



# The **A**piarist

... High Weald Beekeepers' Newsletter

## Chairman's Chatter

By Malcolm Wilkie

The association is doing well and there is a steady trickle of new people joining. There is no beginners course this year as we are trying to concentrate on upskilling those members who already have bees. Look out for the sessions advertised and try to attend. Keeping Bees is not very difficult as long as you are prepared to control swarming and learn how to use the treatments available to knock back varroa mites. As chairman it is heartening for me to see that 26 of you have signed up to attend the swarming session on the 1st of April. I have also put in place a session on options for controlling varroa on the 22nd of July. This probably doesn't sound very appealing but this is the key to keeping healthy bees and ensuring colonies do not collapse over winter. People hesitate about treating these wild creatures but I suspect if their dog had ticks or their children hair lice they would not hesitate in treating. For me it is no different when I am trying to keep bee colonies healthy. Some of the treatments are rather nasty however so it's good to talk through what you need to do and how you need to protect yourself.

For a long time I have felt that a lot of us do not pay enough attention to the health of our bee colonies. So I have got in contact with Dave Rudland of East Surrey Bees. He is a former bee inspector and he and his wife, Celia, run the apprenticeship scheme for young Beekeepers intending to become bee farmers in the future. I have booked them both to run a day on bee diseases, including handling



*Honeybee on Narcissus bulbicodium in Lesley's garden on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2023.*

frames of foulbrood (both EFB and AFB) on Friday 7th July. As Dave runs the apprenticeship scheme he is able to obtain a special license to handle frames of foulbrood and so he is able to bring diseased frames with him to Five Ashes Village Hall. You will be handling these frames and more importantly smelling these frames. This is an opportunity of a lifetime. Watching a YouTube video is never the same! Those of you in full-time employment may even wish to book a day's holiday so that you can attend. You rarely get the chance to get up close to foulbroods! So don't miss out. The cost will be £15. Look out for an email about this that Peter Halford will be sending out soon. There will be a choice of attending either a morning session or an afternoon session.

These fascinating creatures give a lot of pleasure to people and as the goat willow pollen pours into the hives in the next two weeks we can all

## IN THIS ISSUE

### ARTICLES

Chairman's Chatter.....	1
Book review .....	2
HWBKA Microscopy Day .....	3
Wraps and set honey .....	4
HWBKA committee .....	5
SBKA AGM .....	5
Good reads .....	7
To your calendar.....	8
Contacts .....	9
How to clean frames .....	10

For Full calendar & details see <https://hwbka.org.uk/event/>

**The Apiarist** is a quarterly newsletter produced for members of the High Weald Beekeepers' Association.

**Publisher:** Malcolm Wilkie (Chairman)

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**Next issue: July 2023**

breathe a sigh of relief that our bees have survived the winter. The promise of the season to come sets my heart soaring. Good luck in getting a Spring honey crop. I know you are a really good beekeeper if you are getting crops both in May and in July. Remember last year was exceptional. I think I took crops off in May, June, July and September. That won't be the case this year as already the season is a late one.



# Book review

By Paul Lindström

*The Mind of a Bee*,  
by Lars Chittka,  
2022.

I first saw a review  
of this book in  
The Economist,  
where the  
author of the  
review

