

THE HONEY BEE TIMES



And is there honey still for tea?
Rupert Brooke: *The Old Vicarage,*
Grantchester

Welcome to the July edition of the Honey Bee Times. This month Wiltshire bathes in the afterglow of a very successful Bath & West Show where we lifted the Challenge Shield with a whopping 504 points.. Many of those who contributed exhibits (and won trophies and prizes) were women and this month, in *Bees from the Past*, we feature two women who were pioneers in the history of beekeeping: Dr Eva Crane and Olive Brittain (**page 43**). Their names may not be as familiar as Langstroth or Butler but their contributions were equally as important. Neonicotinoids raise their ugly heads again (**page 46**) as the government passes another derogation for sugar beet crops, and in the summary of his talk at Devizes Corn Exchange, (**page 6**) Dave Goulson continues his fight for insects, encouraging all of us to do one small thing in our gardens to help them survive. It will be the honeybee who dominates our time and thoughts this month and whilst the honeyflow may be at the forefront of our minds, the summary of Roger Patterson's talk at **page 35** gives some useful guidance on how to carry out a two frame split to address any late swarming tendencies. Happy beekeeping!



THE HONEY BEE TIMES

What's On



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

The Royal Bath & West Show

Well done Wiltshire Beekeepers!



Chris Rawlings and Sophie Butcher celebrate as Wiltshire wins the Royal Bath & West Challenge Shield with 504 points (Somerset came second with 399 points)

The Royal Bath & West Show

The Royal Bath & West Show took place on the last weekend of May and enjoyed some fine, hot weather. There were 703 entries in the bee and honey section comprised of 44 different classes including needlework, honey, mead, wax models and photography. If you didn't enter this year, you have plenty of time to prepare for next year!



Gloria Pilz and her team of volunteers manned the Wiltshire stall and Gloria and her husband are thanked for setting up such an eye-catching and wonderful display which attracted many comments. Wiltshire members entered hundreds of exhibits and won many prizes. Well done to everyone who entered exhibits or volunteered and helped make the event such a success.

The Royal Bath & West Show



Photographs: Amanda Leworthy and Liz Gwinneil

Savings our Insects

Dave Goulson: Devizes Town Hall 9th June 2026



Dave Goulson: Founder of the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust and staunch advocate for insects

Dave Goulson is professor of biology at the University of Sussex, author of numerous books and a dedicated advocate for insects. As part of the Devizes Festival 2026, he gave a talk at Devizes Town Hall about what we can do to help insects at a time when their numbers are rapidly depleting. Every seat in the house was taken, suggesting, this is subject is of concern to many.

The facts are dire: $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world's flying insect populations worldwide have disappeared in a quarter of a century. This is due to a wide range of factors including climate change, habitat loss and the use of weedkillers and pesticides. A recent survey by the UK government reported that almost half of the UK's bird species, which are dependent on insects for food, declined between 2015 and 2020 <https://bit.ly/4enYHGe>



There has been a sharp decline in the UK's wild bird population which corresponds with the worldwide decline in the insect population.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Savings our Insects

Dave Goulson: Devizes Town Hall 9th June 2026

But whilst the overall picture looks bleak, Dave Goulson was keen to emphasise his message: every single one of us can make a difference, no matter how small.

It is estimated that there are 22 million private gardens in the United Kingdom. Imagine, he said, if they became more wildlife friendly and if, in addition, local councils committed to re-wilding and managing local parks, churchyards and roadside verges and stopped spraying these areas with pesticides and insecticides. France has passed legislation banning these practices and, as he pointed out, that country is still standing.



Species like the marsh fritillary butterfly (above) could thrive if we developed our understanding about the relationship between insects and native flowers.

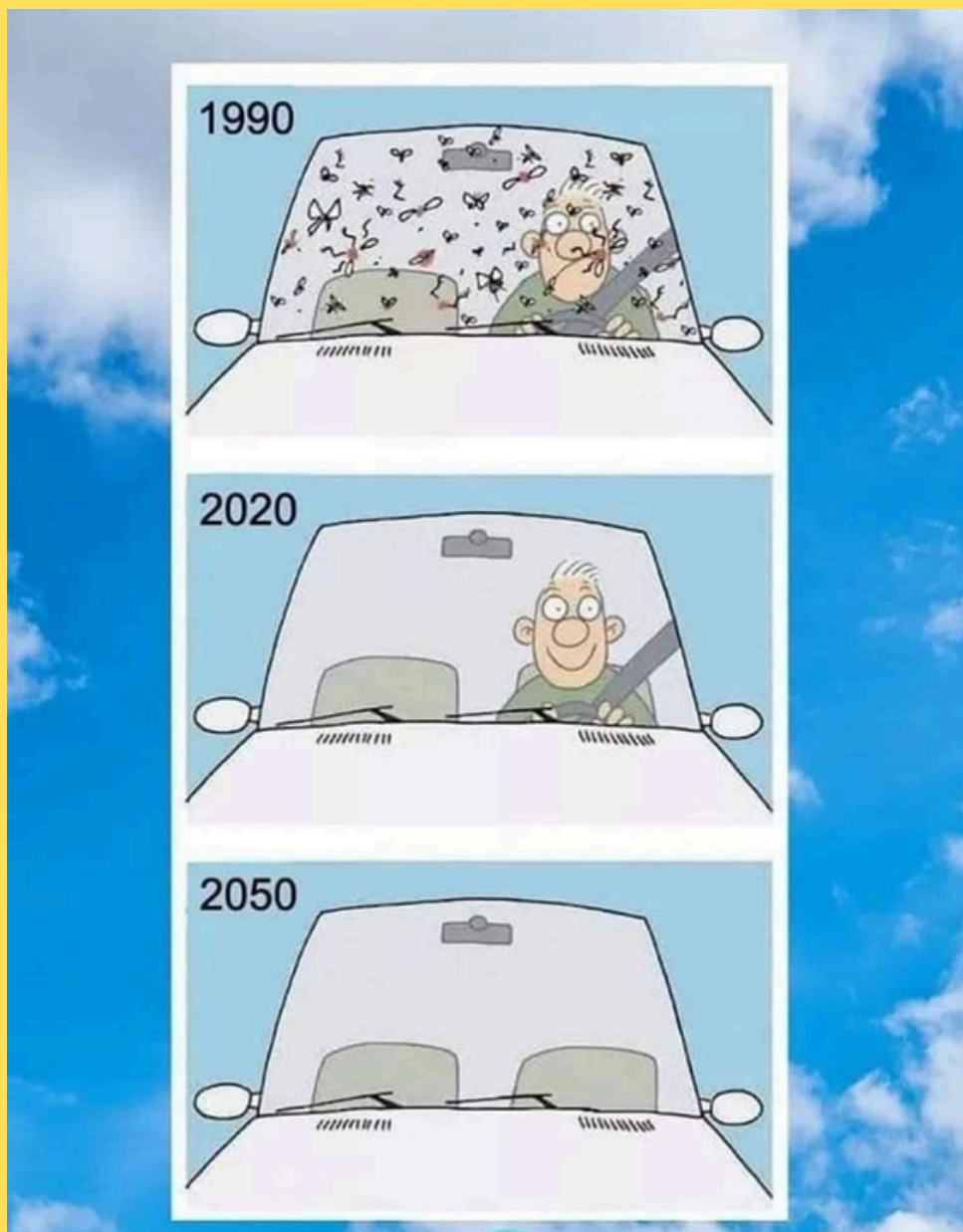
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

If we started to do more for insects in our gardens, the impact on the insect population could be significant. We could leave part of it wild, plant more flowers, stop using weedkiller and pesticides and mow the lawn less frequently. These simple changes could encourage the re-emergence of native wildflowers, many of which have a symbiotic relationship with wildflowers. Devil's Bit Scabious, for example, is the only food source for the marsh fritillary caterpillar, without which it cannot complete its lifecycle. The cinnabar moth will only lay its eggs on ragwort. We should, he suggested, reimagine what we think of as weeds and see them as wildflowers, crucial to the biodiversity of our insect populations.

