

THE HONEY BEE TIMES



The grateful hum of bees; the very voice of Spring
Alice Morse Earle (1851-1911)

It's that wonderful time of year again: the start of a new beekeeping season. Perhaps many of you will empathise with the sentiments expressed in the extract from *The Practical Bee Guide* of 1904 (**page 43**) which seems to express this time of year so perfectly despite being written over 100 years ago. For those of you who have lost colonies over the winter, take heart from Jeremy, apiary manager at Kennet's article (**page 32**). Losses across the south west seem to have been particularly high this winter but Jeremy's article reminds us all that by the end of the season, things could be much improved.

The beginning of the new beekeeping season also means the start of the honey show season, with the first taking place at the Bath & West showground at the end of May. Judging at these shows is entirely voluntary but involves intense training: see Chris Rawlings's article about the trials and tribulations of becoming a show judge (**page 27**). Last year, the honey show section at the worldwide honey festival, Apimondia, was cancelled due to concerns about fake honey. What is fake honey and how is it threatening the honey industry? (**page 44**). And with an influx of new members joining our branches this season, associations may wish to consider how to manage the potential for adverse reactions to bee venom (**page 35**). Enjoy this exciting time of year and happy beekeeping season!



THE HONEY BEE TIMES

What's On



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

Talk by Roger Patterson: Colony Increase and Queen Rearing for Local Needs: The Tawny Owl, Swindon (organised by Swindon District Beekeepers Association): 30th April 2026 at 7.30pm

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

NB: Honey Show Entries close on 4th May

Invasive Species Week: 22nd to 28th June 2026

Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Week: from 7th September 2026

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

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

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

WBKA AGM and The Effect of Climate Change on Honeybee Management: 17th February 2026



Geoff Blay MB of Somerset Beekeepers gave a talk on the effect of climate change on honeybee management after the WWBKA AGM

35 members of Wiltshire Beekeepers attended the AGM at the Corn Exchange, Devizes, on the evening of Tuesday 17th February 2026. Afterwards, Geoff Blay, Master Beekeeper from Somerset Beekeepers, delivered a fascinating talk about the effect of global warming on honey bee management.

Global warming, Geoff explained, is the driver behind climate change which alters the patterns of our weather systems and makes them more variable. He emphasised that in order to understand what impact this is having on our colonies, we need to notice what is happening outside the hive. Inspections, he suggested, are no longer just about looking for queen cells but observing how plants and trees are flowering earlier every year and understanding the effect this could have on honeybee behaviour.



WBKA: AGM and Talk: 17th February 2026

Various organisations, Geoff explained, keep records of phenology - the study of seasons and nature - in order to understand more about the effect climate change is having on our natural world. These record, for example, when the first swallow is seen or when the first of a species of insects is observed. Geoff also keeps his own records studying the snowdrop, hawthorn, horse chestnut and ivy in his garden as typical benchmarks for each season.



The hawthorn tree is flowering three weeks earlier than it did in the early 1980s

According to the BBC, spring is the fastest changing or warming, season, but not every spring will be the same. The weather in the spring of 2024 was very wet, in spring of 2025 it was dry. One of the characteristics of global warming is its variability from year to year. So if climate change is affecting the natural world around us, what effect is it having on our honey bees?

Honey bees are triggered by many different signs, including weather, but also the amount of UV light in the atmosphere and the height of the sun. As the beekeeping season now extends into autumn, the ivy flow, the last true flow of the season, is happening a lot earlier, triggering the bees to prepare for winter much sooner. With warmer autumns and winters, the bees remain more active for longer and will need more stores to sustain them. Those stores will also need to last longer.

WBKA: AGM and Talk: 17th February 2026

Traditionally, the main honey flow peaks in July and honey bees have evolved to take full advantage of this with colony numbers expanding as forage increases. But if they are emerging earlier in the spring and building up earlier, there is a risk that after a colony has swarmed, the new virgin queen may go out on her mating flight before the world is ready for her. This could result in her not mating or not mating properly, resulting in a “stale” queen or a drone laying queen. Conditions for establishing a drone congregation area (DCA) need to be exactly right if successful mating is to occur: The temperature needs to be 20 degrees celsius or above on consecutive or at least every other day with still conditions or only a very light breeze.



Conditions for establishing a Drone Congregation Area need to be exactly right for successful mating

The survival of the colony after swarming depends entirely on the new queen and if she doesn't mate properly or successfully, it may fail.

One solution, Geoff suggests, is to delay swarming by introducing new queens early in the season. This will ensure a strong presence of Queen Mandibular Substance, which will suppress the swarming instincts of the hive.

Climate change is also affecting the behaviour of other insects, such as wasps, which are staying around later in the season and becoming more persistent. This can cause a serious threat to a colony, particularly if the entrance is restricted by a traditional mouseguard through which wasps can attack and sting.

The evidence of climate change is all around us but if we learn to read the signs in nature, we will be better able to understand the behaviour of our colonies and help them adapt and survive.

In flower...
The Bluebell
(Hyacinthoides
non-scripta)



The bluebell is a much loved sight in our woodlands at this time of year: one of the early spring flowers that provides a vital source of nectar and pollen. Whilst the tubular shape of the flower can cause problems for the honeybee with its shorter tongue, they often bite a hole in the base of the flower to access the nectar without pollinating the plant. The bluebell is primarily pollinated by bees with longer tongues such as long tongued bumble bees and other species of solitary bee.

In the Spotlight: Solitary Bees



Solitary bees need our help. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

This month's focus is on solitary bees from bumble to mining to yellow faced. Whilst we, as beekeepers, tend to focus on our honeybees, solitary bees could also do with our help. Our insect population is in severe decline and the solitary bee is at risk like never before. When we introduce colonies of bees into our gardens or create out apiaries, we might give some thought to what effect this is going to have on solitary bee colonies when 60,000 honeybees start competing with them for food.

We can help redress the balance by planting plenty of flowers of different types: foxgloves, hollyhocks and bugle for the mostly longer tongued species of solitary bee, and cornflowers and birds foot trefoil for our honey bees. We might also put up solitary bee houses which can be made at home by drilling holes into non splintering wood. To help bumble bee queens, see page 46 for how build a simple nest in early spring.

Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Update



The Yellow Legged Asian Hornet is a noticeably dark insect

On 17th March 2026, Lucie Chaumeton, a BBKA trustee, gave a surprisingly optimistic talk about the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet (YLAH) and outlined the action plan in place for the UK this year. This focuses on raising public awareness and monitoring.

