

THE HONEY BEE TIMES



“I don’t feel very much like Pooh today,” said Pooh. “There there,” said Piglet, “I’ll bring you tea and honey until you do.”



Congratulations to Chris Rawlings who recently qualified as a Show Judge. The story of how he achieved this worthy accolade will be featured in a future edition of the *Honey Bee Times*.

As January brings the start of a new year, this month’s edition takes a look at what some of our members do in addition to managing their colonies. Their stories show us how beekeeping can take us in all sorts of unexpected directions: Lucie from Melksham tells us how she is resurrecting a neglected apiary at a garden centre (**pg 23**) and Jan from West Wilts shares how her foray into lino cutting was inspired by Carol Ann Duffy’s poem *The Bee Carol* (**pg 28**). Over in Kennet, Sherrill and Elaine give an account of their work in schools and how they generate an interest in bees and the natural world in children as young as four and five (**pg 29**). If you have a story you would like to see featured in a future edition of the *Honey Bee Times*, send an email to editor@wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk. Tickets for the **2026 BBKA Beekeeping Convention (17th to 19th April 2026)** go on sale at the end of this month, offering an extensive range of lectures and workshops which might inspire you to start working on entries for next season’s shows. The first is the **Royal Bath & West on 28th to 30th May**. If you have never considered entering a show before, maybe this year will be the year you decide to take the plunge. And finally, the flower calendar (**pg 43**) is sure to provide some inspiration for what to plant this year to support and encourage honey bees and other pollinators into our gardens.



THE HONEY BEE TIMES

What's On



International Day of Women in Beekeeping (IDWBK): 13th January 2026

Mrs Burney's Bee Club: 13th January 2026 (see pg 34)

**Somerset BKA Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Conference: 24th
January 2026**

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/yellow-legged-asian-hornet-conference-tickets-1976466398202>

**2026 BBKA Spring Convention, Harper Adams University: 17th
to 19th April 2026 <https://bit.ly/3Xw4vWs>**

Royal Bath & West Show: 28th to 30th May 2026

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day: 10th October 2026 Devizes Corn Exchange

National Honey Show Sandown Park, Esher: 22nd to 24th October 2026

Signing up for exams

If you are thinking of taking any of the BBKA exams, please talk with your branch education officer about what training is currently on offer throughout Wiltshire.

When you are ready to sign up to take the exam itself, email Alison Daniels.
membership@wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk

The National Honey Show 22nd to 24th October 2025



**Wiltshire Beekeepers socialising at the National Honey Show, October 2025.
Photo: Gloria Piltz**

Wiltshire beekeepers enjoyed some considerable success at The National Honey Show held in Esher in October 2025. Entries were received from all over the world but Wiltshire made its mark. When you consider there are 270 area associations and branches in the BBKA alone, this was a considerable achievement. Congratulations to all who entered and the following prize winners:



Gloria Piltz: Very Highly Commended for her practical invention relating to beekeeping

Gloria Piltz: Third prize: Beekeeping Limerick (see following page)

