

West Wilts BKA News



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



The photo above shows a honeybee on pulmonaria

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 -13**

The 'fun bits': news and reports.

Hello fellow beekeepers – well – there goes the month of March! I think we can say the weather has been variable! I was surprised by the fall of snow – but I expect, like myself, many of you can remember snow falling in April.

I hope that your bees are healthy and have survived the winter months so far. I am quite sure that you are all looking forward to the next lot of "meets" at the apiary. I understand that Den Pictor (our trusty apiary manager) is still gazing into his tea leaves for some sort of sign that the "season" and "apiary meets" can begin.

Diary of Events

April

BBKA Spring Convention. Friday 12th – Sunday 14th April. Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB ([BBKA Spring Convention 2024 | British Beekeepers Association](#))

May/June 2024

Royal Bath and West Show Thursday 30th May to Saturday 1st June. Royal Bath and West Showground, BA4 6QN - near Shepton Mallet. (Bees and Honey link: [Bees & Honey \(bathandwest.com\)](#))

September

WWBKA Honey Show – Saturday 28th September. Jubilee Hall, Bratton. BA13 4 RW

October 2024

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day Saturday 12th October. Devizes Corn Exchange. SN10 1HS 10am – 4pm.

National Honey Show Thursday 24th to Saturday 26th October. Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher. KT10 9AJ

Re apiary meet dates – we are awaiting these dates – they will be published when the apiary manager has had a chance to critically review the status of the hives on site.

Need to know

A Special General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 16 April at 7pm via Zoom for the election of Richard Green as the second West Wilts BKA Trustee. Full details to follow via club secretary email.

Lectures

Zoom lecture available by Maggie Gill on the subject of Tropilaelaps, 12 April at 11.30 on the following Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83128466047?pwd=Mmx0dXJIN1FFM2xGTzhrZmEvTWd3Zz09>

Did you miss the opportunity to view the AH conference 17 February? It is still available for you view on YouTube. Use the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/live/dUMk2tzaw1E?si=CXzQZtZnWfLGv7SF>

AND: below is the link to the [Asian Hornet Watch App](#), we are all encouraged to have:

<https://www.facebook.com/TheBritishBeekeepersAssociation/posts/pfbid0fgVBgc2JVMY17ShhTnUsXq2o3Znky3GeSoUfhNj4LecCNsboXuVr2FYfFt6nEaoSl>

Winter lectures 2024 - details will be published as they become available.....

Good to Know

Here is a message from Diane Drinkwater, BBKA Chair, perhaps you spotted it in the February issue of BBKA News Magazine? This is an interesting place to visit, and I have been told that others have enjoyed more than one visit!

"Gilbert White's House & Gardens, is an institutional member of the BBKA and has generously offered a two-for-one entry to BBKA Members during the BBKA's 150th anniversary year.

Gilbert White's House & Gardens was the home of the 18th century writer and naturalist whose work 'The Natural History of Selborne', has inspired generations of naturalists. White is remembered for being the father of ecology, identifying several iconic British species such as the harvest mouse and for his observations on drone congregation areas.

His house and gardens in Selborne, Hampshire, opened as a museum in 1956 when money to buy the property was provided by Robert Washington Oates, the nephew of Captain Lawrence Oates, on condition that the museum also displayed the Oates family collections. Today, it celebrates the achievements of three explorers of the natural world – Gilbert White, who studied the environmentally diverse Selborne area in great detail, Frank Oates who explored in Central America and Southern Africa in the late 1800s and Captain Lawrence Oates who was with Scott in Antarctica and walked to his death on this 30th birthday in an attempt to save the lives of his comrades with the famous last words 'I am just going outside and I may be some time'.

The museum established beekeeping on site May 2022 to help to pollinate some 25 acres of land which are managed as wildflower rich meadows, provide additional interest for visitors as well as generating additional income for the charity. The museum is also keen to raise awareness of bees and other pollinators and the important role they play in the 'interconnectedness of things.'

If you would like to take advantage of this two-for-one-offer, please use the ticket on page 11 of the February issue of BBKA News Magazine.

More details on Gilbert White's House can be found on the website: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/news/gilbert-whites-house>

Kit Building Sessions...

Den Pictor (Apiary Manager) and Amanda Leworthy (Club Secretary) extend a big thank you to all those who helped in the kit building sessions. Your efforts are appreciated and will help to get the season off to a great start.

Meet your committee....

Continuing on from the changes in our committee last November, this newsletter features the responses from Amanda Leworthy to the questions posed to committee members so you can get to know a bit about them.

Question - What is your role on the WWBKA Committee? **Answer** - I became the secretary of WWBKA in November 2023.