Lucie's interest in the YLAH piqued in 2023 when a YLAH nest was discovered less than 5km from her home in Hackney. Since then, she has been actively involved with the efforts to resist the spread of this invasive insect.

Lucie believes that the unique response by the UK to the YLAH problem is the key to its success. This consists of the National Bee Unit (NBU) being tasked with eradicating the insect by an intensive system of track-and-trace, which is in itself reliant on the public reporting sightings. Her only criticism is that the government have portrayed it as a beekeepers' problem when it is a potential problem for everyone living in the UK.

Think you've seen an Asian Hornet? Report it!

Insect	Scientific Name
Asian Hornet	<i>Vespa velutina</i>
European Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>
Wasp	<i>Vespa vulgaris</i>
Honey Bee	<i>Apis mellifera</i>

Report through the Asian Hornet Watch app or www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport

Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Update

The YLAH is an extremely successful insect with a voracious appetite. Each nest will consume around 11 kilos of insects a year - equivalent to the weight of a car tyre or one full honey super. Whilst analysis of its stomach contents have shown a preference for honeybees, all insects are at risk. When the worldwide insect population is at an all time low, this poses a serious threat to pollination, fruit and vegetable production and agriculture.



A YLAH nest consumes 11 kg of insects a year: the equivalent weight of a full honey super. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The UK does appear to be in a unique position compared to countries such as France, Spain and Belgium, where the YLAH has reached high densities. This is firstly because we have a government initiative: tasking the NBU to eradicate the YLAH, and secondly because we have the advantage of new AI technology which was not available to those countries at the outset. In 2025, for example, 50 of the 160 nests located in the UK were found thanks to ROBOR deployment (Rechargeable and Reuseable Radio transmitters used for tracking). This, the NBU estimated, reduced the time spent tracking and tracing by approximately 25%.

Lucie also believes that the efforts of the NBU in tracking and tracing are working, but will only work if everyone continues to monitor and report findings back to the NBU using the Asian Hornet Watch app. And this is where everyone can play a part: raising awareness of the YLAH by putting up posters, giving out cards at shows or when they sell honey and encouraging people to install the Asian Hornet Watch app on their phones. And, Lucie, suggested, we should make it clear that we are not doing it because we are beekeepers, but because it is a national problem which involves everyone.

Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Update

There will be several national campaigns this year:

- **22nd to 28th June 2026: Invasive Species Week**
- **W/c 7th September 2026: YLAH week**

Wiltshire BKA is advocating monitoring populations by using simple wick stations. These are placed on a windowsill where you can observe the comings and goings throughout the day. The focus is on attracting queens (and workers later in the summer) so that they can be tracked back to the nest. (Any YLAHs which are trapped must be handed over to the NBU. It is illegal to keep or re-release them.)



A simple wick station placed on a windowsill will allow observation throughout the day.

Lucie advocated, in particular, that points of entry such as ports, distribution centres and large fruit and vegetable markets, should be monitored regularly, as should race courses and riding stables for, it seems, the YLAH likes to travel in horse boxes. Track and trace is the remit of the NBU but, by actively monitoring everywhere we can, vital information can be fed back into the programme.

We have not seen the rapid jump in nest numbers other European countries experienced in the early days of increasing density. The progression of the YLAH in Europe is estimated at 60 to 80km a year. Whilst in the UK 2023 and 2025 were “surge years”, progression here is much lower than expected. And whilst the incursions in 2025 were further inland, most of the nests were isolated and density has not yet reached problematic proportions. Only one apiary in the UK has lost colonies to the YLAH, and that was during the surge in 2023.

Have you seen this insect?

Yellow-legged hornet (aka Asian hornet) *Vespa velutina*



What is it?

A highly aggressive predator of native insects that poses a significant threat to honey bees and other pollinators. Originally from Asia, in 2004 this invasive non-native species was accidentally introduced to France where it has spread rapidly and into neighbouring countries. Since 2016 a number of sightings have been recorded in the UK.



Slightly smaller than the native European hornet. May be confused with other species, shown below in actual size for comparison.



Where might I see it?

May be seen on flowering plants, around beehives, around rotting / fermenting fruit and protein, and at street markets attracted by sweet fruit and fish stalls. Active February to November across England and Wales.

This insect stings, do not disturb an active nest.

Please report sightings immediately with a photo:

- with the iPhone and Android recording app: Asian Hornet Watch
- online at: nonnativespecies.org/asianhornet
- by email: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

Find out more and report a sighting:



For more information on invasive non-native species visit: nonnativespecies.org

One of the posters available from the BBKA:
email Teresa Middlebrook at outreach@bbka.org.uk

The key areas to focus on are raising awareness and monitoring. The BBKA members hub on their website contains a wide range of information that can help with this: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/>

[Watch Lucie Chaumeton's update here](https://memberhub.bbka.org.uk/course/view.php?id=210)
<https://memberhub.bbka.org.uk/course/view.php?id=210>

WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

Our apiary manager, Den, has reported that 15 colonies and one top bar hive have successfully come through the winter. This was particularly good news given the winter losses the South West of England appears to have suffered this year.

The first session of our 6-six week Beginners course started on 16th February with 16 new members attending. We are looking forward to seeing them at the club apiary sessions which start again on 11th April.

Throughout the winter, we have enjoyed various social events which were planned to ensure our members continued to meet up “out of season”. Our monthly meet ups at The Pavilion Cafe, Thoulstone have proved popular and will resume again in October.



Left: Jan and her gorgeous dog Roshi Bob, joining West Wilts members at a Saturday meet up. Below: members enjoy some early Spring sunshine at The Pavilion Cafe, Thoulstone



WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

On 28th January, we met for our annual dinner at The White Hart, Corsley where 25 members enjoyed good food and good company. After dinner, Ms Tree aka our member Jan, put on a delightful magic show for our entertainment.



Members enjoying our annual dinner at The White Hart, Corston



“Ms Tree” entertaining West Wilts Beekeepers (Photos: Andrea Stickell)



WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

Our final social event of the winter season was a quiz night which took place in late February. Members attended with their partners with the promise that not all questions would be bee related! Despite it being a wet and dark night, 14 of our members turned out and enjoyed an entertaining evening at The Crown in Westbury. The winning team were presented with a trophy and the losers won a wooden spoon.



Members enjoyed a quiz night in February

Members have enjoyed our winter programme of social events but now that the new season is upon us, are very much looking forward to returning to the club apiary and getting down to the serious business of managing the bees!

We are looking forward to welcoming our new members. For existing members who might wish to polish up their beekeeping skills, Chris Rawlings will be running our Improvers Course. This is Chris's last year in the role and anyone who wishes to take the assessment this year should sign up and learn from Chris's wealth of knowledge and experience.

