

WHATSTHEBUZZ



Jane's NewBee Keeper diary and Jen's thoughts on keeping informed about beekeeping

What's to be done about *Vespa velutina*? The risk of predation may last for a month or two more

An introduction to the debate on insulating and ventilating hives

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers' Association.

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

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The MBKA website has full information about the Association.

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



Picture above: Mark and Sheila at the MBKA 'shop' at the Ploughing Match. Photo by A McLellan

Hello to October – midway between last spring and next – and to you all

The bees are still flying in huge numbers, especially on warm, sunny days, and bringing in lots of pollen.

There's so much to see in the insect world right now, even if you don't look too hard. There was a [massive \(to me – about 18mm body length\) orb-weaver spider in my bathroom](#) this morning. Yesterday a wasp clattered to the ground in front of me. [I put it on top of a bin and filmed it as it speedily disconnected a grasshopper's abdomen and flew off with it.](#) The grasshopper's antennae don't stop waving throughout the process. I take photos of everything like this that catches my attention. Beekeeping does broaden your interests.

This month, for the beekeeper, inside the colony, and out in the world.

First, beekeepers: if you use woodpecker protection, apply soon. same with mouse guards – though you shouldn't need these if your hives have small entrances. If you used amitraz strips for varroa in august, they would have to be removed no later than ten weeks after applying. You can continue to feed syrup as long as the bees are flying. To prevent mould developing in syrup, [mix in a little emulsified thymol](#). Finish sorting your boxes and the frames of stores which you intend to keep overwinter. Use effective wax moth protection ([sulphur](#), [Dipel](#), [XenTari](#) etc) and repeat the treatment every few weeks initially. Finalise your records so that you have a clear picture of the quality of each colony – and check that it has the same features when it comes to spring. Help family and relatives out by creating a Christmas wish list. They'll be grateful (up to a point!) if you can point them to something that you would really like to receive.

Inside the hive, the queen's laying rate is reducing – though this might not apply with a late swarm!) and the bees will start to form a cluster when the outside temperature drops. They will still fly when possible, and these days, it sometimes feels like mid-summer. Nectar is a more scarce resource but you'll see that the bees are storing pollen with the spring build up in mind. They will also forage for water when possible and fly out for defecation trips. They still have lots nectar to process before it is all capped. They do

this by fanning, but also by consuming and regurgitating it from their crop.

At the moment, these winter behaviours seem far away, but October is only a few weeks from winter. I can remember perishing with cold in the past – on sunny October days!

I don't see wild Michaelmas daisy anywhere, but the garden varieties go on flowering week after week. Lots of flowers have decided to have another flush, as if they can't hang about doing nothing while they wait for the cold. The buddleia in our garden is one such flower.

I hope you find something to catch your attention in this issue. In addition to beekeeping practices, we have news of association events – our Honey Show which was nearly cancelled by an almighty weather event (see inside), and the Ploughing Match happened on a day with perfect, glorious weather.

Archie McLellan, WTB compiler

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MEDWAY BKA NEWS AND EVENTS

HONEY SHOW AND FLOOD 2023



The set up for this show was memorable for all the wrong reasons. The set-up crew (Mark, Tony, John and Sue) were hard at work at Elm Court Garden Centre late on Friday afternoon. The tables, white cloths and the paper backdrop were all in place. Mark was putting bunting around the edges of the tables and Tony, and I were getting the shelving sorted out. It was time for a well-earned cuppa. We had hardly had time for a few sips when there were a couple of cracks of thunder and the heavens opened. After a few minutes of torrential rain, it became apparent that the gutters and downpipes of the garden centre roof



couldn't cope with such a large volume of water and water began to cascade into the building. The garden centre staff sprang into action, collecting the water in tub trugs (see picture) and then using wheelbarrows to move it out of the building. The floor of the garden centre was awash and unsafe so all the customers were moved

to the area by the tills which was dry and as the rain eased, we left the staff to the rest of the clear up operation wondering if we would be able to have a honey show.

Thankfully they were able to post on Facebook that evening that the floor was dry, and they would be open the next day. This was a great relief as phoning round everyone to say that the show was cancelled, and their carefully prepared entries were no longer needed was not a job I had been looking forward to!

On Saturday morning we were glad to find that the area where the show was had escaped water damage so the rest of the set up was quickly done and 76 entries were staged ready for judging by Bob Smith from

Sidcup with Sheila taking on the role of judges' steward.

Our judge was impressed with the show especially in such a difficult and changeable year.

There were strong entries in class 2 for medium honey – won by Sonia with what was the best honey in the show. Archie showed off some beautiful wax in classes 14 and 16 and won the wax cup.

The novice cup was won by Jane entering a honey show for the first time. Mark showed his all-round talents and just beat

Archie to win the Neaves Memorial Cup for the most points. Full results are on the website.

The garden centre was busy on both days, and it was a great opportunity to talk to members of the public, show them what the inside of a hive looks like, and answer questions. Sales of honey and hive products were brisk all weekend and totalled £850.00.



During the weekend we also had a display about Asian Hornets with examples of Asian and European hornets and wasps for people to have a close look at. It was a great chance to explain to them about the problems beekeepers are facing and how they can help. Many people were amazed how large hornets are and took away an information leaflet or downloaded the Asian Hornet Watch app to their phone.

Lastly, thank you to everyone who made the honey show happen by entering, stewarding or helping set up or take down and if you didn't get involved this year, please think about it next year.

Sue Chapman

IMPROVERS' COURSE

Ten sessions, fortnightly on Mondays at 19:30-21:30. Starting 16 October 2023. All dates in the Times and dates table below.

