

West Wilts BKA News



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



I actually managed to get a photo of a honey bee foraging on the daisies on my lawn... I knew if I hung around with a camera long enough I would eventually be lucky!

A special request to all readers from the editor

Please will you email any photos and any reports from the Royal Bath and West show to the editor email address at the end of this edition? I was unable to attend and would greatly appreciate your contributions.

Many thanks,

Elaine Mairis

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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.

How was the beekeeping month of May for you? There was some crazy weather – temperatures varying wildly and never short of a drop of rain. This month the newsletter is a little late in distribution – like many members I have been busy with getting ready for the Royal Bath and West show – a slow build up – some frantic last-minute adjustments building up to a crescendo – and then it is all over till next time – (September and October 2024).

The BBKA news – June 2024 issue - page 21 has an article on lime pollen – read on in this newsletter - great minds think alike – though I expect it is just the time of year!

Diary of Events

June

June 8th 15th and 29th (Apiary meet dates)

July

July 13th and 27th (Apiary meet dates)

August

August 10th and 31st (Apiary meet dates)

September

September 7th and 14th (Apiary meet dates)

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

Need to know

Lectures

Did you miss the opportunity to view the AH conference 17th February? It is still available for you view on YouTube.

Use the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/live/dUMk2tzaw1E?si=CXzQZtZNWfLGv7SF>

Below is the link to the **Asian Hornet Watch App**, we are all encouraged to have: <https://www.facebook.com/TheBritishBeekeepersAssociation/posts/pfbid0fgVBgc2JVMY17ShhTnUsXq2o3Znky3GeSoUfhNj4LecCNsboXuVr2FYfFt6nEaoSI>

To start this June newsletter off - a special note of thanks...

...to all those WWBKA members participating in the Royal Bath and West Show. Many invested time and effort in manning the “revamped” WWBKA stand. It looked absolutely splendid, with plenty of information and items of interest for all – and there was the added usual interest of candle making demonstration. Thank you to all volunteers. “Well done” to everyone involved, especially Gloria Pilz. It seems that a record number of entries were made to the Royal Bath and West Show this year. The efforts of all those who found precious time to make entries and support Wiltshire resulted in the retention of the shield.



Bait hives.

This time of year, terrifies me – after carefully nurturing our honey bees through the winter, it is suddenly “swarm season”. The whole “thing” seems so very hit and miss to me!

Last season I managed to attract a small swarm into a nuc situated behind my greenhouse, and since I have an empty hive this year, I set up the bait hive again to see what happens. A bait hive is an empty hive which is deliberately set up to attract a swarm. Some sources say that by providing a home for a swarm which would otherwise have to take its chances in a hollow tree, chimney, or similar, the bees are far more likely to survive with you to look after them. You may disagree.

The recent weather has been warm (well, it was when I started to write this) and definitely suited to swarming so I thought I would see if I could attract any stray swarms from other locations. I had also read somewhere that possibly if my own bees swarmed, then they might take up residence in the bait hive (wishful thinking that one!) Yes, a gamble I know but there seems to be quite a bit of a gamble involved with keeping bees! Even if you have read copiously on and around the subject of bees, swarms, and prepared your equipment etc, you have the bees themselves to contend with. The general consensus of opinion is that bees have minds of their own. Then there is the weather to consider. Even when a course of action has been decided upon, there will be other beekeepers who advise an alternative approach. It also takes time to consider the course of action if you are not confident and an expert – and the situation with bees is that it is dynamic, evolving and changes while you are thinking about it! (I have heard that experts sometimes get it wrong too). I digress. Anyway, by the time a course of action has been decided upon, (you might have to plan to fit it around your daily life for example) - sometimes when you go to deal with it, the birds (or bees) have already flown!

So - bait hives.... Last year I thought I would have a go. I had some rather “disgusting looking” old brood frames. I had read that honey bees like these, so I put one in a nuc. A wide range of commercial swarm lure mixtures were on sale, but it seemed lemon grass oil does the job admirably, so I bought a bottle of lemon grass oil as a lure. Then I had to decide on a site for the bait hive.

