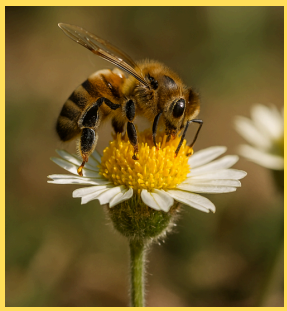
The Honey Bee Times



Out of the silence I fancied I heard the bronze buzz of a bee

Carol Ann Duffy

Welcome to the October 2026 edition of the Honey Bee Times. As we move into autumn and this year's beekeeping season comes to an end, we take a look at how bees help bring communities together, all year round. Travel to Cornwall to marvel at how a community is learning about bees through embroidery (page 46) or admire the giant hive that has been on display throughout the summer at St. Pancras railway station in London (page 43). One great example of buzzing community spirit is at the honey shows in the autumn months where the public and beekeepers come together to celebrate nature, pollinators and all things honey bee. The Wiltshire County Show, held on 10th October, was a resounding success(page 4). One of the sponsors was Eden Renewables and you can read more about the interaction between solar power and bees on page 10. And when we close up the hives for another year, we are reminded that the threat of the yellow legged asian hornet moves ever closer to Wiltshire with confirmation of the YLAH in Street, Somerset this August. Dogwalkers and anyone out and about in the countryside this autumn is urged to keep looking up at trees and down at the ivy and report any sightings through the Asian Hornet app.







What's On



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

Wiltshire Beekeepers Annual General Meeting: 26th January 2027

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**

Increase in Membership Fees from October 2026

There has been an increase to the BBKA, WBKA and BDI fees. For BDI the increase is nominal, a matter of a few pence and it is the first time that BDI has raised the fees in over 10 years. BBKA are very aware that this is the second increase in 2 years. However, rising costs (*BBKA News* for example) have made it necessary. Wiltshire and the 4 branches have also found it necessary to increase the fees but, hopefully, this will not become an annual occurrence.

With immediate effect the fees are;

BBKA Category Fee:
Registered: £24.00
Partner: £16.00
Country: £12.00
Junior: £ 5.00
School: £24.00





WBKA Category Fee:
Registered: £7.00
Partner: £7.00
Country: £7.00
School: £7.00
Junior: FREE

BDI
Up to 3 colonies total £2.10
Up to 5 colonies + extra £1.30 total £3.40
Up to 10 colonies + extra £4.90 total £7.00
Up to 15 colonies + extra £8.10 total £10.20
Up to 20 colonies + extra £10.00 total £12.10
Up to 25 colonies + extra £11.70 total £13.80
Up to 30 colonies + extra £14.30 total £16.40
Up to 35 colonies + extra £16.90 total £19.00
Up to 39 colonies + extra £19.00 total £21.10

Alison Daniels, WBKA Membership Secretary

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

With over 260 entries staged at the Wiltshire Bee & Honey show on 10th October 2026, the show was once again a resounding success and a day much enjoyed by beekeepers and members of the public alike. A heartfelt thank you to Sophie Butcher, Chair of Wiltshire BKA and her team of hardworking volunteers for staging yet another wonderful celebration of the world of bees and other pollinators. It takes months to organise this show and Wiltshire is extremely lucky to have members wiilling to work long hours to make it such a bright and unique success.

Thanks must also go to every person who entered an exhibit, whether that exhibit was placed or not, and to the all the stewards, scribes, judges, stallholders, charities and sponsors - Belectric Solar, Wadworth Brewery, Eden Renewables, and Corsham Print - and the four speakers who presented fascinating insights on honey bee behaviour, drones, starting the beekeeping journey and the varroa mite.



Dr Brian Mathew (centre), MP for Melksham and Devizes with Jake Garrod, left, from Belectric UK, one of the show's major sponsors, and Sophie Butcher, Chair of Wiltshire Beekeepers Association



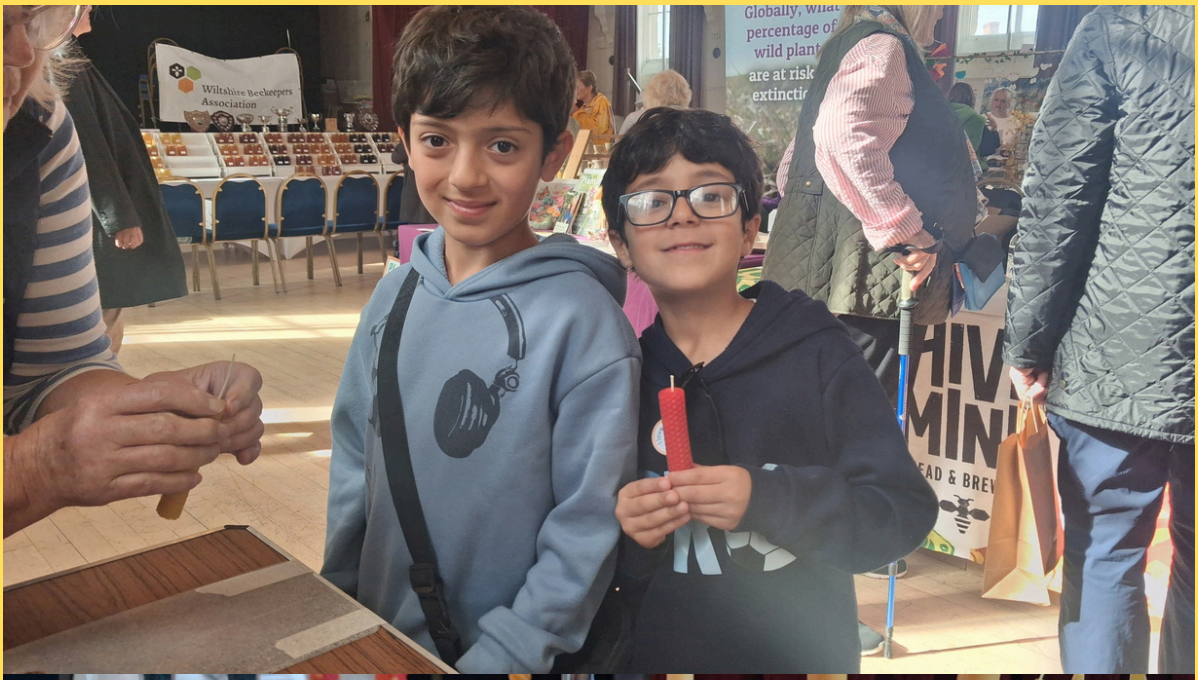

I'm a
BeeKeeper
If you see me running,
Run!










