

WHATSTHEBUZZ



Rethinking autumn feeding

MBKA BBQ photos

Making creamed honey

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers' Association.

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

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

The MBKA website has full information about the Association.

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



Picture above: Four hornets (European) in an Asian hornet monitoring trap in the garden, beside the mini nucs and observation hive. These traps should be monitored daily to release beneficial insects. Photo by A McLellan

Hello to September – it's Showtime – and to you all

If you keep abreast of the NBU (DEFRA) updates on the Asian hornet (AH) incursion, you might be wondering not if, but when, you'll find an AH hawking outside your hives.

And yet, it appears – in this part of SE England at least – that beekeepers are calm and measured in the face of this new pest. Not all, of course. Last week, a rumour surfaced (from no attributable source) that the NBU were under-reporting AH sightings by around 50%. This had the hallmarks of scaremongering.

One can't help wondering what the figures would be if it were possible to extrapolate from sightings to actual populations. The countryside is a big place. There's a lot of it in here in the SE, and, despite the overall population density, there's lots of land which is usually empty of people. So, yes, like swarms, there are probably more AHs around us at the moment than we can ever hope to spot, much less catch.

If AH does succeed in overwintering in the UK – and that's not yet a given – that does not mean that we move into despair mode. Coexistence with pests and diseases is part of life on this planet, and in beekeeping, like all stockholding, there is a long history of learning to cope. In some west European countries, thousands of AH nests are destroyed every year. If AH does get a hold in the UK, containment is the next option. It makes things a lot less bad than they might be.

Right, now that I've addressed that obligatory topic, let's get back on track to the monthly survey of life for the beekeeper at the hives, of the activity of the bees inside the hive, and how weather and season outside in the world affect both.

The traditional advice is that liquid feeding should be complete by end September with 6-8 frames of honey, or 15-18kg weight on each side of hive, less roof. But autumn feeding is a complex subject, and does require beekeepers to be aware of the activity of individual colonies and what, if any, nectar flows remain. There is more on this in an article inside.

If you started varroa treatment after harvesting honey, make a diary note of the end times of these treatments and remove products when the label specifies.

You will notice far fewer drones in colonies now, and will see them being ejected. Although the queen's laying rate slows, this is the season for the growth of the colony's population of winter (long-lived) bees. It is also the time of highest varroa loads, and if the latter is not dealt with now, there will be little of the former, and nothing of the colony at all come next spring. The bees may seem to be foraging and bringing in nectar just now. This will not necessarily be transformed into stores. Assess the situation and decide if feeding is needed now, or can wait till later.

You will have noticed that ivy is in flower. You'll hear this before you see it, with the hum of bees, wasps and other insects. Ivy nectar has a poor reputation, both as honey for human food, and as nourishment for bees. This is because it has a high glucose content and sets hard (and white) in the comb. Fortunately, because the nectar is very rich, the bees have little to do to process it into honey, and they will be able to consume it as and when needed.

Archie McLellan, WTB compiler

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ASIAN HORNET WEEK: 4-10 SEPTEMBER

A gentle reminder of the talk in two parts by Andrew Durham arranged by the BBKA. It takes place on **6 and 7 September** at 19:30. [Click here to register.](#)

MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

MBKA EXAM SUCCESSES

Six of our members passed the BBKA Basic Assessment this summer. Our congratulations to Nicky Brown, Lee Cahill, Jez Davies (pass with credit), Margaret Smith, Sara Spellman, and David Wattle.

MBKA HONEY EXTRACTION FACILITIES

Do please contact Mark Ballard (see back page) if you would like to hire the Honey Room at the Association Apiary. It's there to be used!

MBKA HONEY SHOW 2023

Our Honey Show is on **Saturday and Sunday 2 and 3 September – this weekend!** – at Elm Court Garden Centre, Capstone Road, Gillingham, ME7 3JQ.

Even if you don't have any items in the Show, please do drop in and see the display, and perhaps spend some time chatting with other members or even visitors browsing the Show. It is an annual attraction, publicised by the Garden Centre, and many people visit specifically to see the Show and chat to beekeepers.

Volunteers to help assemble and take down the Show stands, as well as man the counters during the weekend, are needed. If you are able to help, please email me asap.

