THE BUZZ

Westerham Beekeepers'
newsletter

April 2025 | Issue Seven

Welcome:

Welcome to the latest edition of The Buzz. Spring has finally arrived, and the survivor colonies are building nicely. And, of course, the training apiary and associated cake sharing is back up and running again!

We do hope you enjoyed this winter's series of talks, which finished with a visit from a sommelier and exotic honey tasting – see the report below. For next winter, we will look to change the format a bit – fewer formal talks and a couple of more social evenings on different themes. Suggestions have included a pub meet and even a quiz night – your ideas are welcomed! Please let us know – our contact details are all on the back page. The dates for this summer's apiary meetings are also in this newsletter.

It has been a mild spring so far, which carries with it fresh concerns about the possibility of an increase in Yellow-Legged Hornet numbers. Please stay tuned to Topsy's section below, updates through the Training Apiary Facebook site and the club's WhatsApp group.

Mark Waddington

Chairman's Chat:

At the time of writing this, it is mid-April, and the first swarms are already taking to the air. There has been an early and strong flow, and it has not been dependent on oilseed rape. Our new WhatsApp group for swarm collectors and receivers is already active. If you would like to receive a swarm, but haven't registered yet, please contact Alban Brindle (see his piece below).

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The next few weeks will be interesting / fruitful / chaotic / infuriating (delete where applicable), but they certainly won't be boring.

A word about our leading programme of establishing and breeding varroa tolerant stock. Led by well-known author and regular conference speaker Steve Riley 😊 and now with Steve McGrath's work at the new breeding apiary, our efforts on breeding varroa tolerant bees means that we are seeing an increased interest in the branch's activities.

We want to prioritise stock for full members of Westerham Beekeepers who keep their bees in the Westerham Beekeepers' area. The reasons for this should be clear: it is part of the overall effort to increase the concentration of such colonies in our area, by doing this we aim to make the programme as successful as possible, and to encourage our members to keep local bees. This includes new starters and regular attendees of the Training Apiary.

Hence, any provision (sale or otherwise) of such stock will be focussed first on priority for in-area full members.

The initiative is in its early stages and as such the priority is in setting up a successful breeding programme. Colonies may become available to full members who keep bees in the area and are committed to supporting treatment free beekeeping. But only once the queen rearing programme is successfully established and producing queens and varroa resistant colonies. We do not want to compromise the primary objective of the project.

I hope this meets with your support.

Since our last Newsletter we have been delighted to welcome several new members to the branch. We encourage you all to get involved. Six of our new members joined the first training apiary meeting of the year.

Mark Waddington

Events:

Please save the following dates in your diary for summer meetings at members' apiaries. The dates have been "tuned" to meet apiary availability and to avoid clashes with summer fetes.

Saturday 7 June at Keith Masters' apiary on the Henderson's property.

Saturday 5 July at Mark Waddington's apiary.

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

Demonstrators to be confirmed – volunteers are welcome!

Next winter's branch meeting dates are as follows:

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

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. We look forward to hearing from you!

Mark Waddington

Winter Talks:

Tom Bickerdike's Talk

The penultimate talk in our winter series came from our National Bee Unit regional inspector Tom Bickerdike. For those of you who shiver at the word inspector, Tom is really approachable and describes himself as a "slightly obsessed hobbyist" beekeeper who has been keeping bees for 20+ years and currently has about 14 colonies of his own. He's also a really keen woodworker.

It was fascinating to hear the full work of the NBU. Their inspection work almost stopped in 2023 as all the inspectors were pulled onto the front line of our efforts to eradicate YLH incursions, but they are now better organised and have a three-year proactive plan to deal with the hornets and nests as they are discovered. That means the inspectors will go back to doing more inspections of beekeeper and commercial apiaries, as well as the most important aspect of their work which is to inspect imports as they arrive at ports and airports.

