

West Wilts BKA News

News, the planned activities and some advice for members of West Wiltshire Beekeepers Association



What a difference a month makes!

I don't believe that anyone could imagine a few months ago that West Wiltshire Beekeepers' Association would be in the state we are now! Don't get me wrong, I think we are in a great state. You will have noted from the 'STOP PRESS' notice on last month's newsletter that we had a last-minute approval of Wiltshire BKA being converted to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and the new apiary up and running due to the fantastic efforts of the apiary team. Much of this has really come to fruition over the last month (and a bit), so well done to all involved. Add to this the improvement in the weather and things are a whole lot brighter!

This month's newsletter is somewhat slimmed down in respect to the serious stuff...so much so I was considering that we didn't justify a 'Need to Know' Section, which is where I put the serious activities that is spending your money, but we have a lecture that comes into that category so this section survives another month. Otherwise, it is some reports, some fun activities and some advice.

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This is your 'go to' section that will describe the things that you need to know about (because it is the stuff that spends your money)! It also provides information on events or services exclusively provided by WWBKA.

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Diary of events

June 2022

Royal Bath and West Show – 2nd-4th June; nr Shepton Mallet

West Wilts BKA Lecture – 16th (Thursday), 7.30 pm. Trisha Marlow, A Comparison Between Beekeeping Practice in U.K. and Africa.

September 2022

Wilts BKA Honey Bee Health Day – 3rd September (Location to Be Confirmed)

October 2022

Wiltshire Bee and Honey Day – 8th October (Saturday); Corn Exchange, Devizes

National Honey Show – 27th-29th October; Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher

Need to know

Lectures

We have one lecture in the pipeline during June (a Zoom link will be sent to members):

16th June: A Comparison Between Beekeeping Practice in U.K. and Africa.

This presentation will be given on behalf of Bees Abroad which is a charity to promote locally appropriate beekeeping to enable participants to generate income to enhance their livelihoods, alleviate poverty and improve their quality of life. It does a lot of great work in Africa training beekeepers so that they can make a living from their craft.

Good to know

Royal Bath and West Show 2022

The Royal Bath and West Show is upon us a couple of days after this newsletter comes out and if you are coming to steward or help in the Bees and Honey Tent, we'll see you there. If you are just coming as a day visitor, please drop in to the Bees and Honey Tent to see a friendly face. It has been a great day out for many years and we hope that this year will be no change in the new format.

An abandoned hive

West Wilts BKA was offered an abandoned hive in May. It had been left by a beekeeper some years ago, but was still reported to have bees living inside. Our President was duly dispatched to inspect the hive and to see what was worth salvaging. He trekked over to see what he could find and to see if the hive could be signed over to the branch (he didn't want to take it as we were aware of a couple of cases of apparently abandoned hives being 'given' away when they were actually well managed and the beekeeper wasn't too impressed to find their hives missing!). Our President found the hive in some undergrowth (see photo) and duly approached to see what he could find.



The hive was a 14"x12" National with a Deep Roof.



On inspection there were bees entering the hive, but this wasn't a huge number, so our President opened the hive and inspected its contents. The hive did indeed seem to be abandoned and it had the remnants of a couple of incomplete wasps' nests (see photo) and the visiting bees were robbing whatever they could. The roof was full of wild comb (see photo) and there were a few stores inside. There was some undrawn foundation as well as some older brood comb (mainly in the roof).

Given that he couldn't determine what the original bees had died from and the robbing bees could be from any source he decided that this had the potential to be a reservoir for disease. He therefore suggested that the hive is destroyed to prevent any further cross-contamination and decided this was not suitable for further use.

There used to be a BBKA leaflet on abandoned hives, but this seems to have been discontinued. Our advice would be that if you believe a hive is abandoned, try to contact the landowner to see if they know the state of the colony and possibly leave a note in the hive (protected from the bees) to try to contact the beekeeper. Such hives can become reservoirs for disease and can become a nuisance for local beekeepers and the general public, so are best not left alone for long.