Venue: St Lukes Methodist Church Centre, City Way, Rochester ME1 2BQ

Cost: £40.00 for the Course, payable at the first session, or by bank transfer to MBKA account

PLOUGHING MATCH 2023

What a glorious day for the Ploughing Match! The team included John, Sheila, Mark, Sonia, Hilde, Mike, Dave H, David W, and me. We started at 9.00 and soon we had set up a shop, a display and information area, and a demonstration hive. John brought us tea and coffee from another stall which his better half was helping manage. Sheila and Mark started selling honey and wax products. These came from the bees of Sheila, Mark, David W and



John. Later Mark said that there had been a continuous 'trickle' of sales. But it only takes a trickle to flood a house, given enough time. At the end of the day, a great many people had bought honey and wax objects, and only occasionally complained about the price. Sales totalled £874 – a similar figure to our Honey Show.

I sat in full sunshine at the demonstration hive in the morning, quietly turning beetroot, and asked those who slowed their pace as they walked past if they'd like me to tell them about life in a hive. A number of groups, sometimes with all three generations present, settled down on the ground and we chatted about bees. It is one of the most rewarding things about beekeeping. People are interested and you can tell them a marvellous story. And it always goes off into wider concerns about how best to care for the planet and all its critters.

John was keen for me to experience the Ploughing Match, at least some of the time. At different times in the afternoon, I saw Mike, Hilde, David W, Dave H chatting to people over the hive.

So I set out to watch competitive ploughing – and saw that everyone was having lunch. Later, I saw two very young



guys having a 'lesson' in ploughing in straight lines. In another field, I watched old tractors for a while. Nothing wrong with the ploughing – such straight lines – but plenty



wrong with these old inefficient engines. There comes a time when you've had enough of the fumes of half-burnt fuel.

I headed to another field to replace the smell of exhaust with the smell of smoke. These huge steam tractors are mighty beasts. One was at each end of a large field, and



they towed a plough on a cable up and down the field between them. A 'driver' on the plough steers to keep the lines straight. There is a spare seat on the plough. When you're invited to hop on, you know that your seventy-year-old self has become, for just a little while, a seven-year-old again.

The steam plough is almost silent. Very quickly the only sound is that of the plough cutting and turning the soil. It reminded me of sailing. No engine noise. It was magical!

Words and pictures Archie McLellan

TIMES AND DATES

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

The hall at Wainscott is at **Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG**

The hall at St Lukes is at **St Lukes Methodist Church Centre, City Way, Rochester ME1 2BQ**

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
16 October	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course begins (runs fortnightly till 4 March 2024) St Lukes Methodist Church Centre, City Way, Rochester ME1 2BQ
26-28 October	Thu-Sat	09:00-18:00 (Sunday 09:00-16:30) National Honey Show , Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT
30 October	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 2
13 November	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 3
22 November	Wed	20:00 Stewart Spinks, Norfolk Honey Company , talk (topic tbc) at Wainscott
27 November	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 4
6 December	Wed	19:30 Gwynn Gruffydd talk (topic tbc) on Zoom
11 December	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 5

8 January	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 6
22 January	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 7
31 January	Wed	19:30 David Evans , Queen rearing, Part 2, on Zoom
5 February	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 8
17 February	Sat	14:00-16:00 MBKA AGM at Wainscott
19 February	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 9
4 March	Mon	19:30-21:30 Improvers' Course 10
29 April	Mon	19:00-21:00 Introduction to Beekeeping Course, 1. Association Apiary
11 May	Sat	10:00-06:00 Taster Day at the association Apiary
13 May	Mon	19:00-21:00 Introduction to Beekeeping Course, 2. Association Apiary
20 May	Mon	19:00-21:00 Introduction to Beekeeping Course, 3. Association Apiary
3 June	Mon	19:00-21:00 Introduction to Beekeeping Course, 4. Association Apiary
10 June	Mon	19:00-21:00 Introduction to Beekeeping Course, 5. Association Apiary
17 June	Mon	19:00-21:00 Introduction to Beekeeping Course, 6. Association Apiary
22 June	Mon	Time tbc Introduction to Beekeeping Course, 7, Practical session. Association Apiary

DIARY OF A NEWBEE KEEPER



Jane Wheeler, now Mrs Lumley Hunt, 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!

22 August 2023 – Super clean

The bees have done a fantastic job of cleaning up the sticky super frames of residual honey. I can now remove them and store them for next year and

they will have a head start with drawn comb. With any luck this will inspire them to store more honey than this year. If only.

Now that the supers are off it's time for the varroa treatment at last. I've stopped frightening myself by counting the drop on the bottom boards as it's clearly way too



much. Each hive gets a tray of Apiguard set in an eke. I also give the bottom boards a thorough cleaning and tape up the gaps to completely 'gas' them out with the thymol. The hives now look very tidy and compact.

I scrape clean the QEs and super boxes, saving the wax and any propolis. I might have just enough wax for a single tealight and I've no idea what to do with the propolis yet, but feel I should keep it as it's such special stuff.

25 August 2023 – A little jarring

Having read David Evans' article on jarring honey I decide to try his clingfilm technique for removing the settled scum on the top of the honey. It is very similar to the magician's

tablecloth trick. Sadly it doesn't work so well for me, and I end up scraping it off instead. Maybe I was supposed to warm the honey first? Since I don't have enough honey to sell I'm not too worried about any air bubbles working their way to the top of the jars.

I manage to get two full 1lb jars for the honey show entry and a further 18 4oz jars for neighbours, friends and family, plus a partly filled 1lb jar of the last dregs for us. Getting the same weight in each jar was almost impossible and definitely a technique that needs practice. Perhaps it's easier with a gate valve than pouring from a jug as I did.

The ladies are more than happy to help with the washing up. Bless 'em. After all, it was their honey in the first place!

Drop off a couple of jars of honey to the neighbours by way of apology for the 'terrifying' cast swarm that landed in their hedge. They are thrilled, so we've made amends for the unexpected bee incursion. Phew! Discover in conversation that another neighbour had bees in their chimney this summer. Hmm? I wonder where they came from? My swarm we missed? Fortunately the bees flew off, so problem solved. Will absolutely need to clip the queens before next spring.