The key threat Tom highlighted in his presentation was that of Tropilaelaps, which is following the route that varroa took into Europe and is already likely in Ukraine and Turkey and therefore poses a real and present threat of jumping into the UK on imported bees. These mites, about a third of the size of varroa, are very, very, difficult to spot and often the first signs of arrival are when whole apiaries collapse due to infestation. If you want to know more about this mite, I recommend this BIBBA video by one of Tom's NBU colleagues:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Puafvm128K0&t=18s

There was a conversation about the current loophole whereby unscrupulous importers are using Northern Ireland as a route into the UK avoiding NBU checks. The agency is pressing for the loophole to be closed. It was interesting that he wouldn't be drawn on whether a complete ban on imports might be an answer! I guess he has to play a straight bat with the current laws.

He gave an update on YLH, and was really pleased that only 24 nests were found in 2024 compared with the much larger number in 2023. He recognised that the weather played a big part in that and so the unit is far from complacent, putting in place a three-year proactive plan for dealing with incursions. He also highlighted the importance of working with local beekeeping associations – Dover & District Beekeepers found about eight of the 2024 nests! – as well as the importance of educating and informing more members of the public. So, he was pleased to talk with us about Westerham's plans. For him, the most important month of the trapping/baiting calendar is August when there are lots of YLH workers about to spot and track (unless you're in an area close to a confirmed previous nest when spring trapping is key). He suggested that once the ivy starts flowering, watch that rather than bait stations as they'll be on the ivy with every other insect.

He did note that the Westerham area had been neglected by the NBU in recent years - as indicated by a zero show of hands when the audience was asked if they'd got a call about an inspection. The NBU have a new grid system for inspections by the seasonal bee inspectors, and Tom expects a few more of us to be inspected this year. Under the new grid system, our area is actually covered by the seasonal inspectors who work under Tom. They are:

Southern Westerham Area: Helen Hadley – 07741 168555

Northern Westerham Area: Danyal Conn – 07584 202700

If you aren't sure which you should contact, go to BeeBase and there's a 'contact us' page where you can type in your postcode. (You should really have your inspector in your phone in case you need to contact them from the field).

Tom is also happy to be contacted himself at any time:
Thomas.Bickerdike@apha.gov.uk or 07775 119464

So, if you think something is not right in your colony(ies), take a picture, reach out to one of the more experienced club members for their opinion, and then send your picture to your seasonal inspector or direct to Tom, and they can advise.

Steve McGrath

Sarah Wyndham-Lewis's Talk

The last in this series of Winter Talks was held on March 26th. We were entertained by Sarah Wyndham Lewis and Dale Gibson, founders of Bermondsey Street Bees.

Sarah is, amongst other things; a professional writer, frequent contributor to Beecraft, radio broadcaster, food awards judge, rewilding consultant, honey-related corporate events organiser, maintainer of a global honey library, and a great advocate for more action to be taken against honey fraud. She is also a Honey Sommelier; trained in Bologna by the Italian Register of Experts in the Sensory Analysis of Honey.

Photo: Paul Rhodes

Following a brief history of honey, honey fraud and a look at the various activities of Bermondsey Street Bees (production of sustainable, artisanal, raw honey is one of their many operations), we moved to discuss how the taste of every honey depends on its own 'terroir', much like fine wine.

Photo: Paul Rhodes

Then to the intricacies of tasting honey; holding your nose, honey sample behind your teeth, using your tongue to spread it across your palate, drawing in air, looking for secondary flavours when the honey is swallowed… and finally, to practical tasting of three very different honeys provided by Sarah – one based on nectar from a strawberry tree (arbutus unedo), another chestnut-influenced, with floral notes and one multi-floral from a young Greek producer with hives on a small island near Athens.

A well-attended, interesting and enjoyable conclusion to the 2024-25 Winter Talks. Many thanks to Mark and everyone else (especially the tea makers!) involved in putting it all together.

Photo: Paul Rhodes

Robert Ambroziak

Things to do: Jobs for the month ahead.

