THE BUZZ

Westerham Beekeepers'
newsletter

June 2025 | Issue Eight

Welcome:

Welcome to edition eight of The Buzz! You can read more below about the activities of the training apiary, the breeding apiary and the summer events programme, including a plea from the Smiths for as much help as we can offer for the summer fetes. These are a great opportunity to promote the club's activities and to raise awareness of the YLH issues. Please support the fetes if you can.

Congratulations go to Sally Doyle-Linden and Steve McGrath, both of whom took BBKA exams in the most recent round, and both passed with a credit: Steve on Module 1 (Honey Bee Management) and Sally on Module 2 (Honey Bee Products and Forage). Now you know who to ask if you have any questions! The BBKA modules are an excellent way of upgrading your beekeeping knowledge and are well worth a look if you can make time for a little studying.

We start a new feature in this edition of the newsletter: "Words from the Wise (beekeeper)", which is an interview with one of our distinguished senior club members, to hear their thoughts on the joys of beekeeping. This time we spoke to Becky Champion, who has shared with us some of her insights and experiences.

Thank you for your continued support to this newsletter and to the club.

Mark Waddington

Chairman's Chat:

I am sitting writing this on a muggy Friday evening, hoping (in vain?) for a thunderstorm to clear the air. Overall, we can be very grateful for a benign spring, and as has been widely discussed on the branch WhatsApp group, an early blossoming of the main spring flows. The swarming season was quickly active, and I hope that most of us were collecting other people's swarms rather than our own.

Talking to our highly experienced members, there may be a price to pay for this early gift – either an extended June gap or a short summer flow. We shall see – my recent memories of 2020 (that pandemic year) were of a flow that went on and on.

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The club's main activities of the season are in full swing, and if we manage to avoid a second swarming period, we may all be able to relax and pile on the supers.

Mark Waddington

Summer Events & Winter Talks:

It was with some regret that we cancelled the meeting scheduled for Saturday 7th June at Keith Masters' apiary on the Hendersons' property. We hope to reschedule with them for 2026. The demonstrator was intended to be regional NBU inspector Tom Bickerdike, who would have travelled from Northwest London at a risk of doing little more than eating cake with us. It is understandable. He hopes to be able to join as the demonstrator on Saturday 5th July (and I hope that he finds no disease!).

Forthcoming dates for summer meetings at members' apiaries:

Saturday 5th July at Mark Waddington's apiary.

Saturday 26th July at David Turner's apiary near Weald (David is a full member of STW, and a friend member of Westerham).

The dates have been "tuned" to meet apiary availability and to avoid clashes with summer fetes. Demonstrators to be confirmed – volunteers are welcome!

Next winter's meeting dates are as follows:

Wednesday 24th September 2025
Wednesday 29th October 2025
*Wednesday 26th November 2025**
Wednesday 28th January 2026
Wednesday 25th February 2026
Wednesday 25th March 2026

**AGM & Honey Competition*

All to be held in the evening in Westerham. Again, please save these dates for your diaries and let us know if you have any specific requests or ideas for meeting themes.

Mark Waddington

Things to do: Jobs for the months ahead:

Inspections: Weekly
Look for evidence the queen is laying well. Eggs, larvae and sealed worker brood in a ratio of 1:2:4 is reassuring. Check stores and feed through the Dearth (see below). Swarming is mainly over but watch out for an unexpected late swarm. Add Supers ready for the summer flow if you haven't already.

Robbing:
Watch out for robbing, the wasps seem to have started early this year. Narrow the hive entrance & put out wasp traps.

Feeding:
Have some sugar ready to make up syrup, should you need to help your colonies through the Dearth - 1:1 ratio sugar to water. Feed early or late in the day.

Harvesting:
July / August are generally good months to harvest honey. Super frames are ready when over 75% of the frame is capped. Remember, a colony needs about 20kg of stores to see them through the winter.

Disease:
This is a good month to carry out a full disease inspection. Shake off the bees from a frame that contains brood. Carefully check the sealed and unsealed brood. Hold the frame at 45-degree angle to the allow light into the cells. This will help you spot any signs of scales, common with American Foul Brood. Check for healthy larvae – Pearly white, c shaped and well segmented. Carry out a Varroa count and, if treating, start planning for this.

YLH traps:
Check and top up your bait regularly. See Topsy's piece below on the YLH for how to obtain more bait.

