THE BUZZ

Westerham Beekeepers'
newsletter

June 2024	published every other month	Issue Three

Welcome:

It is with great sadness that we record the passing of Robert Dudgeon, who was a long-standing member of the Westerham Branch of Kent Beekeepers. For many years he was both the branch's swarm co-ordinator and representative on the Kent County committee. He will be sadly missed. The legacy of his beekeeping now lives on at the training apiary as you will read below.

It has been a spring of ups and downs. The bees were building strongly with early nectar flows, but the weather was not kind to beekeepers for inspections. So, swarming kicked off with a vengeance and we now in a very wide June gap.

Read below for news of past and forthcoming events, as well as excellent updates from Ross Stark on New Zealand beekeeping challenges and from Steve McGrath on progress towards a Westerham queen breeding programme.

We hope that you enjoy this, our third newsletter in this new format; thank you to all who have contributed.

Mark Waddington

Chairman's Chat:

The summer flow is trickling in with the unfurling of blackberry buds; this will grow as Lime trees, then Sweet Chestnut come into flower. Supers at the ready!

After an initial surge in swarming in April, wetter and cooler weather held colonies back, but no doubt there will be another surge as the summer flow kicks in.

Contd: ➡

In this issue:

Chairman's Chat:	page 1
Things to do next month:	page 2
What's On:	page 2
Membership Note:	page 3
Edenbridge & Oxted Show	page 3
Training Apiary:	page 4
Asian Hornet Update:	page 4
Bee Podcasts:	page 6
Beekeeping tour of NZ:	page 7
Spicy Honey Nuts:	page 8
In My Apiary:	page 9
About Us & Contacts:	page 10
Advice & FAQs:	page 10
Swarm Reporting:	page 10
Last Word:	page 10

Our new Swarm Coordinator, Alban, has been kept busy by a feral colony in a South Godstone church, which has been issuing primary and secondary swarms, both inside and out of the church! A blessed source of varroa resistant traits.

Members of the club attended Robert Dudgeon's "send-off". We know how much Robert contributed to beekeeping over many years, and it was enlightening to hear about and celebrate the other aspects of Robert's life.

It's now clear that Asian hornet queens have over-wintered in parts of the South-East. There were no queens recorded in our area, but any local presence will be more evident when the workers appear during the summer months.

As always then, it's a case of "eyes peeled".

With varroa now established in parts of Australia, we were pleased to host Jackie Morrison and husband Luke from New South Wales. They run Honeyvale Farm and received a scholarship grant to research varroa resistance in different parts of the world. So far, they have been to Hawaii, different parts of the USA and Canada, Scotland, Wales, Germany and Sweden. They will set out a "chemical free" strategy for their part of New South Wales, which is likely to include the queen frame trapping and brood removal techniques used by Westerham beekeepers.

Photos: Steve Riley

We were interested to see the light-weight bee suit used in their sub-tropical environment – apparently, fewer bees land on this blue colour than any other. We studied mite boards for varroa and chewed out pupal exoskeleton, then looked for uncapping in the brood. This was the first time they'd seen this; something we'll do at the club apiary visit from 2.00pm on Saturday, 22 June (see below).

Photo: Steve Riley

And finally, a photo from my hives, showing newly laid eggs standing vertically – they will gently tip over in the following twenty-four hours. HRH was just out of the picture.

Steve Riley

Things to do next month:

Time for the summer flow? It's been a long wait, but if you have kept your colonies in place through good swarm control and diligent feeding through the dearth, it's now time to collect a crop of honey. Make sure you have your supers ready. Don't forget to think about leaving them part of the crop for the winter. A wise beekeeper once told me that there are two things that bees do through the year – prepare for swarming and prepare for winter. Building their stores of honey is part of the latter – leave them some!

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

We held our first summer event on 18th May, a talk on Asian Hornet Track & Trace given by Peter Cobley which was well attended by members and several guests from other beekeeping associations.

Please note the following dates in your diaries for the remaining summer apiary visits:

Saturday 22nd June at 2.00pm – Varroa Resistant Workshop at Steve Riley's apiary.

Saturday 27th July at 2.30pm - Apiary Demonstration at Johnny Pym and Carol Taylor's apiary.

Summer activities comprise something educational, usually in a bee suit and when it's an apiary demonstration, it normally involves an experienced beekeeper opening and inspecting the

host's bee colonies. We then retire to the host's garden or house (weather dependent) for afternoon tea and cakes.