Spring is in the air, with the beautiful display of spring flowers. This, in turn, brings out the bees and marks the beginning of season. Inspections are now in full swing and here are our recommended jobs for the coming month:

Inspections – Every 7 days, or 4 to 5 if there is a risk of swarming.

- Look for evidence the queen is laying well. Eggs, larvae and sealed worker brood in a ratio of 1:2:4 is reassuring.
- Check for signs of pests or disease.
- Check stores.
- Colony size – Add supers when bees cover 7 of 10 frames.

- Signs of swarm preparations – Drone cells, queen cups.

Disease inspection

- Shake the bees from your frames. Pearly white, 'C' shaped well segmented larvae are healthy. Pepper-pot brood pattern, discoloured, misshapen larvae or perforated sunken capping can be warnings signs of disease.
- Possible spring diseases are Nosemosis or European Foulbrood (EFB). If concerned take a sample of bees for examination under a microscope. Contact our National Bee Unit Inspector (see back page) if you suspect EFB.

Queens

- Now is a good time to mark your queens if you choose to: 2024 = green, 2025= blue
- Decide if any older queens may need replacing this season, which method of queen rearing you might use, and how you will introduce them. Steve McGrath is fast becoming our club expert on this, so I'm sure he won't mind you asking him any questions about this.

Hygiene

- Clean your inspection equipment with a soda crystal solution including your tools and gloves between inspecting each hive.
- Clean floors of the hive
- Consider replacing dark older combs (3 years +) for new ones. Use the Bailey method, shook swarm or more gradual shuffling along old combs to the boxes edges and replacing over time.

Swarm Planning

- Prepare your swarm management plan.
- Swarm prevention – add supers if the hive is becoming crowded, especially if you are near oilseed rape.
- Look for signs that the queen laying rate has slowed, she can be slimmed down ready for flight and will lay fewer eggs. Look for back filling – nectar and pollen stores in cells where you would expect to see brood.
- Older queens produce less pheromones, which make the colony more prone to swarming.
- Look for queen cups or open queen cells. If you see these, you will them need to carry out swarm controls with artificially splitting of the colony.

Swarm control

- see: http://westerham.kbka.org.uk/beekeeper-resources/swarm-control/

Swarm list

- Contact Alban Brindle to be added to the swarm list (see his article below)

Equipment

- Have queen excluders and supers ready for your hives, colonies are expanding fast following the recent warm spell.
- Make up new frames and have other spare equipment ready.
- Have your swarm kit ready, especially if you are looking to expand your apiary.

Feeding

- Have some (white granulated) sugar in stock ready to make up syrup, should you need to help your starving colonies or ready for feeding a swarm after hiving. 1:1 ratio of sugar to water.

YLH traps

- Check and top up your bait regularly.
- Inform Topsy Rudd of any traps that she hasn't got marked as monitoring.

Nicola Spreckley

Let's Talk Bees:

We all love talking bees and beekeeping, don't we? With the growing threat of YLH in the UK, concerns over worldwide honey adulteration and the long-term effect of pesticides on all pollinators, it is crucial we share our beekeeping knowledge with a wider public audience. Westerham Beekeepers are invited by local fetes to set up an information stand with our

observation hive. We offer honey tasting which gives visitors the opportunity to buy local honey. And we talk a lot about bees! Come and join us at:

Limpsfield Chart on 22 June 12-4 pm
Limpsfield Village on 28 June 12-4 pm
Four Elms on 12 July 1-5 pm (TBC)
Westerham Country Fayre on 6 September 11-5 pm (TBC)

and

STOP PRESS!
The Edenbridge & Oxted Show has invited us back for 2025! The Kent Hornet Alert Team will be joining us again to give out YLH Trap kits to the public. Edenbridge & Oxted Show on 24 - 25 August 8am - 6pm (2 days)

WBKA SWARM GROUP:

It's that time of year again, when our bees may start to take it upon themselves to swarm, so I am asking everyone who is available to collect and/or anyone who is interested in receiving swarms, to please contact me directly.

