THE BUZZ

Westerham Beekeepers'
newsletter

November 2025 | Issue Ten

Welcome:

Welcome to edition 10 of The Buzz!
This newsletter has quite a heavy focus on the club's AGM, to report back to those who did not get a chance to attend in person. Thank you for those who did come along. It was, as ever, a very enjoyable evening. Congratulations to the winners in the honey and cake competitions!

Of course, we still report back on recent events and talks, please read on for these. And we feature our usual digest of other items, both serious and fun.

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

Mark Waddington

Chairman's Chat:

It has been another good year for Westerham Beekeepers. We have enjoyed a mild last winter and a very kind season weather-wise, although with a couple of apiary demonstrations rained off. We experienced a more typical concentrated swarming period by comparison with 2024, which seemed to have at least two, if not three swarming impulses. Wet weather was rare, and the temperatures were warm. So, the bees were able to enjoy a relatively prosperous season. A little more wet weather would have helped gardeners, water supplies and nectar availability!

2025 was another good year for the breeding apiary, which entered its second year and probably the first full season of establishing a colony base from which to breed. We are very grateful for the matched funding from KBKA, who have taken a healthy interest in the programme.

We have a change of guard at the training apiary. Many thanks again to Jacky Delooze and Steve Riley for their years of unstinting hard work and preparation of refreshments. Many new beekeepers have learned their early skills under their guidance. We now welcome Michelle Ernoult to the role, who was also elected at the AGM as education officer. The two

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roles should work together well, and she is supported by a team of helpers.

It was a great summer on the fete circuit. Thanks again are due to Andrew Smith and Sue Bradshaw Smith for their tireless efforts and for amazing us all by winning the award for the best stand at the Edenbridge and Oxted Show!

As our treasurer Keith Masters reports separately, the branch remains in sound financial shape.

Mark Waddington

Winter Events:

We hope you continue to enjoy our winter gatherings, that have changed somewhat in format as we try to bring in a new approach.

Recent Events:

Joe Ibbertson – 29th October 2025

Joe gave us a very impressive and informative talk about *"Free living colonies and their influence on my Beekeeping"*.

Joe's 15 years plus experience of locating and following feral bee colonies on the Boughton Estate in Northamptonshire has enabled him to mimic many feral traits and apply these to his non-wild beekeeping. Through his talk he has given us plenty of ideas to think about and implement, if we dare, but that is what makes Beekeeping such an interesting and fun pastime even when some of it doesn't always work out. As Joe said the bees will show us what they need and what must be done, so we should take note, listen and leave them to perform accordingly. One of Joe's ideas is to make the hive entrance round and position it halfway up the brood box enabling the bees to fly directly in and out of the brood frames. He says that with an additional round entrance on the supers you will be surprised how the bees select which entrance and at what time during the summer season. The bees will reduce the entrances when required with propolis and can defend them better than standard floor hive entrances.

Photo: Sally Doyle-Linden

His smiling and positive approach to beekeeping was a delight and has certainly whetted many of our appetites to introduce an alternative hive or log hive into our apiaries.

John Metcalfe

AGM – 26th November 2025

Photo: Sally Doyle-Linden

The AGM was well attended and was followed by the honey & cake competitions.

Honey Competition 2025

This year the judging was done by previous winners.

Keith Masters judged the Liquid Honey and Andrew Smith the Set Honey and Novice classes.

Liquid Honey
First place - Carol Taylor & Johnny Pym
Second place - Robert Ambrosiak

Set Honey (the most competitive category this year)
First place - Robert Ambrosiak
Second place - James Cash

Novice category
First Place - Linda King

Photo: Steve McGrath

Honey Make & Bake Competition 2025

Photo: Steve McGrath

There were eight entries this year and standards were high. These were expertly judged by all the members (tea in hand).

The most popular entries won with 12 and 9 votes respectively. We will publish the recipes in a future edition of the Buzz.

