THE BUZZ

Westerham Beekeepers'
newsletter

September 2024 | Issue Four

Welcome:

The great thing about beekeeping is that no two seasons are alike. Call it climate change, the Great British Weather, Asian Hornets or whatever. This is a pastime that will always have surprises. After a mild winter and a wet spring when early inspections were difficult to plan, we have had about three stop-starts to the season and the flow. The unlucky among us had two bouts of swarming. A Sevenoaks member reported a swarm as late as early September! Good luck for that one with the mating flights. Harvests have been variable; yields forage up and down with the temperature.

In this issue, we'll share news of the winter talks programme, reflect on the season that has been, and plan the activities for the quiet season.

Keith, our Treasurer has asked me to share that, so far this year, we have spent more than £1,840 in preparedness for the Asian Hornet, and that, as always, early payment of membership fees is always appreciated. Please see Robert's article on how to use the online membership renewals system on page 3.

We hope that you enjoy this, our fourth newsletter in this new format; there will be one further edition this year, shortly after the November AGM. Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue.

Mark Waddington

Chairman's Chat:

What a fantastic job we did at the Edenbridge & Oxted Show! Visiting delegations included the co-Chair and President of the Show plus the Sheriff for the City of London.

Most importantly, lots of enthused kids went home with an "I found the queen" sticker! Thank you to everyone who volunteered and well done to Susan Bradshaw-Smith (and hubby Andrew) for marshalling a wonderful team. Great fun and a club effort to be proud of. Please see the article later in the newsletter.

As well as an eclectic mix of members' talks arranged for this winter, we can also enjoy the National Honey Show at

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Sandown Park on Thursday to Saturday 24-26 October. There are many workshops (nb; these need booking), lectures and *loadsa* kit to ogle.

I have a couple of speaker slots, and it would be great to have your support at these lectures on Friday and Saturday.

https://honeyshow.co.uk/

Honey sales have been strong at various fetes and shows but do remember to keep some back for our own Honey Competition on 27 November. There are seriously good-looking silverware cups for Best Runny and Crystallised honeys, but also a beautiful WBC replica trophy for the Novice class, open to anyone who has not won a honey show prize before.

photo: Mark Waddington

This November's AGM will see out my fifth year as Chair of this wonderful beekeeping club. Five years is about the optimum time to learn the role, carry it out, then pass on to a new Chair to bring fresh ideas. If you fancy being a candidate – the Chairman is selected by vote from the members at the AGM - ask for the job spec (steveriley91@gmail.com). As we go to print, Mark Waddington has agreed to put his name forward.

Steve Riley

Things to do:

Winter preparation - Here are a few pointers for those of you with (hopefully) strong colonies to overwinter:

1. Inspections should no longer be required. The less often you open-up the colonies, the more chance they will have to get everything sealed up and draughtproof for the colder weather ahead.

2. If you have queen excluders in place between brood and super, these should be removed. The colony needs to be free to move about to where the stores are located and to bring the queen with them.

3. Where possible, reduce space. A full super on top is a good winter-feeding strategy, but any more will increase the space that the bees must heat to stay warm. Remember that they stay warm by "shivering".

4. Aim for around 20kg of winter stores for a full colony. You can test the weight by "hefting" or lifting at each side. If it feels practically "nailed down", then it's probably OK. If you aren't sure, you can weigh the hive by attaching a spring scale to one side and pulling it up until it lifts. Doubling the recorded result gives you the weight of the hive:

photo: Mark Waddington

When I'd fully lifted this scale, it was reading over 22 pounds. Double that is 44 pounds or 20kg – ready for winter!

5. If there aren't enough stores, top up with strong syrup (by the time you read this, it might be too cold for that – rule of thumb is not to feed syrup after the night-time temperature is below 10 degrees Celsius). "The best time to do spring feeding of colonies is in the autumn." (I can't remember where I read that).

Other things to put on your list:

a) Cleaning up the season's equipment

b) Get your yellow-legged (Asian) hornet queen traps set up

c) Update your diaries for the winter talks (see below)

What's On - Dates for the diary & future events:

Summer events recap:

We were treated to a wonderful afternoon on Saturday 27th July, courtesy of Carol Taylor and Johnny Pym. Despite an abundance of stores to guard, the bees were (mostly) very civilised and we were able to do an enjoyable joint inspection (thanks to Kim MacLeod), and help Carol and Johnny prepare their colonies for harvest. A feast of afternoon tea and cakes followed, with Peter Cobley's apple upside-down cake being the talk of the town. You can find Peter's recipe later in this newsletter.

