



The Apiarist

... High Weald Beekeepers' Newsletter

Chairman's Chatter

By Malcolm Wilkie

As your new chairman I have been asked to introduce myself. I started beekeeping about 15 years ago. Honeybees have always fascinated me as they are such very different creatures from ourselves; their world of chemical messaging has always seemed to me such an extraordinary way of leading their lives. There is still a lot that we as beekeepers do not yet understand about honeybee pheromones.

Who among us wouldn't be fascinated by a creature that can communicate accurately how to find a source of food at a distance of up to three kilometres from their home? Even with all the nuances and complications of human language we as a species cannot so accurately communicate and pinpoint a food source.

How it started

I am probably one of life's 'obsessives' and from the very first moment that Keith Obbard showed me a hive full of bees, I was just gripped. This tiny creature is not a domesticated animal and yet they do need our help if they are to successfully survive and thrive. There is a beauty about watching them as they move about on the comb busily working, making bee bread and exchanging nectar through tropholaxis. In Spring I just love it when the bees hang up in chains to make wax. So, from the outset I have always wanted to help my colonies survive.

Unlike most hobbyist beekeepers I have tried most things. My fumbleings have not always been successful but



This photo of Malcolm and Leslie is from the 2017 visit of French beekeepers to Bermondsey bees in London.

sometimes that has enabled me to learn and understand better this fascinating creature. This is why I have been keen to train others by offering a beginner's course – time spent learning this craft properly can prevent the inevitable disappointment when a colony just dwindles and dies out in the winter. And the added benefit for me has been that by helping others to learn this craft, I myself have been exposed to so many different and challenging scenarios that I too have deepened my knowledge and honed my skills.

What I have learned

What I have learned over the years is that there are often many different ways of managing bees. There are definitely a lot of wrong practices (and I have always tried to be firm with beginners about what not to do) but I have come to the conclusion that there are just two things that people need to do and then the bees will prosper. Firstly control varroa. This

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

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Publisher: Malcolm Wilkie (Chairman)

Contact: Paul Lindström (Editor),
the.hwbka+apiarist@gmail.com

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needs to start with a treatment in early August and then be followed up with a treatment of oxalic acid in December. Secondly learn to properly control swarming. And as my beginners have learned, always take out an insurance policy when controlling swarming because inevitably things will go wrong. And it is often the insurance policy that can be used to get things back on track.

This year under my chairmanship I would like members to get involved in our "Refresher Sessions". This could be helping to deliver some of these sessions or coming along to learn from these sessions. For me understanding beekeeping has been like putting pieces of a jigsaw together and it has been the High Weald Beekeeping Association that has allowed me to put those pieces together. I hope that for more of the members this year pieces of the jigsaw will suddenly slot together as they attend and help with this new program (see the box to the right). Venues will be announced later.



Improvers sessions in 2023

Wed February 15th 7.30pm
Talk on Queen rearing

Sat Feb 25th
Beeswax wraps and soft set honey

Sat March 11th 9am-5pm
Microscopy day (now fully booked)

Sat 1st April 11am-2pm
Swarm control session Horsted (including making up a nuc and doing a split without finding the queen)

Sat 15th April 11am-2pm
Setting up a colony for queen rearing

Fri 5th May 11am-2pm
Use of mini mating hives

Sat 10th June 11am-1pm

Introducing a mated Queen to a nuc

Sat 1st July 10am-12pm
Identifying a queenless colony

Sat 22nd July 11am-2pm
Varroa control options

Sat 30th September 11am-12.30pm
Preparing hives for winter

Sat 7th October 11am-1pm
Preparing honey for selling and for show entry

Sat 4th Nov 10am-4pm
Wax workshop

And also:
Sat 29th April
Bee Market Uckfield

Book review

By Paul Lindström

Grey Bees, by Andrey Kurkov.



This is the first book I've read by Kurkov, and I liked it very much. It's a slow phased but moving description of a beekeeper in the "grey zone" between Ukraine and the separatist area of Donbas at some point between 2014 and 2018, but before the second Ukrainian war of 2022. It was first published in Russian in 2018, then in English in 2020, and again a new edition in 2022 with a new introduction by the author making references to the Russian invasion in February 2022.

While beekeeping is central in the story (and being a beekeeper this was probably why I was interested in the book in the first place) Kurkov takes the opportunity to let us know a bit more about the situation in the region, and also the situation for the Crimean Tatars (since the beekeeper in the story decides to move his six hives of bees to Crimea over the summer).

My wife and I hosted an Ukrainian family for a while, and realised early on how little we knew about Ukraine. Having learned a little from them, and also from Kurkov's books, I

slowly started to understand the complexities of this horrible war.

A key event in the book is when the beekeeper Sergey setup some of his hives so that they make a "bee bed", where he can lay down and relax, and have some "bee therapy". Six hives are moved close together 3 by 3 in two rows back to back, and a thin blanket is placed on the roofs for a person to lay down on. I've never heard about this practice before, but in an interview with the author in London recently he was asked about this, if it really was done. And apparently it is a common phenomena in Ukraine. The local top politician in Donbas hears about Sergey's "bee bed" and wants to have a go on it. He is allowed to do so, and comes back several times, and pays well for the experience. After this many other beekeepers in the region copy Sergey in this. The other day I read in the "BBKA News" that other people have confirmed that this is a quite common "bee therapy" in Ukraine, so it's probably more than a funny story invented by the author.

We then follow the beekeeper on a road trip towards Crimea, where he hopes to find an old acquaintance he met at a beekeeping conference many years ago, because the war goes on and on and he fears for his bees. This is where we are introduced to the harsh conditions of the Crimean Tatars, especially from the pro-Russian part of the population, and the Russians who

occupy Crimea since the annexation in 2014.

Andrey Kurkov was actually born in Russia, in what was then called Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg). His father was stationed in Kiev as a Russian test pilot, and his mother was a doctor. Kurkov was assigned to do his military service in KGB working as a translator due to his knowledge of several foreign languages beside Russian. His first novel was published two weeks before the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991, and several of his books are about the mentality of the "Soviet Man", that is, how the Russians have been indoctrinated to think by the communist state propaganda. I've read a couple of his other books, and those have helped me better understand the Russian mentality of today.

At the interview I listened to Kurkov was also asked if it's true that Russian speaking Ukrainians are harassed in Ukraine (Kurkov still writes and publishes his books first in Russian, even in Ukraine), and he said, "absolutely not – I mainly speak Russian, and the only time I have been intimidated in Ukraine was by Russian speaking people".

Andrey Kurkov is said to be one of the most popular authors today in Ukraine, and I can strongly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn a bit more about Ukraine and Crimea.



The HWBKA AGM 27 November

The following is an extract from the minutes.

Jo Gore, outgoing Chair, welcomed the attendees and started the meeting. Peter Leswell, outgoing President, was to make an introduction to the AGM via a ZOOM link, but because of very poor bandwidth Jo Gore had to read it to us instead. Here is the text:

“Good afternoon and welcome everyone. Thank you for joining us for our AGM and Honey Show. I hope you’ve had a good beekeeping season; given the prolonged good weather this year, I imagine most of you will have ended up with strong colonies and a good honey crop.

