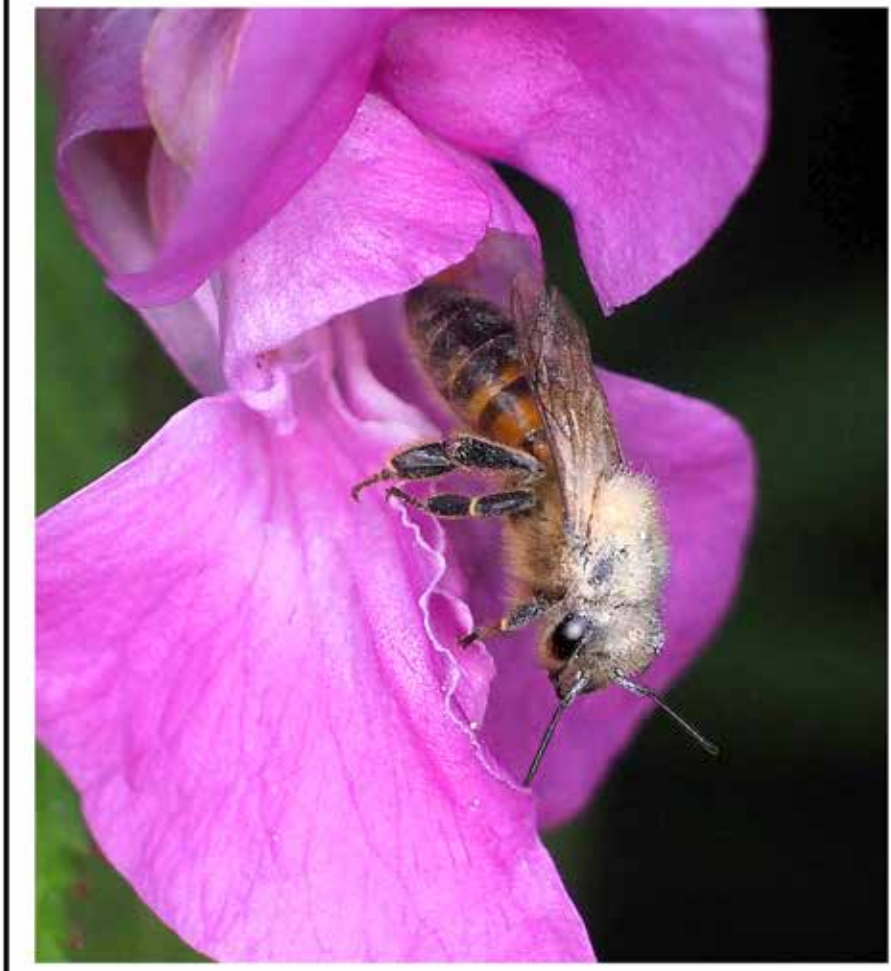
2018 Issue 2

WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

HONEY BEE TIMES

Journal of the Wiltshire Beekeepers' Association



Pewsey Bee Project - Uniting Colonies - Asian hornet

Contents

Himalayan balsam can be an excellent source of late summer nectar and pollen. Bees emerge from the flower with a distinctive smudge of pollen on their heads. Photo: Richard Rickitt

Chairman's report

Once again, the Bee and Honey Marquee and the Bee Garden at The Royal Bath & West Show were as popular as ever.

Something for everyone

Beekeepers from Avon, Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire provided a series of excellent stands and events that attracted and entertained thousands of visitors over the four days of the show. There was something for everyone, with all the many aspects of the craft of beekeeping on display. None of this would have been possible without all the hard work of Chris Rawlings and his committee. A big 'thank you' to them and all the volunteers who acted as stewards on the various stands.

Thanks, also, to all those who entered the Honey Show. This year, the Inter-County competition was hotter than ever with Devon joining in for the first time. However, Wiltshire BKA managed to regain the trophy.

Geraldine Lenert won the prestigious Blue Ribbon for her wax flowers, while Angus Boyd won several trophies and scored the most points. Congratulations to them and all members of Wiltshire BKA who submitted entries. In the Inter-County competition every winning entry counts.

The next step up is National Honey Show at Sandown Race Course in October. I do hope that some of you will fly the flag for Wiltshire there as your honey, wax and photographs are certainly good enough to win classes at national level.

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day

The main local event of the autumn is the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day on Saturday 6 October in the Corn Exchange, Devizes. The event is open to all and the talks are designed to appeal as much to members of the general public as to seasoned beekeepers. Do come along, as it promises to be a most enjoyable and informative event. It includes the County Honey Show with every winning entry counting towards the Inter-Branch trophy.

Honey Bee Health Day

On Saturday 1 September members of Wiltshire BKA attended a Honey Bee Health Day during which bee inspectors from the National Bee Unit updated them on the threat of Asian hornet, small hive beetle, varroa and other pests and diseases that affect our honey bees.

The Asian hornet is a new and very real threat to our honey bees. In Wiltshire, we are drawing on the lessons learned by Devon BKA last year to develop a strategy for dealing with Asian hornets should they be discovered in the county.

Guidance for beekeepers is offered in the article on page 29. In addition, each branch either has, or is planning to set up, an Asian Hornet Action Team. If you would like to be involved, contact your branch secretary.

Education and training

This year, a record number of beekeepers in the county took their Basic Assessment. Some results are still awaited but all those to hand are passes, many with Credit.

Congratulations to the beekeepers and a big thank you to our two assessors, Chris Rawlings and Richard Rickitt. For more

detail of exam results, see page 26.

Winter preparations

At the beginning of the year, many beekeepers in the county lost colonies. While some of these losses were owing to starvation, others occurred because the colonies went into winter either too weak or had not been adequately treated for varroa.

NOW is the time to ensure that you are on top of varroa in all your colonies. The most experienced beekeepers seem to treat for varroa as soon as the honey crop has been removed – whether or not there is a significant drop of the mites on their inspections boards. This is because bees produced at this point will be those that will see the colony through until next Spring. They need to be as healthy as possible, so best take no chances.

Nosema prevention

Treatment over, it is good practice to check for disease particularly in any colony that seems to have muddled along during the season but not thrived. The colony could be suffering from nosema. Each branch now has someone with microscopes and the knowledge to test for this, and I am sure would be willing to check a sample of 30 bees taken from the entrance or outside comb.

To keep nosema at bay, many beekeepers add a thymol solution to their syrup. (30g thymol crystals dissolved in 150ml surgical spirit.) Then 5ml of this solution is added to 4.5l of syrup. This stops the syrup fermenting and deters nosema.

Richard Oliver, Chairman WBKA (Kennet BKA)

Branch reports

Kennet

After a long, cold and wet winter, the 2018 beekeeping season looks to have been one of the best for several years.

At the time of writing, I am sat in the garden watching the bees, mine hopefully, foraging on the hardy geraniums. Many members noted significant colony losses over the winter, with some small-scale beekeepers losing all their colonies. Hopefully, the long, hot summer has allowed lost colonies to be replaced.

The 2018 meetings programme started with Brigit Strawbridge talking on bees and other pollinators. The focus of the talk was on native bees, including bumble bees, solitary bees and cuckoo bees. Brigit is a passionate and knowledgeable speaker. Her talk elicited many questions and inspired several members to invest in solitary bee hotels.

