

West Wilts BKA News



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



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“Fun” items, news, and reports

Picture left: Honey bee on Erysimum

What a difference a month makes – and now West Wiltshire Beekeepers are off to a “flying start.” Well, hopefully not literally, but having listened to discussions taking place at the recent apiary meeting it seems that colonies are vigorous and multiplying rapidly – and we certainly are enjoying a bout of the right weather to support growth and swarming – so we are all trying to “read our colonies” and take appropriate action.

The Royal Bath and West show is in May – check the details and put some entries in (closing date for entries is May 4th) – you can put some entries away carefully and enter them at other shows in the year.

This year has been the last of Chris Rawlings leading the Improvers course -we thank him wholeheartedly for his commitment and for sharing his knowledge – and we thank Nina Wilton for taking over.

DIARY OF EVENTS

MAY

May 4th FINAL DAY FOR ROYAL BATH AND WEST SHOW ENTRIES

May 9th Apiary meeting see page 8 for additional details (Diane Sleigh will be at the apiary with apiary supplies - check last page of newsletter for contact details).

May 19th at 7pm BBKA Zoom talk "Practical Swarm Collection" by Gerry Stuart – more information about this on page 3

May 28th to 30th The Royal Bath and West Show The Royal Bath & West of England Society, The Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6QN

SEPTEMBER

September 19th West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association Show, Southwick Village Hall.

OCTOBER

October 10th 10am to 4pm Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day, The Devizes Corn Exchange, Market Place, Devizes SN10 1HS.

October 22nd - 24th The National Honey Show, Sandown Park, Esher, Surrey, UK.



Good to Know

Please find below a message from WBKA President, Chris Rawlings, regarding this year's Royal Bath and West Show:

Royal Bath and West Honey Show

A quick reminder that the closing date for entries is the May4th.

To find out more, follow the link below to the Bees & Honey Competition:

<https://www.bathandwest.com/bees-honey-competition>

Somerset are advertising for competitors on Social Media and planning to encourage their members to put in Craft entries as it is usually only supported by Wiltshire. So, all you crafters out there, how can you help to respond?

Also, they usually win the Light and Medium run honey classes. Can anyone produce some exceptional entries this year?

Although we lost the shield last year some of our best classes were Mead, Wax flowers, cakes, and all wax classes, so please keep the standards up on these. Good luck!!

We will be setting up the Marquee at about 10am on Sunday 24th May, so if you are able, we would welcome some help.

The Main event on 28th May – 30th May needs volunteers to assist manning the Wiltshire Stand which our Treasurer Gloria is organising again this year.

This requires volunteers to answer questions from the public

Chris Rawlings shares a few words with us as he steps down from running the
Improvers Course and Preparation for Basic Assessments.

"I have been leading this interactive course for many years now and enjoyed meeting all of you who have taken part in the enlightening discussions.

Yes 'enlightening' as you have progressed you have inspired me to check on my knowledge and of new procedures as the craft has advanced.

However, I have been looking for my replacement for the last 2 years and I believe I have achieved this now.

Nina Wilton has shadowed me and was the lead this year, presenting the whole course to a high standard. I have every confidence that she will be as successful in guiding candidates to achieve good results.

All those who have passed at whatever level; Pass, Credit or Distinction, have given me the reward of never having a failure in West Wilts.

It doesn't matter how long (over one season) you have been keeping bees; I would like to encourage all beekeepers to take the opportunity to take this course and assessment and don't wait 10 years as I did, refresh your beekeeping next year.

I am going out on a high and enjoyed the whole experience learning with you.

Many thanks

Chris Rawlings"

West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association members extend sincere thanks for all the time and effort, knowledge and expertise Chris has unselfishly shared with beekeepers while running these sessions in past years - and thank Nina Wilton for picking up the baton.



PADDOCK FOR RENT.

Lucy Stephenson has a paddock to rent just off the A30 halfway between Salisbury and Shaftesbury and would love to rent it to beekeepers. If of interest, please contact Lucy direct

at: lucy.anne.stephenson@gmail.com



DO YOU READ AS FAR AS THE LAST PAGE OF THE NEWSLETTER?