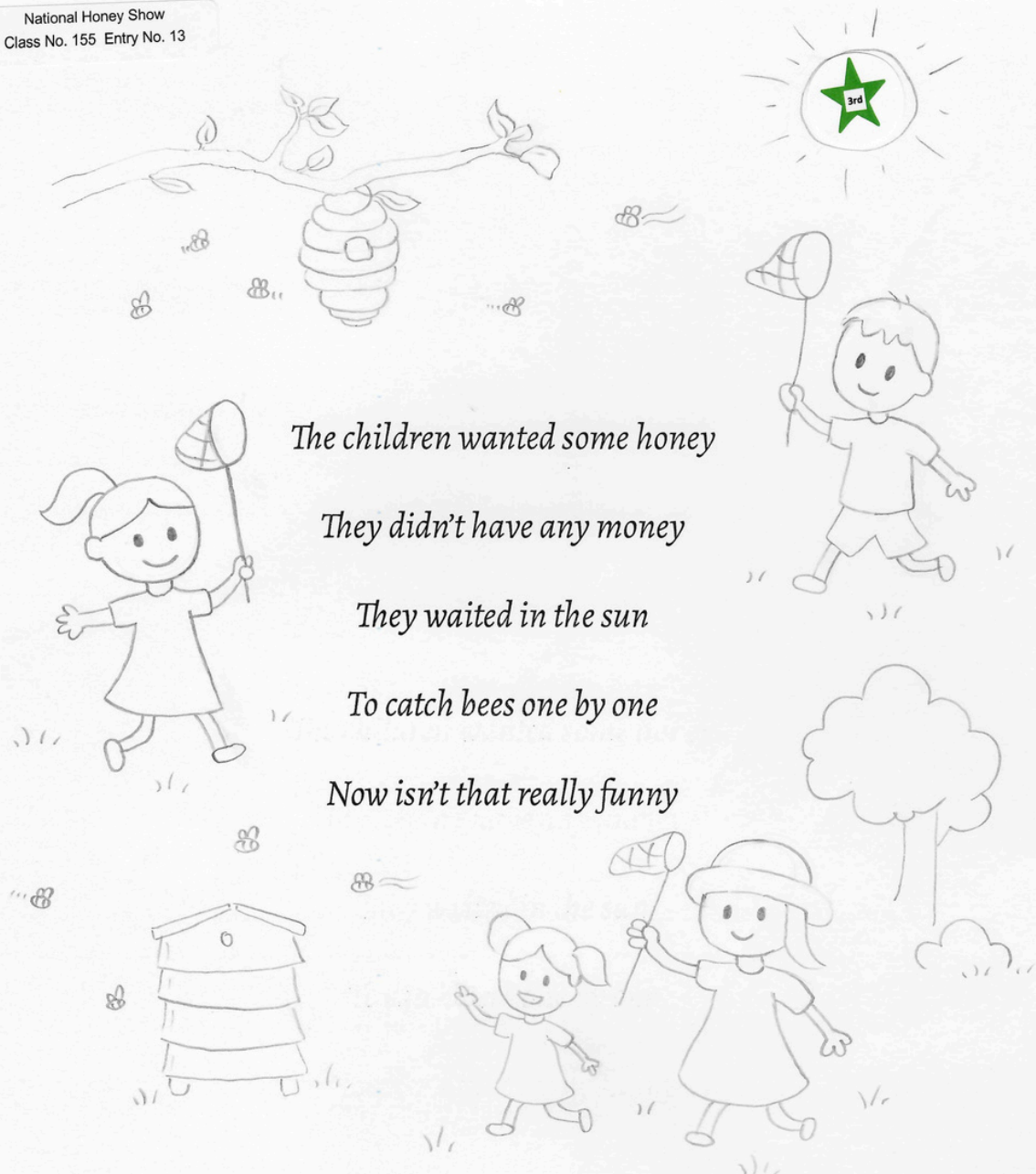
Gloria Piltz: Third Prize: Honey Sweets

Chris Rawlings: Second Prize Metheglin

Sue Rawlings: First Prize: Beeswax Flower Display

Liz Gwinnett: First Prize: Essay about an aspect of honey bee life

The Honey Bee Times: Third Prize in the newsletter category



Gloria won third prize in the National Honey Show for her limerick

In November 2025, the National Honey Show was one of 231 charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups to be awarded the prestigious Kings Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS). The Award acknowledges the hours of work and dedication given by the volunteers who work tirelessly to put on this show every October - the largest honey show and beekeeping convention in the world.

In flower...
Helleborus



**Photo: Hellebore in
November 2025,
Bodelwyddan Castle, North
Wales: Liz Gwinnell**

The genus *helleborus* includes about 20 species of hellebore including *Helleborus niger*, the Christmas Rose and *Helleborus orientalis*, the Lenten Rose.

Ranging in colour from white to green to red and almost black, this hardy flower provides a valuable source of rich nectar from autumn right through to spring.

The double flowered varieties provide less food for pollinating insects but some species offer protection to bees from the wind and rain while they feed.

In the Spotlight:

The Violet Carpenter Bee *Xylocopa violacea*



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

With the advent of warmer weather in Great Britain, the violet carpenter bee has been overwintering in Britain since approximately 2005. First recorded as breeding in Leicestershire in 2007, it is more commonly seen in southern Europe and Asia but is likely to become more visible in the UK with the milder weather brought by climate change.

The violet carpenter bee has a large shiny black body and violet-blue wings. It dwarfs a hornet in size and is roughly the same size as a queen bumblebee. Feeding exclusively on buttercup pollen, it nests in roof thatch, dead or soft wood, lays eggs in straw and favours woodland edges and meadows.

The violet carpenter bee is non aggressive and is often referred to as a gentle giant. It can be seen from early Spring to late summer in the UK.

Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Update



“Our Region is now firmly in the frontline”

This chilling statement was contained in an email received from Somerset BKA in December 2025 and reflects the threat the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet (YLAH) could present to the South West in 2026.

This year, 544 YLAHs were sighted in the UK with 162 nests destroyed. Two nests were discovered in Dorset but only after new queens had dispersed. This raises a concern that new colonies could be established across the South West from the Spring of 2026.

Somerset BKA urges us to think about what preparations we might make in anticipation of this threat and encourages us to attend their YLAH conference at the Canalside Conference Centre in Bridgwater on Saturday 24th January 2026 to learn more. Tickets are £15 per person.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/yellow-legged-asian-hornet-conference-tickets-1976466398202>



WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

As the 2025 season came to an end our apiary manager Den reported we have 14 strong hives going into winter. All of us wish to thank Den for his hard work in the apiary and Donald and Ruth who helped out with the bumper honey harvest this summer.

Following on from our local honey show and the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day in the autumn, several West Wilts members entered the National and did very well. Gloria Pilz was very highly commended for her practical invention relating to beekeeping and won third prizes for her beekeeping limerick and honey sweets. Chris Rawlings took second prize for his Metheglin, Sue Rawlings came first in the beeswax flower category and HBT editor Liz Gwinnell came first for her article about an aspect of honeybee life.



Sue Rawlings's beautiful wax flower display won first prize at the National Honey Show
Photo: Gloria Pilz

WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

This year we decided to introduce more activities during the winter months to encourage members to meet up out of season. We introduced a monthly meet up at The Pavilion Cafe, near our apiary site in Thoulstone, where members could get to know each other outside the apiary and outside our beesuits. The first meet up was in November followed by another in December. Both were very well supported and allowed members who had not been able to attend the apiary in the summer and new members to get to know their fellow beekeepers.



Simon brought his lovely dog Sacha along to our first Saturday meet up in September



Members enjoying lunch at The Pavilion Cafe, Thoulstone

WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

On a Saturday night in November, 20 members and their partners met in Westbury for a skittles match. The night was a great success with the women competing against the men. The overall winner was Roger Candlin, partner of new beekeeper Lucy, who had never played skittles before.



**Members enjoying a skittles night at
The Crown in Westbury**



**WWBKA's new Chair,
Danny Young**

WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

Our AGM took place at the end of November. We were thrilled to see Danny Young appointed as our new Chair and to welcome two new members to the Committee: Andrea Stickells and Tom Kenyon. Andrea will act as our membership secretary whilst Tom was recently appointed Yellow Legged Asian Hornet co-ordinator for Wiltshire BKA.

Cups won at the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day were awarded to members including the Teal Cup awarded to our President David Newell. This cup is given to an individual nominated by the Chair of WBKA for service or achievement of services to Wiltshire BKA.



Outgoing chair Alan presents the Teal Cup to David Newell at our AGM

We are looking forward to our annual beekeepers dinner at the end of January 2026 and to welcoming new members to the Beginners' Course starting on 16th February.

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

Even as the beekeeping season drew to a close, KBKA members continued to keep themselves busy in a variety of ways. Lisa Gates and Sandra Rogers both won Blue Ribbon awards at the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day and were invited to show their produce at the National Honey Show at the end of October: both were pleased to have the opportunity to show in a competition that gathers so many outstanding entries!



