

WHATSTHEBUZZ



Many reports of Asian Hornet in the UK. We look at recent initiatives for dealing with AH.

Our Association has purchased honey jars in bulk at greatly reduced prices. Email Sonia!

Plus Jane, Jen, Mark, Chris F – and, at the end, a job opportunity!

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers' Association.

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

Archie McLellan, WHATSTHEBUZZ compiler archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

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

The MBKA website has full information about the Association.

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



Photo above: Patchwork leaf-cutter bee (*Megachile centuncularis*). Aside from their leaf cutting and carrying behaviour, the most distinctive feature of this solitary bee is a bright orange pollen brush on the underside of the abdomen. Photo by Archie McLellan

Hello to August, to the joy of harvest, and to you all

The flurry of reports of Asian hornet sightings in the last ten days is unprecedented. BBKA News devotes most of the current issue to the topic. The BBKA has also set up a new **WhatsApp group** for those who want to receive news and reports about Asian hornet. **Online training** for the Asian Hornet Team (AHT) is available for anyone who would like to engage in action against Asian Hornets. The previous limit of fifteen members in local AHTs has been abolished. This issue contains more on all these topics including an account from one of our members of capturing an AH at her hives. **The message**, as before, is to be vigilant and to set and monitor AH traps.

Although bees can still successfully forage for nectar, the main flow is over. Possibly it ended a few weeks ago. The time has come to harvest a summer honey crop. In this issue Jen Ferry describes her approach to taking honey from her hives and extracting it in her kitchen. Beekeepers often do things slightly differently from each other (that's something to celebrate) and Jen has discovered ways of working which you might find intriguing.

In a nutshell, our tasks over the next weeks are to remove supers and harvest honey; then, either return the empty supers and frames for cleaning for 4-7 days, or store them wet – but well-sealed from bees and wasps. If there is still a flow, leave a super with partially-filled frames. Monitor varroa levels now if you do not do this routinely. Once you have removed the honey, you can treat with varroacides. If you intend to take a honey crop later, treatment is more difficult because chemicals are not compatible with honey for human consumption. Some beekeepers engineer a brood break so that mite levels can be brought down in time for the winter bee population to grow fully.

Inside the hive, the colony is starting to contract, and the queen's laying rate slows. There is no new drone brood. The bees may attempt late supersedure. They generally keep the old queen till the new queen is established.

Summer was intense and short. It seems, and has so for a few weeks now, as if everything that could flower has done so.

Or perhaps not. Gardening is about creating delights for the senses for as long as possible. It is wonderful to see how much colour can still be found where gardeners have planned for a long season.

There are late-flowering plants in the wild too. Old man's beard (*Clematis vitalba*) is lining the narrow roads with its light green flowers. Wild flowers like hawksbeard have returned for a second flourish. Ragwort and goldenrod add to the yellow presence. In some places Michaelmas daisy grows wild, and, along with rosebay willowherb, provides pink and purple to replace the buddleia that has recently flourished so profusely.

In the coming weeks there may soon be ivy in flower near you. You will know because you will hear the bees even before you see the ivy. Although it is high in glucose and quickly crystallises, it is an excellent food source for the bees because the nectar is sugar rich and needs little effort by the bees to reduce the water content. How convenient that a forage like this comes when the bees need it most.

Archie McLellan, WTB compiler

IN THIS ISSUE

Asian Hornet	3
MBKA news and events	4
Committee (and sub-committee) stuff	5
Diary of a NewBee Keeper	6
Association Apiary	8
Bulk purchase for members	9
Do all trees flower and fruit?	9
Beekeeping – one hobby or ten?	10
Words	13
Earth	14
Queen rearing efforts this season	14
BBKA, BeeBase and Bee Inspectors	15
Handy hints	16
The Kent County Honey Show 2023	16
Shopping	18
Comments	18
The Committee	19

ASIAN HORNET

BBKA WHATSAPP GROUP FOR LATEST AH NEWS

Ian Campbell, who manages social media for the BBKA, has set up a **WhatsApp group** for news items about Asian hornets (AH) in the UK. Members of the group will receive quick, reliable news on confirmed and highly probable AH sightings.

This is a broadcast only group. Only the BBKA Asian Hornet administrator can post messages, and individual members are not visible. [Click here to join the group](#). Or click this link <https://chat.whatsapp.com/KtHEKzoayn46VwwK0isFco>. You can, of course, leave at any time. Members can contact the administrator privately by WhatsApp using his phone number.

There has been quite a number of sightings of AH in the last week of July, from Plymouth, Dover, Oxford, and more places almost every day. The [NBU AH rolling updates page](#) mentions five sightings on 27 July. Read about AH on the [website of the Non- Native Species Secretariat here](#).

The current issue of BBKA News is focussed largely on AH with contributions from the National Bee Unit, from beekeepers in Jersey, and from Richard Noel in Brittany.

ONE OF OUR MEMBERS TRAPS AN ASIAN HORNET AT HER APIARY



Chris Farrell, one of our members who lives near Folkstone, took the photo above and writes:

I caught a live Asian Hornet (AH) on Tuesday evening (25 July). A week or so ago, I saw one in some brambles about ten metres from one of my hives. Unfortunately, it

flew off before I had a chance to get a photo. I reported it on the AH app but got no reply. I contacted the NBU and they said they won't do anything without a photo. I told them I was a beekeeper and knew what an AH looked like but still they wouldn't react.

I already had a number of AH traps from Thornes, so I set one up where I'd seen the hornet. Several days later, I caught a live AH in it. I reported it on the AH app, this time with photos. This was about 6pm. I carefully transferred the AH to a jam jar with small holes in the lid, with a dog biscuit and a smear of honey inside. I put the jam jar in the garage overnight (in case the AH unscrewed the lid). It was still alive in the morning.