ON MAY 9th DIANE SLEIGH WILL BE AT THE APIARY MEETING WITH HER BEEKEEPING SUPPLIES

TOP UP NOW TO SAVE STRETCHING YOUR SUPPLIES AT THE LAST MINUTE



BBKA May Talk

'Practical Swarm Collection' by Gerry Stuart. The next in our monthly series of Zoom talks is on Tuesday 19th May at 7pm. Gerry is a retired police officer and member of Torbay Beekeepers. He used to manage between 28 -30 hives but reduced his beekeeping activities considerably after taking over as a Director of a cider & wine business. He is a former beekeeper for Paignton Zoo and Torbay Coast & Countryside Trust. Gerry is currently a Trustee of HAN UK (Honey Authentication Network UK) and Co-director of the B4 Project: Native Black Bee conservation project which involves Mount Edgumbe, Eden Project, Lost Gardens of Heligan, Paradise Park Hayle, Isles of Scilly, etc.

Zoom

link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81233819992?pwd=DYMZxTlmJjpRCLJjYjvblxgybQQdSZ.1>

Meeting ID: 812 3381 9992 Passcode: 527929

And following on with a relevant reminder in case you missed it in previous newsletters.....

DO YOU WANT A SWARM?

IF SO PLEASE CONTACT OUR SWARM COORDINATOR DAVID RAINES

david.raines@hna.uk.com or 07711018440

THUS ENSURING YOU ARE ON THE SWARM LIST





DID YOU KNOW.....

The British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) strongly discourages importing queen bees and colonies from outside the UK. Their official position advocates for using locally bred bees to ensure suitability to the environment, prevent the introduction of new pests/diseases, and maintain genetic diversity.

Key BBKA Positions on Imported Queens:

- **Biosecurity & Health:** Imports pose a serious risk of bringing in diseases and pests, such as small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps* mites.
- **Encouraging Local Breeding:** The BBKA promotes producing local queens to create strong, resilient, and adapted stock rather than relying on imports.
- **The "Local" Alternative:** Beekeepers are encouraged to learn to rear their own queens or buy from local UK queen breeders.
- **Import Status:** While it is illegal to import package bees or colonies from the EU into Great Britain, importing queen bees is still possible, but very much discouraged by the BBKA.
- **Last Resort:** The BBKA advises using imported queens only as a last resort.

Just saying!



Apiary meet dates...

Please find the dates and advice for attending apiary sessions below....

Apiary sessions start at 2pm - please arrive slightly earlier so that you can be kitted up and ready to go for the start time.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Apiary sessions are subject to the weather conditions and how the bees are on the day - Apiary Manager Den has the final say on whether or not a session can go ahead. If a session should have to be cancelled, we'll send an email to let you know, so if the weather is looking iffy on the day of a scheduled session, please check your emails and WhatsApp to see if the session is still going ahead.
2. Please park in the lane outside the apiary, not on site.
3. Please remember to bring all your protective kit: suit, wellies, and rubber gloves - no leather gloves - and a mug for the post-inspection cuppa and catch-up.

The dates below are the dates of the club apiary sessions; these are also listed on the club website <http://westwiltsbka.org/> - these are the corrected apiary dates from Geoff Cross. For the avoidance of doubt, all apiary sessions are on a Saturday.

May 9th and 23rd

June 6th and 20th

July 4th and 18th

August 1st 8th and 15th

12th September.



Good attendance at the apiary



The photo above was taken at the apiary on Saturday 25th April – the weather was so much better than the previous fortnight when there were biting winds and cloud.

A warm welcome is extended to all new members joining WWBKA.

Asian Hornet App

If you have a mobile phone have you got around to downloading the Asian Hornet Watch App? It is worth reinforcing the importance of the app. Both beekeepers and the general public need to remain vigilant – if you can share your knowledge of the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet (YLAH) and educate others that will be a job well done!

Here's another reminder... if you know of a gardening club, school, or an area of local government who would benefit from a YLAH Awareness presentation, please point them in the direction of **Tom Kenyon** ahat@wiltshirebeekeepers.co.uk **07967 552025**



Entries CLOSE on Monday 4th May 2026.

The Royal Bath and West Show 2026 - 28th to 30th May

Entries for the Bees & Honey Competition at the Royal Bath & West Show are now OPEN.

<https://www.bathandwest.com/bees-honey-competition>

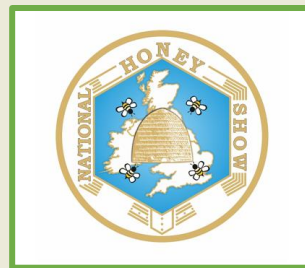
West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association Show 2026

Southwick Village Hall.

Saturday 19th September

Wiltshire Bee & Honey Day 2026

Saturday, 10th October – 10am to 4pm



Save the date!

