

# West Wilts BKA News

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



## IN THIS ISSUE

**Diary of events**                      **page 2**

**Need to know**                        **page 2**

This is your 'go to' section that will describe the things that you need to know about.

**Good to know**                      **page 3 - 11**

The 'fun bits': news and reports.

**Contacts and Services** **page 12**

Special thanks to everyone who has submitted articles for the July edition, there are some interesting items this month – your input and articles are always appreciated. Keep them coming!

### **Welcome to the July edition of the West Wilts BKA newsletter.**

The June weather has been very warm, but a bit more rain and a slight drop in temperature wouldn't go amiss. The grass is very dry everywhere - we all need to exercise extra care with the use of our smokers, lighting them with care and extinguishing them properly after use.

Did you enjoy the Bath and West Show? An exciting time had by all – special edition of the newsletter to follow..... Did you exhibit? Well done if you did! If you missed the opportunity, then there are chances coming up again **West Wiltshire BKA Show, Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day and National Honey Day (dates below).**

# Diary of events

## September 2023

**Frome Cheese Show** – 9<sup>th</sup> September (Saturday), West Woodlands Showground, Nr Frome

**West Wiltshire BKA Honey Show – STOP PRESS! PLEASE NOTE**

Amendment to dates given in previous newsletters – Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September is the correct date - venue remains the same - Bratton Jubilee Hall.

**PLEASE TELL OTHER MEMBERS OF THE DATE TO SPREAD THE WORD QUICKLY.**

## October 2023

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

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

## November 2023

**WWBKA AGM**, 7<sup>th</sup> November, Bratton Jubilee Hall

**Apiary dates:** 8th Jul: 22nd Jul: 5th Aug: 19th Aug: 2nd Sep. Come and join us – don't forget you cup for a drink

# Need to know

## Lectures

If you are aware of any forthcoming lectures to be added here, please let the newsletter editor know.

## Good to know



**Photo above:** At the club apiary – all fully engrossed in the task in hand on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2023

Out of interest does anybody know if there's collective noun for a collection of beekeepers?

A "sting"? A "swarm"? A "hive" or perhaps a "buzz"?

**Photo below:** At the apiary on June 10<sup>th</sup> David Newell brought in a brood frame to show us –

I took a photo of it to share – it's amazing – (my phone put a tag on it – "Art work")

it certainly is a work of art – crafty little devils those wax moths aren't they!



## Telling the bees

Do you talk to your bees? I was brought up to tell the hives on our market garden news about what was happening in the world around about them. Perhaps you read that the late Queen's beekeeper, John Chapple, travelled to Buckingham Palace and Clarence House to break the news of Her death? He carried out the centuries-old tradition of whispering to the hives that their new master was King Charles III.

Ancient beekeeper customs say if bees are not informed of their master's death calamity could strike. The bees themselves might go on strike and no longer make honey. To ensure this didn't happen, according to the press, John Chapple spent a day saying 'little prayers' in front of the palace's five Dark European Honey bee hives and two in Clarence House. He draped black bows around the hives to signify the bees were in mourning for their late master. 'The person who has died is the master or mistress of the hives, someone important in the family who dies and you don't get any more important than the late Queen, do you? He explained to reporters that you have to knock on each hive and say: "The mistress is dead, but don't you go. Your master will be a good master to you"'.

Have you seen the painting "The Bee Friend" by Hans Thoma (around 1864/1865)? It pictures a man sitting in front of skeps talking to his bees. I found reference to another painting "Telling the Bees" by Charles Napier Hemy (1841-1917), though I'm not sure where either are exhibited. There are also poems about "telling the bees" – informing them not only about deaths, but marriages, births and other life events.

John Greenleaf Whittier, a Quaker poet wrote "Tell it to the Bees" (1858) - you might like to find the whole poem to read - but I've extracted a couple of verses and presented them below....

"Before them, under the garden wall,  
Forward and back,  
Went drearily singing the chore-girl small,  
Draping each hive with a shred of black.

Trembling, I listened: the summer sun  
Had the chill of snow;  
For I knew she was telling the bees of one  
Gone on the journey we all must go!"

**(Telling the bees. Elaine Mairis contd....)**

I've read through a variety of reports and stories, it seems the ritual of "telling the bees" is recorded mostly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in New England and Europe, though the tradition of 'telling the bees' may have its roots in Celtic Mythology.

