

West Wilts BKA News

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



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The 'fun bits': news and reports.

Welcome to the August edition of the West Wilts BKA newsletter.

I hope you have had a very successful and interesting month of beekeeping? What has your honey harvest been like so far? I have heard differing accounts of quantities.....

The weather in July has been mixed – some hot and dry and some wet, we have had high winds too!! Who knows what August will bring?

Very many thanks to those who sent contributions for the August edition – your input and articles are always appreciated.

Keep them coming!

Diary of events

September 2023

Frome Cheese Show – 9th September (Saturday), West Woodlands Showground, Nr Frome

West Wiltshire BKA Show – 23rd September (Saturday), Bratton Jubilee Hall. Open judging starts at 1000 when the general public as well as members are most welcome. Refreshments will be provided.

October 2023

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day – 7th October (Saturday), Devizes Corn Exchange, 10 am – 4 pm

WWBKA SOCIAL – Skittles evening. The Organ Inn, Warminster 13th October 7.30pm

National Honey Show – 26th-28th October (Thursday to Saturday), Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, Surrey

November 2023

WWBKA AGM, confirmed for Tuesday 7 November at 7pm, Bratton Jubilee Hall

Apiary dates: 5th Aug: 19th Aug: 2nd Sep. Come and join us – don't forget you cup for a drink

Need to know

Lectures

Off-season lectures start on 13th September - all to be delivered on Zoom; links will be sent to members about a week before each session is scheduled to take place. The broad range of topics should provide interest for members of all levels of experience.

Dan Basterfield - Queenright and Broodright?	Wed 13 Sept 2023
Roger Patterson - The Patterson Unit	Thurs 19 Oct 2023
Bob Smith - Beyond the Basics	Mon 20 Nov 2023
Roger Patterson - Observation: Interpret What You See	Wed 17 Jan 2024
Bob Smith - Keep It Clean	Weds 20 Feb 2024

Good to know

“West Wiltshire Beekeepers need a trustee – could you help?” asks David Newell....

The Wiltshire Beekeepers Association (WBKA), consists of four branches – West Wilts, Kennet, Melksham and Swindon. In April last year, the WBKA became a registered charity governed by a Board of eleven trustees. Three of the Trustees (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) are elected by the County AGM, but the other eight trustees are elected directly by the branches – two from each Branch. One of our members (Amanda Leworthy) is currently serving as the Secretary to the Board but West Wilts Branch has filled only one of our two branch-nominated Trustee posts, so we have a vacancy which we need to fill.

The trustees are at the centre of the county's beekeeping community, working with trustees from the other branches to promote beekeeping throughout the county. To become a trustee you obviously need to be a beekeeping member of a branch but you do not have to be an expert beekeeper. Other relevant skills/experience you can bring to the job will enable you to make an important contribution to the effective management of the organisation. Its Board of Trustees meets four times a year and its meetings are held rotationally in the Branch areas – usually on a Tuesday evening.

The WBKA is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) governed by Charity Law but the liability of trustees is limited (rather like being a director of a limited company). The powers and responsibilities of the WBKA are contained in its Constitution (see WBKA website: www.wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk) and the Charity Commission produces an informative leaflet “*The essential trustee*” (leaflet CC3).

I am filling the other trustee post so, if you might be interested in becoming a Trustee, or would just like to know more about trusteeship, please contact WWBKA Secretary: Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com who will put you in contact with David Newell, or Amanda Leworthy.

David Newell and Amanda Leworthy

BASIC EXAM SUCCESSES FOR WEST WILTS

Congratulations go to three of our members for their successes in the BBKA Basic Examination which they completed on 15 July: Robin Wilton – Credit: Danny Young – Distinction: Nina Wilton - Distinction

Our congratulations and thanks also go to Chris Rawlings who schooled and mentored all three beekeepers for these impressive results. Well done everyone concerned.

Chairman

In search of an interesting article for the newsletter, I contacted the IWBKA based at Quarr Abbey on the outskirts of Ryde, Isle of Wight, and asked if I might be allowed to pop in on one of my regular visits to the island. I had lived on the Isle of Wight myself, was aware of Quarr Abbey but had never visited having been too young or too busy when I lived there previously.