In the meantime, all members would like to thank our apiary manager for his excellent work in managing the bees at our club apiary throughout the autumn and winter.

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

Kennet have been as busy as ever, even though our Chair absconded to the southern hemisphere for a month - something about family and bees in New Zealand and wine in South Africa - no surprise there then!

In the meantime, Gemma and Jeremy have been out and about, spreading the word on bees in response to a request from the Muddy Boots Kennet group which provides support for Beyond Dementia (formerly Alzheimer's Support) to give a talk on beekeeping to clients and their carers. Jeremy and Gemma took up the mantle and went along with beekeeping kit and honey! Unsurprisingly there was a range of attention and capacity but informal feedback indicated that the talk and demonstrations / tasting were very well received – this can, I think, be seen in the pictures below.....



Giving a talk for Beyond Dementia: even the dog liked the honey!

I'm pleased we were able to support this request: in previous newsletters we've noted the great work that KBKA members undertake with schools, beavers and cubs and being able to visit those at the other end of the age range shows that we really are able to engage with all members of the community, at whatever stage of life.

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

Jeremy, our apiary manager, has been busy with a work party assembling the new racking system at the training apiary (we will be able to find what we need now!) and finishing off the hard landscaping in the apiary itself. Some furniture removals are also in the offing! We have also bought a 4G weather station for the apiary so that members can access weather data over their mobile phones and, if they wish, note associated bee activities.



The new racking system at the Kennet training apiary



Kennet have installed a 4G weather system at their apiary which connects to members' phones and allows them to check weather conditions and note bee related activities

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

Jeremy has also contributed a couple of pieces to this edition of Honey Bee Times, covering winter losses (**Keep Calm and Carry On - see page 32**) and a lovely piece of writing from an old beekeeping book about Spring in the apiary (**page 43**). The Association apiaries have not escaped this curse of winter losses and neither have others. You may have seen the recent BBC news piece on losses in the south west. It is undeniably another issue running alongside all the other challenges that bees and beekeepers face.



Finishing off the hard landscaping in the main apiary

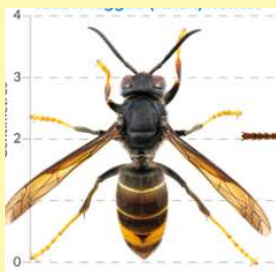
We have started our Beginner's theory course, run over six Thursday evenings and presented by Andrea, Emma and Jeremy. This includes one evening dedicated to foraging, presented by Richard Rickitt and two dedicated apiary sessions where new members can "get their hands in a box of bees". Our "open apiary" practical sessions for all members began in late March at the training apiary.

KENNET BEEKEEPERS



Richard Rickitt presented a foraging talk to new members as part of the Beginners Course

In March we had a “two for one” talk at the monthly club meeting - these are held on the first Wednesday of the month between 7 and 9pm at Bishops Cannings Village Hall. This included an update from our Yellow Legged Asian Hornet coordinator, Roger Allen, who spoke about the clear threat to bees and other insects in Wiltshire. Members were also able to collect a free YLAH monitoring station (or a top up of attractant for members who already had one). These have proved to be very successful in enabling members to keep a lookout for YLAH and also observe other insects that appear.



Roger Allen spoke about the threat from the YLAH at the monthly club meeting

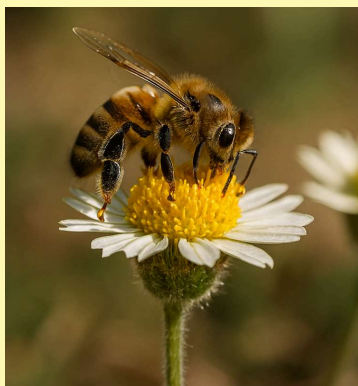
Following this, Jeremy gave a timely practical demonstration on how to deal with queen cells and swarms, aimed primarily at early years beekeepers.

Andrea Waylen: Chair, Kennet Beekeepers Association

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

Apiary Updates

The winter period has brought mixed fortunes across SDBKA's two apiaries. At TWIGS, both colonies purchased in spring 2025 failed to survive the winter. One colony showed evidence of a late supersedure, with only a small cluster and an unmarked queen remaining. Plans are now underway to repopulate the site with our home-reared nucleus colonies from our second apiary, each headed by queens bred from the Association's own stock. This marks a step change in being able to re-populate our apiary and teaching stock from our own SDBKA raised queens and nucs: something which, as a club, we are looking to develop in the coming year.



Winter brought mixed fortunes at Swindon's two apiaries

By contrast, our operation apiary continues to perform strongly. Nucleus colonies remain active and healthy, with bees flying on favourable days and relying primarily on their own stores. A green woodpecker was observed in the apiary during a cold spell, coinciding with minor damage to one of the nuc boxes, but no further issues have been reported.

Education and Member Development

January and February saw renewed emphasis on education and skills development. Members were encouraged to prepare for the season by checking equipment, assembling frames, and monitoring food stores as brood rearing increases. The Chair also reminded members of the importance of responsible beekeeping practices, including regular inspections and disease awareness.

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

The Association celebrated examination successes, with Matt O'Dell achieving a credit in Module 1 and a pass in Module 2, and Barry Roberts passing Module 5. Study groups are being organised for SDBKA members wishing to undertake the Basic Assessment in 2026, with practical sessions taking place at our club apiary all through summer at our regular Bee & Brew mentoring and social weekends.

February also brought the annual Telford Beekeeping Show, where members enjoyed lectures, demonstrations, and the inevitable temptation of new equipment. A particularly well-received session was delivered by Ian Stepler, focusing on the strategic value of maintaining a “nuc battery” to enhance apiary resilience. This is something the Club began to explore last year and has helped us recover from colony losses over winter.



SDBKA members found Ian Stepler's talk at the Beekeeping Show in Telford helpful and informative

At the February club meeting, members were treated to an insightful and meticulously delivered presentation by Barbara Dalby, whose long-standing experience in beekeeping and hive-derived products made for an engaging and highly informative session. Her talk, Products of the Hive, explored the remarkable breadth of materials produced by honeybees and the many ways in which beekeepers can harvest, process, and make use of them **(see page 39)**.

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

Looking Ahead

The programme for 2026 has now been finalised, with plans to welcome a range of speakers and extend invitations to WBKA members. The Association will also host a series of Taster Days in May, July, and August, offering prospective beekeepers an introduction to the craft with early bookings and take up promising.