Charles Fitzgerald Gambier Jenyns, a British Victorian Apiarist, in his book, "A Book about Bees" (1886) even suggests that messages should be relayed to the bees at midnight.

How are your rhyming skills? Apparently Tammy Horn, a literary scholar writes in her book "Bees in America: How the Honey Bee shaped a Nation" (2005), that in New Hampshire, news of a death would not only be sung to the bees but also rhymed!

In conclusion I offer you "The Bee Boy's Song, written by Rudyard Kipling in "Puck of Pooks Hill"

BEES! Bees! Hark to your bees!

"Hide from your neighbours as much as you please,

But all that has happened, to us you must tell,

Or else we will give you no honey to sell!"

A maiden in her glory,

Upon her wedding-day,

Must tell her Bees the story,

Or else they'll fly away.

Fly away—die away—

Dwindle down and leave you!

But if you don't deceive your Bees,

Your Bees will not deceive you.

Marriage, birth or buryin',

News across the seas,

All you're sad or merry in,

You must tell the Bees.

Tell 'em coming in an' out,

Where the Fanners fan,

'Cause the Bees are just about

As curious as a man!

Don't you wait where trees are,

When the lightnings play,

Nor don't you hate where Bees are,  
Or else they'll pine away.  
Pine away—dwine away—  
Anything to leave you!  
But if you never grieve your Bees,  
Your Bees'll never grieve you.

To avoid possible calamities, I suggest if you don't already chat with your bees and keep them updated with local important events, it might be something you consider starting to do (just to be on the safe side).

**Elaine Mairs**

#### **Voluntary registration with Beebase.**

In discussion with Den Pictor (Apiary Manager), he raised the issue of beekeepers registering their bees on Beebase, he thinks it's sound practice. Registering with Beebase assists in the tracking of outbreaks of disease, it's also possible to sign up for e-mail alerts. All other livestock requires registration with DEFRA, so why not register your beehives? The process is very quick and easy, just look up Beebase on the internet. I've registered mine, have you registered yours?

#### **TV series "Animal Park" Longleat**

I also quizzed Den (our Apiary Manager) about the rumours of his fame regarding his forthcoming appearance on the TV series Animal Park. Not sure if any of you watch this series? Back in May, Den was asked if he would like to take part in a short film about bees which would form part of the programmes. They voiced particular interest in the swarming of honey bees and swarm cells. Den told me that, ironically, it quickly became apparent that the colony they were going into had swarmed, so the TV program got to film queen cells. Den says he was more than a bit apprehensive at first but soon settled into the process and it turned out to be quite an enjoyable afternoon.

Finally – we're told this three week series will be aired in August 2023. We're very much looking forward to seeing Den's potential "blockbuster" (please form an orderly queue for autographs!)

In the following article **Amanda Leworthy** explains the benefit she feels from her visits to the club apiary.

### **Why I attend the Apiary Sessions.....**

I got my nuc at end of June 2018 and astoundingly, I have only just completed my first "proper" honey extraction. In theory, there shouldn't have been a problem. I attended the annual honey extraction session generously hosted by Ruth and Donald in their kitchen a couple of times before lockdown, so had a grasp of the practicalities of the process and I've completed the "Basic" and spoken to fellow beekeepers. However, lockdown combined with my natural tendency to overthink things to the point that I can't proceed provided lots of excuses: I needed to leave the honey for the bees, not all the comb was sealed, I didn't have an extractor, amongst others. I contented myself with taking a couple of frames which I scraped to extract enough honey for several jars so that we could have a taste and I could enter the Branch Honey Show "taste and aroma" and baking categories, although it did irk me that in the process I had destroyed all that precious comb which the bees had worked so hard to produce.

