

Spring



Newsletter 2022

- diary • fireside beekeeping • ukrainian bees
- nurture through nature • for sale • news • crossword
- start of season • book reviews •

Welcome to our spring 2022 newsletter

Chair's Notes

I'm so sorry that we did not actually manage a face to face meeting on March 9th as had been planned. We were all looking forward to seeing smiling faces live, rather than on a screen. We will definitely be asking Matthew Richardson (Science and Bee Health Officer SBA) back to give a talk to us on another occasion, so we will keep you posted.

I hope everyone is enjoying seeing their bees flying during this calm, mild weather after weeks of storms. It is heart warming to see the sun coaxing out more foraging choice just this week – out here on the east coast the gorse is starting to bloom in earnest.

Reminders have now gone out for membership renewal. Do action if you have received an email.

We hope that the April meeting can go ahead without a hitch, but do please check on the facebook page. Please think of great questions for our panel who are all looking forward to a lively and informative discussion.

I look forward to saying hello in person.

Regards

Alison Ramcharran

Dates for your diary

April 2022

27th April – Face-to-face Meeting 19:30 to 21:00 at Kelso Rugby Club.

This will be Q & A session, which has proved very popular in the past. The panel of experts will be Kate Atchley, John Wilkinson, John Dow and Norman Jarvis.

We would be grateful if questions could be submitted in advance please to chair@bordersbeekeepers.org

The room at Kelso Rugby Club is big enough to allow for social distancing. Tea and Coffee will be provided but could members please be reminded to bring their own mug.

Donations for the raffle would be much appreciated.

May 2022

17th May – Border Union Countryside Education Day

We have decided to attend this education day and set up a demonstration hive. BBA volunteers will arrange for various activities – such as simple candle-making and hive observation for the children.

Fireside beekeeping for a successful season

by Kate Atchley

There's little we can do for our bees through the winter but this is fast changing. The colonies are growing and soon we'll be doing our first inspections.

So let's make the best of this last spell of 'fireside beekeeping' to set some goals for a successful season ahead.

Here's my take on the main challenges likely to arise as the season progresses, along with goals we might set to deal with them. It's good to be prepared, both with our intentions and our equipment.

Fast Spring build-up: It can be hard to grasp how fast colonies can build up in the Spring and therefore how quickly we may need to respond. I've made this mistake myself and seen beginners amazed and wrong-footed by colony increase in April/May.

On your first inspection – ideally in April on a mild day of $\geq 15\text{C}$ – there may be brood on 2 to 4 frames. Two or three weeks later the queen could have run out of space to lay, with brood on 3 or 5 frames and winter stores crowding her.

We all know that inspections are advisable during the swarming season – generally May to early July – but you'll need to keep a close eye on colonies as they build up to make sure your queens have ample space to lay. This may entail moving store-filled brood frames to the outside of the brood box and/or scraping stores with your hive tool to encourage the bees to consume the contents. New brood frames, if needed, should be added on the outside edges of the brood nest.

Without sufficient brood space for your queens to lay, swarming is almost inevitable. So anticipate this build up and manage your colonies accordingly.

Early Summer abundance: Again it can be astonishing how fast the spring nectar flow can increase, even without oilseed rape in your neighbourhood. In May the hedgerows are laden with flowers along with top-fruiting trees and many garden shrubs. You'll see the bees foraging frenetically: incoming bees diving into the hive entrance and others emerging 'on a mission', flying off fast.

So what's not to like about that? The answer is again brood space but now this is partly dependent on adding supers. So don't delay adding a super once the brood box is well occupied, otherwise the bees have no option but to store nectar in that box, leaving the queen without space.

Also, most colonies take their build-up to the edge through late spring, with more brood cells occupied than there are adult bees. If for some reason they can't forage vigorously, the colony may risk starvation. Long spells of rain at this time of year can be catastrophic and feeding may be needed.

The same can be so during the 'June gap' – usually the third week of June when forage seems to drop off to a minimum and the bees may resort to using their stores. So don't harvest all the honey early in June.

Plan your swarm response: If your queens are young (in their 1st or 2nd season) and you are diligent in providing brood space and supers – perhaps double brood boxes for vigorous colonies – the bees may not make swarm preparations (ie build queen cells). But be vigilant! I strongly recommend that beekeepers keep an empty nuc on hand until mid-July.