Sue Chapman Susan.Chapman@care4free.net

APIARY EVENTS

13 September, Wed, 18:00-20:00 Session on beekeeping hygiene

27 September, Wed, 19:00 BeeChat at the Apiary. BYOB and snacks. Families welcome.

PLOUGHING MATCH 2023

23 September, Sat, 09:00-16:00 at Lillechurch Farm, Lower Higham, Rochester ME3 7HW

The annual ploughing match of the Rochester and Gravesend Agricultural Association (RGAA) happens in three weeks' time. We have, as an association, been to these matches since they were restarted in the 1950's. We run our stall selling members' honey and wax products (10% of the sales go to the association and help to cover the cost of our membership of the RGAA) as well as offering advice to the general public. It gives us an excellent opportunity to talk to local farmers and other people who might be able to offer sites for colonies.

The event includes a range of stalls ranging from the definitely agricultural to vegetable selling to fairground type side-shows. These are arranged around two rings, one for the local gymkhana and the other for horse ploughing or other demonstrations. The main ploughing competitions are held next to the Show area and include both vintage tractors and commercial classes. Both are keenly competed for!

There is a handicraft and cookery competition tent, (worth a look!) and the *Ploughman's Arms* (I am sure that does not need explaining!) does a brisk trade during the day. You'll also find a variety of food outlets including the local Rochester Country Market. You might recognise some of the staff!

It really is a very enjoyable day out. If you can offer half a day on the stall, that would be great. You will get a free entry pass and the rest of the time is free for you to spend at the Show. If you have never come to this type of event before then now is your chance!

The ploughing match itself starts at 10.00am, but we get there by 9.00am to set up. The event finishes at 4.00pm. We are always looking for volunteers to help run the stand during the day. If you are interested please get in touch with me.

John Chapman john.chapman@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

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

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 (address above) Judging Saturday morning Take down and pack up show at 15:30 Sunday
4-10 September	Mon-Sun	Asian hornet week
6-7 September	Wed-Thu	Andrew Durham on Asian Hornet: two talks on Zoom arranged by BBKA. Click to register.
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
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, Norfolk Honey Company , talk (topic tbc) at Wainscott
6 December	Wed	19:30 Gwenyn Gruffydd talk (topic tbc) on Zoom
31 January	Wed	19:30 David Evans , Queen rearing, Part 2, on Zoom
17 February	Sat	14:00-16:00 MBKA AGM at Wainscott

ASSOCIATION APIARY NEWS – AUGUST 23

From Mark Ballard, Apiary Manager

We currently have eight active hives. On our hive inspection on Saturday 26 August, we found that the colony in the poly nuc was only covering three frames and had no queen. Hives 2 and 3 were also small, weak colonies. Because we are going into autumn, we decided to unit all three colonies into one strong colony. The rest of the colonies have sufficient stores and are strong.

At the beginning of August, we took delivery of a large selection of honey jars thanks to Davids's offer to use his large van. The jars were unloaded and are in store in the Pavilion.

Some members have yet to collect the jars they ordered. If you have ordered honey jars, can you arrange with Sonia to collect them.

We ran a honey extraction workshop at the Pavilion on Saturday 5 August and five members came to it. To date we have extracted and jarred up approximately 41kg (90lb) of honey. Some has been sold at the English Festival and the County Show. We also need to pay our rent (in honey) to John Myatt.

We had a BBQ on 12 August and 38 members, with families and friends were there to enjoy the fun – as I hope you can

see from the photos! We hope to make an annual event of this.



We jarred 18kg (40lb) of honey on the 19 August. This will be on sale at both the MBKA Honey Show and, later, the Ploughing Match.

An electrician is currently testing the electrical installation, and when complete will issue an electrical certificate for the building. This will have to be carried out every three years. We will also need to get all the portable appliances PAT tested. If you know of anyone who can do this, please contact me!

The water leak to the incoming supply pipe has still not been fixed. It isn't clear what we should do about this, but we very much want to stop this waste of a valuable resource.

The track leading down to the Pavilion is still causing problems when it rains. We now have permission from the farmer to instal a metal farm gate across the farm track leading to the Pavilion, behind the bungalows.

The friendly relationship with the neighbours and local dog walkers continues and this helps with the security of the Pavilion and Apiary.

General maintenance is ongoing and some of the items that need to be attended to are:

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

Any offers of volunteering will be welcome.

Mark Ballard - Apiary Manager



COMMITTEE (AND SUB-COMMITTEE) STUFF

The most recent meeting was held on Wednesday 9 August 2023 at The Bridgewood Manor Hotel.

A full account of what was discussed will appear shortly on the MBKA website, so what follows is a taster of topics!

Various communications from the BBKA regarding Asian Hornet – the WhatsApp group for latest updates, and the invitations to the Zoom talks next week.

The Education committee are delighted with the successes of the six candidates for the Basic assessment. Four members are already planning to sit next year.