Savings our Insects

Dave Goulson: Devizes Town Hall 9th June 2026

One of the simple things we might all have noticed is how, when driving on a summer's night, our windscreens and headlights no longer get covered with insects. Those of us old enough to remember will recall having to stop the car to clear these before continuing with our journeys. Yet these days, hardly any insects meet their fate this way. This is just one sign amongst many, that the insect world is in a serious state of crisis.

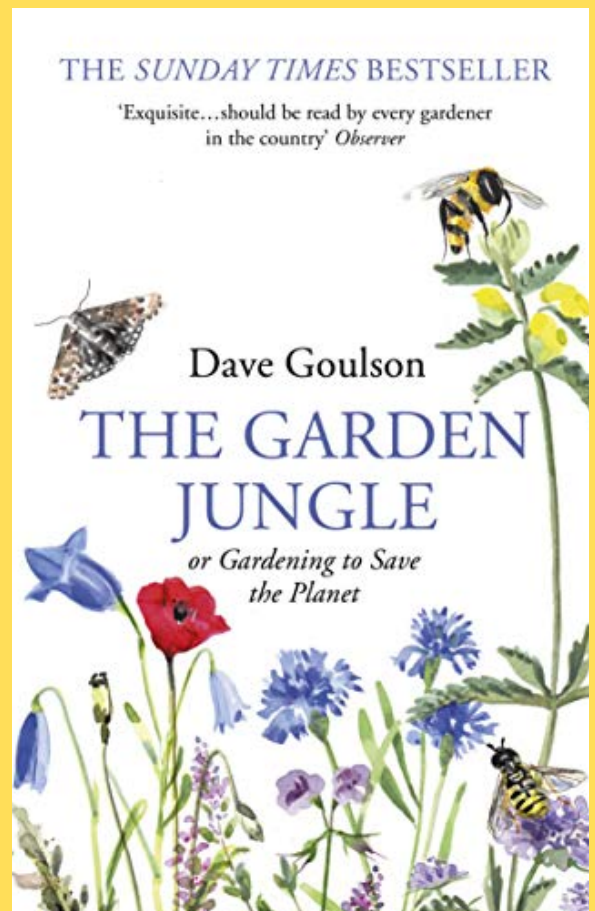
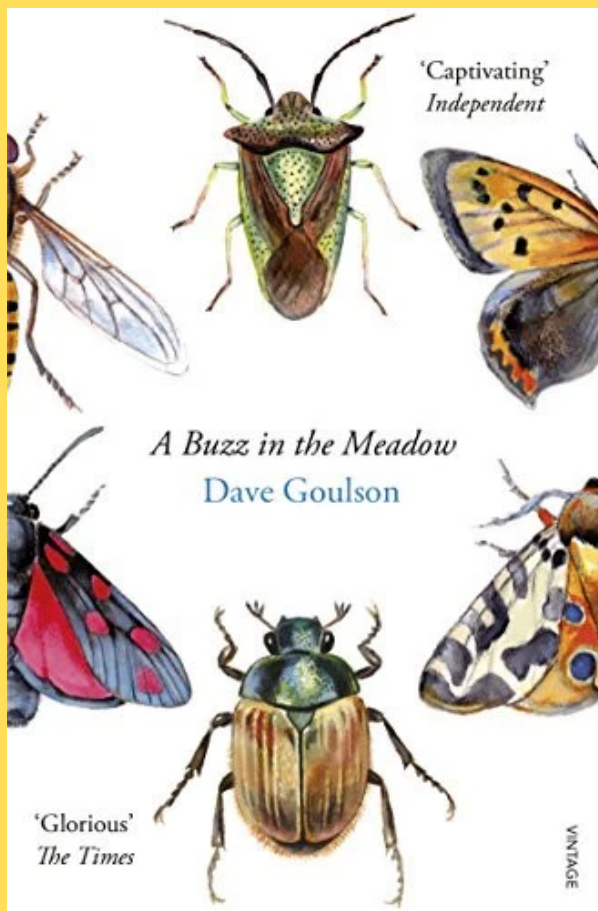


Cartoon: Facebook: author unknown

Savings our Insects

Dave Goulson: Devizes Town Hall 9th June 2026

Many people don't really care much about insects or know that they are in decline. What often fascinates children seems to disappear as we become adults. However if we all did just one small thing in our gardens or every day lives, we really could make a difference and perhaps contribute to leaving a better world for future generations. The survival of the human race depends on it.



Two of Dave Goulson's books

Anyone who wants to know more can read one of Dave Goulson's wonderful books, all of them easy to read and beautifully written. The overall message in all of them, and underlying the talk he delivered on 9th June, is that the insect crisis is a problem that affects all of us but that equally, it is one we can all address. The books also suggests choices we can adopt in our daily lives to help us live better and more in harmony with the world around us.

The Hive In July

BBKA Talk: Jack Silberrad

NBU Regional Bee Inspector



On 16th June, Jack Silberrad, a regional bee inspector based in the Eastern Region of England, gave a Zoom talk on the hive in July.

Based on the premise that a hive needs at least 10,000 worker bees to get safely through winter, now is the time to look at our colonies and assess whether there is anything we can do to boost their chances of building up for winter particularly if we have lost a colony, experienced a swarm or a problem with the queen which has resulted in depleted numbers. To do this we should calculate how many brood cycles there are left in the current season, taking into account the time taken for eggs to hatch, queens to mate and the lifespan of the worker bee.

The Hive In July

BBKA Talk: Jack Silberrad

NBU Regional Bee Inspector

Some of the key areas highlighted by Jack are as follows:

- Honey bound colonies: if workers are filling frames in the brood box with nectar, this could restrict brood laying. Jack suggests ways to persuade the bees to move up into the supers.
- In hot weather, watch for signs of stress. If the bees overheat, all of the workers will vacate the hive and beard on the front. To reduce heat stress, the roof could be painted white and we should make sure there is a source of water available to the water collecting bees which is critical for cooling and ventilating the hive.
- Methods for removing bees from the supers before extraction and how to assess how many frames to remove.
- Post honey crop health checks should be undertaken. By July, varroa present at the start of the season will have increased: Jack could not emphasise enough how important it is to keep managing varroa at all times of the year. Health checks should also be made to identify any signs of disease.
- Consider uniting weak colonies before winter and whether queens need to be replaced if they are suspected of not having mated properly.
- Late July/August: the season for wasps and YLAHs: avoid any open feeding and mop up spills religiously.