This year, 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

Alban Brindle

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

Training Apiary:

We are back at the Training Apiary now that the morning weather is a little warmer. Our first session on 12 April was a beautiful day and the bees were very calm and accommodating.

We have an influx of new members joining our sessions with more to come in the following weeks. Welcome to:
Ki and Malc
Nicola and Mark
Wendy
James

We have 5 thriving colonies that are building up well, with brood in all stages with drones in most hives.

We finished the session with tea, coffee and lemon drizzle cake whilst catching up on what everyone's bees were up to.

At our next session on Sunday 27 April (at 10am) we will be covering SWARMING. If you are new to the branch and would like to come along, please contact me for the location,

wbkatrainingapiary@gmail.com

and please remember to bring your own washing up type gloves.

Jacky Delooze

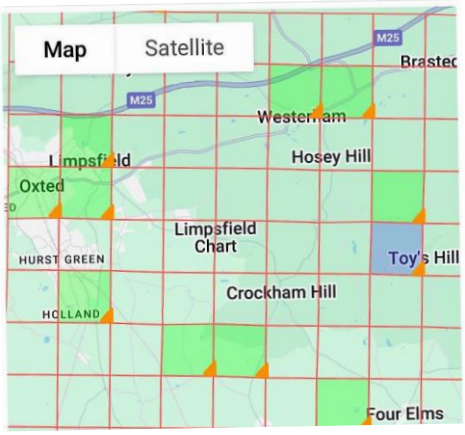
Yellow Legged Hornet:

Record-breaking numbers of Yellow Legged Hornets (YLH) continue to be caught in Jersey – by 13 April 2025 they had recorded 342 YLH queens and found 10 embryo nests. In the UK, a single hornet was found in Shropshire in January and further finds have occurred since:

In all cases, the local Yellow-Legged Hornet Teams have been contacted and asked to responsibly monitor in these areas. For the next few weeks, we plan to send a weekly summary of confirmed YLH sightings.

YLH found near Southampton April 2025

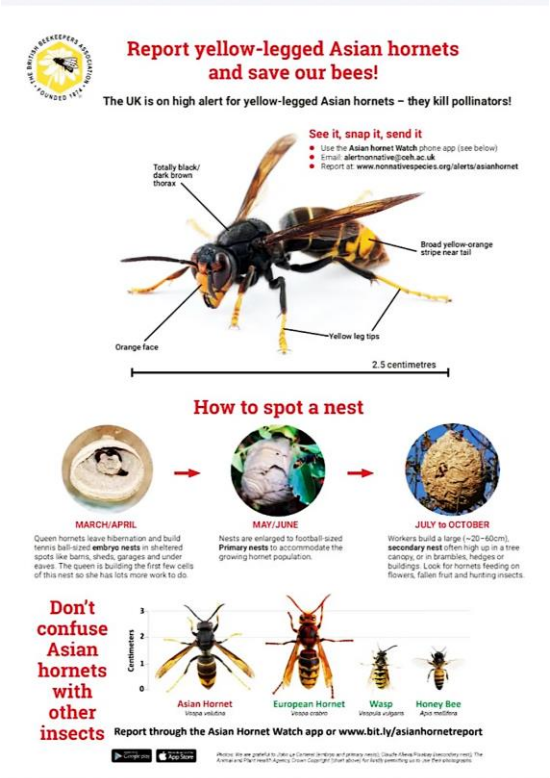
The large increase in YLH seen in 2023 was preceded by prolonged strong easterly winds in late March and early April, assisting the passage of queens across the channel. We have had similar easterly winds for the last three weeks so extra vigilance is warranted. The NBU has just started their selective spring YLH queen trapping in seven high risk zones in SE England including Kent and East Sussex.