Bait hives contd.

Last year I got a ladder and put a nuc on the flat roof of my garage because I read that a bait hive needed to be “up high”. It was there several weeks, and the only attention it acquired was from my neighbours who spotted it from an upstairs window and wondered what I was up to.

I gave the “site” a little more thought, particularly as I am not particularly good up and down ladders since my hip and knee replacement and decided that if the nuc attracted a swarm, the garage roof was possibly going to be rather difficult to carry a box of bees down a ladder without dropping it. So, I decided to move the nuc to a spot behind my greenhouse, where we have a redundant recycling bin which is about 1.5 meters high. I decided this would be high enough and stood the nuc on it.

I washed the greenhouse windows well because the back of the greenhouse is less than a meter from the bait hive. The plan was that this would make a clear and safe viewing station if/when things become interesting. Last year there were days when I thought “oh here they come” and then they didn't”.



There were two or three occasions when scout bees appeared to take interest, but nothing happened. Then at the beginning of June there was a little more interest and activity around the

Bait hives contd.

poly nuc. The interest increased, but I was not convinced anything would happen. I tried not to get too excited. Just as we were locking up to leave the house to have lunch with my daughter on June 4th my husband looked up the garden and called out to me “Here come your bees”!



And in they went. I was unable to watch the whole swarm “go in” but watched some the activity through the greenhouse window before I went to lunch with my daughter.

I closed up the entrance hole in the evening and left the nuc overnight. When I picked it up to move it to a hive in a permanent situation the sealed nuc seemed light. As I loaded it into the car I convinced myself that the bees had moved on. However, when we got to the new location and I opened the nuc, there they were! Not a huge swarm by any means, but a perfectly respectable size. So – that was last year.

This year I have had the same set up behind the greenhouse (washed the glass again so I could watch through it) – and thought on a couple of occasions that I might be lucky – but the weather changed just as I thought there was going to be some success – or maybe those scout bees I had thought had an interest, just moved on. Anyway, the nuc is still behind the greenhouse – it gives me something to do, watch this space, I will update if there is any success.

Elaine Mairis

Read on for a contribution from Mike Walters....

Freshford Pre-School 'Bee Talk' on 22nd May for World Bee Day.

One of the most rewarding aspects of beekeeping for me is sharing 'the wonder of honeybees' with anyone willing to listen! I started beekeeping back in 2016, in East Devon. Having worked for The John Lewis Partnership for 36 years I used my 6-month sabbatical to join the Beginners Course. There cannot be a better hobby for an aging retiree. Suddenly, I am a candle maker, honey producer, basket weaver (lovely skep), competition entrant, honey cake baker, guest speaker and article writer! My eldest daughter, Debbie, is Pre-School Manager and invites me to spend 30 minutes with the children around this time each year.



Children at this age have a short attention span so the talk is interactive, with lots of comb to pass around and squidge, bee toys to play with, and a real Asian Hornet encased in clear acrylic. The session ends with, of course, honey tasting. This year I was able to take in a partially capped frame and they all tried the honey at least once (some fans eventually had to be restrained!!). I returned the frame to the bees when I got home.

Freshford Pre-School 'Bee Talk' on 22nd May for World Bee Day contd.



Both myself and my wife, Cathy, have basic DBS certificates (Police checks). They only cost £18 to apply for online and provide some degree confidence whenever working with children.

Mike Walters



The Joy of Flowers

Keeping bees has made me look at the world differently. A dandelion, for example, is no longer a weed but a vital source of nectar and pollen for honeybees emerging from their winter clusters. I am almost ashamed of how many I have pulled up in the past. Brambles are another revelation. Many gardeners strip back their prickly stalks and use them as strong and effective garden ties. Last year I let one grow in the garden instead of cutting it down. The bees smothered them with attention, and I made jam from the fruit.

Honeybees are an important pollinator and are thriving in the UK. For other pollinators it is a different story. Habitat destruction, climate change, pesticides and light pollution are having a dramatic effect on their populations. Night pollinators such as moths and bats are particularly at risk. 84% of crops grown in Europe depend on insect pollination. If this decline continues, the survival of thousands of species, including the human being, is seriously at risk.