THE NATIONAL HONEY SHOW 2026

THURSDAY 22ND TO SATURDAY 24TH OCTOBER

SANDOWN PARK, ESHER, SURREY

Flower of the month, May: Hawthorn (Crataegus)

You might have already noticed, in the month of April, the hawthorn tree in bloom early this year – particularly resplendent in the month of May with nectar, pollen and pungent blossoms, rewarding birds with forage from its red berries into the autumn and winter. Anyone retrieving a swarm of bees from a hawthorn hedge will be able to vouch for its ability to provide a good wildlife habitat. This tree when used as a hedging shrub provides shelter for birds in its thorny branches, though taller hawthorn trees can be found growing in gardens and mixed woodlands.

**Pollinator of the month: May** – the Common Red Soldier beetle (*Rhagonycha fulva*)

The red soldier beetle is a predator and pollinator easily found on plants around your garden, in hedgerows and fields. These impressively coloured beetles, (named after red coated soldiers), are frequently spotted in large numbers on umbelliferous plants.



Overwintering....

Surgery in November 2025 rendered me unable to look after my hives myself over the winter months. Sadly, I had not prepared the hives equally. I have not always used mouse guards, but since the hives had been moved onto an open field I thought I should add them at the end of the season. I couldn't manage to push them into the wood so two had guards and two did not.

When I finally managed to get to the field to look for hive activity and to check the fondant level on the crown boards, I noticed less activity in one hive and went to check that the entrance was clear. Poking around the entrance (properly protected I hasten to add), I noticed a piece of grass fall out of the entrance. I saw some activity as the months got warmer, but nothing like the level of the other three hives... I crossed my fingers and hoped for the best. My availability to check never seemed to coincide with weather warm enough to open up and have a "proper look." I was away over the Easter week and missed a fantastic opportunity then. Finally, towards the end of April there was weather warm enough for me to open up and inspect, (and I had also been given the go ahead for driving my car again – wonderful to be out under my own steam). I sorted out my overalls and essential kit for a quick first inspection. (Did I just say a "quick" first inspection)?

Well, those colonies had certainly been busy by the time I got there... it almost took a crowbar to open up two of the hives – all seams welded together with propolis and wax – providing highly effective seals against the winter weather. One colony had filled the space of a WBC with brace comb – I had read about this happening, but this was the first time in six years it had happened to me. It took me an extraordinarily long while to free it all up. The colony was surprisingly patient with me while I did what was necessary to free it all up. I have not spotted the queen in that hive yet, though whatever is in there seems to be doing very well – brood in all stages – and in copious amounts. I was as slow and gentle as I could be – hoping I did not inadvertently murder the queen in residence. The other hive doing especially well was a National. In a very pleasing state of abundance with brood in all stages

(Overwintering contd...)

– but again – almost needing the “crowbar approach” to break the seals. It took a great deal of effort and time to ease the frames and clear propolis and wax – and I successfully identified the blue queen happily navigating the frames with her entourage.

With the other two hives it was a different story, I had not been able to add the mouse excluder, and these did not fare so well. The WBC I had poked about the entrance to clear had at this stage dwindled to less than a dozen bees and it is possible they were there to help themselves to the few supplies left. I was correct in my assumption about a mouse – the remains of the nest were on the floor of the hive, and every single frame had been damaged by the mouse (which I found dead, shrivelled up, on the floor). The other National hive was failing, a rather listless colony and I could not spot the queen – I should have fairly easily been able to with such a reduction in number of bees – a few larvae and no eggs. So – the moral of the story is – certainly in my case, make sure I add my mouse guards next year, though it will not be a guarantee for survival – maybe I should invest in some of the mouse guards that stay on all year round which can also act as wasp guards. I now have to scorch the hive in which the colony died, and to incinerate the damaged frames. To add insult to injury, a rat managed to get into where my supers were overwintering. Unfortunately, I have had to have a few bonfires. Next year I will be more vigilant, and I hope better prepared.



Elaine Mairis

Following on from the previous discussion now might be a good time to draw attention to the BBKA pdf available by using the following link.... [BBKA_07_Hive_Cleaning_and_Sterilisation.pdf](#)

Continuing in the subject of winter losses, an email from Clare McGettican, BBKA Vice-Chair, asks for your participation....