Jack's talk can be watched in full on the members hub of the [BBKA website](#) or contact him at Jack.Silberrad@apha.gov.uk for further information or to request a resources pack.

In flower...
Vipers Bugloss
(Echium vulgare)



Vipers bugloss is part of the borage family and much loved by all types of bees, butterflies and other pollinators for its rich supply of nectar and pollen. With its tall, spiky blue flowers, it can grow up to 70cm (30 inches) between June and September. It is one of our native wildflowers and whether it grows in our gardens or in the wild, it is sure to attract buff tailed and red tailed bumble bees, honeybees, red mason bees and painted lady butterflies.

In the Spotlight: The Red Mason Bee



The Red Mason Bee: Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The red mason bee usually emerges in the spring to coincide with the blossoming of fruit trees and is a particularly efficient pollinator of the apple tree. By July, its work will largely be done as its cycle for the year is complete. When collecting pollen, they do not have honey baskets like the honeybee but collect it instead on the dense brush of hairs on the underside of their abdomen. As a solitary species of bee, they are known to be remarkably gentle and docile and whilst the female has a stinger, it is tiny and lacks barbs. Without honey or a colony to defend, they have no reason to sting. When building nests, they will choose a warm south facing cavity and collect balls of mud to divide the egg laying chamber into separate compartments finishing off with a final plug of mud to protect the eggs from predators.

Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Update



The Yellow Legged Asian Hornet is a noticeably dark insect

As we stood at the cash desk of a local garden centre earlier this year, a beekeeping friend of mine and I were discussing the yellow legged Asian Hornet. “Oh,” said the young girl behind the till. “I saw one of those last week.”

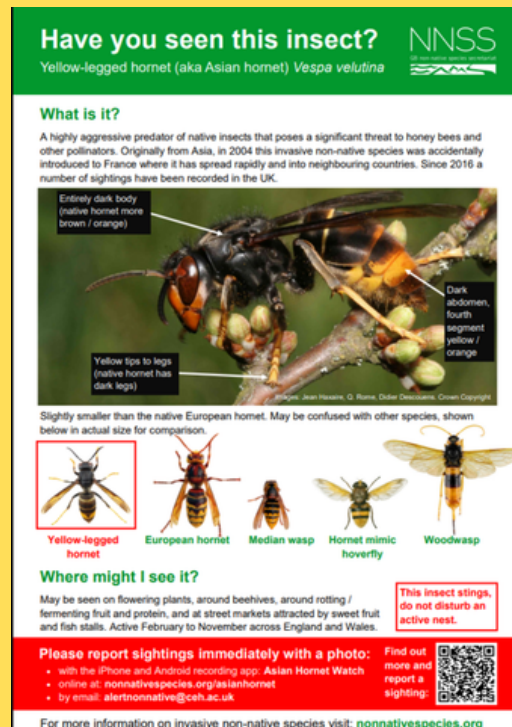
After our initial concern subsided, we established that what she had seen was a European hornet and persuaded her to download the Asian Hornet Watch app on to her phone*. Lucie Chaumerton had, after all, suggested in her recent talk that we take every opportunity to publicise it and in that same talk, had made us aware of the potential for imported bags of bark chip to contain YLAHs. It therefore seems only logical that all members of staff working in garden centres should be aware of the YLAH and have the app downloaded on their phones. Perhaps we could all strike up random conversations with staff when visiting garden centres?

In the meantime, members of the public remain vigilant in reporting sightings to the National Bee Unit (sittings list here: <https://bit.ly/4osV7za>). Whilst most sightings continue to be reported in the counties of Kent, Hampshire and East Sussex, of the 27 sightings reported between April and June 2026, a YLAH was found inside a house in Dorset in May and a confirmed embryo nest was destroyed in Derbyshire after an alert member of the public reported it in April. There have also been sightings in South Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire.

* Note:
29% of
Wiltshire
members have
not yet done
this, according
to a recent
survey of
members.



Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Update



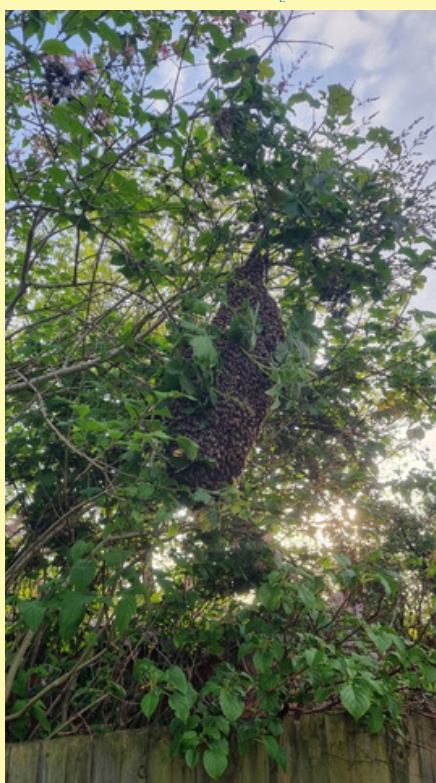
One of the posters available from the BBKA:
email Teresa Middlebrook at outreach@bbka.org.uk

The BBKA, with support from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), is developing a new, free, fully resourced educational project designed to support schools in exploring pollinators, biodiversity, and invasive species. [Pollinator Protectors](#) is a classroom-based citizen science programme that introduces pupils to the ecological impact of invasive species, with a particular focus on the Yellow-legged Asian Hornet. Through structured activities, pupils will learn how monitoring supports national efforts led by the National Bee Unit (NBU), helping to protect pollinators and wider ecosystems.

Unit 1 was released first. An additional 4 units were released on Tuesday 23rd June as part of NNSS Invasive Species Week. Register now at [Pollinator Protectors](#) to be notified when the new units become available.

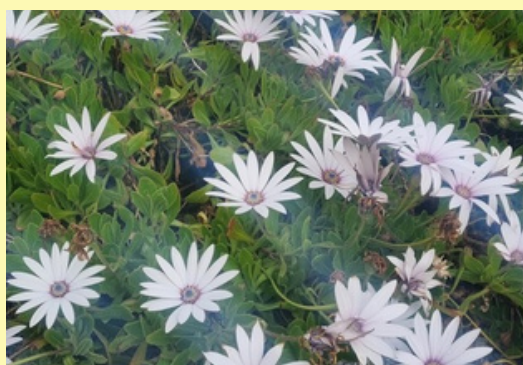
WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

This year's beekeeping season started early with many members experiencing early swarms in late March and early April. Our swarm collector was kept busy with reported swarm sightings which, when genuine, helped to replenish colonies for those members who had suffered losses during the winter months.



Swarm in the branches of a lilac tree in one member's gardens

Apiary sessions started in April with new members from the beginners' course enjoying some practical guidance from our more experienced members. Two sessions, in May and June, had to be cancelled, in terms of opening up the bees, due to wet and windy weather but members still attended the clubhouse for a cup of tea and a chat.



WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

Two of our members continued their queen rearing experiments with one using a de-commissioned egg incubator and the other, their oven! It is hoped to feature more about this in a future edition of the *Honey Bee Times*.



