



Wiltshire BKA

Honey Bee Times

Happy New Year

**Wishing all members of Wiltshire BKA
enjoyable and bountiful beekeeping in
2023**

Wiltshire BKA Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be held on Tuesday 31st January in The Corn Exchange, Market Square, Devizes SN10 1HS starting at 7pm.

The AGM will be followed by the Winter Lecture:

The Electric Ecology of Bees with Beth Harris

Research shows electric fields in the environment may be important in pollination & honey bee communication. Research shows that bees can detect and learn about electric fields in their environment, providing evidence for a new sense, aerial electroreception. It turns out that in both bumblebees and honeybees aerial electroreception plays a role in foraging and pollination and social communication.

However, this is an emerging field of research and there is still much to understand about the electric ecology of bees. In my talk, I will highlight latest evidence for the ways in which electric fields constitute a form of sensory information for bees and the sensory mechanisms by which aerial electroreception operates.

Beth Harris is a PhD student in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Bristol. She is interested in insect sensory systems, and in particular, how bees perceive their sensory environment. Specifically, her research focusses on the biophysical mechanisms of aerial electroreception in bees and the ecological contexts in which this sense is used.

The AGM Agenda will be sent to all members in early January 2023.



Dates for the Diary

Wiltshire BKA

31st January - AGM and Winter Lecture. Details above.

7th October - Bee & Honey Day. The Corn Exchange, Devizes. 10am to 4 pm.

Branch Events

Kennet BKA - Meetings held on the first Wednesday of the month in Bishops Cannings Village Hall unless otherwise shown.

Sunday 1st January at 12.00pm. Oxalic treatment for the bees. Horton Road Apiary.

Wednesday 4th January - 7.30 pm. "KBKA's New Apiary." A talk by the Apiary Manager, Jeremy Percy.

Melksham BKA

See website for details of meetings: <https://www.mbka.org/mbka-meetings>.

Swindon BKA

Meetings are held on the last Thursday of each month in the Skittle Alley at the Haydon Wick Club, Blunsdon Road, Swindon SN25 1JD, start time 7.30pm. Details are published in branch newsletter.

West Wits BKA

Wednesday 1st February - Annual Dinner, Venue is The Duke in Bratton. Details in the January edition of the branch newsletter.

National Events

There are two trade shows planned with very similar names but run by different organisations:

Saturday 4th February 9am to 4pm. British Beekeeping Show. Venue NAEC Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. Details including lectures: <https://www.britishbeekeepingshow.com/>. (Formerly Tradex)

Saturday 25th February. The Beekeeping Show. At Telford International Centre. <https://www.thebeekeepingshow.co.uk/>.

21 - 23 April 2023. BBKA Spring Convention. Venue - Harper Adams University, Shropshire. Three days of excellent talks and workshops by some of the best beekeepers nationally and internationally. Also a trade event.

1 - 3 June 2023 - Royal Bath & West Show at the Showgrounds, Shepton Mallet.

26 - 28 October 2023 - National Honey Show. Sandown Park Racecourse, Portsmouth Road, Esher.

Beekeeping Tips for January

Varroa

Yes, it's that old chestnut again. The days are now longer. The 30 day weather forecast shows no sign of a cold snap. It is therefore more than likely that queens will come back into lay in your colonies, if indeed they ever stopped.

The varroa boards in my colonies are showing less brood cappings than at any time in the last six weeks. If you have not already done so it is time to treat. Do not delay. By the time you read this, my colonies will have been treated with oxalic acid using the trickle method.

Wind

The 30 day weather forecast may not show any frost but it does show lots of rain and with rain comes wind. If your colonies are in an exposed location best strap the hives down. If they are already strapped down just check the straps are still tight.

Feeding



Assuming the queens come back into lay, the brood is going to need feeding. Feeding requires the nurse bee to expend energy so stores will be consumed in greater quantity than in previous weeks. Heft your colonies regularly, or better still weigh them using luggage scales. If they seem light then add some fondant.