The Association Apiary sub-committee would like to buy some new equipment:

- A heated uncapping tray
- A collapsible screen to facilitate Power Point presentations
- A properly functioning digital projector (our present one is out of focus and does not seem to be repairable).

On going tasks at the Apiary include:

- installing an outside door for the secure store
- gates at the top of the path
- roof repair
- plumbing the washing machine
- the mains water leak repair
- Simon Woods cuts the grass weekly
- John Chapman will plant more wild flowers in the spring

The extraction room is now complete, and four supers were extracted on 5 August. We have to give John Myatt his rent of 10 jars of honey. We are hoping to rent out the extraction room if members would like to use it.

Peter Pavely has donated all his new equipment. As a gesture of gratitude, the Association will make a payment to Peter.

Loan of equipment can be pre booked *by arrangement*. Deposit £30 and hire is £10 per week.

Rota update Karon and Sheila are struggling with the rota at the moment. Hopefully this year's 'novice beekeepers' will feel able to step up and the new novices will be happy to support.

Honey show Sheila, Mark, Tony and Sonia are all helping set up and run the Show.

Winter programme 22 November, Stewart Spinks talk at Wainscott; 6 December, Gwenyn Gruffydd on Zoom; 31 January, 19:30 David Evans, Queen rearing, Part 2, on Zoom

Winter studies 2023/4 will probably be an improvers' course. The details will be finalised at the Education Group meeting

Date of next meeting Thursday 14 September at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel at 7:30pm

WHEN SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES

Readers of Honey Bee Suite will be familiar with the articles posted by Rusty Burlew. [In a recent blog post](#) she discusses the use of liquid smoke and asks at the end for others to share their experience. So here goes.

I am aware that there are a variety of methods used by beekeepers to calm the bees from the handed down traditional smoker stuffed with old socks to the flash Apisolis vaporizer at the best part of £200 plus £15 a refill. There are also a variety of things to spray including products such as sugar water, propolis concoctions, homemade herbal recipes of choice and the aforementioned liquid smoke. All basically involve puffing or spraying at bees.



Personally I do not like the smell of smoke and certainly do not enjoy being 'kippered' when inspecting the bees. From a health/environmental standpoint wood smoke is not the friendliest and is known to contain carcinogenic toxins, albeit in very small amounts.

I came across liquid smoke when perusing the Omlet website (www.omlet.co.uk) and reading through their very useful guide to beekeeping. Having watched it in use on a few YouTube videos I decided to give it a try.

The liquid smoke comes as a concentrate and the recommendation is for a 1:20 mix with water, although I

have used it in a weaker mix as I've got to the end of the bottle without any noticeable difference. When spraying the smell is similar to a good barbeque sauce and far nicer in the face than eye watering smoke. It works very well sprayed onto gloves as it lasts longer than smoke. I was alarmed to discover that it left a yellow stain on my white bee suit, however this came out completely in a normal machine wash. If it also stains the frames it's impossible to tell amongst the pollen and propolis and I have not noticed frames smelling of barbeque.

When using it on the bees it seems to have the double action of masking the smell of the alarm pheromone and misting the bees with a wet vapour. This is most effective when used on flying bees. It has very little effect if used to spray the entrance to the hive or under the lid to let the bees know you are there in the way some traditional smokers are used. Liquid smoke is instant, it won't go out like a traditional smoker and is easy to direct at particular areas without the problem of the breeze taking the smoke away.

From a safety point of view you are not going to accidentally burn yourself, melt that poly nuc or set fire to

the dried grass alongside the hive and if you have children helping with your hives liquid smoke is something they can use without the worry. All of this is worth consideration given the risk of wildfires in our increasingly hot climate as Professor Betts, head of climate impacts research at the Met Office and University of Exeter recently told the i newspaper "We need to encourage people to be very careful not to start fires during hot, dry weather, which is something that Britons have not previously been very aware of".

Ultimately whichever method you use it has to work for your bees. If you have aggressive bees, liquid smoke might not be enough on its own. If you have a large number of hives the cost may be a factor. Currently a 250ml bottle of concentrate costs £6.99 and will make up 9 x 600ml spray bottles, more than enough to last the year for an average beekeeper.

Liquid smoke might not work for everyone or in every situation, but it is a very handy bottle to have in your beekeeping tool bag and you can always pep up your burgers with it at the next family barbeque!

Words and photos by Jane Wheeler

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 making creamed honey. Jen has devised methods that suit her ways of working, and they are not completely conventional – though all the more interesting for being so.