Despite the cold and wet weather that dominated June, our apiary manager, Den, managed to extract 180lbs of honey from seven supers, starting work at 7 o'clock in the morning.

Volunteers from West Wiltshire hosted a table at the Bishopstrow village fete on 13th June, held at the cricket ground in the village and with other Wiltshire members, attended Chippenham's Eco-Future Fest held at the Neeld Hall on 14th June. Both were well attended events with the public expressing, as always, much interest in the honeybees we look after.



WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

And finally, congratulations must go to our members who won prizes and trophies with the exhibits they entered into the bee and honey section of the Royal Bath & West Show. Particular congratulations must go to Elaine Mairis who won best in the show with her beautiful lace painting and to Gloria Pilz who won fourth prize for her first time cyser attempt. Our apiary manager, Den, entered and won a prize for his Ross rounds of cut comb! Congratulations to all who won prizes and to all members who put the effort and time in to prepare for and enter the different categories.



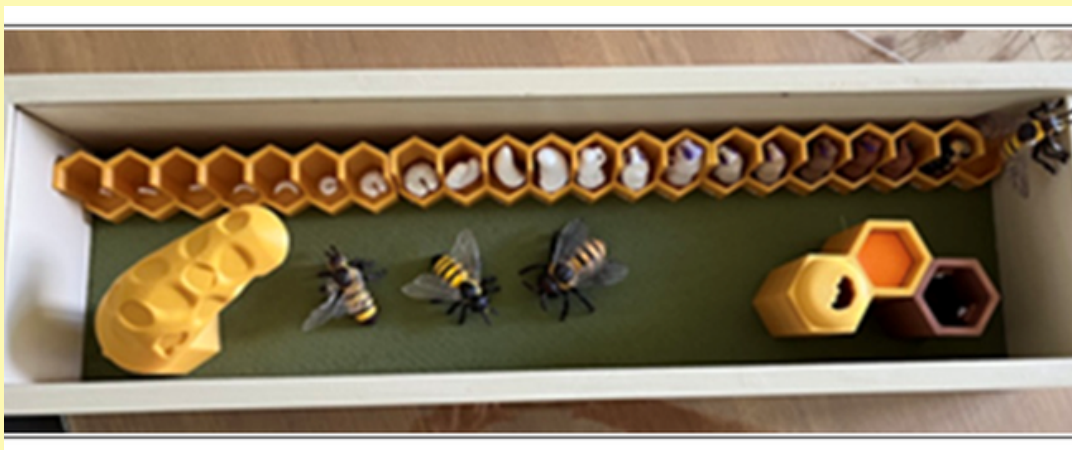
KENNET BEEKEEPERS

Once again, a busy few months with presentations about treatment-free beekeeping and the hygienic behaviour of honeybees (Rachael Banyard) and also non-notifiable diseases and their management (Ceri Joyner). Our June speaker was Richard Rickitt on *Bees, baskets, boles (and a little bit of Butler)*. Richard provided a wealth of information on the history of beekeeping and the equipment and methods used historically. The talk also involved a surprise element, which you may know about if you attended his talk at the spring convention..... we're going to keep it to ourselves so we don't spoil it for others who may wish to ask him to give this presentation to their clubs!



**Richard Rickitt gave a talk
about the history of
beekeeping**

We've been out and about: Jeremy and Andrea gave a talk to Devizes Young Farmers Club at Alton Barnes – that was a great opportunity to illustrate the lifecycle of the honeybee using our educational models which show development from day 1 when the egg is laid until day 21 when the honeybee emerges. There was mix of age ranges here and lots of questions were asked together with a lot of interest in the models themselves.



One of Kennet's educational models demonstrating the lifecycle of the honeybee

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

In mid-May some of our members spent a wonderful Saturday morning at Great Wood near Lyneham, which is under the care of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and currently closed to the public whilst undergoing restoration. We were guided by Nick Self who explained how the site was managed by the Trust. We were shown some of the wild service trees that the site is known for and also came across a group of non-native Redwoods planted by a previous owner.



Kennet members enjoyed spending time in the woods

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

Sherrill and Elaine provided a Honeybee stall at the Netherstreet fete in May, and Sherrill and one of our local members (Vanessa) and Sophie supported the WBKA stall at Chippenham's Eco-Future Fest in June.



Further improvements at Court Farm apiary include gardening undertaken by our green-fingered Sandra: she has planted up a bed in the apiary area with a range of pollinator friendly plants and provided plants for pots to decorate the front of the outbuildings; Sophie also came earlier in the year and, along with several of our members, planted the tree donated by the BBKA to celebrate their 150th anniversary. (You'll have to take our word that the tree is there – Sophie is standing next to it in our “very natural setting” .



Planting the tree to mark the BBKA's 150th anniversary

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

At our mid-June apiary session our early years beekeepers practised hiving growing colonies together with queen marking. The accompanying tea and cake and bee chat always makes our apiary gatherings welcoming to everybody, no matter how long they have been learning about and keeping bees.

On the same weekend, Emma and Andrea ran a queen rearing course in their home apiaries - conveniently they are neighbours which makes life a lot easier! Six people from Kennet and Swindon attended – different methods of queen rearing were considered, apideas were set up and populated queen cells were transferred to them (thankfully, after four weeks of work and some unsuccessful attempts, we managed to raise enough queens for everyone) and genetic factors associated with queen rearing were also discussed; we also practised grafting. As an added extra, many drones ended up with beautifully coloured thoraxes / thoraces when we practised queen-marking. One virgin queen was also introduced into a hive after she'd taken two scenic flights around the garden! As the books say, she found her own way back and went in on her own!



Emma and Andrea ran a queen rearing course in their home apiaries

KENNET BEEKEEPERS



Apideas were set up and charged queen cells added to them at Kennet's queen rearing course

Students taking their Basic assessments have also been attending the apiary for their practical training and next month we will be offering practical training for those students (again from around Wiltshire) who are registered to do their Honeybee Health certificate.

Finally, we were pleased to receive a visit from Dan Eheridge, one of the National Bee Inspectors – he was very positive about both the teaching and the production apiaries. Helpfully, but unfortunately, he confirmed Jeremy's suspicion of a case of CBPV – something that has been affecting many beekeepers this year. While his advice was to let the bees re-queen and hopefully sort the problem themselves, Jeremy took no risks and culled the colony. Thankfully, colonies at both apiaries are building up fast – helped, no doubt, by the current flow – and everything is returning to normal.

**Sonia Meadows and Andrea Waylen
(Vice Chair and Chair, Kennet BKA)**

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

As the season bursts into life, Swindon & District Beekeepers Association (SDBKA) has been buzzing with activity from hands-on learning at the TWIGS training apiary to lively club nights and study sessions that keep our members connected and inspired all year round

TWIGS Training Apiary

The TWIGS colonies have been building steadily through spring. We currently have a mix of full colonies and nucs, including::

- Two strong queen-right colonies
- Nucs created during Bee & Brew sessions
- A swarm collected on site and successfully rehoused
- A nuc relocated from the late Kevin Holt's apiary, a particularly strong colony that stands as a testament to his skill and care.

With the warmer weather, virgin queens have been taking mating flights, and we expect to see new laying patterns emerging over the coming weeks.