I had a series of phone calls that morning from a government scientist in Wales called Chris, explaining that the APHA team were doing a 'bee health day' with Roger Patterson at Wisborough Green and somebody would contact me later. I then received a call from the Regional Bee Inspector saying the Seasonal Bee Inspector (SBI) would visit me that evening to collect the AH. He told me to kill the AH by putting it in the freezer.

That evening the SBI arrived and transferred the now dead AH from the jam jar and put it in a test tube containing ethanol. She said it would be sent to the APHA lab in York for analysis.

I took her to the site where I had set the trap and she put a bait station in its place. This was the same kind of trap but without the lid. She put a kitchen towel soaked in attractant in the jar and a stick to allow insects to climb out. She suggested that I spend five minutes several times a day watching the trap for the arrival and departure of AHs. So far, I haven't seen any.

I was asked by the SBI not to put anything on social media about the AH and that APHA would do all the reporting. I have kept to this agreement.

Now, of course, this sighting has been reported on BeeBase, on the BBKA website, and on the WhatsApp AH group. We are now encouraged to spread the word and encourage trap setting and vigilance.

I informed a local beekeeper who lives in a nearby town about what I had found and told him to check his hives. On

Friday afternoon, he found an AH hawking in front of one of his hives. The photos on social media have come from him.

I've increased the traps around my other apiaries and will check them tomorrow. *Chris Farrell*

BBKA ASIAN HORNET TEAM TRAINING AVAILABLE FOR ALL BEEKEEPERS

There is an **online training course** on the BBKA website for anyone who would like to become part of their BKA's Asian Hornet Team (AHT). The current issue of BBKA News reports that the upper limit of fifteen members per team in any one association has been removed.

Even if you do not want to be an active member of your AHT, the training is a useful way of learning about AH.

MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

MBKA HONEY EXTRACTION FACILITIES

On Saturday, 5 August, from 14:00, come and see the facilities and equipment available for members to hire to extract their honey.

MBKA HONEY SHOW 2023



The rosettes have been delivered...

The important thing yet to arrive is your entry form with lots of entries! Please have a go, don't delay, the schedule is on the website and the deadline for entries is Thursday 24 August 2023.

As usual, offers of help to set up, steward, and take the show down will be gratefully received. Stewarding the show

[The training / test is now available for all.](#) No certificate is issued but the BBKA will, from time to time, contact local BKAs to inform them of their members who are now eligible for the local AHT.

Current members of the AHT are encouraged to retake the test from time to time as a refresher course.

Click here to access the online training

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/asian-hornet-team>.

The current list of sightings can be found here:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/asian-hornet-sightings>

AFT Training can be found here:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/asian-hornet-team>

involves chatting to the garden centre customers, explaining about the honey show, perhaps opening the demonstration hive, or selling honey or wax products. The customers are mostly keen gardeners, and many come each year to see the Show and buy honey.

Help is needed on

- Friday 1 September, from 3.00pm to set up the show
- Saturday 9.00am-1.00pm or 1.00pm-5.30pm
- Sunday 10.30am-1.00pm or 1.00pm onwards.

Please get in touch with your offers of help so that I can get a rota together. Call / text 01634 400470 or email Susan.Chapman@care4free.net.

Honey, wax or other hive products to sell over the weekend will be very welcome. MBKA will receive the usual 10% commission on sales.

[Download the schedule here.](#)

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. 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.

[Download the schedule here.](#)

Sue Chapman Susan.Chapman@care4free.net

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 August	Sat	14:00 Come and see the facilities and equipment available for members to hire to extract their honey.
12 August	Sat	17:00-21:00 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
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
11 September	Mon	Closing date for National Honey Show entries for essays, photos etc
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.
9 October	Mon	Closing date for National Honey Show entries (except essays etc)
14 October	Sat	18:00-22:00 Fish/chip supper / Quiz / Presentation of show prizes evening at Wainscott
26-28 October	Thu-Sat	09:00-18:00 (Sunday 09:00-16:30) National Honey Show , Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT
22 November	Wed	20:00 Stewart Spinks talk at Wainscott
31 January	Wed	19:30 David Evans , Queen rearing, Part 2, on Zoom
17 February	Sat	14:00-16:00 MBKA AGM at Wainscott

COMMITTEE (AND SUB-COMMITTEE) STUFF

The Committee met on Thursday 29 June 2023 at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel.

Association Apiary The Inspection Rota is short of experienced beekeepers. But we have lots of bees! We started with the year with four colonies and now have ten. The mower has gone in for service. It's the other thing that mowers do when not cutting grass. We could do with few more plants – lavender, echium, thyme John will look in the

spring. The water leak of mains water just above the field has not yet been repaired. Southern Water insist it is the landowner who should repair it.

We have a honey room, and it is available for hire.! Mark would like to buy a heated uncapping tray for it. A fee of £30 per day has been mooted with £50. We are hosting an extraction workshop day at the Apiary on Saturday 5 August at 14:00.

The Education group are pleased with the running of the Introductory Course. There were ten participants. There will be six candidates for the Basic exam in July.

The Winter talks programme is taking shape. Jez has invited Stuart Spinks of the Norfolk Honey Company to give a talk on 22 November 2023. His fee will be 100 plus mileage. We plan to invite members of our neighbouring associations to come to the talk for a fee of £5.00. Free to our members! Gwenyn Gruffydd, a bee farmer in Wales, has said he's happy to do a talk via Zoom. Jez will follow up.

Website Sonia has taken over from Paul. She is planning a map for the beekeepers in the area who have honey for

sale. Lists of those who want swarms and are happy to collect will be started again, along with a WhatsApp group for collectors.

Bulk buy Sonia will investigate bulk ordering of jars from Rawlings mixed 8oz/12oz/1lb with lids.

Annual Supper at Wainscott will be a fish and chip supper with quiz and presentation of prizes on 14 October 2023. Fish and chips will be ordered from Wainscott. Someone will be looking into that.