If you find your bees making queen cells, to avoid the loss of more than half those bees in a swarm you will need to split the colony. Personally I think the easiest way to manage this is to re-house the queen in a nuc box, with one or two frames of brood with covering bees – but NO queen cells – and two good frames of stores. Then shake in lots of bees from the supers to make up the numbers so the frames are fairly well covered.

If you can, move this nuc to another apiary at least 3 miles away. If this is not easy, leave the tiniest of entrances and move the nuc well away from the original hive position, close the entrance down to a bare minimum, then position some leafy branches in front of the nuc and its entrance so the bees can't fly straight in or out. This way almost all the bees will adjust to their new home and not fly back to the original hive.

You can then decide what to do with the bees in their original hive. You could leave only one good queen cell to requeen this colony or split it into two or three potential colonies to create increase or nucs to sell to other beekeepers. If you are new to this, it would be best to seek guidance from your mentor or a more experienced beekeeper before completing this. Depending on the age of the queen cells you found being drawn, you will probably have a few days to plan your manipulations as queens emerge 8 days after queen cells are sealed.

This same method of removing the queen from a colony can be used to pre-empt swarm preparations and create increase with a strong colony.

Protect your bees from Varroa and feed generously in preparation for winter. These essential tasks are generally straightforward but if in doubt about managing Varroa, your best to refer to the Managing Varroa advisory booklet available on Beebase: <https://nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>.

Kate Atchley
bees@kateatchley.co.uk



A well-filled frame of brood and stores with little space for the queen to lay.

Ukrainians keep wild beekeeping tradition alive

by Louise Miner & Evelyn Laverick

Ukraine is one of the main producers of honey in Europe. Around 1.5 per cent of Ukraine's population is engaged in various forms of beekeeping, according to the United Nations.

In homes fit for a Queen, their hives are made in trees from a tradition dating back to medieval times. The deliciously sweet product harvested from wild bees is believed to have a special taste.

It is a craft handed down from generation to generation by those who believe wild bees are healthier and their honey tastes different.



Maksym Bortnyk, a honey hunter, makes new hives by hollowing out logs. He then carefully chooses the tree and where to position the hive so it's protected from the winds to ensure the bees inside can survive the cold Ukrainian winters.

"I have left some smell of old bee colony there," Bortnyk said, "I used old wax for it. Hopefully, bees will feel it and will come to live in this beehive."

With Russian tanks rolling out over the Ukrainian countryside and people fleeing for their lives, we can but wonder how their bees are faring. I hope that by some of the Ukrainian beekeepers following traditional practices of wild beekeeping at least some of the bees might survive if their guardians are not around to care for them. See the Thornes/National Honey Show fundraising initiative on page 10.

(Ed.)

Nurture through Nature...

by Heather Taylor

My mental wellbeing is much better because I keep bees. Beekeeping naturally makes you become more mindful, you never really meet a stressed beekeeper – even if one appears to be running from a swarm! Working with bees requires patience and calmness, all of the time. The bees sense when I am nervous, when I am doing something they don't like and they also know when I need to be left alone and given space with my thoughts. I feel blessed to be able to share these experiences with such wonderful creatures. Dog owners are forced to go outside and walk their furry friends, my furry friends require attention but of a different kind. I find they do make me go outside and be with nature but in a different way; I quite often just go and sit and watch them, observe their little adventures as they leave the hive and go on their little journeys. It encourages me



to spend time outside and watch them at their work. A visit to the bees is never wasted and I never put a time limit on it either – I'm just there as long as I need to be on that particular day. Sometimes I need to actually do things but most times I am just observing them and being at one with nature. They have helped me through some bleak times and now I return the favour to them by keeping them busy with plenty of healthy all year round forage.

“Yes, bees buzz. Any two year old will tell you. But they also hum and murmur and rattle. Sometimes when you tap the side of the hive in the dead of Winter, they'll make a sound like rustling leaves. When angry they'll whine like a high-powered mosquito. But on those warm, sunny afternoons in Spring when they know for certain that winter will have to wait it's turn for another year, the bees will send up a sound that is like no other. It's the sound of contentment.” (*The Way to Bee– Meditation and the Art of Beekeeping* by Mark Magill.)