With the warmer weather, virgin queens have been taking mating flights

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

Operations Apiary

Our second Apiary continues to support our queen-rearing and nuc-building efforts. The full colony on site has several supers ready for extraction, and apiary managers have been preparing three-frame nucs for queen rearing later this month. Both apiaries are now entering their busiest period, and members are encouraged to join inspections whenever dates are announced.

In Memory of Kevin Holt

This spring, our Association was deeply saddened by the unexpected passing of Kevin Holt, “Kev” a long-standing and much-respected member of SDBKA. Kev was not only a skilled beekeeper but a generous one, always ready with an opinion, a practical tip, or a steady pair of hands for anyone who needed help.

Kev served on the Steering Committee and was a familiar face at meetings, apiary sessions, and club events, including as quiz master at the 2025 Christmas quiz. His enthusiasm for beekeeping was infectious, and many of our newer members benefited from his willingness to share knowledge, experience, and encouragement. Whether discussing queen behaviour, offering advice on swarm control, or simply chatting over a pint, Kevin brought warmth and humour to every conversation.

A nuc from Kevin’s own apiary now resides at TWIGS, thriving with the strength and vitality that reflected his careful husbandry. It stands as a fitting testament to the skill, dedication, and passion he brought to his beekeeping.

Our thoughts remain with Gail and Kevin’s family. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him as a beekeeper, a committee member, and a friend.



SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

Bee & Brew – Learning by Doing

Our ever popular monthly Bee & Brew sessions have continued to draw enthusiastic crowds to the TWIGS training apiary. These gatherings give newer and less experienced members the chance to get hands-on with the bees under the guidance of our experienced mentors.

The atmosphere is always warm and welcoming, offering a blend of practical learning, good conversation, and, of course, tea and cake. The recent sessions have seen members inspecting brood frames, spotting queens, and discussing everything from swarm control to supering techniques.



Swindon's bee and brew sessions are an opportunity for newer members to gain hands on experience

Building Confidence SDBKA Basic Certificate Study Group

Our BBKA Basic Certificate Study Group is now in full swing, helping members prepare for their upcoming assessments later in the year. Each week's interactive Tuesday Teams call covers the theory in a friendly, discussion-based format, followed by practical sessions at the apiary where participants can put their learning into practice.

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS



Preparing for the Basic Certificate

Looking Ahead – What’s Next

The coming months promise plenty of events from talks on Pests & Diseases to our first-ever SDBKA Bake Off a light-hearted culinary challenge celebrating honey in all its delicious forms. Bakers, polish your wooden spoons and prepare your best honey-themed creations for judging!



Swindon will be holding their first Bake Off in the coming months

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

Well spring finally arrived for MBKA after a very wet winter and a brief period of scorching temperatures – is this weather volatility a harbinger of things to come? And how may it affect our beekeeping going into the future? These are the question we should ask ourselves.

The March meeting covered the thorny topic of beekeeping and the law and was given by our Education Officer Lucie. It is a little touched on subject, yet one that is quite important so beekeepers don't fall foul of the law. Who knew for instance that the bees in your hive are only technically yours while they are in the hive, the second they swarm they become 'wild insects' and remain so until they settle, at which point they become the property of the landowner (on whose land they settled). You also do not have a legal right to enter land without permission to chase a swarm and you may be charged with trespass if you do.



Beekeeping and the law: once honeybees swarm, they become the property of the landowner on whose land they have settled

However, if the landowner does grant access to a beekeeper, ownership of the swarm passes to the claiming beekeeper (who may or may not be the swarm's original owner).

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

Our next meeting looked at swarms again but from a more normal perspective. In previous years, MBKA members have attended the Spring Convention and one of the lectures that we all agreed was very informative was given by Dr Jane Medwell. In it, she covered both the biology behind swarming and the various methods of prevention (or at least delaying). Luckily the lecture has been videoed and placed on the BBKA YouTube channel. So, after some fiddling with the WiFi at our new meeting venue, we sat down to watch the talk. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8-lGrmv07s>



Dr Jane Medwell: Master Beekeeper and BBKA Trustee

This was followed by a question and answer session delivered by Alison, complete with handouts and physical kit to look at. Although some experienced beekeepers may have 'heard it all before', there is always a chance to learn something new or see a different take on a subject (a bit like re-reading a murder mystery novel and picking up on clues you missed the first time). For our newer members it was really useful especially as we were about to enter the swarm season.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

The last meeting of this quarter looked at IPM (Integrated Pest Management) and encouraging varroa resistant traits in our bees. What became clear is that although varroa-free bees may be possible, it is a long journey and one that involves a great deal of monitoring and husbandry before you get there. Simply stopping all treatment will most likely lead to the loss of your colony and increased varroa load on nearby colonies due to drifting bees and the phoretic nature of varroa at places where bees chance to meet, such as flowers.



The varroa mite (right) and on a honeybee (left).
Photographs: Wikimedia Commons

While ‘Darwinian’ beekeeping, as presented by the likes of Professors Tom Seeley and Stephen Martin, is all the rage, it is worth remembering that they have the resources to sacrifice hives and many of the apiaries used are in isolated areas.

While on the subject of apiaries, Melksham’s new apiary is going from strength to strength. Led by the indomitable team of Alison and Lucie and supported by a small group of dedicated volunteers, we have now managed to transition all the colonies on a variety of hive types on to Nationals which will aid the management, as we no longer have to support and find spare kit for say a Langstroth or a Commercial when doing manipulations. We have also slimmed down the number of colonies by supplying this year's beginner course intake with their first colonies, although bees being bees, we will soon be splitting colonies to prevent swarming. All in all it’s going to be a very busy season.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

As ever, Melksham have been out extolling the virtues of Apis M at various events and fetes. The highlight being when Lucie dressed up as a worker bee to demonstrate the waggle dance all day at 'Field to Fork' an event attended by approximately 1500 school children. At the end of the day, she had clocked up almost 20,000 steps – not bad, as the bee flies.



**There will be another From Field to Fork event at
Victory Fields, Bradford on Avon on 1st August 2026**

In April, a number of Melksham members visited the BBKA Spring Convention at Harper Adams University near Telford, Shropshire. It was brilliant – three days of lectures (varying from the history of wax and the latest research on tropilaelaps, to several reports on the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet (YLAH) and the fight back against it in Jersey and France. Sobering information for if/when the YLAH gets a foot hold on these shores. The lectures were augmented by three 'social' events in the evening (including a ceilidh) and a very comprehensive trade show that included companies such as Thornes and Northern Bee Books, which had a few hundred different titles on display.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS



Lucie and Chris Rawlings at From Field to Fork

At the end of May, several Melksham beekeepers helped man the WBKA stand at the Chippenham Eco-Future Fest. This was a one-day event put on by Chippenham town council looking at both nature and the climate crisis. It had stalls from groups such as Wiltshire Wildlife, Cycle Chippenham and Net Zero Chippenham. One of the best presentations was from two local girls who called themselves the 'Earth Warriors' and talked about their efforts to protect the river Avon.