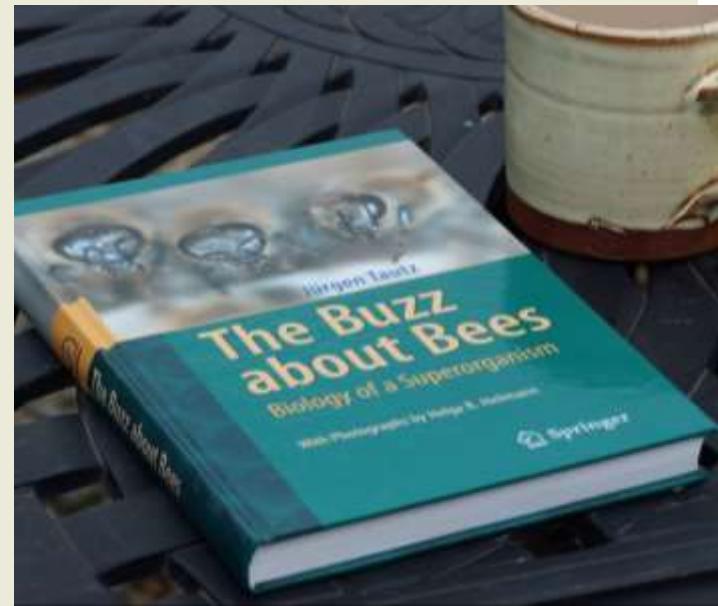


From the library

The Buzz about Bees – Jurgen Tautz

This is one of those books that is really informative and has the chance of changing your thinking about the colony of the honey bee. The author draws on relatively recent research, much of which was undertaken at his institution and extends the thinking of a honey bee colony from being a superorganism to compare it with a mammal. Whilst this may seem a rather great step his reasoning is remarkably logical:

- The honey bee colony has a low reproduction rate.
- The colony produces a milk to feed young.
- The colony operates at a temperature of about 35 degrees C, and
- The colony (as a whole) faces similar challenges to many mammals (predation, the need to forage, combatting the elements, etc.).



The author continues to discuss the way in which the colony addresses the challenges it faces.

The book provides a thorough and accessible grounding in the biology, social interaction, communication, behaviour and foraging of the bee. Accompanied with many beautiful photographs to illustrate the text, this is one of those books that has the ability to give a step-change in the reader's understanding of the bee.

Tautz's book is one of the books in the branch library which is available from loan. If you wish to borrow a book from the library, please check with the librarian.

And finally... 'The Beekeeper'

A new film with everyone's favourite beekeeper - Jason Statham

The internet is 'buzzing' about the casting of a movie which hopes to start filming later this year. The plot is being kept under close wraps but it is set to star Jason Statham (of 'The Fast and Furious' fame and others...apparently! (Ed.)). It is said to be:

"a lightning-paced thriller that will follow an unconventional story with universal themes, deeply steeped in the mythology of Beekeeping."

I don't think I have ever associated such a sentence with beekeeping, but since the plot is shrouded in mystery we can start with the assumption that the 'unconventional story with universal themes' must tread into the controversial territory of non-British Standard hives, hive tool use or treatment free beekeeping.

However, deeper research has revealed one website may have let more slip than they should because they describe '*the expectation that this will be a high-octane movie*'...so that can only mean the 'universal theme' and 'mythology' of getting the smoker lit and keeping it going. Given that the fumes from high-octane fuels are typically hazardous to bees and they burn at a high temperature

I can only imagine that they must have a heat exchanger and particulate strippers on the smoker or I can see local BKAs having to correct another piece of poor advice relating to beekeeping!

It does make you wonder though...there is a human element to this film, so next time you are at the apiary have a look around and decide just who of your branch members looks like their bee suit has that extra tailoring so they are ready to spring from mild-mannered beekeeper to an action-hero.

I also understand that the script has been purchased for a seven-figure sum, so as soon as this edition is out, I will be on the phone to Hollywood to see if anyone is after the plot behind the West Wilts BKA Newsletter!

We won't know the full extent of the content until the film is released next year so until then we'll just have to guess.

Q & A

At the apiary session, a lot of questions were asked by those that had been on the Introduction to Beekeeping Course. Some of which are not that intuitive, so we have selected some of them to answer to a wider audience here:

What should I keep in my hive records?

That is a great question because it really depends upon what you want out of your records. The simplest response to that "it is best to record what you saw during one inspection to tell you how to plan the next inspection, but it is also an essential way of monitoring the performance of each colony". This means you can work out which hives you want to work on, which you want to watch and which you want to breed from.

There are a number of aspects that may be regarded as essential in a hive record, such as whether the colony is queen-right (queen seen, eggs seen, etc.), the presence of queen cells, the size of brood, the amount of stores, health of the colony, varroa severity, temper, feed given and the weather during the inspection. In addition to these there may be colony attributes that you want to identify if you want to breed your bees. These can include the addition of supers, nervousness of the bees (running all over the comb), fecundity, the use of propolis and the hive cleanliness.

The BBKA have a specimen record sheet on their website at <https://www.bbka.org.uk/bbka-hive-keeping-record-system>. Whilst a variety of recording systems exist it is best to record the information in a simple format. There is little point in using a scale that is too fine (such as a ten-point or even a hundred-point scale); if it is possible to discriminate between a temper of 2/10 or 3/10, then you are doing well...but I would suggest that the recorder is losing perspective in that the temper is low and needs dealing with!