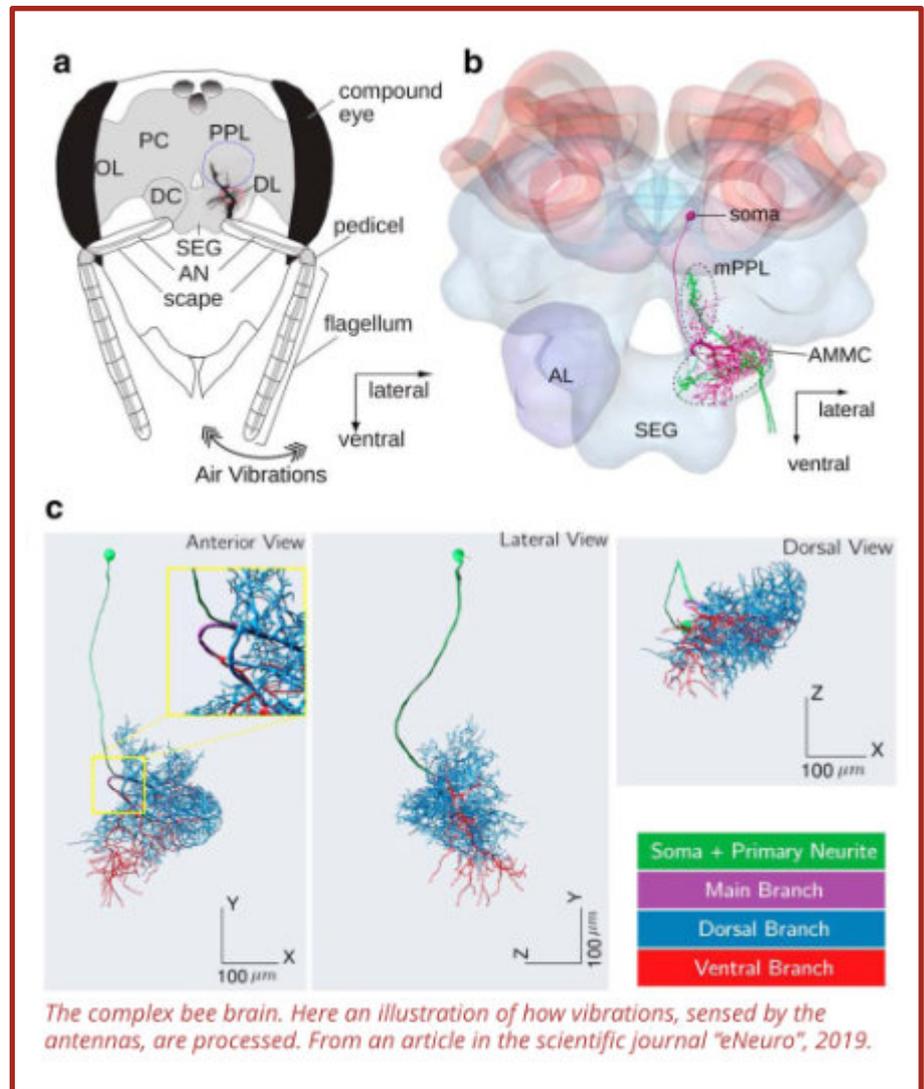


commented on a passage that  
said that bumblebees seemed to  
enjoy a game similar to football, that  
is rolling a ball of cotton around.  
Originally they did this to get to a  
reward of sugar syrup, but the  
scientists noticed that the bees  
continued to kick the football while  
ignoring the reward – so seemingly  
just for fun. This caught my attention.

I later then saw that the book was  
also reviewed on the blog site "[The Beelistener](#)" by Ann Chilcott (July 2022), and I decided I had to get the book myself. Ann Chilcott warns that the book is a bit "academic", but that didn't put me off much. And it is a bit academic/scientific, but still filled with amazing insights in the life of bees that any beekeeper will enjoy learning about.

Some stray findings: Bees can recognise a human face (I knew that). Bees are warm blooded and seek out warm nectar when needed to warm up – like having a cup of hot tea when feeling cold (didn't know that). There is a quote from Darwin's research where he noted that bees sometimes copy the behaviour of "Humble bees" (didn't know that). I smiled when I read how Darwin spelled bumble bees, since the Swedish word is "Humlor", much closer to the word Darwin used. And "hum" is probably chosen because of how they sound when they fly.

On swarming, Chittka makes a reference to the quite "eccentric" beekeeper Maurice Maeterlinc (awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911). Among his books is *The Life of the Bee* (1901), and I found a free version in [the Internet Archive](#), as an ePub-book – this book is lovely but has to be reviewed another time!



A lovely story is told about Baron August Sittich Eugen Heinrich von Berlepsch (1815-1877), who follows a swarm to a pear tree! He noticed a swarm developing in his garden and ordered two horses to be saddled and ready for when the swarm took off. At first he could follow at a trot, but soon he was off in full gallop and managed to stay with the swarm for four miles, when it finally settled in a neighbour's garden in a pear tree. That must have been a quite wild cross country ride!

Chittka then spends a lot of time to explain the complex nature of the bee brain, starting with the findings by the American scientist Frederick Kenyon. He performed ground-breaking research at a young age, and managed to map the cells and neurons in the bee brain, already in 1896. Unfortunately he developed a mental disease and had to be placed in a mental hospital in 1899, and never left it. Later, the same type of neurons were discovered in other

insects and were from then on called *Kenyon cells*.

Somewhere amongst all these scientific descriptions Chittka stops himself and comes to a somewhat surprising conclusion. He says "...the big mystery about bee brains and their cognition is not 'how can animals with such small brains as bees do so many clever things?' – but the opposite: 'why does any animal need as large a brain as the bee's?'"