The event was well attended by both adults and children, many of whom were fascinated by the live bees in the observation hive, although in typical fashion the queen decided to hide herself on the closed side of the frame, it was decided to only open the one side so as not to stress the bees too much.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS



The Neeld Hall hosted approximately 20 environmental groups at the Eco-Future Fest; Shirley helped with candle rolling (left) while Nina, Amanda and Jeremy manned the Wiltshire BKA stall

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

Looking forward, we have several forthcoming events; the regular June meeting was a round table discussion on topics suggested by members and in July we will be looking at how to prepare wax and honey for showing, including product techniques and pointers at to what judges are looking for. [See the MBKA website for details.](#)



Two more events are also being arranged:

1. **July 11th** between 10am and 12pm we are holding a bee 'taster' session for the public, so if you know of any wannabe beekeepers near Melksham point them in our direction. We will supply bee-suits and will have group members on hand to answer any questions.
2. **August 3rd** we are holding a 'bee safari', several members have offered up their apiaries for visitors and we think it will be a fun and valuable experience for those involved, as not only will it allow members to see how others manage their hives, but also how hives respond in different environments: garden vs apiary and urban vs rural etc.

Again, keep an eye on the MBKA website, MBKA FaceBook page and WhatsApp Community for further details.

Well, that's all the news from Melksham branch – see you all again in three months and happy beekeeping.

Jeremy Tyler

Members' News

Roger Patterson on Queen Rearing and Local Production using the two-frame Split Method



Roger Patterson gave a talk in April

Roger Patterson Evening Review April 2026

This April, members from SDBKA and Wiltshire gathered for an engaging and highly practical evening with Roger Patterson. The talk set out a clear, pragmatic route to producing queens locally using Roger's favoured two-frame split technique. Aimed squarely at small-scale beekeepers and associations seeking greater self-sufficiency in queen supply, the presentation emphasised methods that avoid expensive kit and complicated systems. Although the planned practical afternoon could not take place, the evening delivered a wealth of actionable detail and provoked thoughtful questions from those in attendance.

Roger opened by framing his approach around three interlocking goals: simplicity, local adaptation, and careful observation. He argued that queen rearing need not be complicated to be effective, and that straightforward techniques are often the most reliable for hobbyists and clubs. He urged beekeepers to prioritise stock that performs well in local conditions rather than importing traits that may not suit the area, and he stressed that success depends on reading colonies and acting at the right moment rather than relying on gadgets.

Roger Patterson on Queen Rearing and Local Production using the two-frame Split Method



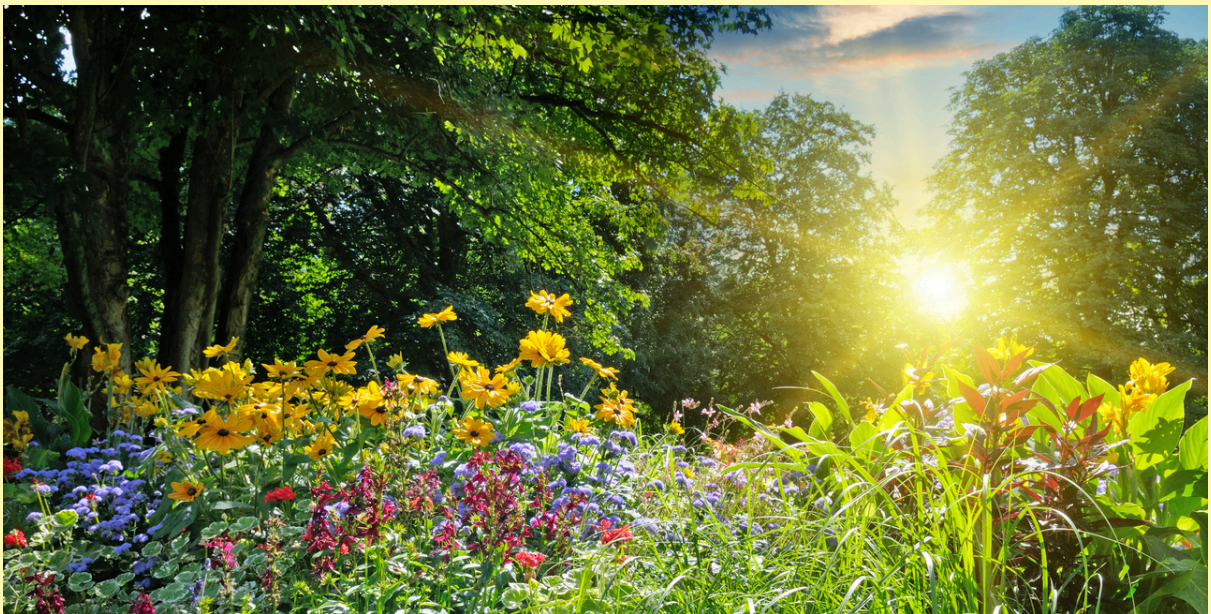
Roger gave a clear explanation of the two frame split

At the heart of the evening was a clear, step-by-step explanation of the two frame split. Roger described it as a low-stress, low-cost method for raising queens and increasing colony numbers, particularly suited to those who want to produce a modest number of queens or nucs for beginners. The basic idea is to create a new nucleus by taking two frames from a strong, healthy donor colony: one frame of brood, ideally with emerging brood, and one frame of stores accompanied by nurse bees. These frames are placed in a nuc box with a feed source if necessary and a frame of foundation or drawn comb to encourage expansion. The donor colony is left queenright but reduced, and the split will either raise a queen from available larvae or accept an introduced queen cell at a later stage.

Timing and colony choice were central to Roger's practical advice. He recommended performing splits during a nectar flow or when forage is plentiful and brood is present, noting that late spring to early summer is usually the most favourable window.

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If a split lacks very young larvae, he advised transferring a frame of very young brood or introducing a queen cell when available. Aftercare is equally important: the new nuc should be monitored for queen acceptance, brood pattern and stores, and fed if forage is poor. Roger emphasised that the method requires minimal equipment and causes low disturbance to the donor colony, and that it scales easily by repeating the process across several strong colonies to produce multiple nucs.



Roger recommends performing splits in late spring to early summer

Selection of breeder colonies and careful record keeping formed a substantial part of the evening's message. Roger urged members to choose donor colonies that display the traits they wish to propagate, highlighting calm temperament, a strong brood pattern, foraging vigour and good overwintering performance as priorities. He also encouraged beekeepers to look for signs of hygienic behaviour and low varroa impact, and to favour colonies that maintain low mite levels without frequent treatments. Practical record-keeping, he said, need not be elaborate: a simple log for each breeder noting colony ID, queen origin, temperament observations, varroa treatment history and overwintering outcome will pay dividends over time. Photographs of frames and marked queens help track performance across seasons and make selection cumulative rather than anecdotal.

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Throughout the evening Roger offered practical pointers that reinforced the central themes of observation and selection. He suggested noting uncapped or partially removed brood as an indicator of hygienic activity and recording colonies that show resilience with minimal intervention. By documenting these observations and using them to inform breeder choices, beekeepers can gradually improve stock quality in a way that is tailored to local conditions.



Roger's approach is refreshingly pragmatic

Roger's approach is refreshingly pragmatic: produce queens locally, keep methods simple, and select for traits that matter in our environment. The presentation provided clear, usable guidance that members can apply at their own apiaries and left many attendees inspired to try the two frame split in the coming weeks. The evening reinforced the value of steady, practical work and careful observation over complexity, and it reminded the club that sustainable improvement often begins with small, well-recorded steps.