Winter talks:

Please save the following dates in your diaries, for what will hopefully be an entertaining and informative series of winter talks. All are held at:

Westerham Hall
Quebec Avenue
Westerham
TN16 1BJ

Talks and the AGM start 8.00 pm with doors opening at around 7.30 pm.

Winter Talks:

Wednesday 25th September 2024 – Norman Carreck - The future of native bees in Britain and Ireland

Wednesday 30th October 2024 – Kevin Thorn - Queen rearing

Wednesday 27th November 2024 – AGM and honey show

Wednesday 29th January 2025 – Derek Mitchell - Thermoregulation in hives

Wednesday 26th February 2025 – Tom Bickerdike - Southeast bee inspector and Asian Hornet catcher

Wednesday 26th March 2025 – Sarah Wyndham Lewis - The work of a honey sommelier

Please note that to enter the Honey Show competition on 27th November you should bring two unlabelled matching jars of your honey to the hall by 7.45 pm.

Mark Waddington

Membership:

As is traditional at this point in the year, membership secretaries start asking for next year's subscriptions. Following a (more or less) successful introduction of the online system last year, we'll be continuing with it for next year.

The process is outlined in the steps below:

Online Membership Renewal 2024/25:

1. You will receive an email from Kent Beekeepers Association - Westerham Branch, with subject 'Membership Renewal Invitation'. (Please set your email system to accept such emails and not dump them in the Junk folder.)

2. The mail will contain a link to the online renewal system (called 'eR2') and your details within the system. The link is unique to you only and does not allow access to any other members' details in the system.

3. Click on the link in your Renewal Invitation to view your details. The left column shows your current details (i.e. for 2023/24 year) and the right column shows new details (for 2024/25 year). Check the details in the right column are correct and amend, if required. There are some explanatory notes in a box on the right side of the screen.

4. Below your personal details there is a box for Renewal Options. Select which options (membership type, insurance, gift aid, etc.) apply to you. The total cost of your selections is shown at the bottom in the Summary of Fees Due box. Note: there is a discount of £7.50 for only receiving the digital version of Beecraft.

5. Once happy with your selections, click the 'Submit Renewal Application' button.

6. You are now taken to the payment page. Complete your personal details and card details and click the payment button.

7. That's it - your membership is renewed!

8. Shortly after your payment, you will receive a receipt from Stripe. This is the payment system used by KBKA.

9. Once the payment has been confirmed by the Branch Treasurer, you will receive a Membership Certificate.

If you have any queries/concerns, please contact me:

Email:
members.westerhambeeks@gmail.com

Phone: 07403 538724

Note: Use of the online system is optional, if you wish to use the original paper-based system or use an alternative payment method (e.g. a cheque), please contact me, as above. Best wishes for a stress-free (and prompt please!) membership renewal.

Robert Ambroziak

Training Apiary:

As we pass the September equinox the days are now shorter than the nights and are getting cooler.

We are reaching the end of our fortnightly training sessions. However, the bees are on top of their winter preparations as are we at the Training Apiary. We have removed the queen excluders and checked on stores. Varroa treatments have been applied to the colonies that require it.

Our *end of term* session will be on Sunday 29th September and it is usually a jolly gathering with our members sampling mead to wash down any offerings of cake. All members are welcome so if you fancy coming along for a coffee and a chat, we start at 10am.

Jacky Delooze

Yellow Legged Hornet:
(formerly known as the Asian Hornet)

Latest Defra update at 20 September 2024.

Since the last update no further YLH nests have been found so, to date, a total of 17 nests have been found in 2024.

East Sussex, West Sussex & Kent - Post nest destruction monitoring has been completed at 16 of the 17 nest sites. All nests have been destroyed and removed and are with the lab for analysis.

Hampshire - The NBU responded to a credible YLH sighting on 15th September in Southampton. The NBU are continuing to monitor at this site.

Topsy Rudd

Bees in the Media:

Game of Drones:

image: BBC

Researchers on the Isles of Scilly have been colouring drone bees on the various isles and tracking their movements. The research, nicknamed *Game of Drones*, has been ongoing for over 3 years.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0021xdc - starts at about 25 minutes in.

