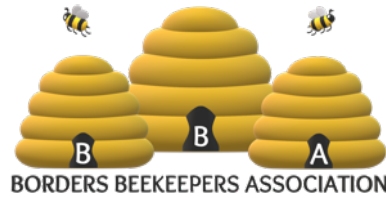


Autumn



Newsletter 2020

• Inside: pic quiz • start the year off • first swarm • greek myth • heather press • bee rescue! • zoom groups • reviews • school news •

Welcome to our autumn 2020 newsletter.

Chairman's Notes

So here we are at the beginning or is it the end of another beekeeping season. Looking back at what I wrote for our last newsletter, it looks like I was expecting COVID to be all over by the autumn. It's not looking like that's going to be the case and we are getting ready for the long haul.

We had hoped to have some winter meetings but this doesn't now look possible. However we are hoping to arrange some zoom get-togethers with speakers once we can sort out the technology.

We have had to cancel our honey show, and we have decided that running a beginners course online is beyond our scope, though we are trying to develop small local groups of beekeepers in different parts of the Borders who might want to associate with each other (see later in this newsletter). Of course any meetings of small groups with the current restrictions will have to be outside and limited to two households, which makes it pretty difficult, although there is a clause in the rules which exempts educational purposes, but I'm not going to push it!

There are a lot of activities online for those with that sort of inclination. I've taken part in some of the SBA sessions which I've found really interesting and one of the advantages of these events is that you can participate from your own sofa and if they are too dull, you can just switch them off.

It's a good time to look back at what went well and what didn't go so well in your beekeeping this year and start making plans for next year which will be here sooner than we think.

John Wilkinson



Picture Quiz

Can you guess what this structure is? See page 10 for the answer...

Start the year ... with care

By Kate Atchley

It is said this is the beginning of the beekeeping year though, with the honey harvest recently gathered in, it feels like the finale. Either way our beekeeping, ahead of the cold weather, is pivotal to the health and survival of our bees, having more impact than any other aspect of bee management.

It's getting late to guide you on feeding the bees enough for the winter and treating them to reduce their *Varroa* count to a minimum (and therefore breed strong winter bees). Both are essential for a good outcome as explained fully and well by Prof David Evans in his inimitable blog: see <https://www.theapiarist.org/weed-and-feed/>. There he covers *Varroa* treatment, storing honey supers and feeding. (Do sign up for his weekly posts – there's always more to figure out!).

We have recipes for heavy and light syrup and fondant/candy on the website:

<https://www.bordersbeekeepers.org/courses>

Bee feed is also available from the BBA if you prefer to buy it: <https://www.bordersbeekeepers.org/shop>. Reusable plastic tubs of 13kg ApiInvert Syrup cost £17.50 (recent price increase). Packs of 12.5kg (5 x 2.5kg) ApiFonda fondant cost £20.

It's already getting nippy overnight as autumn approaches so don't delay your winter preparations. The bees work on syrup as they do on nectar, reducing the water content to less than 20% and capping it so that it won't ferment. Clearly this becomes increasingly difficult as the temperature falls so aim to have completed treating and feeding by mid-October latest. This can be tricky if you start late as feeding and treating for *Varroa* at the same time is not recommended.

Some beekeepers like to leave a super of honey for the bees and this is an excellent natural winter feed. However it's best to clear such supers while you treat for *Varroa*, so the comb does not become contaminated. They can be replaced after treatment but remember **to remove the queen excluder**. Leave it on and you risk the queen becoming isolated and dying as the cluster of worker bees moves up into the super in late winter.

Let me add a few seasonal tips to add to your autumn activities in the apiary, your 'shed' or by the fire:

- Scrape and clean equipment and stack with a sealed base and roof to prevent unwanted visitors. Ideally store under cover (see Beebase guidance: search *Hive Cleaning and Sterilisation* to find the pdf file.)
- Once feeding etc is complete, strap your hives and secure to stands or the ground.
- Leave under-floor inserts in place over winter or not? There is no consensus on whether to do this. More ventilation or added warmth – your call? But do watch out for wax moths taking up residence if the inserts are left in place for a while.