Date of next meeting Wednesday 9 August at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel at 7:30pm

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. Never a dull moment!

26 June 2023 – Things are getting nasty

Decide to add a super to the swarm in the vain hope they might like the extra space to store lots of honey. Can't work out why it won't fit and then have a Homer Simpson moment when I realise that the brood box is upside down. Duh!

Luckily Queen RuBee has decided to hang out on the underside of the crownboard and it is easy to stash her in the lid for safekeeping whilst I flip everything around. Phew! What a rookie mistake.

Hive #2 with Queen PhoeBee is full of brood and stores and an empty super – still. Archie is right when he says it is very wearisome waiting for them to move into a super. Have pushed the boat out and ordered new queen excluders (wire, framed) to see if they will make a difference.

Hive #1 has turned into the hive from hell. Another empty super – surprise, surprise. Bees are very aggressive, only just managing to get the extremely sticky QE off when I'm stung on the arm, twice, through my beesuit! It's at this moment I discover that my glove has torn on a stray roof pin, and I have bare flesh exposed. Shriek! Cowardice being the better part of valour I close them up smartish and get out of there.

Why on earth have they turned so bad? Was it the distant rumble of thunder?

3 July 2023 – From bad to worse

Despite being a small colony the swarm are doing alright for stores even if they are still to completely fill all the frames up. Queen RuBee seemed happy in her 'right way up' home.

Hive #2 appeared much as before. Didn't see Queen PhoeBee this time and needless to say the super remains untouched. Fitted the new QE. Let's hope this encourages them to greater heights.

Before I get to Hive #1 I notice two bees rolling around on the floor. It looks quite aggressive (must be a Hive #1 bee) and one appears very pale in colour. When the aggressor flies off I see an unfinished bee with DWV, beaten up and left for dead on the ground. Harsh.



Hive #1 gets full on smoke as I open them up. Ambling across the top of the frames is a virgin queen. Where has she come from and where is LibBee? This queen seems a bit

dazed from the smoke and goes over the edge of the brood box falling to the ground. I scoop her up and pop her back in the frames. I need to go through all the frames now to find my marked queen/queen cells/who knows what. The frames are packed full with everything – apart from any eggs that I can see. No queen cells and no sign of Queen LibBee. Bees are getting angrier by the minute and three of them launch a synchronised attack to my hand. I've seen and felt enough to know Queen LibBee has gone.



It looks as though I've missed another swarm, the 4th one from this hive!

A few other bees see me off the premises and hang around the back door of the house for half an hour to make sure I don't come back outside. Not much chance of that as I now have a hand that would put the Michelin man to shame.



15 July 2023 – Expert on the case

Archie has come over to inspect the bees with me and see if we can find out what the problem is with Hive #1. I'm taking no chances and using the very timely advice in WTB I'm wearing well-fitting suede gloves under my nitriles. It works surprisingly well.

Hive #1 have undergone a Jekyll and Hyde transformation. Just like misbehaving kids who only play up for their Mum the bees are now as calm as anything when another person is here. Typical. We're pleased to see all is well with the hive, but don't manage to find the unmarked queen. Finally they have started to fill up the super. I wonder if it was the new QE, which Archie points out is fitted upside down – as my set-up is bottom bee space.



Is there no end to the kit I manage to put on the wrong way up?

Hive #2 have also moved up into the super at last and, yes, their QE is also on upside down. At least I'm consistent. No sign of Queen PhoeBee, but she is laying well and so we leave them to it.

Several bees decide to follow us, so we have to stand in the middle of the lawn for a while puffing smoke about us and chatting about what we've seen.

A lone bee follows Archie all the way back to the car to say goodbye.

16 July 2023 – In the clover

In the last few days the lawn has erupted with white clover in full bloom. Along with the ever-present daisy and buttercup it's a meal on the doorstep for the hives, which my fussy bees have totally ignored up till now.



I spend a very happy hour sitting in the sun, with a cup of tea and cake, watching my bees along with at least 4 types of bumbles, hoverflies and one small wasp busily feeding on the clover flowers.

My family are now under strict instructions to 'look where you are walking!'

Words and photos by Jane Wheeler

ASSOCIATION APIARY



APIARY REPORT JULY 2023

What a varied month this has been weatherwise. Last July last year shirtsleeves, this year sweaters. Beekeeping definitely can not be carried out by the calendar – it is the weather that dictates!

The number of colonies has gradually increased to eleven, the majority of which are on 14 x 12 frames. Most of these increases have been from splits from our swarm control. One colony swarmed whilst we were inspecting the hives and conveniently settled in a bramble, at chest height, on the edge of the ditch by the roller. I wish all swarms were as easy to collect and as close to an apiary.

We were disappointed at the low interest in the Queen Marking workshop on 5 July – only two members turned up. Hope this is not a trend for further workshops.

However, Bee Chat on Wednesday 26 July was successful with a total of eight members. A mixture of experienced beekeepers and novices. A really enjoyable evening!

The Apiary was used on two occasions for members to sit the Basic Exam. Three candidates did the Basic on the 15 July and a further three on the 22nd. We now know that all six passed with Jez gaining a credit. Well done everyone.

On the 22 July the weather turned wet after the first two candidates had completed the exam and to prevent the exam being cancelled, we erected the small gazebo over one of the hives so that the exam could be carried out! Looking at the results it was worth doing.

We will have honey to extract from the hives in the Apiary so will carry out a honey extraction workshop on Saturday 5th August in the Pavilion.

Some of the honey from the Apiary hives was entered in the Kent County Honey Show but sadly could only manage a fourth place. Will do better next year.

Members and families are invited to a free BBQ we are hosting at the Pavilion Apiary on Saturday 12th August and donations will be given to Bees for Development. Hopefully

this event will be well supported, and the BBQ may even become an annual event.