The Killer Hornets:

image: BBC

And, a very watchable 16-minute programme on BBC iPlayer about Asian Hornets.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m002377x/the-killer-hornets

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Lessons from the south of France:

This summer our family took a holiday in the South of France, north-west of Nimes towards the beautiful Cevennes mountain range and national park. Driving along a country road one day, I saw signs for a *Miellerie* down a side track and hastily took a detour with my family groaning and shaking their heads.

If you're ever in that region, a trip to Gaec Miellerie de Clairan is well worth the visit. A shop filled with lots of single-source and multifloral honeys (I learned I do like the very dark and rich sweet chestnut honey) as well as hive products and other local produce, an opportunity to look enviously round their extraction room with its automated line, and most importantly an opportunity to talk with the beekeepers.

The Miellerie is run by five semi-commercial beekeepers and their families. Between them they have about 800 hives over a wide area. When i arrived, I expected to speak at length with them about their experiences dealing with the Asian Hornet, or *Frelon Asiatique*. But the beekeeper I met gave one of those endearing gallic shrugs and told me that was "yesterday's problem". He told me that they aren't having any significant problems with hornets in all but one of the locations in which they keep bees. That was down to: a combination of spring hornet queen trapping; ensuring they have only strong colonies; and keeping entrances tight all year round. The location where they were having a few problems had a less successful spring queen trapping program, he said. This only confirms what we have heard elsewhere - spring queen trapping is key to keeping Asian hornet nest levels down to a level where they aren't over-running apiaries and hives.

I also learned when I popped into a pest control equipment shop in Nimes, drawn by the empty nests hanging in the display windows, that anyone can try and take care of an Asian Hornet nest if they find one in France! The sales assistant even tried to sell the me the chemicals needed to kill off an Asian Hornet nest while I was in there.

Asian hornet nests on display in a pest control shop, Nimes – photo Steve McGrath

photo Steve McGrath

Meanwhile, our French peer back at the Miellerie then told me that their big problem now is the African bee-eater, or *Guepier d'Afrique*.

Guepier d'Afrique – photo: Adam Riley

These much more audacious and voracious versions of the native European bee-eater arrived about five years ago and nest in the ground near, or even in apiaries picking off bees continuously. He told me they even swoop in when the beekeepers lift frames during an inspection and grab bees from the frames! Our European bees are easy pickings compared to the African bees these bee-eaters would normally go after.

The big problem has been queen mating because the birds particularly like the larger queens and the drones as they fly from the hive. They are having terrible problems re-queening hives and have had colony after colony fail because they just don't re-queen, the virgin queens are either eaten when they leave the hive or because all the drones have been eaten.

A drone congregation area is a bountiful feast for these birds. It's currently illegal to control the birds and so there isn't a lot they can do at this time.

Once again, it's a sign of how non-native species arriving in an area can have horrendous consequences for native populations. So, while we're rightly doing all we can to keep on top of the Asian Hornet threat, there will be new threats we have to deal with in years to come, for sure. In the meantime, let's deal with today's problem in the UK and all get our Asian Hornet bait stations topped up right now and our spring queen traps in place next spring so we can heed the advice of our French peers!

Steve McGrath

Longest swarming season ever?

It all started quite normally……

There was the usual strong build-up of worker brood in March, perhaps missed by beekeepers as cold weather restricted opportunities to inspect, followed by the new season drones being laid in April.

Increasingly congested brood-boxes, combined with warm spring weather and

strong nectar & pollen flows, led to the first swarms of the year issuing in April and continuing through May and early June.

Then the weather in our area turned cold and damp through to mid-June, which stopped the nectar flows. This put a dampener on swarming activity, continuing into the "June gap", when the spring flows subside, before the summer flowers blossom. And then, wallop! It all kicks off again.

The unsatisfied reproductive swarming was triggered by some beautiful warm weather and the start of the summer flow in the third week of June, particularly as the blackberry came into flower. Swarming continued as nectar flooded into brood areas through the summer but, thankfully, tailed off later in July, as the nectar flow subsided.

We all learn something new each bee season. As beekeepers, it's easy to blame the vicissitudes of the weather, but the key take-aways are:

- Locally adapted bees significantly change their behaviours according to the availability of nectar and pollen. Bees won't feed the queen when there is no food coming through the *front door* and she'll quickly go off-lay.