Colony Increase, Queen Rearing & Varroa-Sensitive Hygiene: A Special Training Day with Roger Patterson and Steve McGrath

On **30th April**, SDBKA will host a significant and forward-looking training event featuring two highly respected figures in British beekeeping: Roger Patterson, well-known author, educator, and long-standing practical beekeeper, and Steve McGrath, a leading member of BIBBA with specialist expertise in Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH) and varroa-resistant breeding.

The session, arranged following detailed discussions between Roger and the Association, will combine an evening talk (open to all WBKA members) with a practical half-day workshop for SDBKA Members only, offering members a rare opportunity to deepen their understanding of sustainable stock improvement.



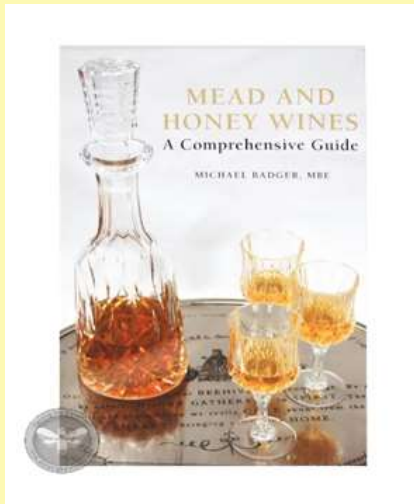
Roger Patterson is giving a talk on 30th April to which all Wiltshire members are invited (See “What’s On” page).

For members with long-standing links to Ron Hoskins’ work, the inclusion of VSH identification will be of particular interest, offering a chance to connect past local innovation with current national and scientific developments.

The day promises to be both highly practical and strategically important, supporting Swindon BKA’s ongoing efforts to strengthen local beekeeping, improve stock quality, and promote resilience in the face of evolving challenges. July’s *Honey Bee Times* will feature a full summary of these important beekeeping events.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

MBKA certainly started 2026 on high: our first meeting at the new venue was a splendid way to kick off the New Year with an excellent demonstration by Chris Rawlings on mead-making. Chris shared his expertise and gave us many tips and tricks to make mead, melomel and metheglins. He also brought several bottles to share with us, including some of his prize winners in national competitions. This was our highest attended meeting for some time with 50% of the membership in attendance. It inspired many of us and there will undoubtedly be more mead entries in the honey shows later this year. Judging by the number of rosy cheeks and smiling faces at the end of the evening, it also raised spirits and managed to banish the January blues.



Chris Rawlings's talk on mead making inspired many members. Will there be an increase in mead entries from Melksham at honey shows this year?

Chris has certainly thrown down the gauntlet, and it will be good to see how many MBKA members rise to the challenge. Granted, he made it sound simple, just 3lbs of honey and 6 pints of water, sterilised demijohns and a bit of yeast. Methinks it is a bit more complicated than that!

He very kindly recommended a book which I am sure will find its way into many homes: **Michael Badger's MEAD AND HONEY WINES** (see above). It really was an inspirational evening, Many thanks Chris.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

A few days later, the inaugural meeting for the running of the training apiary was held in the King's Arms, Melksham. MBKA now has a core group of people, a clear method of communication and a plan for the inspection regime. A BIG thank you to the people who came to the meeting and to all those who have made a firm commitment to assist throughout the season. The apiary is certainly going to be a lively social space going forward.

To maintain the idea of having meetings that give members lots to think about and inspire them to start making plans *before* the main 'bee season' is upon us, we invited another member of WBKA to come and talk to us in February.

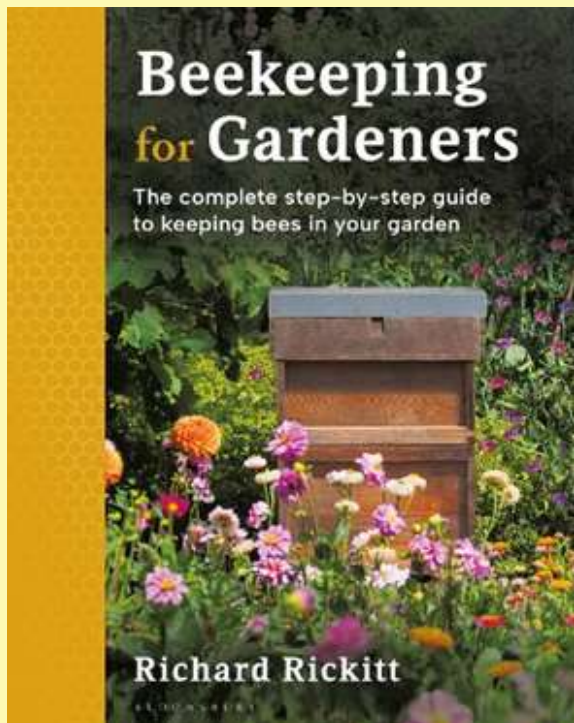
Richard Rickitt, a very well-respected beekeeper and author, came to talk to us about Trees and Bees. As beekeeper at Westonbirt, he ought to know a thing or two about that! A fascinating insight into an aspect of bee foraging which is often overlooked. Thank you, Richard.



Richard Rickitt, who gave a talk to Melksham in February, is beekeeper at Westonbirt Arboreteum (above). Photo: Wikimedia Commons

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

Richard brought copies of his book [Beekeeping for Gardeners](#) and was kind enough to sign copies. This latest publication has been widely recognised by Bee Master Anne Chilcott as *‘Not just a gem of a book, but the jewel in the crown’* and by RHS Wisley’s Mark Tuson as *‘one that will be highly recommended to horticultural students and one that will be making its way into the RHS library’*.



**Richard Rickitt's book was a finalist in the
Guardian Media Guild Award in 2024**

Meetings aside, it has been a busy couple of months for concentrating on education at MBKA. The introduction to beekeeping course was well attended and all the theory sessions have now been completed. Our new recruits are now champing at the bit, waiting for the weather to improve and for the practical sessions to take place.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

In addition, we had a Module 3 Study Group running. Good luck to all candidates taking modules at the end of the month.

A Basic Assessment study group starts in April. If you are thinking of taking the assessment, get signed up quickly. Revision and preparation are much easier when you are working in a group of like-minded people. **Don't forget, the closing date for applying to take the assessment has been brought forward to May 1st this year.**

With the apiary appearing so prominently in last year's Honey Bee Times, it would be remiss of me not to give you another update. The apiary is getting off to a good start this season. All bar two colonies have survived and seem to have decided that it is already time to get the the queen laying in earnest; the foragers are getting out there and bringing back pollen. This enthusiasm wasn't even dampened by the attentions of a green woodpecker, who decided to give several hives extra entrance holes.