The March meeting, *A bee's view of beekeeping*, was cancelled: snow.

The April talk was on the importance of drones by Lynn Ingram. To most beekeepers, these are the little understood inhabitants of the hive. The talk gave our members a better understanding of their role and function within the colony. There was a lot of discussion on drone congregation areas, which set us up nicely for a planned drone congregation hunt at the end of June.

The final talk of the spring season was on pheromones by Ivor Davis. He talked about their importance as a means of

communication within the hive. From sensing that the queen is present and viable, to warning of danger to the hive and preparing to defend it.

The July and August meetings were informal 'bee chats' – an opportunity for new and experienced beekeepers to discuss and share their beekeeping problems.

On a hot Saturday afternoon at the end of June, members went on a drone congregation hunt. The group, led by Stephen Fleming from *Bee Craft*, walked up Potterne Field Hill just south of Devizes. Stephen had a caged queen attached to the end of a long pole, much to the bemusement of a passing mountain biker. As the group approached the brow of the hill, the buzz of bees started to become audible. Walking further along the footpath, the group was witness to clouds of drones flying around the caged queen. After several minutes of this spectacular display, the group descended the hill and, as evidence that we had walked out of the drone congregation area, the drones did not follow us, even though the caged queen was still being held aloft. A truly amazing display of nature in all its glory.

The education programme is starting to wind down. The introduction to beekeeping courses have finished. Basic beekeeping module discussion sessions have also finished. Hopefully, we will have a lot of certificates to present at the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day in October.

The meetings programme for the rest of 2018 and into 2019 is as follows:

- 5 October, AGM and branch honey show
- 2 November, *Queen rearing my way*, Kevin Horner
- 7 December, Skittles evening, Fox and Hounds, Nursteed
- 4 January, Beekeepers' discussion evening

All talks are at Bishops Cannings Village Hall, starting at 7.30pm.

John Barber, Kennet

Melksham

How quickly time passes when you are having fun collecting all those filled frames of honey… and wondering how and where you can store them until you find a minute to extract!

What a roller coaster of a year it has been. The weather has surprised us: cold, wet, warm, cold, wet, cold, warm, dry, warmer, hot, hot, hot, etc! Some colonies got off to a flying start, whereas others did not do so well.

I am beginning to learn – this is my third season as a beekeeper – that this is normal. The club apiary had major problems this year while mine, only a mile away, has done magnificently and have rewarded me handsomely.

Still, having problems at the apiary gave the new beekeepers, thanks to Apiary Manager Liz Taylor, plenty of experience in recovery and rebuilding to create strong colonies in preparation for winter.

In August we had a most entertaining evening firing questions at our panel of experts in what has become a permanent annual fixture of Beekeepers Question Time.

We are fortunate to have access to some very knowledgeable beekeepers who are prepared to be tested in public. Our thanks to Alan Stonell of Kennet BKA, who has been keeping bees for 65 years, Anne Rowberry, who is our BBKA link trustee, and our own Richard Rickitt. Richard is very active and at the end of the evening was dashing off to Manchester for another bee-related event. As our education officer he runs various courses in the Spring each year and is heavily involved in research as well.

We had a good selection of speakers this year ranging from Claire Waring, the Editor of *Bee Craft,* on *Non native honey bees*, John Haverson on *Beekeeping the with Warre Hive*, Richard Rickitt on *Bees I have met!,* Lynne Ingram on *The importance of drones* and Andy Willis on *A year on forage*. Other Wiltshire branch members are always welcome at these meetings.

With generous help from other branches, MBKA have also been busy preparing for the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day to be held this year in the Corn Exchange on Saturday 6th October 2018. Please mark your diaries and start checking the entry classes. All entrants welcome. Full information about the day including speakers can be found here: www.wiltshirebeekeepers.org.uk.

We have more stands this year than in previous years and are expecting a busy day. Whether you are new to beekeeping or a veteran, drop in to see us, as we are sure you will find something of interest.

Although MBKA are the lead branch, this year's event is unique in that it is the first time that the Wiltshire branches have worked together, which means it will be a more lively and interesting event overall.

All in all, Melksham Beekeepers had a good year with excellent attendance at the apiary on Saturday mornings, with plenty of 'Apiary Angels' to assist Liz Taylor, which meant that novices had plenty of hands-on experience by the time the season came to an end. And Liz produced plenty of Club Honey for sale which will help the Club's finances.

Terry Cooke's talk on bee farming was, for me, very interesting as a comparator with the hobbyist beekeepers that make up the majority of UK beekeepers.

He was keen to distance himself from some of the brutal procedures practised by bee farmers in the US with which he did not agree. His procedure for swarm control – anticipate to make sure there is plenty of space inside the hive for the rapidly expanding colony – is simple yet apparently fairly effective for him.

Coping with 300 colonies would be a nightmare for most of us, but he was keen to point out that one needs to be efficient with the use of one's time. Could we spend less time peering into our hives and disrupting our colonies? I suspect we could. And no open floors? What about the varroa count? Yes, you can have mesh floors but leave a solid floor in place most of the time.

I am going to put my wooden solid floor in place during the coming cold weather. I am not so sure about the metal one – perhaps it will be too cold and not help the temperature inside the hive and I should make myself another wooden one for the winter months. Food for thought.

As we enter another year, we are organising speakers for our monthly branch meetings at Broughton Gifford Village Hall, which has now been equipped with a very efficient modern heating system.

Tony Awdry, Melksham

Swindon

Since losing both colonies over the winter at the Twigs apiary, we have restocked with four nuclei; two at the Twigs site and another two at a new satellite apiary outside Swindon.

The Twigs site, although offering amazing foraging for the bees, had a major drawback when it came to access, as the site shuts down at 1800 hrs every day, which does not allow us to carry out some essential tasks such as moving bees, etc.

The satellite apiary in Lydiard Tregoze offers us 24 hr access, albeit on a farm which currently does not offer much in the way of forage for the bees. We are feeding the new colonies at the new site with litres of syrup!

We ran training sessions for new beekeepers on Thursday evenings, although evening beekeeping is coming to an end now, due to failing light. Members will be canvassed to ask what times would suit them for visiting the new apiary.

Mike Benson and Richard Bunce have together run three beekeeping education sessions for the under-11 year group at St Francis' School. Mike reported that the children and teachers were extremely interested and asked that Swindon BKA help them set up an apiary on the school site.

This will take place next spring, with the Swindon group contributing some of the equipment to aid in this objective.

The Swindon group were surveyed in late spring to try and get an idea of how many colonies were lost over the difficult 2017/2018 winter.

Approximately 25% of the current membership replied and the loss rate was a staggering 40%. Some members lost everything, and others none at all. The results were not relatable to feeding or varroa treatment, although the survey questions were somewhat simplistic.

Ian Cowdy, Swindon

West Wilts

We held a Beginners Beekeeping Course in February/March for sixteen candidates and Chris Rawlings held a Basic Beekeeping study group as well.