If you are coming to the BBQ, please let Sheila know, asap, so that we can cater for the correct number.

We are still looking for volunteers to carry out work at the Apiary, mainly grass cutting and gardening. Basically, keeping the site looking tidy.

There will be further workshops and maintenance days during Summer/Autumn

Mark Ballard – Apiary Manager

BULK PURCHASE FOR MEMBERS

The committee has decided to bulk buy honey jars for members. This means we can offer jars at considerably cheaper prices! Details of jars available are below. Numbers of boxes will be limited in the first instance to four boxes of 1lb and two boxes of other sizes per person, to ensure everyone can take advantage of the deal. We will let you all know if there are any left over. Jars will need to be picked up from the Association Apiary. We'll confirm the dates and times soon.

Please email me if you would like to purchase any jars. I will then send confirmation, total due, and payment details.

- 1lb (454g) round jars and lids, box of 72 £40
- 8oz (227g) hex jars and lids, box of 108 £55
- 12oz (340) hex jars and lids, box of 84 £45



Not having done this before we have very limited quantities of 8oz and 12oz as we were not sure what demand there would be. Jars will be allocated on a first come first served basis. We are hoping this will be successful and if the demand is there we will do this again next year (or even this year) and maybe buy two pallets worth next time!

Sonia Belsey

sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

DO ALL TREES FLOWER AND FRUIT?

Flowers look good and smell nice. Plants reproduce with flowers for pollination, then fruiting, then scattering seed. Beekeepers are aware that trees are a huge source of nectar and pollen for bees throughout the season. For one thing, many trees are very big!. A single large tree is like a three-dimensional small field.

Trees with shapely, aromatic, and colourful flowers are easy targets for foraging bees. We can see why bees would head for blackthorn, cherry, and hawthorn trees. That's what we would do if we were bees.

But if that's how we think, we're going to be surprised at some of the other foraging choices made by the bees. Some plants with very small flowers are very successful at luring bees in. Think of cotoneaster, privet, and ivy.

And there are even smaller flowers that attract bees, and these are found on *catkins*. Catkins are the flowers of many trees, and it is what those trees without garish blossoms use for reproduction. Bees can forage on them from January through July. And even into November, if you count ivy, which you should.

Hazel is abundant and flowers during January and February. Sometimes the catkins arrive in time for Christmas. At this time of year, in the depth of winter, anything that flowers, even a tree with light brown catkins, will not go unnoticed, not even by humans! These catkins are air-pollinated, so they don't depend on insects. Honey bees are able to collect small loads of pollen, but it isn't easy for them. That's because the grains are not sticky – they actually repel each other so that they remain light enough to travel



in the air. Look out for the female catkins / flowers which are tiny red buds, hardly visible on a tree dripping

with yellow male catkins.



Goat willow catkins are either male or female on any one tree. Unlike hazel, they are insect pollinated and provide an important early source of pollen and nectar for bees and other insects. Like all early flowering trees, the catkins or blossoms appear before the leaves. That's one reason they make such a show.

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 describes her own procedures for harvesting and extracting a honey crop. Jen has devised methods that suit her ways of working, and they are not completely conventional – though all the more interesting for being so.

Probably the main reason people keep bees is to harvest honey, but the task that I never found anyone to guide me with was how to harvest and extract! Now that the honey room at the apiary has been completed, there will be a chance to watch how others do extracting, but as



Spring is the time for dazzling floral tree displays: wild cherry, hawthorn and so much more. I had the impression that blackthorn flowered in such profusion this year.

Around late April and early May, trees sprout leaves. The time from bud to full-grown leaf can be startlingly brief. Over the next weeks, these trees will flower, fruit, and eventually seed. Because the trees are already in full leaf, many will flower - produce catkins - and the event will go unnoticed.

Ash has purple flowers which appear in spiked clusters at the tips of the fine branches. The catkins of oak are long, yellow, and dangling, not compact but

loosely formed. The flowers appear from April to May. Silver birch male catkins are long and yellow-brown in colour like lambs' tails; the female version is smaller, short, bright green and erect.

And so on, for sycamore, beech, horse chestnut, sweet chestnut, lime (large leafed and small-leafed versions, the latter making a distinctive honey), and many more. There is so much to see, not just the flowers, but the fruits and seeds too.

I live in a formerly wooded area. Trees were removed to make space for roads and houses, but many were retained. Outside my front door are four hornbeams and a sweet chestnut, all very large. Clearing up catkins, fruits, and leaves was what started my journey into looking at trees.

[The Woodland Trust website](#) gives a gentle introduction to our trees. And you can glance at it at any time and pick up little titbits of information as you need them.

Words and photos: Archie McLellan

with all beekeeping, we all find our own way and today I will describe mine.

These two processes, although separate and very different, and done in different locations, are inextricably linked as you need to aim to extract within 24 hours of taking the honey from the hives; and the sooner the better. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, whilst on the hive, the



honey will be kept warm. Once it is removed, it will cool down to room temperature. As it cools it becomes thicker and stickier and more difficult to extract. Any fast-setting honeys, such as oil seed rape and sunflower, may crystallise as the temperature drops, and can set hard in the frames.

Secondly, there is the hazard of wax moth. You may not have seen any on the frames, but without the bees in the hive to keep them in check, any wax moth larvae present will start to destroy the frames and render them unusable.

The third reason to extract quickly is that the full frames of honey are a magnet for both bees and wasps and it's not a good plan to allow a robbing frenzy to start in your kitchen.

I aim to harvest at the end of July, start of August. This varies from year to year and depends on your location. Often bees located in towns and villages have longer foraging periods. I don't like to wait until the end of all the forage, but prefer to take the harvest and allow the bees time to collect more nectar for their winter stores.