Other findings are that bees have individuality (I think I knew that). Some are more clever than others. The big question is if they have Consciousness. It's clear that Lars Chittka thinks that they have. Not the same as humans, and as Chittka admits – he can't prove it for sure, but larger brained vertebrates, including bees, most likely have a kind of consciousness, and can feel pain and anxiety.

I learned so much from this book, and found it well worth the time it took me to read it.



# HWBKA Microscopy Day

By Paul Lindström

In early March we had a first trial session of a Microscopy Day, arranged by HWBKA. The ambition is to train a group of members in microscopy so they can act as lecturers for any future sessions.

At this event we had the excellent guide to microscopy from Bucks County BKA Sean Stephenson, assisted by Bob Curtis from HWBKA and BLBKA. Steve had brought 26 microscopes to Five Ashes Village Hall where the session was held. We were 12 pupils in all, and all of had two microscopes to our disposal. One stereo microscope for dissection analysis, and one high resolution microscope for pollen and disease analysis.

Some of us had previous experience in microscopy, but I think we all learned a lot on this day (I certainly did).

## Setting up the microscope

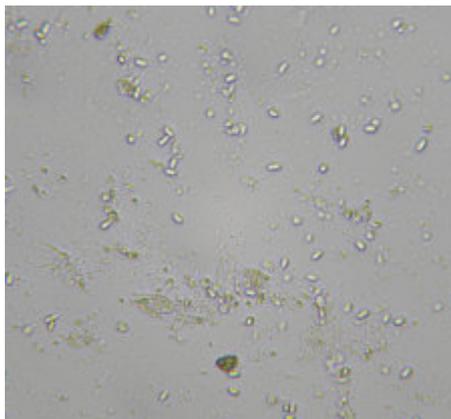
We started with the lower resolution stereomicroscope, suitable for dissections. This has a maximum resolution/enlargement of 40X. We started to look for Tracheal mites, also known as Acarine. They can cause Acarapisosis, an infestation of the breathing tubes (trachea) of the adult bee. In many cases bees cluster in front of the hive, appearing confused and disorientated, unable to return to the hive. Luckily we didn't see any signs of Acarine in our samples.

We then learned how to attach a bee to a blob of wax in order to do a more elaborate dissection. We looked inside the abdomen of a bee, to try and identify the parts of the alimentary system – crop, proventriculus, ventriculus, rectum and the Malpighian tubules. We also looked at the poison sac and gland, and the actual stinger. A bit gory, but also fascinating.

## Zooming in

We then started to use the microscope with ten times higher enlargement, 400X. The first exercise was to look for Nosema. Sean had brought some samples which contained traces of Nosema apis. And

sure enough – there they were, looking like tiny grains of rice. From Wikipedia: “Nosema apis is a microsporidian, a small, unicellular parasite recently reclassified as a fungus that mainly affects honey bees. It causes nosemosis, also called



*Nosema apis, as seen under 400X enlargement.*

Image taken by attaching a Canon EOS 750D digital SLR camera with an adaptor for the microscope.

nosema, which is the most common and the most widespread of all adult honey bee diseases.

In order to take pictures of what you see in the eye piece, you can simply place the lens of your smartphone where you look down into the microscope, and get a reasonable picture. But better is to have a digital camera of kind, replacing the eyepiece and showing the image on a computer. In my case I have an adaptor for my Canon digital camera, and can make a “live shoot” of what is shown. If you want you can also connect a video projector to your computer, and show your screen to the other people in the room. Sean



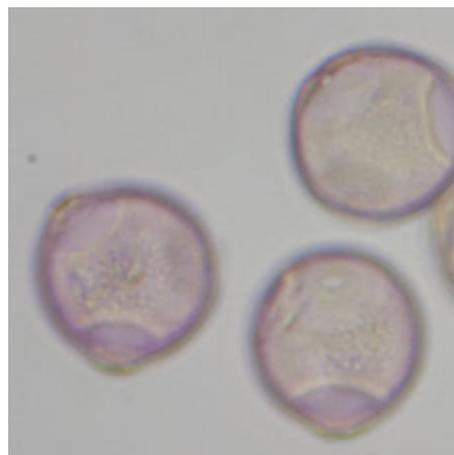
*Concentrating pupils at the first HWBKA Microscopy Day. Sean Stephenson (in white lab coat) helped us through the different stages of the lesson.*

Photo by Bob Curtis

did that for us, to show what he looked at in his microscope.

## Pollen

We then moved on to look at different types of pollen. We again used the microscope with up to 400X enlargement, since pollen can be almost as small as fungi spores and virus cells. We started to look at a Hazel pollen, since this is used as a reference when it comes to size for other types of pollen. Hazel pollen grains are 20-25  $\mu\text{m}$  (micrometer) across one axis, and 26-28  $\mu\text{m}$  in the other. There are different shapes of pollen. Hazel is described as “isopolar, suboblate to oblate or oblate-spheroidal and contains 3 pores”. Yes, when you start to dig down deeper there is a lot to learn about pollen.