In March we held a talk on swarms, which included the bee's preparations for swarming, what can be done to stop them (artificial swarm) and how to collect a swarm. In April, we held a microscopy evening – we are lucky that several of our members have dissecting and compound microscopes and were willing to lend them for the evening. In May, we had a talk on integrated varroa management.

During the summer, we had fortnightly apiary meetings that were well attended by both new and more experienced members; the tea and cake session after these has been a good social and learning occasion. Several people, including children, have come along to observe bees for the first time. They all seemed to have enjoyed the experience and I hope they will join a Beginners Course next year.

The bees are now doing well after a slow start and a lot of feeding in the cold, wet spring. They have been working hard in the lovely sunshine and the honey harvest is very good.

Geraldine Lenert, West Wiltshire

Bees and goodwill

'One by-product of the bee is the human goodwill which seems to be generated amongst beekeepers. In many years of living and working with people who share their lives with bees I have often noticed the remarkable generosity and friendship amongst them and can therefore warmly recommend an involvement with bees and honey...'

Ted Hooper, *Guide To Bees and Honey*

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Gardening for honeybees – filing the June gap

The 'June gap' is a perennial (pardon the gardening pun) problem for beekeepers, when, just as colonies start to hit their peak in June, they may be faced with a dearth of nectar.

The timing of this is fluid and depends on how early or late, and warm the spring is. Many spring flowers come and go within a matter of days when faced with three or four days of unseasonably hot weather in April. But with carefully planting, gardeners can provide some forage for their bees during this gap. Hopefully, the plants listed below will provide some ideas to help get your bees through next year's June gap.

Amelanchier spp
Small- to medium-sized tree. Good source of pollen during the June gap. Can be grown as an informal hedge.
Anchusa (Anchusa azurea)
Perennial with a long flowering period starting in June.
Astrantia (Astrantia maxima, A. major)
Perennial in a range of colours from white to scarlet. Good source of pollen.
Avens or Geum (Geum spp)
Includes unshowy native plants as well as garden varieties, such as 'Mrs Bradshaw'.
Baby blue eyes (Nemophila menziesii)
Pale blue, low growing, hardy annual, this has a long flowering season starting in June.


Bugle (Ajuga retans) courtesy of www.gardeningexpress.co.uk


Astrantia major courtesy of Nathan MacInnes

Bay laurel (Laurus nobilis)
Can be grown as a clipped shrub or grown into a large tree.
Beauty bush (Kolwitzia amabilis)
Large bush, with pink, tubular flowers.
Bellflowers (Campanula spp)
Wide range of heights and colours from white to dark blue.
Berberis spp
Evergreen and deciduous varieties with bright orange flowers.
Borage (Borago officinalis)
Annual that self-seeds. White to blue flowers.
Broad beans (Vicia faba)
Sowings in January/February can ensure flowers in June. Pollination essential for production of beans.
Broom (Sytisus scoparius)
Medium, short lived shrub. A wide range of colours from off-white to orange and red.
Bugle (Ajuga reptans)
Native plant but several garden varieties available. Excellent ground cover plant.
Burning bush (Dictamnus albus)
Perennial. Flowers similar to hardy geranium.
Californian lilac (Ceanothus spp)
From small ground cover to large shrubs. White to blue flowers, resembling horse cakes from a box of liquorice allsorts.
Camassia spp
Late spring/early summer flowering bulb, in colours ranging from white to blue.

Catmint (Nepeta spp)
Good source of nectar.
Chicory (Cichorium intybus)
Perennial with white to blue flowers.
Climbing hydrangea (Hydrangea petiolaris)
Grows best on a north or east facing wall.
Common poppy (Papaver rhoeas)
As well as the native red poppy, there are garden varieties in a wide range of colours. Long flowering season starting in May.
Cornflower (Centaurea montana)
Perennial cornflower, white to purple.
Cornflower (Centaurea cyanus)

Jacob's ladder (Polymonium caruleum) courtesy of www.crocus.co.uk

Annual cornflower, white to purple. Flowers in June from seeds sown the previous summer.
Escallonia macrantha
Semi-evergreen. Flower colours from white to red. Can be grown as an informal hedge.
Evening primrose (Oenothera spp)
Biennial. Flowers open in the early evening when, if warm, bees may still be flying.
False acacia (Robinia pseudoacacia)
Medium to large tree. Racemes of off-white to yellow or pink flowers. Prickly branches!
Firethorn (Pyracantha coccinea)

Geranium phaeum courtesy of www.letsgoplanting.co.uk

Wall shrub. White flowers followed by yellow, orange or red berries. Great source of nectar.
Flannel bush (Fremontodendron californicum)
Large shrub often grown against a wall. Large yellow flowers. Not reliably hardy in the UK.
Forget-me-not (Myosotis spp)
Self-seeding biennial. Flowers from April.
Garden speedwell (Veronica longifolia)

Cornflower (Centaurea scabiosa) courtsey of planteset.com

Perennial with white to blue flowers. Likes moist conditions.
Geranium (Geranium phaeum, G. pratense)
Not to be confused with pelargonium or pot geraniums. Two of a wide range of geraniums. Planting other species can provide nectar throughout the summer.
Giant hyssop (Agastache foeniculum)
Short lived perennial. Flowers over a long period starting in June.
Gorse (Ulex europaeus)
Flowers over a long period starting in January in mild areas. Very prickly, probably not suitable as a garden shrub.
Heaths (Erica cinerea)
Not to be confused with heather (Calluna vulgaris). Small, ground covering shrub.
Hop tree (Ptelea trifoliata)
Small- to medium-sized tree. Small, scented greenish flowers.
Hyssop (Hyssopus officinalis)

Poached egg plant (Limnanthes douglasii) courtesy of www.crocus.co.uk

Small evergreen shrub. Long flowering period but not reliably hardy in the UK.
Jacob's ladder (Polymonium caruleum)
Perennial with white to pale blue flowers. Likes moist conditions.

Salvia pratensis courtesy of www.crocus.co.uk

Judas tree (Cercis siliquastrum)
Small- to medium-sized tree. White or deep pink flowers.
Knapweed, common (Centaurea nigra)
Native plant. Good source of nectar.
Knapweed, greater (Centaurea scabiosa)
Native plant. Good source of nectar.
Lavatera, tree mallows (Malva spp, M. arborea)
Flowers throughout the summer starting in mid-June. Perennials and short-lived shrubs.
Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia)
Has a long flowering period and can start in June.
Love in a mist (Nigella damascena)
Short flowering annual which self-seeds easily. Extend flower with repeat sowings in late spring-early summer.
Meadow sage or meadow clary (Salvia pratensis)
Biennial or short-lived perennial with spires of deep blue flowers.
Medlar (Mespilus germanica)

Purple loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria courtesy of www.watergardenplants.co.uk

Small tree.
Mignonette (Reseda odorata)
Annual with insignificant but sweetly scented flowers.
Mullein (Verbascum olympicum)
Tall biennial, yellow spires. Good source of pollen.
Orange ball tree (Buddleja globosa)
Large shrub, related to the butterfly bush with orange globular flowers

Buddleja globosa *by Saskia James*

Portuguese laurel (Prunus lusitanica)
Large evergreen shrub. Can be a hedging plant.
Peony (Paeonia spp)
Single flowered forms only. Good for pollen.
Phacelia, blue tansy (Phacelia tanacetifolia)
Primarily grown as green manure. Long flowering period, well into the autumn.
Poached egg plant (Limnanthes douglasii)
Annual. White flowers with yellow centres.
Purple loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria)
Moisture loving perennial. Flowers throughout the summer from mid-June.
Oriental poppy (Papaver orientale)
Perennial. Good source of pollen.
Raspberry (Rubus idaeus)
Select summer fruiting varieties rather than the autumn fruiting varieties. Pollination is necessary for fruit production. Grow in front of your hives.
Rock rose (Helianthemum spp)
Small, evergreen shrub. Good source of pollen. Wide range of colours
Rose of Sharon (Hypercium calycinum)
Great source of nectar. Creeping habit and can be invasive.
Roses including the dog rose (Rosa spp, Rosa canina)
Not the hybrid garden varieties but single

Sun rose (Cistus × purpureus 'Alan Fradd') courtesy of www.crocus.co.uk

flowered species. Great source of nectar.

Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis)
Low growing shrub. White to blue flowers. May start flowering in early spring.

Solomon's seal (Polygonatum odoratum)
Likes damp shade. Perennial that starts flowering in May.

St. John's wort (Hypericum perforatum)
Native plant. Low growing, spreading, with yellow flowers. Good source of pollen.

Strawberry, garden and alpine (Fragaria ananassa, F. vesca)
Good source of pollen. Pollination is essential for good fruit setting.

Sun rose or rock rose (Cistus spp)
Small, short lived shrub. Large white to pink flowers

Swedish whitebeam (Sorbus intermedia)
Medium- to large-sized tree. Flowers slightly later than the native whitebeam. Off-white flowers followed by red berries, much loved by birds, in autumn.

Sweet rocket (Hesperis matronalis)
Can be grown as a biennial or as a short-lived perennial. Colours white to purple.

Sweet rocket (Hesperis matronalis) courtesy of www.crocus.co.uk

Symphoricarpos spp (Snowberry, Wolfberry and Coralberry)
Suckering, untidy shrubs for a forgotten corner of the garden. White to pink berries in autumn and winter.

Tea tree or manuka (Leptospermum scoparium)
Small- to medium-sized tree. Not reliably hardy in the UK in hard winters.

Thrift or sea pink (Armeria maritima)
Native plant but several garden varieties available. Excellent ground cover plant.

Tulip tree (Liriodendron tulipifera)
A large tree, suitable for very large gardens. Has large, yellow, tulip-shaped flowers.

Viper's bugloss (Echium vulgare) courtesy of www.crocus.co.uk

Viper's bugloss (Echium vulgare)
Native biennial with blue flowers. Good source of nectar.

Wallflower (Erysimum spp)
Spring bedding plant that is coming to the end of its time, but will go on into June.

White horehound (Marrubium vulgare)
Native perennial, related to mint. Good source of nectar.

Wild sage or wild clary (Salvia verbanaca)
Native plant. Biennial or short-lived perennial with spires of deep blue flowers.

Wallflower (Erysimum) courtesy of www.crocus.co.uk

John Barber (Kennet)

Uniting colonies

Throughout the summer, the number of colonies in an apiary usually multiplies for many reasons, including splitting to prevent swarming, queen rearing and collecting swarms.

Late summer is a good time to consider whether you have the right number of colonies, and whether those colonies are in the best condition to get through the coming winter.

Three questions to ask yourself

- How many colonies do you want to run next year? If you have more than you want or can manage, then it may be time to reduce numbers. However, it can be worth running several additional colonies through the winter to allow for possible losses.
- Are all your existing colonies strong enough to survive the coming winter? Colonies with a small number of bees and few stores are unlikely to make it.
- Are your stocks headed by healthy, young queens with characteristics that you want?

Thoughtful uniting can solve a lot of issues. By combining two or more stocks you can create a single, larger colony that is headed by a good queen.

Taking stock

Inspect each colony and refer to your record sheets to assess the quality and viability of each stock. Decide which colonies are good and should be taken through to the next season, and which colonies are not worth keeping as they are. If a colony isn't thriving, think carefully about the reason. Never unite bees that may have any sort of health issue.

When you have decided which colonies to keep, make a plan to combine your stocks to produce the desired number of best-quality colonies. Usually you will unite small colonies to bigger more successful colonies, removing the least promising queen at the same time. Sometimes you might even combine several small stocks to produce a single, larger colony.

Musical hives

One complication may be that the colonies you want to combine are in different places. Before uniting stocks of bees, make sure that all of the bees will accept the location of the new combined colony location. If not, the flying bees from a moved colony will simply fly back to their previous location.

The well-known rule for relocating colonies is that each move should be less than three feet (one metre) or more than three miles (five km). If you have an apiary or other suitable spot that is more than three miles away, you can do a temporary transfer for a couple of weeks before bringing them back and placing them in their new location. If this is not possible, move colonies around your apiary incrementally, shifting them a maximum of three feet per day. This assumes the weather is fine and your bees can spend each day re-orienting themselves to the new position. If the weather is poor, the process can take longer.

Uniting using the newspaper method

Heaving hives

If you are moving a nucleus, it is relatively easy to carry the colony. Moving full-sized colonies is harder, especially with larger hive types. Be kind to your back by reducing a colony down to its best frames and placing them into a nucleus box before you begin the move. Frames of stores can be removed individually to reduce the overall weight.

Sometimes you may need to change the direction of the hive entrance so that it is similar to that of the receiving colony: rotate the hive slightly during each move until it eventually faces the right direction.

When the bees have reoriented themselves to the final position, move the nuc to one side and replace it with a full-size brood box on a stand. Then transfer all the frames from the nuc to the brood box. This is the time to find and remove the queen if this is the one you want to discard. With the nucleus colony installed in a full-sized brood box, unite them to the bees in your other full-sized hive.

Removing queens

Which queen do you want to survive? This is likely to be the younger queen or the one with the more desirable traits. Find and remove the unwanted queen immediately before the hives are united.

But what if you can't decide? Some people let nature take its course, allowing the two queens to meet and fight. Survival of the fittest should mean that the better queen will win, although you may end up with a dead and an injured queen. I prefer to play god and remove one of them myself. She can always be kept in a nuc as a reserve, or given to a friend in need of a new queen.

Big to small?

It is often said that the smaller of the colonies should be united by placing it on top of the larger one. It is also said that your chosen queen should be in the receiving colony and that the queenless colony should be united on top of the queenright one. I have found that it makes little difference. I tend to base my decision on where I want the bees to end up – I bring the other colony to that position and put it on top, irrespective of their relative sizes or which holds my preferred queen.

The news paper method allows the two colonies to get to know each other

Combining colonies

Every honey bee colony has a distinct odour. If you combine bees from two different colonies without any warning, the bees will probably fight and deplete the final colony. The trick is to combine the bees without starting a war.

It takes times to sort out the newly combined broodnest

Direct uniting

It is possible to unite colonies without allowing them time to familiarise themselves with each others' odour. An additional scent or distraction may suitably confuse the bees and minimise fighting. Some people use a squirt of aerosol room freshener to confuse the bees, but are you sure the spray is not toxic to bees?