27 August 2023 – Round 2

Time for the second Apiguard treatment for the swarm and the Nasty Bees.

Make sure I have plenty of long-sleeved layers this time and keep my visit as short as possible.

The swarm are calm and filling most of the brood box, but they are still a worryingly small colony. Over half of the Apiguard has gone so just swap it over with a new tray as I'm being good and following the instructions to the letter.

The Nasty Bees roar out of the hive as soon as I take the crownboard off. It's a quick swap of trays and leg it down covered in stingers. Interestingly, the bees seem to have abandoned the comb they had built in the roof space, possibly because the super I put on (didn't have another

eke) to house the Apiguard tray has separated them from the roof space. I might try to retrieve this next time if I'm feeling brave.



In my back garden I have a largish shrub which looks like a spirea. It's *Caryopteris incana* 'Sunshine Blue', which has burst into flower this weekend. The bees are all over it and it is just six feet from the hives. Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner on the doorstep! I shan't need to worry about feeding them for now as this will boost their stores no end.

2 September 2023 – Everyone's a winner

First day of the Honey Show at Elmcourt and I'm there early to set up the entries for Archie and my two precious jars of honey, plus the cake I made last night.

It's very interesting to see how things have to be set out so carefully and exactly. The display does look good, and passers-by are intrigued.

Pop back later in the afternoon and discover I've won first prize in the Novice class. I'm gobsmacked. Not only do I get a red rosette, but there's a cup to be engraved with my name and a book. This causes some confusion as I married four months ago and haven't got around to changing my



name on everything, such as my bee memberships! As the cup is for the next year (and posterity) it has to be done properly so Mrs J. Lumley Hunt is now the proud winner.

The two jars are literally all the honey I have left, and I can now brag that it is an 'award winning' honey from a very, very limited edition.



When I get home I tell the bees about their success. They seem very nonplussed as they already know how good their honey is. I'd give them the rosette except it would be propolised beyond recognition. I shall keep it safe indoors for them.

As for the cake, best not to mention it.

3 September 2023 – It's all a bit off putting

Give both hives a second tray of Apiguard and take the opportunity to have a look through the frames. They are both in a very similar state with plenty of stores and about three frames of brood. I see both queen PhoeBee and

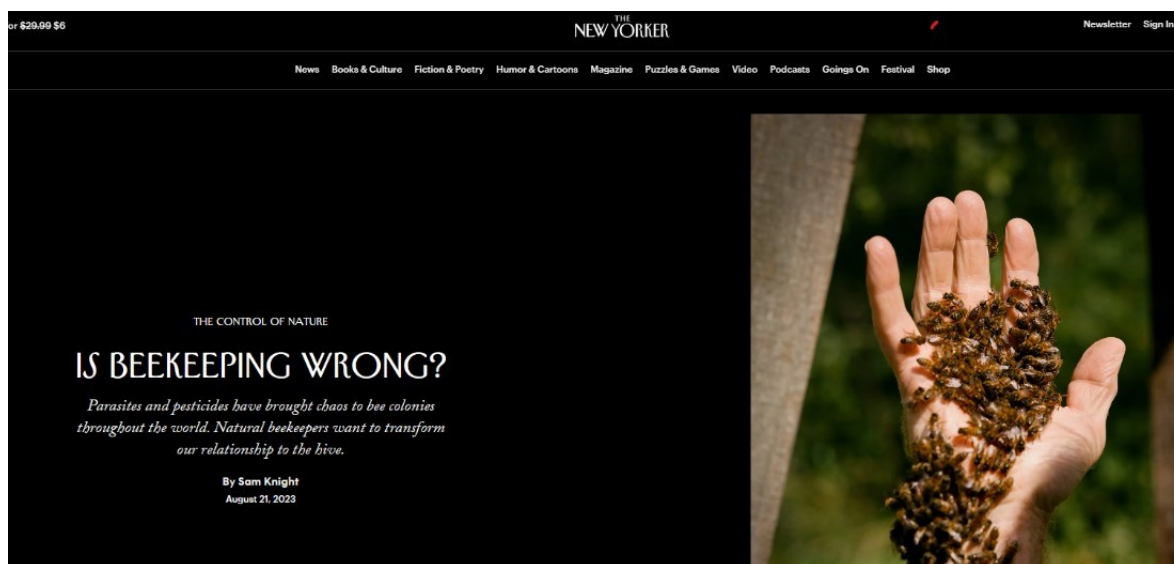
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS?

LibBee mooching over the frames. Their bright pink dots have mellowed to a more accurate red. However, I can't see any eggs or very small larvae which makes me think that the Apiguard has put them off laying. I'm not surprised as it has been warm, and you can smell the thymol before you get to the hives. Hopefully as these trays get used up 'normal

service' will return and the new brood will have less or (better still) no varroa to deal with.

Empty out the Vespa trap of its gruesome mix of wasps and flies, plus one moth who somehow squeezed in there. Thankfully the bees are far too smart to go near it.

Words and photos by Jane Lumley Hunt



THE CONTROL OF NATURE. IS BEEKEEPING WRONG?

Parasites and pesticides have brought chaos to bee colonies throughout the world. Natural beekeepers want to transform our relationship to the hive. By Sam Knight, New Yorker, August 21, 2023

You can read this article from the New Yorker [here](#). I'll not make any comment now so that you have an unprejudiced mind before you read it. I'm sure you'll agree with me that it's an interesting article, comprehensive and well-researched. If you would like to comment on it, please write a little piece for the next issue of WHATSTHEBUZZ.

BEEKEEPING – ONE HOBBY OR TEN?

Jen Ferry concludes her monthly survey of the many facets of beekeeping, especially the ones that interest her. This month, she reflects on education and learning in her journey to become a beekeeper.