If you search for Quarr Abbey on the internet you will find the following information from www.quarrabbey.co.uk

“Quarr Abbey is a delightful Benedictine Monastery, home to a small group of Benedictine monks since 1907, and originally settled by the French monks of Solesmes, in voluntary exile from France. Prior to their arrival Quarr Abbey House was frequently visited by Queen Victoria, and her youngest daughter Beatrice honeymooned there after marrying on the island. There have been many famous visitors over the years, including the writer Robert Graves, who mentions Quarr Abbey in 'Goodbye to all that.' Today Quarr Abbey is a thriving visitor attraction, with a magnificent apiary, tea shop, gardens, pig farm and rescue centre for former battery hens. It is also a teaching Apiary run by the Isle of Wight Beekeeper's Association which celebrated its centenary year in 2018”.

The following is an account of my visit to Quarr Abbey -

Beekeeping in the grounds of an abbey - sounds idyllic? Well it really is! I had the privilege and the pleasure to be allowed to visit the apiary on the Isle of Wight. The picture below is of Quarr Abbey from the car park.....



(Quarr Abbey visit continued.....)

The club has a separate teaching apiary and then, down a lane past the abbey, in a coppice of trees, there are many more hives. I didn't count how many! Mainly Nationals and a few Langstroth as I recall.

The meet up started around 0900. Beekeepers and gardeners are alike - in as much as I find they are always a friendly bunch! I was greeted with many smiling faces, (the names I forget, but faces I do remember - that's how my brain works!)

Some of the group stayed at their base, to "chat bees", put the world to rights etc., while others steamed old frames to release wax. I was invited to join a group that wended their way down a slight incline, (pay attention - the relevance of that point will become clearer later), to a coppice of young trees. In the clearing hives were visible. We took with us a trolley on wheels, (similar to the ones we've just purchased for our own Apiary) loaded with equipment that might be needed. There was a large storage box of spare equipment in the clearing close by the hives, containing queen excluders and crown boards etc. Before our walk down to the hives, Christine McClellan (the apiary manager), had briefed those attending of the likelihood of what was to be found in the hives and what might need to be done when we got there.

(Excuse me while I wax lyrical and tell you that some of the hives are in a little fairy dell! Well, that's what beams of daylight breaking through leafy green boughs and wisps of smoke drifting from the smokers looked like!)



(Quarr Abbey visit continued.....)

I joined a couple of ladies who deftly went about their business together: reading the last set of notes on each hive, opening them up, looking for new queens, marking them, then completing the notes again recording what they had found.



As I recall we put supers on a few hives and removed full supers from a few and placed these in the wheelbarrow to take back to the "base". I hope you were taking notice of what I said earlier.....the fun bit was trekking back up the hill (whoops - "slight incline"), it was a warm day and I found the wheelbarrow quite heavy for me. I pushed it some of the way, but being slower, I rather lagged behind. Fortunately Christine came back to find me and we returned to the base together.

I finished off my visit with a chat with some of the other members and I was invited to pop in again when I was on one of my monthly visits to the Isle of Wight.

Very many thanks to all the people I met - and for the invitation to visit again – I certainly plan to return as soon as possible.

Elaine Mairis

Following on from our June newsletter, here is Liz Gwinnell's next instalment of her experiences with the bees.....

The bees arrive....

The night before the bees arrived, I removed the sheet covering the Standard National hive I had been storing in my office and breathed in the heady scent of wax and wood. Early the next morning, I took each pre-assembled section to the bottom of my garden and put it together. It was a beautiful morning in June and the grass was bleached from a long period without rain but the sky was blue and the weather was warm. It was a perfect day to welcome the new girls.

I had waited a long time for a colony of bees and as I waited for my mentor to arrive, I felt a mixture of apprehension and excitement. My mentor arrived shortly after nine o'clock with the polystyrene nuc she'd been rearing a small colony in after splitting a swarm earlier in the season. It was one of the most precious gifts I've ever received. It was a small colony, probably about 20,000 bees and we transferred the old frames from the nuc into the brood box and added some new ones. We didn't see the queen but, my mentor assured me, she had been equally elusive during previous inspections. We knew she was in there because there was brood. My mentor left me with a list of things to buy and instructions to remove the entrance block at the weekend. I was now responsible for 20,000 honey bees.