Matthew O'Dell SDBKA

Heatwave!

Our UK honeybees have had a lot to put up with these last couple of weeks - and if the weather forecast for July is right, we could all be in for another hot spell. To protect our colonies of honeybees we need to be mindful of the threat of potential dehydration and hive overheating. Trying to site our hives in partial shade and close to a water source may alleviate those problems to some extent.

In hot weather, honeybees use increased amounts of water to cool their hive through evaporation, so providing a water station in a shady spot near your hives is a good idea. Last year I saved the moss from scarifying the lawn and put it into a large bucket topped up with water to leave by the hives, providing an easy and accessible source of water. In hot weather, shallow water bowls can quickly evaporate and may need frequent replenishment.



What can we do to help our bees in a heatwave?

It may be helpful to open up the hive entrance to improve the air flow although this will depend on whether you have a “wasp issue” at the moment. I have heard reports from other beekeepers of increased wasp sightings but until late June, I had not seen any around my hives. Some beekeepers prop open the crown board with a coin or a matchstick to aid the flow of air.

Heatwave!

Other beekeepers provide temporary shade by erecting an umbrella over a hive. A sheet of reflective insulation (such as you might place behind a radiator), placed over the crown board, can act to reflect the heat of the sun upwards and away from the hive. A reduction in inspection of hives can give both the bees and the beekeepers a break on warmer days. During inspections, we should also keep ourselves hydrated and apply sunscreen under our veils. If you must inspect during periods of very hot weather, try to do so at a cooler time of day and keep those inspections as brief as possible.



During hot weather, it is best to inspect hives at a cooler time of day

Ensuring your colonies have enough space inside the hive by adding sufficient supers is sensible. Increasing empty space above the crown board is unlikely to help and may result in the bees building brace comb.

A study undertaken by the University of Chicago found that temperatures exceeding 40 degrees celsius can have a devastating effect on a colony of honeybees, affecting their ability to regulate the temperature of the brood and shortening the lifespan of adult workers.
<https://bit.ly/4p2dZ8P>.

Heatwave!

We can offer short term solutions to some of the problems faced by honeybees in times of intense heat but we can also plan ahead. With our summers likely to become hotter, we might want to consider simple changes like, for example, placing our hives in areas where there is more shade.



Planting drought tolerant plants such as echinacea, lavender, allium and borage, will provide forage during the hottest of summers, whilst cultivating areas of native wildflowers can provide shelter and a rich source of pollen and nectar.

Don't underestimate your influence – youngsters are often already environmentally aware. Use every opportunity to talk to them about the problems that pollinators face and about the plants we put in our gardens.

Elaine Mairis, WWBKA

Bees from the Past

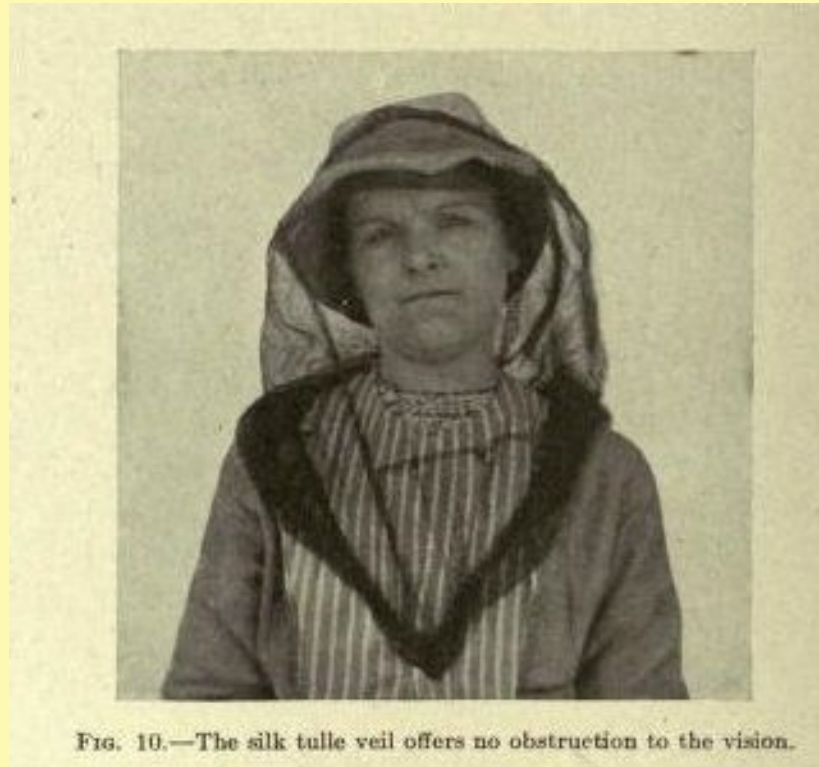
Do you have a story to tell about bees or beekeeping in the past? Perhaps a grandfather or grandmother who kept bees or a story that's been handed down through the generations?



This month we take a look at women in beekeeping from the humble housewife to the women who helped transform our knowledge of the honeybee and beekeeping practice. There has been a long association between women and the honeybee with the Greek nymph Melissa (meaning “honeybee”) being credited with discovering honey and teaching humanity the art of beekeeping.

**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



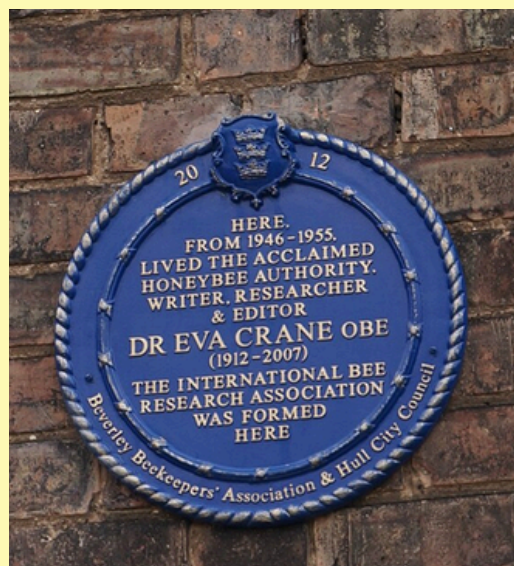
Beekeeping in the past was part of the daily routine for many women in the countryside. Women traditionally managed the skeps where the bees were housed. Honey provided sweetness and wax was used in the making of candles and home medicines. Both could be sold to supplement the household income. Looking after bees was just another part of daily life, like looking after cows or pigs, or tending a herb garden. Beekeeping was part of country life for many years before it developed into a hobby.

The women also made their own veils, often from silk or calico or muslin, incorporating wire mesh or netting into wide brimmed hats.

From the 19th century, beekeeping emerged from being a rural necessity to a structured practice with women like Eva Crane, born in 1912, making groundbreaking discoveries.

Bees from the Past

Dr Eva Crane became fascinated by the honeybee after she was given a hive as a wedding present. Although she had a degree in nuclear physics, the wedding present changed the course of her life as she travelled the world studying bees, wrote volumes about them and founded the Bee Research Association. <https://www.evacranetrust.org/en/page/about-eva-crane>



Dr Eva Crane OBE 1912 - 2007 dedicated her life to the honeybee, travelling to over 60 countries in her lifetime to study them. The blue plaque is attached to the house where she lived in Kingston upon Hull.