Wiltshire Beekeepers Association


THE BRITISH BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
Wiltshire BKA


HONEY MUSTARD DRESSING
BEESWAX BODY BUTTER
WAXED JAM POT COVERS
BEESWAX FURNITURE POLISH
FIRST PRIZE
BATH&WEST SHOW


Wiltshire Beekeepers
Association


Wiltshire Beekeepers Association
local honey from local beekeepers


BEAUTIFUL PLANTS


Wax can vary in colour depending on pollen bees have brought to the hive.

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day Prizewinners

Record	Name	Title	First	Second	Third	Highly Commended	Commended
1	Novice - 1lb Run Honey	Novice or newcomer - one 454g (1lb) jar Run Honey any colour	Lisa Gates	Dita Jaksicova	Jan Mojsa	Nikki and Farran Crosskey	
2	Novice - 1lb Set Honey	Novice or newcomer - one 454g (1lb) jar Set Honey		Lisa Gates			
3	Newcomer candles	Pair rolled candles, colouring permitted	Jan Mojsa				
4	Young Members	Young members - one 454g (1lb) jar of honey, any type					
5	Light Run Honey	Light run honey- two 454g (1lb) jars	Sophie Butcher	Cressida Hemmings	Sonia Meadows		
6	Medium Run Honey	Medium run honey - two 454g (1lb) jars	Chris Rawlings		Sophie Butcher		
7	Dark Run Honey	Dark run honey - two 454g (1lb) jars	Donald Watt		Ruth Watt		
8	Soft Set Honey	Soft set honey - two 454g (1lb) jars, creamed or naturally granulated	Chris Rawlings				
9	Three Jars for sale	Three matching 454g (1lb) Jars of Honey, any colour, set or run, with own labels for sale	Sandra Rogers	Elaine Irvine	Sophie Butcher		
10	Chunk Honey	Chunk honey - one 454g (1lb) jar		Elaine Irvine			
11	Cut Comb	Cut comb, one container, minimum gross weight, 226g (8oz)		Elaine Irvine			
12	One Sect Comb Honey	One section of comb honey (round/square)	Lisa Gates	Sandra Rogers	Sophie Butcher		
13	Shallow Frame of Comb	Shallow frame of comb honey for extraction	Andrea Stickells	Paul Bollen	Donald Watt		
14	Taste & Aroma	Taste and aroma class, one 454g (1lb) jar run honey	Nina Wilton	Donald Watt	Robin Wilton	Ruth Watt	
15	Four Beeswax Blocks	Four beeswax blocks, 27-29g (1oz)	Ruth Watt	Sophie Butcher	Donald Watt	Sonia Meadows	
16	Cake of Beeswax	Cake of beeswax, min 227g (8oz)	Sophie Butcher	Donald Watt	Barry Roberts		
17	Pair Candles (dip/drip)	Pair of natural beeswax candles, dipped or dripped	Sophie Butcher	Chris Rawlings	Lucie Castleman		
18	Pair Candles (cast)	Pair of natural beeswax candles, moulded or cast	Sophie Butcher	Lucie Castleman			
19	Pair Candles (rolled)	Pair of natural beeswax candles, rolled, colouring permitted	Sophie Butcher	Lucie Castleman	Liz Gwinnell		
20	Beeswax Flower Stems	1-5 stems of beeswax flowers	Daniel Young				
21	Beeswax Flower Display	Artistic display of beeswax flowers	Sue Rawlings	Daniel Young			
22	Furniture Polish	Beeswax furniture polish	Lisa Gates	Chris Rawlings	Lucie Castleman		
23	Furniture Cream	Beeswax furniture cream			David Brown		
24	Beeswax Wraps	Two beeswax wraps		Jan Mojsa	Elaine Lewis		
25	Sweet Mead	Bottle sweet mead	Elaine Irvine	Chris Rawlings	Ruth Watt		
26	Dry Mead	Bottle dry mead	Donald Watt	Chris Rawlings			
27	Fruit Melomel	Bottle fruit melomel	Chris Rawlings	Alan Ridout	Elaine Irvine		
28	Spiced Metheglin	Bottle spiced metheglin	Chris Rawlings	Elaine Irvine	Alan Ridout		
29	Cyser	Bottle Cyser	Alan Ridout	Chris Rawlings	Elaine Irvine		
30	Counter Display	A counter display, minimum of three different products	Sophie Butcher				
31	Display of 6 Products	Display of six bee products	Lucie Castleman				
32	Six Honey Fairings	Six Cornish Honey Fairings		Cressida Hemmings	Amanda Leworthy		
33	Six Honey Sweets	Six Honey Sweets	Amanda Leworthy Leworthy		Ruth Watt		
34	Honey Cake	Honey cake	Sue Rawlings	Steve Double	Ruth Watt	Lorna Boyle	Alison Daniels
35	Photo Honeybee(s)	Photo: Honeybee(s) & plant(s)		Jeremy Tyler	Dita Jaksicova		
36	Photo Hive/Apiary	Photo: In or about the hive / apiary	Sophie Butcher		Katie Carrington		
37	Photo Series of 3-5	Photo: a series of 3-5 photographs on any subject	Robin Wilton	Elaine Irvine	Chris Rawlings		



Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day Prizewinners



Trophy	Winner	Purpose	Notes
Methuen	Sophie Butcher	Individual Most Points	26 points
King Shield	Chris Rawlings	Best Honey in Show	Medium Honey
Kennet Perpetual	Robin Wilton	Best Non Honey	Photo 3-5 photos
Norman Lovegrove	Chris Rawlings	Best Mead	Coffee Metheglin
David Wicks	Andrea Stickells	Best Frame for Extraction	
Novice Cup		Best Novice/Newcomer/Young person section winner	Medium Honey - young beekeeper
Applegate	West Wiltshire	Branch Most Points	Again!!!!!!
Teal Cup		Service & Achievement	
Geraldine Lennert	Sophie Butcher	Best Wax Exhibit	Dipped Candles
Blue Ribbon	Chris Rawlings	Best Entry in Show	Medium Honey
Novice Ribbon	Lisa Gates	National Honey Show Novice award	Most points of a novice/newcomer

Branch	Points
MDBKA	3rd
KBKA	2nd
SDBKA	4th
WWBKA	1st

The winner of the Teal Cup was Gloria from West Wilts. Please note that some other winners withheld their names from publication.