Safer techniques include spraying the bees with water scented with a few drops of peppermint essential oil, or sprinkling them with flour or icing sugar. A light sugar syrup can also be sprayed on the bees, although in autumn that might spark a robbing episode.

Another way of confusing the bees is to unite more than two colonies at once if you have several small nucs to be combine. By mixing three or more colonies, the bees can't decide who the enemy is, decide not to fight about it and quickly settle down!

Any of these methods can work if you are in a hurry, but the following method is gentler on the bees and probably more reliable.

Indirect uniting

The most common method of uniting enables two colonies of bees to become acquainted with one another gradually. The colony odours mingle before the bees are completely united. Known as the newspaper method, it is simple and reliable.

Once your colonies are next to each other, remove the roof, crownboard and queen excluder from the receiving colony. Lay one or two sheets of newspaper over the brood box covering all the frames. Broadsheets are a good size. Replace the queen excluder over the newspaper to hold it down. This also keeps the queen in her original box so that the bees from the queenless colony have to come to her, which I feel makes them more likely to accept her. Many beekeepers make a few holes in the newspaper – I don't usually bother as the bees nibble their way through soon enough.

With the receiving colony prepared, remove the roof of the second colony (to minimise weight) and place the brood box on top of the receiving colony. Replace the roof and leave alone for a week. Quite soon you will see shredded newspaper being thrown from the entrance. If you have open mesh floors, a fluffy layer of nibbled newspaper will collect on the tray or ground beneath. After seven days the bees will be well and truly united. You can quickly check the box containing the queen and if you see her, or find eggs, you will know all is well.

Sorting things out

Once successfully united, the brood boxes need to be re-organised. How you do this depends on how you keep your bees – on double brood, brood-and-a-half or in a single, large box like the 14 x 12 Nationals that I use. The aim is to arrange the best mix of frames (food and brood) for winter. Go through the top box and place the best frames of brood or stores in a spare brood box. Look out for the queen and if you see her, place the frame she is on somewhere separate and safe, such as in a nucleus box.

Reorganise the frames in the receiving brood box so that the healthiest frames of brood from both boxes form a unbroken brood nest flanked by the best frames of stores or good quality comb capable of receiving plenty of stores. This is a good time to remove frames of old or mis-shapen comb. The process can be messy, as you end up with multiple open boxes and moving frames from one to another. Not surprisingly, the bees may get a bit agitated, so try to work quickly and gently, using smoke or water spray to calm the bees. When you have finished, reintroduce the queen and close the hive.

If you have too many frames of brood to fit in the hive, place them in a brood box above the main brood nest with a queen excluder between them. After three weeks all of the brood will have emerged and the frames can be removed with the help of a clearer board if necessary.

Make sure your new strong stock has sufficient stores or start feeding to be certain they have enough for winter.

You are now ready for next season with the right number of good quality colonies.

Richard Rickitt (Melksham)

Exhibiting at honey shows

Showing your honey and other hive products is an enjoyable aspect of beekeeping. Have a go at entering at least one or two classes in your association show. Here are some tips.

Taking a little extra time to prepare your honey can make all the difference between being placed or not