Being a beekeeper means that I am always thinking about what forage my bees have around them and therefore has made me become more aware of what plants are in their local area, and subsequently what is in my garden and near the hives. I have learnt about plants and flowers, when they all have pollen available and I try to extend the bee-keeping foraging time by choosing wisely what plants to put and where. I had no concept of gardening before I took up beekeeping as a hobby either but it seems that they come hand in hand. I haven't cut my dandelions out of my grass and paths, quite the opposite, as these provide early forage for early-season bees, bumbles and the like so we all need to let these little sunshine flowers thrive and signal the start of the beekeeping year.

Gardening is very mindful and Monty Don himself is a champion for the health benefits of gardening. Monty is an advocate for gardening as mental health therapy and tells others of how his mood has been lifted, from a bad day at the office through to depression, simply by the process of looking after plants. Being outdoors – planting, harvesting, having practical connections with nature and animals through a farming or gardening experience – is simply therapeutic by nature. The process of growing plants is all encompassing; planting the seed, watching it grow and then if it bears fruit to eat then even better. The home-grown harvest always tastes the best as it has involved you and the pleasure is all yours. This for me is a sense of achievement, and contentment to some degree. I feel honoured to eat fresh honey every day from my wonderful ladies but I am content that I have contributed to their world and they to mine.

Why don't you put down your phone, go outside for a walk and sniff the air around you, enjoy the natural world around us and mother nature will reward us all with healthy minds if we choose to connect with nature.

Items for Sale

Hives & bees for sale near Duns: 2 colonies in National boxes, cedar. Laying unmarked queen, recently treated for varroa. **Contact Andrew Mossop 07523 103113 / possom1066@tiscali.co.uk**

Books in 'as new' condition

'Practical Beekeeping' by Clive de Bruyn. £15
'BBKA Guide to Beekeeping' £15
'The Biology of the Honeybee' by Mark Winston £10
'Beekeeping Study Note for BBKA bBasic Beekeeping Certificate' £5
'Beekeeping - A Seasonal Guide' by Ron Brown £8
'Bees and Honey' by Ted Hooper £10
'Buzz - The Nature and Necessity of Bees' by Thor Hanson £8
'Beekeeping - practical advice for beginners', published by the National Trust £5

I also have

One large bee-suit with hat and veil, used. £10
One Swienty polystyrene brood box £10
Two Swienty polystyrene supers £7 each
One polystyrene nuc box £20
Two polystyrene feeders: full super size £10 each
Two wooden National supers £7 each
One Wooden National roof £10

I'm happy for anyone to come and look at anything that interests them.

Wendy Frost: Telephone 07933 513450 email mandw.frost@btinternet.com

Wax available

We kept bees for many years in our garden in Selkirk but gave them up a while ago. We sold the hives and all the equipment to a new beekeeper which was neat and satisfying. However, I'm now trying to clear the house a bit and in a dark corner have unearthed kilos and kilos of beeswax - if anyone is interested in taking in exchange for a charity donation, contact:

Pat Neil Tel 01750 20841 or 07799 128 985 patneilgarden@gmail.com

Offer of fields for placing hives

Hello, we are a low stocked, organic certified farm with 5* self catering lodges near Lauder. We are open to the possibility of hives being placed on our land, free of charge, if that is something your members would be interested in. Please contact me if you wish to discuss further:

**Damian Kelly www.airhouses.com
airhouses@hotmail.com**

News

Price of nucs to increase

In recent years BBA's recommended charge for 5-frame nucs has been £150 plus the cost of frames to be returned to the seller - ie around £165 total. The committee has researched nuc charges in other Scottish associations and has agreed to increase the recommended price that members charge for nucs to £180.

This price will include the five frames, so none need to be returned. The nuc should include a marked, young, laying queen, at least 2 frames each of brood and stores and be well-filled with bees. All frames should be fully drawn.