Lisa Gates (left) and Sandra Rogers with Devizes Town Mayor Jennie Britten at the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day 2025

Members continued to attend our monthly evening presentations: in October Jeremy Percy talked about threats to insect populations via the adverse impacts of expanding urban environments, the associated loss of suitable insect habitats and the use of household cleaning materials (check the warnings on the back of your washing up liquid bottles). Michael Bennett from the National Honey Monitoring Scheme visited in November and told us about his citizen science programme in which he is using environmental DNA to investigate the ongoing decline of wild bees and honeybees around England and Scotland.

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

We ended the year with a sociable and competitive Christmas Quiz in which the winners demonstrated a considerable amount of knowledge about all things bee-related: the winners scored an impressive score of 42/50, answering questions on both common and obscure topics. Whilst they won a KBKA printed mug, the rest of us took our reward from the tasty sharing plates provided by each team!



Quiz winners: Steve Double, Emma Morley, Dick Church, David Brown

Jeremy (our apiary manager) and a small team of regular attendees, have made great progress in continuing to renovate our apiary: they cleared a skip full of rubbish from our clubroom and have continued with the hard landscaping of the apiary: this was an overgrown piece of wasteland when we took over the site three years ago.

This team has built and kitted out a honey kitchen, a kitting up / storage room and Jeremy has also provided us with a permanent loo on site! More permanent storage space is going to be added to the club room (we already have tea & coffee making facilities) – and these will definitely improve efficiency! The honey kitchen has been well-used this year: members can extract their honey in a dedicated space without compromising their own kitchens.

KENNET BEEKEEPERS



Members have worked hard to make improvements to the apiary

Going into 2026, we are already well into planning for the year ahead: monthly talks are being scheduled (both on Zoom and in person (see our website for details); the first of our Introduction to Beekeeping courses starts at the end of February and a Preparation for the BBKA Basic Exam will begin in the spring. The club purchased two new microscopes last year - members can borrow these to examine their own bees and/or prepare for the BBKA microscopy exam held in the Autumn. In order to better understand the support that members would like from KBKA, we are also planning a series of mini-surveys via WhatsApp so that we can tailor our activities and resources appropriately.



Improvements at the apiary

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

We have a frame-making morning planned in January – this social event is a great way to ensure that new beekeepers can practice frame-making with support from more experienced members and that we are equipped with enough new frames for the season! Tea, coffee and cake are provided and there are plenty of opportunities to “chat while you tap” (the nails into the frames)! Sophie Butcher is running a candle-making masterclass at the end of the month and there will be a swarm management / collecting course in March.

Finally, KBKA has undergone a few changes of personnel: Andrea Waylen is now Chair, supported ably by Gemma Harris as Secretary. Gemma has hit the ground running and set up a KBKA Instagram account – visit us at [kennetbka](https://www.instagram.com/kennetbka). Roger Allen is our newest committee member: he has joined us as YLH / Asian Hornet Coordinator and is already planning to support the postcode registration of YLH monitoring stations maintained by our members.



**Kennet's new Chair
Andrea Waylen**

We're looking forward to a busy, productive and educational year ahead and send all best wishes for 2026 to our own members and those across Wiltshire.

Andrea Waylen, Chair

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS



Our October meeting was going to be an Open Forum but as the new WBKA AHAT lead, Tom Kenyon, was coming to introduce himself to us, we took full advantage of him to find out more regarding the Asian Hornet problem in the UK at the moment.



Tom Kenyon is the new YLAH co-ordinator for Wiltshire and spoke to us in November

Our AGM took place in November. Some changes have been made to our Steering Group. Tim Bullock stood down after seven years as chair and Stephen Greenaway has taken his place. Nicola Perrett and Justin Downes also stood down and were thanked for their service to the Club over the last few years. Janet Thomas has joined us. After the AGM Kevin Holt made us put on our thinking caps as he presented his bee related quiz – one round was B-related and one non bee related. It was great fun – and there were prizes!!!!



Photo: Canva

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

Bryan Hopper was our Club President for several years and, before he passed away, donated a Trophy to the Club to be awarded to a member who had gone above and beyond for the Club. The Steering Group unanimously agreed that Barry Roberts should be awarded the Trophy this year. Barry has taken on the role of Education Officer, ran the Starting Beekeeping Course, set up our new second Apiary (with Mick Carter) and mentored several new beekeepers - a very worthy recipient.



Tim Bullock (left) presents the Bryan Hopper Trophy to Barry Roberts (right)

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

We do not hold a Club meeting in December but at our Bee and Brew session on the 13th, we put on a Bee Related Artifact Treasure Hunt around TWIGS. There were 30+ items to find and when we checked our findings a discussion followed regarding the use for the items so it was a brilliant way to help our new members (and some of the established ones!!!). We then enjoyed mulled wine and homemade mince pies – tea or coffee for the drivers.

One of our members Ian Cowdy sadly passed away on the 8th November. Ian was a member of SDBKA for many years and was a member of the Steering Group for many of them. Together with Kathy Hobson, he was Apiary Manager at TWIGS for several years before starting the Club's second Apiary at Park Farm helping new beekeepers begin their beekeeping journey. He was also the Club's first AHAT lead. Ian was a very innovative beekeeper - some of you may remember his horse trailer apiary – there was an article in *BeeCraft* about this and when he was our Newsletter editor, there were always “Notes from the Bee Trailer”.



Ian Cowdy's bee trailer: photograph originally published in *BeeCraft*

Our 2026 programme has now been planned and we are hoping to book some good speakers in the year ahead. We will be inviting all WBKA members to join us and hope some of you will be able to come.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

Rowdefield Apiary – The Final Chapter

It has been a very busy time for MBKA. After much deliberation, the decision was made to close the old apiary at Rowdefield with a proposed closure date of Spring 2026. This came about as a result of comments made by the outgoing apiary manager that managing one apiary, let alone two, was difficult enough.