Dave the Drone is Dead

Dave the Drone is dead, Richard Oliver, Master Beekeeper and link trustee for Wiltshire Beekeepers explained at a talk given during the afternoon of the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Show.

Drones, he said, are usually dead at this time of the year but after raising an enquiry with the beekeepers in the audience, it was clear that many had seen drones in their hives quite recently. This, he advised, meant that there was still the possibility of supercedure, even this late on in the season.



Have you seen drones in your apiary this autumn?
(photograph: Wikimedia Commons)

There is still much that is unknown about drone behaviour, Richard told us, but what is known is that they are a muscly, mighty flying machine responsible for continuing the genetic line of the honeybee. Many people consider drones to be worthless, and lazy, fed by their sister worker bees and contributing nothing to the day to day running of the hive. This may be true in some respects. Drones, Richard said, are lazy, until they are spurred into action. For when they sense the pheromones of a queen, they become completely focused and energised by the task in hand: mating.

What many of us hadn't realised is that drones don't just die after mating or when they are evicted from the hive at the end of the season. They also die from sheer exhaustion, usually at around five weeks old, which perhaps contradicts our commonly held view of drones. Whatever we may think of them, they are a crucial aspect of the honeybee world and drone comb early in the season is an important indicator that a hive is thinking of swarming.

Why do bees behave the way that they do?

This was the question Kate Graydon set out to answer when studying stingless bees in Brazil earlier this year.

Kate, studying for a second PhD at Bristol University, explained that sometimes asking one question can raise a hundred more. One of the areas her research focused on is why honeybees are flower-constant. For once they have identified a particular flower using shape, scent and colour, they will “unlock” the key to pollination and stick with it, often visiting that type of flower for several days at a time.



Why do honeybees remain faithful to one flower at a time? Photo: Canva

Whilst there is still much to learn, the experiments conducted by Kate and her fellow researchers suggested that once a bee has learned how to pollinate one particular flower type, it is a better use of energy and time to continue to harvest it rather than expend that time and energy on learning how to unlock the key to pollinating a different type of flower..

Powered by the Sun

In March 2026, the British government reported that a total of 2 million solar installations have taken place in the UK so far: in homes, communities and on solar farms. With our increasingly hot summers, capturing solar power to use as energy is growing in these times of rising energy costs and concerns about climate change. The government is committed to switching to “clean power” by 2030, moving away from traditional fossil fuels, which emit huge quantities of carbon dioxide and trap heat in the atmosphere, one of the largest factors contributing to human induced climate change.



The partnership between solar farms and beehives: Park Farm, Leicester

Eden Renewables, which sponsored the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day again this year, are passionate about clean energy and about working in harmony with the environment. In particular they work with beekeepers, encouraging them to keep hives on their solar farms with sites specially designed to work in harmony with nature. A dedicated ecologist, Dr Guy Parker, a speaker at a previous Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day, advises on the best native wildflowers and grasses to grow around solar panels, according to what is best suited to the local environment. Every new development must deliver a minimum biodiversity net gain (BNG) of 10%; Eden Renewables typically achieves much more than that – over 50%. One of the reasons they continue to sponsor the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day is to help bring the importance of pollinators to a wider audience. Their solar farms create wildflower meadows, new hedgerows and pollinator habitats, giving local bee populations the ability to thrive whilst at the same time, generating clean energy.

Powered by the Sun



Creacombe solar farm, a community-owned project in Devon, which was also developed by the Eden Renewables team. All photos reproduced with the kind permission of Eden Renewables.

The RSPB reports that solar farms can be beneficial to nature when they are not situated on sites which are already important to wildlife or near those that are sensitive, and where they are properly managed to help wildlife. The RSPB has conducted research which concludes that solar farms with a mix of habitats can support higher numbers of birds than nearby intensively farmed land which is often a desert for wildlife and bees. Several studies have also found that solar farms managed with nature in mind can boost pollinator numbers. In addition, solar sites can rest agricultural land and allow it to recover from intensive farming and pesticide use. Solar panels can thus be an important tool for fighting climate change and promoting the health of our countryside.

Powered by the Sun

Eden Renewables are currently working on three solar projects in the Chippenham area which they expect to build in 2027, and a further installation near Porton. In addition to encouraging beehives on the land and growing wildflowers, their sites also offer bird boxes and hibernacula for amphibians on appropriate sites. They currently have 12 solar projects in the pipeline spread over a geographical area from Essex in the south east to Fife in Scotland. Two of the sites which the Eden Renewables team have already helped to develop are Park Farm Solar Farm in Leicestershire where bees on site have produced the wonderfully named Solar Honey. Eden Renewables also helped develop a community owned solar farm in Creacombe, Devon (see photos).



Honey produced at Park Farm solar farm in Leicestershire, another project developed by the Eden Renewables team

“Solar farms and beekeeping are a natural fit,” Sophy Fearnley-Whittingstall of Eden Renewables says. “Healthy bee populations are a key indicator of the biodiversity gains we're committed to at our four solar farms in Wiltshire. Sponsoring the Wiltshire Bee and Honey Show each year is one small way we can support the local beekeeping community that does so much good work on the ground, and it’s also a great way to remind people that the benefits of solar farms go well beyond clean energy generation - they are good for wildlife and farming too.”

In flower... Autumn Hawkbit (Scorzoneroides autumnalis)



Autumn Hawkbit looks like a dandelion blooming in September. Named by the Royal Horticultural Society as one of their plants for pollinators, this hardy flower blooms from July to October, often providing a last vital source of nectar to UK pollinators. It is one source of the golden pollen seen in our beehives at this time of year and once flowering has finished, the seed heads become a favourite food for finches. Its foliage also provides low level cover for beetles and invertebrates.

In the Spotlight:
The Tawny Mining Bee (Adrena fulva)



The Tawny Mining Bee often makes its home in people's lawns.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The tawny mining bee can be seen between March and June in the United Kingdom. The female, which is much larger than the male, has an orange furred abdomen and reddish fur on top of her thorax, whereas the males are browner in colour. The males also have a white lower face which often resembles a moustache.

The tawny mining bee is seen more frequently than other mining bees, often nesting in footpaths, lawns, gardens and parks. Its presence is noticeable from the volcano-like mounds of earth that mark the entrance to its burrow. These do not damage lawns and wash away within a few weeks.

The tawny mining bee is highly dependent on spring flowering shrubs for forage, visiting blackthorn, hawthorn and fruit trees. It also feeds from buttercups, dandelions and rape.