A five-point scale that relates to good, above average, average, below average and poor is widely recommended...quite whether this a score of 5 to 1, 2 to -2 or A to E is up to you (although I would question the psychology of giving some nasty bees a score of one 'gold star' in the hope they aim for five 'gold stars'...they just don't respond to encouragement like that!).

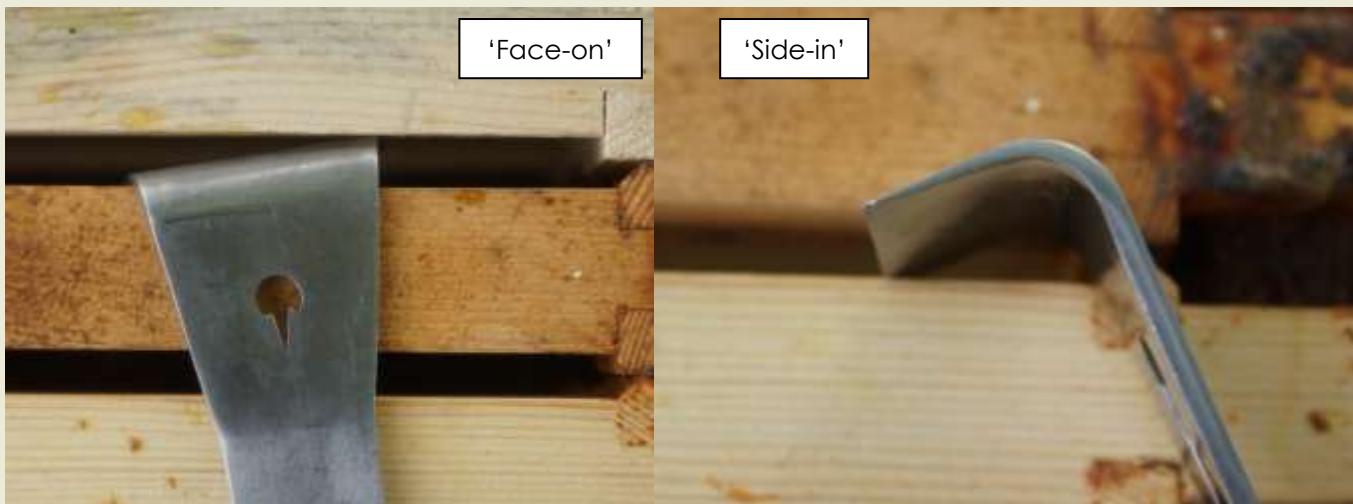
Record keeping is an essential way of monitoring your progress and when you do come to compare colonies at the end of the year, only compare within a single apiary – do not try to compare across apiaries because there are too many variables. Only through keeping records can you see whether you are meeting your aims in improving your stock over the years.

When is the right time to re-queen my hive?

The answer is really it depends on the reason you are requeening. If you are requeening because the queen is failing or the colony is aggressive, then the answer is "as soon as possible". If you are requeening because you want a young queen going into winter, then later in the year is acceptable, but you want to allow enough time for her to lay a good brood of winter bees. It also depends on the source of your new queen if you don't know anything about her temperament, or how well mated she is, it is a good idea to get her going in a nuc to monitor her. Then requeen the old colony...and of course if the old queen is just a 'bit older than you would like', then you can get her going in a nuc and try to over-winter her. The worst outcomes are you have a dirty nuc with dead bees, you have a drone laying queen or laying workers...the best outcome is you have a spare queen to tide you over if you have any other colony problems.

Why do you lever the frames with your hive tool side into the frames?

The simple answer is that this is the way that is often taught, but I appreciate that many people use the hive tool 'face on'. If you are not sure what I mean, please have a look at the images below. I mean, please have a look at the images below.



Here is my reasoning:

1. Using the tool 'side in' means that the lever forcing the frames apart is shorter than using the tool 'face on'. This provides greater force and more control (because a given movement of the hand results in a smaller movement of the frame 'side on'). I had one colony of bees that were prolific users of propolis – I needed as much force and control as I could get because the frames would 'spring apart' each week. I also found with these that if I wasn't careful and had freed one end of the frame the second end would stick and the frame end that was free would spring open and crush any bees. I now place a hand over the top of the frame to stop this happening.
2. Using the tool 'face on' means that your hand is over the brood nest. It is therefore visible to the hive occupants and it can cause the bees to 'lift up'. Using the tool 'side in' means your hand is outside the brood box.

Of course, a J-tool provides a mix of this anyway – the tool lever is about the same length as a conventional tool 'face in' and the lever is outside the brood nest when used.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE SEND THEM IN OR ASK AT THE APIARY.

Contact us

Newsletter content

We will try to send this out as close to the 1st of the month as possible. We will have a copy date of a week before to give us time to get everything together, and we would really like to hear from you. If you want to include anything please send an email to Newsletter-WWBKA@outlook.com.

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