*Hazel pollen, 25  $\mu\text{m}$ .*

Image by Jo Fuller, in the lesson.

We will buy a couple of microscopes for HWBKA, and also borrow scopes from SBKA, and plan for more Microscopy Days in the near future. We'll come back with dates. 

## Event – Wraps and Set Honey



*Helen Hadley showing participants how to make beeswax wraps.*



*Malcolm putting honey that has been creamed into jars.*



*And the end result – some very pretty ecological and sustainable wraps.*



# Summary of last HWBKA committee meeting

HWBKA is applying for a grant “to be used in educational efforts”. We decided to apply, mentioning that we plan to buy a couple of microscopes as well as a digital camera that can be attached to them. We will then arrange microscopy courses using our own microscope as well as microscopes borrowed from SBKA and members in HWBKA who are willing to lend HWBKA their microscopes.

We need to engage more members in the running of HWBKA. For the moment it's a small group that do most of the work. One suggestion is to ask each member to sign up for at least two hours of work for the association per year. At the AGM Steve Davis, former assistant apiary manager, tried to circulate a list for volunteers to help especially at the “Slab Castle” apiary, but didn't get

many people to sign up. We will try to present a workable solution for this.

We will investigate if it is possible to place a compost loo at the Horsted Green Park apiary. At the moment there is no toilet available, and that doesn't work in the long run.

Peter Coxon takes on the task of Asian Hornet Action Team (AHAT) coordinator for now, on top of being Apiary Manager for Horsted Green Park apiary. We decided to maximise the number of hives per apiary to be about 10-12.

The finances continues to be strong – about £23,714.59 in the bank.

There are now (Feb 2023) 184 members. We will offer to arrange BKA exams in the summer.

We need to have a card payment function, to sell products at fairs and bee markets.

The “Calm Queen Project” will continue, and Helen Hadley, Peter Coxon and Malcolm Wilkie are in the sub committee for this. The site will be at the Horsted Green park apiary.

We plan to have a “Taster Beekeeping Day” this year, even if we don't offer any course for beginners.

We will participate in the SBKA “Bee Market” Sat 20 May in Uckfield.

It was discussed if HWBKA should buy honey jars in bulk on behalf of members, but we decided not to pursue that.

The HWBKA Honey Show and AGM will be on 19 November 2023.

***The next HWBKA Committee meeting will be on 26 April*** – you are welcome to suggest topics we should discuss and give feedback. Just send an email to our secretary Holly Caetano Alves de Castro on: [the.hwbka+secretary@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+secretary@gmail.com) 

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## SBKA activities – a summary

The SBKA held its AGM on 4 March, and here is a brief summary of what transpired.

The HWBKA is a division of the Sussex Beekeepers' Association (SBKA). The other divisions are Hastings & Rother, Eastbourne, Brighton & Lewes and East Grinstead BKA.

The main business of the AGM is to hear reports from the officers of the association, plus the divisional reports, conduct the elections, drink some tea and listen to an interesting talk.

The existing committee comprised Jonathan Coote (President), Peter Coxon (Chair), Jean Piper (Hon. Sec) and Harold Clout (Hon. Treasurer)

The HWBKA was represented by Malcolm Wilkie (Chair), Lesley Francis, Fiona Henniker, Colin Small and Sue Taylor also attended via Zoom.

I was at pains to point out that my main aspiration had been to increase the relevance of SBKA for members. To some extent we are the victims of our own success in that the divisions have grown tremendously ... by a factor of 3-4 in the case of HWBKA since I took up beekeeping, which

means the divisional committees are all extremely busy with their own affairs, putting on full programs of activities, etc., and consequently with less time for SBKA activities. We are now sharing more talks and events, which are an important resource for the members, and it is proving increasingly popular.

The SBKA website is now regularly updated and being able to meet in person again has been a welcome improvement for the committee.

Our finances could be healthier given the huge amount of work required to put on some events such as the Bee Market. This is no reflection on past committees but needed to be addressed if we, the SBKA, are to have more relevance by providing more to the divisions. So, the capitation will be increased from 50p by 50p per head, the first increase for 26 years, and will help to increase the bank balance.

A lot of work has already been put into the 2023 Bee Market. This year it will be held at a new venue - Uckfield College. Entrance charge will also be increased from £1.00 to £2.00. Wonderful new posters have been produced by Simon – attached later.