BECOMING A BETTER BEEKEEPER

In this, my final piece, I am looking over my beekeeping journey and how I have learnt and developed as a beekeeper over the last 13 seasons.

'It is what we know already that often prevents us from learning.' Claude Bernard

My beekeeping journey started with a mixed theory and practical Introductory Course in 2011. Following this I was keen to learn and took every opportunity to pick the brains of experienced beekeepers. I would attend association meetings, turn up to every apiary open day and accept every opportunity to visit other beekeepers and watch them work. I didn't have a mentor, but found I mastered the basic skills and could sometimes get my bees through the winter. Learning to be a beekeeper as an adult, I preferred to learn from experience. I was interested in learning things that had immediate relevance to what I was doing. I preferred a hands-on approach to learning, and I preferred to solve actual problems.

However, I only got so far with this approach. After a couple of years, I found that I was no longer progressing as a beekeeper, and my bees were doing little more than surviving. I needed other routes to develop my skills and knowledge.

When I moved to Kent, I was fortunate to meet a beekeeper with vast experience and knowledge. He became my mentor. I was guided by him, and he enabled me to make decisions about the management of my bees. It was a challenging time. I felt I didn't really know enough. I was becoming aware that there are often many routes to an end point in beekeeping and I needed to be better informed as to which route to take.

Good mentors motivate you to learn and encourage you to question everything. Unfortunately, I've also come across mentors who want to flood the learner with advice and prescribe the way forward. No doubt they have the best intentions, but in taking away the opportunity for you to

make your own decisions they are costing you the chance to grow and develop.

And so, the second phase of my development as a beekeeper began.

I subscribed to a couple of journals and found these interesting, but they lacked rigour and there was often little or no challenge to the position that the 'expert' put forward. I needed to know more.

I looked at the BBKA system of education and decided to embark on studying the Modules course. The Modules cover a range of subjects including honey bee management, bee products and forage, bee pests, diseases and poisoning, honey bee biology, honey bee behaviour, and finally, the selection and breeding of honey bees. MBKA were running a winter study group looking at one of these Modules and I joined the group. In these sessions we took turns to present a topic of the Module. We were steered by senior beekeepers with more knowledge and experience, and through reading and discussion we all learnt a lot. I enjoyed these winter studies and opted to take the exam at the end of the course. I found the discipline of sitting the exam made me engage in more depth with the topic. There were frustrations too as some of the sections in the modules seemed outdated and irrelevant, but overall, they provided a framework for learning.

In addition to the structure of the first winter study session, I studied for some modules alone. During the pandemic when using Zoom became commonplace, several of us got together without a lead expert, and created our own online study group. All routes have their advantages and drawbacks.

After Module 1, I went on to take the Basic Assessment. This is a one-hour field test with four sections, both practical and theory, covering manipulation and equipment, natural history and beekeeping, swarming, swarm control, and finally, diseases and pests. This Assessment is just a rubber stamp to say that you have acquired sufficient knowledge and skills to now call yourself a beekeeper. There are other practical and theory courses run by the BBKA, and there are other course providers worth looking at.



I have participated in a couple of weekend residential courses with bee farmers. They are so knowledgeable and full of practical hints to make beekeeping easier. They are used to managing hundreds of colonies and can help you streamline your own processes.

The honey bee is a well-studied insect; there are many books and a plethora of research about them. The BBKA courses have a booklist, which has recently been updated. Northern Bee Books stock a huge range of bee books, and have a big presence at major events and conferences. The latest research can be accessed in academic papers and in talks given by experts at meetings such as those taking place at the annual National Honey Show and the Central Association of Beekeepers.

Study days run by local associations, usually in the winter, and talks by guest speakers who are expert beekeepers or academics, also cover a wide range of subjects.

SEPTEMBER SWARMS

Early in September, I got a swarm call. Lots of bees were going in and out of a little gap between two bricks in the side of a house. The couple said that they had noticed the bees only in the last couple of days. If it really was the case that the bees had only just arrived, then I hoped it might be possible to lure them out with some open brood into a new nest – a poly nuc box. I called Mark Ballard who has lots of experience of bees in buildings. He confirmed that brood might work; definitely not a frame of honey, which would only invite robbing, and not only from the swarm bees in the cavity! I set up a nuc on the nearby garage roof with a couple of frames of brood and left. Before long, the owner sent me a picture of bees at the entrance of the nuc. That was promising.

Next day, about noon, he called in near panic to say that there were ‘thousands and thousands’ of bees in the air. The neighbours were out in the street watching the spectacle. Their pets were scared. What should he do? I reassured him that the bees would probably settle nearby very soon. And they did – on the side and front of the box I’d left for them. He sent a photo to say that he doubted there was enough space inside that box. He may have been right. We didn’t know how many bees were already inside the box. So I took a double nuc box and ‘transferred’ the

Talking with others who are interested in the subject enables you to engage and test your comprehension. It is when you teach others, perhaps at clubs and school groups, that you really discover if you understand something fully.

Many of the experts and academics can be found for free online. YouTube, blogs, and internet forums are just some of the platforms they use.

Whilst my knowledge base (and collection of books!) has increased vastly in the last ten years, it all just goes to show me how little I know and how much more there is to learn about both bees and beekeeping. But now I can keep healthy bees, I regularly get my bees through the winter, I raise as many queens and bees as I need, and I still get a crop of honey – so I’ll class that as progress!