Although a few hives had been placed at the new apiary, there was still much work to be done. Despite this and despite the facilities being fairly basic, the apiary at Roundponds hosted three days of BBKA assessments for candidates from all four associations during the summer of 2025 under the expert eyes of two external BBKA assessors. I am happy to say that all the candidates passed! The assessors, realising the apiary is a work in progress, were very complimentary and thought it had the potential to become an excellent apiary.

The difficulty of having equipment spread over two sites prompted the new committee to bring forward the closure of Rowdefield. During two weekends at the beginning of November, a small band of MBKA members worked heroically at both sites to achieve not just the closure but also the clearance of Rowdefield and the housing of all the equipment at Roundponds.

On the first day, the remaining occupied hives had to be strapped up and transported to Roundponds before the working party could return to Rowdefield and start the clear up. The work included emptying and dismantling both sheds with the larger of the two earmarked for transportation to the new apiary. Then came the unenviable task of lifting the overgrown astro-turf. The upside to this was discovering many, large (and heavy) paving slabs underneath.



The first of two very necessary fires as Melksham Beekeepers clear the Rowdefield apiary site

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

By the end of the second day, the site was completely cleared. All viable equipment (and the paving slabs) were at Roundponds, and anything that was in very poor condition or no longer required was either burned or consigned to the “Skip Pile”



The tired but triumphant team ready to leave Rowdefield

The only task left to do was to take the trailer to Roundponds where it was left until the following day. Even the ashes had to be raked through to remove all the metal work.



Rowdefield before

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS



Rowdefield after: Rowdefield and the “Skip Pile” awaiting the arrival of a 6-yard skip and environmentally compliant disposal. The landowner was very pleased with the result of our efforts.

On the third day, a very small group (three men and an elderly woman), laid the floor and erected the sides of the shed at Roundponds. The roof, which had been recently covered in new roofing felt, was too heavy and it was decided to leave the shed until the following weekend.

The second weekend was, compared to the first, a walk in the park. Despite torrential rain on the Friday, the new site was still relatively dry underfoot and not too muddy. All that was required was the shed to be roofed and the internal shelving re-installed before the equipment could be divided between the two sheds and stacked in a much more orderly fashion.

The entire project took place over 4 days and involved some eighteen MBKA members, family and friends putting in approximately 98 hours. MBKA owes a huge thanks to all those concerned.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

There is still work to be done if the apiary is to be made ready for the practical elements of the Introductory Course, the Basic Assessment and the BBKA assessments in the summer of 2026.



The old shed resplendent in its new location at Roundponds

The final meeting of 2025 took place on the last Monday of November at Broughton Gifford Village Hall. For the last few years it has become something of a tradition as a social occasion and quiz night. The members who attended enjoyed a marvellous homemade buffet and the highlight of the evening was the quiz compiled and presided over by Andrew Tyrer. There was much good-natured banter and the evening concluded in the same vein when the winning team shared their prizes with the runners up and nobody went home empty handed. Even the left-overs of the buffet were shared!

This meeting brought to an end, MBKA's links with Broughton Gifford and 2026 promises to bring about many changes. Not only is it a new year, but we also have a new venue and a new meeting day.

**MBKA's first meeting in 2026
will be on Tuesday 27th January
in Bowerhill Village Hall,
Halifax Road,
Melksham
SN12 6YH
At 7pm**

Members' News



Taking on the Challenge

Whilst most beekeepers begin with a hive in their own garden, keeping bees away from your home if you are lucky enough to be offered a garden, an allotment or a field, may be the only option for some. Taking on hives of uncertain origin adds another dimension and with it, the possibility of not knowing what one is taking on. But this is exactly what happened to me last year.



The hives at the garden centre had been badly neglected

A local garden centre owned and run by a professional horticulturalist who is passionate and knowledgeable about plants, and also sympathetic to the plight of the insects that his nursery supports, needed a beekeeper to take over the running of his WBC hives. They had been carelessly managed, and somewhat neglected, and then abandoned suddenly with no records in late autumn – the worst time of the year to take on responsibility for a colony. Unable to properly inspect at that time of the year, I offered to husband the colonies that were widely dispersed across the garden centre site.

Taking on the Challenge

Seeing that their location was not easily accessible, the first job was to improve the access, the site arrangement and collocate the dispersed hives. With grateful support of Melksham branch members Shirley, Sarah and Terry, who were willing to help with the initial tasks, the hives began with the usual winter fondant, a varroa treatment and crossed fingers. We took the opportunity to move kit closer to the hives, to scorch and rewax available hive parts, paint the WBC lifts, and reorientate the hives toward the early morning sun on substantial flooring supplied by the nursery owner. However, by the beginning of the spring, we had lost two colonies to Nosema which, had it been identified at an earlier stage, might have been recoverable and might not have spread.

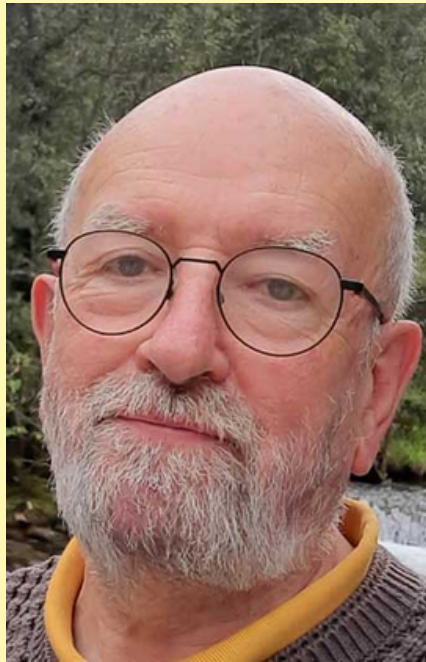


Poor comb management can significantly contribute to the spread of Nosema

The remaining strong 14x12 colony flourished, and by the end of the year it had been split twice. Having completed the Honey Bee Health assessment this year I was on constant lookout for signs of nosema, and chronic bee paralysis syndrome (CBPS) in particular, which has blighted so many colonies across Wiltshire this year. We have entered this winter with three new queens, and viable disease-free colonies on clean wax in scorched freshly painted hives. Not a jar of honey was extracted. But with patience the reward will come.

