



Photograph: Bees on Borage by Bee Dale

Summer 2024

WVBKA Charity Registration
Number: 517008



Diary Dates Summer 2024

September

- 6th 7pm Apiary meeting - Pests & Diseases part 2 (Bronwyn); Preparing for the Honey Show - Shenmore
- 13th/14th Kington Show
- 22nd Honey Show and Harvest Lunch

October

- 16th WVBKA at Hergest Gardens Autumn Plant Fair §



2024 Course - Making Frames

Queen Colour of the Year 2024 is: **GREEN**

Notes from the Chair

After another cold and damp spring into summer, where we have been on starvation alerts, and some members have been on European Foul Brood (EFB) alerts, it feels like a relief to finally see occasional sunshine. The bees must be delighted that they can get out and forage at long last, in between showers at least. The wasps are now on the move, and I am sure that some bees will be troubled by hornets as well, but hopefully not Asian ones (yet!).

Some of our beginners may feel that they are far behind, but please do not fret. This year and last have been hard for the bees. Many members have lost colonies, including me, and many queens have failed to mate this spring because of the challenging weather.

Members have been sharing photos and information about what is happening with their bees, with some excellent photography, including this impressive one from Zoe, where you can see the eggs in the cells, some of which had two eggs, so good discussion there too. Well done, Zoe! I find this all very helpful and learn new things all the time via the WhatsApp group, although sometimes I am on catch up with it.

One of our jobs as an organisation is to help to educate the public about bees. In order to do this, we attend some local events. Some of our members, Bob North in particular, deliver short seminars to local groups from time to time as well. This is important, not least because of the decline in our overall insect population. This year there appears to be an even more radical drop in observed insects, but data is only available until 2023, which of course, is being held to question. For more information see the government report from March 2024:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmsctech/326/report.html#heading-1>.

With this in mind, along with the EFB alert, we have for the first time, organised a Bee Safari that includes hunting for other types of bees and insects, such as hoverflies, moths and butterflies, as well as examining and understanding their local forage.

The National Bee Unit has been asked to focus on other types of bees as well, so we are in line with this move.



Eggs in cells



Close-up

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Moreover, our constitution is currently under review, and this may be something members would like to see factored into what we do. It would be most helpful to hear your thoughts and to have your involvement. Please contact Bob North, who is leading on this project.

In the meantime, I am busy harvesting in my garden and watching what the bees are on. I only harvest once the pollinators have finished with a plant. The thyme is just finished, the pelargonium, damask roses, early lavender and peppermints are all in flower and are very popular with bees of all types. Hopefully, I will have some honey to harvest in August.

The club honey will be harvested on 18th August, the day we all meet in Moccas to extract it. Please do join in – it was lots of fun last year!

Finally, thanks again to all who have helped with events. This is really important, as without people coming forward, we would not be able to do as much as we do. It's also good fun!

Hopefully see you all very soon, and good harvesting.

Patricia

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Apiary Report May to July 2024

It's been a mixed season. The bees were not looking their best at the beginning of the year and the constant damp weather has not helped. However, thanks to Clare and her team who have worked very hard, we have 10 decent colonies in the Shenmore apiary, with 16 supers. Let's hope for a good honey harvest on 18th August.



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August Notes

What a season! We've had it all this year – queens failing to get mated, swarms and the bees not doing very well. I have never seen a season quite as topsy-turvy as it has been this year. Most what I have to say has already been put out on the WhatsApp, so here we go with my take on the season so far.

We are approaching the end of the season, so in general not much honey will be gathered in August because most colonies will be on the downward spiral preparing for winter. Which brings me nicely to what is needed at this time of year; any colonies which have failed to produce a laying queen need to be united with a queen-right colony. Please make sure when you are uniting that you are uniting with a clean colony and not transferring disease from one colony to another. I am a firm believer that you should always check your brood for disease at this time of year before taking the supers off and any abnormalities should be noted. If you are going to replace your supers after extraction, please, please do it in the evening to reduce the chances of robbing from other colonies. Of course, this is more important when you have several colonies altogether, not quite as important if you only have one, but the same criteria will prevail even with one or two. So having checked for disease and extracted your honey all well.

But there are other things you can do to mitigate problems occurring in the first place. Mark your supers from the colony which you have taken them from and replace to the same colony if possible, job done. The queens that are failing is probably down to the weather.