Words by Jen Ferry Jen_ferry@hotmail.com

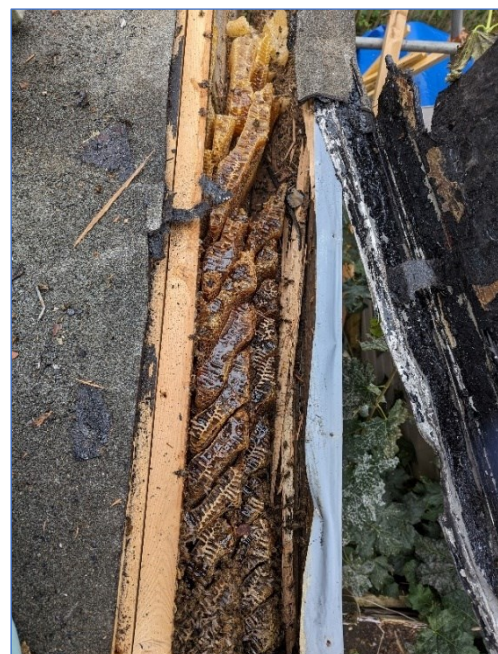
bees to the inside of that box. I draped a white sheet below the entrance and down the side of the garage.

When I returned in the evening, all the bees were inside. I took them away and they are now in a full hive with lots of bees, brood and stores.

Oh, that swarm collecting were always like that!

A few days later, I got a call about bees inside a flat roof. The builder wanted to take the roof off for an extension being built above. When I met him there, I offered him a

suit: full size or jacket? He opted for a jacket. That was my first mistake. With all the heavy work he had to do, there was an explosion of bees as soon as he prised open the cavity. In no time, the bees found their way between his jacket and trousers, and he was out in the street stripping off. With



reinforced PPE, he started again and exposed two 6-foot lengths of old and new comb in an L shape, full of honey. One length crashed 15 feet to the ground. The mess with all that honey lying around was unspeakable! I gathered it up and removed all the other comb still exposed on the roof.

There seemed to be no brood anywhere. Eventually I found two little patches of eggs. I wasn't hopeful as I placed them

between rubber bands in frames and left the nuc for the bees to go into.

When I returned the bees were gone, and the nuc empty. The builder's problem was resolved but it was an unhappy, messy result.

Words and pictures Archie McLellan

WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

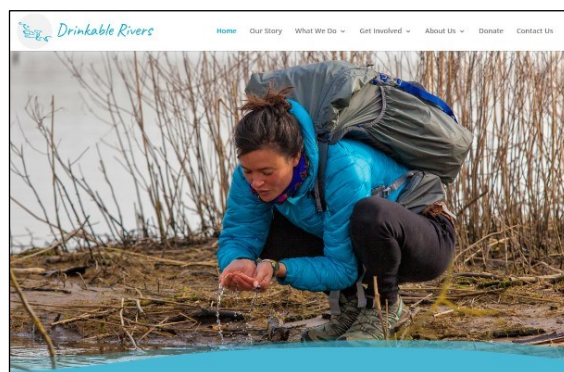
This is the final top bar of grafts that I placed in this cell raising nuc this summer. It wasn't particularly successful. Few of the grafts were raised to cells. I left one and closed the box up to raise a queen and let the colony develop normally. Several weeks later, I looked inside. The cell bar was stuck to the bottom of the feeder, the bees had drawn some rather untidy comb, and the colony was thriving with lots of bees, brood and stores.



DRINKABLE THAMES WALK

The Drinkable Thames walk is happening just now. If you'd like to walk with them while the walkers are in the Cliffe and All Hallows area on 15 October, please [click here](http://www.drinkablerivers.org). (www.drinkablerivers.org)

The idea of the walk is fully described on a lovely website by the walk organisers, Maarten and Li An. You can contact them on 0031 643907736 if you'd like to walk with them or even offer a bed for the night.



INSULATION AND VENTILATION

There was a time when every beekeeper knew that dampness, not cold, was the killer for honey bee colonies in the winter. Insulation was NOT necessary, but ventilation, in the form of a through draught would ensure that the hive interior remained free of condensation. Propping up the crownboard with matchsticks seemed like a good idea, although the bees tended to propolise the gaps. The solution recommended by some was to make the gap bigger – beyond what propolis could bridge.

The use of open-mesh floors coincided (I think) with the search in the 90s for non-chemical ways of treating varroa. Even after it was demonstrated that the varroa load would not be significantly improved with this strategy, open mesh floors remained fashionable. Matchsticks and a gale roaring through the hive for ventilation began to fall out of favour. Beekeepers felt that replacing the solid floor with a panel of mesh would ventilate the hive sufficiently.

Although a lot of beekeeping experience has always been behind these strategies, some people questioned the thinking. Just because something *worked* was not sufficient reason to believe that it was the *best* option. Might there be some other approaches that might be even better for the wellbeing of the colony?

Both natural and conventional have sought to learn from how bees survived in the wild, and to see if the bees' methods of managing without human intervention might influence the methods adopted by beekeepers. The contrast between bees living in a natural cavity and a human-made hive has not gone unnoticed. It goes like this:

Bees living in a natural cavity such as a hollow in a tree are well insulated, and are almost completely sealed in apart from a small entrance near the bottom. Why then would we give them a poorly insulated cavity, with a large entrance, an open floor, and an opening for ventilation at the top?

It's important to recognise that the bees have to make do with what's available. Perhaps their natural nests aren't ideal, but, like beekeepers, they stick with something that they have found works, particularly if their options are limited.*

However, the bees have been managing life on this planet for much longer than beekeepers have been trying to manage them. Many beekeepers and scientists are now pursuing a hive strategy which aims to replicate the features of a natural cavity.

I've incorporated the following features into all my full-size hives. (I have about 20 plus nucs.) Most of them are typical of the steps taken by beekeepers who want to replicate some features of a natural cavity in their own hives.

- Insulation is in place throughout the year; this stabilises the temperature, reducing the effect of extremes, especially direct sunshine.
- The floor is mesh, but with a solid wood 'drawer' underneath, and the end is blocked from draughts. Monitoring for varroa – and the activity in the hive – is still possible by checking the debris. (for more on wood drawers see WHATSTHEBUZZ February 2023)
- The 8mm entrance is under the floor, with a sheltered landing area. (for more on floors with Under floor entrances see WHATSTHEBUZZ December 2022)
- An eke with 'slatted racks' is placed between the floor and the bottom of the brood box; this provides a



This hive has an underfloor entrance and an eke with slatted racks

'foyer' area below the frames where comb is not built, and which is often found in natural bee cavities.