Taking on the Challenge

I was fortunate enough to hear the wonderful Jim Ryan speak at the National Show recently. In his lecture **Moving up from Small Scale Beekeeping**, he spoke wisely about the principles that apply to managing out apiaries. Whilst not all principles are highlighted below, I have included the ones I believe have the most relevance. I also acknowledge the contribution from our own Graham Davidson who has contributed greatly to my knowledge about taking on abandoned hives.



Jim Ryan gave a lecture at the National Honey Show highlighting the principles which should apply to managing small apiaries. Some of these principles are reproduced below.

Siting - Colonies must be away from where they could become a nuisance or where they could be seen by vandals or unscrupulous thieves. Do you know who else has hives around and about? Check with your branch.

Forage – Mono culture surrounding the apiary is not ideal. Bees need a variety of plants to forage on and flying long distances to find it reduces honey yields as the bees will use the nectar they have gathered as energy.

Taking on the Challenge

Access – must be good and ideally hard core. You are going to need to remove heavy supers at some point. You do not want to have to carry supers a long way to your car. Grass management should be considered at this point if tracks do not run up to the hives.

Position – visit the site to determine levelness, good morning sun, shelter from wind, protection from cattle, sheep or deer, air flow around the hive, source of constant water nearby but in a flood free zone.

Equipment – consider how you will keep essential equipment on or as close to the site of the colonies as possible. You will soon tire of carrying kit. You could use a spare hive or an 80l poly bucket with lid to contain smokers, hive tools, soda solution, fuel and lighters, Q marking equipment and cages, straps, and if you manage more than one out apiary, a beesuit and gloves. Remember if the site is unsecured and visible, vandalism or theft is always a threat.

Hives – Standardise your hive size for simplicity. A minimum of 4 supers per hive is recommended. Create good working conditions from the start when erecting hive stands.

These principles apply up to 3-4 hives. For a larger number of colonies, it is essential to include a permanent home at the site to accommodate the equipment required. If you are offered a site to keep bees and it is likely you plan to increase your stock, it must come with a lockable shed or building in which to store essential supplies.



Honeybees prefer a variety of forage

Taking on the Challenge

It is not difficult to manage bees at an out apiary if you consider these principles, but if any of them are disregarded, it will make the challenge of keeping them more difficult. My advice to anyone considering managing an out apiary would be to attend your training apiary for at least one complete season. Start small. Focus on one hive and on one colony. Learn the fundamentals of what bees do. Learn how to spin one plate before you try to spin ten! If you make mistakes, and there's not a beekeeper in the country who would admit to getting it right every time, then you are only jeopardising one colony. Consider the demands made on you and those you may need to make, if you take on too much, too soon.

Best of luck.

Lucie Castleman MBKA



When considering managing an out apiary, start small and attend at least one training session at your local apiary before you begin

Photograph: BBKA website



Winter Bees



Dame Carol Ann Duffy became the first female Poet Laureate in 2009 and held that position for ten years. Her first collection of poetry to be published in her new role was *The Bees*, in 2011.

This wonderful selection of poetry about bees includes *The Bee Carol*, a beautifully quiet poem set on a frosty Christmas Eve which invites the reader to go with her into an ice-locked garden to visit a hive of bees at midnight. The hive is silent beneath a dark starry sky and she takes a moment to send blessings to the winter cluster of worker bees shivering around their queen.

This wonderful poem has inspired Jan Gentaku of West Wilts to work on her first lino cutting which she hopes may turn out something like the image above which she has produced from her imagination using an AI graphics app.

Buzzing Around

In 2024, the BBKA set up a pilot scheme to encourage and support local branches to go into schools and speak to children about bees and beekeeping.

Elaine and Sherrill of Kennet Beekeepers registered their interest with the BBKA because, by then, they had already been going into schools for several years. The BBKA provided them with additional resources such as paper, young bee suits and allowed them to claim mileage.

“I have a passion for young children having been a teacher all my life,” Sherrill explains. “And we love teaching them about bees and the natural world. The idea is to get the children to enter the world of the bee. If the weather allows, we take scouts out into the playground where they look for a new home and return to class by making a beeline. Back in the classroom or “hive”, the children perform a waggle dance to direct the “bees” to their new home. In this way we introduce language and teach the children about the structure of a colony and what bees do.”



Sherrill teaching children about bees and flowers at the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Show, October 2025

Sometimes Elaine and Sherrill speak to a class together: at others, Sherrill will take a younger class and Elaine a slightly older. All their work is carried out in primary schools.

Buzzing Around

“I like to make an entrance,” Sherrill says. “Sometimes I will knock on the door of a classroom wearing a beesuit covered in felted honeybees. I tell the children I have lost all my bees and ask if they can help me find them. Immediately I have their interest and they can’t wait to tell me that the bees are on my suit! I then take the bees off the suit and give one to each child, asking if they will look after them for me.”



Sherrill's stand at the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day: each flower is scented and decorated with tiny, removable balls of pollen

“I usually dress up the teacher as the queen bee,” she says, showing me the outfit she has brought along to our meeting. “It gives the whole thing a reference point.”

Willingly, in the middle of a cafe in the countryside, she puts it on. She has a crown, to introduce the children to the concept of the queen, a deely bobber head dress to demonstrate the bees’ five eyes, a tutu, wings and a sting that is attached to the back of the costume.

“I always make sure the teacher knows what I am doing before I dress her up,” Sherrill laughs. “One day I had just dressed a teacher who then remembered she was on playground duty that day for the whole school.”

At breaktime, the children get the chance to taste honey Sherrill brings from her hives and this activity is supervised by the teacher who gives it to children on breadsticks.