The bee is delightfully gentle as it has no large nest or queen to defend. The males have no sting at all and the females will only sting if squeezed, handled or provoked to extremes.

Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Update



A Yellow Legged Asian Hornet nest was discovered in Street, Somerset

A primary YLAH nest was found in Street, Somerset, in August, which has led to Wiltshire Beekeepers increasing monitoring. On a more positive note, only 49 nests have been recorded up to 26th August 2026 compared with 86 in the same period for 2025. Tom Kenyon, AHAT lead for Wiltshire, believes the reduction could be due to a number of factors:

- Climate
- YLAH situation in France/low countries
- Later spring/drought conditions
- Successful nest destruction last year
- Less vigilance

The nest near Street was oserved by a vigilant beekeeper tending his hives in Ashcott, near Street. He contacted Bee Base via the YLAH app on his phone. Bee Base used electronic tagging on captured hornets to trace the hornet back to its nest. This was relatively small, hidden in a patch of brambles in nearby woodland.

Tom urges all of us to remain vigilant: look up at trees as the leaves fall, and down at the ivy. He particularly urges all of us to download the YLAH app on our phones.



WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

Honey yields from our apiary this season have been phenomenal, suggesting that despite the long hot summer with its extreme temperatures, the bees have not only managed to cope but find nectar despite the shortage of rain. We would like to thank our apiary manager, Den, for his hard work extracting honey and looking after the colonies, which now number 16, as we head into autumn.

Sheltered from the hot sun by hats and umbrellas, 30 members got together for the summer garden party held in July at The White Hart, Corsley. This is where we held our annual dinner in January, and our hosts once again went out of their way to welcome us with yellow bunting strung around the pub garden and bee themed novelties scattered across the outdoor tables. It gave us all another chance to meet each other outside our bee suits and welcome non beekeeping partners to join us.



West Wiltshire Beekeepers held a summer garden party in July.

WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS

New beekeepers from this year's beginner's course attended our apiary sessions during the season, and a taster day took place in August, with those attending already signed up for next year's programme. Many of us are now wearing name badges on our bee suits so people know who we are! Congratulations go to our members who successfully completed the Basic (now called Improvers) course and received their certificates at the Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day with pride.

Our annual honey show took place at a new venue, Southwick Village Hall, on 19th September with over 100 entries being staged. These included bottles of mead and melomel, beeswax wraps, furniture polish, delicious honey cakes - the list was endless! Just over a month later, many of these exhibits were entered into the County Show, securing West Wiltshire the Applegate trophy for the branch with the most points.





When Chris Rawlings (left) isn't hiding under stages, he makes a wide range of exhibits for honey shows including this beautiful wax model (above).

Our members continue to visit primary schools and assist in raising the profile of Wiltshire Beekeepers and in August, Liz Gwinnell gave a talk on bees and beekeeping to the Southwick Seniors. One of the men who attended relayed the story of how, as a young man, he worked in the Co-op department store in Trowbridge which, in those days, appears to have had a bee equipment department. He recalled how they would make frames and all types of bee equipment in the workshop, which then had to be packaged up and put on the evening train to send to customers throughout the country. His job, as one of the younger members of the department, was to push the trolley carrying the parcels to the railway station, which was very hard work!

WEST WILTSHIRE BEEKEEPERS





Many of the exhibits at our branch show went on to win prizes at the County Show a month later

As the season comes to a close for another year, we are hoping to introduce more training-based get-togethers during the winter months as well as continuing our programme of social events. From November, our monthly meet-ups at Thoulstone will start again with a chance for members to call into the Pavilion cafe for a chat, coffee or lunch. This gives us the opportunity to keep in contact during those months when we don't meet at the apiary. We are also hoping to host another skittles night in November, when there will once again be fierce competition between the women and the men's teams.



Members enjoying a cup of tea in the club house after an apiary session

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

Well, what a summer that was!! While the “warm” temperatures were welcome to begin with, they soon became a nuisance and then a torment for humans, but the bees, despite the parched ground and withering forage, seemed to keep calm and carried on! I’ve heard many reports of beekeepers with considerable honey harvests – the last count at Kennet, was a harvest of over 500lbs from both our teaching and production apiaries! (I’m glad I wasn’t extracting that day 😉!)



Kennet’s harvest from both their apiaries produced over 500lbs of honey this year

In addition, Jeremy, our apiaries Manager was kept busy making wasp traps and trialling different recipes for YLAH attractant that didn’t attract the bees…. Something we didn’t really succeed with….. watch this space for further experiments next year.

Sonia reported on an ad hoc visit from Dan Etheridge (Bee Inspector) in the last *Honey Bee Times* and, just like London buses, we ended up with another visit, this time associated with a reported outbreak of EFB within three miles of our apiaries. Thankfully, we were quickly given the all-clear.

Most recently, I'm sure like everyone at the apiary. We've been reorganising our colonies to give them the best chance of getting through the winter. This has included nadiring, feeding and giving prophylactic treatments to ward off varroa – now it's a case of sit tight and fingers crossed!



Only the primary products of wax and honey are covered by the insurance provided by the BBKA. Beeswax wraps are not covered by BBKA insurance, given that no one can account for what dye was used in a given piece of material.

Barbara Dalby visited us on our club night in July and gave an interesting and thought-provoking talk around the regulations surrounding homemade products from the hive (excluding pure honey and uncoloured / unscented beeswax candles). You may already know that the insurance policy from the BBKA, which many beekeepers rely on, only covers these two primary hive products; products NOT covered by the BBKA include: bees wax wraps and other products / foodstuffs that comprise more than just wax, honey or propolis.

The restriction applies because if a product with added ingredients (even just a piece of cotton) proves to be faulty, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to prove whether it was the hive ingredient or additive at fault. Barbara told us that there are widely available 'Tradesmen & Professional' insurance policies (for individuals) for beekeepers who want additional insurance cover for the products they sell – probably worth a quick review of your insurance policies and the products you add to your honey and beeswax to make sure you're covered!

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

We held our new format, new location AGM and Honey Show at Nursteed Community Centre in Devizes on Saturday, 26th September. Changes were made following feedback from members who attended last year's show who felt that the beautiful village hall we use for meetings was a bit too small for a joint event like this. Thankfully, informal feedback from those who attended this year was that the changes made were indeed positive.

There was much more space, the honey show took place without distraction from the AGM discussions; similarly, members were able to give Daniel Bailey all of their attention as he gave a presentation on Honey and Health: a review of the science (and some folklore) relevant to the use of honey in treating medical and other conditions.