Please save the following dates in your diaries, for what will hopefully be an entertaining and informative series of 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

Mark Waddington

Membership:

Welcome to all our new members including those who have joined recently as Friends - hopefully you've been able to join one of the training apiary sessions, but if not, they happen every other Sunday. See below for more detail.

There's a small change coming to the eR2 membership system. This is something being introduced by the Kent Beekeeping Association, who administer the system. When a member renews their existing membership, or a new member joins, there will be a new tick box, to enable data-sharing with the National Bee Unit. This is entirely voluntary, and while I would encourage you all to participate, you can choose not to. The default setting is OFF (i.e., no data sharing). *Contd: page 4*

Edenbridge & Oxted Agricultural Show - 25th & 26th August 2024

The WBKA will be at the Edenbridge & Oxted Agricultural Show in August 2024. We are looking for **volunteers** to be on our stand to distribute information to the public. There will be handouts and information posters plus the popular observation hive. All we need you to do is be on hand to talk about bees and beekeeping.

To keep your time on the stand to a minimum, we will need at least 10 people on each day. Time not on the stand is your own, to visit events at the show, for the rest of your day. As a stand volunteer you will get **free entry** to the show. Car Parking is free too. Normal ticket prices: Adults [Age 16-64]- £24.00; Concessions [65+/students]- £22.00

Show gates are open from 8am – 6pm.

If you haven't been to the Edenbridge & Oxted Agricultural Show before, this is your opportunity to enjoy the experience free.

Check out the show events this year at:

www.edenbridge-show.co.uk

If you would like to volunteer to help on the stand, please contact me, Sue Bradshaw:

susan.bradshaw.smith@gmail.com.

Or message me, Sue Bradshaw-Smith, on the Westerham Beekeepers WhatsApp group.

If you have a preference of time/day, please let us know and we will endeavour to accommodate this on the rota. You are more than welcome to volunteer to be on the stand on both days.

Sue Bradshaw-Smith

Also, as a reminder, there is already a tick box on your eR2 record for "BeeBase data sharing agreed to". This allows sharing of hive numbers and locations with BeeBase and is something you can tick (or not) during the online renewal process. If you want to change this one way or another, before renewal time, please let me know.

If you have any membership queries please email me:

members.westerhambeeks@gmail.com

or call me on 07403 538 724

Robert Ambroziak

Training Apiary:

I am delighted to say that the late Robert Dudgeon's bees have settled in well at the Training Apiary. Thank you to all involved in moving them.

We have welcomed lots of new beekeepers in the last couple of months: Jenny, Ryan, Doug, Ged, David, and Ann & Bill.
It's great to see their confidence in carrying out their first solo inspections.

We have noticed that our hives are short on a strong nectar flow, do keep an eye out for starvation in your hives as the weather is not very bee friendly for the next week or so.

Photo: Steve Riley

Our next training apiary meeting is at 10.00 am on 23rd June.

Don't forget that your membership covers you for as many sessions as you wish. And there always optional cake - with great thanks to Karinne Marshall for all her baking prowess.

Jacky Delooze

Asian Hornet Update:

The National Bee Unit's Beebase has a 2024 rolling update on Asian Hornet reports in the U.K. At the end of May twenty-one Asian hornets had been reported and one nest had been killed. Most of these reports were in Kent.

Key:
Grey - resolved, i.e. dead/captured
Orange – Unconfirmed
Red - confirmed at large/not captured

So, none near us yet, but we should keep trapping.

To everyone who put up traps for Asian Hornet queens earlier in the year, thank you. We've not had reports of any being caught in our area, which is hopefully good news. However, it is a good idea to replenish the Trappit every now and then as it tends to lose its scent after a while. Please also make sure that you regularly check your traps and release any by-catch, such as wasps or European hornets, so that they do not die in the traps.

From early June we may start seeing

Asian Hornet workers, and so we need to add monitoring stations as well as keeping our traps going (if you have a Gard Apis trap, you should change the red end pieces to the orange pieces).

Photo: Beebase

Monitoring stations can be made simply from a jam jar or plastic takeaway container with a hole made in the lid and a piece of material like a j-cloth pulled through. The cloth then hangs in the Trappit acting as a wick and the top protrudes through the hole attracting the hornets to feed. You can also use an open bait station.