Buzzing Around



Sherrill models her Queen bee outfit

The afternoon is taken up with other activities including talking about flowers and colouring them in and ends with a story about bees. All the children go home with a bee sticker and Elaine and Sherrill are both keen to leave something behind with the teacher to reinforce their activities. This is usually an age appropriate story book and information about where to find further resources.

“Beekeeping is a massive subject,” Sherrill says. “When I started off, I gave a lot of thought to what I could give to a five-year-old child whilst fitting in with the national curriculum. I keep it all lighthearted but it spreads the word about bees and beekeeping and the natural world and filters back to the parents. But even if it doesn’t, it’s introducing their generation to nature in a way they might not have encountered it before.”

Children enjoying painting activities



Buzzing Around



Elaine sometimes contributes to Sherrill's activities. At other times, she speaks to classes of older children. Whilst Sherrill tends to speak to children who are about four years old, Elaine's children tend to be older, usually around eight years old and able to understand some more complex aspects of the honeybee and beekeeping.

"I wear my bee suit when I enter a classroom," Elaine says. "With my veil up and puffing an unlit smoker. I pretend the children are bees and ask them not to sting me. This approach opens up all sorts of curiosity and conversations."

Sherrill models her full Queen bee outfit

During the summer months, bees are sometimes taken into schools by a third member of Kennet Beekeepers and carefully supervised in the playground but it is more usual for Elaine to take in a virtual hive with coloured pictures on the frames. The children dress up in beesuits and she explains what honeybees do.



Elaine encourages the children to identify which flower might produce the different colours of pollen

Elaine often takes a pollen board into schools to encourage the children to identify what flower might produce a specific colour of pollen in any given month. The group also work individually on activities such as identifying parts of a bee and flowers, all of which fall within the appropriate key stage learning. There are also other activities such as colouring in bees and word search games which ensure that all abilities are included in this fun section of the visit.

Buzzing Around

“Beekeeping crosses all boundaries,” she says. “It is multi cultural, unisex and open to all children regardless of colour or creed. They ask some wonderful questions and we hope that what we do may light a spark in them for the future or at least make them more aware of the world they live in, including how the bees help us to get our food and their place in the ecosystem.”

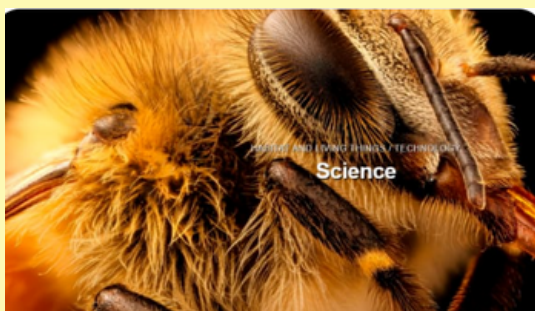


The BBKA has a host of resources for schools who might wish to integrate bees into the curriculum: photograph: BBKA

Elaine also speaks to cub groups who recently awarded her a beekeeping badge which she proudly wears on her beekeeping suit.

“The message we give is subliminal and delivered in a light hearted fun sort of way,” Sherrill says. “But what we are doing is spreading the word and I believe that beekeepers are the right people to do this.”

Elaine and Sherrill are often asked to return to the schools they visit or to visit other schools who have heard about their bee days.



Science

Bees in the Curriculum resource

BBKA's Bees in the Curriculum
<https://www.bbka.org.uk/Listing/Category/bees-in-the-curriculum>

Buzzing Around

Recently, Elaine checked with the BBKA to see how many branches had enrolled in the pilot scheme for visiting children in schools.

“At that time, only about nine branches had registered,” she says. “And yet there are 270 associations across the United Kingdom. It may be that people don’t know about the pilot scheme and we are happy to speak to anyone who might be interested and tell them more about what we do. It won’t suit everyone and it must be something people want to do. Just like the children, we sometimes have a few who don’t want to get involved in our bee experiences but it must always be a choice. No one should feel pressurised. Beekeeping is meant to be fun although for the children, there is a definite message being passed on which we hope might trigger a lifelong appreciation of the honeybee and nature.”

Anyone interested in learning more can contact Sherrill or Elaine at Kennet Beekeepers, or Erica Chalice at the BBKA, who is in charge of the schools programme.

Mrs Burney's Bee Club Tuesday 13th January 7:30pm

This talk is for anyone who is interested in teaching children about bees and beekeeping, whether that be engaging your own children or grandchildren with your hives, bringing children into your club apiary or visiting schools to talk to children. Debbie Burney will talk about what she has learnt over the last 4 years about beekeeping with children, tried and tested methods of engaging children about bees and how to adapt teaching to different age groups.

This Zoom presentation will be limited to 100 members and will not be recorded. [Register HERE](#)

The BBKA is inviting schools to visit their garden and education centre where they learn, through creativity and discovery, about the importance of pollinators, beekeeping and the natural environment.
<https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/category/school-visits>



Members' Photo Corner



Nina of West Wilts made these beautiful candles in December.

Nina says it is crucial to match the wick to the diameter of the candle to ensure even and consistent burning and that it is best to use a braided wick with beeswax. She also discovered that wax has a “memory” and how a pillar candle will need to burn for about two hours when first lit to ensure even burning on the second and subsequent occasions.

Do you have a photograph of bees/beekeeping or one related to beekeeping you would like to see featured in the HBT? Send them to editor@wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk



Photographs: Nina Wilton

Bees from the Past

Do you have a story to tell about bees or beekeeping in the past? Perhaps a grandfather or grandmother who kept bees or a story that's been handed down through the generations?