Heather honey flowing from the press

- Prepare fondant to add above the crown boards in mid-winter if the bees are near the top of the frames.
- Repair and patch equipment as necessary before March.
- With Christmas coming up, drop hints about journals you hanker for. For your early years of beekeeping, *BeeCraft* can be helpful reading: <https://www.bee-craft.com>. For those with more experience, why not a subscription to *American Bee Journal*: <https://americanbeejournal.com>. Both offer digital versions and the latter covers many of the latest research findings before they are widely broadcast.
- Books too? With a winter of possible lockdown we may find ourselves with unusual amounts of time to sit in that comfy chair with a book. Here are some of my favourites, listed roughly in order of complexity:
 - *Following the Wild Bees* by Thomas D Seeley
 - *Plants and Honey Bees* by David Aston & Sally Bucknall
 - *The Buzz about Bees, Biology of a Superorganism* by Jürgen Tautz
 - *Mating Biology of the honey bee* by Gudrun & Nikolaus Koeniger, Jamie Ellis and Lawrence Connor
 - *Breeding Super Bees* by Steve Taber



Contact me at bees@kateatchley.co.uk.

A First Swarm!

By Nicky Stevens

This is our 3rd year of keeping bees, we had split a hive that was making swarm preparation and felt very pleased with ourselves. That is, until a nice bright day, after a few of rain, when I was crouched down weeding in the veg patch and suddenly I was aware of a loud buzzing, clearly audible over the strimmer that Neil was using round the back in our chicken area. As I lifted my head it was to see a huge cloud of circling bees around head height, heading right over me. The queen must have already been starved by her workers and had taken off despite our best efforts!

First task was to automatically grab the unsuspecting puppy by the collar and haul him into the house (he's black, so the girls aren't too keen on him and I didn't want to take any chances), then wave and shout at my strimmer-wielding husband till he eventually realised what was going on. We stood helplessly as they circled our beech tree and then took off across the back lane. Nooooooo... A few seconds later along came our neighbour in his tractor – and we flagged him down and pointed out the cloud of bees along his path – he's very



understanding and said he was planning to go that way, but would do something else first, so he reversed and we waited, and watched as the bees disappeared...

We ran up the road on the other side of the field but could see nothing, but there were a few bees in one area, so we retraced our steps inside the field margin and BINGO – there they were, clustered conveniently low in a clump of wild raspberries. Not being sure how long they would stay there we called Norman Jarvis, who said he would pop over later but was busy cooking, but not to be afraid and just go and collect them.

Having never even seen a real swarm before, we gulped, suited up and followed the bees with a spare brood box (which had luckily arrived only days earlier) a set of loppers and a painting sheet. We put the sheet down on the long grass, right up to the edge of the

raspberry patch, and I set about with the loppers removing canes in the way to the clump of bees. I had my phone on video, under my arm – it's not easy to use it with gloves on – but I did manage to get a few useful clips of the process! Neil held the top of the cane the bees were mostly on, I gently cut underneath it, and he moved it to directly over the brood box and gave it a stiff downwards shake. WOW, a cloud of bees immediately flew up, but most had indeed landed exactly where we wanted and within seconds we could see the bees fanning – the queen was in! The rest of the bees from that cane poured in after her and we cut the remaining small clump out and repeated the process. It was just amazing to see so many bees moving like water down a drain.

We left them to it for a short period as we went back to the house to collect the roof for the box – and found Norman in our garden – “ach, I couldn't wait” he said, “I can finish dinner later.” He had only taken about 25 minutes to get to us and the job was already done! Well done, but he came up to have a look – in his shorts and t-shirt – “they'll all be calm and gentle,” he said, and though many were still flying none took a blind bit of notice of us. So a cup of tea was had in the garden, and then later on sure that the bees were in, we carried the hive back across the road to it's new location just a few feet away from where they had started.

The queen has done a super job, bearing in mind that the swarm was from a split; the girls have worked hard, drawn lots of frames, and filled a super, although as we had run out of foundation and not realised there were a couple of empty frames in there, the bees built their comb in a wave across the two frames; beautiful to look at, impossible to spin, but the comb honey has been fabulous.

So there you have it: one hive into 3 instead of 2 – not the way we planned it, but it has all worked and we were glad to be able to rescue our first swarm from a fairly straightforward location. Lucky us – and the farmer did his postponed jobs the same evening, so everyone was happy!