Kennet's annual honey show took place at a new venue this year

KENNET BEEKEEPERS

As usual, prizes were given for the excellent honey and other products entered into the Honey Show but we were honoured to be given a new trophy in memory of Chris Sheridan, a Kennet member who sadly died last year. Before awarding the cup, Mrs Sheridan told us of her search for something fitting to Chris's memory: she wanted something special associated with honeybees; after lots of research, she found a glassblower who used honey in his glass-making. The trophy is shown below: within the glass is some of the last honey that Chris had from his bees. This was a very emotional story and many members were, not surprisingly, moved,including Roger Allen who was the first recipient of this beautiful glass trophy.



The Chris Sheridan Memorial Queen Cup trophy, newly awarded in 2026

That's it from us – now it's a case of cleaning kit, tidying and reorganising where necessary and starting to plan for 2027; we already have diary dates for Beginners' Courses and Swarm preparation sorted, as well as plans for frame-making mornings..... and so the list goes on. The spring will be here before we know it!

Andrea Waylen, Chair KBA

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

It has been a busy and rewarding few months for Swindon & District Beekeepers (SDBKA), covering everything from a demanding, drought-affected season at the apiaries through to a successful queen-rearing project, a well-attended programme of training courses, and a memorable morning of education work with a local primary school.



Taking honeybees into the classroom: Stanford in the Vale Primary School

One of the highlights of our summer was a visit to Stanford in the Vale Primary School, where Mick, Barry, Stephen and Matt spent the morning speaking to every class in the school, from reception right through to Year 6.

Each session was pitched to the age group in front of us, but the core messages were the same: how a honeybee colony works, the role honeybees and other pollinators play in our food supply and wider environment, and most importantly what the children and their families can actually do to help. With the summer heatwave and prolonged dry spell very much part of the children's own experience, we focused on practical, achievable actions: putting out shallow dishes of water with stones or pebbles for bees to land on, letting lawns and verges grow a little longer, planting pollinator-friendly flowers, and leaving wildflowers where they are rather than tidying them away.

We also used the visit to raise awareness of the yellow-legged Asian hornet (Vespa velutina). The children were shown how to tell a hornet from a honeybee, wasp or hoverfly, and we explained why early reporting matters so much for honeybees and native pollinators alike. Posters were left with the school for parents, encouraging them to stay alert and to download the Asian Hornet Watch app so that any suspected sighting can be reported quickly and accurately.



SDBKA educated the children about the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet

The star of the morning, as ever, was the observation hive. Being able to see live bees close up and in safety, spotting the queen, watching nectar being stored and brood being tended turns an abstract lesson into something the children will genuinely remember. The questions came thick and fast, and the enthusiasm across every year group was a real pleasure to see.

Our thanks go to the staff at Stanford in the Vale Primary School for the warm welcome, and to the team for giving up their morning. Outreach of this kind is some of the most valuable work we do, and we would encourage other associations to take an observation hive into their local schools if they can.

Apiary Updates

Both Association apiaries are in a strong position going into winter, and disease inspections and varroa monitoring have now been completed across both sites.

At TWIGS, all seven colonies remain strong and are ready for winter. A full disease inspection was carried out on every colony alongside varroa monitoring. Sacbrood and bald brood were found in a few hives, but no other issues of concern were identified. One colony recorded a high varroa count and was treated in accordance with BIBBA's varroa calculator.

Basset Down is now fully populated, with 19 colonies in total, including 13 SDBKA-reared nucs. We expect to be able to sell approximately half of those that come through the winter. All colonies have undergone thorough disease inspections and varroa-level checks, and none currently requires treatment.

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

Queen Rearing: More Than Forty Locally Reared Queens

Apiary Managers Michael Carter and Barry Roberts set themselves the goal of raising enough queens to supply both the club's colonies and their own nucleus colonies with locally reared queens and bees, rather than relying on bought-in or imported stock.

Working with the Nicot system and the Ben Hardman method, they selected a colony in early April with a one-year-old prolific laying queen, calm and manageable bees, and sufficient strength to support the process, placing it on double brood to make handling the Nicot frame easier.



All 16 of the queen cells successfully hatched to produce new queens for the SDBKA apiary (photograph: Matt O'Dell/Swindon & District BKA

The Nicot frame went into the upper brood box on 30 April for the bees to clean and prepare. The blue-marked queen was confined in the Nicot box on 5 May, with eggs confirmed the following day before she was released back into the colony.

On 9 May, twenty cells containing larvae and royal jelly were transferred to a queen-rearing bar and returned to the same colony. By 14 May, sixteen of the twenty cells had been drawn and capped, and each was placed in a protective cage. On 18 May all sixteen cells were placed into nucs without their cages.

The nucs themselves were three-frame units prepared using the Roger Patterson split method, each ideally containing a frame of stores, a frame of brood, and bees shaken from three further frames. With the season still early and the nectar flow strong, supplementary feeding helped the bees draw foundation; later in the season the double-brood colonies supplied plenty of drawn comb.



Worker bees and a queen cell: photograph: Wikimedia Commons

On 22 May, Michael Carter and Tony Hughes confirmed that all sixteen queens had emerged. Two weeks later, fourteen of the sixteen had mated successfully and begun laying. The process was repeated twice more across the season with reasonable success, producing more than forty queens in total. Looking ahead, the intention is to make greater use of Apidea mating nucs so that each unit requires fewer bees, and to share the experience gained by running queen-rearing courses through the club.

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

Growing Future Beekeepers: The 2026 Courses

Our 2026 training programme is now complete and was a success across the board. Eight people attended the two-day Starting Beekeeping Course, run by Barry Roberts with Mick Carter assisting. Some of those attending already keep bees, while others hope to start next year. We also ran four Taster Days with a total of 34 people attending, delivered by Kathy Hobson with help from Stephen Greenaway, Dita Jaksicova, Janet Johnson and Diana Webster. All those who took part were highly enthusiastic, and a good proportion hope to begin their beekeeping journey next year. Our thanks go to everyone who gave up their time to share their knowledge and inspire the next generation of beekeepers.



34 people attended SDBKA's taster days.
Photograph: Matt O'Dell/Swindon and District BKA

Alongside the formal courses, our monthly Bee & Brew mornings at the TWIGS training apiary continue to thrive. Members suit up to inspect colonies, share tips and build confidence under the guidance of experienced mentors. It remains hands-on learning at its best, with teamwork, tea, cake and plenty of bees.