Oil seed rape and creamed honey

When I took up beekeeping I had visions of harvesting plentiful quantities of delicious, golden honey at the end of each summer. Somehow this didn't happen. Achieving a honey crop proved almost impossible when I was living in Cambridgeshire where the vast green fields stretch as far as the eye could see, and hedgerows were almost a thing of the past. I soon found that no matter how good or bad you are at tending hives, if you haven't paid enough attention to the forage available then your bees will struggle and there will be no surplus honey for you! On moving to Kent, I was pleased to find the farming and the forage quite

different, but this presented other challenges. One of the crops that is on frequent rotation on the Hoo Peninsula is oil seed rape (OSR), and most years I find that there is a field for the bee within flying distance from my apiary.

Most, but not all, varieties of OSR are a rich source of early nectar for 3-4 weeks in May, and sometimes into June. If the conditions of temperature, rainfall and sunlight are all aligned, there will be an abundance of nectar to be had that will enable the colonies to both build up and store their excess forage in the supers.

However, this bounty comes at a cost! OSR honey is high in glucose and so it will crystallise easily, and can set hard in the frames. The trick is to remove it from the hives and process it at the right time. When is the right time? It's a matter of watching and waiting for the last of the OSR flowers. If you harvest too early before the flowers have gone, you will find your summer honey is 'contaminated' with OSR that the bees collected after you harvested, and it too will set in the frames. Harvest too late, when all the flowers are gone, and the spring honey may have already set hard in the comb. Also, normal rules don't apply! You may find that at the right time to harvest, the super frames are not fully capped. In this case, as long as the honey is thick and doesn't drip out of the frames, and the water content is about 18%, it should be safe to harvest. Wait any longer and it will have set. However, the honey only remains liquid whilst it is warm, and as soon as you take it off of the hive it will start to cool. You need to be ready to extract the same day or be able to store the frames at a temperature of about 35deg C!

Extracting the OSR honey, while it is liquid, is the same process as for any other honey. If it has set in the frames then it will need to be heated. One method is to melt it on a heated uncapping tray, but this will cost you the comb (as it melts first), and it will elevate the temperature of the honey only briefly. Or, you can do as I do: put any set frames aside and feed the crystallised honey back to the bees in the winter.

Once the liquid honey is extracted into buckets, I leave it in a cool place where it will set fairly rapidly. The OSR honey sets rock hard and the texture is very coarse. It was a supersaturated liquid and so, once it is cold, it forms large, coarse crystals of sugar. These large crystals are unpalatable. It is necessary to reduce the size of the crystals so that it is more pleasant to eat. This is called 'creaming the honey'.

To produce creamed honey from solid OSR honey, it is necessary to warm it in some sort of heating cabinet back to liquid honey. I have an old freezer that I have rigged up with a bar heater and a terrarium thermostat. This takes several 15lb buckets at a time. It may take several days to



bring the honey slowly back to liquid and it requires a temperature of about 45deg C. Once the honey is liquid, it is removed from the cabinet and allowed to cool down to room temperature. This is where the magic happens. If you allow the honey to sit in the buckets, or to cool further, it will simply recrystallise into large crystals. The process now is to 'cream' the liquid honey by stirring it for a few minutes every hour for as long as you can manage over the next day or so. A lot of stirring is needed, and I was unsuccessful doing this by hand as it gets very heavy as it thickens. The second year I tried, I bought a tool that fits into an electric drill to help me do this. It was shaped like an auger and stirred the honey quite well – but again I failed! With the honey in a large 50lb food grade plastic bucket, I struggled to control the auger as the honey got thicker. As the rotating tool touched the sides of the bucket, it stripped a fine layer of plastic off each time and so I contaminated the whole batch with fine shards of plastic! The tools have now been updated and are flatter and less likely to do this – but I didn't trust myself to try this again.

As the annual planting of OSR continued, I still needed to deal with the honey. I took the plunge and bought an electric honey creamer. Like all beekeeping equipment, there are several available and I went for the most basic one I could find. Some have a heater function, but I chose one that just stirs the honey. It looks a bit like a short, squat extractor. It is a large stainless-steel drum with a central paddle and a motor. The motor is switched on and off by a controller, and it runs for 15 minutes every hour for 48

hours. The OSR honey goes in liquid as before, and when finished it is thick, almost white, and ready to jar once it has stood to allow the bubbles to rise. The honey is easy to jar, and once in the jars I stand it in a cool place for about 2 weeks while it sets. It makes a good addition to my range of honeys for sale. It is probably not quite as popular as the clear honey but those that like it enjoy being able to pile it high on their toast!