Nicola Spreckley

Sounds of Summer (Fetes):

Enjoying a summer full of buzzing bees? Then why not join us on the WBK Event Stand where we

- ☐ Talk bees & beekeeping
- ☐ Sell delicious local honey.
- ☐ Enjoy a local fete for free

If you can tick any of the boxes, come and join us on:

Sunday 22nd June LIMPSFIELD CHART FETE 12-4pm

Saturday 28th June LIMPSFIELD VILLAGE FETE 12-4pm

Saturday 12th July FOUR ELMS FETE 1-5pm

If you are interested in helping and\or selling your honey on the stand contact Sue Bradshaw-Smith. All honey is sold at Westerham Beekeepers Club prices 2025. All jars must be labelled correctly as per BBKA Guidelines.

Edenbridge & Oxted Show update: As mentioned in the last issue of The Buzz, the Westerham Beekeepers Event Stand has been invited back to the E&O Show on **24th & 25th August 2025**. We are extremely proud of this amazing achievement. The E&O organisers have again generously donated FREE ALL-DAY TICKETS for those Westerham Beekeepers members helping us on the stand. There will also be a free plus one option available to any helpers on request. This ticket will include allocated car parking on site (great for visiting and honey deliveries!). Gates open at 8am and close at 6pm. We recommend you arrive early to avoid the traffic queues and the crowds. Remember, you have the whole day to enjoy the event after helping on the stand. If you wish to take advantage of this amazing offer, please contact me, Sue Bradshaw-Smith, for further details (email address below).

If you would like to help at any of the above events, please contact me: susan.bradshaw.smith@gmail.com

You don't have to be a Whizz Beekeeper to join in the fun of the fair. Get in touch now!

Susan Bradshaw-Smith

Swarm Group:

So far, the 2025 swarm season has been pretty quiet, possibly due to the very dry spring weather. Nevertheless, I am asking everyone who is available to collect and/or anyone who is interested in receiving swarms, who has not done so already, to consider joining the swarm collection group. I have started a dedicated WhatsApp group for swarms, so that those that are not interested in swarms are not constantly messaged about them.

Please message me or email me with your name, email address, mobile contact number, your location, your postcode, and whether you are happy to collect swarms or are only willing to receive a swarm once available. My email is: agbrindle@hotmail.com

Also, when you collect a swarm, members of the public may ask whether you would like some money. This year, after discussion with the Westerham Beekeepers committee, it has been decided that swarm collectors can - if they wish - and only after being asked by the public, suggest that a non-mandatory donation to a bee related charity of their choice can be made, and if they wish they can also include Westerham Beekeepers in their suggestion. This is entirely up to the discretion of the swarm collector.

Alban Brindle

Training Apiary:

Since the last newsletter we've raised new Queens in mini mating nucs, built up small colonies and moved them into full size hives. We've marked new laying

Queens and practiced our artificial swarming techniques.

Opening small mini mating nuc - unmarked Queen in marked area. *Photo: Steve Riley*

Recent activities included disease awareness and inspection. Thankfully nothing to report

Photo: Steve Riley

Our biggest turn-out so far has been twenty-three. Thanks for all the bakers - we've all enjoyed your efforts

Jacky Delooze

Yellow Legged Hornet (YLH) Update:

As of 6th June, NBU had reported 29 credible sightings of YLH in 2025, and 3 nests have been found and destroyed. The sightings were in Kent (21); Hampshire (4); East Sussex (2); Shropshire (1) and County Durham (1).

The NBU are now terminating their spring trapping, but we will keep our traps out. If you have a Gard Apis trap, change the nozzles from red (queens) to orange (workers) as workers will be emerging from any nests to forage in the summer. Please check daily for insects in your trap and release any by catch. You may be seeing a lot of European hornets or bumble bees in your traps, which we obviously need to avoid killing.

Map: BBKA

A number of the traps registered on our monitoring app are currently showing red, indicating that monitoring has ceased. Unless this is actually the case, please update your app every week to keep showing that the trap is live and being checked. For those without traps, you can easily set up a wick pot, as long as it is somewhere that you pass regularly and can keep an eye on it. A jar containing Trappit and a bit of cloth that sticks out of a small hole in the jar lid, to act as a wick for the attractant, will mean you are likely to see the larger European hornets visiting it. If you see a slightly smaller hornet with yellow legs and a single yellow band round its abdomen, it will be an YLH worker. Try to photograph it and report it via the YLH Monitoring App and call one of the committee who can come and set up a trap as well.

Keith Masters, James Cash and I all have supplies of Trappit so please contact one of us if you need more. It is a good idea to refresh the bait on a regular basis.

Stop Press: Defra have just provided an update for the week ending 13th June.

Six further credible report of YLH's. This means that currently there has been a total of 35 sightings in 2025.