I don't take the full super boxes home from my apiary for extraction. They are heavy and prone to leak honey all over the car. I have a stack of 32 litre plastic boxes that take 8-9



full super frames in each and I carry the frames home in these. I take these plastic boxes to the hives and harvest straight into them. I place three boxes, with lids, beside the hive I want to harvest. I take the roof and crown board off the hive and clear the bees from the supers using a fume board and 'Bee quick' spray that repels the bees and pushes them down into the brood box. This saves me from lifting all the supers off to put a clearer board on – I'm all for cutting out unnecessary lifting. I remove the frames one at a time from the top super, sweeping any remaining bees off with a handful of sappy grass; it's much cleaner than a bee brush and I just get a fresh handful if it gets sticky.

All fully capped frames go into the first box, the partially filled/capped frames go into the second box, and any empty frames go into the third. The lids are kept on all boxes to prevent robbing. I work through all the supers on the hive, moving the fume board down as I go. When the hive has been harvested, I don't open the brood box; the

bees have had enough disturbance for one day. From the partially filled frames and, if necessary, the full ones, I then make up one super to leave on the hive. This ensures that the bees have enough honey for the winter, and that my honey for extraction comes from fully capped frames. This means that it will have a very low water content and is, therefore, not liable to ferment.



I work through the hives and end up with several 32 litre boxes of full capped super frames ready to transport home. The empty frames are returned to the shed for another year. All the partially filled ones are back on the hives. The

plastic boxes each holding 8 or 9 frames, are lighter than a wooden super with 10 frames, and I have no problems with robbing or leaking. It works for me!

Once home, the full plastic boxes are stacked on my kitchen table ready for the extraction to begin. The kitchen has been well cleaned before I go to harvest the honey, and the extractor and hot uncapping tray are set up ready to go. I sterilise any honey buckets and all the extracting equipment such as sieves and uncapping forks that I plan to use, in advance, with a brewer's sterilising solution, and I dry them with either paper or clean non lint cloths. I have a stack of clean dry cloths available. Everything not needed is removed from the kitchen. Somehow, even with care, the honey seems to get everywhere. I put on protective clothing and I'm now ready to go.



I have a 20-frame electric extractor. I uncup the first 20 frames with a wide, cranked uncapping fork. I have tried a hot air gun, a knife, a heated knife, and a reverse uncapping tool but I work best with the wide fork. I place the cappings on a heated uncapping tray. This has water in the bottom layer, and, as I remove the cappings, they rest on the sloping metal tray. I set the thermostat to 60°C; beeswax melts at 62°C so this is just enough to soften the cappings and allow any honey removed with them to be drained out into the collecting bucket



without it being contaminated with liquid wax. The honey is only minimally heated and cools quickly once in the bucket.

Once the extractor is full, I set it going and start to uncup the next 20 frames. The extractor cycle lasts for 20 minutes, and I leave it running for the full time.

I usually stop uncapping and drain the honey from the extractor through a double sieve into a 50lb honey bucket with a honey gate attached. Honey, unlike water, runs silently. Unwatched open honey gates can easily flood the floor and waste the honey. It pays to be vigilant and not get distracted. The sieve can block with the debris from the frames, so I swap with spare ones while I clean the original one out. The water content of the honey is checked frequently using a refractometer to ensure that it is below 20%. It is often at 17-18%.



The extracted honey is drained from the 50 lb bucket into 15lb buckets for storage. I find this size easy to handle and a convenient size to warm when I jar honey to sell. Each bucket is sealed with a lid and labelled with the apiary name and date of extraction. These buckets are then stored on shelves in a cool place until needed.



Once the extracting is finished, I turn the heated tray temperature up high and melt the wax. I do not collect any more of the honey as it has now been overheated, but the wax is run off into a collecting bucket, cooled into a block and can be used later for candle making.

After a long day there is a lot of cleaning to do! I clean the tools and the extractor in the garden with the hose. Cold water is best for cleaning as warm water melts any wax flakes onto the equipment, making it more difficult to clean. The hot tray is unplugged and left to cool, and I try to clean it before it is completely cold and sets hard! The floor and all the surfaces need a good wash and I always wonder how I got honey so far up my arms...

The season is over. The next job is to prepare the hives for winter and set them up for another season next year.

Words and photos by Jen Ferry Jen_ferry@hotmail.com



WORDS

The Words column has appeared in most issues of WHATSTHEBUZZ since it started about 30 months ago. The consequence for the writer is that he has found that he doubts the meaning of many words he used to take for granted, and he assiduously looks up any and every word that he is unsure of. They are all listed in a file on his computer, and scarcely a day goes by without the list being added to.

Many of these terms have been found in beekeeping contexts. Perhaps you've come across them too.

imminent: about to happen. *As in, is swarming imminent in this colony?*

tyro / neophyte: a beginner or novice. *There's something not quite right about referring to adults, sometimes very eminent in their profession, as **beginners**, though many beekeepers do so regardless. I'm not sure if these alternative terms are any improvement!*

morphometry: the process of measuring the external shape and dimensions of landforms, living organisms, or other objects. *For example, the veins on the wings. There is a long sausage shape at the outer back edge of the honey bee's front wing, which makes identification conclusive.*

heterozygosity: the possession of two different alleles of a particular gene or genes by an individual. *So, a honey bee worker or queen, not a drone.*

visceration: (organ removal) the process of removing one or all of the organs from the inside of a body. *Think of the unfortunate result of a drone's successful mating with a queen.*

tendentious: expressing or intending to promote a particular cause or point of view, especially a controversial one. *What?! No such thing in beekeeping.*

noodler: one who improvises. *You won't become a seasoned beekeeper without being one from time to time.*

scuttlebutt: rumour, gossip. *WHATSTHEBUZZ is a scuttlebutt-free publication.*

schadenfreude: pleasure derived by someone from another person's misfortune. *Example: I hope the guys who vandalised those hives got stung.*

perturbation: anxiety, mental uneasiness. *As in finding that your sleep is affected by the goings on in your colonies.*