Green woodpeckers have visited both Melksham and Swindon's apiaries this winter causing minor damage. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

A small working party then spent an enjoyable morning filling in the holes and giving all the hives a very fetching chicken-wire overcoat. This seems to have done the trick and there have been no more woodpecker holes.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

Recently, the usual tasks have been carried out with queen excluders being put back, supers removed from below the brood boxes, etc, etc. Despite only being recently set up, the apiary is beginning to look well established and, with the luxury of having two good sized sheds, there is room to do work inside when the weather isn't particularly pleasant. The first weekend in March saw a large group turn up for a very convivial couple of hours to make frames, clean and scorch boxes. Tasks become almost enjoyable when you are doing them with others and certainly the opportunity to chat and find out about our fellow beekeepers is well worth a little bit of manual labour for the benefit of the club apiary.



Melksham members are looking forward to a talk about honey labelling and regulations at the end of March. Example honey label: E.H. Thorne

We are looking forward to a presentation on Beekeeping and the Law on 31st March. This will be a wonderful opportunity to find out about the rules and regulations which apply to honey jar labels, responsibility/ownership of bees and which agencies and statutory instruments hold and determine responsibility for the welfare of honeybees in the UK. It promises to be a very informative evening.

Diane from The Bee Depot will also be in attendance supplying kit and this year's queen marking pens - WHITE. Diane can be contacted at diane.sleigh@thebeedepot.com or call 07879 811967.

Alison Daniels
MBKA Chair

Members' News



My Judging Journey by Chris Rawlings

It was Wiltshire Honey Day 2021 and I was watching the judging being carried out by Hazel Blackburn. She was so methodical, organised and structured and made it look easy. I started talking to Hazel about what she was doing. It was worlds away from my experience of entering exhibits at shows and I realised how little I knew about the judging process and what it involved.

I thought well, it's another branch of beekeeping which I have not done, so far, at 71 years. Have I left it too late?



Sue and Chris Rawlings have won many prizes and run workshops at Honey Shows throughout the country

Photo: National Honey Show

My Judging Journey

Hazel's reaction was "You should have done it twenty years ago, but we need new judges so why not give it a go? And, by the way, you need thirty 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place cards from honey shows and more than one hundred entries just to register and get your record book." (the "Blue Book").

Well, I thought, that's easy. I already have those. And then I realised that many of the awards were achieved jointly with my wife Sue, and needed to be in my name only.



Chris's portfolio

I then entered most classes at the Bath and West, the Somerset County Show and Wiltshire Honey Show, and within a short time I had my starter. My Blue Book was delivered and the registration fee paid. I also downloaded the syllabus and started to organise my training.

Training is done by stewarding for qualified judges at major shows, who ask you to complete the return winners slips for the show stewards, fetch and carry whatever he/she requires, wash mead glasses and glass rods, wet cloths for keeping hands clean, replace exhibits on the show bench, and at the same time, listen to their comments about the exhibits.

My Judging Journey

I had to telephone judges or honey show organisers and ask if I could steward. Not easy when there are others trying to do the same. I applied to the National Honey Show and was allocated to Steve Guest, a Cheshire Judge, as his steward, because he has a reputation for heather honey judging, and as we don't have heather in Wiltshire, I needed the experience of a judge to help me fill the gap.



Chris spent hours stewarding at shows to become a honey show judge

Each time I stewarded, I entered the show in as many classes as I could because I had to get another 75 placement cards in 12 different categories i.e. honey, wax, comb, commercial, frames etc.

Everything is recorded in forms kept in the Blue Book with judges recording how many classes I judged, the number of entries in each class and what method I used. Once they had done this, they signed the form.

To date, I have stewarded for 17 Judges all over the country. I have judged at smaller honey shows e.g. Melksham, Swindon, Kennet amongst others, many of them “open judging”. I must say thank you to them for allowing me to gain experience.

My Judging Journey

To learn how to judge, I must ask questions about methods used. Most judges allow trainees to taste the honey and the mead.

During my training, I had to acquire a full collection of judging items such as scales, magnifying glasses, a refractometer, tasting rods and glasses for mead, matches to light candles, a lightweight suit for judging nucleus hives, a judge's coat and hat, spare untinted reading glasses, DB grading glasses, etc. etc.

And then, in 2025, after three passes and one failure by qualified assessors, I booked a final assessment at the National Honey Show. I was not permitted to enter the competition, except in the mead classes, or steward or be present during the judging.

On the morning of my final assessment, I was directed to a small room with my extensive judge's kit including hat and coat. Present were two final assessors, a mediator, and a judge, (Steve Guest), who was hoping to become a final assessor.



Chris learns from a honey show judge

After an explanation, of the procedure we all went to the show bench where I was to judge a class for "sections". I was so nervous I could not place the lid on one of the sections and Sue Carter, one of the assessors, offered to become my steward to put it back on for me. I made my decisions and we moved on to a heather honey class. My extra efforts to train for this class paid off, and I was able to judge it satisfactorily.

My Judging Journey

After that it was back to the little room and a round of questions and answers from the assessors, which I was relieved to complete. It took about 3 hours in all and everyone was pleasant and helpful throughout. Waiting for the whole process to be agreed and ratified took another 2 weeks but eventually I received the email that I had passed. Sigh of relief!!



After five years of hard work, Chris has qualified as a honey show judge. Congratulations!

My name will now join the list of National Honey Judges and I will be available to judge any honey shows in the country. However, I will not be allowed to issue a Blue Ribbon until I have judged at the National which takes place in October 2026. Hopefully I will get an invite.

I would like to say thank you to all who have helped and encouraged me over the last 4 years, particularly Hazel Blackburn and Suzi Perkins.

The funny thing is that last year, my diary was full with stewarding and assessment appointments and this year, it is almost empty as I wait for someone to ask me to judge for them!

Chris Rawlings

Winter Losses: Keep Calm and Carry On!



I hate this time of year in the beekeeping calendar!

You go into the winter with strong colonies that are well fed with plenty of stores. You have treated for varroa, given fondant as a precaution and the bees are in a nice, dry and well insulated hive with a relatively young queen. And then, come spring, the hive is ominously silent. Having a quick look under the crown board reveals a cold and lifeless interior.

It's a lottery. Very similar hives in an apiary survive differently and for no apparent reason.

So what are the common causes of colony loss and what can we do to reduce them?

Varroa with its attendant Deformed Wing Virus: follow an annual monitoring and treatment regime.

Cold and damp hive: address with open mesh floor and insulation. Avoid placing hives in damp areas.