SWINDON AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS

The SDBKA Bake Off

Our first Bake Off proved a thoroughly delightful evening filled with creativity, laughter and a generous helping of buttercream. Our thanks go to judges Gail and Zoë, who bravely took on the enviable and occasionally sticky task of tasting and evaluating over 40 entries in the Showstopper category.







Swindon and District Beekeepers' first "Bakeoff" was a roaring success. Photographs: Matt O'Dell/Swindon & District BKA

First place went to Rebecca Messenger for an outstanding banana loaf, with Matthew O'Dell second for honey flapjacks, Matthew Gale third for honey baklava, and Matthew O'Dell fourth for honeycomb. While judging was underway, contestants faced a frantic two-minute cupcake decorating Technical Challenge, which descended into cheerful chaos and demonstrated that more frosting is not always better. A special mention goes to Kathy Hobson, who kindly collated all the recipes into a SDBKA Recipe booklet for members to take home.

Matthew O'Dell, SDBKA

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

As we approach Autumn the question is, when will the weather become more seasonal? After the unusually hot summer we are all scratching our heads and wondering how to cope in years to come. Is this summer's weather, and, more importantly, the behaviour of the bees, going to be our new normal or do we just have to play it by ear in the future?



Photo: Canva

Despite the hot weather members are saying they have had bumper honey crops, which bodes well for the forthcoming honey shows. Also, the bees were very obliging to the candidates taking their Basic Assessment this August and many congratulations go to them and to Lucie Castleman, the MBKA Education Officer, for preparing them so well that all who took the assessment passed.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS



All Melksham members who took their Basic Assessment this year passed

The MBKA Apiary Team was also delighted to get high praise from the Basic Assessor who carried out BASIC and Honeybee Health Assessments at the now, not so new, apiary at Roundponds. Very many thanks to all the members who came to look after the bees, equipment, sheds, track, grass mowing, installation of a water source and all the myriads of jobs that go with having a successful apiary. Not only is it a rewarding way to spend a couple of hours but it is also very educational, and the wind-down cup of coffee and biscuit provides a nice sociable end to the morning's exertions.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

Another innovation in the MBKA diary this year was the Apiary Safari. Six members were brave enough to open their own home or out apiaries and allow fellow MBKA members to drop in. The apiaries provided a variety of settings from a small urban garden in a newly built estate where bees are successfully thriving, to a woodland setting for Flowhives.





Six Melksham members went on an apiary safari, visiting each other's apiaries (all photographs: Melksham BKA)



MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS

One member is assessing the productiveness of different hive types and has a novel beekeeping shed in the form of a horsebox providing the necessary storage for kit and equipment at a remote location



One member has a fountain at her apiary which provides the bees with a constant source of water



Innovative use of a horsebox - as a bee shed!

The general consensus, for both new and seasoned beekeepers alike, was that it was a very useful experience that gave everyone food for thought and much useful information, experience and refreshments were shared.

As the bee year draws to a close, the committee are already planning for 2027. MBKA will be running the usual Introduction to Beekeeping and Basic courses in the New Year as there is ongoing demand for places. In addition to these there will be a study group for anyone intending to take Module 1 which covers Honey Bee Management, it is also hoped to run 'taster days' at the apiary to encourage new beekeepers.

MELKSHAM BEEKEEPERS



Melksham Honey Show took place at the end of September. Photo: Canva

MBKA held its annual honey show on the last Tuesday of September (more to follow in the next update).

Our AGM will be held in October, hopefully for the last time, as the intention is to move it to February in the future. Finally, another first, we hope to host an Association dinner in December where we can congratulate all the members for their hard work this year.

Members' News

A Year of Forage Exploration

SDBKA member Nicola Perrett has spent the year getting to know the wildflowers our bees depend on for forage, using the free citizen-science app Flora Incognita to identify plants in the apiary and in the parks she visits regularly. Her honest conclusion was that she knew far less than she had thought, and she has been struck by both the variety of wildflowers around us and how they differ between woodland, riverside and open meadow. She also notes how lovely the names are, having passed common mouse-ear, lady's bedstraw and white goosefoot many times without knowing what they were called.



Nicola was struck by how lovely the names of wildflowers can be

Members' News

A Year of Forage Exploration

The exercise also revealed how easily similar-looking plants are grouped together in error: what she had previously filed mentally as cow parsley could equally have been wild carrot, ground elder, hogweed, angelica or water hemlock. Through May and June she photographed and tagged the location of every new flower, gradually building a record of the wildflower succession.



Cow Parsley can easily be mistaken for other wild plants

That record stopped abruptly in July with the drought, when new flowers simply ceased to appear, with the sole exception of her riverside location. It is a small but telling piece of evidence of what the dry summer did to available forage.

Members' News

Is Cork the Future?

In August, a group of singers arrived at a little beautiful hill top town called Morella (between Barcelona and Valencia).

Why? Well we've been there before, the old hill top Monastry has excellent acoustics – oh and Morella was on the direct line to see the 100% total eclipse .

Here's Morella and here's the total eclipse: (photographs: Brian Wilson)





So where's the 'bees' connection'?

In Morella there are a number of shops selling local produce including honey One had some old bee hives made out of cork.

In Castillian (Spanish) they are called *colmena de corcho,* or simply *corcho*. However, we are in 'Catalan country', so they are called *rusc de suro* (rusc = beehive – and de suro = made of cork).

Cork hives have a long history of use around the Mediterranean, notably in Spain and Portugal, where traditional cylindrical cork hives can last for centuries.

Members' News

Is Cork the Future?



Cork beehives have long been used in Mediterranean countries: Photograph: Brian Wilson

I thought, 'that's just for the tourists' – but I was wrong.

Whilst local beekeeper now use 'conventional hives', they also use the 'old fashioned' cork hives. I noted that the entrance to the cork hive was at the bottom (I did not ask if they had a wasp problem!!) and bees build their comb inside. To collect the honey, they just lift off the cork top. Years ago they used a rudimentary queen excluder that sat half way up the hive – but now they cut plastic queen excluders to shape.



Traditional beehive handmade with cork; Author: Daniel Feliciano; Location: Torres Novas - Portugal (Wikimedia Commons)

Members' News

Is Cork the Future?

That started me thinking – always a dangerous occupation! - why cork? And are there any advantages?

Here's what I found out from the beekeepers working in the shop (I had an interpreter!!):

Natural cork bark mimics the thick, insulated walls of wild honeybee tree hollows. What are the advantages?