The new venue has two large lecture theatres, a splendid refectory, a large outdoor terrace, good wi-fi, and mobile phone coverage, essential for the traders, plus lots of parking.

The 2023 Bee Market invited talk “From Buckfast to Buckingham Palace” is to be given in person by Richard Rickitt editor of BeeCraft Magazine.

In the elections, the existing committee were all willing to stand again and being unchallenged were duly elected with the exception of Norman Dickinson who is standing down from the SBKA and the National Honey Show Committee due to ill health. We expressed our appreciation for the huge contribution Norman has provided over the years and in recognition of his sterling service presented him with the beautiful Honey Bees book by Jurgen Tautz.

The talk ‘Planting for Pollinators’ by David Robinson was endlessly fascinating. Malcom was in 7th heaven. One time owner of Suttons Seeds, he now owns National Bee Supplies which he is converting to become carbon neutral. 

Come and learn all about the fascinating world of bees at the

*Sussex Beekeepers' Association*

# *Bee Market*

SATURDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2023 - 10 AM TO 4.30 PM

*Uckfield College*

Downsview Crescent, Uckfield TN22 3DJ

**EVERYONE WELCOME - ADMISSION £2**

Bees, plants and honey on sale

A talk on honey bees:

*'From Buckfast to Buckingham Palace'*

Interactive Children's Bee Workshop

Refreshments and snacks available

Live bee demonstration

Equipment auction

Gardening ideas

Trade stands

Workshops

And much more!



<https://sussexbeeorguk.wordpress.com/sbka-events/>

# Good reads

By Paul Lindström

*Here follows some interesting articles I've read of late that I thought I should share.*

The February blog by Ann Chilcott in [The Beelistener](#), headline "Communication in a Colony: Cues and Signals" was very interesting. Since I was reading Lars Chittka's book *The Mind of a Bee* in parallel, this article complemented this very well.

Honey bees have at least 21 known signals. These include the worker-produced Nasonov pheromone which functions to attract nestmates, and the queen-produced mandibular gland pheromone (QMP) which

indicates the presence of a queen. Circulating QMP helps maintain colony cohesion by suppressing the building of queen cells.

Then there are mechanical signals, for example the well know waggle- and tremble dances. But also the shaking signal, buzz run, grooming invitation, antennation signal and worker piping. There are two forms of worker piping, wings-together and wings-apart. We know that the message of the wings-together is "warm up your flight muscles". Queen piping, indicating the presence of a queen, is the only known queen-produced mechanical signal (and also

a similar sounds, the "quacking" and "tooting" – editorial note).

Cues are information variables perceived by a bee that have not been shaped by natural selection to intentionally impart information; instead, a cue conveys information incidentally. An example of a chemical cue is the floral odour on a waggle dancer. It incidentally indicates the type of flower visited by the dancing bee.

It well worth reading this article in it's whole, since Chilcott list all the known signals and cues. Just click on the link at the beginning.



## Systematic analysis off the root cause of colony losses

Dylan Gussman from Hampshire BKA has written an excellent article in the March issue of [BeeCraft](#) called "Colony post-mortem".