- Reproductive swarming is hard-wired into bees' DNA, and they'll take the opportunity to satisfy the urge whenever conditions are ripe. In an ideal world this would be in the spring, allowing the colonies time to rebuild for winter.

Perhaps we are also hearing about and communicating the whereabouts of swarms through our own WhatsApp group and Facebook more effectively (top work from Alban).

Of my colonies, 40% swarmed in the spring, 40% in the summer and 20% haven't swarmed and won't, now that the colonies are preparing for winter.

It's been tricky, but another good learning season.

Steve Riley

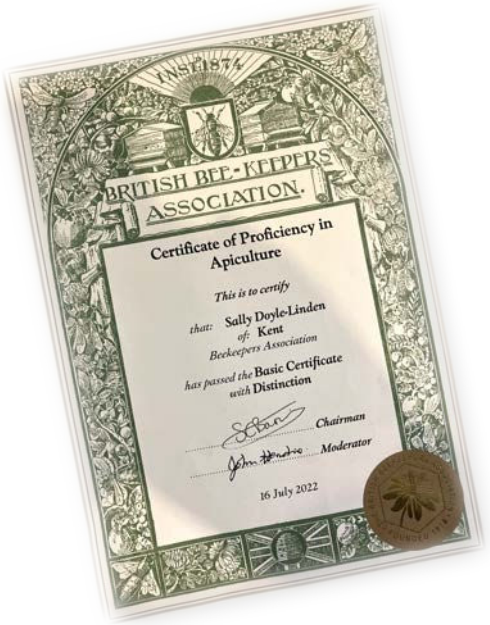
Beekeeping Education - Winter Study:

Once the bees are ready for winter, it may be time to consider building on your beekeeping skills. There are several options available.

BBKA Basic Assessment:

To take this you should have managed a colony of bees for a minimum of one year by the time the assessment takes place. The assessment takes place each summer in a local apiary.

This is a fantastic opportunity to show the things you already know, and the course covers foundation skills and knowledge of beekeeping. The preparation sessions will allow you to get to know other members of our Association and to share your experiences.



Details can be found on the BBKA website

From January to April, Steve Riley will be running a fortnightly study session on zoom for members, followed by some practical sessions at the training apiary hives in spring. Many of our members have passed. It really is an excellent foundation course covering all the key aspects of beekeeping. The syllabus can be found here.

Currently we have Linda, Fiona and Paul lined up for the course, but Steve can accommodate a few more. It is free to members, so please let Steve know if you are interested, or have any questions:

steveriley91@gmail.com

BBKA Written Examination Modules:

For those with two or more years' experience, and who wish to expand their beekeeping knowledge and skills, the next step may be to take one or two of the seven written examination BBKA Modules. The topics are:

Module 1 - Honey Bee Management

Module 2 - Honey Bee Products and Forage

Module 3 - Honey Bee Pests, Diseases and Poisoning

Module 5 - Honey Bee Biology

Module 6 - Honey Bee Behaviour

Module 7 - Selection & Breeding of Honey Bees

Module 8 - Beekeeping and Honey Bee Management

The syllabus for each Module can be accessed via the BBKA web site:

https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/category/written-exams

and the online exams are held twice a year in March and November. Correspondence tutors are available via the BBKA, and this is great way to test and expand your knowledge of the topic with a very experienced beekeeper from another branch.

Now would be a good time to sign up for a module with a view to taking the exam in March 2025. Please let Steve know if you are thinking about taking a module so he can put you in touch with others who are also considering sitting the exams.

Steve Riley & Sally Doyle-Linden

Apple Cobley:

As mentioned by Mark in his introduction to this newsletter, Peter Cobley made an excellent apple upside down cake for the visit to Carol Taylor & Johnny Pym's apiary. We have re-named Peter's cake Apple Cobley with a nod to the better-known popular pudding. Here is Peter's recipe which does not appear to use any honey! Despite that, it was rather good.

photo: Mark Waddington

Ingredients:

285 gm	Self Raising Flour
255 gm	Butter
255 gm	Caster Sugar
3	Medium Eggs
½ tsp	Ground Cinnamon
½ tsp	Baking powder

2	Apples
To taste	Vanilla Extract
To taste	Almond Essence
To soften	Milk
To spread	Apricot Jam

Method:

Cream the butter and sugar together in a large mixing bowl.

Separate the egg yolks & whites then whisk the whites with a little sugar, until light and fluffy.