I left it a week before I carried out my first inspection but every morning I took a cup of coffee down the garden and watched them fly. I had inadvertently allowed a stray bramble to flourish by the fence and was glad for my oversight because now it was flowering and attracting the bees like a magnet. I had rarely seen honey bees in my garden before the girls arrived and now I found myself standing still and staring at flowers for what seemed like hours. Would they live compatibly alongside the bumble bees that were also visiting the bramble? They seemed to.

I started to think about what other flowers I could grow in the garden. I had read that honey bees thrive on a varied diet just like we do and that a plethora of nectar and pollen options keeps them busy and diverts them from aggressively defending their hive. Good foraging therefore equalled happy bees. The Buddleia and sweet peas were just coming into flower and that afternoon I ordered a selection of seeds to grow next year including phacelia ("the bee's friend") and hollyhocks.

A week after the bees arrived, I headed down the garden for my first inspection. This was it. I was on my own. It was a warm Friday afternoon with a breeze strong enough to stir the branches of the cherry plum tree opposite the hive. Initially the bees were quite sleepy when I opened up but that was before they smelt the fabric conditioner on the wool gloves I was wearing. I had worn them as I have very small

(The bees arrive contd.)

hands and the fingers on "Marigolds" often get caught under the lugs on the frames making it awkward to remove and replace them. Not only did the scent stir the bees up and draw them to my hands like magnets but later, when I learned they can get their feet stuck in wool fibres, I realised what a big mistake I had made. The mistakes of a new beekeeper were mitigated when I saw the queen walking across one of the frames, the unmarked red queen of my hive.

When I got back inside, I sent a message to my mentor informing her of the sighting and telling her the bees hadn't yet started to draw out the new frames in the brood box. "Do they need feeding?" my mentor responded. "Do they have enough stores?" I wasn't sure. I had been so distracted by the queen and my gloves I hadn't really noticed. I also had limited supplies which certainly didn't extend to owning fondant. "Soak a bag of sugar, make a hole in it and put it over one of the holes in the crown board," she said. And what about the undrawn frames? "Don't worry about that," she said. "When the rain comes and the flowers start producing nectar and honey again, they'll work on them. In the meantime, removing the super and feeding them should help them concentrate on drawing them out."

So that is how, early on a Friday evening, my partner and I ended up in the baking aisle of the local Co-op. Caster, icing or granulated? I didn't know but opted for caster and bought two bags in case I messed up the first {which I did}. I placed the sugar over the holes in the crown board and removed the frames from the Super so I could use it as an eke. The thoughts I took to bed with me that night were: had I smothered the bees with sugar? Was the sugar wet enough for them to eat? Four days later my mentor came over to mark the queen which I had decided to call Deborah as "Devorah" is Hebrew for bee. Once again she proved elusive but at least I hadn't suffocated the bees with Silver Spoon.

Two days afterwards I was offered another colony. "I think I'll just stick to one for now," I said. "I've only had bees for just over a week."

Twenty four hours later, I changed my mind.

To be continued!!

Liz Gwinnell

Angry bees and friendly Club members

As several members know to their cost, we had a colony of angry bees that were not only affecting members attending the Club apiary, but could have posed a threat to members of the public using the footpath alongside the apiary. They even took a dislike to our illustrious landlord whilst cutting the grass around the hives. They had to go!

Luckily, one of our members, Jonny Marion who is giving up his bees for a couple of years, has kindly donated a colony of his calm busy bees to replace the angry colony, so future apiary sessions will return to their normal tranquillity.

Den Pictor - Apiary Manager

Aggressive bees or defensive bees?

Following on from Den Pictor's note above, I have read more about the subject of "bad tempered bees". From what I heard of the bees Den Pictor was talking about they weren't just bad tempered, in the words a very readable article by The Apiarist on the subject of "stroppiness".....

"Truly psychotic bees - follow you up the field back to the car. You have to hang around until they lose interest or drive off still wearing the veil"

.....it sounds to me as though the colony Den was talking about were probably in this league!

The same article by The Apiarist writes.....

"calmness, confidence and experience – or ideally, all three characteristics – shown by the beekeeper is the major influence on the behaviour of the colony". This we know and are taught early in our beekeeping journey.