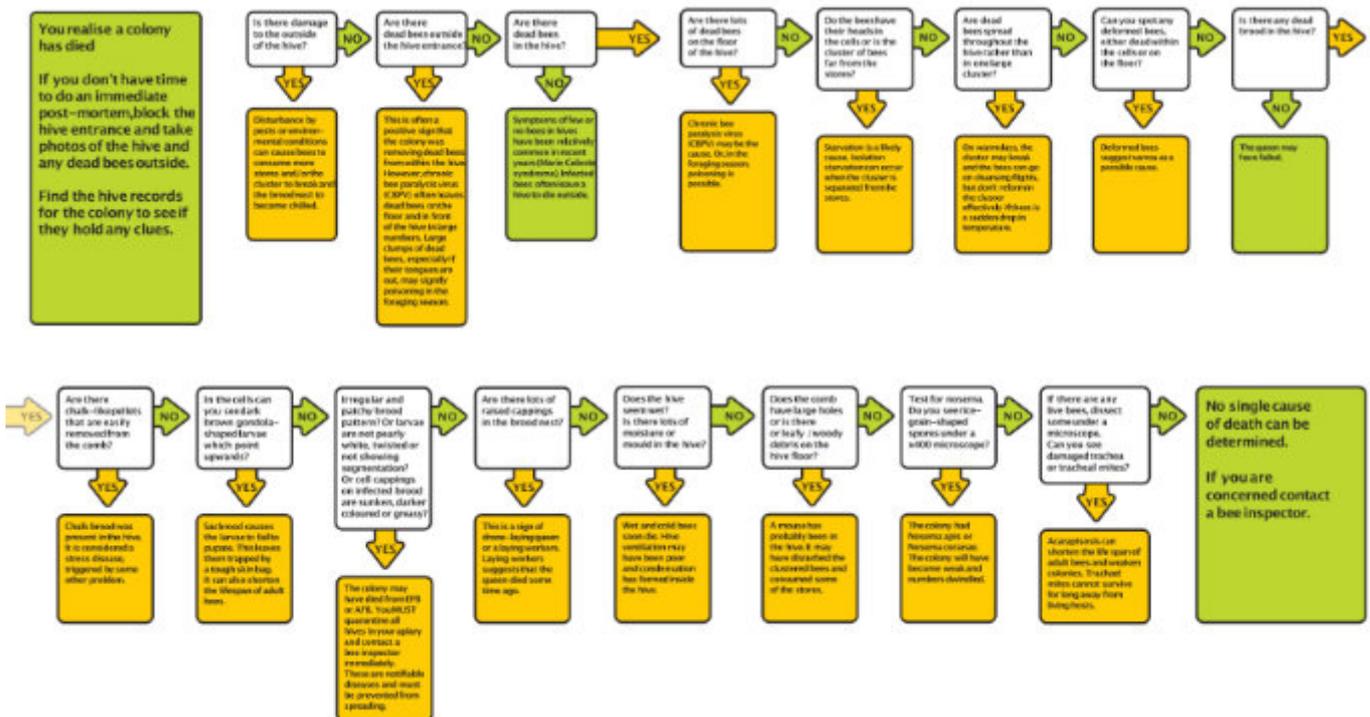
He describes the sadness we all feel if and when we open a hive that was full of buzzing bees the year before, but now is completely quiet. But he does more than mourn – he decided to conduct a systematic autopsy, a post-mortem of the colony.

It's of course best if you can do this straight away, since leaving the deceased colony for a while may lead to changes within the hive that makes it harder to determine the cause of death. Gussman suggests you work from the outside of the hive inwards. You should also go through your hive records to try and find a clue to why things started to go wrong with the colony. Having another beekeeper to

talk through your thought process is another tip from Gussman.

I'm a strong believer in making flow charts, and this is a good example of a very useful one.

Members of HWBKA can get discount on subscriptions to the BeeCraft magazine. Contact our membership secretary Peter Halford if you are interested in this, email: [the.hwbka+membership@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+membership@gmail.com)



*This flowchart is kindly provided by BeeCraft, from the March 2023 issue of the BeeCraft magazine. It is provided to subscribers of BeeCraft as a high resolution PDF. It's reproduced her in low resolution only for copyright reasons, but you get an idea of how systematically Dylan Gussman goes about in his analysis of a colony loss.*

## Dates for your calendar

*National Dandelion Day* – April 5  
*World Microscopy Day* – 13th April  
*BBKA Spring Convention* – 21st - 23rd,  
April – book via the website  
*World Bee Day* – 20th May  
*Bees Needs Week* – 10th-16th July  
*Asian Hornet Week* – 4th-10th  
September  
*National Honey Day* – 21st October

### **BBKA Spring Convention update**

Harper Adams University April 21-23  
Book by 11th April for in-advance three-day and single-day wristband ticket rates. Thereafter, tickets & £6 Sat 22nd Trade Show only tickets are available at the Convention at 'On-the-day' prices. Several workshops & seminars are already booked up, so

ten extra have been opened and some have places still available. Associations teaching Beginners' Courses could perhaps recommend the workshop – "Build your own hive". Something that many beginners struggle with. The cost (£205) may seem a lot but is a bargain for a complete cedar hive correctly assembled! There is no shortage of tickets to the Convention and its lecture programme – a choice of 25 topics, everything from cutting-edge science to basic practical beekeeping. We look forward to meeting you. For full details please see <https://www.bbka.org.uk/planning-your-bbka-spring-convention>

### **Additional event weeks of note**

Pollinator Week 19th – 25th June  
[Solitarybeeweek.com](http://Solitarybeeweek.com) – 3rd - 9th July

### **The West Sussex Beekeepers' Association**

is again organising a Bee Market and Auction for the benefit of its members and non-members. The event will again take place at Chichester College's Brinsbury Campus in Pulborough, West Sussex on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Auction details, Guidance Notes and Entry Form are available to download from the WSBKA website -

[www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html](http://www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html).