We just need to be vigilant now over the winter – some queens continued in lay long after colonies were fed in the autumn and put to bed for winter so, unless your bees were very generously provisioned, they may run short of stores and need helping out with fondant and possibly some pollen patties, together with a nearby source of water – at least until the Willow comes into flower next spring.

As you are aware, this is the end of my 3-year term as President. It has been an honour! At the start, I was looking forward to having the opportunity to get to know the newer members, and meeting again those who were students on any of our first five years’ Beginners’ Courses, when Keith and I shared the tutoring.

Unfortunately, my term as President has coincided with the Covid pandemic which, together with my family circumstances, has prevented me from taking part in the activities of our division as I’d originally hoped, and as I feel a President should.

I have at least had the pleasure of getting to know the committee, and having attended virtually all our committee meetings over the last three years, and also seen the masses of email correspondence generated, I’d like to pay tribute here to the work of the current retiring committee – and I include the major contributions made by Steve Davies and Lorraine Patel, both of whom were members of the committee until recently, when, for

personal reasons, they each had to resign.

We’re going to hear reports from the various officers of the Division shortly. Behind the items and activities presented in their reports there lie many many hours of unseen work in planning, arranging and delivering the year’s programme, in producing our newsletter ‘The Apiarist’ and in maintaining our association apiaries at Slab Castle and Horsted Green Park.

Given that we are a voluntary organisation, I think the commitment of time and effort shown by the committee has been exceptional, and on my own behalf, and that of all our membership as a whole, I’d like to thank them sincerely for all their efforts.

Finally, I’m sorry I can’t join you later for the Honey Show, but hope I may see you at some future meeting.

My best wishes to you all – and ‘Happy beekeeping!’”

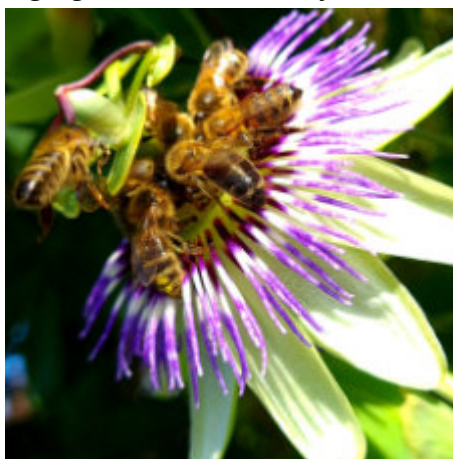
Peter Leswell, Retiring President HWBKA

Jo Gore showed us the book “Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse” by Dave Goulson, which was given to Peter Leswell together with the usual engraved hive tool as a token of our appreciation of his work and contribution for our BKAs.

After this intro the AGM started proper.

Chair’s report

Jo Gore gave her report where she highlighted some of the key facts



Rob Gorse’s winning photo of honey bees on a Passion flower.



from the season. It was a strange year – a long period of drought followed by an amazing honey crop. Several HWBKA members did well in the National Honey Show, among them Rob Gore who won a prize for his lovely photo of a bee on a Passion flower. Lesley Francis won the Lady Denman cup, Rob the Crawley cup and the Berry cup and Phil Edwards the PJ cup for mead.

Jo encouraged members to volunteer in the different tasks and activities in HWBKA, paraphrasing President Kennedy in saying “don’t just ask what the HWBKA can do for you, but also what you can do for HWBKA”.

Other reports

This is a summary from the different sections of HWBKA (for the full reports see the documents sent out before the AGM).

Hon. Secr. report (Lorraine Patel): Report produced covering the legal status of Unincorporated Associations; The Health and Safety Risk Assessments has been updated; clarified insurance provisions in relation to Taster Days and Food Safety; introduced the “BBKA



Jo Gore hand over the certificates to Phil Edwards for the BBKA Module 2 and the Basic Assessment.



Jo Gore hand over the certificate to Steve Davies for the BBKA Basic Assessment.



Jo Gore hand over the certificate to Paul Lindström for the BBKA Basic Assessment.



Jo Gore hand over the certificate to Sandy infield for the BBKA Basic Assessment.

Disclaimer letter" for training; advised on "Food Hygiene Registration" to support bulk honey sales; advised the committee on the HWBKA Constitution and possible changes necessary going forward.

Membership Secretary report (Peter Halford): The membership numbers are 231, slightly down from 247 last year.

Several HWBKA members have passed BBKA exams this year; Lorraine Patel has finished Module 7 and 8 as well as the Advanced Theory. Phil Edwards has taken the Basic Assessment and Module 2. Steve

Davies, Jo Fuller, Paul Lindström and Sandy Infield passed in the Basic Assessment.

Honorary Treasurer report (Rob Gore): The finances are still strong with a balance in the books of about £23k.

Training & Education Manager report (Malcolm Wilkie): Beginners Course – 16 started the course, 13 now have bees. The course was run as a hybrid again with in-person and zoom sessions. Thanks to all members who helped run sessions, especially Rob Gore and Pete Coxon.

We won't run a beginner's course next year, but provide "Bee buddies" for new members.

The plan for next year is to instead run "Refresher sessions".

Apiary Report – Slab Castle (Keith Obbard); All colonies survived winter, but three were lost in spring. Spare equipment and storage barn refurbished. Two beginners sessions held in April. EFB discovered in May, but the apiary declared free of infection in July. Swarms successfully attracted to 2 bait hives. Further beginner's sessions held later in year. Nine colonies ready to go through winter.

Thanks to all members who have helped out at the apiary this year, but volunteers are needed for the next season.

Apiary Report – Horsted Green Park (Peter Coxon); Despite significant winter losses, likely due to

varroa, the apiary has been built up to 13 colonies (Thanks to in part John Miller for his donation of three colonies). Horsted was used for two Beginners sessions when Slab Castle had EFB. Queen rearing took place again this year, using cell punching and then a cup kit system (Cell punching resulted in 9 queens provided to members, but the "Cup kit" was a complete failure). This year saw a bumper honey crop from Horsted. 48lb has been sold at the Bee market and at Crowfest, 180lb to Ben and Maggie Pratt with a further approximately 150lb still to sell.

Thanks to all members who have helped out at the apiary this year, but volunteers are needed for the next season.

Apiarist Report (Paul Lindström); Four editions produced this year. Feedback and/or suggestions for articles is always welcome.

Events Report (Talha Dinc); Bee Banter – Meetings have started again in person, alternating between the Blue Anchor in Crowborough and Rose & Crown in Mayfield.

Markets & Fairs; Attended Sussex Bee Market, Crowfest and other summers fayres such as Langton Green, selling honey and showing the observation hive.

Workshops; Two wax workshops held: "Potions and Lotions" and "Candle making". Thanks to Helen Hadley, Helen & David Chivers, Rob & Jo Gore.



A candle making workshop was held in November in Five Ash Down run by Helen Hadley and ably assisted by Jo and Rob Gore and Helen and David Chivers. .

The next workshop covering soap, lip gloss and wax wraps is planned for January 2023.