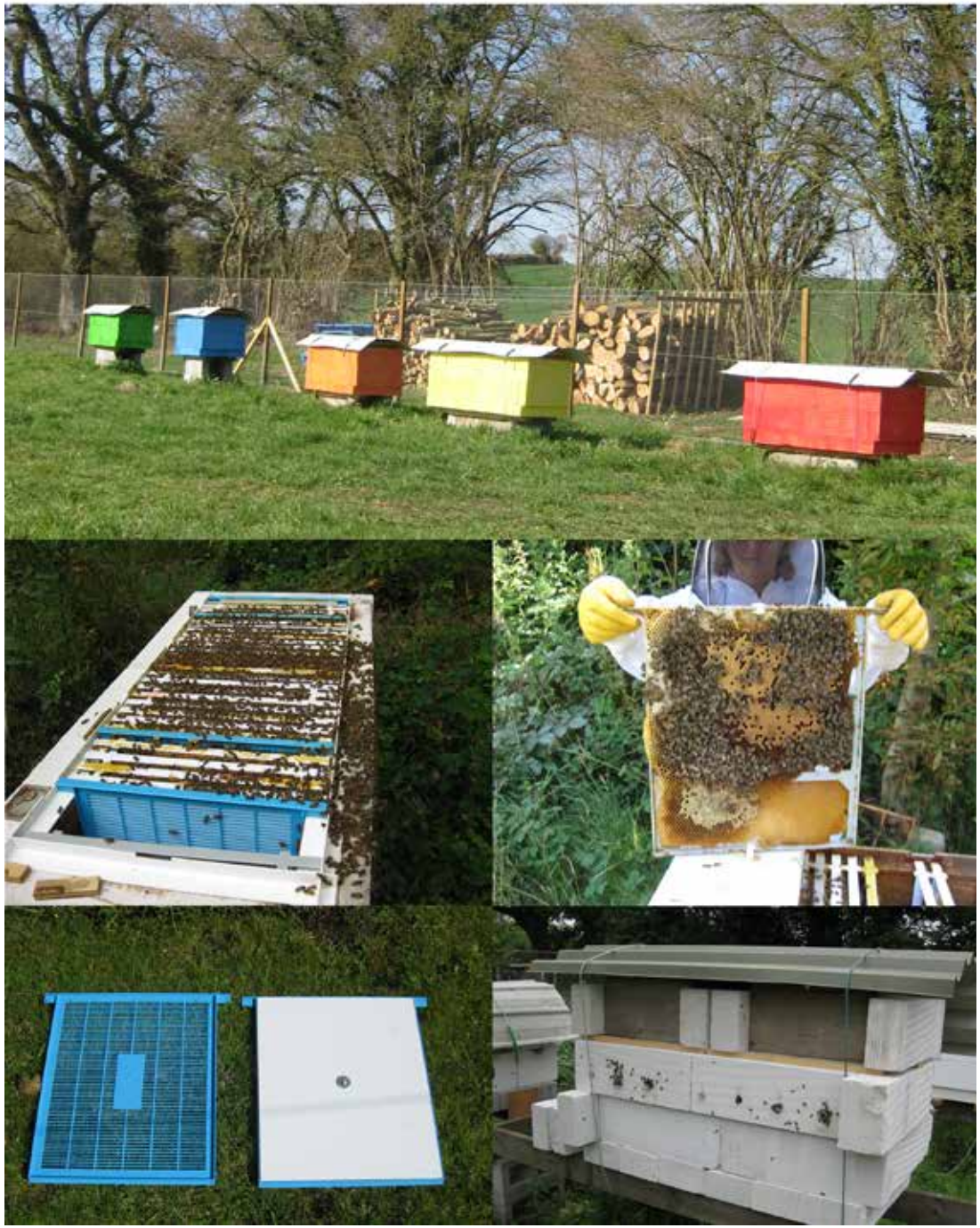
Honey

- Most classes require 1lb squat jars with gold coloured, screw on, metal lids.
- Make sure the jar are clean and free of any fluff from drying cloths.
- Make sure there is no rust on the lids and wash these well to remove any loose white sealant from the inside.
- No labels to be attached other than the class labels supplied, unless it is a class 'as for shop sale'.
- Full jars, no daylight showing between the honey and the lid.
- No scum on the top of the honey. Remove this by laying cling film on top of the honey and then lifting it off. Anything left can be removed with a small spoon.
- Perfectly clear with no granulation. Check the bottom of the jar to see if any crystals are starting to form – if so, heat gently in hot water at least 24 hours before the show.
- Soft set honey should not move when the jar is tipped sideways; the crystals should be small so that the texture is pleasant.
- Honey that granulates quickly, such as oil seed rape, will granulate with small crystals. If OSR honey is mixed with slower granulating honey, it will all granulate with acceptable small crystals.
- Chunk honey must not be granulated in the comb and should be placed in the jar the right way up – as it is in the hive. The surrounding honey should be the same as that in the comb. Remove any small bits of loose wax.
- Cut Comb should be allowed to drain before being boxed so that the outer cut cells are dry. No granulation in the cells.
- Frames of honey must not be granulated and all cells should be completely sealed across the frame.

Wax products

- Use the best wax with the lightest colour that you have from cappings.
- Wash wax in rain water or distilled water to remove honey and dirt.
- Filter it well to remove any foreign bodies. 'J cloths' are very good for this.
- When staging candles, ensure they stand secure and upright in the candle holders.
- Prepare the wick by dipping in it the wax before inserting in the mould, making sure it is central all the way down.
- Inspect any wax products when they are finished to make sure there are no very small black specks showing.
- Cool wax moulds very slowly to prevent cracking on the top. Turn off the oven and leave to cool overnight.

Geraldine Lenert (West Wilts)



BBKA Spring Convention 2018

This was the first year of the new 're-jigged' convention at Telford.

This year, the show placed more emphasis on lectures and less on trading – in fact the trade hall opening was restricted to just the Saturday this year, which led to some mad shopping dashes by attendees trying to fit purchasing in between lectures. This is direct response to the effect of the earlier BeeTradex Show, which is now the preferred spring event for many beekeepers.

There seemed to be two underlying themes to the lectures this year: those of diseases and hive pests and the dreaded Asian hornet. Amongst all this doom and gloom, there were some interesting side lectures including a lively debate on the merits of polystyrene hives over traditional wood, as well as talks aimed at the newer beekeeper, such as the biology behind swarming.

What follows is a brief breakdown of the lectures I attended.

Managing a hive throughout the year – Ivor Davies

This made you think carefully about your bees and have a feel for what could be going-on in the hive without lifting the lid.

You can track your colony through the year by the flowers in bloom at that time. For instance, snowdrops are strong source of pollen as the queen is beginning to go back on lay. By the time the flowering currant is out, her lay rate will have increased greatly, and it should be at maximum capacity by time the sycamore is in flower. Once lupins are in flower, be alert for the signs of swarming, as the colony should be in the best position to reproduce. When the blackberry is in flower, the major (primary) swarms should have happened and your bees will be busy building up their stores for winter. By the mid/end summer flowering period, the colony begins its winding down processes, ejecting the remaining drones and beginning to take the queen off lay. Ivy is the last significant crop harvested and is only used to make up for any shortfalls.

What robots can learn from bees – Karl Crailshelm

Professor Crailshelm looked at swarm intelligence and how groups of bees are able to work together and make group decisions for the good of the colony.

This is done using pheromones combined with natural feedback loops, so that when an individual bee senses a particular situation, she will communicate it to her sisters using pheromones and/or actions. Her sisters will then make personal judgement calls on the data and choose to ignore or reinforce the signal by further communicating it.

Therefore decisions can be made that bypass the queen, and the same action (such as comb building) can be independently initiated by different groups of bees in the hive, only joining together in the later stages of building.

This is possible because different bees have different response thresholds as per the genes they received from their parents – in a balanced colony, there should be several groups of bees with different tolerances, allowing the colony organism to react to a range of situations.

Prof. Crailshelm then explained that he had worked with computer scientists to look at the use of artificial intelligence for various tasks. The team found that once they had adopted the decentralised (colony-led) model used by bees, the robots were much better at completing the tasks than when they were using a centralised (queen -led) model.

Tracking Asian hornets – Peter Kennedy

This lecture looked at the tracing and destruction of last years' Asian hornet nest at Tetbury, as well as tracing the path of the invasion/colonisation through France from point zero.

It is believed the initial incursion into Europe began with a single queen in the soil of an imported plant in 2004. This queen immediately began its nest. By the end of the summer the colony had moved to its secondary nest and produced reproductive queens who, after hibernating, went on to produce more colonies the next year.

Unlike the European hornet, which may only produce a couple of dozen new queens each year, the average Asian hornet colony can produce hundreds of new queens. And thanks to a quirk of their biology, they are not subject to inbreeding problems, as their internal DNA is able to recombine in random patterns for each new queen. Thus, the spread through France was fast and devastating.

The Asian hornet has now made its way across to Jersey and Aldernay in the Channel Islands, and have also been discovered in Guernsey and Sark.

An interesting point was that the initial nests are often built in 'man made' locations (under roofs, in sheds, etc), while the secondary nests were more usually found at the top of tall trees.

Processing wax – Dan Basterfield

This was a standard lecture describing how to harvest the wax from your hives, how to process it and what to do with it – either to sell as value-added items or to reuse to make new foundation.

Dan made a subject that can sometimes be quite technical (with lots of processes and temperatures) fun and enjoyable. It was interesting to see that the issues that some of us have with wax processing are the same for the bigger boys and girls, just with bigger impacts. Dan shared many amusing stories of things going wrong before focusing on what he had done to correct the mistakes (and thus not lose the wax in question).

Know your bee diseases and colony threats – Colin Pavey

This was mainly a Q&A session interspersed with slides of various hive problems from chalk brood to small hive beetle. Although aimed at the beginner, it was still informative, especially the part looking at different brood diseases.

Asian hornet – Steve Martin

This was a lecture by head of entomology at Salford University and beekeeping's answer to Indiana Jones. Starting with the countdown taken from the *Thunderbirds* TV show, this was a detailed look at the biology of our hobby's number one bogeyman. Steve then focused on the various types of Asian hornet (yes, there are more than, but one luckily for us we only have to deal with Vespa veluntina) describing how the placement of the ocelli (the additional eyes on the top of the head) on different species is a sure-fire way of telling them apart. He explained that while

there are many species of hornets in Europe and Asia, none naturally occur in Africa, or Australia. This is due to a combination of competition in the former, and non-evolution in the latter.

On emergence from overwintering, the Asian hornet queen will find a smallish, enclosed location and begin building her nest and colony in the same way as a European wasp might.

However, once the colony is big enough, it will relocate itself to the highest point possible in the local area (normally the top of tall trees). This offers protection from a range of predators and gives them an unrivalled foraging advantage over a large area. As a result, Asian hornet nests can grow to an enormous size and support the production of thousands of workers and hundreds of new queens and drones, thus increasing the species' hold on an area.

Asian hornets are a major predator of honey bees, and will 'hawk' workers outside a hive, hovering and then snatching honey bees mid-air. Unfortunately our honey bees have little defence, having had no experience (in evolutionary terms) of the predator.

