stings at very defensive colonies, and still

retain the finger sensitivity to avoid crushing bees when lifting frames, or to pick up a queen by the wings to mark her. If you have a colony that is difficult to handle, it is not a badge of honour to endure stings to your hands. Find the right quality and size of gloves for you, keep them clean inside and out, and enjoy your beekeeping.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

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

Cat Jones

Registered | Stacey Harrell

Associate

BEEBASE AND BEE INSPECTORS

ASIAN HORNET NEST DESTRUCTION – NEAR DOVER, KENT

If you're registered with the NBU, you have already received this. If you're not registered, this email shows one reason why it makes sense to join. Don't wait till you get bees. Simply set up an apiary with the number of colonies set to zero.

From BeeBase [‘On Thursday 22 June a small primary nest of Asian hornets](#) was reported to the NBU. A National Bee Unit Inspector investigated the report and collected samples which have been sent for analysis by scientists. Traps have been set for hornets returning to the nest site, and follow up activities will take place to raise awareness.’

It makes sense to be registered on [BeeBase, the website of the National Bee Unit](#). You will receive news about bee pest

and disease issues by email. It's important to check regularly that your records are up-to-date. The service provided by the Bee Inspectors is free and invaluable. If you are suspicious that there may be foulbrood in any of your colonies, contact the local Seasonal Bee Inspector (SBI). [Enter your postcode on this page](#) for the phone number of the SBI. Contact them by phone and / or take a photo of any suspicious larvae or sealed brood and email it to them. MBKA members who live in Medway will likely find that their SBI is **Danyal Conn** or **Lisa Jenkins**. [The full list of SE England SBIs can be seen here](#).

The BeeBase website is also a huge resource for beekeeper education. You can while away hours if you're not careful!

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.

From Archie McLellan Thank you Sonia for sharing your interest in orchids in the May issue of WHATSTHEBUZZ. A

ANSWERS TO THE WORDS QUIZ:

1. Nucleus colony 2. Supersedure 3. **eggs** hatch, **pupae** emerge, **eggs and pupae** eclose 4. Deep super

friend has taken part in an Orchid Count recently in Queendown Warren. The results are below for those like me whose interested you've sparked:

Type of orchid	Number of flowers seen
• Lizard	1
• Broad leaf helleborines	4
• Man	15
• Fly	23
• White hellebore	45
• Bee	60
• Pyramidal	852
• Fragrant	3641
• TOTAL	4641

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



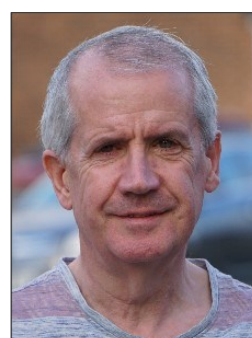
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PICTURE SUPPLEMENT

At the end of each issue of WHATSTHEBUZZ comes the rogues' gallery of the committee members. Anything after that is not really in the newsletter; it's a bit like an afterthought.

What follows here is not to be taken too seriously, and is more of a musing on nature, rather than something erudite. I have a new phone and discovering its capabilities has been a delight. In particular, it is able to take close-up pictures showing things I haven't seen before. This is a light-hearted collection of photos and the thoughts they have provoked.

Over the last couple of weeks, I've tried to look and listen a little more to nature. Naming things isn't everything. Even so, I have BirdNet, PlantNet and Picture Insect apps on my phone. Spending time identifying things involves spending time looking at them and making photos of them. Or, in the case of birds, spending time listening to and recording them. Growing up in the NW Highlands, you could usually see the birds that had the most attention-grabbing calls. I remember the curlew especially well. But, among small birds, only the blackbird is easily visible when singing. Who knew that robins, wrens, song thrushes, and chaffinches had such amazing and varied calls. Thank you, BirdNet!



My day usually begins with a little visit to my observation hive in a shed in the garden. Yesterday I saw the queen walking over some capped honey cells. She hurried along with that particular gait that queens have, and then found herself on the open nectar cells, and then a little further down, over some empty, ready-for-eggs cells. As she settled her abdomen deep into a cell, that famous circular retinue

that workers form around the queen took shape. This particular queen takes 45-90 seconds to lay an egg. It's longer than I expected – but maybe quite normal.



In one of my full-size hives, the queen in this picture below has just died. The bees are making sure that this really is the case. I don't know how it happened. When I found her, she seemed quite undamaged, but was immobile. The next day the bees had started to draw cells.



A couple of days before this, I returned a bee from a cage where I had put her for safe keeping while I 'rolled' a Demaree (swapping brood frames in the bottom box with empty frames from the top box). The queen seemed reluctant to emerge from the cage. Then she gently rolled on to the top bars. Queen 'fainting' after an event like this is not uncommon. The next time I looked she was happy in the hive, with combs full of eggs.



This is the sharpest picture I've taken of a bee – except it's not a bee, but a hoverfly, easily identifiable by having only two wings. This is a Drone fly, and I can be quite sure about that because I've looked up the pattern of the veins in the wings.

As we get older, Esther encourages the flowers to do their own thing and many annuals self-seed to return each year. It's important not to do too much weeding or hoeing! We get many varieties of poppies, and nigella and campion do very well on their own. The seed heads of some of these (such as the nigella below) are almost as enchanting as the flowers!