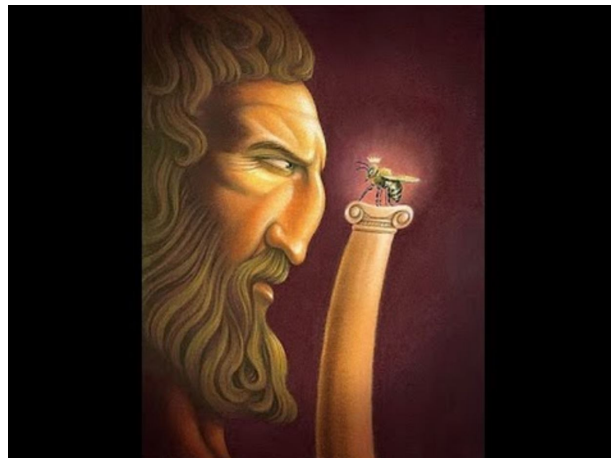


Why Bees can only Sting Once, according to Greek Mythology

Submitted by Craig Fenton

After slaying his titan-king father, Zeus placed himself on a throne in the skies above Mount Olympus. Thus, he made himself king of the gods. At his sides sat his siblings: his fellow Olympians. One of them was Hera, his sister and consort. By her (and by other women), Zeus's offspring filled the remaining of the twelve seats above that mountain. Together, they ruled and shaped Greek mythology. But none other did so more than Zeus, the lightning-bearing All-Father. His later exploits in the art of cheating and avoiding Hera, who would represent marriage and family as his faithful wife, would lead to some of the most well-known stories in myth. Before all this, there had to be a wedding. And it was celebrated like nothing ever had been.

Hundreds of nymphs brought the heavenly couple wedding gifts to try and taste. A hall packed with the gaudiest lauding of wealth and heritage – any way they could steal attention. Not one of them was righteous enough to ignore Zeus's power and generosity in a good mood: give to him, and he will give to you what you could never have otherwise. However, one nymph stood with no embellishment. Round and furry with small, translucent wings that made the most incessant noise, she offered only a golden goop in a plain bowl. Her name was Melissa.



Source: Indeestudios.com

She was strange, even by nymph standards. When Zeus and Hera tried her food, it was a courtesy of a king and queen. A sign of good faith. What they were not expecting was the most sensational tasting food they had ever come across in their boundless lives. Zeus raised the bowl, and blessed it as Ambrosia, the food of the gods forevermore. For mortality, this food was called honey. In reward for her contribution to the gods, Zeus promised to grant Melissa anything she wanted.

The key struggle in Melissa's life was... everything. She was too round, her wings too small and the ingredients for her honey too widespread to maintain any consistency in its production. Hurdle after hurdle escalated the process: animals far larger and terrifying reaped the fruits of her labours, stealing her stores until only a puddle remained. All she asked of the All-Father was the ability to defend what she had suffered the effort to make. She had no weapon, not like the scorpion had a sting or a wolf had canines. Attempting to manipulate the fabric of creation, Melissa's wish was to bear her own weapon.

Zeus was infuriated. This creature, blessed by the king of Olympus to exist and roam in peace, asked for something to wreak violence. All to ensure she could not share. It was the greatest offence one could imagine on a king's wedding day: a day meant to celebrate unity, a connection that ought to exist amongst all manner of life. And she threw it in his face before everyone. It would not be so.

Although dealt by the god of justice, Melissa's punishment was hideous. First, he gifted her a colony of bees to help her gather ingredients and she would lead them as their queen – to ease her effort. Disappointment slumped her, but the king had not finished. Second: her weapon. The hall watched as she shrieked, a giant, black sting slowly protruding from her belly. At its end was a barb, to latch onto what and all she would use it on. As promised, Zeus had given her what was asked for, and more. In doing so, he condemned her. For Melissa could not use that sting without ripping out her very innards in the process.

Article written by Sam Hopkins for milk-magazine.co.uk April 2019

New Equipment for Loan

We are thrilled to announce a new piece of equipment to add to our list for members to borrow throughout the year. A stainless steel **heather honey press** with a couple of scrim bags. Similar to the one pictured in Kate's article above. Let me (Joanna) know if you would like to borrow it!

Bee rescue from a cavity wall

by Alison Ramcharran

On the east coast near Coldingham, not far from where I live, there was a swarm in the cavity wall of a house. The owner of the house did not want to take his wall down, and so with the expert help of Kate Atchley, we formed a local team including a beekeeping couple, who live close to the house where the swarm was, and me.



Our first move was to fashion an exit. Kate had visited, given us advice and sent an article which described the key steps to the rescue. It was imperative to make the exit from the cavity hive into a one way exit, into which the foraging bees could not return.

This was completed with some expert joinery by Steve, who fashioned a long tunnel to lead the bees down from the window sill exit, and out through a cone made of wire mesh. The cone is essential, and the end must be very narrow. The narrow end of the cone allows the bees to exit, but when the foragers then return, they gather near the old entrance and do not go back towards the cone.

At the same time as blocking the entrance with the tunnel and cone, we installed a hive – which I supplied – with a few frames of bees and brood, as close to the cone as possible. As you can see from the picture, the new exit

and cone was a very complex construction but it held on – with a lot of duct tape and some very diligent nightly checking by Steve and Lesley.