sesquipedalianism: the practice of using overly long words. *Science jargon can feel like that to us non-scientists.*

quandary: a state of perplexity or uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation. *As in not being able to decide what to do, but feeling that you can't keep the hive open any longer while you make up your mind.*

swither: hesitate, be perplexed. *Most Scots are unaware that this is a Scottish word. Swithering happens a lot in Scottish beekeeping.*

factoid: an item of unreliable information that is reported and repeated so often that it becomes accepted as fact. *Think of all these beekeeping myths that abound. My favourite factoid is that you can tell the type of queen cell by its position on the frame. You absolutely can not!*

vatic: describing or predicting what will happen in the future. *Example: the essence of being a good beekeeper is not just recognising what are the bees doing now, but sensing will they be doing in one or two weeks' time.*

shufti: a look or reconnoitre, especially a quick one. *Example: what you **shouldn't** do for a couple of weeks (or more) when a colony is requeening itself. [A wise man](#) said: Anxiety is no substitute for patience, so wait.*

EARTH

In [Otherlands, A World in the Making](#), which was featured here in the April 2023 issue, Thomas Halliday tells stories of the growth and life of planet earth since its beginning, as a way of understanding the life and plight of the planet today.

Chris Packham, in his new BBC series *Earth*, a guide to 'five pivotal moments' in the planet's history, is doing a similar thing. His words are accompanied by dramatic music, restless imagery, and the whole gamut of modern film-making techniques and gimmickry. The inspiration and purpose of both Halliday's book and Packham's TV series is the reality of climate change. The planet has been through it all before, and has always survived, or been reborn, in a new version of itself. But regeneration after past extinction events takes many thousands of years. If the whole history of planet



Chris Packham, in his new BBC series Earth

kaching: (ka-ching) used to represent the sound of a cash register, especially with reference to making money. *Example: the sound of sales at the National Honey Show; you know it will ring for you before the day is out.*

incipient: beginning to happen or develop. *As in Honey Show judges' term for visible granulation in a jar of honey. (Actually, this is not accurate: it could be the remnant of granulation that had not been fully cleared by warming. Anything to score a point over the judges!)*

spurious: not being what it purports to be; false or fake. *example: beekeepers' claims about their, and their bees', achievements.*

earth were represented by 24 hours, then modern man of the last 10,000 years would fill the time of the blink of an eye, less than a tenth of a second, just before midnight. Any idea of riding out climate change because the planet has seen it all before is not one that fragile human life is likely to be part of.

In the concluding chapter of his book, Thomas Halliday presents a balanced and coherent account of the problems which now beset us. He writes 'Unlike past occasions when a single species of group of species has fundamentally altered the biosphere ... our species is in an unusual position of control over the outcome. We know that change is occurring, we know that we are responsible, we know what will happen if it continues, we know that we can stop it, and we know how. The question is whether we will try.' (*Otherlands*, p286)

QUEEN REARING EFFORTS THIS SEASON

I'm not against the idea of buying in queens. I bought one Carniolan queen from BS Queens this year. I've kept her in a nuc with the idea of restricting her laying rate, but she is prolific! Perhaps I should have removed a couple of frames and filled the space with a 'fat dummy' or such-like.

However, her daughters have mated with the local drones, and from past experience there are some unpleasant genes in that pool! Time will tell whether the new queens are better or worse than queens raised with local genes.

Ultimately, unless you are prepared to buy in new queens for most of your colonies every year, then you have to work with what's locally available. It takes time, and queen selection might not be enough. You have to work to improve the drones too. I have some colonies that have 'room for improvement'. It's a long game.

Although I had my toes in the water last year, I've waded much further into the queen rearing pool this year. I still need arm bands and I'm not a comfortable swimmer yet. But I have enjoyed the experience, had a little success, and learned lots of things that will ensure better results next year.

My queen rearing is a bit like Esther's gardening: you've nothing to lose by trying something, so take every opportunity that presents itself. This approach is a little chaotic, or at least it has been for me. My record keeping is abysmal.

Things didn't get off to a good start. A badger (presumably) destroyed my first batch of mating queens in eight mini-nuc boxes. They were too close to the ground. Esther suggested making ledges on top of the garden fence and that works well with space for about 20 boxes. Since then, beside some successes, I've demonstrated that I learn best from (bad) experiences. For instance, it's important that queen cells are removed no later than day 14, or a day or two earlier to be on the safe side. Now I have seen the result of being just a few hours too late: the first virgin to emerge will result in all the other cells being torn down and the queens within will be killed. Whether the 'prime' virgin will do this or herself or simply by her presence ensure that the workers will do it for her, I'm not able to say. The result is the same anyway.

I've fallen out of the habit of caging the cells *in situ* shortly after they are sealed. There didn't seem to be any need.



Yellow spots to the camera please. Some queens with attendants in the kitchen for a stopover between mini-nuc and final hive destination.

Two nights ago, I checked on some cells, but decided they could wait a day before being harvested. No, they couldn't! They hadn't been caged, and they were all gone when I went to distribute them to mini nucs a day later.

I've tried a range of hive options for cell-raising: Ben Harden, Cloake board, and simple queenless nucs, stuffed with bees. They all work, to a degree.

I graft larvae into cells, because I

find it easy (with +3.5 specs, and a powerful headlight) and it can be done straightaway. If grafting didn't work for me, I'd try other methods like Miller, cell-punching etc. My beginner's luck has long since expired. Initially, 80-90% of grafts became sealed cells. That proportion has dropped significantly now, and I'm not sure why. It doesn't really matter. I have lots of cell bars and can quickly collect a frame of young larvae, graft into cups, and place the bar in a cell-raiser colony.

I made an incubator using the design David Evans created. It works well and I'm pleased with it.

My current queen cells are probably the last for this season. I had a number mated in mid-August last year. I also had some colonies that become queenless in January and February this year. Lack of good records means that I can't say if there is a connection.