# BOOK NOW!



## Spring 2023 Convention

Friday 21 - Saturday 22 – Sunday 23 April 2023

Harper Adams University, Shropshire, TF10 8NB

Lectures, Workshops and Seminars covering a wide range of practical and scientific topics, directed at all levels of experience, presented by leading experts

### **Bumper Trade Show Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Speakers and Tutors include:** Randy Oliver (virtually), Samuel Ramsey (virtually), Marin Anastasov, Martin Bencsik, Shirley & Richard Bond, Giles Budge, Stephen Case-Green, Julie Coleman, Michael Collier, Lynfa Davies, Stephen Fleming, Mike Garratt, Fani Hatjina, John Hendrie, Luke & Suzie Hutchinson, Lynne Ingram, Angela Kirk, Stephen Martin, Jane Medwell, Jenny Morgan, Chris Park, Tom Pope, Sara Robb, Anne Rowberry, Debbie Smith, Victoria Soroker, Sean Stephenson, Oliver St.John, Jane Stout, Jim & Val Vivian-Griffiths, Alison Wakeman and more.....

For further information, **and to book** from 30<sup>th</sup> January  
see the Spring Convention pages of [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)

**Refresher Session – Swarm control**

April 1 (Sat) 11:00 am - 2:00 pm  
 Swarm control session (including making up a nuc and doing a split without finding the queen)  
 Place: Horsted Green Park apiary  
 Please register on our web site.

**Refresher Session – Setting up a colony for Queen rearing**

April 15 (Sat) 11:00 am - 2:00 pm  
 Setting up a colony for Queen rearing  
 Saturday 15th April - 11am-2pm at  
 Place: Horsted Green Park apiary  
[Please register on our web site.](#)

**Bee Banter – Rose and Crown, Mayfield**

April 26 (Wed) 7:30 pm - 10:00 pm  
 Place: Rose and Crown, Fletching Street TN20 6TE Mayfield. No need to book; just come along and chat.

**Refresher Session – Use of mini mating hives**

May 5 Fri 11:00 am - 2:00 pm  
 Place: Horsted Green Park Apiary  
[Please register on our web site.](#)

**Bee Banter – Blue Anchor, Crowborough**

May 31 Wed 7:30 pm - 10:00 pm  
 Place: Blue Anchor, Crowborough Beacon Road, Crowborough

No need to book; just come along and chat.

**Refresher Session – Introducing a mated Queen to a nuc**

June 10 Sat 11:00 am - 1:00 pm  
 Place: Horsted Green Park Apiary  
 Introducing a mated Queen to a nuc  
[Please register on our web site.](#)

**BBKA “Basic Assessment” exam**

June 27 Tue  
 Place: Horsted Green Park Apiary  
 If interested and you have not already applied click [<here>](#). This will also give you more info and links to more resources.

**Bee Banter – Rose and Crown, Mayfield**

June 28 Wed 7:30 pm - 10:00 pm  
 Place: Rose & Crown, Mayfield Fletching Street TN20 6TE, Mayfield  
 No need to book; just come along and chat.

**Refresher Session – Identifying a queenless colony**

July 1 Sat 10:00 am - 12:00 pm  
 Venue to be confirmed.  
[Please register on our web site.](#)

**Refresher Session – Varroa control options**

July 22 Sat 11:00 am - 12:30 pm

Place: Slab Castle Apiary Cherry Garden Farm, Groombridge, Kent  
[Please register at our web site.](#)

**Bee Banter – Blue Anchor, Crowborough**

July 26 Wed 7:30 pm - 10:00 pm  
 Place: Blue Anchor, Crowborough Beacon Road, Crowborough  
 No need to book; just come along and chat.

**Summer BBQ**

August 20 Sun 12:00 pm  
 Place: Black Shed Studios Sunnyview, Nursery Lane, Fairwarp, East Sussex  
 This is at Sandy Infield's place. There will be a charge for food – payable in advance. Bring your own drink.  
 Please register by clicking [<< here >>](#)

**Bee Banter – Rose and Crown, Mayfield**

August 30 Wed 7:30 pm - 10:00 pm  
 Place: Rose & Crown, Mayfield Fletching Street TN20 6TE, Mayfield  
 No need to book; just come along and chat.