So, what can we do to help?

For night pollinators, we can turn off the lights in our gardens, grow our grass longer and sow night scented stock, phlox, evening primrose, borage, and lemon balm. To plug the "June Gap" when forage is scarce, we can plant phacelia, and Californian lilac (ceanothus) early in the year to ensure there are plenty of flowers to keep them all occupied. Planting rosemary will please a wide variety of solitary bees including the mason bee, the flower bee, and the bumble bee.

But before we go mad and throw ourselves headlong into a planting frenzy, it is important to know what is attractive to pollinators and what is not. Double flowers on some varieties of rose and dahlia make it impossible for bees to get to the centre of the flower and harvest the nectar and pollen. Single flowered varieties are much easier to navigate. Bees will avoid narcissus, honeysuckle, zinnias, and trumpet shaped flowers which can make gathering nectar and pollen hard work. Saying that, honeybees love holly hocks and foxgloves.

The Joy of Flowers contd.

Honeybees will avoid geraniums for they dislike their scent, and the plant contains little pollen anyway. Begonias, busy lizzies, pansies, petunias, and pelargoniums have no value to any pollinating insect as they have had most of their pollinating goodness bred out of them. The double petals of most varieties have replaced the pollen producing anthers and many of these plants are self-pollinators and have no need of outside assistance.

Traditional wildflower type plants such as cornflower, cosmos, lavender, sage, catmint, and Rudbeckia are the heroes of pollinators, providing a varied and plentiful selection of nectar and pollen for all our pollinators during the summer months.

This year I have decided to sow wildflowers wherever I can. A favourite pastime of mine is throwing seeds over my fence to populate the grass verge beyond and scattering wildflower seeds on roundabouts. Wiltshire Council have a new policy of only trimming the edges of verges and roundabouts to benefit the environment (although the cynical among us might also call this a cost cutting measure!) but whatever the reason, long grasses and wildflowers are being encouraged to flourish.

Little cotton bags of bee bombs can be bought from Amazon which easily fit into a handbag or rucksack and can be thrown into cracks in pavements, verges, and roundabouts wherever we go. It is important to check first that the seeds originate in the UK. The bee bombs I have are made in Dorset.

And so, whether we have big gardens, small gardens or no garden at all, everyone can help our pollinators in small but significant ways. If everyone scattered wildflower seeds on patches of wasteland, down alleyways or in cracks in the pavement, the world would be a much brighter place, our pollinators would thrive, and our honeybees would be kept busy during the months when there is little forage available.

Liz Gwinell

A simple breakfast recipe with honey for you to try

I often ask beekeepers what they do with their honey. I think I may have remarked previously in this newsletter, that my Dad used to enjoy a spoonful of clear honey drizzled over ice cream (with a spoonful of whisky on some occasions). Although it seems sacrilegious to bake with honey, I have a recipe I was given by a flat mate in London in the 1970's that calls for the use of honey, and I like it very much. I have not made a batch of this recently – it is like a granola breakfast cereal... When you make it you can adapt it to your personal preference – for instance you can add flax seeds or sesame seeds – or use sultanas instead of currants – I like to add dried apricots. Try it and let me know what you think.

Nutricrunch

2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups oats

$\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sunflower seeds

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup of currants

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup desiccated coconut

1 heaped cup of wheatgerm

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped nuts

1. Mix together in a large mixing bowl

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup clear honey

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup vegetable oil

2. Mix together and pour over the dry ingredients

Blend thoroughly, spread mixture thinly on baking trays and cook until lightly browned.

(Stir once or twice whilst cooking).

Gas Mark 3 (300 – 325) for 15 minutes.

Store in an airtight container.

Serve at breakfast with milk.

Elaine Mairis

Current sources of pollen.