The idea is that the returning foragers finally make their way into the new hive, as there is no queen initially, and then they start to requeen to become a new colony, including all the foragers from the cavity.

So we left it, checked it regularly, and after around 6 weeks, there did not appear to be any more bees exiting the cavity wall. The queen – of course – will never come out.

Initially I had not quite appreciated just how much fresh brood was needed, so I returned with more brood – including lots of eggs – a week after the initial installation, which probably put progress back a bit. We then found a queen cell, but have not to date managed to spot the queen.

Having beekeepers nearby was essential as Steve and Lesley checked regularly, including fashioning a white painted runway, onto which they placed some of the foragers who had gathered near the window sill, but could not get in. The white runway worked to tempt them to walk into the hive when placed on it. Gradually the hive came to be the home for all of the foragers.

We three learned a lot. One of my thoughts was the whole operation would work better earlier in the season, but sadly we did not get to it until July, and it took a little while to gather everything together. The timing of placing the new hive as you block the entrance is essential, and we all felt we got as many foragers out as was possible.

The hive now has a new home, and the hole will be sealed. It may have been possible in another rescue to allow the new hive to rob the old one of honey. Given the house owner's patience with us, and the bees, plus the presence of lots of wasps we did not want to risk introducing anything else into his wall.

It was a good feeling to have done this rather than allowing a pest control company to come in.



Mentor/Mentee Groups during Covid Restrictions

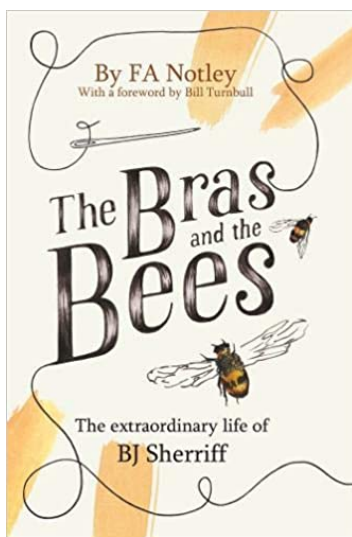
As social distancing is likely to be in place for the next 6 months, group apiary visits will be impossible to organise. So in the meantime we are hoping that small groups might be able to

get together via Zoom to discuss all matters and questions bee related, with a mentor who would be a slightly more experienced beek. The idea is for the group to be very informal and friendly, to meet virtually once or twice over the winter and spring, just until we are able to have our meetings and apiary visits again. Ideally these will be organised geographically, to enable actual get-togethers once they are allowed. We will be appointing someone to coordinate the groups in due course and will email the membership with information.

Book Reviews

The Bras and the Bees – the extraordinary life of B J Sherriff

by F A Notley



This is all about the beekeeping suits produced by B J Sherriff whose origins were actually in the family business of corset-making and bras. He invented the bra-kerchief (the what?!).

When he started beekeeping, he did wear protective clothing, but was still getting stung on the back of the neck. So his wife set about making an improved bee veil from boning, net, polycotton and swimming costume gussets (well that was what was to hand in the factory!).

He did become a bee-farmer, and although he was Cornwall-based, he bought 400 Smith hives from Scotland (designed by Willie Smith from Innerleithen, so mostly only used up here).

A gentle and interesting life story, with unusual twists along the way.

By Christina Auchinachie (This book is available from the BBA library)

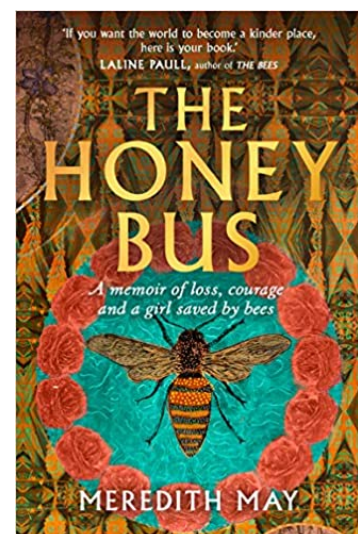
The Honey Bus – a memoir of loss, courage and a girl saved by bees

by Meredith May, 2019

*'The bee is more frightened than you,' he said.
'Can you imagine how scary it is to be this small in a world that is so big?'
He was right.*

Meredith May is an award-winning journalist and fifth-generation beekeeper.

She was five when her parents split up. Her mother took her and her younger brother to live with their grandparents in Big Sur, California. Whilst her severely depressed mother disappeared into herself, her father stayed on the other side of the country. Meredith's rescue from what could have been a difficult childhood was her grandfather, a warm-hearted, down-to-earth, wise and eccentric – basically wonderful – beekeeper, and all she learned in his apiaries of about 100 hives.