- Good thermal regulation – Cork sheeting has a high natural R-value (around R-3.6 to R-4.2 per inch) and keeps colonies warmer in winter yet cooler in summer while remaining lightweight and resistant to moisture.
- Cork provides better thermal protection than several inches of wood, helping bees save honey stores and expend less energy.
- Cork is impermeable to liquids (that's why they secure wine bottles) and gases, preventing water absorption and dampness inside the nest.
- Traditional cork cylinders are light enough to be moved easily by one person.
- The natural chemical makeup of cork repels small insects and resists fungal or bacterial growth.
- The internal rough interior surfaces encourage bees to coat the walls in propolis, boosting their immune defence. (Is this the same with straw skeps?)



Cork has natural insulating properties

Members' News

Is Cork the Future?

What about today?

Well, the recent hot, dry spring and summers may invite us to look at cork in a different light. You could build a cork hive, but today some beekeepers are looking at using cork sheeting to insulate their standard hives as they have found that they are cooler in summer and warmer in winter.

Then there is the question as to how to protect cork sheeting on the outside of a hive? Some people, who use cork sheeting or tiles from a DIY project, use thicker cork sheets or paint them to give some more protection. Others advise that if you are lining the inside of your hive, encase it in a smooth thin wood layer, as bees often propolise cork which can cause some damage.



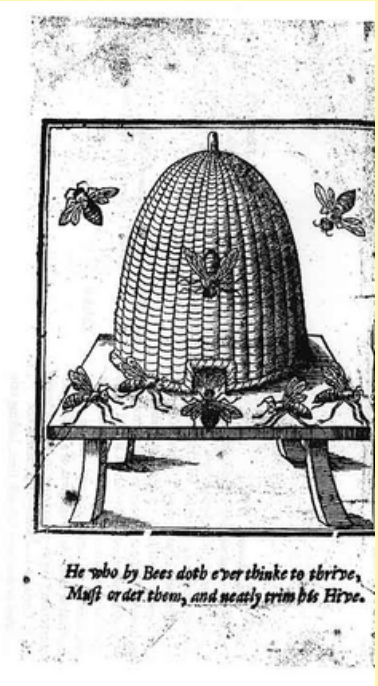
Bees often propolise cork. Photograph: Wikimedia Commons

So, yet again we can learn from beekeepers from years ago and from other countries. If our climate change means hotter summers, then cork may be used more often.

Brian Wilson Melksham BKA

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?



When we inspect our hives and tend to our bees, do we ever think about the progress made over the centuries to provide us with the knowledge about honeybees we have today? This month we learn more about Charles Butler (1571-1647), often considered to be the father of English beekeeping and author of the influential book "The Feminine Monarchie". .

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 worke and fruit of the little Bee is so great and wonderfull, so comely for order and beauty, so excellent for Art and wisdome, & so full of pleasure and profit; that the contemplation thereof may well beseeme an ingenious nature.”

Charles Butler



Stained glass window in Wootton St. Lawrence Church, Basingstoke dedicated to Charles Butler in 1954. Photo: Wikimedia Commons



Bees from the Past

Charles Butler (1571-1647) was a writer, a priest, a composer and fascinated by honeybees.

In 1609, he published what would become the standard text on apiculture for the next 200 years, The Feminine Monarchie.

Charles Butler was the first person to confirm the existence of the queen bee. For over 2,000 years, it was believed that the queen bee was a king, a precept suggested by scholars as long ago as Aristotle and Virgil.

Not everyone accepted Charles Butler's theory to start with and many continued to believe that honeybees were controlled by "male master bees."

The Feminine Monarchie was a utopia of bee delights, containing chapters on bee gardens and swarm catching and methods of predicting when a colony might swarm by listening to the different pitches of the bees' buzz. He translated the tones to compose a musical score which became known as "The Bee's Madrigal" or *Melissomelos,* the lyrics of which extolled the virtue of bees. A copy of the musical score was included in the 1623 version of his book.

Charles Butler was the first to identify male drones and confirm that beeswax was not collected from plants, but came from the bees' bodies. However he also believed it was the worker bee, rather than the queen, that laid eggs.

A stained glass window was dedicated to him in 1954 at the church of Wootton St. Lawrence in Basingstoke, where he lived for most of his life, and a choir from Oxford sang the Bee's Madrigal.

In Other News...
The Buzz at London St. Pancras





The installation at London St. Pancras Station was inspired by the Fortnum & Mason hives on the roof (photographs: BBKA)

Have you ever wondered what it might be like to step inside a beehive? Between July and September this year, there was a chance for the millions who pass through London St. Pancras station in London every week to find out.

Inspired by Fortnum & Mason's working beehives on the roof of the station, the 8.4m tall installation was described as "an immersive installation created to celebrate 100 years of "Disney" Winnie the Pooh. Inside, illuminated honeycomb and ambient soundscapes transported the visitor to the world of the beehive with seating areas designed to provide a moment of calm respite from the rush of the commuting world.

The installation also focused on the health of bees and pollinators and the role they play in our ecosystems, highlighting the work London St. Pancras undertakes alongside the high speed rail route to contribute to the natural world. This includes supporting 25 community beehives by providing space for local beekeepers to care for their colonies. London St. Pancras are also committed to protecting and restoring the peatlands in Kent as part of their wider sustainability ambition.



Gold bees decorated the installation at London St. Pancras and the exterior of the iconic Fortnum & Mason store in Piccadilly. Photograph: BBKA

Combining Fortnum & Mason's honey heritage, Winnie the Pooh's love of honey and London St. Pancras's commitment to biodiversity, the beehive stopped commuters in its tracks with its six gold bees created by artist Paul Badham. It also marked the launch of Fortnum & Mason's limited edition of "100 Aker Wood Hunny" and showcased a Winnie the Pooh "hunnyu pot hamper" available for sale in its stores.



Some of the gold bees designed by Paul Badham raised £89,900 for the British Beekeepers Association this summer. Photograph: BBKA.