Lectures Report (Helen Chivers); Talks arranged so far this year include: "Food Hygiene" by Andy Pedley and "Bee Shelters" by David Evans.

Agreement reached with EBKA for sharing talks and associated costs. Other SBKA divisions willing to share talks, but not costs.


Election of officers

Thanks were given to the committee members standing down: Peter Leswell, Rob Gore, Lorraine Patel, Steve Davies, Talha Dinc and Jo Gore,

and members standing down were presented with the customary engraved hive tool as a token of appreciation for their service to the association.

Keith Obbard was elected new president. Malcolm Wilkie new chairman. Paul Lindström vice chair. Holly Caetano Alves de Castro Honorary Secretary. Phil Edwards Honorary Treasurer. Sandy Infield Events Secretary. Roxanne Gould as General Member. Paul Lindström keep the role of Apiarist Editor and Helen Chivers keep the role of Lectures Coordinator. Keith Obbard and Peter Coxon keep the roles as

Apiary Managers and Peter Halford keep the role of Membership Secretary. Outstanding is the roles of AHAT Coordinator and Training & Education Manager. Those can probably be filled by existing committee members. PC offered to take on AHAT role until someone else wishes to take over.

Since there were no other business, the outgoing chairman Jo Gore thanked the attendees for joining and handed over to the new president Keith Obbard, who would preside over the HWBKA Honey Show. 

The HWBKA Honeyshow 2022 – results



Jo Gore busy compiling the results from the HWBKA Honeyshow.

Class 1 Clear Honey

1st - Malcolm Wilkie
2nd - Liz Missen
3rd - Jonathan Alawo

Class 2 Set Honey

1st - Andy Hayward
2nd - Malcolm Wilkie
3rd - Leslie Francis

Class 3 Cut Comb

1st - Rob Gore
2nd - Phil Edwards
3rd - Leslie Francis

Class 4 Novice

1st - Joanna Marshall
2nd - Holly Caetano Alves de Castro
3rd - Andy Sunnucks

Vera Becvar Cup – Joanna Marshall

Class 5 Cakes

1st - Phil Edwards



Malcolm Wilkie took home prizes in Class 1 Clear Honey, Class 2 Set Honey and Class 9 Moulded Candle.



Liz Missen got 2nd prize in Class 1 Clear Honey.

2nd - Leslie Francis
3rd - Helen Chivers

Class 6 Biscuits & Confectionary

1st - Phil Edwards
2nd - Neil Underhill
3rd - Phil Edwards
Highly Commended - Leslie Francis

Class 7 Preserves & Mead

1st - Phil Edwards
2nd - Phil Edwards
3rd Peter Coxon
Highly Commended - John Miller



Jonathan Alawo and Sarah Waterfall, beekeepers at Wilderness Wood, Hadlow Down receive their prize in Class 1 Clear honey.

Class 8 Dipped Candle

1st - Rob Gore

Class 9 Moulded Candle

Joint 1st - Malcolm Wilkie & Phil Edwards
3rd - Helen Chivers

Class 10 Hive Products

1st - Phil Edwards
2nd - Helen Chivers

Class 11 DIY item

1st - Steve Davies
2nd - David Chivers



Andy Hayward took first prize in class 2 Set Honey.



Leslie Francis took home prizes in Class 2 Set Honey, Class 3 Cut Comb and Class 5 Cakes.



Andy Sunnucks took home a prize in Class 4 Novice.



John Miller took home a prize in Class 7 Preserves & Mead.



Phil Edwards took home prizes in Class 3 Cut Comb, Class 5 Cakes, Class 6 Biscuits & Confectionary, Class 7 Preserves & Mead, Class 9 Moulded Candle and Class 10 Hive products.



Helen Chivers took home prizes in Class 5 Cakes, Class 9 Moulded Candle and Class 10 Hive Products.



Steve Davies took (as usual) home a prize in Class 11 DIY Item.



Rob Gore took home prizes in Class 3 Cut Comb and Class 8 Dipped Candle.



Neil Underhill took home a prize in Class 6 Biscuits & Confectionary.



David Chivers took home a prize in Class 11 DIY Item.



Holly Caetano Alves de Castro took home a prize in Class 4 Novice.



Peter Coxon took home a prize in Class 7 Preserves & Mead.



Roxanne Gould was given the Lynn Moore memorial cup for outstanding contributions to the HWBKA association. Roxanne stepped in and helped Keith Obbard with the "Slab Castle" apiary when Steve Davies injured his back early in the season.

BBKA ADM preparations – a summary

The BBKA Annual Delegates Meeting will take place on 23 January 2023 and here is a summary of some of the topics that will be discussed.

Notes on the progress made by the BBKA Honey Adulteration Group

The group has undertaken several tasks and are in the process of pursuing other aspects of the Directions given at the ADM by our members. We are working in collaboration with the UK Honey Authenticity Network.

The Prime Minister and The Minister for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have received letters asking for action concerning adulterated Honey and the labelling of Honey to reflect the country of origin and the percentage of the Honey from each of these countries.

We worked with a member who has a link with a Senior Parliamentary Researcher at the House of Commons to try to get a sympathetic MP to ask a question in parliament. The movement resulting from continual Cabinet reshuffles with the new Prime Ministers has made this almost impossible, but we will continue to contact MPs. As you may have noticed from Twitter my own MP is already onboard.

The group have produced a banner to display at the Spring Convention and National Honey Show and members are able to download the artwork for the banner and also the posters so that they can be used at local honey shows.

We are working closely with HAN UK and have leaflets shared by HAN UK that are being adapted to reflect statistics concerning the British Honey market that are available for Area Associations to download. A well-attended webinar presented by Lynne Ingram is helping to raise the issue of honey authenticity. We need to ensure the consumers can make an informed choice when purchasing imported honey and the benefits of buying local honey.

Leaflets and a banner will be available to Area Associations using the 'Hive Experience' at shows.

The BBKA are keen to promote LOCAL honey and we have introduced the National Honey Day (21st October) and many people enjoyed honey on their toast for breakfast. I even managed to get a gift of a jar of honey and note from the BBKA put on the King's breakfast table.

Our NEW petition is 'live' asking the Government to change the honey regulations to ensure all countries where the honey originated are listed on the labels.

Please sign the petition <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/624402/signatures/new>

Report on Importation of Queens and Bees

Although the importation of package bees is not officially continuing, mated queens are still being added to newly imported bees in Northern Ireland to form nuclei. Northern Ireland struggles to divert their inspectors to examine every consignment, and some are delivered to the rest of the UK without inspection. I have raised it several times in the Bee Health Advisory Committee and been assured that a % of each consignment is examined. It would be good to stop all imports, but it is not possible at the moment, the Government have been a little busy in the last few months and certainly do not want to upset the Irish Protocol.

Queens are still being imported and they are valued by some of our members and some Bee Farmers who want new queens early in the season. Some Bee Farmers are investigating solutions to this issue and some are producing their own queens.