Inspections

We may have some relatively mild weather over the next few weeks but do not be tempted to open the hive except very briefly to treat with oxalic. However you can still learn something from your bees by observation - silent inspections. (See next article.)

Entrances

On a warmer sunny day some bees will be keen to leave the colony to forage and/or defecate. It is therefore important to ensure that hive entrances are kept clear. Take a hive tool or similar instrument and poke it through entrance, move it around to create a passage. In most cases there will be nothing there but if a disease such as *Nosema cerana* has infected the hive there could be many dead bees inside blocking the entrance preventing healthy bees from going about their business.



Silent Inspections

Last month in the Beekeeping Tips section I mentioned that, in addition to observing the Varroa drop, you could determine the size and location of the cluster by analysing the droppings on the varroa board. A silent inspection.

Silent inspections can be undertaken throughout the year and you can learn a great deal about your bees simply by observing them.

In the winter months the colony will be in cluster. If the queen is in lay the bees will aim to keep the brood at about 35°C. The average temperature of the cluster will be 25°C and on the outside down to 10°C. Bees will move continuously from the outside to the inside. In doing so a well trained ear will pick up a soft buzz.

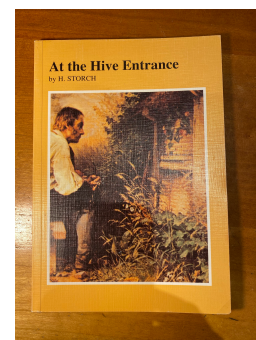
On another day if the temperature increases rapidly, the winter cluster breaks apart. The buzz will increase - more like a breeze passing through the trees. The same applies if the temperature drops and the cluster tightens with the bees vibrating their wing muscles to keep the brood warm.

It may be that you see the odd bee leaving the hive and dark faeces at the hive entrance. This is a sign of dysentery that could result from: unclean winter food stores, too cold a hive, queenlessness or disease (most likely *Nosema* but possibly a bad *Varroa* infestation). One way to alleviate the problem is to feed warm sugar syrup via a contact feeder for an hour or so around noon when the temperature is above 5°C. The aim is to induce a cleansing flight.

Healthy bees have the ability to expand their rectum until it almost fills the abdomen. Consequently they need to take fewer cleansing flights. Those suffering from dysentery have to consume more food to maintain their core temperature so need to defecate more often. If it's too cold to fly or they are too weak, they will defecate inside the hive.

If like me your hearing is past its best, then a stethoscope pressed against the hive wall will help you pick up the buzz.

You can spend hours observing your bees throughout the year and over time you will come to spot when all is not as it should be. The best book on the topic is "At the Hive Entrance" by H. Storch, available via Amazon or Northern Bee Books.



Education, Training and Exams

Closing Dates for Exams and Assessments

If you are planning on sitting a **module** exam on 18th March 2023 then do remember to register before the closing date of 10th February.

The closing date for **Honey Bee Health, General Husbandry and Advanced Husbandry** is 28th February.

To acquire an application form contact Richard Oliver (raoliver.64@gmail.com) who will arrange for a form to be sent to you digitally.

Beginners Courses

If any member has a friend or acquaintance who is considering taking up beekeeping then details of the courses being run by branches are:

- For Kennet contact - education@kennet-beekeepers.co.uk.
- For Melksham see - <https://www.mbka.org/beginners-course/index>.
- For West Wilts see - <https://www.westwiltsbka.org/beginners-course>.
- For Swindon contact - hobsonkathy3@gmail.com

Better Beekeeping

As beekeepers we take on the responsibilities similar to all those who manage livestock. Whether it be sheep, horses, poultry or bees it requires specialist knowledge, skill and experience. If you have been keeping bees for two years or more, you can prove to yourself and others that you are a competent beekeeper by taking the **Basic Assessment**.

If you already have the Basic why not learn more about bee diseases and how to manage them by studying for and taking the **Honey Bee Health Assessment**.

There will be more about becoming a better beekeeper in next month's Honey Bee Times.