We spend a lot of time wondering about perennial and annual flowers as a source of pollen and nectar for the honey bee. When you are taking in a walk in the next few weeks, look overhead. The holly tree in my garden is usually resplendent in the winter months with its shiny red berries (though not for long because the pigeons make a meal of them). Currently this holly tree is busy with honey bee activity, though up too high for me to photograph. The flower is somewhat innocuous, but nonetheless it seems a useful source of forage.



Did you noticed red pollen coming into your hives on your bees? Look up and admire the amazing candelabra flowers of the horse chestnut tree, as well as being the source of the conkers that you played in the playground with as a child, the horse chestnut tree is a good source of pollen and nectar for many insects. Chestnut honey is a dark brown honey from the chestnut tree (pictured below)



Current sources of pollen contd.

The linden tree (pictured below left) is very fragrant, the flowers are far less noticeable than those of the chestnut tree - you may not notice the small yellow/green flowers. These flowers are another source of pollen and nectar for bees. The aphids like to feed on this too and release a sticky residue from it – try not to park your car under this tree – it might need a wash after. Sycamore trees (photo below right) are a great early nectar source, their blossom is another that may easily be missed.



Hawthorn is currently in bloom too – it has a very memorable perfume, but though said to attract many different species of bees, apparently it is an unreliable source of nectar and pollen.



I expect many of you experienced bee keepers are well aware of the pollen charts that can be used for reference to identify the source of the bees forage. They can be purchased from online sources to help identification of pollen going into our beehives.



Current sources of pollen contd.

It is possible to buy a booklet that reproduces the Dorothy Hodges drawings of pollen grains.

You can read what Richard Jones (previous director of (International Bee Research Association) had to say by using the following link...

<https://ibra.org.uk/product/2021-reprint-of-the-pollen-grain-drawings-of-dorothy-hodges>

I have used his comments in the paragraph below to outline her work.

Dorothy was a trained artist, and a beekeeper, her original drawings are preserved at Kew Gardens. She had the idea of making a colour chart of pollen loads in 1946, but it took until 1952 before the publication of "The Pollen Loads of the Honey Bee" by the (then) Bee Research Association. The booklet was designed to be a practical guide for beekeepers. It became extremely popular; copies of the original book are now rare and highly sought after. A reproduction of this work is now available and makes it more accessible for all. Mrs Hodges drawings are reported to be "of outstanding artistic merit and offer the possibility of identifying the pollen forms which are most frequently collected by bees. For beginners, these drawings will do good service as an introduction to the pollen analysis of honey."

I think I might have a look for a copy – I wonder if our library has one...

Elaine Mairis



Meet your committee....

This newsletter features the responses from Elaine Mairis 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 editor of WWBKA newsletter in November 2022.

Question - How did you become interested in keeping bees? **Answer** – My father once had a market garden on the Isle of Wight when I was young. A bee keeper was invited to bring his hives to our land to see if they would help with pollination of the crops. I was fascinated and watched the bees and the keeper with interest. I used to go with my Dad to find swarms that were reported to us. A swarm flew directly into an empty hive over my head while was working in the glass cloches - I was enthralled – I was not so thrilled when I was stung behind my knee on my wedding day by a honeybee that had sneaked into my wedding dress!

Question - How long have you been keeping bees? **Answer** – I started keeping bees during lockdown, my neighbour had done the basic course and acted as a mentor for me.

Question - How many hives do you have, and which hive is/are your favourite? (Why?) **Answer** - I currently have 4 hives two WBC's in my garden. I have two National Hives in Crockerton. Neither of them is more nor less important than the other, though I like working with the WBC's as the lifts give a convenient resting place to stand the supers on.

Question - Do you like your honey - what do you do with it? **Answer** - I like a little honey on fresh crusty bread and butter, but I find it terribly sweet and can only eat a little of it. I have a dreadful history over the last few years with my bees and am hoping and praying for a better season this year. I gave the honey from my most successful season as Christmas presents.

Question - What has been the most useful tip given to you that you would like to pass on?

Answer – A wise gentleman at the club told me to trust my instincts – as time passes and I grow in confidence and knowledge I realise he is right. The other tip given me was to make sure I have enough equipment, to deal with different situations – (my shed now full to bursting point).

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: 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