Very successful queen rearing courses have been run at Stoneleigh over the last two years, the BBKA is working to offer Small Scale Queen rearing courses to Associations around the country, please email me if you are interested. We are

continuing to spread the message that 'Local bees are Best' and rearing good queens is very possible for everyone. It is important to rear good queens with the traits that we are keen to encourage; temperament, disease resistance and reasonably productive.

Recent news that the Dover port is being monitored is encouraging. The NBU were called to a consignment of queen bees that were being imported through Dover Port without the required Health Certificate. This led to action being taken to stop their import, resulting in the Queen bees being humanely destroyed.

Anne Rowberry, BBKA President

Asian Hornet Report

As chair of this committee, I have registered our concern to Defra about the apparent lack of forward planning and the lack of feedback to our teams when hornets are sighted and reported.

It is difficult because of GDPR and ensuring that there is a scientific diagnosis concerning the photo or specimen reported. It does take time but more information would be helpful and should be more forthcoming. I have been assured that if there is a large influx of Asian Hornets inspectors will be reassigned from other areas to help with the situation.

I have permission to quote the reply from Nigel Semmence, Contingency Planning and Science Officer, National Bee Unit:

'The NBU works in concert with the AHT's across England and Wales and this work is coordinated on the BBKA side by Anne Rowberry. The role of AHTs as you described, in increasing awareness and helping with correct identification, is a key part of the contingency response to Asian hornet and it is greatly appreciated across APHA and Defra. For note I recently thanked the stakeholders at the BHAF (of which Anne is a representative for the BBKA) for the contribution the BBKA and AHTs have made. . .

As there is no evidence of an established population in the UK, we are still in the eradication phase of the contingency response, and this year will be undertaking limited trapping in the immediate vicinity of last year's nest in Portsmouth as well as an enhanced awareness program on the South coast. . .'

I raised the issue at the Pollinator Advisory Steering Group (11th May 2022) and received a lot of supportive comments from the group. The group was attended for a short time by the Environment Minister, Rebecca Pow. I addressed several questions to her including the request that a 5-year plan should be published indicating how the Government proposes to address the possible large influx of Asian Hornets during the next 5 years and quoted the figures from Jersey (they have now destroyed 190 nests but are feeling overwhelmed by the problem).

We did arrange training for team leaders during the summer but unfortunately pressure of work for Pete Kennedy meant it was not able to be delivered but he may still be able to produce a short video for later this year. We did hold an Asian Hornet week last September, thank you to all those involved in working to make it a success and delivering interesting talks.

I was able to visit the apiaries of beekeepers near Vigo in Spain when I went to hear reports on the European Atlantic Positive Programme. I was shocked at the numbers attacking the colonies in several apiaries despite the use of electric 'harps', small entrances, mouse guards and other small electric inventions. Thousands of dead hornets were in heaps on the ground although they are cleared every week. The bees were cowering in the hives refusing to emerge while the hornets were around. Despite this onslaught some beekeepers did manage to get a small percentage of their normal crop of honey and with careful management the bees survived. One beekeeper said she killed around 300 hornets a day in a couple of hours using a badminton

racket! The good news is that research in several different areas is progressing. We will be hosting a zoom style conference, on 4th February where some researchers will be presenting their findings and introducing some new research that is being trialled.

Thank you for supporting the research that is contributing to grants for work on Asian Hornets.

My experience has reinforced the need for our teams to be vigilant, we have only had 4 confirmed hornet sightings this year and it is thanks to you and the messages received from the public that nests and hornets have been destroyed. The AHT work is very important if we are to stop the Asian Hornets becoming established, thank you for your willingness to work hard on all our behalf.

Anne Rowberry, President and BBKA Asian Hornet Co-ordinator

The BBKA position on Neonicotinoids

The BBKA position on Neonicotinoid has not changed; we are opposed to their use.

The Government granted a derogation request in 2021 as the forecast of the damage likely to be caused by the yellow virus was 38% The treatment was approved but the exceptionally cold spring resulted in the aphids transmitting the virus being at a much lower level and the treatment was not used.

The UK Government again gave the go-ahead for the banned pesticide thiamethoxam to be applied to sugar beet crops across England in 2022.

This will be the second year running that usage has been granted following a successful application by British Sugar, despite the government's own advisors recommending against its approval.

In 2017, the then Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, said: "I have set out our vision for a Green Brexit in which environmental standards are not only maintained but enhanced." I

hope he has some influence on the current Government's position on Neonicotinoids.

The BBKA are talking about lobbying with other pollinator groups for a complete ban. I was part of the All-Party Pollination Group where there was a strong feeling against the lifting of the ban on using Neonicotinoids. The BBKA will continue to be involved with other groups in trying to improve the environment and to push the use of alternative approaches.

The Government has bowed to pressure even though, three years ago, the UK Government supported restrictions on the neonicotinoid pesticides across the European Union because of the very clear harm that they were causing to bees and other pollinators. The BBKA will be writing to the Prime Minister requesting that he reverses the Secretary of State's decision and focuses support for farmers to adopt non-chemical alternatives so that agriculture supports nature and does not destroy it.

Anne Rowberry, BBKA President



This image is borrowed from the January 2023 issue of the BBKA NEWS, and only serve to illustrate that the article is based on information from BBKA.

Review of a scientific paper

By Jonathan Coote

I have just picked up this interesting and possibly very important research paper, fortunately in English, produced by The University of Belgrade in Serbia and published on 22 June 2022.

I thought you might find it encouraging.

The full title is "Use of Thymol in *Nosema ceranae* – Control and Health Improvement of Infected Honey Bees.

It is written by Uros Glavinic, Jovan Blagojevic, Marko Ristanic, Jevrosima Stevanovic, Nada Lakic, Milorad Mirilovic and Zoran Stanimirovic. The full article can be downloaded [here](#).

It is the first real opportunity for controlling *Nosema ceranae* which I believe to be a much more serious problem than we realise. One reason might be that heavily *N. ceranae* infected bees are thought to leave the hive to die, although I believe it is probably spread by trophylaxis. It is most prevalent in late winter and early spring'

In essence the conclusion is that feeding bees an autumn feed, after the main feeding has ceased, of 50% w/v sugar solution with 0.1 g of thymol per kg of syrup produced a good result in controlling *nosema ceranae* (and also probably *nosema apis*)

This is might not be too far from thymol tincture added to prevent fermentation in winter syrup feeds

The paper does not specify how the thymol is made soluble as it is naturally insoluble in water but in fact we

know that alcohol is a solvent of thymol and will enable water solubility to be achieved. (perhaps a decent vodka would suffice as the pre-solvent).

As we know Thymol is already approved by the EU for use in hives for varroa treatment for bees which is quite a useful aspect.

For treating *N. ceranae* in relatively small amounts it would be unlikely to taint the hive or any sealed stored honey and small quantity of thymol is already naturally present in some honeys

N. ceranae is a hidden killer as unlike *N. apis* which leaves obvious residues indicating its presence, *N. ceranae* leaves no visible evidence.


N. ceranae is very difficult to differentiate from *N. apis* under the microscope and is therefore probably a much greater cause of winter/spring losses than is realised.

As far as I know the VMD post Brexit is still following EU standards which I think is likely to approve this

even though the research is outside the EU. I hope so.