First prize - Honey Cake - Angela Davis
Second prize - Spiced Christmas Biscuits - Jacqueline Nixon

Photo: Paul Rhodes

Sally Doyle-Linden

Remaining Winter's Events Dates:

Thursday 29th January 2026

Quiz Night and Social Evening at the Carpenter's Arms, Limpsfield Chart, RH8 0TG

Wednesday 25th February 2026

Steve McGrath: Varroa tolerant breeding, the story so far.

Wednesday 25th March 2026

Provisionally Yannick Wurm (Queen Mary University, London)

Again, please save these dates for your diaries and let us know if you have any

specific requests or ideas for future meeting themes.

All meetings and talks (except the Quiz Night on Thursday 29th January) to be held at Westerham Hall, Quebec Avenue, Westerham, TN16 1BJ. Events and talks start 8.00 pm with doors opening at around 7.30 pm.

Mark Waddington

Things to do: Jobs for the months ahead:

Inspections: No full inspections until spring but do heft regularly, check entrances for any blockages and, after any storms, for damage.

Feeding: If stores are low, Fondant is a good back up. Place this on top of the hole in the crown board. It is now too late and cold for Syrup feeding as this can cause dysentery.

Hefting: Heft (lift your hive from the back and sides) to check stores. You are looking for around 20Kg or stores. It is recommended to heft every 6 weeks and then in the new year, every 4 weeks. This is a great video on hefting and well worth a watch. Note that brood frames weigh around 2.5kg and super frames weigh around 1kg.

Winter Prep: Now is a good time to clean up your kit, make any repairs and restock. Old brood frames should by now have been placed in the freezer for 48 hours or more to kill off Wax Moth and its larvae before packing away for winter.

Yellow Legged Hornets: Clean out any traps ready for Spring trapping next year.

Dark Evenings: Do check out the bee suppliers for discounts on any kit. And this is a good time to study for your next Module.

Nicola Spreckley

Membership Report:

Thanks very much to everyone – both long-standing and new members who have renewed their membership for 2025/26.

Membership numbers remain very healthy, with a total of 146 members.

These break-down as:

Fully registered BBKA Members: 78
Friends: 53
Junior and Partner Members: 15

If you have not yet renewed, please do so in the next week or two, before the distractions of Christmas preparations take precedence!

A reminder that the renewal invitation mail was sent out on Oct. 10th, from 'Kent Beekeepers - Westerham Branch', with the subject 'Membership Renewal Invitation'. If this has got lost in your email's digital dustbin, please let me know and I can send another invite.

Remember, if you prefer not to use the online renewal process, please contact me and I can send you the paper renewal form.

As reported in The Buzz, issue 9, we are appealing to members to voluntarily increase their annual subscriptions by making a suggested minimum donation of £5.00 per member.

We are a charity, and any money that you donate will be channelled into a better service on all that we offer.

Just as importantly, if you are not renewing your membership this year, let me know so your record can be updated to show this. If nothing else, it will ensure you don't get any more emails from me chasing you for renewal!

Robert Ambroziak

Financial Report: Year 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025

This year we have made a small loss of £23.

The donation figures for this year are inflated by two special collections, and the club has been fortunate to receive significant additional support from a number of generous individuals.

Interest received on our income managed to creep over £100 whilst our current Charifund holding is worth slightly more than this time last year; the club's worth is approximately £12,670.

Beecraft and membership fees account for most of our spending as usual, although lecturer's fees and fete expenditure almost reached a thousand pounds.

2025 also saw significant planned expenditure on the purchase of frames, foundation and Nuc's for the breeding apiary.

We have been supported generously by our Kent colleagues providing matched funding for the project and this will continue into next year when DNA analysis will be taking place.

Some expenditure is overdue at the training apiary and plans in hand for it during 2026.

It appears worryingly likely that the Yellow legged Hornet will reach us sometime in 2026, and I anticipate that we will have substantial expenditure to accompany it.

Keith Masters

Training Apiary:

Whilst there are no training meetings at the Training Apiary during the winter months, just like with beekeeping, there are still jobs to be done. The training apiary is being visited weekly to heft the hives (and nucs), check the entrances haven't become blocked and that generally all is well.