Question - How did you become interested in keeping bees? **Answer** - My interest in bees began in my late teens when, while travelling in Greece, we were unexpectedly surrounded by a swarm of bees during lunch one day. We calmly left the table one-by-one to take refuge in the house. I was amazed that no one was stung and found the whole experience fascinating. My best friend got bees about 10 years ago, which reignited my interest and when my youngest left for university, the time felt right for me to get bees.

Question - How long have you been keeping bees? **Answer** - I completed the Beginners course in 2018 and was lucky to get a nuc from club member, Kelly, at the end of June that year. Seeing flying bees in February 2019 was such a thrill and relief!

Question - How many hives do you have, and which hive is/are your favourite? (Why?) **Answer** - I currently have 2 hives and cherish them equally.

Question - Do you like your honey - what do you do with it? **Answer** - To be honest, I was never a huge fan of shop-bought honey but tasting my friend's honey changed all that and now I'm a huge fan. It's taken me a while to get on top of swarming, so last spring was my first decent harvest. I love having enough to share with friends and family and I'm partial to honey on toast or crackers.

Question - What has been the most useful tip given to you that you would like to pass on? **Answer** - Be proactive rather than reactive and learn to read and work with the bees.



The Royal Bath and West Show



At the risk of repeating previous articles – here is a reminder of the important message from

Chris Rawlings, (President Wiltshire Beekeepers Association)

“The Royal Bath and West Show is at the end of May - not far off now however the **closing date for entries is 1st May** so our members need to start planning what they can enter. The show schedule and entry form can be found by following the link to the Bees and Honey Competition <https://www.bathandwest.com/bees-honey-competition>

Somerset have already started forming groups to specialise in certain classes and will be doing their best to stop Wiltshire from winning again... I wonder if Wiltshire could do the same to block out the opposition?”

Come on Wiltshire! Put on your “competitive hats” and let's see what we can do together!

Did you know there is a “WhatsApp group for West Wiltshire Beekeeper Association (WWBKA) members to stay connected with other members with regard to beekeeping issues? Any member currently on the group is, at the moment, able to add a member of the association who has paid their membership fees.

Book review – this month we are focusing on a book sent to the club secretary

Haynes Bee Manual, Clare & Adrian Waring, Foreword by Bill Turnbull The complete step-by-step guide to beekeeping. Haynes Publishing, 1st Edition 2011; ISBN: 978-0-85733-809-9; 287 x 210 mm • 800g Hardback • 179 Pages

• **Special Spring Offer! Now only £20 (Was RRP £25)** (postage and packing not included)

Available to buy through <http://northernbeebooks.co.uk/>



The Bee Manual provides a complete and easy to-follow reference to the intriguing world of the honey bee and the addictive craft of beekeeping. Aimed at the novice but also containing plenty to interest the experienced beekeeper, the Bee Manual presents no-nonsense advice, facts, and step-by-step sequences, as well as plenty of relevant photographs and diagrams.

Find out how to work with these fascinating insects to enable them to thrive, carry out their pollination activities and produce a satisfying honey crop – and you could also play a part in reversing the decline in the number of bee colonies.

- The honey bee, its life cycle and activities, and how the colony operates.
- The honey bee in the environment and its importance in pollination.
- Choosing equipment and obtaining bees.
- Finding and laying out an apiary.
- How to inspect a colony, handle frames and control the bees.
- Advice on swarm prevention and control.
- Dealing with the honey crop.
- Uses for honey, beeswax and propolis.
- Detection and control of the main honey bee pests and diseases.

Have a go at this light-hearted "Beekeeper Quiz" of only ten questions (don't shoot the quizmaster!)

answers at the end of the newsletter – (no cheating!)

Question 1 What was the name of the female Welsh singer releasing the song "Kiss Me Honey, Honey Kiss Me" in the late 1950's?

Question 2 A "tearjerker" pop song released in 1968 by a male singer, the song starts

"See the tree, how big it's grown

But friend it hasn't been too long

It wasn't big"

Do you remember the name of the song and the artist?

Question 3 In 1976 a song entitled "Honey Honey" was released by a famous group of 4 Swedish people, (formed in 1972) what was the name of this group?

Question 4 one verse of a song follows:-

"Oh, what a glorious thing to be

A healthy, grown-up, busy-busy bee

Visiting the picnics, quite a little tease

Raising little lumps upon the boy scout's knees

I'd like to be a busy-busy bee

Being just as busy as a bee can be

Flirting with the butterfly strong upon the wing

Whooppee, o death, where is thy sting?"

Which English comedian and actor (whose catch phrase was "Hello playmates") released this popular song in 1937?

Question 5 In 1964 a group with a girl drummer released a song called "Have I the right to hold you"

What was the name of the group - and the girl drummer?

