

# West Wilts BKA News

News, the planned activities and some advice for members of West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association



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## Quieter times

We have had some busy months and we are preparing for the end of the year with the County Bee Health Day and our own Branch Annual Show in the next few days, with the County Bee and Honey Day next month and a lead up to our AGM.

As a result, this months' Newsletter is quite short and is starting to plan for the year ahead.

We have had some excellent apiary sessions and the last of the year will have been held by the time you get this. Hopefully, you have enjoyed coming along and learnt something new at this fantastic facility. If you don't manage to get there we would like to know if there is something we can do to make the sessions more suitable to you, so we will be trying to canvass views at the AGM, so please try to think if we can provide more help.



## Diary of events

### **September 2022**

Wilts BKA Honey Bee Health Day – 3<sup>rd</sup> September, Market Lavington Village Hall

West Wilts BKA Honey Show - 10th September; Bratton Jubilee Hall

### **October 2022**

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day – 8<sup>th</sup> October; Corn Exchange, Devizes

National Honey Show – 27th-29th October; Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher

### **November 2022**

West Wilts BKA Annual General Meeting – 7<sup>th</sup> November; Bratton Jubilee Hall

## Need to know

### Lectures

We have had a deliberate reduction in the number of lectures over the past months, because there was so much going on and the attendance had reduced. We are hoping to start a series up over the coming months with the intention that we will have a bit of variety over the months before Christmas and we will aim for a short series on Queen Rearing in the New Year. The reason we are thinking of a short series is because Queen Rearing is so varied in the options available and whilst each queen-producer has their own preference, we don't believe there is a single method that suits everyone. Therefore, we want to have lectures on a few options, which should help you to choose what suits you.

We will continue with Zoom lectures, because we can get some excellent speakers and there isn't the need to book a hall and travel.

# Good to know

## History of Beekeeping in West Wiltshire.

You will have seen from the recent Special Edition Newsletter that we have produced a logo for the club for prize cards and anything else where we feel we need an 'identity'. We conducted a search of various sources (as described in the earlier article) and we thought success came from a search of the Warminster and Westbury Gazette. In there we found a description of a practical demonstration by a Mr. E.H. Smith (Science Master) on moving bees from skeps to new ten frame hives in a demonstration of the scientific manipulation of bees.

A thorough description is given of the three colonies that he handled, however, for importance to WWBKA, the article ends that "*Beekeeping on modern principles in Warminster having increased during the past year or two, mainly through the efforts of Mr. Smith, the members of the Bee-keeping Class have formed themselves into a branch of the Wilts Bee-keeping Association, of which Mr. W. Strong, jun., is secretary and district adviser*". So, this looks like it may be the start of 'modern' beekeeping in the area. This was published on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June 1895. We started to believe that this may be the start of the club. However, being diligent types, we decided to try to exhaust all avenues on the formation of the club, especially since there were a lot of events since then that may have affected the survival of the branch.

A trawl of the National Archives pointed us to Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, so a day was spent over there going through eight large boxes of beekeeping history from the area. There was no pre-World War II mention of the Warminster Branch, although there was a branch active in Trowbridge in the 1930s. We must assume that the 1895 branch had folded for one reason or another. The first mention of the Warminster Branch was in the 1946 yearbook, which announced that a Warminster Branch had been formed on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1945 with help from the Trowbridge Branch, leading to thirteen branches in Wiltshire (Calne, Chippenham, Corsham, Devizes, Downton, Ludgershall, Malmesbury, Marlborough, Trowbridge, Salisbury, Shrewton, Swindon, Warminster). So, could it be 1945 saw the creation of the current club?

At some point in the 1950's Trowbridge and Warminster merged...could we trace our start back to Trowbridge? Certainly, there was a Trowbridge branch before the second World War, so we may have found a fresh start...but then we continued looking to see what was happening and decided to keep searching forward. We came to the swinging 60's!

By 1964 the number of branches had reduced and there was a review of the accounts by Wiltshire BKA of the accounts in annual yearbook. Swindon and Salisbury were going strong, as were a few other branches, but some had fallen by the wayside. Indeed, it was Trowbridge and Warminster Branch's turn in 1964 to fold with a rather damning assessment that the branch was 'disapproved'. As a result, it ceased.