First she discovered the rusted old military bus in which he harvested his honey. As they bonded over the art of beekeeping, he showed her that everything she needed to know about life and family was right before her eyes, in the secret world of bees and in their hives.

Meredith: *'Grandpa taught me about bee behaviour, but he spoke in metaphors that helped me maintain hope during my childhood. He showed me how a beehive is a matriarchy, with a queen and tens of thousands of daughters, and only a few hundred drones. It is a fully functional family, with selflessness as its operating principle...'*

Reading it at the beginning of lockdown – and my first beekeeping season – I was spellbound by this hopeful, moving, as well as informative book; part memoir, part beekeeping exploration. It is a warm, rich and lyrical coming-of-age family story in 1970s California, interwoven with the knowledge of beekeeping and the lessons we can learn from nature and not least these marvellous little insects we are all fascinated by.

'The Honey Bus is my story about being raised by bees,' says Meredith May in the book trailer on her website: <https://meredithamay.net/book-trailer-2/>

However I highly recommend that you read the book before you find out what she, the honey bus, the Big Sur landscape and not least her wonderful granddad beekeeper look/ed like. It is the kind of book that will stay with me long after I finished. I shall definitely read it again!

"If you want the world to become a kinder place, here is your book." Laline Paull, author of *The Bees*.

By Meike Schmidt

School News

Buzzing about the bees

I didn't realise that keeping bees would be so much fun! I have been part of my school bee club since starting Kelso High two years ago. I enjoyed the lessons which gave me a good introduction to beekeeping. Then, when the school closed in March this year Mr Baxter, the teacher involved, offered me the opportunity of looking after two hives at home. I was nervous as I had only been to the hives once or twice, and hadn't done an inspection or even opened the hive myself. It's a huge responsibility but it's been a fantastic focus for me and my family. A couple of months later it was time for them to leave. I was sad to see them go, but I now have my own hive. I'm lucky to have Mr Baxter and also Norman Jarvis, who lives nearby, to ask for help.



By Elsa Dalziel

Request for help with my project!

Hello BBA beekeepers, my name is Eleanor Rea and I am an S6 student at Kelso High School, and have also been a member of the KHS Bee Club since S1– so a long time now! Being a part of this has meant that my twin sister Alice and I were the first in Scotland to be awarded a N5 Beekeeping qualification, I know that we are both extremely grateful for all the

support the BBA has given us along the way! I am writing this as I have a request to some of the local beekeepers around Kelso. I am currently studying Advanced Higher Biology at school, and as a part of this I have a project that I need to complete throughout the year. For this project, I have decided to investigate Chalkbrood within hives, whereby I will be measuring the prevalence of Chalkbrood (by counting/measuring the weight of mummies)



and comparing this to the hive entrance area (and humidity). What I am planning to do with this is to manipulate the hive entrance area myself (such as through using wood/metal to decrease the size) and have three separate measurements for this – meaning there will be 5 hives of three different measurements that I need to use. Therefore, this is a request to any beekeepers in the local area who would be willing to let me use some of their hives for my experiment, and if anyone is happy to let me do this I can assure you that I will be very responsible and I will make sure that my sampling will not negatively impact your hives in any way! Thank you very much, and I hope to hear from some beekeepers soon! 😊
My Email: reaeleanor919@gmail.com

Facebook Page

For all the new beekeepers, do join our facebook page and feel free to post questions, photos, amusing things etc. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Borderbeekeepers>

Answer to Picture Quiz

It's a 19th century Bee Shelter, and resides in the churchyard of St Mary's at Hartpury in Gloucestershire. It was the creation of Paul Tuffley, a stonemason and has 28 partitions that protected the skeps, housing around 840,000 bees. It was found in the garden of Nailsworth police station in 1957 when the station was about to be demolished, and was moved by the Gloucester Beekeeping Association to a nearby farm institute. Having been designated a listed building but needing renovation, it was carefully moved again and the little building was re-opened on its current site in 2002. This is an unusually large and decorative example of a bee shelter; historically they were little more than a 'bole', a recess built into a cottage wall or a simple 3-sided structure to protect a skep from the rain. It's not known if this one was actually used, or whether it was built to order by the stonemason in his garden but the order was never fulfilled. Another theory was that it was intended as an advertisement for the Tuffley family business, as an exhibition piece showcasing Cotswold stone.



Your newsletter editors Joanna Payne and Kate Atchley would love to hear from you with photos or stories, poems or musings, requests for articles or announcements; we hope to prepare the next issue in the spring.

Please contact Joanna (jp@thepayneclinic.co.uk).

We look forward to hearing from you!