I have been following this line of research for some years as I hoped such a reasonably well researched finding would eventually emerge from several less well presented earlier forays. This is the first credible paper appearing to follow a fully replicable process and to quantify the results,

The amount of thymol introduced to the hive is minuscule compared with that used for varroa control. The latter works by evaporating thymol fumes burning the softer critical organs of the adult varroa mites and possibly juveniles (sexual organs and mouth parts are most affected).

Nosema control in this case uses a different internal pathway. It is absorbed directly from the bee's haemolymphatic system that the micro-organism is feeding on, hence the very much smaller quantity and concentration needed to be efficacious. 

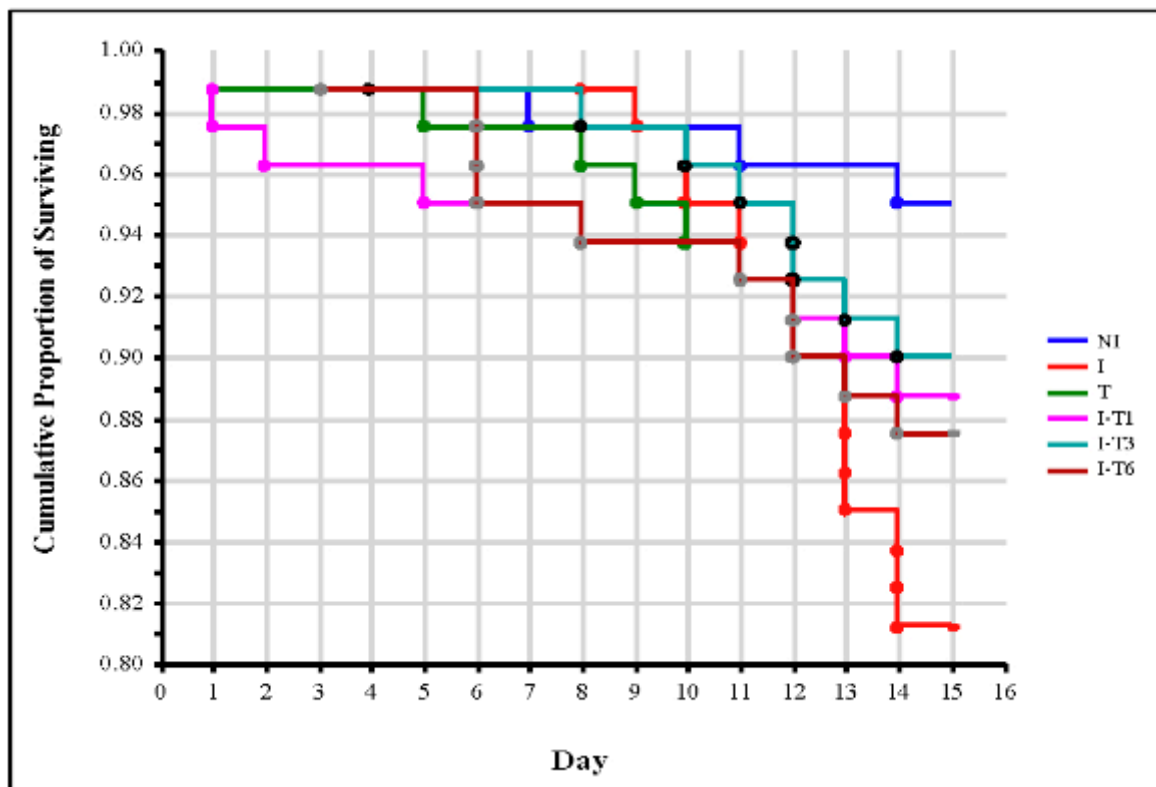


Figure 1. Survival curves of bees from control groups and from groups treated with thymol. Group infected with *N. ceranae* (I), group that was non-infected but treated with thymol (T), groups infected with *N. ceranae* and treated with thymol from day 1 (I-T1), day 3 (I-T3), and day 6 (I-T6), and non-infected (NI) group.

Selling Honey

By Peter Coxon

Who'd have thought selling honey could become quite so complicated? Here an answer from someone who knows about it.

Most of us who are fortunate to produce sufficient honey to sell, do so through small local shops, 'at the gate' and at country fayres etc. and have done so for many years and that is not a problem... mostly ... more on that later.

Some members who don't want to be bothered with all that labelling, jarring, invoicing stuff etc. have for many years sold honey in bulk by the bucket load to companies such as Paynes and the Bee People (aka Ben and Maggie Pratt).

For most of my beekeeping career I have operated firmly in former domain, however this year gone has been such a bumper year for many of us and with the additional workload of the Horsted Apiary I decided to sell some of the Hosed Honey to Ben and Maggie as I simply didn't have time to jar it etc. Not as profitable but much less work. At the 11th hour a member of our committee who has expertise

in EEC regulations pointed out that this falls into a different regime of regulation also covered in British law.

It's a long story but is summarised quite succinctly in the flow chart below, re-produced with kind permission of Andy Pedley from his book 'Food safety for Beekeepers' (Northern Bee Books. £17.00 - perfect for Christmas, Birthday etc.). Basically, it says that when selling your honey directly it is 'Prime produce' follows the green leg and we are not required to be registered food producers but when selling bulk honey to the likes of Paynes etc. we are required to become registered food producers. However, when selling through local stores as I do we fall into the grey box ...grey because the terms 'Small' and 'Local' are not defined in the regulations ... not entirely satisfactory.

So, this might put some in a dilemma, stop selling bulk honey, carry on selling bulk honey as one might have always done and ignore the rules as the likes of Paynes etc don't even check that you are a registered food producer anyway or get registered. When this arose in the committee there was a certain