Subject: EC 2026-04-10 Launch of BBKA Winter Loss Survey 2025/6

*BBKA 2025/26 Winter Loss Survey. With increasing anecdotal reports of significant winter losses this year, it is more important than ever that we gather robust national data. I hope you will spare 5–10 minutes to complete the survey. Please note that questions marked with * are mandatory.*

www.bee-survey.com/762947

Some local associations have already run their own surveys; even if you have completed a local version, please take part in this national survey as well. Your contribution is essential to building an accurate picture of colony losses across England and Wales.

Again, the BBKA will work with COLOSS, the international non-profit based in Bern dedicated to improving bee health. Survey results will be published in BBKA News and will contribute to the global COLOSS study on threats to honey bee populations. Where appropriate - and only following full review and approval by the BBKA Board of Trustees - the BBKA may also support recognised researchers by sharing anonymised, aggregated data solely for research that the board feels will benefit bees and beekeeping. Using the standard COLOSS questionnaire allows comparison with other countries and helps us better understand the relative risks of colony losses linked to decisions such as varroa treatment and colony migration. The full survey data privacy policy can be found [here](#).

This survey will close on Friday, 15th May 2026. Many thanks in advance for your participation – I look forward to sharing the results with you! <https://coloss.org/>

Swarming Glory

Although, at the time of writing, the year has not yet tipped into May, the bees have certainly been keeping us on our toes. Our West Wilts swarm co-ordinator, David, had four swarms reported to him earlier in the month which turned out to be non-viable (small or not swarms), but others were, including a swarm in a wood pile and another in a domestic chimney. We have all, it seems, been spending our spare time hammering away in sheds and gardens making frames, putting on supers at a record pace and seen how some of those supers have filled up in a very short time. There is no doubt that this year's beekeeping season is off to a roaring start which is good to hear after the recent news about winter losses in the south west but the prospect of our bees swarming nags at us and is something we are all keen to prevent.



Both of my colonies have swarmed already. One did it quite blatantly, whilst I was standing next to it and for the next few hours, the scouts flew around my house clearly deciding that they quite liked the look of it. It is only when you are inside with all the windows and doors closed on a warm day in spring that you start to wonder how bee proof your home might be. Some of the bees found a way into the exterior flap of my kitchen extractor fan necessitating a quick climb onto a chair outside to plug the hole. I then had to open the grilles inside the kitchen and let them fly out the window. They don't teach you these girl guiding skills on the Basic.

(Swarming Glory contd...)

My second colony swarmed on a Sunday evening when I was just about to settle down with David Attenborough. My neighbour sent me a message to say my bees had been acting strangely and that she thought there was a wasp's nest in one of her trees. Could I take a look?

What I found was fascinating: the first swarm I had seen in "the wild". 30,000 bees hanging on to the branch of a lilac tree about nine feet off the ground. I tried not to shudder when my neighbour said she had thought about spraying it with bug spray or calling in the pest controllers. I reassured her that it was my bees and that they had swarmed and would not sting but even so, I cautioned her to close her windows and stay indoors.



Not having dealt with a swarm on my own yet but being very keen to learn, I contacted Alan who gave up his Sunday evening to come over and help out. As he shook the bees into a brood box full of frames, some of them kept flying back to the swarming location overhead. He didn't think the queen was up there because the majority of the bees were quite happily "marching" into the hive

(Swarming Glory contd...)

– a wonderful sight to see – but he did think the swarm had been on the branch a lot longer than we thought – possibly overnight because some of the flying bees were bringing back pollen. He explained that the branch was probably saturated with queen pheromone which kept attracting some of the bees. The solution was to apply copious amounts of smoke to the branch to try to mask the pheromone whilst being careful not to smoke out the new brood box below and disrupt the pheromones that were guiding the bees into their new home.



I have subsequently learned that if bees stay in one place for some time in a swarm, the likelihood of them returning there (or maybe choosing it as a good place again in the future) are high. There are several remedies suggested including re-smoking the area, applying more smoke, or dousing a surface with vinegar. What to use will very much depend on the location of the swarm. For those who have had swarms in chimneys this year or other unusual places, I am not sure what the solution might be, but I am quite sure that in more complicated places which beekeepers can't reach, experts will know what to suggest.

(Swarming Glory contd...)

I hadn't expected my first experience of swarm collection to be with my own bees, but it was something I found fascinating. In addition, I knew that my bees were safe and my neighbour newly educated about what a honeybee swarm looks like.

I don't think we can prevent every colony from swarming because it is, after all, their natural instinct although I appreciate we have to try if we want to keep our bees and avoid them being a nuisance. On reflection, I think that losing half of a colony in a swarm is better than losing it for other more negative reasons and looking into a dark and empty hive.