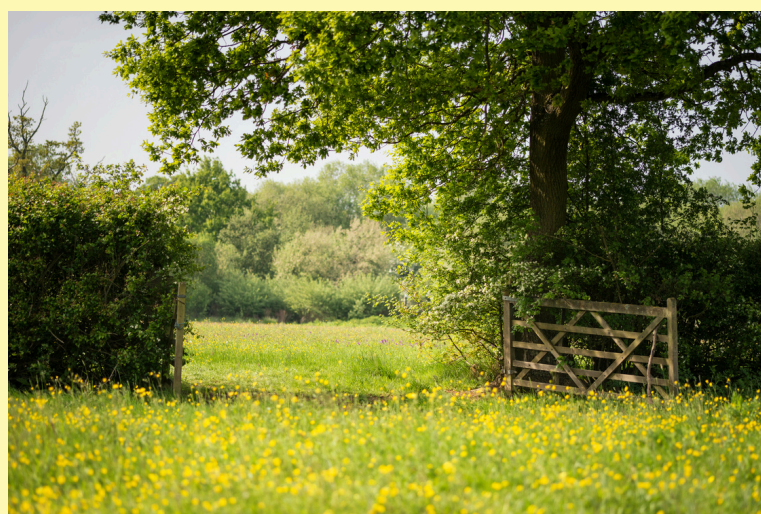
Please email contributions to
editor@wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk with
photographs if possible

Bees from the Past

Living in the heart of Wiltshire is one of the oldest beekeepers I have ever met. Born in 1927, Harry Philips's* first memories of standing in front of a beehive with his father were when he was approximately ten years old: in 1937, two years before the start of World War II.

Currently he is researching the history of his family who, for many generations, were farmers in Dorset.

“What you have to remember,” Harry says. “Is that the attitude towards beekeeping in those days isn’t what it is now. Most people were incredibly poor and bees were just something they kept, as they might keep chickens or a pig. It wasn’t a hobby or a pastime, it was a way of obtaining something cheaply that they could eat and was nourishing.”



Honeybees mostly foraged on wildflowers growing in fields and hedgerows before farming practices changed in the 1950s

Harry remembers his father talking about Isle of Wight disease which, during the years of WW1, devastated the British honey bee population and destroyed approximately 95% of it. The British government were so concerned about the effect this might have on the crops needed to feed the population that they embarked on a re-stocking drive, importing Italian and Dutch bees from Europe.

Bees from the Past



Acarapis woodi is a mite which lodges in the honeybee's trachea and causes acarine disease. It was called "Isle of Wight disease" when it was first identified in Britain in 1904. Between 1914 and 1918, it eradicated 95% of the native British black bee population.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

"I remember my father talking about it," Harry continues. "People chose Italian bees in the 1930s but my father used to say they were too lazy, always waiting for the sun to come out. In those days, the common belief was that bees pollinated everything. Now we know a lot more, but not everything, about pollination. We still don't fully understand, for example, exactly how much the honeybee pollinates an apple tree or the exact proportion of pollination bees are responsible for."

Harry's family were farmers and always kept bees. His father had a bee hut where he kept his equipment and made up hives and frames. And when his father came back from World War 1, he gave it to Harry.

"My father had a honey extractor," he says. "But it was quite a crude, hand operated thing. His bees were kept in WBCs, bought as flat packs and made up at home. The WBCs were quite cumbersome to work with and it wasn't until the Nationals came along and superceded them that beekeeping was made a little easier. Some of my hives are about 70 years old. They are made of red cedar, which doesn't rot."

Bees from the Past

These days, Harry no longer actively manages bees and his son has taken over management of the two hives kept on their land. However Harry vividly remembers his early beekeeping years when he learned all he knew from his father.

“My father never wore a bee suit or gloves,” Harry says. “He wore a veil, a piece of material loosely wrapped around a hat, but that was it. We didn’t buy bees, we waited for a swarm to come along and housed it in the hive. The way bees were managed was very different in those days: there was no talk of management. It was just something people did. You caught the bees, you put them in the box and hoped they’d move on or die out in the autumn when you’d move in and take the honey. Honey wasn’t filtered either. You just cut out the bad bits and put it in the cupboard. Honey was also good way for preserving fruit.”

During his lifetime, Harry has seen many changes in agriculture and landscape which have affected honeybees and the way in which they forage.



Beekeeping practice has changed significantly over the last 100 years
Photograph: British Bee Journal: 1916

Bees from the Past

“What most people wanted was pure clover honey,” Harry continues. “In the old days, there were vast meadows and pastures filled with clover and wildflowers. Some of those fields had never been ploughed. There were water meadows, too, where the channels were cut by hand. Up until the 1850s, all arable land was “folded” by sheep. They grazed in the meadows one year and the following year, the field would be planted with corn. The year after that, the field was left to lie fallow. That was the system. The sheep fertilised the land and played a big part in the management of the meadows but this no longer happens. Water meadows and flower meadows have disappeared and have been planted over or built on.”



Britain has lost 97% of its flower meadows in Harry's lifetime



White clover was coveted as a foraging plant in days gone by

Bees from the Past

Yet more changes came along in the 1950s when farming underwent significant changes with the introduction of mechanical equipment, larger fields and pesticides. This eliminated the pastures of clover, and wildflowers growing in hedgerows, which honeybees in Great Britain had foraged on for hundreds of years. And despite these radical changes, the honeybee adapted.

“Beekeeping is considered a hobby these days or run as a business,” Harry says. “But years ago, people lived off the land and honey was a source of nourishment which cost practically nothing to produce. The attitude towards beekeeping changed when the middle classes realised that keeping bees was a good and healthy thing to do and got them outside in the open air.”



Beekeeping is today considered a hobby rather than an essential part of country life

Bees from the Past

One of the things Harry would like to see change is the emphasis given to the recording of honey yields and how they differ from year to year.

“There used to be much more emphasis on this in the beekeeping world,” he says. “I have records dating back forty, fifty years but no one seems to be interested in honey yields any more. And yet, years ago, it was featured quite prominently in the BBKA magazine. I think beekeeping is in danger of becoming too technical, too managed. In the old days there were no clubs, just a couple of old men sitting around in huts talking. Its origins were humble, almost primitive.”