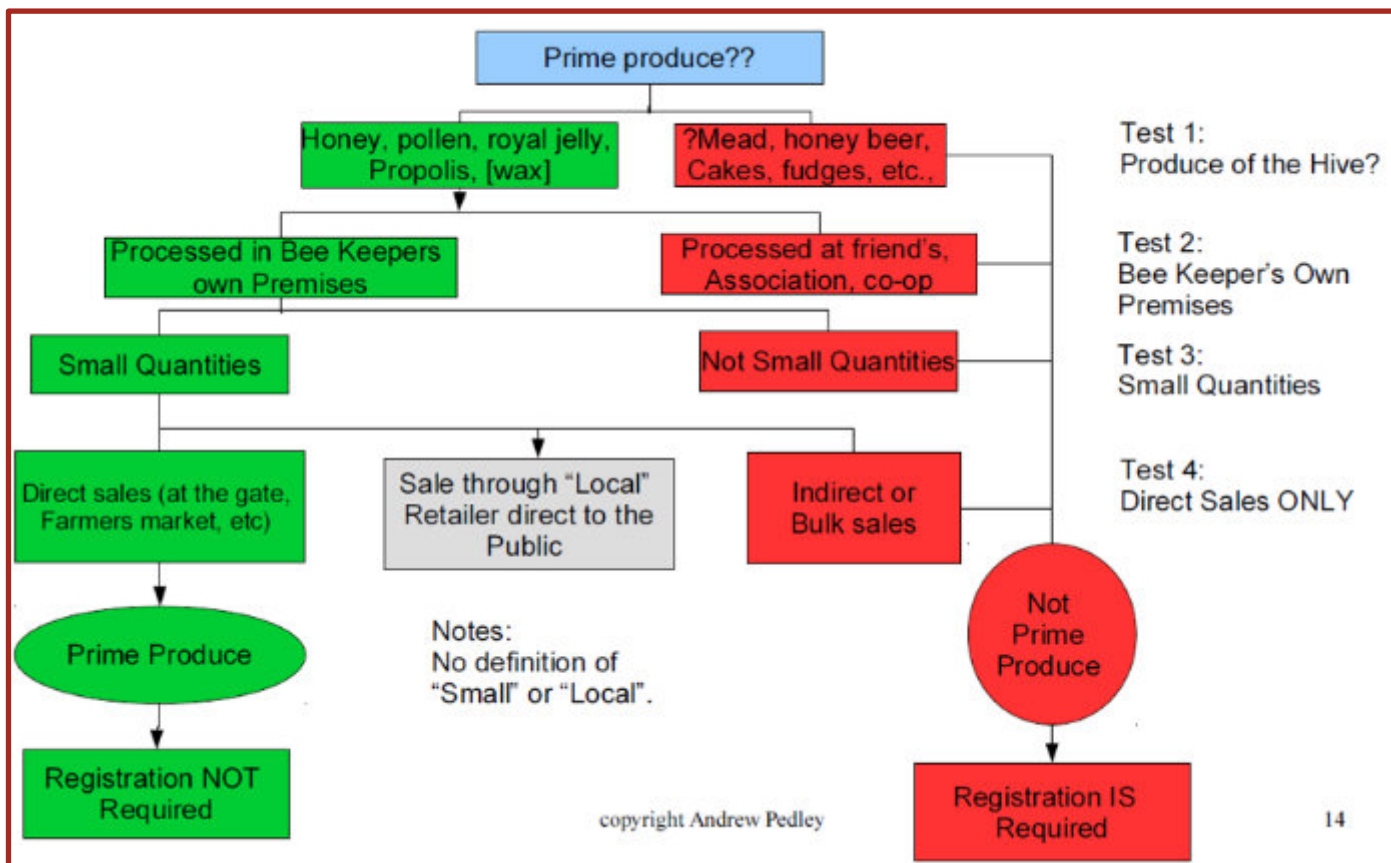
amount of consternation about the implication of inspections and talk of hefty fines etc. ...so! what to do?

Guided by the sage common-sense advice our erstwhile Hon. Sec Lorraine Patel also a chartered EHO (Environmental Health Officer) I set about becoming registered and it was not such a big deal.

As Lorraine pointed out the EHO's are not there to catch people out and hit them with fines. They are there to maintain public health and help us all lift our game. Honey is intrinsically a very safe product as far as they are concerned. They are much more concerned about produce involving meat and dairy where they again provide advice and only resort to law and fines after persistent offenders refuse to take action.

In terms of actions to take to get registered :-

- Apply - on [Food business registration - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- You will receive a response and be asked to register your business details at [New Food Business Self Assessment Form - Your Details - My Rother](#)



- You will then receive another acknowledgement saying you are registered and can commence trading.

It is all self-explanatory and free!

- You may then receive a notification of inspection.

For the inspection the inspector will want to see evidence of good practices, so ...

- Hygienic working procedures, clean work areas, surfaces, and cleaning procedures for all equipment, clothing, gloves.

- Awareness of the risks of cross-contamination .. so e.g. 2 sinks preferably, not allowing supers to sit on earth for fear of botulism. Control of other food items in the area such nuts and other allergens.

- Good record keeping and batch numbering for traceability, including VMD records.

- Labelling which is compliant with regulations – a topical item being tightened up and the subject of recent BBKA articles.

- Good storage of honey jarred or otherwise and equipment. Water content measurement, avoidance of HMF build up etc.

- Any food hygiene qualifications or training although this by no means a showstopper.

- If nearby they might want to see your apiary and storage facilities.


- It is useful to have something called an HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point document) – basically a document . . . possibly a flow chart showing the whole of your production process with controls and checks, as this demonstrates that you have considered all the possible risks and how to keep them under control and take remedial action. I can help

with this aspect and may post something on the website.

You get marked on a scale of (0-5), with a Hygiene Score, Structure & Cleaning Score, and Confidence in Management Score – this latter item less quantifiable but it is clearly important to demonstrate that you are clear about your own procedures.

After my inspection I was told I would not be inspected for another 3 years at least and then it might only be an on-line form to check what might have changed ... so clearly this is not an ongoing onerous chore.

My overall experience of doing this has been entirely positive and I have learned much useful information . . . I even managed to get a 5-star rating. I would recommend doing it.

At the end of the day, registered or not, a safety inspector might pick up a jar of your honey in a local store or wherever and decide to pay you a surprise visit! 

DIY: From Smoking Problems to Vaping Problems

By Peter Coxon

From 'Smoking Problems' – my previous DIY Apiarist article, to vaping problems ... I'm moving with the times you see ...or more correctly a few words on using Gas Vaps to sublime Oxalic acid in certain types of hive.

In my apiary I have WBCs with copious landing boards and Pol Nucs for which I made stands . . . with copious landing boards.

At the Little Horsted Apiary which I look after we have Paynes Poly Hives, which . . .have copious landing boards made from polystyrene and Poly Nucs which Steve Davies made luxurious stands, with accommodation for a varroa inspection boards and ... you guessed it ... landing boards! (There's a theme developing here!!)

Many of us these days use sublimation of anhydrous oxalic acid to control varroa in our colonies. In years gone by, this was mostly done using a heater on a stick powered by a 12V car battery and although these worked well, carrying around a 12V car battery is not a lot of fun and if like me you have set the WBC porch height to ~6mm to limit the entrance and thereby stop mice without using a mouse excluder (more expense ...did I mention I don't like spending money) in which case they don't fit through the entrance.

Some 3-4 years ago, however, a clever chap came up with the idea of the Gas Vap ... so simple, obvious, transportable and cheap to make ...I wish I had thought of it. It won prizes at the National Honey Show, in fact.



The Gas Vap

However, have you ever tried to use one of these on a hive with a landing board? Even with the extension tube, going in through the entrance to any extent is all but impossible and if you try it on a Poly Hive, chances are



It works fine with a regular Correx inspection board as well.



Problems at the landing board

you may well melt big holes in the landing board. Previously we have tried pulling out the inspection board and grovelling around under the hive to squirt the vapour up through the gap created, but it's not much fun in the wet.

So, this year I had the bright idea of simply drilling a hole in the upstand of the inspection board (see image below) and through the polystyrene so that the Gas Vap can simply be poked in through the back. You still need the extension tube but a 10mm hole will provide a snug fit around it such that you can simply poke it in.