I'm looking forward to winter-thinking time to plan how to do things better next year. And how to keep track of every larva grafted into a cup right through till it becomes a mated queen in its final home.

Words and photo: Archie McLellan

BBKA, BEEBASE AND BEE INSPECTORS

See the Asian Hornet article at the start of this issue!

HANDY HINTS

Sticking zips If the zip for your veil gets stuck, try pulling it with your hand on the opposite side. It will be more in line with the direction of the zip's travel.

Recycling brood comb Can you recycle the wax in old comb containing brood? Yes, but not if there's any brood in it. Think of the decomposition, and the smell! But if you lay these combs on the ground, in the long grass, or under some shrubs, they will be cleaned out in a few days – without any damage to the wax. I haven't seen who the cleaners are. Possibly insects, birds... any little creatures whose diet isn't exclusively vegetarian.



Getting a sharp blue edge in the refractometer If, when reading the refractometer, the edge of the blue area is soft, blurry, or ill-defined, then you don't have enough honey on the plate. Add a drop more and see the blue boundary turn razor sharp. At least it did for me. Once. But perhaps I'm wrong to infer that the extra honey was the cause of the improvement.

THE KENT COUNTY HONEY SHOW 2023

The Beekeepers from the five associations in Kent (Dover, Kent, Laddingford, Medway, and Thanet) came together to provide an exhibition in the Maidstone Hall at the Kent Show Ground. This year is the 100th year of the founding of the Kent Agricultural Society, so we included a few items reflecting how beekeeping had changed over the years. Our main aim was to show how keeping bees and the conservation of other pollinators are important for the provision of pollination for the flowers, fruit and

Reading the bees Specifically, can you interpret the bees' behaviour as they crawl over a caged queen? Is it safe to remove the tab over the fondant? Will she be accepted in a day or two when the bees have tunnelled a way in to her cage? As someone said: Are they loving or murdering her?

[Erichalfbee on Beekeeping Forum](#) said: A good tip, I find: Pick up the cage and see if bees are putting their proboscis in to feed her. That's a good sign. Biting the cage isn't.

Can you brush the bees off? Hostile bees cling on and you can't just brush them off.

What's **your** reading of the bees' behaviour in [this short video](#). If you send me your guess, I'll let you know what happened when I opened the cage.



Some beekeepers have found that it's best to break the tab over the fondant (candy) after 24 hours (not later), except with large, defensive colonies, when it's best to make up a nuc to get the queen laying and established before uniting.

vegetables. All the exhibits are aimed towards involving, informing and entertaining the general public.

The stalls in the main part of the hall included examples of bee friendly plants; *Hive to Jar*, covering where honey comes from and how the honey is extracted; candle-rolling and badge making (for children of all ages including the young in heart); Pollinators Quiz; and opportunities to purchase honey and wax products.

The Bumble Bee, Wasps and Hornets display always draws a lot of interest and we were again pleased to have the assistance of the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust volunteers to man these. Beekeepers and potential beekeepers are not left out as our Education and Information stand was very busy. This year, we had included a display of the basic equipment needed to begin keeping bees including an estimate of the potential cost.

In the porch area, we located two observation hives each day and a display of the range of some hives and skeps that have been used over the last 100 years. This area was, as ever, very busy with a lot of interest shown in the bees.

The committee that puts the exhibition together includes – Bob Smith, Lesley Fancote, Roger Thompson, James Salter, Jacki Aucott and John Chapman. We rely on volunteers to set-up the exhibition and to man the stands during the 3 days of the show and to pack away after the close on Sunday. If you are interested in helping next year, look for information about stewarding at the show in your newsletters.

Overall, over 55,000 people booked to come to the Kent Agricultural show this year, and I am waiting for the final figures to be calculated. A lot a very positive comments have been made about our part of the show by those who visited our displays.

The Kent Honey Show was held, as part of the Kent Agricultural Show, in the Maidstone Hall. The show is open to all members of the five beekeeping associations in Kent. We had 140 entries from 18 exhibitors of which 134 exhibits were staged, which was to biggest number of entries for over 15years. This year, the show was judged by Claire O'Brien and Sonia Belsey was the Judge's Steward. The place winners of the classes in the show are on the attached table. The winners of the cups are shown on the list below:

The Agricultural Society's Trophy (highest points in classes 1 to 16) – John Chapman (Medway BKA).



Clive Watson Memorial Trophy (winner of Class for Medium Honey) – Gary Luckhurst (Kent BKA).

Mead Cup (Overall winner in the Mead Classes) – Archie McLellan. (Medway BKA).

Reginald Tower Rose Bowl (best exhibit in candles) – James

Salter (Laddingford BKA).

Subscribers Cup (Winner of the Exhibition Class – Mark Ballard (Medway BKA).

The Novice Cup (best exhibit in the novice classes) – Archie McLellan (Medway BKA).

Geoffrey Dixon Trophy (Branch or Association Apiary Honey) –

Laddingford BKA.

Best Exhibit in Honey (Ticket to the National Honey show) – Gary Luckhurst (Kent BKA).

The Margaret Calder Plate (Best Exhibit in Cookery Classes) – Lesley Fancote (Kent BKA).

Central Division Cup (Branch or Association Winning the most points) – Medway BKA

The winners in each class are published on a separate attachment.

Our judge, Claire O'Brien, made some comments about our show "The honey entries was all well presented on the show bench, with very few exhibits showing any surface defects. The soft set exhibits were outstanding. The winning entry had one of the smoothest honeys that I have ever tried. The exhibition class was very full of a wide range of items. The wax classes were well represented, and the exhibits were well presented. Unfortunately, one of the candle entries was attached to the bottom of its holder so the wick position could not be judged, which was a pity as it was a nice wax. Overall, the standard was good."