Screen shot from co-ordinator's app

Our YLH monitoring activity is supporting the NBU's trapping programme. It is going well thanks to those members who have put queen traps out and are using the BBKA App to update their monitoring activity on a weekly basis. The map shows the 1km squares that we have claimed in our area (orange tick at bottom right of square) and those squares that have been allocated to a monitor (blue); those that are being actively monitored (green); and those where monitoring has ceased (red).

I would urge those who have been allocated a square to please keep updating it using the personalised app you were emailed by Beekeeping Membership Services, as the NBU has access to the map on a national scale and wants to be able to see which areas are being monitored. You should get reminder emails from Beekeeping Membership Services if you forget to update it.



Source: BBKA

Please remember to check your traps every day to release any by-catch and top up with Trappit (bait). We have plenty of traps and Trappit to give out to anyone who would like to start queen trapping so

please contact me via the WhatsApp group or email (details at the end of the newsletter) and I shall endeavour to get them to you. You can then be added to the monitoring scheme and get your square on the map!

Topsy Rudd

Extinction of the dark European Honeybee:

On my speaking travels this year, I came across some extraordinary endeavours by beekeepers and organisations to save the dark European honeybee (Apis mellifera mellifera or Amm), which is also native to the UK. In Ireland, bee breeding kit and training is being subsidised to produce more dark bees and fight off imports and in Germany, universities are involved with the roll-out of a dark bee varroa resistance programme.

Mass commercial bee breeding is leading to the extinction of Amm in many countries. This includes the UK, where purer Amm now only exist in the West Country, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. In countries like Lithuania, the dark European honeybee has been all but wiped out. Similarly in Germany. Where is the logic in that?

There are over 30 sub species of Apis mellifera honeybees, with each bee type adapted to the geography of its region, particularly the climate and timings of local flora. Amm has adapted to the maritime and variable conditions here in the UK, Ireland and throughout much of central and Northern Europe.

Source: Kleinjans HAW, 2012

The map shows the natural historic spread of the various sub species of bees. However, because of commercial bee breeding, much of the orange area, where Amm evolved, is now filled with Carnica bees, native to Slovenia and southern Austria, resulting from a German breeding programme started in the 1940s. There is also a powerful network of breeders heavily marketing and exporting mixed species bees all over Europe, including into the UK.

In the UK, the dark British or European honeybee is hanging on despite the onslaught of imports, where c.10,000 queens came into the country last year. From DNA testing, it has been shown that UK bees still have 40-50% of Amm in them (ref: Prof A. Pinto), with this range highly variable by area. The dark bee clearly still has natural advantages with its evolutionary adaption and suitability to our conditions.

What can we do?

1) First, understand that imported bees are the nub of the problem. Most UK bee suppliers use imports to raise queens and nucs to sell. These are also "mite-susceptible" bees, i.e., varroa breeders.

2)Buy locally adapted bees. There are plenty of club members with surplus bees. The club has started a project to breed more varroa resistant bees under Steve McGrath, which will come on stream next year. He will also be testing for the percentage of Amm. That will be interesting and give us a baseline from which to increase the percentage of Amm.

3)Raise bees from your own colonies. We have some great bees in our club area and all of the science points to local bees outperforming imports (ref: COLOSS 2014).

Let's make a difference – the club has a growing reputation for producing varroa-resistant bees. Let's add the British/European dark honeybee to our priorities. Put the VR into Amm!

Steve Riley

Learning corner:

This is the time of year when your newly learnt beekeeping skills, through reading and studying over the winter months, can be put into practise.

However, in beekeeping we never stop learning and to help you on your journey why not use the BBKA's training resources?
A number of members have taken the Basic Assessment over recent years. After 3 years of experience, why not move to the next step and take The Honeybee Health Assessment certificate? This link:

https://learning.bbka.org.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=2028

will take you to the syllabus, but you will need your membership details to access. I am not aware of any member taking this Assessment recently, so why not be the first and share your experiences with others? Applications are due by 31 May, and the Assessment must be taken by 31 August. This is a practical assessment with similar format to the Basic Assessment.