After all, the season is young and there is time for it to build up again.

Liz Gwinnell



HEY THERE BEEKEEPERS –

DON'T GO AWAY UNTIL YOU HAVE READ THE FOLLOWING!

**Please consider registering your colonies of bees with the National Bee Unit
on “BeeBase”**

The advantages are considerable, registration is both voluntary and free.

**You will receive disease alerts and surveillance, Free Inspections, Asian
Hornet Response, and Educational Resources.**

LOOK for <https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/register>

Oil seed rape.

Following a mild winter and with a warm start to the spring this year (according to a weather forecasting discussion), many beekeepers local to our WWBKA club may have noticed yellow fields of oil seed rape (OSR) crops. I have noticed a fragrance similar to wallflowers (also in the brassica family) when I have been in the close vicinity of these fields.



According to an article published (accessed on internet 28/04/26 [Bees increase oilseed rape yield under real field conditions - ScienceDirect](#)) in 2018, oilseed rape (OSR, *Brassica napus* L.) was the fourth largest oil crop in terms of production in the world and the most common in the European Union (FAOSTAT, 2014). The results of the study carried out found the main OSR pollinators were honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) and wild bees (*Lasioglossum* spp.). Another report published in November 2025, Farming UK News ([Oilseed rape set for 30% surge in 2026 after hitting 42-year low - FarmingUK News](#) accessed online 28/04/26 1830) reported (November 2025) after a 42 year low, due to the problems with infestation of Cabbage Stem **Flea Beetle** (CSFB) after the ban of treatment with neonicotinoids, oil seed rape looked set for a major comeback in 2026, early forecasts suggesting an increase in the crop's area by nearly a third for harvest in 2026. Good news for bees! Oil seed rape flowers provide an early forage boost to honey bees at a time of the year when there can be a dip in availability of forage, the bright yellow flowers offer an abundance of nectar and bright yellow pollen. My hives are close to fields of OSR, I noticed on my last visit to

(Oil seed rape contd...)

them, bees returning from foraging carrying a bright yellow spot on their foreheads – said to be picked up from foraging on the flowers.



This early and sudden surge of nectar into the hives may catch beekeepers out – the rapid build up of collected nectar might “flood” the hive – reducing amount of space for the queen to lay in and increasing the potential of early swarming. The high glucose content of OSR honey may result in very quick crystallisation of honey in the comb, making swift extraction of honey from the comb desirable to avoid giving you “extraction headaches”! If your bees are foraging on oilseed rape then it is a good idea to have plenty of supers available and kit to use to help you avoid a swarm developing. Filtering as you extract honey that is likely sourced from OSR seems advisable as this makes handling the honey easier if you need to leave it to a slightly later date to jar.

Elaine Mairis

A colorful promotional banner for 'The Royal Bath & West Show'. The banner features a dark blue background with white text that reads 'FOOD, FARMING & RURAL LIFE' in a large, bold, sans-serif font. To the right, the text 'THE ROYAL BATH & WEST SHOW' is displayed in a serif font, with 'SHOW' in a red box. Below this, the dates '28 - 30 MAY 2026' are shown in a red box. The banner is decorated with illustrations of a Union Jack flag, a wooden wheel, a beehive, and various flowers. At the bottom, a dark blue bar contains the text 'DISCOVER MORE AT THE ROYAL BATH & WEST SHOW' and 'Book your tickets now: bathandwest.com/tickets' in a smaller font.

Recipe of the month: May – James Martin’s Banana and Honey cake

Ingredients

200g butter

200g caster sugar

200g self-raising flour

3 eggs

2 bananas

100g pecans chopped

2 tablespoons honey

Method

1. Pre heat the oven to 180°C.
2. To make the cake beat the butter and sugar in a kitchen aid until the mixture turns pale. Add the pecans and bananas then beat until smooth. Add the eggs and continue beating until they are thoroughly combined, then fold the flour in by hand.
3. Spoon into a 2lb lined loaf tin and bake for 45 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the cake comes out clean. Allow to cool.

I have not had time to try this recipe yet – let me know if you find time to try it and tell me how it turns out.

Source: [Banana and Honey Cake - James Martin Chef](#)

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

Contact details for committee and officers

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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 Social Secretary: Social-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

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

Swarm Collection Register: Contact Branch Swarm Coordinator (David Raines 07711 018440 1373-825560 or David.Raines@hna.uk.com)

Find us on  :West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association