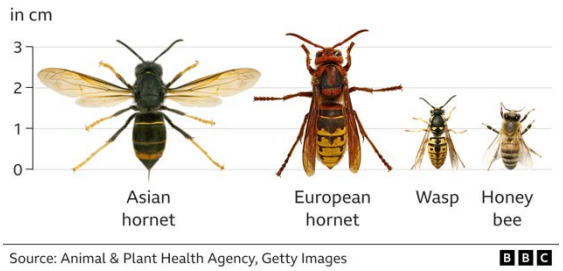
Photo: BBC

If you see an Asian Hornet on your monitoring station you should photograph it, then try to see in which direction it flies off. If the hornets keep flying off in the same direction, this information can be provided to the National Bee Unit who can then come to investigate the possibility of a nest nearby.

Primary nests are often in sheds or under cover, please keep your eyes open and photograph any insects returning to the nest.

Source: BBKA

It is often easier to differentiate between wasps, European hornets, and something else using a comparative photograph.



If you think it is an AsianHornet, report it immediately on the Asian Hornet Watch app.

Once the workers hatch, they will begin collecting food for the brood and will be searching for protein sources. That is when they start catching insects. July is when they tend to be hawking around bee hives. We should add protein to our monitoring stations, in the form of cat food and squashed prawns in an open container. This will need replacing every few days as it will obviously go off.

Before July, we should think about hive protection. Keeping your varroa board in all summer or replacing your mesh floors with solid floors, as well as draping small size garden mesh around the hive base to the ground, like a skirt, will help. This stops the hornets sitting on the open mesh floor emitting pheromones and stressing the bees, which causes the queen to go off lay and diminishes the colony to the point of collapse.

Preventing hawking is more difficult but mesh guards to go over the entrance are available from beekeeping suppliers or use a large trap such as Jadeprobe which catches the hornets.

In summary - keep traps going and change Trappit; add monitoring stations from early June; provide protein from mid-June; keep an eye open for nests; and consider adding hive protection.

As always, sensible safety precautions should be taken when carrying out any of these activities. The BBKA has provided important safety guidelines when using traps and monitoring stations which can be found here. If anyone is helping members of the public to set up traps or monitoring stations, please make sure you give them a hard copy or provide the link to these safety guidelines, for everyone's protection

Please keep sharing information about Asian Hornets on your local village social media pages or magazines. Ask me for material if you need it, we have facebook/Instagram posts and press releases that you can use We can also provide posters if you want to put one up in your local garden centre, allotment, village shop etc. Here are a couple of useful links that you can pass on:

Warning over Asian hornets after record sightings

How to spot an Asian hornet and what to do if you find one

Topsy Rudd

Bee Podcasts:

Since beginning by beekeeping journey, I have consumed several books, watched many YouTube videos and talked bee with fellow beekeepers. My new passion for consuming Bee knowledge alongside the classics, is to listen to podcasts on the subject. There are many ways to listen to these from logging into their websites, smart phone apps such as BBC sounds, Spotify, Google Podcast app and the podcast app on Apple, plus smart devices such as Alexa. There are many podcasts available, and I wanted to share a few that I have listened to recently. Some are quite funny and informative, and some are more factual.

BBC Let it Grow - Bees in a pod with Rob Beckett

BBC Start the Week Bees- Culture and Survival

BBC The Infinite Monkey Cage – Bees V Wasps

BBC Sliced Bread – Manuka Honey

BBC Farming Today – Bees and oil seed rape.

Beekeeping Short and Sweet with Stuart Spinks

And, if you'd like something a little different to enjoy while listening to one of these podcasts, I can recommend:

Image: Beesou

made with Beesou, an all-natural bitter aperitif "kissed by honey".

Nicola Spreckley

A Beekeeping tour of New Zealand - a lesson in sustainability:

While the UK was enjoying its wettest winter for decades, I decided to head back to New Zealand to catch up with family and do some maintenance on my property. I visited an old friend who has been a beekeeper for over 50 years and at his peak of production managed over 2,000 hives. I went to John's apiary, which is out on the coast in a predator-free sanctuary for New Zealand native birds including the Kiwi and the Tui.

Most beekeepers in NZ use Langstroth hives for brood and supers. The supers when filled are taken to the local honey packing factory for extraction at a cost of $25 (£12) a brood box - not many bother to extract themselves. Most also seem to use plastic frames, but John believes that after years of trying plastic, wooden frames are still the best.