- There is no through ventilation; the crownboard has no openings and the entrance, even when very small, is adequate for both drawing in and expelling air. It is easy to observe this at a hive entrance with an object like a feather. (This approach to ventilation is subject to climate conditions. It works in most parts of the UK, but not perhaps in Canada or the north east US.)
- The crownboard is clear (Perspex). Condensation can be observed; when present, it seems to drift to the sides and drain down the interior walls. Perhaps this is a water source for the bees in non-flying weather.

The hive in this picture has 50mm TW55 PIR insulation (such as Kingspan or Celotex) covering five of its six sides. (It lifts off easily!) The floor is mesh with a solid wood draught-excluding panel, and the entrance is under the floor and draught-proof. It has thrived for two seasons producing a large colony on double brood boxes and a plentiful honey



There were bees everywhere when this picture was taken, after much disruption in the apiary – such as reducing double brood hives to single brood.

harvest. One instance does not demonstrate any kind of pattern, except that if this had been an *unhealthy* environment, the bees would probably have died.

I manage (but do not own) a number of other hives and these do not have all the above features. The floors are open mesh (though I keep the plastic board in place), and they have no insulation. Without a series of controlled measurements, it is impossible for me to say if one group of colonies performs better than the other.

[An article in Bee Culture in 2016, Winter Management, by William Hesbach](#) gives a comprehensive and highly readable summary of the issues surrounding the insulation and ventilation debate.

[The engineer, Derek Mitchell](#), published papers on the thermal conductance of hives and natural cavities, and also, on top ventilation and top entrances. The papers themselves are not written for beekeepers and the engineering content is not for laypeople. However, Mitchell

has a [presence on Beekeeping Forum](#) where he regularly spells out the implications of his research on hive design.

*A classic example of how the bees have to make do because nothing better is available is found in the bees' use of nectar. The bees need carbohydrates in large quantities in winter. Their way of managing this is to make honey, because they do not have access to granulated sugar. It works extremely well. However, in winter, what the bees really need is fuel for warmth. Beekeepers give them sugar to replace the honey they have harvested. No one, I am reliably informed, has yet been able to demonstrate that sugar is inferior to honey *as carbohydrate fuel for survival through winter*.

** https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/141140/5/honey_bee_engineering.pdf
and <https://ez-bees.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ColonyMassSurvival-Derek-Mitchell.pdf>

WORDS

Nestduftwärmebindung I don't speak German. I love how composite words are made with all the components that can be found in an entity – or so it seems to me. I love breaking down long words into pronounceable parts and then practising putting it all together again. Then I listen to a pronunciation guide on the web. (It doesn't count as cheating anymore.)

What fascinates me about hearing a word like *Nestduftwärmebindung* spoken properly is the clarity of the enunciation. There are 20 letters in this word. You must say them all, and not, under any circumstances, omit the 't' at the end of the second syllable. Have a listen [here](#) (click the speaker icon) and you'll see what I mean.

The word was coined by Johann Thür, a German scientist, for a paper he wrote in 1946, and it appears 22 times. It's not easy to make sense of the paper using Google translate*, but the word literally means *nest scent warmth binding* – which you could guess, because three of the four words are almost the same in English. It refers to the atmosphere inside the hive – the air, which is warm, humid,

odorous, germ-free, anti-bacterial, and pheromone-laden. This might be more aptly described as a fug; something that we should take care NOT to ventilate out of the hive.

There isn't a word in English for this, nor was there in German. The difference seems to be that if you can't find the word you need in German, then you make a new one.

* Since writing this, I've found a translation of Johann Thür's 'book', *Beekeeping: natural, simple and successful* (all 11 pages of it) by David Heaf, the celebrated natural beekeeper. You can see it [here](#).

Beekeeping: natural, simple and successful

by Johann Thür, Beekeeper

Translated by David Heaf from *Bienenzucht. Naturgerecht einfach und erfolgsicher* by Johann Thür, Imker (Wien, Gerasdorf, Kapellerfeld, 2nd ed., 1946). Ch. 1 & 2. http://www.seanet.com/~alexs/bien/bienenzucht_full.pdf

Chapter 1 Thriving

The principle of retention of nest scent and heat: the basis of health, thriving and yield

In order to thrive and produce, bees depend completely on heat. It is as important for them as nourishment.

Science has established that bees require various temperatures. During overwintering with no brood,

WHAT TO DO ABOUT VV / AH

Everyone seems to be full of praise for the NBU team who search out and destroy *Vespa velutina* / Asian hornet nests.

Because the hornets predate and nest in areas which are more urban than rural, it is possible that a significant proportion of nests in the UK are being found. We don't yet know what the future holds but it is worth being as informed as possible on AH, its life cycle, predatory habits, and how to best defend one's bees.

Did you hear Andrew Durham's talks on *Vespa Velutina* / Asian hornet?

Even if you did, they are worth revisiting.