The team of volunteers have been arranging work parties to sort, clean and repair equipment and discuss ideas.

Photo: Paul Rhodes

The winter months are a good time for planning for the next season, and I'd really like to extend our teaching activities. Next winter I'm planning on running an 8 or 10 week Beginner's Course. This is very much in the early planning stages at the moment, but I'm thinking Zoom meetings have a lot of advantages – not having to go out when the weather is bad and making the course available to not so local beekeepers. I've recently been taking part in a study group run by Somerset beekeepers and have learnt from beekeepers I would never otherwise have met.

I'd also like to re-introduce a few Beekeeping Taster days. The aim being for groups of 3 or 4 people around a hive with a beekeeper and plenty of time for questions.

Some of the money raised by the Beginner's Course and the Taster Days could then be used to buy new equipment and, possibly, extend the training apiary.

Does anyone have any suggestions or requests for the training apiary? Maybe something you would like to learn? Is anyone thinking of taking the BBKA Basic next year? If so, please get in touch.

Please also get in touch if you'd like to help out at the training apiary.

Finally, if anyone has any odds and ends of wax (for us to exchange for foundation), breeze blocks and bricks, and 4"x4" and 4"x2" lengths of timber for making hive and equipment stands that you might be getting rid of, please could you let me know – we can use all these at the training apiary.

Michelle Ernoult

Yellow-Legged Hornet Update:

The NBU reported 530 sightings and 157 nests in 2025 including at Godstone, Chelwood Gate, Wakehurst, Tunbridge Wells, Bromley, Dorking.

We have monitored over 30 one km squares using bait stations and traps and made two call outs to the NBU to investigate reported sightings (no YLH found). We have given out ID cards, posters and traps to the public at summer fetes and shows and have made Photo of the Month in the BBKA Magazine!

Photo: BBKA News November 2025

We will aim to increase our selective trapping in 2026 and to encourage more members to monitor, especially in the "gaps" across our patch, as a result increasing queen trapping between February and May using the black lid traps. We will increase our outreach to other local organisations and potential international entry points (e.g. Lingfield Racecourse).

We also plan to undertake a concentrated three-week worker trapping programme in August publicising worker trapping as "Great Yellow Legged Asian Hornet Hunt". Our plan is to get the public to put out bait stations over three weeks and to check daily. They will be asked to report back to us, if unable to photo/report via Asian Hornet Watch App, to triage sightings.

We will also advise members on available/potential hive defences and seek volunteers to build an Action Team to do more public education via social media, press releases, events, shows etc.

Topsy Rudd

Conference Report:

I have been fortunate enough to travel with beekeeping in recent months and to share the Westerham Beekeeper varroa project with interested beekeepers.

Photo: Steve Riley

First at the week-long **Apimondia** in September 2025 in Copenhagen, a biennial gathering of beekeepers from all around the world which attracted over 8,000 participants.

A little like the UK National Honey Show on steroids. There were umpteen talks on every topic under the honey sun, plus a tasting of honeys from around the world; sadly, fraud killed off the honey competition 2 years earlier.

Also, included were social events for networking plus expeditions to Scandinavian apiaries and other local attractions.

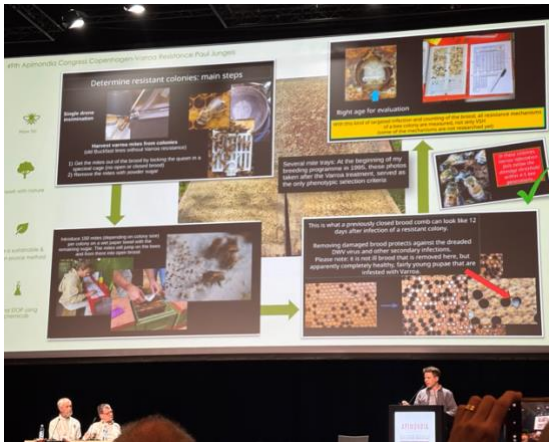

Photo: Steve Riley

I joined a round table (actually straight) discussion group on "Breeding for Varroa Resistance" with some of the greats of research in this area: including Barbara Locke, Fannie Mondet, Stephen Martin and Ralph Buchler, who mentored the start of our own project.