The next BBKA written exams are in November, with BBKA study groups starting early in September. Please note you do not need to sit the Modules in order – many candidates do not! In fact, the first module has a very broad syllabus, and it can be off putting. By contrast Module 2 has some great botany facts that will impress many of the keen gardeners in the membership. Module 3 has been updated to include varroa resistant traits – why not be in the first cohort of students to cover this updated syllabus?

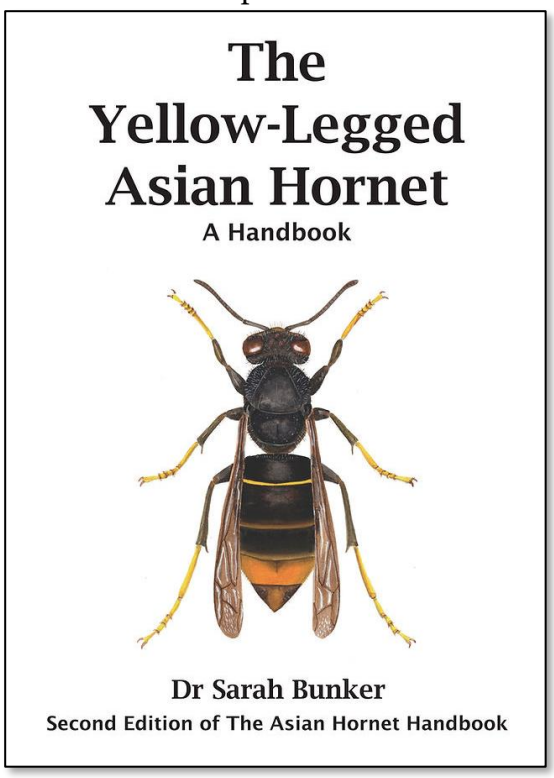
Please let Steve Riley or me know if you are interested in any of these options and we can then support you through the process.

Sally Doyle-Linden

Jersey in July:

I have volunteered for a week to track and trace YLH on Jersey. My ferry is booked, and I will take my car, a bike and a tent bought for £10 - I've not camped for 40 years! On a serious plea, if anybody has any camping gear that I might borrow, please contact me via the branch WhatsApp group.

I have read Sarah Bunker's book, a condition of the trip.



I have a campsite booked and am now making detailed plans. I will try to meet and video as many people as possible for the benefit of the group. I have funded this all myself and I must thank my wife for letting me go.

The team in Jersey stress how important it is to gain practical experience which can only help when the hornet arrives in earnest in the UK.

Mark Edwards

Recipe: Chinese beef with Honey

Photo: Mark Edwards

I came across this recipe in Taiwan when I opened a cookery school some 30 years ago.

Ingredients (for two):
250g cheap cut of beef (e.g. beef skirt or topside) (NB: This technique can be used on other types of meat.)
1 tablespoon baking soda
2 tablespoons cornflour
1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
4 tablespoons water
Optional ingredients: Sesame oil, white pepper, chopped garlic, etc

For the sauce:
An espresso cup of dark soy sauce
1 clove of chopped garlic
1 large knob of grated ginger
3 tablespoons of runny honey
Sprinkle of chilli flakes

Method:
To make the sauce, mix the above ingredients in a small saucepan and allow to reduce on a gentle heat for approx. 5 minutes. Keep an eye on it so it doesn't burn. Set this aside to cool.

The trick to getting very tender beef from the cheap cut is to slice the beef with the grain, into long strips approx. 1 inch thick, then lay the long cuts down and slice across the grain. Place the thin even slices of beef into a bowl, then add the baking soda, cornflour, dark soya and the water. Then massage the meat.

Photo: Mark Edwards

Here you can add (depending on what ingredients you have, or prefer) sesame oil, white pepper, chopped garlic, etc. Continue to massage the meat gently combining it with all the added ingredients. Set aside or place in fridge to marinade.

