

West Wilts BKA News



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



The above photo is of a honey bee on the Daphne Bholua in my garden – it was taken the year before last – (rather less growth on it this year as it got badly caught in the winter of 2023). It illustrates the benefits of having early flowering plants available for forage.

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

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The 'fun bits': news and reports.

I hope that everyone attending the annual Branch Dinner enjoyed the event, I was sorry to have missed it.

The weather has been cold and all those with bees are regularly checking whether the bees have enough stores. I am reliably informed the Apiary Manager, Den Pictor, has plenty of fondant in stock. If you need some – you can contact him through the WhatsApp group or via the details at the end of this newsletter.

This newsletter has been completed earlier than usual as I will be away at the end of the month – please accept my apologies if you wanted to add content but have been unable to do so.

Diary of Events

April

BBKA Spring Convention. Friday 12th – Sunday 14th April. Harper Adams University, Shropshire.

May/June 2024

Royal Bath and West Show Thursday 30th May to Saturday 1st June. Royal Bath and West Showground, near Shepton Mallet.

September

WWBKA Honey Show – Saturday 28th September. Jubilee Hall, Bratton.

October 2024

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day Saturday 12th October. Devizes Corn Exchange, 10am – 4pm.

National Honey Show Thursday 24th to Saturday 26th October. Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher.

Winter lectures 2024 the next season's details await confirmation – details will be published as they become when available.....

(Apiary dates will follow when the weather bucks up – if anyone has a crystal ball will they please lend it to the Apiary Manager – I am sure all of us would love to know what the weather has in store for us this year after the surprises we had in 2023!)

Need to know

Lectures

Off-season lectures will be delivered on Zoom; links will be sent to members about a week before each session is scheduled to take place.

Bob Smith - Beyond the Basics

Wednesday 20th February

Good to Know

On Saturday April 6th, 2024, at Shipham Village Hall BS25 1SG

9.45am – 4.30pm (arrive any time after 9.15 for tea and chat)

The Spring Gathering

Getting together with other beekeepers to swap experiences and ideas with the chance to pick up new ones. Here's everything you need this year to put in ...

THE BEEKEEPERS KIT BAG

All the ideas and new skills necessary to equip beekeepers for a successful season

With

Roger Patterson and Dan Basterfield

Talks will include:

Reading your Bees

Making Preparations for a Better Season

A Straightforward Approach to Bee Improvement

Challenging what you are told

Also, an update about the Asian Hornet, Bees Abroad and other important practical news and views.

There will be refreshments and a light lunch during which a short Avon AGM will be held to elect the new committee

How to apply.

Please sign up and pay before the event. The cost is £10 which will include refreshments and light lunch.

Pay: Avon Beekeepers Association Bank code 30-99-50. Account No 87831968

For ref use initial, last name and "spring G." e.g. JSmith SpringG.

Could you also inform Rob Francis at: robfrancishere@gmail.com

WWBKA Courses commencing February 2024 –

the details follow below for the Beginners Course and the Basic Assessment course, if you know of anyone interested – please pass on the details to them – you can find out more on the website link below-

[Training – West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association \(westwiltsbka.org\)](http://westwiltsbka.org)

Beginners' Course 2024 – Dates and Venue

The classroom element of the course takes place in the Main Hall at the Bratton Church Institute, Tynning Lane, Bratton BA13 4RR. The dates of the classroom sessions for the 2024 course are:

Tuesday 13th February, Tuesday 20th February, Tuesday 27th February, Tuesday 5th March, Tuesday 12th March and Tuesday 19th March

Classroom sessions begin at 19:30 and end at 21:00.

Course fee £80

Contact education-WWBKA@outlook.com

The Basic Assessment Course

The Basic Assessment Course provides beekeepers with one or more seasons of beekeeping experience with the basic training necessary to take the BBKA Basic Assessment practical examination.

The Basic Assessment Course is also an excellent refresher course for more experienced beekeepers who feel that their knowledge or skills might have become a little rusty!

The course runs for 6 weeks, starting in mid-February. The cost of the course is £30. The 2024 sessions will begin on Tuesday 13th February and will take place in the Oratory Room at the Church Institute, Tynning Lane, Bratton BA13 4RR.

If you would like to enquire about enrolling, please contact our Training Co-Ordinator at education-WWBKA@outlook.com

Meet your committee....

Continuing on from last month and the changes in our committee, this newsletter features the responses from Gerren Maine (recently elected Vice Chairperson) to the questions posed monthly.

Question: What is your role on the WWBKA Committee? **Answer:** I carry out Vice Chair duties. This entails carrying out the Chair's duties in their absence, supporting the Chair in carrying out their duties and accepting any delegated tasks from them.