We are fast approaching the wasp season and if you have followed my advice, you will have put your entrance blocks in and reduced them to a very small entrance. The bees will not come to any harm by doing this and it may provide some of you with the solution to combating wasps. The stronger your bees are and being queen-right will in most cases be sufficient. Wasps do attack colonies which are failing in one respect or another. Strong colonies that are well fed and queen-right, will sort most things for you. The bees seem to have a resilience if they are queen-right. Don't let robbing start in the first place, give them a chance by reducing the entrance. If you have a colony which is being perpetually harassed by wasps, the only thing that I have found is to move them from the site away from the wasps.



The Wye Valley BKA are practising a non-treating policy which so far seems to be working okay with very little negative evidence. Of course, there is the impending *Honey Products and Extraction Day* where you may pick up a few tips on extraction etc. Don't forget to prepare your honey carefully for the Honey Show if you plan to enter. Remember without entrants there cannot be a show!

Of course, as you all know the association is run by volunteers, so please support them where you can with new ideas and suggestions for the future.

Thank you,

Dave

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Bee Safari

Having had to cancel our Bee Safari last year due to adverse weather, we were on alert for the weather this year, and alas, it looked like it was going to let us down. Beccy, in consultation with the rest of the event team, made the difficult decision to postpone it for another date. As things turned out, we likely would have been OK, showing how difficult these decisions are.

Caroline and James Hanks stepped in and offered to host it on 30th July instead. Not an ideal time, as it was a Tuesday evening, and many people already had plans at such short notice. However, because we wanted to look at bumble bees and other pollinators, as well as looking into a hive or two, the general feeling was that it was best in high summer.



Dark honey in frame with bees



James & Caroline Hanks' Apiary

James' other hives were in the middle of re-queening and two looked as if they were successful. Of course, he will have to wait to find out.

I was most impressed with James' hive stands. On the side of a hill, he cleverly levelled them by knocking chestnut posts into the ground.

Caroline joined us later and we had a wander around their land looking at forage for bees and other pollinators, notably three types of knapweed, watermint, yarrow, and thistles. We spotted some bumble bees, four types of butterfly: Peacock, Emperor, Meadow Brown and a white one (too far away for identification), as well as loads of honey bees feasting on everything.



Light honey in frame



Tin can platform



Bumblebee on thistle



Chestnut poles for hive table legs on hill

Caroline and James have a lovely spot just across the river from me, and they were ready with cake, apple juice, cider, butterfly nets and bee catchers. I waded across the river SAS-style and climbed up the bank with my kit. A great tip for cooling down before you put your bee suit on.

James' bees were very impressive. He opened two tall hives from which he had already extracted honey and had replaced the combs for cleaning. However, the bees were simply refilling them, so, supers went back on. Caroline and James have another good harvest to look forward to later in August. Of note was the considerable difference in honey in different frames and all in the same hive.



James Hanks examines his bees



James Hanks on way to the apiary

Unfortunately, (well, fortunately for me!), I was the only one who turned up. I had a really lovely time and came home very relaxed. Thanks so much James and Caroline!

Patricia

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Gwatkin Country Fair – 8th June 2024

Duncan and Clare came up to ours to collect the trailer (which was much easier than splitting things up and putting it in car boots) and we got down to Gwatkin's about 8.30am. As usual, Richard was ready and waiting to show us to our regular place in the Craft Barn. The trailer was unloaded and we began setting up. Geoff Dutson was there with his car on display, so he helped us set up. It is quite difficult because obviously being a barn we don't have a flat surface to stand our proper display boards up to show posters and pictures etc, but we did display the 'roll-up' posters which people said were very eye-catching. We put the tables lengthways which meant people could still come and look at what was on them, and the little ones could be in the middle, which was better than having them out in front of the tables where they were surrounded by onlookers, and frankly were a bit in the way.

It is a good thing having the children roll the candles and do colouring. The look on their faces when we say they can take the candles home is wonderful to see. We must thank Clare Ratcliff who was a tremendous help to us. She looked after the children who were doing things and worked the machine for taking card payments, which none of us could do.



We were quite busy all morning, the observation hive is such a draw and we gave out many 'I saw the Queen stickers'. Some of the children were so clever, I had a little boy who couldn't have been much more than six or seven and he was asking the most intelligent questions about what the bees did. The Virtual Hive was useful to show what the frames looked like in the hive when explaining things to the parents. Shaun Davis and his son were kept busy all morning with the observation hive, so thanks go to them as well. It is very good to see other members come and do a stint on these stands which are necessary to promote the WVBKA, so many thanks to those who came and helped. Dave sat and made his skeps and answered questions about them.