The beef will cook quickly, so make sure you have all your side dishes ready before you start to cook it. To cook the beef, heat a shallow frying pan (or wok) with enough oil to allow the beef to fry quickly. Add some colour to the meat, then remove the pan from the heat, cool a little and drop the beef into the sauce mixture.

I enjoy this dish with a small amount of cooked brown rice, and I serve it on top of stir-fried vegetables, garnished with sesame seeds and fresh coriander. You can eat immediately but I've also eaten it cold in a sandwich, or salad.

Mark Edwards

Recipe: Hot Honey Drink

A friend comes to stay and always makes this cleansing drink that's really refreshing.

Method:
1 empty 2-3 cup cafetiere or 2-3 cup teapot
1 x unwaxed washed lemon sliced
6 generous slices of fresh ginger
1 green-tea bag
Runny honey for adding to the cups to taste

Place the lemon, ginger and tea bag in the cafetiere or teapot and pour over enough boiling water to cover over the ingredients. Allow to infuse for 10 minutes before serving in cups. Add honey to the cups to taste. The cafetiere or teapot can be refreshed at least once with boiling water.

Suggestions that it potentially increases metabolism, burns belly fat, helps the digestive and immune systems, is a natural detoxifier, and provides stress relief are a few of the claims attached to this drink. But importantly, it tastes good and is a nice way to start the day.

Mark Edwards

Propolis Throat Spray: *by K. Wells**

Propolis has countless biological active compounds and has many health benefits including, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, anticancer and believed to help with rheumatoid arthritis, heart disease and much more. It takes a while to make, so if you have any excess propolis from winter hives, then don't let it go to waste. Scrape it off and try out this recipe.

This propolis honey throat spray is great for soothing scratchy throats. You can also use it daily to help keep your immune system performing its best!

Yield
1 ounce

Equipment
1 ounce glass spray bottle

Materials
1 tbsp propolis glycerite (see recipe below)
2 tsp raw honey
¾ tsp distilled water

Instructions
Place the propolis, water, and honey in the small spray bottle and shake to combine. Add more water, 1/8 teaspoon at a time if needed for the right consistency. The mixture should be be thick enough to coat the throat, but just thin enough to be sprayable.

Note: Store the mixture in the fridge, and it should last for several weeks.

To make a propolis glycerite:

Glycerites are similar to herbal tinctures but instead of using alcohol, use vegetable glycerine. They do take 6 weeks to make. Glycerites are safe for children, naturally sweet, and won't burn or irritate the throat like alcohol.

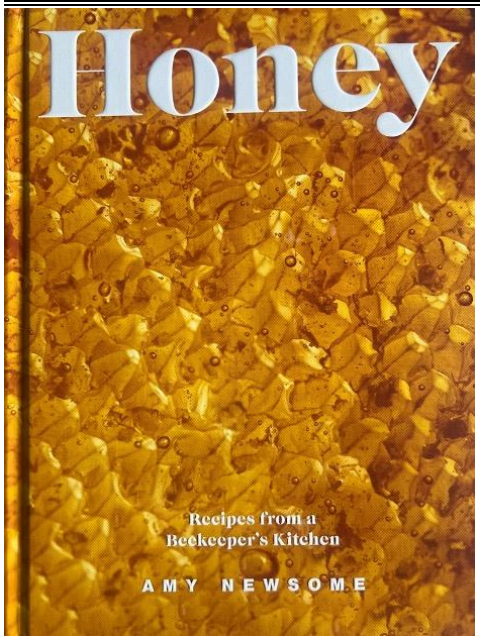
To make a bee propolis extract with glycerine:

1. Place 2/3 cup of propolis powder in a 16-ounce glass jar.
2. Combine 3/4 cup glycerine with 1/4 cup distilled water in a separate jar and stir well.
3. Pour the glycerine/water mixture over the propolis powder and stir to combine.
4. Put the lid on the jar and shake daily for 6 weeks.
5. Strain the liquid through a coffee filter into a clean jar (this will take a while!). You may need to do this step twice to remove all of the powder.