Creamed honey can be made from any regular honey crop, but it needs to be 'seeded' with some previously set honey. For this purpose, I always keep a few jars from each batch as a 'starter' for the next batch. The seed helps the new batch form the same small crystals and ensures that it sets. You follow the same process, ensure the bulk of your honey is liquid and at room temperature, and add to it 10% by weight of already set seed honey. To ensure they mix, I empty the seed into the bowl of my mixer and beat it until it is soft. Take care that the main honey is at room temperature, or you will 'melt' the seed honey. The set honey stores well, and I have been able to make a large batch as it is stable in the jar, provided the water content is



low and all the equipment sterilised/scrupulously clean to eliminate yeasts. This blended honey is in some ways preferable to the pure OSR honey, which has a distinctive flavour not to everyone's liking.

Words and photos by Jen Ferry Jen_ferry@hotmail.com

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!

28 July 2023 – Queen mystery

Set off to the hives with a list of jobs to do which makes me feel like a very organised beekeeper.

My first task is to try to find the elusive queen in Hive #1 and mark her. The bees are still calm (good sign) and I loosen the frames to go straight to the middle where the queen might be lurking. Who should I see at the bottom of a frame but the original marked Queen LibBee! Looking as fat and fabulous as ever. Where has she been hiding all this time? So, she didn't swarm then? What's been going on?

It looks as though she has been there all along and there has been some kind of right royal queen battle. This might explain the period of aggressiveness with the other bees picking up on the fighting mood and joining in. Perhaps there were conflicting messages from having more than

one queen in the hive? I don't fancy the chances for the virgin queen I saw. It's very possible she was already being ousted when I saw her fall off the brood box.

I can only think that as Queen LibBee is, shall we say, 'a larger lady' she tends to hang about on the bottom of the hive, or at least that is where she is when I see her. I have also noticed that her drones are huge, like doormen on steroids!

This has thrown out my first task on the list. Not such an organised beekeeper after all. Instead, I set about some housekeeping in the supers swapping over some frames to get them filling out the empty ones. I can dream.

Then the crownboard holes are covered with cut to size Correx pieces made earlier in the best Blue Peter fashion and the roof spaces are filled with some sheep's wool insulation that I had from a frozen food delivery. It used to keep our guinea pigs nice and toasty in the winter so I'm sure the bees will appreciate this extra layer to help regulate the temperature. Being a natural product, it should work well in all seasons.

Next on the list is to clean off the bottom boards. They are given a scrub with warm washing soda solution and come

up a sort of white again ready for another layer of (far too many for my liking) varroa carcasses.

Having ticked off all the jobs like a super-organised beekeeper I leave the bees to it for this week.

3 August 2023 – Left for dead

Enjoy a rare patch of morning sun and coffee with some family members on the patio next to the house. As we sit chatting my son notices two bees rolling around on the decking near our feet. Once again it is a worker bee attacking an unfinished bee with Deformed wing virus (DWV). The worker flies off and I pick up the still alive victim to show everyone. We are amazed that the worker bee has carried this poor deformed thing the entire length of the garden to dispose of it.

My sister is horrified and begs me to 'put it out of its misery'. One stamp from my garden clog and it's now bird food.

It can be tough being a beekeeper and even tougher being a bee.

7 August 2023 – Small but perfectly formed

Go check on the swarm living in my neighbour's garden across the road. They have only just started to look at the frames in the super and I don't think they are going to be able to produce a surplus of honey this year. They were a cast swarm and even though they have grown in size this colony is still much smaller than my other two hives.

Check on the brood box and the very first frame I pull out has Queen RuBee on it. How's that for luck! All looks good and they have lots of stores even if the super is empty as always.

Add a Correx piece to cover the crownboard and a layer of sheep's wool insulation as I don't want them to feel left out. I now need to consider how best to configure this hive to get them through the winter, which means I need to pester Archie with lots of questions.

9 August 2023 – How the other half live

Exciting day as I go to see Archie's bees and try to help, rather than hinder him, with his hives. I get to see his observation hive before we set off for the apiary. It would be very easy to lose a whole day watching the bees in this fascinating set up.

The apiary is amongst an orchard of plum trees, currently dripping with fruit, on a local farm. We set about checking supers for honey and fitting clearer boards. This is very useful for me as it is a task I plan on doing in a couple of weeks, although I doubt the swarm will have anything to collect. I'm amazed to see how much honey they have produced compared to my bees, which is frankly pathetic if I'm honest.

I'm given charge of the notes folder and dutifully write down a long-winded sentence for each hive as I don't really understand Archie's shorthand and don't want to get it wrong. My other job is to clean off the bottom boards. Is this the beekeeper version of starting at the bottom and working your way up?