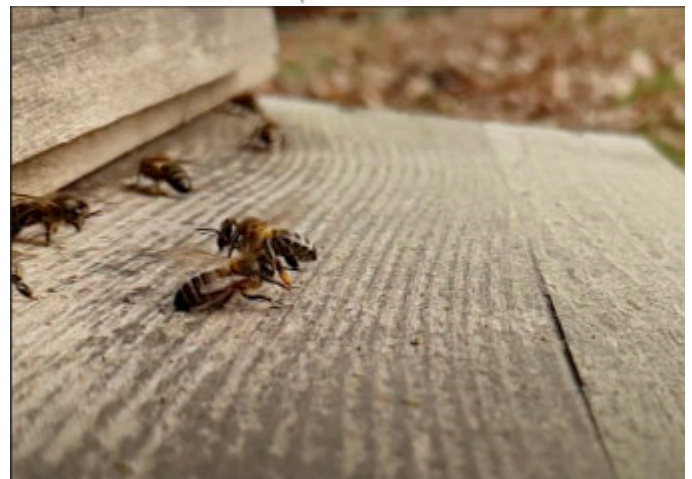
Drill a hole in the upstand of the inspection board.

If you have a regular Correx inspection board...same thing!

I have also done the same with my WBCs
Works like a treat

On the subject of that extension tube - a further tip!
The tube is supposedly heated by the blow torch heating the evaporation bowl, but in cold weather it doesn't get hot enough to prevent the oxalic acid vapour from re-condensing inside the tube and blocking it. It is easily unblocked with a stick or better still by heating it with another blow torch but beware of the vapour that will pour out even after the bowl is empty. Better still, pre-heat the tube before use and avoid the problem altogether!

And if you're feeling unconcerned because you don't have landing boards and don't believe they are necessary, have a chuckle [at this video](#) I took some years ago showing how the bees struggle when landing (it takes a while to load.)





Part 10 (final) in the series "Three Bees":

Winter blows into Spring

By Laurel Lindström

Rain pounded the walls of the hive with such ferocity that Curly feared icy water would soon penetrate his home. Winter winds had been shaking the hive for days now and the temperature had barely moved up or down. Gales forced damp and cold into every available gap and the bees had been unable to send out scouts for days. The entire colony had remained tightly clustered around the brood, rotating at Curly's command as he tracked time and temperature to keep live bee numbers as high as possible. But something was changing.

Weeks had gone by since Curly's momentous confrontation with the seven sisters and the ageing Queen. She was legendary having twice swarmed away from her home, only to return twice to murder about-to-hatch virgin princesses in their beds. Throughout the summer the Queen had been ruthless whenever she discovered newly built Queen cells. She had stung through cell walls to kill numerous gestating princesses. And finally as summer turned to autumn she had stopped laying altogether. But as legendary as her determination to hold onto power, was her laziness. Curly had barely seen her since the nights had started to draw in.

From time to time a messenger bee came to tell Curly the numbers he had requested: new bees born, bee deaths, hours of light, hours of darkness, how quickly their food stores were diminishing, if the Queen was showing any sign of egg-laying.

This last was a crucial question for Curly, for once Mother started laying it was a hint that winter may perhaps be coming to an end. He wasn't convinced of this, nor did he entirely trust that the Queen would be right in her timing. But it gave him a sense of hope.

Curly made his calculations on the warmest wall of the hive, using a softened concoction of wax and propolis flakes and his trusty propolis stick to record the data. The graphs and charts he was particularly proud of, although on the rare days when the sun hit the hive wall with especial intensity, Curly's figures and diagrams tended to droop a little. But they would harden back up again when the temperature reverted to super chill and it was doing this less often of late. The variability tended to bring into question some of the numbers and graphs, but overall, Curly was confident that winter was beginning to wane. The charts for daylight hours and darkness were showing clearly that the light was beginning to outpace the dark. The frequency of his bee rotations was slowing down too, and the noises outside the hive were occasionally more than just howling wind and pounding rain.

He chewed on his propolis stick awhile, aware that he hadn't eaten much lately. In fact, he couldn't quite remember when he had last eaten and the latest messenger bee to visit had not brought any supplies. Or had she? Looking at the numbers was becoming more interesting to Curly than recording them or sending his instructions for the changeovers. And

Curly was aware that he couldn't quite remember why they were so important. After all, it was just a bit of wind and cold and Mother was still somewhere in the hive, doing whatever it was she did. Curly couldn't always remember that either.

His charts and diagrams though were a great comfort, and as he pondered what the overlapping circles meant a new messenger bee arrived. At least she might have been a new one. She stood slightly deferential with her head bowed at the entrance to Curly's little cubby hole. The hive wall with its calculations and pictures formed one wall. Honey comb was shaped to form the rest of this small private cell, where Curly spent his days mostly asleep when he wasn't pondering. No one ever entered, not even messengers bearing nourishment. At night when the hive was coldest, he was up on the outer edges of the cluster. He moved constantly into and out of the nest's many layers instructing the bees. He told them when and where to move, so that they did not get chilled and risk death, and so that the brood at the heart of the nest would be kept warm. Daytimes were his to contemplate his calculations and to doze.

"What is it?" Curly called over his shoulder to his young visitor with some irritation. "It's Mother said the little round bee, 'she's told me to fetch you and the seven sisters have told me to hurry up and bring you to her. They're going too.'" Curly leant a

little against the honeycomb, taking care not to lean too hard as it was softening under the growing warmth of the sun. The wild winds had dropped to occasional squally gusts, and the rain was easing. Curly couldn't see it, but the late winter cloudscape was losing its overhanging grey and revelling in erratic golds and pinks, sunlight shining on clouds highlighted with gleaming streaks of silver. Behind them an endless blue was getting slowly bluer. A radiant sky. A harbinger of spring. "Are you sure" said Curly somewhat dubiously. "Why? And why should I believe you?" The youngster had not anticipated any challenge, nor had she expected the imperious superiority of Curly's tone. She shivered slightly and looked defiantly at the ends of her antennae which were drooping uncontrollably as the shivers continued and she started to doubt the wisdom of volunteering for this mission. Confused and cross she turned away. She muttered "you're not all you're cracked up to be Curly the Wise", not quite under her breath.

Curly, being feted as Curly the Wise for so many weeks now and having a somewhat inflated view of his own indispensability, had heard her. But as he couldn't remember why this messenger was here, or what she had been saying to him, he stepped out of his cell and traipsed after the little round bee "Curly the Wise did you say?" And tucking his propolis stick under a foreleg, he started speeding up to catch his visitor. She in turn looked over her shoulder slightly uncomfortable that this saviour bee might have heard her rude remark. "You are Curly the Wise aren't you?" she ventured in a conciliatory tone and slowed her pace a little so that they could walk alongside. "I'm Lisa. They want to see you, that's all I know." Curly stared ahead puzzled and a little anxious, memories of drone patrols and wingless corpses floating into view. He gave his young companion a soft pat and did his best to maintain an expression that lived up to his name as they ambled along.