Blocked entrances: check and clear throughout winter.

Starvation: feed well in autumn, heft during winter, place fondant over feed hole as a precaution.

Isolation starvation: remove queen excluder before winter, reduce hive size so that bees can keep it warm and reach stores in upper boxes.

Weak colonies: unite colonies in autumn to increase size and strength.

Nosema: (yellow or golden streaks of dysentery on entrance and tops of frames): change brood frames on a 3 year cycle.

And last but by no means least: **Queen failure:** re-queen regularly.

Winter Losses: Keep Calm and Carry On!

Studies in Europe show that Yellow Legged Asian Hornets hunting outside a hive reduces foraging significantly, preventing the bees from emerging and leading to starvation. Last year's biblical amounts of wasps in some areas (including at both the Kennet Association apiaries) also dramatically reduced foraging behaviour, and I do wonder if that has contributed to our winter losses as the bees were able to take advantage of a late flow of Ivy honey once the wasps had reduced in number, leading to frames full of honey that the bees find difficult to consume.



Did a surplus of wasps last autumn contribute to winter losses?

It should perhaps come as no surprise that there are any number of reasons for colony loss, some of which are outside our control. At last year's Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day, Roger Patterson said that queen failure is increasing year on year, and I would agree: my experience over the last couple of decades or so backs this up.

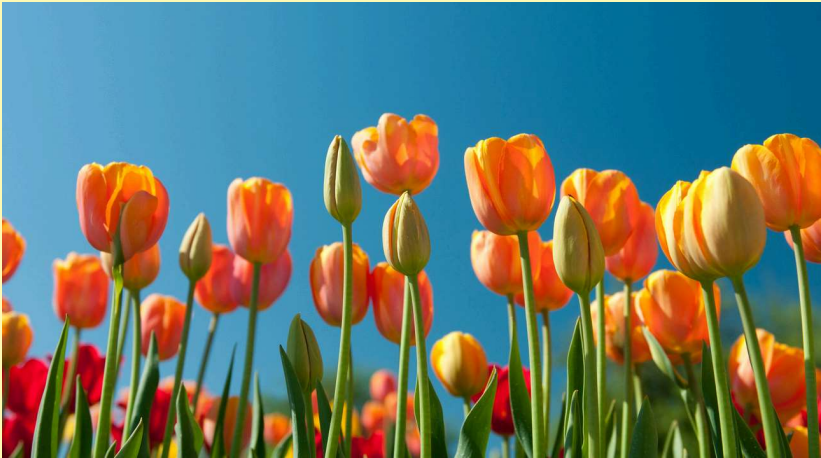
We sometimes forget that we are facing a global insect Armageddon and the figures speak for themselves: colony collapse disorder, bugs and viruses, pollution in all its forms, habitat loss and so on. And whereas the valiant worker bees are replaced, having lasted only 6 weeks or so through the summer, our poor queens are stuck in the hive for 3 or 4 years, surrounded by goodness knows how many 'forever chemicals' and other nasties bought in by the workers, which become trapped in the wax.

Winter Losses: Keep Calm and Carry On!

The annual survey of colony losses shows that anything from 10% to 30%+ is the norm and I've known really excellent beekeepers who have lost almost every colony over winter.

So do not be despondent if you have lost colonies. Provided you have followed the rules above going into winter, you should not blame yourself. It is the way of things in nature (and not helped in recent times by mankind).

And with the Spring comes a renewal of hope and enthusiasm as the cycle begins again.



Spring brings a renewal of hope as the seasonal cycle begins again

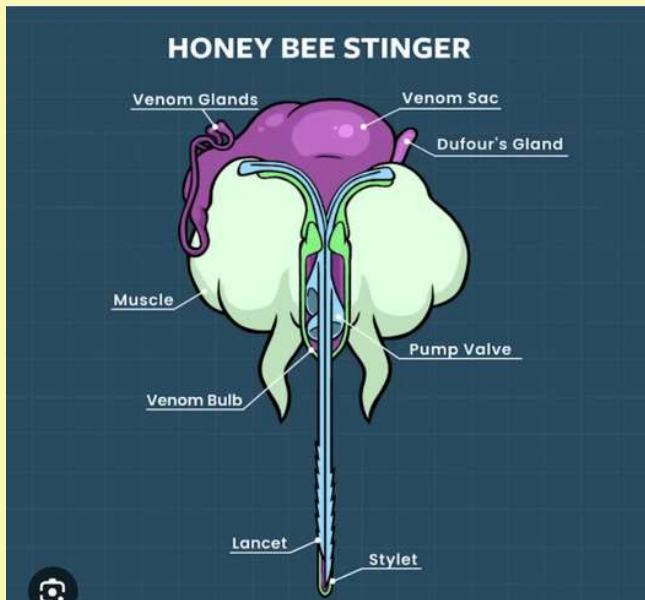
Be prepared to change out those old dark brood frames and you can be assured that the only thing on your mind shortly will be how to deal with all those early swarms! Oh, and once it's warm enough, mark any new queens whilst you can find them more easily.

Jeremy
Apiaries Manager KBKA

A Sting in the Tail

Anaphylaxis and Bee Venom Talk: 20th January 2026

On 20th January, 2026, the BBKA hosted an online talk delivered by Dr Paul Turner and Professor Claire Behune. Dr Turner is Professor of Anaphylaxis, Paediatric Allergy and Clinical Immunology at Imperial College London and Chairperson of the WAO Anaphylaxis Committee. Professor Bethune is Honorary Professor and Deputy Head of the Medical School at the University of Plymouth, and lead investigator for the Ubees Study researching beekeeper responses to stings.



The worker bee's sting is a highly developed defence mechanism producing a venom which can provoke an extreme reaction in human beings

Dr Turner and Professor Bethune are working on understanding more about why some people react to stings and bites whilst others have little reaction. They are interested in hearing from beekeepers who might wish to take part in a study to explore this further: follow this link to the BBKA page which gives more information about the study. It will also allow you to watch this talk if you missed it. <https://memberhub.bbka.org.uk/course/view.php?id=199>

A Sting in the Tail

One of the concerns for the beekeeper is the reaction that can come from a bee sting. Even beekeepers who have experienced stings over many years can suddenly develop an adverse reaction.

anaphylaxis UK

Be Allergy Aware & Save a Life

Anaphylaxis is a serious and life-threatening reaction to allergens such as food, insect stings, medication and latex.