*More and later events is listed [on our web site](#), and will also be listed in the July issue of *The Apiarist*.*

**HWBKA Committee 2022-2023**

President: Keith Obbard (the.hwbka+president@gmail.com)

Chairman: Malcolm Wilkie (the.hwbka+chair@gmail.com)

Honorary Secretary: Holly Caetano Alves de Castro (the.hwbka+secretary@gmail.com)

Honorary Treasurer: Phil Edwards (the.hwbka+treasurer@gmail.com)

Magazine Editor and Vice Chairman: Paul Lindström (the.hwbka+apiarist@gmail.com)

Apiary Manager (Slab Castle): Keith Obbard

Apiary Manager (Horsted): Peter Coxon

Events Secretary: Sandy Infield (the.hwbka+events@gmail.com)

Membership Secretary: Peter Halford (the.hwbka+membership@gmail.com)

Training & Education Manager: Malcolm Wilkie (the.hwbka+training@gmail.com)

AHAT Coordinator: Peter Coxon (the.hwbka+ahat@gmail.com)

Lecture Coordinator: Helen Chivers (the.hwbka+lecturecoordinator@gmail.com)

Acting web master: Peter Coxon (the.hwbka+webmaster@gmail.com)

**Other useful contacts – National Bee Unit inspectors:**

Regional Bee Inspector: Dan Etherington (Mobile: 07979 11 93 76 Email: daniel.etheridge@apha.gov.uk)

Seasonal Bee Inspector: Diane Steele (Mobile: 07775 11 94 52 Email: diane.steele@apha.gov.uk)

For more Seasonal Bee Inspectors see the National Bee Unit [web site](#).

**This is an article recycled from the April 2020 issue of The Apiarist because of recent discussions on the WhatsApp group**



*Peter Coxon has tried a method of cleaning hive components suggested to him by Steve Davies.*

Take

1. One old 50-gallon oil drum and cut approximately in half (What else are you going to do with one of these things ... except maybe make a barbeque?) – Ensure all traces of the previous contents are removed.
  2. 10-15 gallons of water
  3. 4-6kg of washing soda
  4. Enough broken branches from the garden after the winter storms to light a small fire
  5. Add to this, hive frames, Queen excluders, crown boards, hive tools and whatever else takes your fancy.
  6. Boil these for 3-5 mins or so, or until tender.
  7. Season with a modicum of elbow grease, applied via the medium of a scrubbing brush
- ... and hey presto, not a new delicacy from Jamie Oliver, but lots of lovely clean equipment in record breaking time!



*Everything gets a nice even tan from a thin layer of propolis evenly distributed all over the surfaces – perhaps beneficial for the bees?!*

I normally have all my equipment cleaned in the autumn and ready for the new beekeeping season, but not this year ... being retired I just don't seem to have the time anymore.

Normally, I would have cleaned everything the 'traditional way', scraping, scratching and torching, which is OK for small quantities, if a bit tedious, and requiring a great deal more of that elbow grease.

However, our genius Apiary Manager Steve Davies introduced me to an alternative methodology last summer involving cleaning the frames using hot washing soda solution ... he even cleaned a few frames for me. He had in turn been introduced to this by Michael Myszyn, and Michael by his father before him etc.

I had been aware of this method previously, but always thought it a bit of a palaver ... until Steve showed me the light and how well it worked.

I had quite a lot of equipment to clean last week when the rain finally stopped for a while, so I thought "don't be so unadventurous Coxon ... give it a go" ... and 2hrs later I had 11 Queen excluders, 6 crown boards and 18 frames all cleaned. I reckon the 'traditional way' would have taken twice as long at least.

But what's most impressive about this method is just how clean you can get everything, especially the Queen excluders, which are always devilishly tricky little blighters to clean... all those little crevices and cracks where the baddies can hide out.

It even appears as though they all have a nice even tan from a thin layer of propolis now evenly distributed from the 'soup' all over the surfaces. One could imagine that might be beneficial for the bees ... or am I drifting off into the land of optimistic fantasy here?

Steve is somewhat more professional than I am and has invested in a gas ring and bought one of those outrageously expensive metal bins to use as his boiler. (Obviously embarrassed about all his extravagance, (when he now sees it in black and white) he tells me he has found that an old water tank is large enough to fit supers and brood frames in, even 14x12.)

Me, I'm too tight... but definitely a complete convert to the Davies/ Myszyn methodology... although it must be said the Coxon adaptation to the D-M protocol is more economical, carbon neutral, it only took me an hour or two to cut the drum in half and I didn't get burnt too badly trying to light a fire under an old oil drum. I must admit the idea of an old rectangular metal cold-water storage tank as an upgrade and that would take a 14x12 brood box has me little excited .... anyone got one? Am I mad? ... definitely but happy in my own little way.

*Peter Coxon*



*Perhaps a more professional take is to invest in a gas ring and one of those outrageously expensive metal bins – at least that is what Steve has done.*