Add the baking powder and cinnamon to the flour

Sieve about half of the flour into the butter/sugar with the egg yokes

Add half the whisked whites and sieve in the remaining flour

Adding at the end some vanilla extract and almond essence to taste

If the mix is to stiff add a little milk to smooth

Fold in the remaining egg whites but try to keep in as much air to lighten the mix.

Core the apples and slice to about 10mm (should give about 5 slices per apple not including ends)

Butter and flour two sandwich tins then add 5 slices of apple per tin

Cover the apple with half of the batter in each tin, finishing each with a sprinkle of sugar (optional)

Cook for 25 minutes at 180C (fan assisted), or 200C

Open the oven quickly and tap the top to check if cooked. If not, cook for another 5 minutes

Put first cake apple face down and spread thickly with apricot jam

Place the second cake down to show the apples, adding a sprinkle of caster sugar to finish.

Peter Cobley

Plum & Blackberry Compote:

(We are saving Mark Edwards' wonderful sounding Greek Honey Cake recipe until the next newsletter, but until then here is his compote recipe using plums, blackberries, and honey of course)

I have a plum tree, and we picked some blackberries with the grandchildren.

We then made this compote which can be used with yoghurt, served with light cakes or, with more fruit added, to make a crumble.

Ingredients & Method:

photo: Mark Edwards

Take 10 **plums**, wash and cut into 1/4s and set aside

Place **blackberries** in a little salted water, soak for a 1/2 hour, then drain and allow to dry

Place 3 x **cardamom pods**, 1 x **star anise**, and 6 x **cloves** in a spice cloth together with 1 teaspoon of ground cinnamon and tie up

In a pan, add 100 gm **hone**y and the juice of half an **orange.** Add the spices, cover and gently cook - allow the spices to infuse.

Add the plums, cover and continue to cook - after a few minutes the plums will soften

Add the blackberries and stir gently - avoid breaking fruit up

Within a few minutes the compote is ready

Taste and adjust the sweetness to suit - plums can vary in sweetness

Allow to cool & remove the spices

Store in the fridge and if not used, after a three to four days, add some more fruit and bake as a crumble

photo: Mark Edwards

Simple crumble mix:

100gm butter
200gm flour
75gm sugar

You can add 50 gm ground almonds or oats to partially replace the flour – enjoy!

Mark Edwards

Summer Apiary Visit:

Steve Riley's Apiary - 22nd June 2024

Weather check: 0900 hours 22nd June - Raining and 14 C just like the beginning of

the month. Not the perfect day for disturbing the bee world. But by 1400 hours, all had changed, it was sunny and warm at 23 C bringing a good turnout of beekeepers.

Steve kicked off the proceedings with a quick talk about Varroa management. The traits that we should be looking for in the hive, and on the varroa boards which give you a good insight into how the bee colony is managing to control and suppress the breeding cycle of the Varroa mite. He referred to "a book" several times, and after some of us kept on winding him up, questioning him "which book?", he finally succumbed and referred to "His Book"!

So, if you are a serious Beekeeper and don't already have a copy, now is the time to buy one; it has a wealth of knowledge, and the proceeds are for a good cause.

photo: Mark Waddington

We then ventured down to Steve's Apiary tucked away at the bottom of his garden next to a small brook and with plenty of dappled light.

We selected hive 2 but before opening it up we looked at the Varroa board which gave us an indication into what was going on in the hive. Six varroa were counted, three of them adult mites and three smaller juvenile mites.

This drop was over the previous 3 days which averages two per day, which is low and a good sign.

We also saw various forms of exoskeleton which reflected the uncapping and chewing out of mite infested pupae.

Differing colours of pollen, including grey pollen, showed that the bees are foraging on the early blackberry. A quantity of water showed that the bees are reducing the water content of the nectar stores enabling them to finally cap the honey stores. A row of wax droppings showed the bees were drawing out and preparing the comb frame.

We opened the hive placing the two supers to one side, proceeded to the brood box and selected the fourth frame, being the start of the brood nest. We saw plenty of evidence of uncapping and recapping – the slightly dished top of the cells and, sometimes, cells showing the pink to purple eyed pupae in a recently opened cell; a good trait of bees managing and interrupting the Varroa breeding cycle.

We continued through the other brood frames - all showed similar traits.