Recognise the **ABC symptoms** and act quickly - you could save a life.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	WHAT TO DO
A AIRWAY <ul style="list-style-type: none">Swelling in throat, tongue or upper airwaysVocal changes [hoarse voice]Difficulty swallowing	Lay the person flat and raise their legs - do NOT allow them to stand or walk anywhere. <ul style="list-style-type: none">If unconscious, place them in the recovery positionIf breathing is difficult, allow them to sit up supported
B BREATHING <ul style="list-style-type: none">Sudden onset wheezingBreathing difficultyNoisy breathingPersistent cough	Administer adrenaline without delay (use prescribed AAI or intranasal EURneffy) Refer to device label for instructions.
C CIRCULATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">Dizziness or feeling faintSudden sleepiness, confusionPale clammy skinLoss of consciousness or collapse	Phone 999 and tell them the person is suffering from ana-fil-ax-is
	If symptoms don't improve after five minutes, or symptoms get worse, a second dose of adrenaline can be given

These severe symptoms may occur alongside milder skin, mucosal or gut symptoms.

Anaphylaxis may occur without skin symptoms [e.g. hives or swelling].

Medical observation in hospital is recommended after anaphylaxis.

www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

anaphylaxis UK

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Anaphylaxis UK is a charity registered in England and Wales (1049521) and in Scotland - charity number SC026395.
A positive future for people with severe allergy.

It seems that beekeepers (and people in general) fall into two categories:

- Those who get a mild reaction when stung by anything including honeybees e.g. mild discomfort and itching at the site which only lasts for a short while.
- Those who experience a more severe reaction when stung by anything, including honeybees, which provokes a prolonged reaction e.g. swelling in the local area.

A Sting in the Tail

The doctors advised that it is people falling into the second category who may be more likely to develop an adverse reaction to honeybee stings and their studies suggest that this group of people are the most vulnerable to developing a more extreme reaction as time goes by: anaphylactic shock.

Anaphylactic shock is a reaction by the whole body to being stung, not just a discomfort in the local area. It is essential that paramedics attend as soon as possible to administer adrenalin.



EpiPens are prescribed to those who have experienced anaphylactic shock

The overall message is not to be overly alarmed but to be aware of the risk, particularly in club apiaries, and to have a plan to manage it.

Every club apiary should have two plans: one which will be activated if someone who has never experienced anaphylactic shock before is stung and reacts badly, and a second for those who have had an anaphylactic reaction in the past.

All members should be familiar with the plans which should be displayed in a visible place. The names of first aid trained members should also be displayed in a prominent position.

EpiPens will be prescribed to those who have had a previous extreme reaction and so it is important that new members and those who may have suddenly experienced a reaction after years of interaction with honeybees, make others aware of this.

EpiPens can only be prescribed to a named person and apiaries cannot simply keep them on site for emergency use. However if the person is not able to administer their EpiPen, another member can do so. It is unlikely, the doctors advised, that they would face prosecution for saving a life.

A Sting in the Tail

The following points are suggested as helpful guidance to all club apiaries.

- The branch should have two plans: one for those who have never experienced anaphylactic shock and one for those who have had an anaphylactic reaction.
- All members should be familiar with the content of the plans, particularly new members.
- The name of branch first aiders should be clearly displayed.
- All new members should be asked whether they have experienced any extreme reactions to stings in the past and if so, whether they carry an EpiPen.
- Anyone who exhibits signs of anaphylactic shock should be laid down with their feet raised and 999 dialled immediately. Paramedics will carry adrenalin.
- Most branch apiaries are in the middle of nowhere. It is a good idea to display the What3Words identification at the apiary. This can help the person calling the ambulance to convey an exact location to the emergency services.
- Those who suffer a mild and local reaction do not need to receive medical treatment.
- Anyone who suffers from an anaphylactic episode should be prescribed an EpiPen. They can also engage with an allergy clinic and consider undertaking a course of immunotherapy. [Allergy UK](#) and [Anaphylaxis UK](#) can offer further guidance and support.

The BBKA plans to issue guidance on its website, including posters and graphics to raise and encourage awareness of anaphylaxis amongst beekeepers.

Products of the Hive: A Presentation by Barbara Dalby



At the February club meeting, SDBKA members were treated to an insightful and meticulously delivered presentation by Barbara Dalby, whose long-standing experience in beekeeping and hive-derived products made for an engaging and highly informative session. Her talk, *Products of the Hive*, explored the remarkable breadth of materials produced by honeybees and the many ways in which beekeepers can harvest, process, and make use of them.

Barbara began by emphasising a central theme: the hive is far more than a source of honey. While honey remains the most recognisable and commercially valuable output, she reminded attendees that bees generate a suite of substances, each with its own biological purpose, chemical complexity, and practical application for beekeepers.



**Honeycomb: a beehive is more than
just a source of honey**

Products of the Hive: A Presentation by Barbara Dalby

Honey: More Than Just a Sweetener

Barbara opened with honey, discussing its formation, natural variations, and the factors influencing flavour, colour, and moisture content. She highlighted the importance of correct handling and storage, noting that responsible extraction preserves both quality and the bees' welfare. Members appreciated her practical guidance on preventing fermentation, managing crystallisation, and presenting honey attractively for sale or show.



Beeswax: A Versatile, Under-Appreciated Resource

Moving on to beeswax, Barbara outlined its production by young worker bees and its essential role in comb construction. She demonstrated how clean, well-rendered wax can be transformed into a wide range of products, including:

- candles
- furniture and leather polishes
- cosmetics and balms
- reusable food wraps

Her examples underscored how even small quantities of wax can be put to good use, and she encouraged members to value wax as a premium material rather than a by-product.



Propolis: The Hive's Natural Defence

Barbara then explored propolis, the resinous substance bees collect from tree buds and sap flows. She described its antimicrobial properties and its role in maintaining hive hygiene. For beekeepers, propolis offers opportunities for:

- tinctures
- salves
- natural remedies
- varnishes and wood treatments

Her discussion balanced scientific insight with practical advice, making the topic accessible even to those unfamiliar with propolis processing.



Products of the Hive: A Presentation by Barbara Dalby

Pollen and Royal Jelly

Although less commonly harvested by hobbyists, Barbara provided a clear overview of pollen and royal jelly, explaining their nutritional significance within the colony. She touched on pollen traps, ethical considerations, and the niche markets for these products, while emphasising that colony health must always take precedence over commercial interest.



Left: Royal Jelly and above, pollen: Colony health must always take precedence over commercial interests. Photos: Wikimedia Commons

A Well-Received and Inspiring Session

Members responded warmly to Barbara's presentation, praising both the clarity of her explanations and the breadth of her knowledge. Her practical examples offered inspiration for beginners and experienced beekeepers alike, and many left with renewed enthusiasm for exploring the full potential of their hives.