Five of these sightings were at different locations in Kent:

9th June a YLH nest was found within Ivy in Wye. The nest was damaged and YLH were seen. An inspector visited on 10th June, destroyed the nest and collected it.

8th June a YLH was seen in an apiary trap and a second YLH was seen at bee hives in Selsted. The 2 samples were collected by a bee inspector. The beekeeper and local YLH Team are monitoring in the area.

8th June a YLH nest was found in a bird nest box in Ashford. The nest was destroyed and removed on 10th June.

9th June a householder in Hythe reported multiple sightings of YLH seen from a window. An Inspector visited on 10th June and found a nest in the ground. Samples of adults were collected and the nest destroyed on 12th June.

12th June a nest on the underside of a shed in Kennington was reported. On the same day an inspector visited, destroyed and removed the nest.

In West Sussex:

6th June a report was made of a YLH seen on some wood in a shed in Shoreham. Inspectors visited the same day and found a nest. This was destroyed and removed on 10th June.

All samples were sent to Fera Science. No further YLH have been seen in County Durham.

Topsy Rudd

Words from the Wise (Beekeeper)

Becky Champion, in conversation with Mark Waddington, gives us the benefit of her years as a beekeeper and the wealth of knowledge she has accumulated.

How did you start beekeeping?

I am a third-generation beekeeper. Even when I was small, I was involved in beekeeping. My father was the secretary of the local beekeeping association. I learned from many experienced beekeepers. I used to go to Gormanstone on a regular basis. I went to Apimondia meetings in Canada, Switzerland and Belgium!

What/who inspired you?

My parents inspired me, but I have a natural interest in zoology and outdoor natural history. Then there is Margaret Thomas, John Hendrie, Ken Basterfield. I have been to as many lectures and beekeeping meetings as I could. I did several of the BBKA modules and have been on several courses for the others. I also did the practical course at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire. I have collected a huge amount of information from other beekeepers, for which I am very grateful. I am a member of CABK and BIBBA. I am a regional member of Westerham, and of an association in Devon.

What hives do you use?

At the moment, I use WBC hives, but I have previously used Langstroths, and BS Nationals. WBC hives are easier to lift as they are slightly smaller internally. I work on a brood and a half. I know of some people who use three supers instead of brood and a half because each box is easier to lift than a full brood box. Some people don't like brood and a half. At this time of year, I have a super of new foundation above the queen excluder, which the bees draw out and fill with stores. I don't harvest this super. In the spring, it goes on the floor with a deep box on top, then a queen excluder. Because

this box has no brood in it, I then only worry about the top box when looking for queen cells. This works well – but like most things in beekeeping, it works most of the time!

What is your most useful piece of kit?

My hive tool! I use the J tool, which allows you to lever up the frame with the little J hook. I bought a very nice slim stainless steel one many years ago in Leeds. Also, two cloths with wooden battens at either end, to keep the rest of the frames sheltered and dark while doing a manipulation or finding the queen.

What is the most useful piece of advice you've received?

Learn the colony cycle! I mean the full cycle, not only the cycle from eggs to larvae to capped to hatching, but also the life cycle of the living bees throughout the year, and how this affects the colony's life cycle overall.

Also, learn how it affects the colony and understand what you observe when you open the hive. This year is a good example – we have had a very kind spring, but this will affect the timing and length of the summer flow.

What piece of advice would you pass on?

Always think ahead and think like a bee! For example, from the midsummer day, the days start getting shorter and the bees will sense this and respond accordingly.

I'm also a great believer in the bonfire for cleaning up potential disease, for example with old brood frames.

What method of swarm control do you favour?

Generally, I do the Pagden method, which works well with WBCs. With Nationals, I have done Demarees, but Pagden is easier to manage with less lifting.

What is your favourite bee book?

Two, Clive de Bruyne, Practical Beekeeping, and Ted Hooper, Bees and Honey.

What is your biggest/funniest mistake?

I have managed to take out all queen cells and leave the bees with nothing!

Also, I fed some colonies in an orchard, but the car got stuck in the mud! It had to be left overnight and collected the next day.

I had a colony in an out apiary that went rogue. So, I left them on their own, collected the honey, and then administered the petrol treatment. Sometimes it must be done.

Becky Champion in conversation with Mark Waddington

Beekeeping Apps Review:

There's an App for everything these days, and beekeeping is no exception. We've reviewed two Apps below but, if you know of anymore, do let us know and we'll take a look at those too.

Bee.Watch Built by a beekeeper in the UK. https://www.bee.watch

Free or paid? - Annual subscription with tiered amounts depending on how many hives – free for the first three hives.

How does it work? - You buy plastic QR code cards which you keep in the hive lid and then scan using the app at the hive.