That left us with the issue that a branch had stopped in 1964, but we knew it was going in 1976 from a member's recollections. Further searches in the yearbooks note a mention of a desire to reform a Warminster Branch in 1972. The reformation happened in 1974 (in the same year that Shrewton folded) when it became a fully-fledged branch of the Wiltshire BKA and whilst it has also had the name of Warminster, Westbury and District BKA it is now the West Wiltshire BKA. Whilst it would have been nice to trace our history back to 1895 as a branch formed to promote modern beekeeping practices, we can look forward to our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in a couple of years. It also means that we can put this proudly on our logo and know with some confidence that we are not trying to pretend we are something we are not.

## Q&A

I want to raise queens next year and I understand I should record some desirable attributes to pick my breeding stock. What is best?

This is another question that is unfortunately answered by another question – “What do you want from your bees?”. Only when you have decided that can you decide how you will select your queen mother (and then without 100% success because of the way queens mate). There are several attributes that can be chosen, but the most popular are:

- Temper – do you need two bee suits and a suit of armour to go near them or are they nice and quiet?
- Quietness on the comb – do they run around everywhere or sit there nicely when you handle them?
- Productivity – do they produce more or less than the average?
- Swarminess – is their answer to everything to try to swarm? (Note: you need to consider the age of the queen when answering this...and, of course, what you may have done, or not done, that would encourage them to swarm).
- Disease resistance – do they always seem a bit more sickly than other bees (signs of varroa, chalkbrood, Nosema, etc.) or are they amazingly healthy?
- Over-wintering – do they come out of winter strongly or are they down to their last cell of honey, only a small cupful of them left and a messy hive, so you must intervene?
- Thriftiness – do they need little stores, especially over winter and when you have a bad spell of weather, do they seem to do well?
- Propolis – is their answer to propolis everything or do they keep the hive gunge-free?
- Build-up timeliness – do they build up at the right time for your area or do they only build up when the main crop has gone or there are vast numbers of bees when there is no available nectar?

Note: you can only compare many of these across one single apiary...there is no point in comparing against two different sites.

There are many more and, of course, many of these are inter-related (...a colony that has low demand on stores, may not collect as much in the first place, or a colony that doesn't over-winter well may be susceptible to disease, etc.). It would be incredibly difficult to get everything you want in your bees, so I would recommend just picking your top three attributes and selecting on them. Even then, I would keep one as my main priority and only use the second and third attributes if you are spoilt for choice on the first.

So, what would I choose?

1. Temper - as aggressive bees are no fun,
2. Ability to over-winter - as dead bees in the spring aren't much use and
3. Low Swarminess - as juggling spare hives and nuclei isn't much fun, especially since they seem to know you need to do a 'quick inspection' as you are planning on going out straight after you have looked at the bees!

However, what you choose needs to suit you so that your stock improves. Whilst we hope to do some talks on queen rearing in the New Year, now is the time to start thinking on what you want from your bees.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE SEND THEM IN OR ASK AT THE APIARY.

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# Contact us and services

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## Newsletter content

We will try to send this out as close to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month as possible. We will have a copy date of a week before to give us time to get everything together, and we would really like to hear from you. If you want to include anything, please send an email to [Newsletter-WWBKA@outlook.com](mailto:Newsletter-WWBKA@outlook.com).

## Contact details for committee and officers

WWBKA President: [President-WWBKA@outlook.com](mailto:President-WWBKA@outlook.com)

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## Services available to members

The following services are provided by West Wilts BKA to members:

Bee Bank (for sale or purchase of queens, nucs and colonies). Contact the Branch Secretary at [Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com](mailto:Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com)

Bookers Wholesale Customer Card. Contact the Chair at [Chair-WWBKA@outlook.com](mailto:Chair-WWBKA@outlook.com) or 07711 018440 for details.

Equipment loan (microscopes, extractors, etc.): Contact the Branch Secretary at [Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com](mailto:Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com)

Library: Contact our Librarian (either direct or through the Secretary)