The next Apimondia is in Dubai in 2027, then Germany in 2029.

Photo: Steve Riley

Varroa Resistenz 2033: Switzerland Conference

Photo: Steve Riley

This project's aim is to expand varroa resistance across the EU so that no miticides are required by 2033. It started in Germany, but is rapidly gaining traction across the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland; at the conference in Landquart, Switzerland, 14 countries were represented.

Two hundred beekeepers, including many breeders, gathered to listen to presentations on genetics, selection of varroa resistant traits (from yours truly), biotechnical measures, breeding and mating nucs.

From the pioneers of Treatment Free Beekeeping, Kirk Webster from Vermont, USA and the Reinsertion story from Norway were told. Both managed some 400 colonies and hadn't treated for over 25 years. Wonderful examples of how honeybees conquered varroa.

Steve Riley

Education report:

Training beekeepers is more encompassing than the exams that some of us take. It starts with a respect of the honey bee and the colony's behaviours.

Often the first experience for Westerham Beekeepers occurs at the Training Apiary, so a special and deserved mention goes to Jacky Delooze, who oversaw many of those first introductions. After a year or so of "hands-on" experience, beekeepers can take their BBKA Basic exam; it's dreadfully named, but is a really good

foundation covering all aspects of beekeeping. We had a vintage crop of results this year with two passes at distinction level and two credits: best ever results for this exam. Very well-done Juliet, Linda, Fiona & Paul.

Photo: Mark Waddington

Moving on to the Modules, a collection of deeper dive "written" (typed) exams on different aspects of beekeeping taken under students own studying steam. Sally passed Module 2, Honey Bee Products and Forage, and Steve McGrath passed Module 1, Honey Bee Management. Brilliant work!

Education is ongoing for all of us, including through the willing sharing of knowledge between beekeepers; a collegiate style we are well known for as a club.

As I step down as Education Officer, I wanted to record my thanks for all the fun, laughs and hard work of candidates. And, to wish Michelle very best wishes going forward.

Steve Riley

Christmas Lists:

And if you need something to put on your Christmas list, perhaps try this:

Hive is a strategic game for two players that is not restricted by a board and can be played anywhere on any flat surface.

Photo: Gen42

Hive is made up of twenty-two pieces, eleven black and eleven white, resembling a variety of creatures each with a unique way of moving.

With no setting up to do, the game begins when the first piece is placed down. As the subsequent pieces are placed, these form a pattern that becomes the playing surface (the pieces themselves become the board).

Unlike other such games, the pieces are never eliminated, and not all have to be played. The object of the game is to surround your opponent's queen, while at the same time trying to block your opponent from doing likewise to your queen. The first player to surround his opponent's queen wins the game.

Sally Doyle-Linden

Honey Mulled Wine:

Ingredients:

1 bottle of good red wine
2.5 glasses of orange juice
2 spice bags
1/2 sliced orange and/or sliced lemon
few cloves
bay leaf
orange zest
2 to 3 tablespoons of runny honey

Method:

Gently warm the wine and spices in a large saucepan.

The key to successful mulled wine is to NOT boil or simmer for more than a few seconds, otherwise the wine will taste bitter with the sliced oranges or lemons and not fruity.

Mark Edwards

Words of the Wise: Nick Withers

For this edition, we welcome thoughts from Nick Withers, who first joined Westerham Beekeepers in the 1970s.

Photo: Nick Withers

Q: How did you start beekeeping?

A: I have to think back to the 1970s, where I think a vague interest from biology at school and university, discovering about things like the waggle dance and the biology of honeybees. Even when doing A-levels at school I learned about it. At university, I had an interest in gardening, horticulture and that led to the interest in beekeeping.

Q: What is your favourite bee book?