Several beekeepers invited me to give a talk, on treatment-free beekeeping in the UK, to the Hawkes Bay Beekeepers Association. I showed a video featuring Prof Stephen Martin and talked about what we are doing in the Westerham club. It was very well received, and some were amazed that treatment-free beekeeping was working. Most beekeepers (99%) in New Zealand are still treating for varroa in one form or another and are finding that varroa there are resistant to most miticides. A large number of beekeepers, mainly in the large and dominant commercial sector, are losing hives to colony collapse as a result of varroa resistance to miticides.

Before worldwide demand for Manuka honey from New Zealand soared in the 1980s, the country had approximately 350,000 hives. By 2000, there were nearly a million hives which were officially registered. The price of Manuka dropped, and a lot of companies have stopped production or gone into receivership. The bees can only harvest the Manuka for a 2 to 3 week period in the mountains or 5 to 6 weeks down in the plains. The problem then has always been what to do with the hives for the rest of the year; that's why many beekeepers gave up.

In the UK, we hobbyists are very fortunate to have organizations like the BBKA and BIBBA, as New Zealand beekeepers are very much at the behest of Apiculture New Zealand, which puts the interests of the commercial beekeepers first.

Ross Stark

Spicy Honey nuts:

This is a family favourite and great for entertaining. It's easy to make and if you have an air fryer you can speed the process up.

Ingredients:

The nuts:
50gm cashews
50 gm pecans
60gm whole almonds
50gm walnuts
60gm brasil nuts

The spice mix:
1 tsp cayenne pepper
1 tsp cumin
1 tsp dried oregano/or finely chopped fresh rosemary
1 tsp cracked pepper
1 tsp nigella seeds
1 tsp salt
Small quantity of chilli flakes if desired
1 tsp sesame seeds (not in photo) added at last stage

2 tbsp honey melted or runny
1 tbsp sesame oil
1 tbsp olive oil

Method:

In a normal oven, scatter nuts (only) on an oven tray and roast for 15 mins, stirring occasionally. Remove and while still hot stir in all other ingredients except

the sesame seeds. Return to the oven for couple of minutes for the honey to mix and caramelise the nuts and coat them in the spices. Add the sesame seeds.

If using an air fryer, roast the nuts (only) for 5 minutes and then continue the remaining steps in a normal oven.

Note: the honey will firm up as it cools.

Best prepared couple of hours before needed.

Mark Edwards

In My Apiary:

This is definitely a year of steep learning for me. Twelve months ago I'd taken a first honey crop and my bees were following the seasonal textbook. This year is completely different thanks mainly to the weather. In my home apiary, I am leaving the honey on the hive for now, and after an initial early swarm season, those I haven't split yet have slowed down. Split nucs are needing more feeding.

In my out apiaries, where I have some less good bees, I have had new queens fail to mate, bees eat out all their stores meaning I have had to feed at the end of May and beginning of June for the first time, and I have had queens just stop laying. Long may this recent sunnier weather last. Hopefully it will warm up too.

But this has only confirmed to me why it is so important to raise the right bees. Over in the new WBK breeding apiary, we have just hived our initial colony which built up well in the split nuc. That colony has the traits we want for our breeding stock:

First and foremost, they manage varroa by themselves - for example uncapping and re-capping cells after chewing out infected pupae. They have a consistently low mite count. Second, they are nice dark bees and we'll soon be testing them to see if they are mainly Apis melifera melifera, our native bee strain and not too hybridised. Third, they are locally-adapted, having been bred and raised in the WBK area, and they can handle this inclement weather: they will fly at lower temperatures, they are frugal with stores, and they build steadily rather than building so fast that they are always at risk of not being able to support the colony during a dearth.

I am now busy practising grafting and miller frame queen breeding methods so that I can re-queen the colonies in the out apiaries that either failed to re-queen or just aren't showing the right traits. Next year, I'll be ready to show any other members who want to learn how they can do this themselves and improve their own bees.

Queen cells raised on a Miller frame

Bees managing varroa by uncapping infected pupae at the pink eye stage
Photos: Steve McGrath

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:

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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: *Borage* a herb noted for its sky blue flowers and cucumber smell. The leaves and dainty flowers are edible. These flowers, attractive to all pollinating insects, begin replenishing their nectar within minutes and replace it fully in less than twenty minutes, compared with up to 24 hours for other some plants.

Photo: Birgit Steven-Lahno