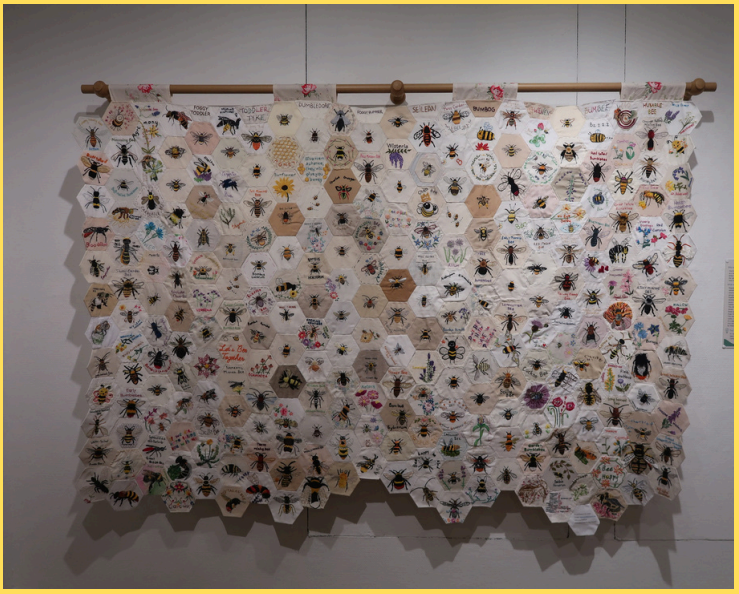
Created by Camden artist Paul Badham and his company, Metal Works, some of the gold bees which decorated the installation at London St. Pancras and the shop front of Fortnum & Mason, were auctioned in August 2026, raising £89,900 for the BBKA.



Fortnum & Mason's 100 Aker Wood Hunny: currently retailing at £50 for 300g. Photograph: Wikimedia Commons

The Embroidered Bees Project





Left: Vicks Harrison, instigator of the Embroidered Bees Project and right, the quilt (all photographs reproduced with the kind permission of Vicks Harrison)

In 2019, Vicks Harrison who lives in Penzance, Cornwall, spent a year learning how to grow wildflowers at Bosavern Farm in Cornwall. Vicks had long been concerned about wild bees and wanted to do something to help them. Vicks started growing wild flowers at home, giving them away from her doorstep with notes about how they could help the bees.

Next, Vicks started two projects: a wildflower garden created on a roundabout in the middle of a housing estate in Penzance and a community project from embroidering a bee quilt.

“The idea is to encourage people to learn and research more about our native bees,” Vicks says. “As the quilt grows, so does the community’s knowlege about bees.”



As the quilt grows, so does the community’s knowledge about bees

The Embroidered Bees Project was set up and run by artist Vicks Harrison as a way to engage people with learning about the 277 kinds of British native bee and biodiversity loss and how, by growing the right plants and creating the right environments, we can have an impact on their decline. Anyone can attend the workshops but hopefully they will have started to research and identify a solitary bee they would like to embroider before they attend This is a way of starting a discussion about biodiversity with participants learning about the kinds of plants bees need for good habitats. The workshops are suitable for both beginners and those with more experience of needlework. Participants are inspired to grow wildflowers and bee friendly plants or put up bee hotels for solitary species.



Most of the embroidered bees have a connection to West Penwith

Most of the bees embroidered have a local connection to the Penzance area. So far, the quilt contains 211 hexagons displaying local bees such as the long horned bee, which has been found on several sites in West Penwith, the green eyed flower bee which has been spotted in Penzance's Morrab Gardens, pantaloon bees and ashy mining bees.



Materials such as linen tablecloths are repurposed for use in the quilt



Embroidering bees helps people learn more about the natural world around them

Regular sessions are held at Morrab Library, Penzance and in other local venues when requested. Vicks has held sessions at Penlee House, Bosavern Farm and the Redwing Gallery.

“Sometimes,” Vicks says. “Groups come together and send us their bees. We had a group get together on the Isles of Scilly and another in Helston. The participants develop knowledge, learn new skills and become part of a social group. Some go home and replant their gardens creating a bee habitat.”



The quilt currently has over 200 bee hexagons with more on the way

Vicks is always on the look out for suitable material and keeps a store of cream, pale beige or white fabric for participants to use. This mostly comes in the form of linen tablecloths and heavier type cotton: table runners, chair backs and napkins. Templates of the hexagon are provided and embroiderers will trace a bee from a wide range of sources Vicks suggests. The embroidery is then exhibited which engages more people with the issues .

“The most common comment I hear,” Vicks says, “Is: ‘I didn’t realise we had all these types of bees’ or how solitary species depend on specific plants to survive. It’s often a huge revelation.”



The Embroidered Bee Project is entirely voluntary

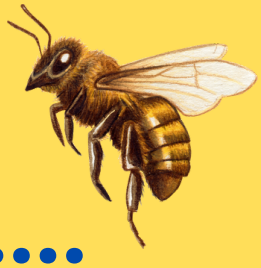
The bee quilt project is entirely voluntary and relies on donations and Vicks wants it to do as much good for bees as possible.

“There is no end to the project,” Vicks says. “The more it grows, the more it draws people into the discussion.”

Vicky hopes that ultimately the quilt will be exhibited with people donating funds towards wildflower planting and local bee projects.

“Solitary bees need our help more than ever,” Vicks says. “And this is a gentle way to make a difference.”





Did you know....

- A drone generates more body heat than the average worker bee, helping to keep the sensitive brood warm.
- Research suggests that chemicals such as Amitraz, used in the varroa treatment Apivar, may have a negative effect on the quality of drone sperm during development: . https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6292656/
- Honeybees are attracted to music with a 250-500 Hz frequency as this is reminiscent of the sounds they produce in the hive. Songs on this frequency include The Arctic Monkey's *I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor,* which may well be one to play during the waggle dance.



Bees in Space

In 1984, NASA sent approximately 3,500 honeybees and a queen into space, on board the Space Shuttle Challenger in an aluminium "bee enclosure module". After a period of adapting to their new conditions, the bees built 30 square inches of comb and the queen laid 35 eggs. Sadly, none of the eggs hatched when the bees returned to Earth.



And finally.....

Knit or Crochet a bee for The Honeypot Children's Charity



Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of Honeypot

Instead of a recipe this month, why not knit or crochet a bee for charity? Honeypot offers year round support to young carers aged 5 to 12 years old providing them with much needed holidays in one of their three residential holiday homes in the New Forest, Wales and Scotland.

Each child is given a knitted or crocheted honeybee to take home with them in their memory bag as a souvenir and a reminder of their next holiday. The charity also takes the knitted and crocheted bees out into the community to publicise what they do and raise funds. The link to the patterns can be found here: https://www.honeypot.org.uk/knitted-bees.

Details of where to send the bees once completed can be found on their website.

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

Wiltshire BKA

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

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

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