Finally, we would like to thank our class sponsors for their support and hope they will be willing to support us again next year. Our Sponsors this year were (in alphabetical order) – Biddenden, Freeman & Harding Kent BKA, Laddingford BKA, Maisemore Apiaries Ltd., Medway BKA, and Thornes (Beehives) Ltd.

You can see [the full list of prize winners for all classes here](#).

John Chapman (Show Secretary)

SHOPPING

It's well known that bees can't process syrup in cold temperatures and fondant is recommended as a winter feed. Of course, if there are sufficient stores in the frames in late autumn, no winter feeding will be necessary. Many beekeepers use fondant exclusively, all year round, as a supplementary or emergency feed. As fondant is already more expensive than plain granulated sugar, it does not make sense to buy expensive 1kg or 2kg packs sold in beekeeping retailers. Despite some claims, there is no advantage in these products over bakers fondant such as this product below. As you can see the price has dropped again significantly.

FONDANT

from [BFP](#). Buy from their website. Delivery is free for orders above £150. If you want to join with others to make up a bulk order, email WHATSTHEBUZZ



GRANULATED SUGAR



Buying granulated sugar and making syrup is probably the cheapest way of feeding bees. Buying in bulk is possible at

COMMENTS

TO POST A COMMENT, PLEASE EMAIL WHATSTHEBUZZ.

Beekeeping is fertile ground for opinions to grow, and there are lots of them in WHATSTHEBUZZ.

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

some outlets but it does not seem to be significantly less expensive than bags bought in the supermarket. Save yourself (or your friendly delivery man) the heavy lifting of a large batch of sugar and buy sugar in over several weeks in time for autumn feeding. And when does autumn feeding happen? Some would say, as soon as you take a honey harvest in early August. Others, perhaps those who live in areas with ivy and Himalayan balsam, might delay feeding till mid-October.

[Consider adding thymol to homemade syrup to prevent mould growing.](#) A side benefit of introducing a little thymol to the hive at this time of year is that it will have a deleterious effect on both varroa mites and Nosema spores.

Cutting a 1-2kg slice of fondant with the 12.5kg block placed just over the edge of a double hive stand is quick and easy. Making up little cartons for feed in mini-nucs (à la Dan Basterfield) is a messy affair. Although (Prof) David Evans uses syrup with straw in his mini-nucs, (Prof) Robert Pickard says that fondant should be used for such small colonies. I find both work fine.

Possibly the bees draw comb faster with syrup.



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

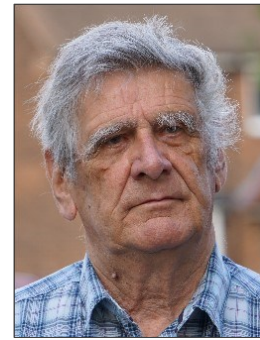
Chair - vacant

Vice-Chair,
vacant

Vice-Chair - vacant



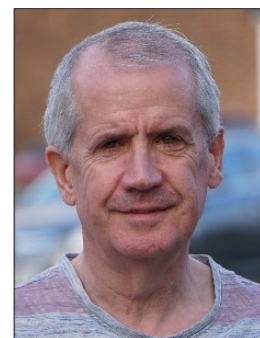
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AFTER THE AGM IN FEBRUARY 2024

The present compiler of WHATSTHEBUZZ is retiring after his 36th issue (three years) which will be the at the start of February 2024.

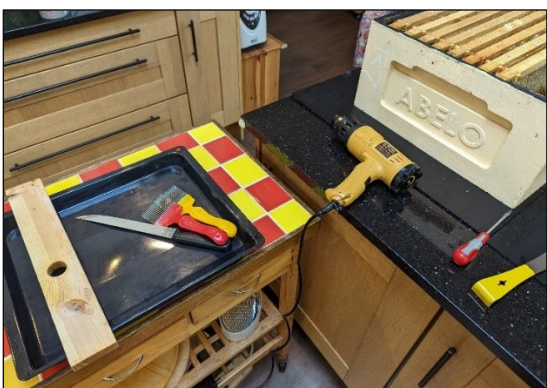
Does the job of editing / compiling the MBKA newsletter appeal to you? The newsletter had a different look in Paul Lawrence's time as editor, and the next person in the job

PHOTOS OF ANOTHER KITCHEN HONEY ROOM



Extraction day on 20 July 2023. Team: A&E McLellan

The kitchen has been cleaned and everything is in place. The extractor can take 12 shallow or deep frames. The floor is not covered with any protective material as it is resilient and easy to clean. The 'staff' wear disposable hair nets (called 'mob caps') but not gloves. There are two sinks in the kitchen and a third in the adjoining scullery, as we call it. No disposable cloths are used but a good supply of large microfibre cloths is on hand. Supers are placed on sheets of Correx, both on the floor and the work surface.



Uncapping: The screwdriver and hive tool are for dislodging stuck frames. The heat gun, forks and sharp knife are all used as needed for

uncapping. Frames are held above the grill pan, supported in the hole on the wood strip, which in turn is held in place by two grooves on the underside.

The honey gate on the extractor is left open – most of the time! Honey is strained through coarse and fine filters into

will bring a different look again. It's healthy that tasks in the Association should be rotated around the members, and if this is to happen with the newsletter, this seems an appropriate time for the present compiler to hand over to someone new.

If this tingles a nerve in you, don't push the idea away!

honey buckets. The moisture content is measured with a refractometer, and this is marked on a label sellotaped to the lid of the bucket, along with the apiary, date of extraction, and weight. Cling film on the surface of the honey reduces contact with air, and lifts scum off at a later stage when the honey is jarred.



The honey buckets are then stored under the table tennis table in the garage.

Although we have worked throughout the day into the evening in the past, that can be exhausting. This session was more comfortable. We produced 112kg / 247 lb honey, and moisture readings varied from 16.8 – 17.8%.