Question: How did you become interested in keeping bees? **Answer:** I had been interested in keeping bees for over a decade but kept putting it off, trying to find the right time. I realised there was no right time and the sooner I got started the better. I wish I had not delayed it as long as I did.

Question: How long have you been keeping bees? **Answer:** I started keeping bees in 2020. I attended the introductory workshop we offer and managed 5 of the 6-night courses before we got shut down by Covid. I ordered my Nuc in December, so I got the call in May to say my bees were ready without ever handling a bee! It was a tough couple of years, but I learned so many lessons, mostly on how not to keep bees! That is why I am so enthusiastic about people attending the apiary sessions as you learn so many important, practical skills.

Question: How many hives do you have, and which hive is/hives are your favourite? (Why?) **Answer:** I currently have 3 hives and this year I have built 3 over-wintered Nucs which will hopefully come through OK. I plan to get to 5 hives and bring 2 - 3 nuts on each year to cover any losses I may have. I use WBC's I know a lot of people feel they are a bit of a faff with the lifts, but I like the additional protection the lifts provide against the weather (fingers crossed, I have not had an issue with Woodpeckers yet). You also learn very quickly to use the lifts as a platform for your suppers when inspecting.

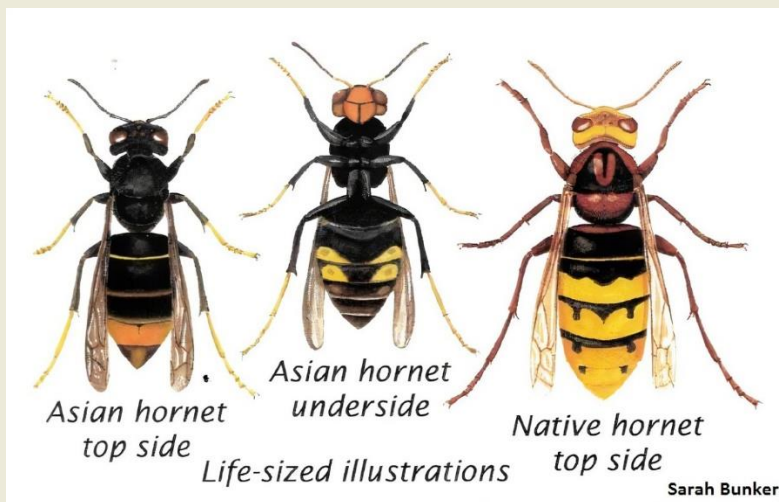
Question: Do you like your honey - what do you do with your harvest? **Answer:** There is nothing like your own honey, especially in the early years of beekeeping. I, and my family enjoy honey and use it daily. So far I have not produced enough to sell commercially; most has been given to family and friends as gifts.

Question: What has been the most useful to given to you that you would like to pass on? **Answer:** There have been so many insightful pieces of advice that I could respond with, however having a plan on what you want to achieve for the next season has been key for me. Early on, just keeping the bees alive was the focus but as I went into last year I realised

(Meet your committee contd.)

I needed to increase the number of colonies I had to allow me more scope to split/combine etc. It sounds simple but if you know what you want to achieve, and plan accordingly, everything gets just a little bit easier.

We are offered a salutary reminder with regard to the ominous and present threat of the Asian Hornet...



This is Bigger than Beekeepers....

...were the final words given in the Asian Hornet update delivered over Zoom by Andrew Durham on 16th January 2024.

Andrew collates and disseminates information from France to help beekeepers in the United Kingdom prepare for the invasion of the Asian hornet widely predicted for 2024.

Climate change and other factors are driving the spread of the insect in France and Belgium with 2023 declared the hottest year on record and the Met Office predicting similar temperatures for 2024. In Flanders, Belgium what started off as thirty reported Asian Hornet nests increased to over 4,000 in just four years: a flavour of what we could be dealing with in the UK over the next few years.

Kent is likely to be the first County to be seriously affected as more nests are established near ports and "hitchhikers" come across on lorries and ferries and travel further afield. Kent is also within easy flying distance of the North coast of France where the French appear to be adopting a policy of only destroying nests positioned less than five metres off the ground.

What can beekeepers in the UK do to prepare themselves?

(This is Bigger than Beekeepers....)

Forewarned is perhaps forearmed: we can study and learn from the experiences of beekeepers in France, Belgium and Jersey (see wwbka.org.uk) and we can start planning.

Andrew suggests an integrated approach is the most effective strategy using a combination of methods to defend colonies such as setting out traps in Spring (Andrew recommended the Veto Pharma) and mustering our hive defences. Defensive tools used by French beekeepers are primarily the Asian Hornet muzzle which operates on the same principles as a mouse guard (Thornes, £28) and the electric harp. Some French beekeepers have reported that no defences work against the Asian Hornet, but this appears to be where they have not been used in conjunction with other methods or where they have not been applied properly.