The Japanese honey bee (Apis cerana japonica) is another matter entirely – they will drag a hornet into their nest, clustering around it to increase the heat and eventually cooking it to death.

Steve pointed out that the hornets do very well in urban areas where they have largely abandoned insect predation, choosing to gain their protein from easier sources, such as abandoned meat products in bins.

He then showed a few slides of his friends' hornet farm, where he gives each colony raw steak every couple of days before cutting the whole nest down and bagging it to sell at local food markets –Asian hornets are considered

This September, an Asian Hornet nest was found in Fowey, Cornwall, and destroyed by bee inspectors

a delicacy in Asia and a good sized nest can fetch the equivalent of a £100-£150.

Steve ended the lecture with on a chilling note – in the European countries where the Asian hornet has established itself, it has rapidly become the apex predator. He thinks, this will eventually happen here too.

Oil seed rape – blessing or curse – Pam Hunter

This looked at the evolution of every beekeeper's favourite crop/worst nightmare (delete as appropriate). Once the properties of its oil were discovered, the plant was bred and crossbred to produce the strains in our fields today.

OSR nectar has high levels of sugars compared to other plants – usually 30-40% and sometimes as high as 50-60%, and is composed mainly of fructose and glucose with some sucrose.

Pam then explained the best way to take advantage of the OSR harvest – that you should have a hive with a young queen, and supers with empty pre-drawn frames, which you should be prepared to replace rapidly as the harvest comes in. She did add a note of caution, explaining that OSR is not to everybody's taste as it can be tricky to process and crystallizes pretty fast in the comb.

Jeremy Tyler (Melksham)

Wiltshire BKA exam and assessment results and study programme

Module examinations

Congratulations to all those who sat BBKA module examinations in March:

Sophie Butcher (K)	Module 3 Credit
Alan Hepper (WW)	Module 3 Distinction
Geraldine Lenert (WW)	Module 3
Peter May (K)	Module 3
Richard Oliver (K)	Module 7
Martin Phipps (K)	Module 3
Richard Rickitt (M)	Module 3
Frances Shires (M)	Module 3 Credit

- Module 3 covers Honey Bee diseases, pests and poisons.
- Module 7 covers Selection and breeding of honey bees.

Richard Rickitt and Frances Shires both achieved their Intermediate Theory Certificate with credit.

Honey Bee Management

This winter Richard Oliver, Dick Church and Frances Shires will be running a study group for those wanting to take Module 1: Honey Bee Management.

This will consist of six two-hour sessions on a weekday evening between the end of November and mid-February.

Studying for the modules will give you a greater understanding of your honey bees and will help you become a better beekeeper – whether or not you take the exam, which is not compulsory.

continued ...

Honey Bee Times
is looking for a
NEW EDITOR

From January 2019 this magazine will need a new editor - will it be you? It doesn't have to be a single person - why not think about doing it with your beekeeping friends? You don't need any design experience, as design and print are done by others.
If you might be interested, please get in touch.

Without a new editor/s this magazine will cease after the winter 2018 edition.

Pleasae contact Richard Rickitt if you are interested:
beesknees1972@gmail.com

Microscopy

There will be a one-day Microscopy Workshop on Saturday 17th November in Rowde Village Hall.

Half a day will be devoted to dissection led by Sally Wadsworth and the other half on pollen led by Alan Stonell.

There are 12 places available.

BBKA Basic Assessment

All four branches ran courses to prepare their members for the Basic Assessment.

Seventeen members have been assessed and, at the time of writing, the following results have been confirmed by the BBKA:

Mal Anley ((K)	Credit
Angus Boyd (M)	Credit
Rosie Boyd (M)	Credit
Lucie Castleman (WW)	Credit
Mario Caves (K)	Credit
Charles Irvine (WW)	Credit
Geoff Lupton (WW)	Credit
Richard Peterson (K)	Credit
Larry Phipps (M)	Pass
Andy Reed (M)	Pass
Peter Smith (S)	Pass
Jacquie Steel (WW)	Credit
Andrew Tyrer (M)	Pass
Nicky Ward (K)	Credit
Angela Wilkes (S)	Pass
Tony Wilkes (S)	Pass

Many thanks to Chris Rawlings (WW) and Richard Rickitt (M) for conducting the assessments.

BBKA General Certificate in Beekeeping Husbandry

Richard Oliver (KBKA) Pass

BBKA Qualified Beekeeper

Having gained the Intermediate Theory Certificate and the General Husbandry, Richard Oliver and Richard Rickitt become Qualified Beekeepers.

Honey Bee Health Certificate

The BBKA's Examinations Board has recently introduced two new assessments, the Honey Bee Health Certificate and the Certificate in Honey Bee Breeding.

The Health Certificate is designed to encourage beekeepers who have been awarded the Basic Certificate and have at least three years of beekeeping experience to improve their understanding and practice of beekeeping. The syllabus covers hygiene in the apiary, statutory requirements affecting honey bees, brood diseases, adult bee diseases, viruses, nutrition and spray poisoning and pests.

There are also three practical tasks: a mandatory brood disease inspection; either a shook swarm or a Bailey comb change for a weak colony, and either the collection of a sample of 30 bees or use of a lateral flow device.

If there is sufficient interest, Richard Oliver plans to run a course to help beekeepers prepare for the assessment. A number of sessions would run from late March to early May.

Find out more

For more information on any of these courses, contact Richard Oliver: raoliver.64@gmail.com

Asian hornet – guidance for beekeepers

In 2016 an Asian hornet nest was found and destroyed in Gloucestershire.

In 2017, the same happened in North Devon. This year an Asian hornet was found in a lettuce Lancashire that had come from Lincolnshire. In August an Asian hornet was spotted and killed on the Cherbourg to Poole ferry.

Confirmed sightings have since been made in Fowey and Liskeard, Cornwall, and Hull.

There is a very real possibility that sooner or later we will have an incursion of Asian hornet in Wiltshire. Here is how to prepare for its arrival and what to do if you spot one.

Preparation

Contact your beekeeping neighbours (including non-members) and discuss plans for a local sighting of an Asian hornet.

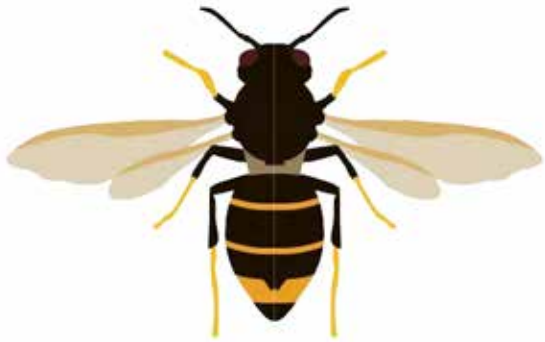
Have a laminated copy of the Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) Asian Hornet Alert either pinned to the underside of a hive roof or held in your Hive Record Folder.