You can easily double or halve this recipe depending on your preference. Once you have your propolis glycerite or have bought it, you're ready to make the throat spray!

*Wells, K. (2024) DIY Propolis Throat spray, Wellness Mama®. Available at: https://wellnessmama.com/remedies/propolis-throat-spray/ (Accessed: 17 April 2025).

Book Review: Honey – Recipes from a beekeeper's Kitchen by Amy Newsome



I was given this book at Christmas by a close friend and fellow beekeeper. 'Honey' is a collection of recipes and stories as well as a glimpse into the craft of beekeeping and the world of the honeybee.

This beautiful book contains eighty inspiring recipes, including honey ferments, garlic fermented honey with miso sourdough, honeyed chipotle lamb tacos, saffron & apricot honey buns, plus many wonderful cocktails to wash it all down.

This is a cookbook, covering the beekeeper's year and how honey is made. The author pays homage to the honeybee and shows why and how we should treat honey with the respect that it deserves.

My daughters loved making the honey buns with me and I am about to try making the fermented honey and miso sourdough.

Nicola Spreckley

Breeding Apiary:

What an exciting start! As we have all experienced, the beekeeping season has got off to an early and rapid start, and it has been no exception at the breeding apiary where we are already well into manipulations we'd normally have done in late April. Some have been successful, others less so.

We've hived two over-wintered nucs and they're already going great guns in the full-sized hives. We did a successful shook swarm on a hive where we needed to change hive and comb; the Queen is rapidly laying up her new combs.

Lastly, we tried a Bailey comb change on a hive where we needed to move from one comb size to another. That started well and then it decided to swarm in the middle of the two-week process! We were very lucky to be there when it happened and so we managed to get the escaped swarm back into a new hive in the apiary! So that's out first split of the year, even if totally unintentional! Lessons learned.

So, we now have four queen lines in five hives, with a fifth queen line to be introduced when a new queen is available. They are all showing good varroa resistance at the moment, with uncapping and chewing out resulting in very low mite counts. Another big thank you to all the donors of this fantastic genetic baseline!

Talking of genetic baselines, we'll be testing all the colonies in May so we know the percentage Apis mellifera mellifera versus exotic non-native sub-species. The aim over time is to improve so that we're as near-native as possible. Can our club area move to a place where we have completely varroa resistant, near-native, locally-adapted bees? That would be a huge accomplishment that would benefit us all.

But, let's bust one myth - that near native bees are grumpy and aggressive. This is just not true. Every colony we have in the breeding apiary is a joy to handle.

We will also be kicking off our breeding program in the next couple of weeks. We're going to be raising new queens by queen cell harvesting (the bees' choice) and grafting (the beekeeper's choice) and comparing for quality. We'll be raising

cells in a couple of ways, and we'll also be mating our queens in a couple of ways too, including apideas. It's going to be busy, a lot of fun, and will teach us a lot.

In the last newsletter, I offered a small-scale queen rearing course for members. Unfortunately, interest so far as been very low, and so those who did express an interest will join me as we do the breeding in the apiary. If more members do come forward, we may revert to the planned course. So, if you'd like to learn some simple ways to raise new queens and introduce them, to form new colonies, then please do get in touch! It's a lot of fun and can cover any losses that you might experience in or out of season or can increase the number of colonies that you have.

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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Jacky Delooze – Training Apiary Manager wbkatrainingapiary@gmail.com

Topsy Rudd - Branch Secretary & YLH Co-ordinator westerhambeekeepers@gmail.com

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

Branch representatives on KBKA Council- James Cash and Peter Cobley

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: Trophallaxis a critical part of the social fabric of a colony; a processes whereby nectar, water, and information are distributed via nectar (or water) collectors, to hive bees (and vice versa), and from one hive bee to another. This is how the queen gets her food, highlighting the importance of the process.

Photo: Kenneth Lorenzen