Question 6 What was the name of the actor playing the character Samantha Stuart in the drama series "Foyles War"?

Question 7 What was the name of the actor playing the character "Honey Mitchell" in the TV series "Eastenders" between 2005 and 2008?

Question 8 What was the name of the controversial first play by the British dramatist Shelagh Delaney, written when she was 19 and adapted into an award-winning film of the same title in 1961?

(Beekeeper quiz contd...)

Question 9 Two characters, one a symbol of wisdom and the other, a member of the family “Felidae” set off on a nautical adventure. On that voyage they took with them something wrapped up in the smallest denomination banknote currently issued by the Bank of England, and one other substance. How are the two characters usually referred to?

Question 10 “Don’t forget the honey Mummy” was the “catch phrase” for which breakfast cereal and character?

Bee smokers

Using smoke in the practice of bee keeping is said to mask bee alarm pheromones, to cause the bee to think there may be fire close by and a threat to their hive. It is suggested, as a result of this, the bees engorge themselves on their honey stores and they become more docile. Moses Quimby, an American beekeeper (born in New York in 1810) is credited with “inventing” the bee smoker, though apparently he did not patent this invention. His bee smoker featured a bellow attached to a tin burner. My curiosity piqued, I looked online at some antique and vintage bee smokers. A few pictures of them are below.



The bee smoker fuel chamber is made of copper, stainless steel, or galvanised metal. The bellows are made from leather, suede, vinyl, or rubber – modern smoker tools are frequently able to have bellow replacements.

Of course, care should always be taken when using a smoker, if possible locate a source of water near your hives in case of fire. When lighting your smoker, please remember to remove your veil from your face when lighting it. A smoker might flare with the combustible fuel inside, the mesh in veils might catch fire and leave you with a hole to repair. There is also the possibility that your veil could catch fire and you may suffer burns. It is frustrating if you miscalculate the amount of fuel you require for your smoker – always make sure you have enough with you to finish the job you start!

I have an old aluminium bucket which I stand my smoker in – do be careful where you place your smoker, if you knock it over you may start a fire. There is often a hook on the back of the smoker –

(Bee smokers contd...)

this can be used to hang it from a brood box or suchlike when you are not using it.

It is a good idea to snuff the fire out before packing equipment away – especially if you are driving back from a site. When you have finished using your smoker, it is good to get into the habit of stuffing the spout with grass to starve the fire of oxygen, so damping the flame and putting it out. It is also not sensible to empty your smoker ash out but to wait until you have a safe area to dispose of the ashes, this way there is less chance of inadvertently causing a countryside fire.

What do you use in you smoker?

A piece of scrunched up newspaper is handy to start your burn. But I have heard of many different choices of fuel. It is my understanding that the smoke should be “cool” in order to cause as little as possible trauma to the bees themselves and avoid burning their wings. A small bundle of grass over the fuel when the burn has started may stop embers and debris being puffed out of the smoker. Lighting a smoker is a skill to be acquired – and sometimes your smoker will light, and all will go well – other times you may find yourself having to make several attempts to keep it burning – put away your fuel in a safe dry place and this should help.

Different beekeepers prefer different fuels. I have heard that old sacking lights well - with good production of smoke and the burn is said to last well. Pine needles and pine cones burn well too – probably because of the natural oils in them. I know of those who use a combination of wood shavings and cardboard, but have heard wood pellets, cat litter, compressed sawdust, wood stove pellets all suggested. A neighbour of mine offered me her clippings from a lavender hedge – I dried these – then read that lavender can be used in a smoker to calm the bees – so I added a little to my smoker – I do not know whether it calmed me or the bees – but it smelled nice! I have read that you can buy all manner of mixes online with different herbs and meadow flowers in them – an effective way of getting you to part with your hard-earned money! Basically, what you want is white smoke from natural materials, so apparently untreated cotton can be used too...

Having had a quick wander through the internet, I read about “liquid smoke” – no lighting required, it will not “go out” and you cannot burn yourself with it. Apparently this is bought in a concentrated form and diluted with water which you then spray onto the bees using a garden sprayer. I shall ask my expert beekeeping friends what their experiences and thoughts are on this subject.

Anyway, chat amongst your beekeeper friends to find out what their favourite is – and why – then make your own mind up!

Elaine Mairis

One of our club members, Samuel Cooper, offers this insight into

Beekeeping in Grand Cayman, January 2024.

In his own words...

"Back in January, my wife and I visited our close friends in Grand Cayman. To keep it short, it was lovely and warm with temperatures averaging 30 degrees almost every day. I think January warm weather breaks will become a regular occurrence for us.