It's amazing how much is NOT retained after one hearing. There's no need to rewatch the videos if you don't want to. Andrew has generously made available large files with the content of his talks. You can download them [here](#). Here are some random takeaway thoughts from his talks:

- Stress is the hidden killer. Be sure not to aggravate the situation by causing stress. Inspect only if and when necessary.
- Don't draw attention to your hives by creating olfactory clues. So don't leave hives open or frames of honey exposed.
- Let grass grow in front of your hives to give the bees somewhere to hide.
- Use solid floors to contain hive aromas. Alternatively, insert the varroa board and close off any gaps.
- Forget about widely spaced hives. They are more vulnerable. Groups of five at least spread the pressure from predation.
- It is possible to make a mesh barrier at the hive entrance. Search *Frelon Asiatique muselière* for images. Mesh size should be around 13mm.
- Summer trapping aims to catch and kill hornets. Don't put any bait out before the hornets arrive, or they may find your hives sooner! AH begins predation in July and continues through autumn. Bait can be *pressed* apple juice, or wax cappings and *fermented*

Asian Hornet – A Special Briefing for Beekeepers
Part Two

Presented by Andrew Durham – Cambridgeshire Beekeeper

Asian Hornet Week 2023

Photograph © Gilles San Martin via Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0)

zoom

honey. (Andrew does not say if honey bees are lured to this bait. One hopes not.)

- It's possible that hornets will attack a hive en masse when prey dies off in autumn. The defence for this is to reduce the entrance to a 5.5mm strip in a plastic or Correx cover over the entrance. And make sure the colony has sufficient stores.
- Spring trapping is now 'officially adopted', although many people do not accept the principle or claims made for it. It involves trapping foundress queens. It has to be done on a large scale, and some claim that there is a risk that the loss of biodiversity caused by the destruction of other insects could actually be counter-productive and aggravate the situation for honey bees by removing from the environment other insects which could have been predated by AH. Traps must be selective, be set up to prevent drowning, and be monitored frequently. This is a matter for discussion next year when the BBKA plans to organise spring trapping on a large scale.

The NBU website has lots of info on AH. [This document](#) deals with making and setting up traps, and what attractant to use. (Briefly: in spring, a sweet substance for queens, such as dark beer with syrup or pressed apple juice. In summer, use protein such as raw fish or meat with water. Replace very few days! If you want to spend money, get [Trappit](#).)

BREEDER AND F1 QUEENS – AND F0?

In conversation we might talk of ‘breeder queens’, sometimes calling them ‘F0’, because the queens that professional suppliers sell are known as ‘F1 queens’. The daughters of these queens we might call ‘F2’. It’s all rather vague talk but we generally make ourselves understood.

We have an expectation that the queen that is the mother of F1 queens is special, but are perhaps not sure why, because she is as much a daughter as she is a mother. F1 queens from reputable breeders will often produce sizable colonies of productive and well-tempered bees. The breeders assure us that, although these queens are ‘open-mated’, the drones in their area are from colonies with the traits they expect to see in the next generation. F2 queens are the daughters of these F1s for which we paid nearly £50 (including Special Delivery). Even though we might believe our money was well-spent, we know that subsequent generations are now at the mercy of our local drones, and our F2s might lose some of the attractive qualities their mothers displayed so well.

Ideally, we take the time to improve our local stock by selecting our best and culling our worst every season. Like the clay soil in the garden, it will improve year on year if we work at it.

But we might also decide we need a bit of a leg-up and that’s why it is perfectly understandable to give our stock a bit of a nudge each year or two by introducing some quality

stock. I’m not saying it’s the right or best thing to do – just that I can see why many people choose to. And sometimes buying a queen is the only way to save a colony.

But what does ‘F1’ mean, and is there such a thing as ‘F0’?

The term comes from selective breeding of plants or animals. F1 stands for Filial 1. The significance of ‘filial’ (son or daughter) is that it represents the first generation from a cross-mating of two parents, neither of which has the desired traits but which the filial generation (it is hoped) will display.

It’s not clear to me that this applies in queen bee breeding. Breeder (sometimes referred to as F0) queens might be thought of as P (parent) queens. You expect to get a bee with the racial characteristics of say a Carniolan or Buckfast. Perhaps this will have been achieved with artificial insemination, or perhaps by isolated breeding where the drone population is controlled.

A professional breeder will sell daughters (F1) from this P queen and retain the characteristics of the parent even with open mating.

In a sense, because P queens are daughters too, we can create a similar process in our own apiaries by selecting from the best (our P queens) and breeding our F1s from them. As you descend through the generations, you lose some of these desirable traits but bring them back with further selection to introduce valuable traits again.

SPEND LESS ON A FEEDER

It doesn’t have to be expensive to feed bees. But Ashforth feeders – the ones that have the same dimensions as a shallow box – are not cheap. In this picture there is a deep eke (you could use an empty shallow box, but where are you going to store the frames?) with a 3-litre plastic box stuffed with straw and syrup. There’s room for three of these boxes, or you could source a larger one.



HANDY HINTS

Sugar has gone up a lot in price. Fondant more so. Invert syrup (aka Ambrosia or Invertbee) even more so.

I have used fondant almost exclusively since I started beekeeping, but this year I decided to change to granulated sugar for home-made syrup. I get regular deliveries of two 5kg bags of sugar in the weekly supermarket shopping.

I have some large (formerly invert syrup) containers. These will hold 11 litres. The mix I use for syrup is 2:1 by weight – 10kg sugar to 5 litres water. That's 15kg weight of syrup, but only 11 litres in volume – so a comfortable fit for the plastic containers.

Randy Oliver's experiment on the bees' consumption rate of thick and thin syrup is well known: it makes no difference to the bees! The amount of sugar they consumed was the

same for a particular period of time, whether it was presented in thick or thin form.

We don't always give syrup to bees to *feed* them.

Sometimes we want to give them the idea of a nectar flow, and a thin syrup is more suggestive of nectar.

The traditional 2:1 recipe for thick syrup is 2lb to a pint of water. This translates to a ratio nearer 5:3 rather than 2:1.

It matters not. There's a wide range of sugar concentration in nectar. The bees are accustomed to managing this.

So we shouldn't be fussy about the ratio of sugar to water when making syrup. My containers held 11 litres. Adding 5 litres of water to 10kg of sugar produces 11 litres of syrup.