The electric harp is expensive but when compared to the potential for destruction the Asian Hornet brings, investment in the best possible equipment is essential. For if we ignore what is about to happen in the UK and/or fail to prepare properly, hundreds of colonies of honeybees will be wiped out. The Asian Hornet will also have a wider effect on our lifestyles and ecology. France originally dismissed concerns about the effect the Asian Hornet would have on biodiversity but have now revised that view after research revealed that just one Asian Hornet nest has the capability to destroy the dry weight of 11kg of insects. For more information about the effect on pollinators and the pollination process, Andrew suggested reading research papers such as *Honeybees Are Not the Only Prey* by Quentin Rome.

In France, a group of school children were attacked by Asian Hornets after their nest was disturbed and general disruption is experienced by communities when nests are located and destroyed resulting in road closures and the cancellation of sporting events. The saliva of the Asian Hornet is particularly venomous and whilst no one has died in France or Belgium after being stung, it can trigger a more severe reaction in those susceptible to anaphylactic shock.

Who is going to co-ordinate and fund strategies ready for the Asian Hornet invasion? There appear to be few long terms plans. Currently the National Bee Unit is responsible for tracking and destroying nests, but DEFRA have not identified who will take over when the NBU steps back.

So, despite the consequences the Asian Hornet is likely to cause, it looks like preparing for it and addressing the initial incursion is going to fall fairly and squarely on the shoulders of beekeepers. Should our local associations be linking up with other nature organisations such

(This is bigger than beekeepers contd.)

as the National Trust and the RSPB to co-ordinate efforts? Should the government be taking a stronger line: promoting a national strategy, educating the public, publishing contingency plans, and funding proposals? Should we be lobbying our MPs?

The problem is too big for beekeepers alone to deal with, until a government department or local authority steps up with a definite action plan, beekeepers will be the ones who will have to deal with the initial stages of invasion. We have been warned! *For further information watch Andrew Durham's briefing on You Tube:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SNvrg7oNBY>

Liz Gwinnell

Liz Gwinnell has also passed on the following useful link for WWBKA members.

<https://www.suffolkbeekeepers.co.uk/Asian%20Hornet%20Beekeepers%20Guide%20-%20Defences%20in%20the%20Apiary.pdf>

if you follow the above link you will find set out, what needs to be done and when, in preparation for the arrival of the Asian Hornet.

At a recent Asian Hornet Zoom update, the speaker stressed a successful defence depends on the right measures being implemented at the right time. The link will lead you to information that helps to clarify what the right measures are and when we should deploy them.

Hefting your hive...

Have you been hefting your hives this winter? I am sure you know that hefting should start at the end of the summer to effectively assess the weight of hives and be able to judge the rate of depletion of winter stores. To effectively "heft" your hive, the technique involves raising a corner of the hive a small distance off the ground, to judge whether lighter or heavier, (the idea is to judge the effort required when it is lifted about a centimetre).

It is not a skill developed overnight, practice and experience are required in order to be successful, so start early in the season to gain the expertise if you have not done this before. Searching the internet, you will find suggested that it is possible to weigh hives fairly accurately using a luggage scale and wire. Personally, I would be a little anxious about using this technique – the thought of spilling my precious bees across the ground in the

(Heffing your hive...)

winter rather concerns me, though I suppose if I watched the procedure demonstrated by an “expert” I might be less apprehensive?

The aim seems to be for a full-size colony to have 18-20kg of food available as it enters winter at the beginning of October.

The loss of heat sustained by opening up a hive in the winter to add fondant, is far from ideal, but this activity seems justifiable if the alternative is starvation of the bees.

Elaine Mairis

CAN YOU HELP?

A co-ordinator is urgently sought
for the 2024 Branch Honey Show...

If you are able offer assistance please contact the secretary for details as soon as possible
(Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com)

Also

Could you spare your time to help on the “Field to Food” event on
Wednesday 17th April at the Bath and West Showground?

The event is aimed at educating the next generation about farming and food production
– open to primary school pupils only...

Please contact the secretary for more information...

(Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com)

Beekeeping supplies.



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Your local supplier providing a service for:

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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

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WWBKA Treasurer: Treasurer-WWBKA@outlook.com

WWBKA Secretary: Secretary-WWBKA@outlook.com

WWBKA Apiary Manager: Apiary-WWBKA@outlook.com

WWBKA Honey Show Secretary: HoneyShow-WWBKA@outlook.com

WWBKA Membership Secretary: Membership-WWBKA@outlook.com

WWBKA Asian Hornet Action Team Coordinator: AHAT-WWBKA@outlook.com

WWBKA Newsletter Editor: Newsletter-WWBKA@outlook.com

WWBKA Education: Education-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

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

Equipment loan (microscopes, extractors, etc.): Contact the Branch Secretary at 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).

Find us on  :West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association