So, what gave me the push to have a go? Basically attending the apiary sessions under the guidance of experienced beekeepers and course leaders is helping me to take all the theory and knowledge in my head and put it into practice and this has boosted my confidence to just get on with things. I sometimes feel people think the Apiary sessions are just for beginners, but so many interesting issues crop up and you get the opportunity to see them close up and get involved. The objective of the Apiary session at the end of May was to remove supers for extraction. We were told us to brush the bees off, put the full frames in a box and replace with empty ones, which we did. And that's what I did at home the next day, no faffing about, mission accomplished. I was fretting about a couple of what I thought might be queenless colonies. I had a chat with the apiary manager and left with a plan. I was delighted with my 22lbs of honey but was especially thrilled to be able to give the bees back the supers with the comb intact in addition to the cappings to clean up. As well as the hands-on bee stuff, I especially enjoy meeting up with fellow beekeepers to share experiences, ask questions and have a laugh over a cuppa and biscuit and the set-up at the new Apiary is great for this.



**Amanda Leworthy**

June 2023

WWBKA member, **Liz Gwinnell's** attention was caught by an article from The Guardian in April. She has kindly condensed what she has read and offers it for your interest – certainly very thought provoking.....

### **Insight**

Almond milk is an unprecedented success story. Sales of almond milk in the USA have increased by 250% over the past five years and the shelves of British supermarkets are testimony to this new trend. Some almond milk is made in the UK but most of the almonds are imported from California where vast orchards of almond trees are cultivated. Every year, beekeepers throughout America rent out their colonies to the mega farms in California's Central Valley which provide 80% of the world's supply of almonds. Bees are woken early from their winter dormancy and shipped to California ready to start pollinating thousands of acres of almond blossom in February.

It is estimated that in 2023, 23% of British consumers buy dairy alternatives, believing them to be kinder to the planet. But exactly how much kinder to the planet are they? Almond milk needs 371 litres of water to create just one litre of milk and many blame the thirsty almond orchards for contributing to California's drought and soil erosion problems. But perhaps the most concerning impact of this extensive method of farming is the effect it is having on the honey bee: 50 billion of them were wiped out during the winter of 2018/19. Various explanations are given for the loss of the bees. Almond orchards are doused with more pesticides (including glyphosate/Roundup) than any other commercially grown crop and are a sterile monoculture stripped bare of wild flowers and other plants in order to control fungi and insects. Honey bees have to compete with local bees for forage and are expected to produce to a high standard year after year. These factors place untold stress on the worker bees who are expected to thrive in an alien and challenging environment.

The US Department for Agriculture (USDA) has invested heavily in research to help commercial beekeepers manage their colonies and work out ways to counteract the stress bees experience in pesticide laden fields. Some agricultural operations have reduced the use of pesticides and attempted to plant a more diverse crop. Bee Hero for example is one of the first commercial pollination stations to directly address the issue of animal welfare, placing electronic sensors in hives to monitor the sounds and tonal vibrations of a colony which, Bee Hero says, reflects the colony's emotional state. The Bee Better certification programme launched in 2017 by the not for profit Xerces Society, works to introduce biodiversity into almond groves to naturally control pests and nourish honey bees. Xerces works with almond growers to plant Californian wild flowers, mustard, clover and native flowering boundary hedges. Haagen Daz ice cream was the first food company to carry products with the Bee Better seal. Bee Better works to protect pollinators and encourages biodiversity conservation on farms throughout the US. The Bee Better mark can be found on many American products from blueberries to peach vinegar.

Some are cynical about this approach including Stephen Buchmann, a pollination ecologist who has studied bees for 40 years and is the author of "What a Bee Knows: Exploring the Thoughts, Memories and Personalities



**(Insight – Liz Gwinnell contd....)**

frustration, playfulness, fear, optimism and even PTSD like symptoms. He argues that the way in which bees are used for commercial production makes no allowance for their emotional life. Whilst colony collapse has primarily been attributed to the use of pesticides in California's almond groves, Buchmann and other scientists argue that the decline is also due to the physical stress caused by the brutal practices of intensive industrial agriculture.