Photographs: Wikimedia Commons.

Bees from the Past



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Olive Brittan, pictured above, is another pioneering woman who dedicated her life to honeybees. Olive made international headlines when, after the second world war, she was made beekeeper to the King of Libya and tasked with introducing modern beekeeping to the country.

In her correspondence to friends back home in Britain in the 1950s, she described the difficult conditions in which she lived and worked, which included her house being damaged by an earthquake, which could not be repaired due to a lack of funds. She wrote of staff shortages and how the bees of the Green Jebel forest would not survive the winter without protection. She described the long exhausting hours working night shifts, which was essential due to the unusual nocturnal foraging habits of Libyan bees.

In Other News...

The Return of the Neonicotinoid

Neonicotinoids are insect killing chemicals developed in the 1980s. They are known to cause serious harm to all pollinators worldwide and could be one of the contributing factors to the alarming decrease in insect numbers. Neonicotinoids are largely used on crops and in the UK, they have been used repeatedly on sugar beet crops to combat aphids causing “virus yellows.”

Plants absorb these chemicals quickly and distribute them through their tissues, including to their nectar and pollen. They work by targeting receptors in an insect’s central nervous system causing paralysis and eventual death. They are indiscriminate: if they are applied to control aphids, they will kill any other insect that visits the plant. In addition, they are water soluble and any excess will travel through the soil to non target areas. They also leech into waterways presenting a danger to aquatic life.



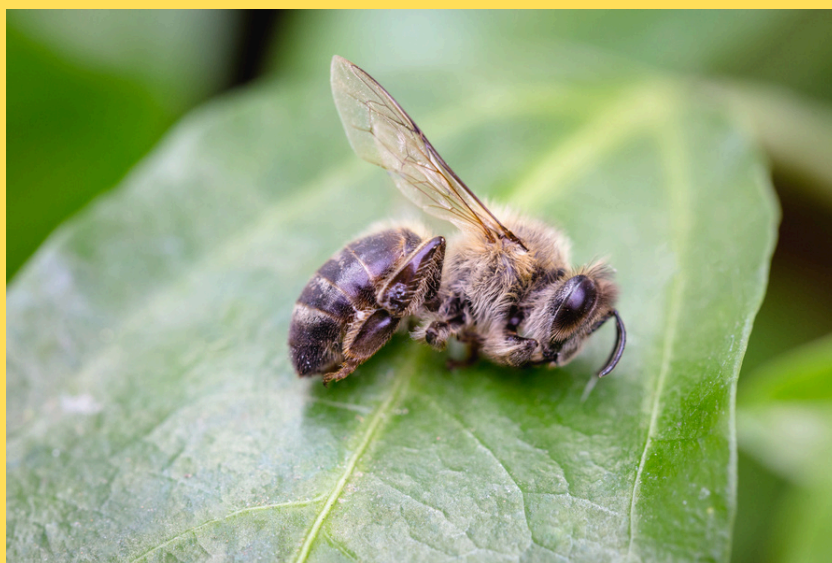
A new derogation has been granted allowing the use of the neonicotinoid Thiamethoxam on sugar beet crops from May to August 2026

There are three types of neonicotinoid which cause most concern for pollinators: clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam. In the past they were used in the UK on crops such as maize, oilseed rape and cereals, but the most prolific use in recent years has been on crops of sugar beet.

The Return of the Neonicotinoid

In 2018, the EU banned the use of neonicotinoids and the UK initially observed the ban. However derogations can be granted by the government if a crop grower can show that his crop is likely to fail without the use of these pesticides.

Derogations were granted to sugar beet growers in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. No derogation was granted in 2025, but this year, yet another derogation has been granted allowing sugar beet seeds to be treated with Cruiser SB 28th May and 1st August. Cruiser SB is thiamethoxam.



Neonicotinoids are lethal to honeybees and pollinators

The BBKA and many other conservation trusts and charities have long campaigned against the continued use of neonicotinoids and the granting of derogations. The current government has indicated it is currently consulting on stricter guidance to prevent future approval of derogations but there is nothing definite at the moment and with government changes imminent, there could be further delay.

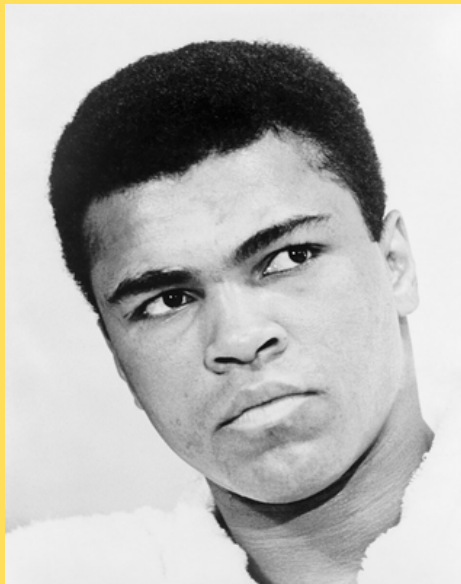
A case was recently brought in Romania's Court of Appeal by the beekeeping organisation Romapsis and farmers belonging to an organisation called Eco Ruralis. The result was the Court banned any future derogations in relation to these pesticides.

Questions need to be asked about why the UK can't do the same, and how we could adopt a less toxic way of treating crops with integrated pest management which harnesses natural predators, parasites or pathogens to control pests. In the meantime, we could write to our MPs, sign petitions and support campaigns to end the practise of granting future derogations.



Did you know....

- Muhammad Ali, the world heavyweight boxing champion, boosted his diet with pollen. claiming it gave him energy and stamina in the ring.
- In around 340 BCE, Aristotle stated that honeybees collected wax from olive trees. This belief remained unchallenged until 1792.
- Drones do not reach sexual maturity until between 12 to 16 days after emerging from their cells.
- The eyes of a honeybee can detect polarised light, enabling them to know where the sun is, even on a cloudy day.



Muhammad Ali boosted his training regime with pollen.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Queen Bee Science

Scientists at the Univeristy of California have discovered there is more to raising a queen bee than just feeding her royal jelly. Their research suggests that worker bees build royal cribs made from special beeswax and form specialist units dedicated to raising a new queen. See more at: <https://bit.ly/4xRLqPr>

And finally.....

Honey, Parsnip and Coconut Cake



**175ml sunflower oil
plus extra for greasing
3 large eggs
100g light muscovado sugar
75g clear honey
plus 2 tbsp for the icing
280g self-raising flour
½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
200g parsnips
grated
75g desiccated coconut
3 tbsp coconut
flakes
300g cream cheese**

Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Lightly grease a 22cm round loose-bottomed cake tin and line with baking parchment.

Put the eggs, oil, sugar and honey in a bowl and whisk for 3-4 mins until thick and creamy. Fold the flour, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda into the mixture and add the parsnips and desiccated coconut. Spoon into the tin and bake for 45 mins until golden and firm to the touch.

Toast the coconut flakes in the oven for about 5 mins until lightly toasted.

To make the icing, beat the cream cheese and 2 tbsp honey together. Spread over the top of the cooled cake and finish with the toasted coconut flakes.

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

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