This plant (above right) is filling a mighty space! It is a mallow, a common weed, and you see it everywhere that it is allowed to grow. Esther will be whisking it out as soon as the first flowers start to make seed. One plant is fine, but many might feel like a plague.



Of course, one person's plague is another's forage for their bees. Visiting family in London last week, we saw a lake of Rosebay willowherb. London's bees need all the help they can get, I'm told.

Christopher Lloyd, the gardener and author, etched himself in my memory forever by encouraging an open, reckless attitude to mixing colours in the garden. This little corner of the garden (below) reminded me of him.



White clover used to be the single most prolific honey bee nectar source in Britain. There is some in a field where I have bees, but the huge blankets that covered the country are a thing of the past. One can guess why. It's not a situation than can be resolved by a little thing like No-mow-May.

Bramble (Blackberry) is possibly the largest forage source now. The flowers are delicate and short lived, but I'm told there are nearly 150 varieties in the UK, which goes some way to explaining why the flowering period is from mid-June to mid-August.



I'm referring for that info to the diagram on the back of Prof Robert Pickard's 'The Beekeeper's Rule'. On the front, you can see at a glance the development of workers, drones, and queens on any date you set. On the other side of the card is a diagram showing flowering periods for UK plants. There are many I'm not yet familiar with such as toadflax and mustard. Produced in 1978, this aid is still available from Thornes for a pittance.

For all that the bramble flower seems so fragile, a close look gives an impression of energy and vigour.

The hawk's-beard which has filled the ground between the trees in a local orchard is now nearly over. There were flies and beetles on almost every flower – and few honey bees.

This metallic green bug (above right) is, unsurprisingly, called a Swollen-thigh beetle, but both the dazzling colour and these thighs are not obvious without a close look.



In parts of this orchard, the grass cannot compete with the yellow rattle, hawk's-beard – and pyramidal orchids (right). These orchids are, according to one local survey, the second commonest variety, but I guess it depends where you're looking!

There are lots of buzzards in this area and they are glorious to watch. Their colours and feather patterns under-wing are very striking. It can be difficult to see much more than a dark silhouette against the sky, but the shape of the end of the tail is convex.

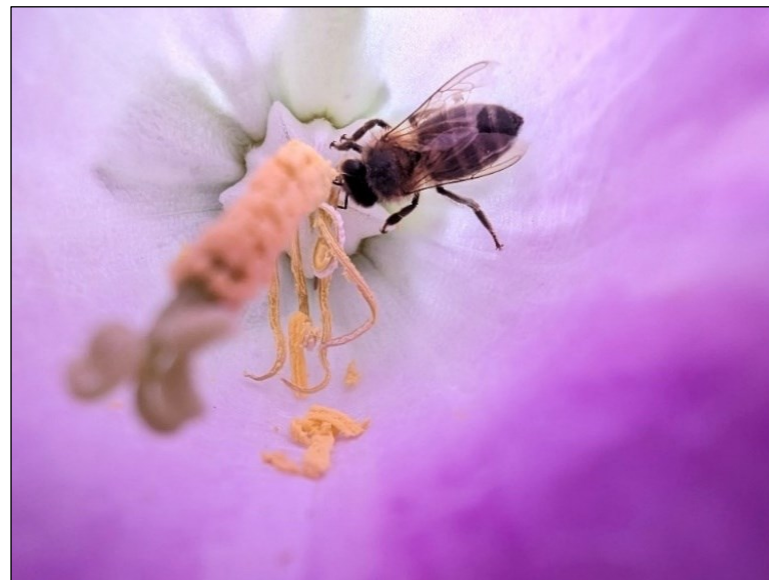


The forked tail in this bird (left) clearly identifies it as a red kite. By the time I got off my bike and got my phone out, the bird was a fast-disappearing dot high in the sky.

This array of catmint and campanula (next page) is always covered with bees. Hairy bees on catmint on the left, and honey bees in the campanula. They get doused in light grey pollen, with a large circular dome of it on their thorax. The white Mohican of bees on Himalayan balsam is not the only peculiar way that honey bees wear pollen!



A single canterbury bell flower (below) can engage a honey bee for fully five minutes. It makes a change from their flighty approach to most flowers. It might be the nectar, but it might also be the protection afforded by these deep flowers.



There are 25 species of bumble bees in the UK and ten times that number of solitary bees. In a parallel way, the number of butterfly species – 57 – is matched by nearly fifty times that number of moth species. Moths of all shapes and sizes are everywhere.



This privet hawkmoth (above) was on the grass in the garden. It managed to climb on to my hand, then, after a warm-up of constrained wing flapping, it flew on to Esther. We left it in the garden shed overnight with some honey and water. Moth, honey and water were all gone next morning.

The picture below (which includes part of our garden) is of two dragon flies which flew around the 'lawn' for about 20 minutes, sometimes heading straight for us before veering off at the last minute. Not easy to photograph. Even harder to see in this photograph!



Finally the cover photo of this issue is an evening picture of one of my apiary sites. Please send a photo of yours. And anything in nature which has caught your attention recently. This is about celebration, not education!

Words and photos by Archie McLellan