Archie has a soda bucket (due a refresh he admits) and scourer for the tools and is impressively rigorous in cleaning between hives. This is very different from my hives where I have a fresh hive tool and gloves for each and clean up at the end. But then I only have two hives. Cleaning gloves instead would make it easier, and I'd go through less pairs. Tip for the day to take away.

We also check on some nucs and discover that the bees have not released the queens who are still trapped in their cages behind the fondant. There doesn't seem to be any obvious reason why they haven't eaten through the plug, and we find that some of the attendants in the cage have perished. Luckily the queen is alive and well. Fortunately, when we set the queens free the bees do accept them and there are no further problems.

I get to see the gorgeous Carniolan queen who is stuffing the nuc box with brood to the point that they have no room for any stores. We swap a frame of honey over with another nuc to keep them going until Archie can move them to a bigger hive.

In the queen raising nuc the bees have raised 14 queen cells on the cell bar frame. The plan is to transfer these to a portable incubator to be taken away to then place in mating nucs. However, the bees have been more proficient than expected and Archie discovers that he doesn't have enough cages to do the job in one go. So interesting for me to see this as I still consider raising queens as advanced level stuff.

I found it all so helpful in broadening my understanding of how a full apiary works and couldn't believe how quickly the time went. It was also very hot which combined with so

much to take in and observe means I'm exhausted by the end of the day, as I'm sure Archie was by my millions of questions I bombarded him with all afternoon.

13 August 2023 – Let's all sting together

Visit the swarm to take off the super since they have done absolutely nothing with it other than crawl about over the frames. Remove the QE and can see plenty of honey in the brood box, just not in the super. Bees are getting very grumpy for some reason so decide not to disturb the frames other than to move over an empty frame at the back. Position a tray of Apiguard on top of the frames and close it up as they are now trying to sting me on my arms.



Move on to the dreaded nasty bees. This is a hive my neighbour has had for several years, and they have basically become feral. They have not been looked at for at least 18 months or longer to my knowledge and I need to treat them as well if the Apiguard is going to be effective for the swarm and my bees across the road.

Lift off the roof and discover they have filled half of the roof space above the crownboard with comb.

I work quickly as these are not nice bees and I'm away from them asap. However, they are not going to let me get away that easily. I'm hounded down the garden by them and off the premises. I lose them by the time I get back to my house and discover that my sleeves are covered in stings. Four stings have got through my suit to my arms, but it could have been a

lot worse. Just when I think I'm safe again I find a bee in my pocket!

Note to self: Wear long sleeves under the beesuit next time!

19 August 2023 – Clear off

Check the supers on both hives and estimate that we might get 5 frames of honey total. If we're lucky! Fit a clearer board in expectation. Also hang up a Vespa trap in the tree by the hives in the hope it will keep the wasps at bay when we take the honey off and also be an early warning alarm system for the dreaded AH.

20 August 2023 – Honey, honey, honey

At last, the exciting day we've been waiting for, taking the supers off and collecting the honey.

I'm impressed with how effectively the clearer board has worked, not a single bee in the super. Sadly, there are only four frames with any honey on them. Check the water content with the refractor and it's all good.

I do not have an extractor yet and really don't have enough honey to worry about one this year. So, we use the uncapping tank to scrape off the honey and use the 'crush and strain' method. The smell is wonderful, and the comb makes the most unusual crackling noise as you cut through it. Overall, it's a slow, sticky process but we are pleasantly surprised at what honey we do get and the amazing taste.

The second hive supplies three more frames, none of which are anywhere near full.



At the end of the afternoon we have a pile of gunky washing up and incredibly half a bucket of honey, about 7.5lb. Far more than we expected and, if I get tiny, weeny jars, maybe just enough to give to friends and family.

Words and photos by Jane Wheeler

MAKING A SOLAR WAX MELTER



I'd seen videos of how effective a solar wax melter can be especially for the darker brood comb, but the cost of a new one was very expensive. I had also seen various Heath Robinson versions of ones that people had made themselves. The principle seemed very simple and worth a go.

I began to look at what I had in the garage that might do the job. I had a good-sized polystyrene container that had been used for a meat delivery and an old turkey roasting pan with a frame. I lined the inside of the box with aluminium foil to reflect the heat and trimmed the top edge with a Stanley knife to create a recess for a sheet of glass to

sit in. The idea is that I will still be able to fit the original lid back on for storage.



The turkey pan fits in nicely and I also found an old home-made sieve in my father's greenhouse that fits perfectly on top of that. I can either line the sieve with paper towel and let the wax drip through to the tin underneath or put the wax in a fine gauze vegetable bag from the supermarket and sit this on the turkey frame.