It is important to be able differentiate between "defensive" and "aggressive" colony behaviour. There are reported to be several different reasons for bad tempered/aggressive bees. A defensive colony is reactive rather than proactive. Aggression in bees is an unpleasant characteristic with predominantly genetic causes. Defensive behaviour may occur under the following circumstances, (the headings are presented in no particular order of importance).

Nectar dearth and robbing - At differing points in the "season" bees may have too little honey, or too many "mouths to feed" - this is generally a temporary situation. At times like these, drones may be "thrown out of the hive" by their own colony to conserve stores. Interference with their hive is unlikely to improve their temper, these might be classified as "hungry" bees - lacking in forage or stores. Robbing bees cause defensive behaviour in the hive, but are most likely to be a problem with small and failing colonies (see more below).

Bad weather - I have read that towards the end of summer if it "starts to get wet" and the weather is still warm, this situation can make it difficult for bees to "cure" the honey. If this is the case inspection would further aggravate the colony.

Manipulation - clumsy manipulation of frames by the beekeeper, might well result in angry bees. Bees sting as a result of pheromones released, which acts as a further danger signal to the colony. As a result the number of bees seeking to sting might increase.

Alarm pheromone on bee suit - alarm pheromone on unwashed bee suits (from previous stings and opening of hives) can accumulate - these alert bees by acting as a distress signal. It's a well-known fact, keeping bee suits regularly laundered is good practice and helps to maintain a high standard of apiary hygiene.

Removing honey supers - if you had worked hard all summer to produce honey for the winter, you would be irritated too when someone attempted to steal it wouldn't you! Though, it would be fair to say this does not happen with all colonies and some relinquish their stores with less fuss than others!

Hive placement - placement of hives is requires careful consideration before embarking upon keeping bees and purchasing equipment. Bees prefer unhindered access to their hive entrance, constant passage in front of their entrance is recognised as a source of irritation to them.

Robbing - a weak hive with few numbers in the colony might be unable to defend themselves from other bees that are looking for easy harvest - once a robbing frenzy starts you might witness "mayhem" around the hives. One quick way of reducing the robbing is to reduce the hive opening - however, there is no swift way of increasing the colony numbers. I have read that draping a wet towel over the hive to cover the entrance is one way of reducing robbing as it seems to confuse the robbers whilst the resident colony can manage to negotiate this obstacle. Making sure your hive is "bee - tight" might help to reduce intruders - so keep any gaps in your hives to a minimum, wasps are renowned for cunning and robbing!

Queenlessness – I have read that queenless colonies might exhibit defensive behaviour – though I have not read the research supporting this. It would appear understandable that the absence of a queen in the colony would lead to disharmony and unrest. Similarly if the queen is not "laying well" or there are problems with the brood or eggs – and that may tie into the next category.....

Heavy varroa infestation – in a heavily varroa infested colony the bees may be sick and suffer weakness and deformed wings – these bees may act in a defensive manner.

(Aggressive bees contd.....)

Genetic – an article published on the internet (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) [Vol. 106 | No. 36](#)) states that aggression is a complex, polygenic trait. Aggressive bees are a complicated subject, truly aggressive bees are problematic and sometimes dangerous. It's worth stating once more that defensiveness in bees is usually reactive behaviour.

In conclusion, the comfort and safety of the public is a concern of the WWBKA. We thank Den Pictor for achieving satisfactory closure of the recent incident at the club.

You can find the article referred to at: <https://theapiarist.org/stroppiness/#A%20Defensive%20Colony>

Top Bar Hive

Did you follow the link from the email sent to members to see the video of the Chairman's Top Bar Hive – fascinating!

Here are a few photo's taken from that session – if you haven't had time to view the video it's well worth a look.



A view of one of the (unwired) frames from the top bar hive – careful handling required!

(Top Bar Hive photos contd....)



Above left - The queen spotted in the top bar hive



Above right – queen cell spotted – lucky to see it with the "trap door still clearly attached.

Beekeeping supplies.



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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

Bookers Wholesale Customer Card. Contact the Chair at Chair-WWBKA@outlook.com or 07711 018440 for details.

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

Library: Library: Contact our Librarian through the Secretary.

Swarm Collection Register: Contact Branch Swarm Coordinator (David Newell 01373-825560 or sj007q0836@blueyonder.co.uk).

Find us on  : West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association