The evening served as a timely reminder that beekeeping is not only about colony management but also about celebrating and making use of the extraordinary materials bees create. Barbara's expertise illuminated just how rich and varied those materials are. Barbara very kindly provided SDBKA members with a multitude of at home recipes for people to try, from polish to cough tinctures.

Matt O'Dell: Swindon and District Beekeepers Association

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?



This month's contribution comes from Jeremy, Kennet's apiary manager, which he found in 'The Practical Bee Guide' of 1904. "The language is lovely and the sentiments sweet," he says and it certainly seems to sum up that wonderful feeling all beekeepers experience when they first see their bees emerging after winter.

**If you have a story to tell or something about bees
or beekeeping you have discovered from the past,
please email it to
editor@wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk with
photographs if possible**

Bees from the Past



“The Bee in Spring – Signs of Survival”

“Throughout all the long wintertime, the living mass clinging to the hive-combs has maintained life and warmth. The bees of the cluster have been steadily changing places; those on the outside passing to the centre of the sphere, their places taken by those within in steady rhythm. Now, with the lengthening of the days, as the sun, in genial humour, peeps through the open door and gives to the long imprisoned inmates assurance of kindlier conditions without; the bee-man, watching for signs of survival, delights to see the first one, and then another, and presently many of his little pets appear upon the alighting board. Discreet in their new found joy, they risk no long excursion, nor venture overmuch. Scenting the freshness of the air, they seem to revel in it, and the heat and light which stir the life in them. They move about the entrance; examine the doors and porch; meet and salute each other; and rising, fly for a moment in front of the hive. A gladsome hour this for the bee-man also; an infectious happiness. He knows now that snow and storms, and all the frost and cruel winter hardships, have failed to work their devastation within the little home which his foresight and loving care secured and sheltered before the falling leaves had left the branches bare. With each succeeding sun the bees in larger numbers move abroad – creatures “fanatically cleanly” who will suffer much and long and yet refuse to sully the purity that their incessant care preserves within the hive”.

The Practical Bee Guide, 1904

Faking It



In the 1970s, my father was one of the founding members of CAMRA - the Campaign for Real Ale. This was, in essence, a group of real ale enthusiasts who got together to save real ale at a time when it was seriously at risk of being lost in the deluge of mass produced keg beers manufactured by companies such as Watneys and Courage.

Why did they bother? Real ale is completely different from beer produced on a mass scale. Real ale is a living, cask-conditioned, unpasteurised, and unfiltered beer that continues to ferment in the barrel. By contrast, beers such as Watneys Party Seven were a pasteurised, mass-produced, filtered, and artificially carbonated "keg" beer, designed for convenience, stability, and home consumption in the 1960s/70s.

Parallels can be drawn with today's honey industry. Making cheap "fake" honey is a slick, universal, billion dollar business and threatens to sink the genuine, naturally produced version.

There are two ways, it seems that this fake honey is being produced, with China suspected of being one of the main players. The first is by adding additives like sucrose syrup - additives which mimic the trace elements naturally present in honey. This allows the substance to pass quality control tests. There are sophisticated laboratories dedicated to this task - tell them what you want and they will add it. Want a honey with a heather pollen footprint? No problem. Traces of clover? Come back next Tuesday.

Faking It

The second method involves shutting honeybees into hives and preventing them from going out foraging. Here they are fed on a diet of sugar syrup. Every so often a plane flies over and drenches the hives in a chemical concoction of antibiotics to eliminate any diseases. And when the “honey” is extracted from the comb, it is treated at very high temperatures to remove any residual nasties destroying, in the process, all the natural enzymes and goodness associated with honey.



In 2023, the European Commission found that 46% of the honey it sampled was suspected to be fraudulent.

This so called “honey” is then sold cheaply in supermarkets.

Until recently, there was no definitive test which could determine “fake” honey”, but there is now a test (costing £200) which looks like a good possible. (An article on Metagenomic DNA analysis follows soon.)

There are many people campaigning to save “real” honey (including Lynne Ingram of Somerset BKA) and on 30th January 2026, Radio 4 featured a disturbing investigation into the fake honey market: “[The Honey Trap](#)”. It is big business, making billions of dollars for companies whose practices appear compliant on the surface and who present a genuine profile to the general public.

So why does it matter? It matters in the same way that real ale mattered when it was at risk from keg beer. It matters because it undermines beekeepers, making it impossible for genuine producers to compete with cheap imports. It matters because it is a product tied to ecosystems and pollinators and for consumers, it matters because it erodes trust and removes informed choice. Many would like to see a CAMRA type campaign set up to champion “real” honey. In the meantime, the public are largely unaware that what they are buying for 90p from supermarket shelves is not honey and does not contain any of the goodness they believe honey contains. And that, surely, is fraud.



Did you know....

- Beeswax can support 40 times its own weight in honey
- The “Manchester” honeybee has been used as a symbol for the city for over 150 years.
- Bee boles were recesses in a house or garden wall in which skeps were placed to protect bees from the weather
- Old wives tales recommend lime blossom honey to aid sleep and sunflower honey to treat fevers

How to build a bumblebee nest

wildlife
watch

Scottish
Wildlife
Trust

You will need:

- terracotta flower pot



- trowel



- dry grass or moss



- sheltered spot that gets some sun



(preferably under a bush)

- 1 Dig a small, shallow hole under a bush. Your chosen site should not get too hot or too cold, and be in sun for about half of the day.



- 2 Fill the flowerpot with dry grass and/or moss.



- 3 Half-bury the flowerpot upside down in the hole. Position it at an angle so that the hole in the bottom points out.



Illustration: Louise Widdall © Copyright Scottish Society of Wildlife Friends (SSWF)

www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

Help emerging queen bumblebees survive this spring by making a simple nest in the garden.
Reproduced with the kind permission of the Scottish Wildlife Trust

And finally.....

Traditional Honey Tea Bread



Make a pot of tea (300ml) using three teabags. Pour into a bowl and stir in 100g of honey. Add 250g dried fruit and leave to soak for 3 to 4 hours.

When cool, stir 2 medium sized beaten eggs into the fruit. Add 275g plain flour, 1 ½ tsp of baking powder and ½ tsp ground nutmeg.

Grease a 900g (2lb) loaf tin and spoon in the mixture.

Bake at 180C/350F for 1 hour 15 minutes.

To test if the bread is cooked, insert a metal skewer. It is ready when it comes away clean.

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.

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www.wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk

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