Action on sighting Asian hornet

- Report to:
  - ◇The NNSS – it will take no further action until evidence (a sample or photograph) of the Asian hornet is produced. (alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk).
  - ◇The local seasonal bee inspector: robert.carpenter-turner@apha.gsi.gov.uk
  - ◇Wiltshire BKA Secretary, who will inform the other branches in the county.
  - ◇Branch point of contact for Asian hornet sightings.
- Be part of/lead a surveillance team from branch members.
- Know how to recognise Asian hornet – use Asian Hornet Watch App (www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm or available free from the Apple store.)
- Ensure you have suitable equipment with you. Work in pairs.
- Ensure records are kept of sightings and other relevant information.
- Do not release details of location or personal details – no press disclosure. (The NBU will contact the press once they are on the ground).
- Be sensitive to land owners and the general public.
- Act with caution and care.
- Take video recordings and obtain samples where possible.
- If appropriate start noting flight lines.

How to spot an Asian hornet

- *When seen from the front, its head is orange and its legs are yellow at the tips.*
- *It is predominantly black with a broad orange stripe on the abdomen and one yellow band on the first segment.*
- *It measures between 17 and 32mm.*



The Pewsey Bee Project

In August 2015 our community environmental group pledged to help protect and promote pollinator populations across the Vale of Pewsey.

This was prompted by a series of talks and films on the decline internationally of pollinators, and recognising the effects of habitat loss, disease, climate change and agricultural practices here in Britain.

The project came about when several things came together.

- An unexpected visitor, who turned out to be a beekeeping farmer.
- A fairly knowledgeable group of people already savvy in fundraising.
- A smaller group of people willing to be hands-on in learning beekeeping skills.

Early advice

When visiting his relations in Pewsey, farmer Justin Riggs from Oxfordshire came to the final environmental talk.

Already involved in his own community, he had devised a pilot initiative to establish a network of community hives, focusing on bee breeding. The aim was to increase numbers of these vital pollinators in the area. Any increase in bees could be sold on to another community to replicate the project.

Securing funding

We secured funding from North Wessex Downs AONB, and Link2Nature. A local school was willing to give us some land for the apiary and the groundsman, who had grown up keeping bees, selected an excellent spot for the site, protected and isolated.

On paper, the idea looked good – after an initial outlay of funds, new funds would come from each sale of bees bred.

What was not discussed sufficiently was the sheer volume of knowledge needed to get there... and the amount time that might take. Sadly, Justin had to withdraw from advising us.

The next steps

This is the point where I got involved, having completed an Introduction to Beekeeping Course three years earlier, but very little hands on experience.

By January 2016, I was a trainee member of Kennet Beekeepers (KBKA). Four other trainee Pewsey beekeepers joined me.

The KBKA was our salvation, giving us a great deal of support and advice. We bought our first nuc with around 3000 bees and a queen in May 2016 and a six frame polyhive. The bees did well, and we transferred them to a full-sized National wooden hive.

They overwintered successfully

Preparing the site for the apiary

and came out the following April clearly ready for business. By early May they were getting ready to swarm. Now we really were having to learn to think on our feet! We went for a Pagden split, which seemed successful.

The apiary as it is now

Teething problems

Then all our problems started; no queen in the new hive. We tried introducing a new queen but marked her too early and they weren't having her (I hadn't read about that bit yet). There was no evidence of a queen for three weeks so we gave them brood from the first hive…

By the end of August, Hive 2 was just downright nasty. 'Close them up!' said Robert Carpenter Turner. With relief, we closed it up and left it for the winter, and by the spring it had recovered.

So those were some of lessons we learned last year. Hive 2 is currently lovely, by the way.

Creating a continuous 'road' of forage

In addition to learning to become beekeepers (none of us would dare to call ourselves beekeepers yet), we have become involved with a range of other community groups.

In an initiative with Transition Marlborough, and alongside the Marlborough Downs Farmers Stewardship scheme, we are working on 'The Bee Road' scheme. The aim is to create a continuous 'road' of forage between Pewsey and Marlborough.

In doing this we have found other groups working with similar aims in Swindon – encouraging whole roads and communities to fill their gardens with bee- and pollinator-friendly forage.

By visiting and creating local community events and going into schools, we are spreading the word – and seeds – to get more wild flowers growing to help save our pollinators.

We haven't yet got to the point of putting Justin's idea into operation but we are continuing to learn.

Christine Body (Kennet)
Bee Pewsey Project Leader

Christine Body inspects a frame assisted by Paul Darby and Sylvia Clayden

Beekeeping in Madeira; lessons learned

Madeira is a beautiful, green, volcanic island set in the Atlantic on a similar latitude to Marrakesh.

The south side of the island is bathed in African winds, the north side bears the powerful Atlantic swells, so it tends to be that bit colder and wet.

In Madeira, you'll find a subtropical climate on the south coast and, as you climb up into the mountains, you'll feel at home with the temperate flora. In the area around Madeira's capital, Funchal, the temperature only varies throughout the year from 16˚C-23˚C – it's always spring in Madeira! The combination of rich, volcanic soils and continuous spring-like weather mean that the island is now blessed with world-famous gardens filled with exotic flowers and plants.

Madeirian people are very proud of their island and its beauty, and quite rightly so. You can see images of the countryside and its flowers in almost every corner. There is even a series of stamps extolling the beauty of the island, including its bees and honey – why not a similar series in the UK?

With such a rich fauna and ideal weather conditions, you might expect that Madeira was a haven for beekeepers, but this is not the case.

If you came to Madeira a few years ago, you would have seen lots of beehives. Things were going very well until varroa and American foulbrood arrived. Like the UK, the majority of beekeepers kept bees as a hobby so there were only a few commercial producers with hundreds of hives. However, unlike the UK, there was less emphasis on training and education, less rigorous hive inspections, less notification of disease, and very little control over queens and colonies brought onto the island from elsewhere.

Working beehives on Madeira – note the roofs: tropical rains sometimes lash the island

So much so that, when varroa and AFB arrived, many beekeepers did not recognise the problems, did not know how to treat for them, or even report it. I have been told that many beekeepers, not wanting to affect their honey sales, decided not to notify the authorities of their problems. The net effect was the total decimation of honey bee colonies – at one point the home-produced honey business collapsed completely.

So does that mean that beekeeping and honey production is dead today? No. There is now a resurgence: there are hives to be seen dotted around the hillsides. I have been told that there is now more training, education and disease notification, so things look a bit brighter for the future.

What does all this mean for us over here? Remember what low levels of training, lack of notification and negligible bee inspection led to on Madiera. There does seem a lot of sense in what some people, wrongly, claim to be an imposition on their beekeeping.

Brian Wilson (Melksham)

Wiltshire

BEE AND HONEY DAY

Incorporating the Wiltshire Honey Show

Saturday 6th October

10am-3pm

The Corn Exchange, Devizes, SN10 1HS

FREE ENTRY

Talks include

- **"Wot a whoppa" – experiences of a double brood system on 14x12**
- **Sex, drugs and ecosystem services: how flowers attract bees**
- **Really getting to grips with swarming**

Activities include:

- **Candle rolling**
- **Face painting**
- **Mead and Honey-Beer tasting**
- **Open classes for all the family**
- **The chance to sell your honey and candles to the public**

For more information and to download the an entry form visit www.wiltshirebeekeepers.org.uk

With Thanks to Corsham Print Ltd.