I just need to get a piece of glass cut to size with the edges rounded for safety and it's ready to go.

Words and photos by Jane Wheeler

WORDS

Honey bees are **constant** and, separately, **faithful**. So virtuous!

But it sounds like saying the same thing with two different words.

Although the words themselves usually mean much the same thing, they have specific, and different, meanings when applied to honey bee foraging behaviour.

- Honey bees tend to forage on one plant species on any foraging trip. This is termed *constancy*.
- Honey bees can be seen returning to the same patch of flowers repeatedly. This is termed *fidelity*.

Reference [The Apiarist, 21 July 2023](#)



constant and faithful?

MOVING FROM DOUBLE TO SINGLE BROOD BOX FOR WINTER

There are several reasons why your colonies might be in double brood boxes during the season. Apart from giving space to a prolific queen, you might have managed swarm control with a vertical split or a Demaree. These methods involve introducing a second brood box, and it may still be on your hive, long after the swarming impulse has gone.

Many beekeepers advise keeping a colony in a single brood box for winter, possibly with a partially filled super under the brood box (a nadired super). So how and when should this reduction in hive size be done?

The first removal of boxes is likely to be the removal of supers to harvest the honey. It is not really possible to begin the autumn varroa treatment till that is done. In order to maximise the population of winter bees, this treatment should be done now, if not already started. Amitraz treatments take ten weeks, and thymol six weeks. Others are shorter, but in the UK, none can be done with honey supers on the hive.

When the supers are off, combine all the brood frames in a single box. Fill the remaining space with the best honey and pollen frames.

BBKA, BEEBASE, NHMS, DEFRA...

DEFRA ASIAN HORNET UPDATES

[Click here for the latest.](#)

BBKA SPRING CONVENTION VIDEOS

[Videos of last year's presentations are now available.](#)

The remaining frames of stores can be preserved over winter and used to bolster colonies in the spring. These frames are useful for helping nuc colonies get underway. But storage is not straightforward if wax moth damage is to be avoided.

Alternatively, get the bees to move these stores into their one brood box. You can do this by placing this box under a queen excluder under the brood box (nadired), or, when any nectar flow is over, by placing this box above the crown board, leaving a very small access hole (one or two bee spaces). The bees regard this area as outside the hive and will carry the stores down into the brood box. When the box is empty, remove it and store the comb, treated so that it is safe from wax moth.

While wasps are still flying, it is probably unwise to nadir any box containing honey. There will not be enough bees in this box to guard the stores. In any event, unless you have an underfloor entrance, reduce the entrance gap to one or two bee spaces while wasps are a threat.

Archie McLellan

THE NATIONAL HONEY MONITORING SCHEME (NHMS): A PEEK BEHIND THE SCENES – BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

[An illuminating and entertaining article on the work of the NHMS.](#)

LEARNING ABOUT BEEKEEPING

I met someone recently who wanted to do an Introduction to Beekeeping course. Now, please. I explained that courses were generally held in the first few months of the year, but that there was no reason not to start learning about beekeeping now. I was asked to be specific and make suggestions. This list below is what I came up with. Most of

it is as relevant to practising beekeepers as to those who've yet to start on their beekeeping journey.

Books (choose one)

[Beekeeping for Dummies](#)

[The Bee Manual: The Complete Step-by-Step Guide to Keeping Bees](#)

Blog posts

[David Evans, The Apiarist](#), posts every Friday on his blog, without fail. Occasionally his posts are heavy-duty science, but he is the most accessible and sensible writer about beekeeping on the internet. Try using his search facility for any topic that comes to mind.

This section must also include the other big name in this category: [Rusty Burlew](#). Rusty has written hundreds of posts – even more than David Evans – because she has been doing it so much longer. Nowadays her posts are on more niche topics, but search her archive. You’ll find that she has written on most topics umpteen times.

Videos

Many people speak very highly of [Stuart Spinks](#) and [Lawrence Edwards](#) video blogs – though you need to have time to sit and go at their speed – rather than reading something at your speed.

The one set of videos I really do have time for, because of the sheer pleasure of watching his wonderful bee handling

AUTUMN FEEDING

I am not in thrall to [David Evans’s writings on beekeeping](#), though I might sometimes give that impression!

However, on one topic, I have never been comfortable with following what David does in his own beekeeping. That is his style of autumn feeding. When David takes the honey supers off, at the same time, he inserts Apivar strips (no problem with that) and plonks a whole 12.5kg block of fondant on the queen excluder in an empty super box.