Whilst we were there taking part in various day trips and activities, I decided to search online for local beekeepers and beekeeping information. To my delight I discovered Reagan's Honey, based on the south side of the island. Our friends knew of the owners through their local church, so we were fortunate to get a discounted rate on their beekeeping tour.

I managed to encourage my wife and our friends to come along, and we visited Reagan's Honey on the 15th of January 2024 and met Jamaal, the owner. He provided us with ventilated bee suits, a hive tool, and a smoker. We were then given a short brief on what to expect and the various aspects of beekeeping to look forward to, such as spotting the colours of pollen, nectar in cells, brood in all stages and, of course, the queen!

It's worth noting, I've been keeping bees for almost two years, and this was the first time my wife has worn a bee suit and come up close to the bees. Maybe the hot weather and promise of a rum cocktail persuaded her to come along, and not only for the honey!

Once briefed, Jamal then took us to the apiary, which was a short drive from the meeting point. The apiary was in Grand Cayman's mangrove wetlands where we were shown the local wildlife and the many iguanas roaming free. We then arrived at the apiary and were greeted by various colonies of all sizes hidden among the trees and bushes.



(Beekeeping in Grand Cayman, January 2024. contd.)

Jamaal explained there is no formal beekeeping association on the island and so he had to study beekeeping in the USA, which was problematic as the teaching in the USA focused on the local area and not on Grand Cayman. Jamaal added there were few beekeepers on the island, who help where possible, but resources are limited due to the strict import rules on bees and beekeeping products onto the island.

After hearing about the challenges Jamaal faced, we were then shown two hives to inspect, both of which were from swarms. Other than splits, this is one of the only viable ways of increasing colony numbers without buying nucs, unless you can meet Grand Cayman's strict import guidelines, which Jamaal managed to achieve by purchasing Italian Hybrid Queens.

Our friends had the luxury of opening the first hive and noticing the wonderful smell of wax and nectar filling the air. They were then taken aback by the quantity of bees, but in awe of the various colours of pollen. I enjoyed watching my wife and our friends take it all in. It reminded me of my first time opening a hive and eagerly wanting to order bees when I got home!



We listened to Jamaal share his challenges with pests, such as Wax Moth. This was due to capturing swarms and using old used comb to maintain colony numbers. He had however, recently ordered a fresh new batch of foundation ready to make new frames in the hope of giving the bees a fighting chance.

Throughout the beekeeping season in Grand Cayman, there are no lengthy cold periods, or should I say... days where the temperature falls below 20°. Although warm, there are periods where forage is limited, and the bees work hard to continue the year-round brood cycle. Honey production is

(Beekeeping in Grand Cayman, January 2024. contd.)

usually between December and July, and during August and November is when preparations for the nectar flow restart and pest control take place.

At the end of the session, we were given a small jar to extract some honey directly from the hive, and it was incredibly fragrant and delicious!



If you'd like to find out more about Jamaal and Reagan's honey, you can do so at www.reaganshoney.com"

Samuel Cooper

Apiary Manager Den Pictor

...would like members to know that his apiary email address is not working, he asks that members contact him on his personal email address. If it is something that needs a quick answer, he asks that you call him on his mobile phone.



Can you help? A Secretary is needed for The South West Beekeepers Forum (SWBKF)

The South West Beekeepers Forum is looking for a volunteer to take up the post of Secretary when the current Secretary leaves office. The post is one of a small team of three volunteers (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) which organises the three meetings per year of representatives from the ten Beekeeping Associations in the Southwest of England. These meetings provide an opportunity for beekeeping associations in the southwest to meet and discuss topical beekeeping matters of common interest.

The Secretary prepares and distributes the Forum's agenda, attends the three meetings (usually held in February, August, and November – in the Taunton area), and produces brief minutes. Between meetings, the Secretary is also the Forum's main contact with the participating associations.

This is an interesting post with opportunities to keep up to date on regional beekeeping issues and to meet beekeeping personalities from the Southwest of England. Mileage allowance is payable for travel to meetings.

For further details please contact David Newell (Wilts BKA's delegate to SWBKF) on 07732 545757 or sj007g0836@blueyonder.co.uk.

The South West Beekeepers Forum was established more than 50 years ago. Its purpose is to foster and facilitate consultation and cooperation between the beekeepers of the southwest.

Quiz answers

1 Shirley Bassey **2** Honey by Bobby Goldsboro **3** ABBA **4** Arthur Askey **5** The Honeycombs (girl drummer Honey Lantree)
6 Honeysuckle Weeks **7** Emma Barton **8** A Taste of Honey **9** The Owl and the Pussy Cat **10** Sugar Puffs (Honey Monster)

Beekeeping supplies.



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Diane Sleigh

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

WWBKA Newsletter Editor: 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

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: 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