Can you record varroa resistant observations? - At the moment, you can only observe if mites are seen at an inspection or not, otherwise you have to record observations and counts in the generic notes section. But the developer is planning to add fields for mite count, uncapping and pupal exoskeletons.

Pros: - Very easy to input inspection data on one screen. A good To-Do list is created so you can stay ahead and on top of all the jobs that need doing at subsequent inspections. You can see detailed data by hive or by apiary and download it all into Excel to manipulate using the web version of the app which comes with additional features. The developer is very receptive to improvements and ideas.

Cons: - It's not free. It can occasionally be buggy meaning you're struggling to access it in the apiary when you need it. The interface isn't the most attractive or intuitive on the market.

Summary: Aimed at beekeepers with several hives but made by a beekeeper for beekeepers and receptive to ideas for updates and inclusions. No frills mean it's easy to record what you need to and it generates to-do lists based on this. Being able to download your data is very useful.

HiveTracks Built by a beekeeping team in the USA. https://www.hivetracks.com

Free or paid? - Free

How does it work? - You need to know which hive is which using your own naming convention.

Can you record varroa resistant observations? - Not in the detail we use at Westerham, but you can add them in notes or in a specific generic field for mite observations.

Pros: - It's free. Nice modern interface with variety of menus and toggles making it easy to dive into your data. Very good To Do lists created which you can pull up by job required as well as date. Comes with nice to have features like weather forecasts. You can easily setup useful notifications to your phone to remind you of jobs you need to do.

Cons: - If you have a lot of hives, you need to remember which hive you're inspecting and updating otherwise you could mix them up. There are potentially too many menus and features, so you'll need to spend time working out which are useful or not and how you get to the right places to record what you want. It's not clear whether you can download your data, however, a Pro version provides many additional features including data download and analysis for $70 per annum.

And, don't forget if you like to use a good old paper record there is a template available on our website.

Nicola Spreckley & Steve McGrath

Learning Corner:

Having taken the practical BBKA Basic Assessment and BBKA written exam Modules 1 and 2, I have come across several publications and presentations that I continue to refer back to when managing my own bees and deciding on what plants to add into my garden.

Steve Riley's presentations for the BBKA Basic Assessment – excellent high-level reminders of beekeeping fundamentals (this is a shameless plug as

you may need to attend Steve's zoom meetings to get hold of these!).

BBKA Guide to Beekeeping by Ivor Davis and Roger Cullum-Kenyon – covers a lot of ground and is easy to navigate to your particular interest or challenge.

A Lifetime of Beekeeping Mistakes by Geoff Critchley – Geoff was my correspondence tutor for Module 1. This book is not on the reading list, and it is not a textbook for study, but it is a good read and covers so many practical aspects of beekeeping. It also has some good handy reference appendices.

Honey – BBKA News Special Issue Series – this issue is packed with articles ranging from harvesting and extracting honey from different sources, information on processing honey and comb for own use, sale and for showing. It includes honey regulations (essential for anyone planning to sell honey), key properties of honey, important safe temperatures and even how to calibrate your refractometer.

Drooping Clover florets indicating pollination – a signal to bees to go elsewhere.
Photo: Sally Doyle-Linden

The Honey Bee Around and About (3rd ed) by Celia F Davies – such a delight to read this book. Celia is a fount of knowledge. The second half of this book was excellent for studying the fascinating relationship between bees and flowers and the resultant products of the hive. (This covers a lot of Module 2!)

Except for Steve's notes, these are all available to buy – although you may need to look around as they do go out of print. They are all worth a read and will help you in your early years as a beekeeper and are a great reminder for even the most experienced.

Sally Doyle-Linden

Recipe: Rhubarb and Yoghurt Dessert

A simple seasonal dessert for 4

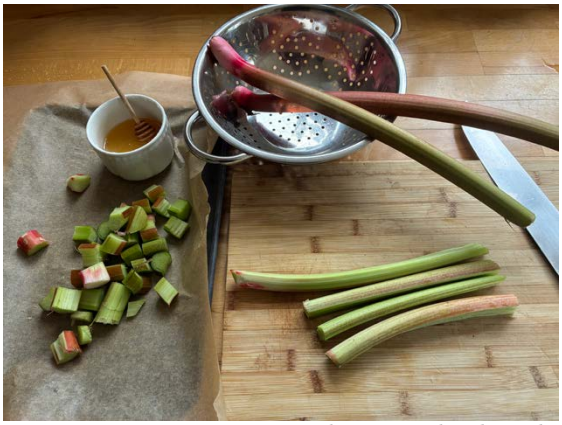


Photo: Mark Edwards

Ingredients:

4 stalks rhubarb, chopped into even sized pieces (2cm)
Honey to drizzle
Vanilla pod or vanilla extract
4 generous spoonfuls of natural full-fat yoghurt
White chocolate, grated
Strawberries or other red fruit

Photo: Sally Doyle Linden

Method:

Heat to oven to 180C
Place washed, trimmed and chopped rhubarb on a flat oven tray lined with greaseproof paper. Drizzle with honey and add vanilla pod or vanilla extract.