I’ve asked David about this after Zoom talks, mentioning my worries about the brood box becoming filled with sugar resulting in a shortage of space for brood that will become winter bees. In fact I’ve asked him twice, and blow me, although the two occasions were a year or two apart, his answer the second time began with, ‘You’ve asked me before about this, Archie...!’

His answer is that 1) the bees possibly take down fondant a little more slowly than syrup, and 2) ‘it works for me.’

I think it doesn’t work for me, and, because of the price of fondant now, I am moving to granulated sugar. I get three 5kg bags of sugar each week in the grocery delivery from the supermarket.

skills and charming presentation, are those from [Paul Kelly in Canada](#). You’ll notice he uses little clothing protection. In the UK, we wear full bee suits and usually thin gloves, largely because of our changeable weather. People will tell you that beekeeping is completely different on the other side of the pond. I think the difference is more style than substance. The bees are the same species (*Apis mellifera*) after all.

Social media

[Beekeeping Forum](#) has a Beginners’ section and there are many wise people there who are very generous with their help. In fact there are already so many posts on how to get started that you won’t need to start a new thread (if you don’t want to). Or you could ask the very question I’m trying to answer here! The best thing about Beekeeping Forum – unlike all other online sources – is that if someone posts something questionable, someone else will very quickly question it!

Archie McLellan

I’ve been looking around for alternative guidance on autumn feeding. [Emyr Jenkins in south Wales](#) suggests that feeding is sometimes started too early when the colonies are still strong and packed with both bees and brood. Towards the end of September the colonies are preparing for winter, the queen is slowing down considerably, and emerging bees are leaving room for winter stores.

Is a single brood box enough to provide for the bees and their stores till the following spring? Yes, most agree that it is. If you have a partial super, or a second brood box with some stores (after you have consolidated the brood in one box only), then get the bees to move the stores into the brood box, either by placing the box below the brood box, separated by a queen excluder (don’t do this if there are robbing wasps about), or by placing it above the crown board, with just a little hole for the bees to access the stores and bring down to the brood box.

Remember, that although the honey harvest is more or less over by the beginning of August – or earlier – the bees can still take advantage of later forage such as ivy. There is no need to feed to get a brood box full by the end of September if there is still the possibility of a nectar flow.

I also wonder if advice to beekeepers is keeping up with climate change. I'm referring to what is happening now, in terms of warmer seasons. When the bees are still flying, feeding is less likely to be needed. If possible, wait till space is created naturally in the brood box with a reduction in brood. Eventually, eight or nine frames of stores will be needed – but not yet.

[Eric Beaumont makes an interesting point](#). 'At this time of the season judge feed according to need. To ensure the queen lays this and next month, check that the colony has income trickling in. *Bear in mind that bees will not uncap sealed stores now to feed a queen (without which she will*

not lay) so it must be liquid. (My italics) If no nectar at all is coming in, then by all means feed, but slowly and minimally to keep the engine turning. A full DN frame will hold 2.7kg and eight frames will hold 21.6kg, so you'll have reached the target. Bear in mind that invert syrup is far easier for bees to process (about 22% water) than home-made syrup with a much higher water content.'

So there you have it. A slightly different perspective, and one which I think is more in line with our new weather patterns.

Archie McLellan

HANDY HINTS

To avoid bubbles in honey in jars, pour the honey into the tap bucket, warm it if you're going to, and give it time to settle and cool – at least overnight – before jarring.

When vaping nuc boxes with a mesh floor, lift the hive off the stand and place on a folded piece of material such as hessian to contain the sublimate for a few minutes.

UNITING COLONIES

Use Air Freshener to unit colonies?

Yes, you can, but if you are uniting a calm colony with a defensive one, then it's probably safer to use newspaper.

In a normal uniting situation, a quick spray with air freshener on the top and bottom of the frames will be enough to mask smells, and the colonies should accept each other.

If taking a couple of frames with a queen from a nuc to a queenless hive, then remove frames as needed from the hive, spray into the void, and drop in the new frames.

[Dani Akrigg, a retired VET and beekeeper](#), writes that 'you can quickly unite two adjacent colonies during the day when the bees are flying without having to come back in the evening. Kill one queen. Lift one brood box off its floor having taken the crownboard off the colony you're uniting it with. Give a quick spray (just one second) on the top bars of the bottom colony and bottom bars of the other. Plonk the box on top, add crownboard and roof and you're done.'

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 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!

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



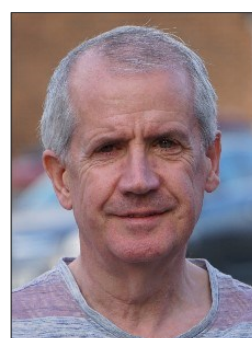
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