Steve then suggested that we have "a quick look" at the larger hive to the left containing the daughter of the Queen in hive 2 just inspected. "There shouldn't be much to do, other than looking for signs of uncapping and recapping" he said.

photo: Mark Waddington

The queen excluder was removed and immediately the beginning of a queen cell, but vacant, could be seen on the

underside. Further investigation showed one charged queen cell and several vacant. Swarm control kicked in there and then and the call went out for a spare Nuc. The queen was found, and her brood frame was scanned for any further queen cells that need to be taken down. The brood frame with the queen and her nurse bees were placed into the Nuc together with a second frame of brood and a third frame of stored nectar all with nurse bees placed either side of the queen brood frame. With the Nuc placed further away in the Apiary we continued through the main hive checking for eggs and queen cells, one of which in turn will produce the new queen. The hive was closed and the supers, now feeling much heavier, returned.

So, when someone says "we'll take a quick look" always be prepared for the unexpected. Thankfully, refreshing tea and cakes beckoned.

John Metcalfe

Edenbridge & Oxted Show:

Westerham Beekeepers featured as one of the "New for 2024" attractions at the Edenbridge & Oxted Show, over the August bank holiday weekend.

The education stand, organised and run by Sue and Andrew Bradshaw-Smith, featured Treatment Free Beekeeping, Honey Adulteration and the threat from Asian Hornets.

A big thank you to those who volunteered to help at the show, including Mark Edwards, Paul Haxell, Anne Robinson, Vicky Tonks, Jo Sinclair, Chris Cornthwaite, Steve Riley, Ross Stark, Topsy Rudd and Tom Sterritt.
Thanks also to Peter Cobley for volunteering to be on call as part of the stand backup team.

Steve Riley filled the observation hive with some of his treatment-free bees and these were a popular draw for visitors to the stand, captivating many children and adults.

photo: Tom Sterritt

The new Westerham Beekeepers "I found the Queen Bee!" stickers proved popular with both children and adults alike. Capped "baby bees", some waggle dances and nectar glinting in uncapped cells were also spotted by keen eyes. The take-home children's activities included colouring in bees and Asian hornets and Bee Word-searches, which also gave the adults time to ask some more in-depth beekeeping questions. Lots of interested people took the new WBK business cards in order to get in touch later via our website for further information as to what our club can offer new and old beekeepers alike.

Photo: Andrew Smith

Thanks to our beekeepers (Anne Robinson, Ross Stark, Steve McGrath, Steve Riley, Mark Edwards and Topsy Rudd) for providing jars of their honey to sell. Our visitors could taste a range of different honeys on both days, helping us to reinforce the message about honey adulteration. Tasting clearly showed the public the diversity of local honey which proved a real eyeopener with some visitors and made our honey very popular. We sold out!

Kent BKA and Asian Hornet Alert were on hand to educate our visitors about the risk to all pollinators from the invasive Asian Hornet (or Yellow Legged Asian Hornet). Over 50 bait trap kits were distributed on the first day for people to put in their gardens, one as far away as Cambridgeshire.

It was fascinating to catch up with the latest information on reported sightings and also to see how we can engage positively with the public to help raise awareness nationally. It became obvious that people are making the assumption that Asian Hornets are just a beekeeping problem. Public safety being a high priority was a surprise to some visitors, as well as the fact that European Hornets are not a threat to our biodiversity because they are a natural part of it.

photo: Tom Sterritt

We were honoured that our stand was visited by Westerham Beekeepers member Bronek Masojada in his role as Sheriff of the City of London, accompanied by the Show President Jan Boomaars and Joint Chairman Holly Taylor. We would like to thank them for inviting us to put together an education stand for the E&O Agricultural Show 2024, and with providing all our wonderful volunteers with free entry passes. We were also provided with a fabulous marquee directly opposite the horticultural tent displays. It was the perfect location for drawing in the crowds and keeping the observation hive bees nice and cool.

Sue Bradshaw

In My Apiary:

Staying Warm & Dry this Winter

As I sit here writing this, we are having a glorious spell of late September warmth and sunshine which the bees are enjoying immensely. Out every day, filling up on ivy nectar (don't be frightened of it - a strong, healthy colony with access to water will use it!) and bringing in pollen to feed the winter bees still being produced by the colony.

However, a key lesson I learnt early on as a beekeeper is to always think ahead and at some point, in coming days, the temperatures are set to start falling and we'll head into autumn and then winter. And so, it's time for me to insulate my wooden hives.