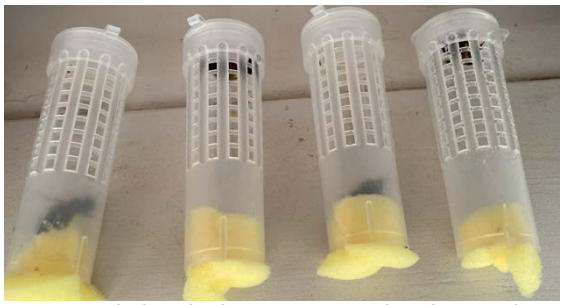
Place on top shelf of the oven for 10-15 minutes until just soft (but not a mush). Remove from oven and leave to cool. Then place in the fridge.

To assemble – it looks good served in four glasses: Spoon rhubarb mixture into base of each glass. Add spoonful of yoghurt and top with grated white chocolate and small strawberries (or raspberries, or red currants). Finish with a drizzle of honey.

Mark Edwards

Breeding Apiary: May Madness

What a beekeeping month May was, and such a complete contrast with last year's washout! The dry and sunny weather had colonies going gangbusters, building strongly as the pollen and nectar piled into the hives and then making their swarm preparations. That provided us with a massive opportunity for colony increase at the breeding apiary and excellent weather and drone availability to get our new queens mated successfully.



Newly hatched virgin queens heading to their mating nucs. Photo: Steve Mc Grath

We started with grafting, but quickly moved on to swarm cell harvesting - we adopted the saying 'never let a queen cell go to waste', harvesting every spare cell. Some went into apideas or nucs as cells, and some were hatched in my incubator before being introduced to their mating nucs as virgin queens.

We have tried out various methods and experimented; we are already forming a picture of what works best. Not everything has been successful, but we have had some good success, and we're currently well set to go into winter with a good stock of colonies from good varroa resistant queen lines, which was the aim for this year. And we still have two more months of breeding possibilities left this season - more details on this in the next update.

A harvested swarm cell from which a queen has emerged. Photo: Steve Mc Grath

Not all our initial queen lines came good, with one queen having to be replaced as she turned spotty drone layer (*see Last Word(s) below-ed.*). But other queen lines are doing very well, and we have a base stock of four lines - all from proven varroa resistant stock, some very dark others slightly less so, but all of them nice to work with and handle.

We're keeping meticulous records on each queen line, as well as of the methods used to raise queens so we can see how the methods impact queen quality over time. This means we will have very detailed histories of each and every queen, including where they came from, how they were raised, and the qualities of the colonies over time.

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:

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

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Topsy Rudd - Branch Secretary & YLH Co-ordinator
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Andrew Smith & Sue Bradshaw-Smith – Librarians & Fete Team Organisers
wbkalibrarian@gmail.com

Keith Masters – Treasurer
masterskeithmasters@hotmail.com

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

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

To join the **Swarm WhatsApp group**, please contact Alban Brindle agbrindle@hotmail.com

Committee Members:

Mark Waddington – Chairman & Events Programme

Topsy Rudd – Branch Secretary & YLH Co-ordinator

Keith Masters - Treasurer

Jacky Delooze - Training Apiary Manager

Steve Riley - Education Officer

Robert Ambroziak - Membership Secretary

Alban Brindle - Swarm Co-ordinator

Peter Cobley – 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 Brindle on 07919 843 546, or the nearest contact from the BBKA website if Alban is not available.

National Bee Unit Inspectors:

Seasonal Inspector Southern Westerham Area: Helen Hadley – 07741 168555

Seasonal Inspector Northern Westerham Area: Danyal Conn – 07584 202700

Regional Inspector: Thomas Bickerdike thomas.bickerdike@apha.gov.uk or 07775 119464

Last Word(s): Spotty Drone Layer - a new beekeeping term coined by Steve McGrath to describe queens laying an increasing amount of drone brood, and in a spotty pattern, *one here, one there*. Not to be confused with the established term *spotty brood* which may be a sign of a failing queen, American Foul Brood, or an inbreed queen.

If you don't use chemical miticides on your lucky bees, let your customers know!

Photo: Steve Riley