Job done.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

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

- Geoff Hillard, Registered
- Caroline Allsop, Associate
- John Colvin, Associate

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](#)

ANDREW DURHAM'S TWO-PART TALK OF ASIAN HORNET

- [Part one](#)
- [Part two](#)
- [Resources](#)

COMMITTEE (AND SUB-COMMITTEE) STUFF

The Education sub-committee met on 15 August 2023.

Present: Sheila Stunell, Mark Ballard, Mel Henbest.

Apologies: Tony Edwards, Sonia Besley

Taster Day and the Introduction to Beekeeping Course 2023 were well received but those delivering the course

had felt that perhaps one weekend for the Introduction Course, was too intense. Sheila was concerned that the weekend did not give time for the information to be properly absorbed. The course delivery is 12 hours which equates to 6 sessions of two hours.

The Taster Day 2024 will be on 11 May; a full day 10:00-16:00, cost £70, and held at the Association Apiary.

The Introduction Course 2024 will be held at the Apiary from 19:00-21:00 over six weeks from April to June with a practical session to conclude. The cost for this would be £175. Maximum of 12 people at the Taster day and the Intro Course.

Basic Assessment 2024 After this year's success, we are hoping for the same in 2024. Sonia will now book the examiner and Bob Smith will be asked if he will do revision on swarming, and pests and diseases.

Improvers' Course The winter programme for 2023/24 will be a re-run of the Improvers' Course held in 2017/18 by Bob Smith. Bob has kindly given us the programme used. It will not be appropriate to use the Pavilion building during the winter months. This means Wainscott Hall or another suitable location. The course will run fortnightly from 16 October 2023 to 4 March 2024.

Expenses for trainers At our last meeting in June we discussed paying the instructors and felt that £25 per day was appropriate. We'll put this to the committee on 14 September.

Date of next meeting Wednesday 4 October at 8pm at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel

The full Committee met on 14 September 2023.

Present: Sheila Stunell, Ian Halls, Mark Ballard (Chair), Sonia Belsey, Rob Frost, Jez Davies Tony Edwards. In attendance: John Chapman. Apologies for absence: Archie McLellan, Karon Thomas-West, Nigel Rawlins

Treasurer's Report The email accompanying this report states that, since 1 January 2023, expenditure exceeds income by nearly £3,000.

Asian Hornet 43 sightings at 39 locations. Open invite to Folkestone Beekeepers s from 9.00am to talk about the Asian Hornet experience.

Education (The sub-committee minutes are above.) We need a venue for the Improvers' Course, running fortnightly from 16 October 2023 to 4 March 2024

Trainers who attended the education programme during the spring/summer 2023 would be paid at the rate of £25 per day.

Pavilion Apiary Mark Ballard reported that we ended the season with ten colonies. Work had continued through the year and the building and out buildings are in good shape. Simon Woods is currently cutting the grass weekly and the site is looking good.

We have moved to monthly inspections. Treatment for varroa and winter feeding is in place. We are concerned that few experienced beekeepers were willing to support the weekly inspection through the summer this year.

Jez Davies had managed to source a heated uncapping tray which Mark agreed we should purchase. We are grateful to Michelle Davies for collecting it from Guildford for us.

Annual supper on 14 October will be a quiz and fish supper. There will be a raffle and presentation of certificates and cups.

Ploughing Match 23 September. Mark, Sheila, Archie, John, Sonia, David, will be available to support. John Chapman has ordered three new tables for the Apiary.

Pamphlets Information for Taster day and Introduction courses will be available. Sonia will compile these.

BeeChat This has gone well at the apiary through the summer. If it is to continue through the winter months, we'll need to meet in a venue. Tony agreed to sound out the Three Mariners in Rainham.

Website Up to date. Sonia hopes to be able to upload a calendar and will talk to Michael about this.

Martin Smith of Bee Diseases Insurance wrote to all BKAs, and published an article in BBKA News, about an initiative which allows associations to provide their consenting members with the option to share their contact details with the NBU. The NBU privacy notice ensures that these details will only be used for restricted purposes by the NBU.

Associations like MBKA which use online renewals, can now include in their online renewal form an option for members to select or decline having their contact details shared with the NBU.

The committee must decide whether to make this option available to members. Then individual members decide whether or not they wish to accept it at the point of subscription renewal.

The committee was asked to agree to this, and a vote was passed unanimously.

Jez and Sonia suggested a WhatsApp broadcast group for disseminating information. They will look at this.

We have been invited to join a charity Walkable Rivers event, walking the Thames. This leg will be on 15 October from Gravesend to Cliffe and Cliffe to Allhallows.

Tony Edwards raised an issue for the agenda for the next meeting. He had been going through our calendar and we have English Festival. Kent County show, our own honey show and the Ploughing match as events that need support. We undertake inspections and grass cutting and maintenance of equipment at the apiary. There are not enough members who volunteer to help with parts of the annual programme and in the long term this is not sustainable. Tony belongs to Angling Society and annual fee is £60. He gets an option to join a work party to cover various maintenance tasks. Those who choose not to join the maintenance crew pay an extra £10 on their

subscription. The group then use the levy to pay have the work done professionally. Those willing to help effectively get a discount on their subscription. Tony asked the committee to consider this for discussion at the next meeting.

John Chapman and Sonia Belsey plan exhibits for the National Honey Show. The plan is for a shop front – looking for produce for the shop candles, honey, wax wraps.

BBKA Annual Delegates Meeting Sonia volunteered to be our delegate for 2024. BBKA have plans to hold a hybrid meeting again this year so the need to travel is not necessary. Sheila will notify BBKA of the revised name.

Date of next meeting 11 October 2023 at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel at 7:30pm.

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



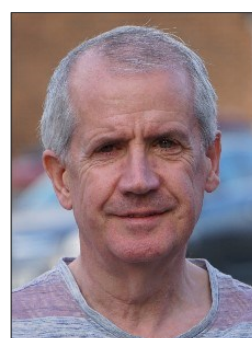
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