Together they passed carefully through the outer layers of the nest, comforted by the low level hum of the moving bees, working to create heat from their collective movement's friction. As Curly and Lisa crept carefully through the dense network of bees, Curly began to understand that it was Mother who wanted to talk to him and that the seven sisters had agreed to let him approach. Curly the Wise had said something sometime ago to the seven sisters about wanting to know when the Queen would start laying again. Perhaps that was what this meeting was all about. He had told them that this step in the colony's progress through the winter would mark a crucial turning point. The rota for nest warming duties could be changed, food and water rationing could slow down and there might be more chances for foragers to take preliminary excursions, weather permitting. But only when the Queen started laying again.

As they approached her, Curly sensed that whatever it was the Queen wanted to share, it was not just to do with egg-laying. She was reclining, long and lazy, her head supported by a couple of attendants who appeared to be massaging her. She bee-yawned and slowly shifted to ensure the continuation of the massage and that Curly was in full sight. "Welcome Curly the Wise. We have something to share you and I, but we need to be alone."

This last caused a buzzing panic from the surrounding bees. Their message passed quickly to the outer layers of the nest where it came out as "whinny Toblerone" – a phrase that gave the outlying bees no cause for consternation or concern. But closer in the colony was tense and anxious. As they pressed tighter around Curly and Mother, the seven sisters made it very clear that alone was not an option. Reassured the bee cluster lost some of its tension and resumed its agitations. But Curly and Mother were in a very different shared space, aware of the surrounding bees, but unaware that it should matter. They were together alone and both

understood that other bees, seven sisters or no, were excluded from their private intoxication. Together they turned to face the gathered bees, Curly feeling unaccountably larger and bolder, slightly dizzy and somehow very peaceful. Outside a crow landed on the roof of the hive and lifted off sharpish, as the entire colony started to buzz. The distraction was long enough for Curly to move in closer to Mother. He sat at her feet like an aged companion only slightly less frail than his friend.

"Get up Curly the Wise and come and sit beside to me" she said as the surrounding bees let out a collective gasp and as one stepped in shock away from them both. Even the courtiers and attendants moved involuntarily and unaccountably away, curiously drawn to join the rest of the congregation and away from the Queen and Curly. In this swift moment of separation Curly was anointed, privileged, an honoured consort. He knew it could only be temporary, just as long as it took for the seven sisters to regain their composure and for the attendants to get over their strange stupor and remember their duties. As if she could read his thoughts Mother whispered "we have only limited time. I must ask you to stay with me, rest with me, and to tell them that egg-laying is commencing". Curly turned to the massed onlookers and leaning on his propolis stick cleared his throat and waited as they as one drew in closer. He did his best to set his voice at what might be considered an authoritarian pitch. It sort of worked, but his voice was more croaky and thin than Curly remembered it being.

"Egg-laying" he said, "Egg-laying is what this is all about. And Mother wants me to stay close. Not sure why, but there is no need to panic. I can continue to give instructions at night and I will nap with her during the day." The Queen nodded slowly at the start of this terse speech, but had dozed off before Curly had finished it. The seven sisters went immediately into action, shuffling about and telling the bees to "move along now, nothing to see here, show's over". Curly sat

quietly for a moment or two before giving the Queen a surreptitious nudge and whispering that she might want to wake up and get a bit of a move on, to start with the egg-laying as soon as possible. It would be three or four days before the eggs turned into grubs and another three weeks or so before the grubs would be born into new young bees. According to Curly's calculations, Mother should be laying at least six hundred eggs a day and this should be enough to get the colony's population up to where it needed to be for its survival. As the weather improved and the days continued to lengthen Curly estimated that soon the bees would be able to stop their nest warming rotation and to start foraging.

With a lazy arm draped over Curly's bent shoulders the Queen heaved herself up and started moving from cell to cell, dipping her slender abdomen into each one she passed and leaving behind a tiny egg, a speck like a tiny grain of rice. Over the next few hours she moved slowly, deliberately across random empty cells. With each deposit she whispered to herself, "another and another and another and soon they will all be gone". Curly followed along but wasn't paying much attention to Mother's meanderings or her peculiar conversation. He became aware of a sense of alarm from the young messenger bee who had so insulted him. Lisa had stayed behind to watch out for Curly and Mother when all the other bees had returned to their various tasks. Curly pulled away from his Queen to reassure Lisa that all was well, because the Queen was laying again and that winter would soon be over. Everything would be just fine. But the young bee shook her head resolutely and told Curly in a very quiet voice, that they


couldn't survive as a colony, if all the eggs were gone.

Curly had no idea what she was talking about, egg-laying was egg-laying surely. But the young bee had been a housekeeper before getting her promotion to messenger for the seven sisters. As a housekeeper bee Lisa had paid close attention to all the nursing bee conversations about eggs and brood and what they should be fed, because she too would be a nursing bee at some stage. She didn't want to mess it up. Her eavesdropping lead her to understand that when there were not enough eggs laid or if fewer than several hundred eggs were laid every day, the bees would take an important decision. They would have to decide if it was time to raise a new queen. In preparation they would tell the engineers to enlarge selected cells in which an egg could be fed a special diet of honey and Royal Jelly, and so that the growing grub would eventually emerge as a honey bee princess. But the new princess would be a virgin, so she would not be able to lay any eggs until she had mated. There had to be enough eggs laid, so that there would be enough bees to raise the new Queen and send her out to mate with as many drones as possible. Timing was critical. At least that is what the young messenger bee had overheard. Lisa understood what it meant and as Curly's mind rapidly processed this new information, so did he.

Curly returned to Mother's side repeating under his breath what Lisa had said, lest he forget. It was difficult though and by the time Curly reached the Queen he was saying it out loud. As he took a proffered foreleg, the Queen drawled "now do you get it?" and Curly stared back blank and uncomprehending. "Er, not entirely majesty, no, sort of? No not

really at all." She finished laying her final egg and turned away from the brood cells, using her heft to pull Curly along with her. "Where are we going?" he asked struggling feebly to resist before giving up. Wherever it was, they were going together.

"I've long watched you Curly, I always knew you were special, different, like me, and that we should have a wonderful future together. And now the time is right for us, it's time for you and I to take a different sort of step. Now. Together." By the time this little speech was finally completed Curly was feeling very tired. The traipsing about seemed to have gone on for hours and what with all these conversations and strange ponderings his bee brain was feeling the strain. And now he was beginning get it. He turned to Lisa still loitering along behind them. "Look, Lisa, look at the sunlight coming in. Stay here and watch us. Tell the seven sisters to remember for the next time. Tell them we're off, we're at the end and we're going together."

Lisa watched amazed as the Queen and Curly readied themselves for take-off. Out and up into the chilled blue of an early spring sky the two bees flew to the nearest landing spot. For a few moments they stretched out limbs and wings sunning themselves and catching their breath. All memories of their lives in the colony, of their brothers and sisters, of honey, of eggs, of charts and propolis sticks and gentle massages, slowly faded into pallid remembrances. Lisa watched the two bees make it unsteadily to the first available branch and watched as they stretched out in the sun. She was watching still when, with infinite grace, Curly and his Queen drifted slowly to the ground forelegs linked, wings folded, eyes sightless, and all so very silent. 



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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: (vacant at the moment)

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