Do bees really suffer from stress? It is only in the last decade that research technology has become sophisticated enough to allow for analysis of a bee's neurobiology. Before this, most scientists studying small insects, believed insects to be "instinct driven robots" with no capacity to feel pain or experience suffering. Lars Chittka, a professor in sensory and behavioural ecology at Queen Mary University, London, has worked with bees since 1987 and is the author of "The Mind of a Bee." This book is a result of his studies and research into how bees learn and process information. He concludes that as pollinators, bees are in a class of their own because the vital ecological role they play probably requires a uniquely sophisticated mind. Bees are the only pollinators who must get enough food for themselves as well as harvesting large amounts of pollen and nectar to support their colony. They must also memorise a constantly changing landscape, make quick decisions and evaluate flower options. Buchmann and Chittka believe that only by changing agricultural practises will the problem of colony collapse be solved. They reject the scientific methods used to monitor bees such as the insertion of electrodes without anaesthesia and experiments designed to stress and kill bees in order to find out how much they can tolerate in laboratory settings. Chittka now only undertakes experiments he believes to be "ethically defensible". Chittka and other scientists have studied bee behaviour in response to fluctuations in the feelgood neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin. Experiments show that mood regulatory chemicals increase when bees received a surprise reward of sucrose resulting in an increased enthusiasm for foraging when compared to bees who receive no reward. When bees were shaken in a tube or otherwise put in an anxiety inducing situation, dopamine and serotonin levels decreased. Buchmann, in his book, suggests this indicates bee brains may have their own internal opiod pleasure centres. Bees were also shown to exhibit PTSD like symptoms when they were grabbed by a crab spider hidden in a flower. From then on, the bees were observed to carefully scan the laboratory flowers before landing and even after scanning a "safe" flower, often rejected it and flew away, seeing a threat where there was none. The research of men like Buchmann and Chittka suggests that the sterile environment and stressful working practices demanded of honey bees in almond orchards has a huge impact on their emotional well being and survival. However most importantly, it also shows, for the first time, that a small creature such as the honey bee, may well possess sensory abilities.

(Summarised from articles published in The Guardian, April 2023).

### Unveiling of “The Arthur Goodhead Memorial Hive”.



The Goodhead family with the Chair about to unveil the hive.

At the Club apiary session on Saturday 24 June, your Committee and all those members gathered for beekeeping welcomed four members of the Arthur Goodhead's family – namely Roger Goodhead (son) and Lindy Wimslow (daughter) with their spouses Angela and Eric respectively. Lindy and Eric had travelled all the way from Minehead for the occasion which was to formally unveil the observation hive that the family had generously donated to the Club, following their father's death (see his obituary on page 3 of August 22 Newsletter). The family had agreed that we could name his observation hive the Arthur Goodhead Memorial Hive in his memory, with a plaque to this effect on the outer frame. The preparations for this occasion were complete when Den Pictor very kindly populated the hive with ladies from one of his colonies bringing the whole facility to life.



The Chairman shaking Lindy Wimslow's hand to thank the family for donating Arthur Goodhead's observation hive in his memory.

In a note of thanks received from Roger Goodhead two days later, he said:

*"We all really enjoyed it, please thank everybody involved in our visit. It is really heartening to know that our Dad was so well thought of, and that there is something so practical to remember him by. Thank you all for making us so welcome, and the tea and biscuits! All the best to you all for the future - Roger Goodhead (on behalf of all the family)"*

We intend to keep the observation hive occupied for the foreseeable future, so I would encourage all members to join us as the next few apiary session to see the new occupants of the Clubhouse. Why not bring members of your own family – including children – if only for an hour or so?

## Beekeeping supplies.



### For Your Beekeeping Supplies

Your local supplier providing a service for:

- All Thorne's supplies
- BBWear suits – try before you buy
- Second hand kit bought and sold
- Available to attend your association, apiary meetings
  - Supporting Trainers, Improvers, Newbies
  - Payment by BACS, card, cash, cheque
  - Deliveries – subject to distance, order size

Please email your order or phone so we can arrange an appointment for you to visit to discuss what you need.

**sales@thebeedepot.com**  
**07879 811967**  
**01373 430458**

Diane Sleigh  
The Apple Garden, Buckland Dinham, Frome, Somerset, BA11 2QP  
what3words poetry.unto.driveway

## Contacts and services

### Contact details for committee and officers

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

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

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

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

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

WWBKA Honey Show Secretary: [HoneyShow-WWBKA@outlook.com](mailto:HoneyShow-WWBKA@outlook.com)

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

WWBKA Asian Hornet Action Team Coordinator: [AHAT-WWBKA@outlook.com](mailto:AHAT-WWBKA@outlook.com)

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

### 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)

Swarm Collection Register: Contact Branch Swarm Coordinator (David Newell 01373-825560 or [sj007g0836@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:sj007g0836@blueyonder.co.uk)).

**Find us on**  : West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association