A: The first book I read about beekeeping: "The Art of Beekeeping" by William Hamilton. It is very thorough, but probably now out of date (published not long after WWII, with government support, to help encourage beekeeping). Beekeeping was strongly supported in the post-war years.

Q: What/who inspired you?

A: I was inspired by the book mentioned above and I then contacted the local Westerham branch of KBKA. Members at the time were very inspiring. Ted Miller, a former member of Kent Beekeepers was very helpful, as well as Brian Palmer.

Through local authorities, beekeeping was encouraged and funded by the government. Brian Palmer was the Kent County beekeeping instructor, sponsored by government. I went to classes run by him at Hadlow College in Kent.

Q: Tell us about the photo?

A: It's from the '90s, a tanker lorry carrying sugar came off the M25 near Clacket Lane and slid down the bank. Some of its load had to be dumped to enable it to be pulled back up.

Local beekeepers heard about it and got some free sugar! I think John Williams was in on it too, though I don't know who else.

Q: What hives do you use?

A: I use BS Nationals, usually on brood and a half. Once you have some boxes, you want to use them! The Art of Beekeeping recommended Langstroths, but most people in Kent were using National Hives.

Q: What is your most useful piece of kit?

A: For any beekeeper, the most useful piece of kit is a decent smoker. I have a Dadant smoker, a decent one from when I had a job as a bee inspector. It is a bit bigger than most smokers and stays lit well. There is no point in buying a small smoker. Get a decent sized one with a decent fire box!

Q: What piece of advice would you pass on?

A: My most important thing to pass on is for beekeepers to travel. Go and visit other beekeepers and appreciate the variety of beekeeping styles and techniques. For example, beekeepers in Morocco use cylindrical basket hives, and they successfully breed bees and harvest honey. You only find out these things if you travel. For many years I visited other parts of Europe with a coachload of other beekeepers, seeing other beekeeping practices in action but also enjoying the local food and wine.

Q: What swarm control do you favour?

A: The main thing is to do splits and get new queens. I would usually wait until the swarm cells appeared and then made the split. I occasionally used to transfer good queen cells from one colony to another. The aim was always to get the colony headed by a new queen. I used to routinely clip and mark the queens. The clipping was just to make sure that a swarm didn't escape. It doesn't stop a swarm appearing, but the swarm will return and although the queen might be lost, she could be replaced using spare queen cells.

Q: What is your biggest/funniest mistake?

A: When I first started out, I kept the bees in an open garden where the hive was quite exposed, and they died out over winter. They were too exposed to the elements and in a better winter they might have lasted, but not this time. Providing shelter so that the winter bees can fly safely is very important.

Thank you very much to Nick Withers for his time and thoughts.

Mark Wadington talking to Nick Withers

And do look at Last Word(s) below for a link to an informative article by Nick including a fascinating recording of the sound of Queens communicating.

Music to our Ears:

Q: Why do bees hum?
A: They forgot the words.

As some of you know, our regular recipe contributor, Mark Edwards, has recently moved out of our area. He reports that he is settling in well and is focused on finding the best location for his hives.

He sent this photo from one of his swarm collection outings this summer. He says:

"That speaker was my most unusual swarm collected to date. They really posed a problem of how best to remove them. In the end, I sawed the front off the speaker and, putting my hands in to extract the swarm, I reassembled it on empty frames. Then I popped the frames in a hive and fed them; lots of comb needed to be built and plenty of stores were required.

Photo: Mark Edwards

Yet, despite me smashing their home apart they were so gentle. I found a huge brown queen and the foundation inside was small resulting in small bees, lots of whom were outside; the inside of the speaker being so confined.

The speaker was located next to a swimming pool, and the owner had tried removing them by turning the volume up but that did not work.

I hope they survive winter, all the signs are looking good."

Mark has also been good enough to send us his Honey Mulled Wine recipe – see above

Sally Doyle-Linden

BeeConnected:

Bee Connected is a new way of undertaking a long-standing practice: that of farmers informing beekeepers of an intention to apply an insecticide. It is a voluntary arrangement between farmers and beekeepers whereby farmers can inform beekeepers of an intention to apply insecticides.