I remember reading somewhere that the National hive that many of us now use came about when beekeepers started converting old Kentish apple boxes into hives able to accommodate the then novel removable frames. Handy for the beekeeper, and the design hasn't much changed for over 100 years! But if you look at bees in nature, they're in hollowed trees or other cavities with much thicker walls that give them better protection in winter.

Last winter, I insulated my wooden hives for the first time, supported by some articles that appeared in BeeCraft and BBKA news with new research and thinking on insulation. I did a bit of an experiment, insulating one with 2mm thick Correx sheets, another with the cork inserts you can buy from Thornes (those that fit the outside the hive only), and one with thick cork boards that I'd managed to find.

The colony that seemed to do best was the one insulated with the Correx sheets - the bees came through winter well and built steadily into a nice strong colony in spring. The beauty of Correx is that it's also waterproof, meaning the hives aren't wet, which exacerbates the cold. It's relatively cheap online, comes in different thicknesses, and you can even get hold of it for free (ask your local estate agent for old 'for sale' boards). You can paint it if you don't like the original colour. I just cut it so that it covers the four sides while also fitting up under the roof and then pin it in place with drawing pins. Don't forget to cut a piece out around the entrance!

I can't recommend this insulation
Photo: Steve McGrath

I know another Westerham beekeeper who builds boxes that slide over the whole hive or nuc (out of the thicker insulation sheets that builders use, taped together - you can often find that for free too). It's the same principle - keeping the hive dry and warmer.

This year, I'll be insulating all my wooden hives in my home apiary and the queen rearing apiary with Correx sheet, again to keep the bees warmer and dryer, more akin to the experience that wild colonies enjoy.

Steve McGrath

About Westerham Beekeepers:

Westerham Beekeepers is a branch of the Kent Beekeepers Association. Our aim is to promote the craft of beekeeping by helping to educate both beekeepers and the public. While we are mostly practising amateur beekeepers, membership is open to interested members of the public. We meet during the winter months in Westerham, usually for lectures by visiting specialists and our own members. During the active beekeeping season, we meet for demonstrations by experienced beekeepers in our members' apiaries.

Website: https://westerham.kbka.org.uk

Contact Information:

Steve Riley – Chairman & Education
steveriley91@gmail.com

Robert Ambroziak – Membership
members.westerhambeeks@gmail.com

Jacky Delooze – Training Apiary
wbkatrainingapiary@gmail.com

Topsy Rudd - Branch Secretary
westerhambeekeepers@gmail.com

Andrew Smith & Sue Bradshaw-Smith – Librarians & Fete Team Organisers
wbkalibrarian@gmail.com

Keith Masters – Treasurer
masterskeithmasters@hotmail.com

Peter Cobley – Asian Hornet Co-ordinator – p-cobley@tiscali.co.uk

Mark Waddington – Events Programme - contributions for newsletters and ideas for winter talks & summer visits
wbka.events@gmail.com

To join the Westerham Beekeepers' WhatsApp group, please contact Mark Waddington

To join the Training Apiary's Facebook group, please contact Jacky Delooze

Committee Members:

Steve Riley - Chairman & Education Officer

Topsy Rudd – Branch Secretary

Keith Masters - Treasurer

Jacky Delooze - Training Apiary Manager

Mark Waddington - Events Programme

Robert Ambroziak - Membership Secretary

Alban Smith Brindle - Swarm Co-ordinator

Peter Cobley – Asian Hornet Co-ordinator & Branch representative on KBKA Council

James Cash - Branch representative on KBKA Council

Advice for Beginners & FAQs: on our website

Swarm Reporting: Please contact our swarm co-ordinator, Alban Smith Brindle on 07919 843 546, or the nearest contact from the BBKA website if Alban is not available.

Last Word: ***Melissa*** – a female given name from the Greek μέλισσα (mélissa), "bee", which in turn comes from μέλι (meli), "honey". Melissa is also a genus of perennial herb in the family Lamiaceae. Its species are native to Europe and Asia but cultivated and naturalized in many other places. The name is also derived from the Greek word meaning honeybee, owing to the abundance of nectar in the flowers. The stems are square, like most other plants in the mint family. The leaves are borne in opposite pairs on the stems and are usually ovate or heart-shaped and emit a lemony scent when bruised. Axillary spikes of white or yellowish flowers appear in the summer. The most commonly grown species of this genus is Melissa officinalis, commonly known as *Balm* or *Lemon Balm*.