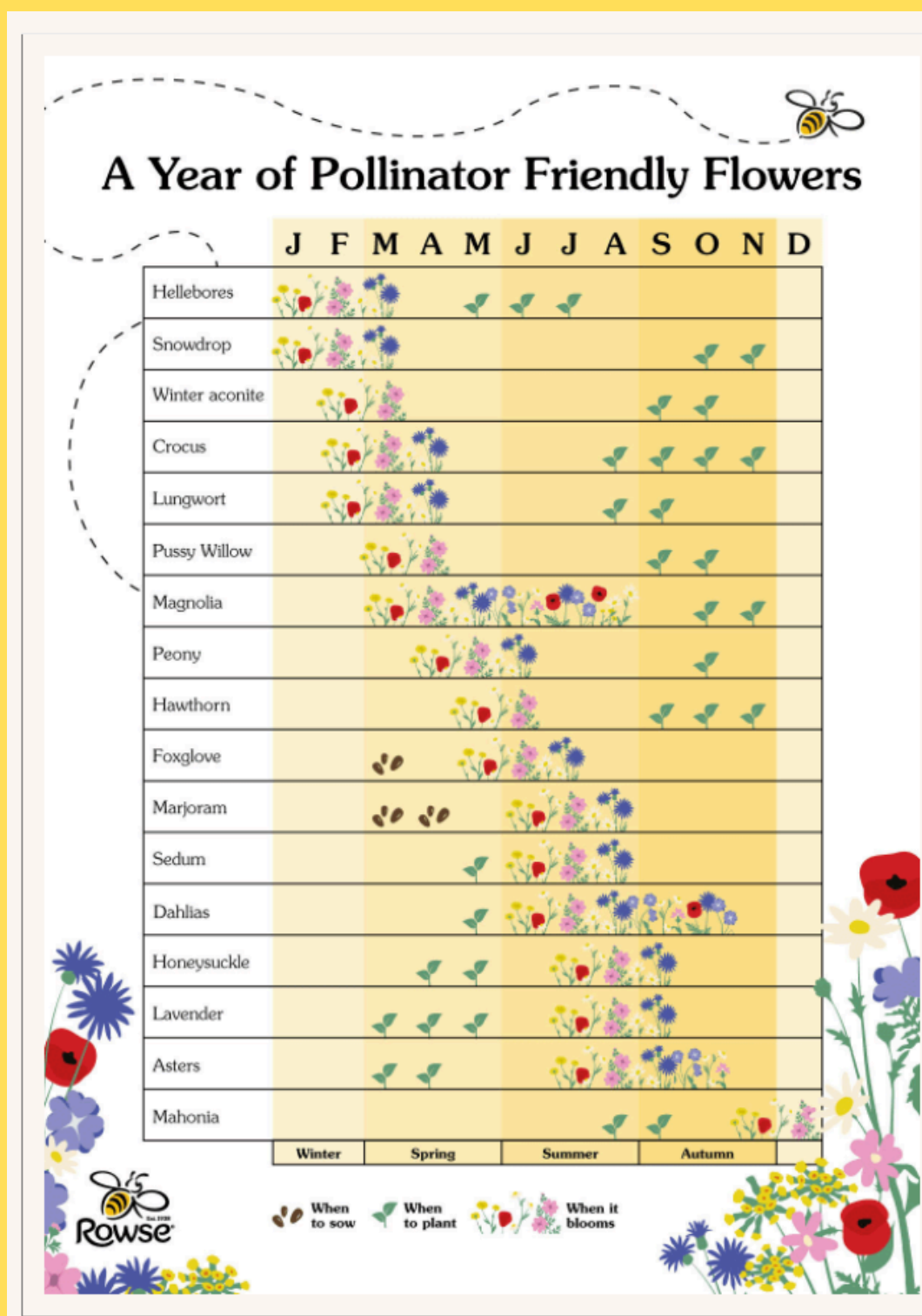


There used to be much more emphasis on honey yield in the UK

“I think it’s because of the way people view keeping bees,” Harry says. “It used to be much more simple. Now everything is technical and computerised. I telephoned the *BBKA News* magazine and asked why they don’t ask beekeepers to send in details about their yearly honey yield like they did years ago.”

And are they going to change anything?

“Well,” he laughs. “They thought it was a good idea.”



This calendar is reproduced from the BBKA website and is provided by Rowse Honey. It shows the best times to sow and plant bee friendly flowers and the month in which they will flower. Rowse Honey's website also provides a wide range of useful information about nature tips, sustainability and recipes: <http://bit.ly/48MgSDT>



Did you know....

- A single lime tree in flower (linden tree) provides the same amount of forage as 32,292 square feet of wildflower meadow (roughly the size of a football pitch).
- Some flowers have dark lines called honey guides, which show up under ultra violet light. Scientists believe these help honeybees and other insects find their way into flowers, as ultra violet light falls within the spectrum of light visible to their eyes.

Visibility

Nectar guides are sometimes visible to humans; for instance, the **Dalmatian toadflax** (*Linaria genistifolia*) has yellow flowers with orange nectar guides.^[8]

However, in

some plants, such as the **meadow buttercup** (pictured to the right), they are visible only when viewed in **ultraviolet light**. Under ultraviolet, the flowers have a darker center, where the nectaries are located, and often specific patterns upon the petals as well. This is believed to make the flowers more attractive to **pollinators** such as **honey bees** and other **insects** that can see ultraviolet light.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nectar_guide.

And finally.....

Honey Scones



Rub 225g self raising flour with 50g unsalted butter and a pinch of salt.
Mix in 1 beaten egg, 25g caster sugar and 2 tsp of honey and mix to a stiff dough.

Roll out the dough to 2cm thick and use a 6cm cutter to stamp out the scones.

Place on a greased baking sheet and cook in the middle of the oven at 200 C for 12-15 minutes until risen.

To serve: split each scone in half and smother with butter and honey.

***If you have any recipes or tips you would like to see featured in The Honey Bee Times
please email them to editor@wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk***



Wiltshire BKA

Honey Bee Times is a Wiltshire Beekeepers Association production. Wiltshire Beekeepers Association (WBKA) is a registered charity and a member of the British Beekeepers Association.

The WBKA has four branches and organises events and education for beekeepers in Wiltshire. Registered Charity Number 1198735.

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