Do sign up and encourage neighbouring farmers and beekeepers to also sign up.

Sally Doyle-Linden

Breeding Apiary: A winter of frames, frames and more frames

The unusually mild season continued right up until mid-November when the latest first frost that I can ever remember finally arrived. That meant the bees were flying for much longer than in a more normal year (do we have a normal now?).

Bees still active on 5th Nov - *Photo: Steve McGrath*

Normally, a visit to the apiary in November for a check and heft means you're already nervously wondering whether your bees are okay. My last visit to the breeding apiary left me in no doubt that the colonies were okay – all of them were flying in the mild temperatures and autumn sun!

Eight hives are all going into winter with full supers are hefting heavy. I had to replace the 1kg fondant bag on one of the nucs while the other four were only halfway through. Usage will drop now it's colder, but I'll still be keeping a close eye on the over-wintering nucs and making a note of the one that has consumed double the amount of fondant as the others – does it mean these bees are less frugal with their stores than the others? It's hard to tell with a nuc, but we must record every detail of a colony's behaviour in a breeding programme.

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Insulated Hive – *Photo: Steve McGrath*

Still busy bees Photo: Steve McGrath

Our team of volunteers were looking forward to a winter with feet up in front of the fire and a good beekeeping book. No such luck. James Cash's incredibly generous donation of beeswax, which was topped up by a donation from Joe Ibbertson, was exchanged for over 200 sheets of foundation at the National Honey Show. Frames were acquired in the subsequent Thorne's sale. This will be enough to fill our 14 new nuc boxes as well as the nucs into hives and the extra supers we will need for those hives. Thank you so much again to the team of volunteers for agreeing to put together a batch each over the winter months.

Insulated Hive – *Photo: Steve McGrath*

Our plans for 2026 are currently being finalised, and, unless there's a complete disaster over winter, we will have the first varroa resistant, locally adapted bees available for club members to buy next season.

Details will be released in February when I have agreed to give a winter talk on the apiary, covering aspects like how it came about, why it's important, what we have achieved so far, what's coming next, and crucially all the details on availability.

Until then, have a fantastic festive season!

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
For **Advice for Beginners & FAQs: see details** on our website

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 westerhambeekeepers@gmail.com

Keith Masters – Treasurer masterskeithmasters@hotmail.com

Alan Brindle – Swarm Co-ordinator agbrindle@hotmail.com

To join the **Westerham Beekeepers' WhatsApp group** contact Mark Waddington

To join the **Training Apiary's Facebook group** contact Michelle Ernoult

To join the **Swarm WhatsApp group** contact Alban Brindle and for **Swarm Reporting** contact Alban Brindle on 07919 843 546, or the nearest contact from the BBKA website if Alban is not available.

Committee Members:

Mark Waddington – Chairman & Events Programme

Topsy Rudd – Branch Secretary & YLH Co-ordinator

Keith Masters – Treasurer & Branch representative on KBKA Council

Michelle Ernoult - Training Apiary Manager & Education Officer

Robert Ambroziak - Membership Secretary

Alban Brindle - Swarm Co-ordinator

Peter Cobley – Branch representative on KBKA Council

Steve McGrath – Breeding Apiary Manager

National Bee Unit Inspectors:

Regional Inspector: Thomas Bickerdike thomas.bickerdike@apha.gov.uk or 07775 119464
Seasonal Inspector Southern Westerham Area: Helen Hadley – 07741 168555
Seasonal Inspector Northern Westerham Area: Danyal Conn – 07584 202700

Last Word(s): Piping & Quacking

Here is a fascinating article by Nick Withers (see Words from the Wise) including a recording of Queens piping.

Newly emerged virgin queens seek each other out, ready to fight to the death. They signal to each other by making a sound called 'piping' – listen to the recording on page two of the article. They make the sound by pressing themselves against the comb and vibrating their flight muscles without moving their wings. Other queens respond, including those still in cells making a lower pitched sound called 'quacking'

Extracted from Nick's article