I'm afraid I jumped ship this year at lunchtime as my daughter and son-in-law came and picked me up as they were here for the weekend to celebrate Dave's and my birthday which we did with a meal at the Red Cow on the Sunday for 12 of us. I was told that all the honey was sold so that helped funds for the club. Other members came then for the afternoon shift including Peter.

June Williams

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Asian Hornet Incursions

As many of you will know 2023 was the worst year for Asian Hornet (AH) incursions that the UK has experienced. There were 71 nests discovered and destroyed mainly in the Sussex and Kent areas of the country. So far in 2024 there have been 22 sightings and capture of single hornets. It is likely that the invasion will continue as some nests are missed and new incursions from the continent lead to the development of a UK resident population

The National Bee Unit (NBU) and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) are working hard to try and prevent the spread of this problem, but we should be prepared that this will be unsuccessful, and the AH will become a regular feature of the UK insect landscape. APHA coordinate their communications at a local level through county beekeeping, associations which means that initial contacts will come to the Hereford BKA.

To enable the WVBKA to be part of the investigations we have established a joint task force called an AHAT (Asian Hornet Action Team) with HBKA.

The next stage of our development is for beekeepers to become trained in capture and release investigations to identify nest sites. Currently it is against the law to release an alien species if you have not been trained, so we are looking for 10 volunteers from the WVBKA who are willing to join our action team and be trained up. Please contact Peter Woodward or Bob North to register your interest.

It is important that we are ready, as we know from previous invasions of varroa that spread can be a lot faster than scientists predict. Please get involved and help us protect our bees and other insects.

Peter Woodward
Asian Hornet Lead

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Jean Bufton

It is with much sadness that I am reporting the death of Jean Bufton, my best friend of 48 years, on Monday 29th July at St Michael's Hospice. She was once called an unofficial member as she did a lot for the Association. More recent members will know her from annual attendance at our Christmas Lunch but much older members will remember her for cooking the Christmas

lunch at Holme Lacy College back in the 1980s. Her funeral will be on Saturday 24th August at 3pm at Peterchurch church and afterwards at Peterchurch village hall.

June Williams

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WVBKA Officers for 2024/2025**Chair:**

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- *Vacant*

Secretary:

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- Jane Matthews

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Committee:

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- Andy Strangeway
- June Williams
- Andrew Barnes

Catering Committee:

- Margaret Woodward

Mentoring Team & Technical Advisors:

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- Clare Penkey
- Duncan Penkey
- Julie Crickmore
- Andi Parker-Smith
- Juliet Parker-Smith
- Cliff Rose
- Fletcher Barker
- Andy Strangeway

Website Editor:

- Roger Jenner

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- Stephen Purse

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Brian Taylor

I am sure you are all aware that many of our members have been experiencing difficult times in the past couple of years, looking after elderly and very poorly relatives, and going through illnesses and other of life's traumas, including bereavements of those closest to them. The support that we give each other within our club is invaluable to help us through these times. Our bees help us all enormously as well. I know that this awareness, love and friendship gets many of us through these difficult times.



With this in mind, I thought it was important to acknowledge the recent and unexpected loss of one of our members, Brian Taylor. Brian joined the WVBKA 14 years ago to support his wife, Ruth, who wanted to become a beekeeper. He quickly became very enthusiastic and attended most of our events. Subsequently, he and Ruth introduced their grandson George to beekeeping. George joined the club as well and showed just as much enthusiasm, helping Ruth at home with her bees.

Brian was a horticulturist and a local leader in taking environmental action in all that he practiced, so beekeeping was a natural affinity for what he did. In his work at Allensmore Nurseries, he did his best to ensure the least environmental damage possible to insects, plants and soil. He was a natural gardener and a major fan of nature from early childhood.

Even through hard times, Brian would bring a cheerful and thoughtful persona to meetings, showing interest in all that people were doing with bees and plants. Where possible he advised and helped people to grow bee-friendly plants. He was always interesting to talk to and had extensive knowledge of plants. Last year, despite his deteriorating health, he helped Ruth put all our honey into jars.

We will miss Brian. I know his family will miss him enormously. I am sure his spirit and wisdom will live on when we meet.

Our love to Ruth, George and all their family.

Patricia

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Thanks!

A special note of thanks to all who helped with the Basic Course, not least Julie Crickmore and Penny Taylor, who are filling the giant shoes of Peter Woodward.

Also, thanks to those who have contributed to our Apiary Sessions, especially Dave Williams, Rob Doran and Alan Burford. There has been some excellent feedback from those attending and I have been sorry to have missed some of them.

Patricia

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