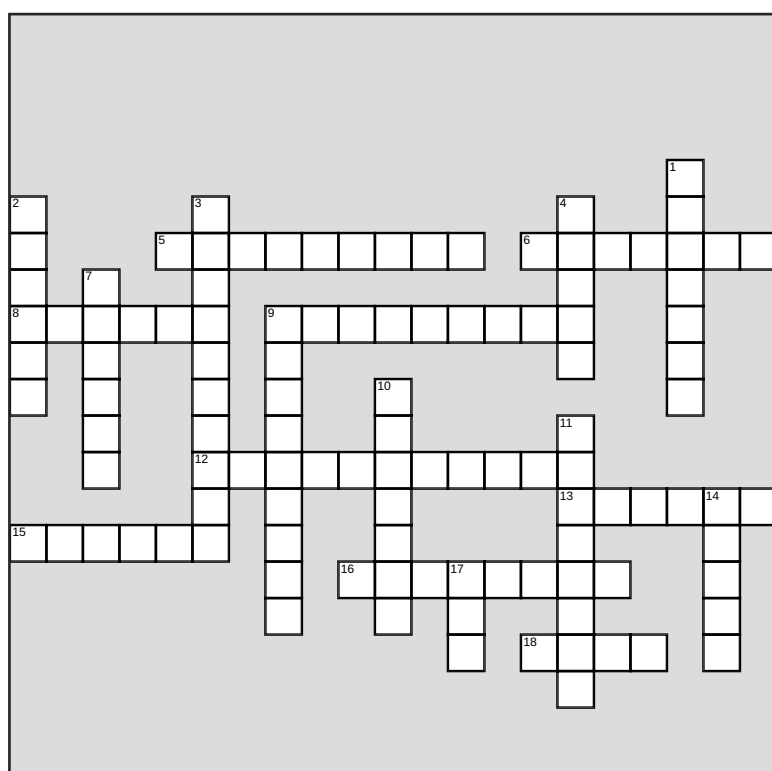
Extractors for loan

The association has purchased another stainless steel extractor together with the kit comprising uncapping tray and knife, 2-part sieve and honey bucket. So with 3 kits available this should cut down waiting time. As usual, contact Joanna (on equipment@bordersbeekeepers.org) who coordinates this. We will try and keep one set each at the east and west side of the Borders and one set more centrally.

Library access

We have now completed the move of the library to Berwickshire High School, Duns. By keeping the books at a school they are more accessible to members as well as being a valuable resource for schools that are developing their own apiaries. To borrow books members need to contact Deon Hills (librarian) with details of the book/s they wish to borrow and to arrange a time and day for picking them up. Deon will meet them at the front of the school building and hand the book over. She will also keep a log of who has the book (name, address etc). This service will only be available during term time. We have an extensive range of 68 books – so there's plenty of fun and education to be gained. A list of library books, term dates and Deon's email address are all available on our website, <https://bordersbeekeepers.org/library>.

Beekeeping Teaser



Answers at the end

Across

- 5 When filled, specially good served with soft goats cheese
- 6 Pheromone from this gland helps bees find their home and forage
- 8 Life for bees and beekeepers would be easier without these creatures
- 9 Used for moving or posting a queen
- 12 Glorious when in flower on the hills
- 13 The colour of dandelion and many spring pollens
- 15 You're likely to find hives here
- 16 Never be without one at the apiary!
- 18 The number of eyes of a honey bee

Down

- 1 Will ensure bees don't starve in winter
- 2 The second brood stage lasting about 5 days
- 3 Made in the hypopharyngeal glands
- 4 Bees forage for this in early Spring
- 7 Early pollen source with one of the largest pollen grains
- 9 A warning of swarm preparations?
- 10 Some are said to be sting-proof
- 11 Hard to clean off but excellent for hygiene
- 14 The recommended colour for marking 2024 queens
- 17 This will help create space for feeder or treatment

The beginning of the season – a few thoughts!

by John Wilkinson, past chair

After a few warm days recently and the flowering currant in bloom, it's time to think about the season ahead. The flowering currant in my garden always flowers early and despite this being the traditional indicator it's safe to go into the hives, I'm going to wait a few weeks for the weather to warm up. It needs to be 16 degrees to avoid chilling the brood but as long as the temperature is in double figures it's usually safe for a quick look.

What am I looking for? I'm primarily checking to see there is a laying queen, ie brood. It's not unusual at this time of year to discover you've got a drone-laying queen with the typical uneven pattern of only drone brood. You also need to make sure that the colony is healthy and has enough stores or fondant to get it through to the Spring nectar flow. It's also a good chance to remove the mouse guards and to look for any damage to the hive. I usually change the floors at the first inspection.



Last year I took stock of my beekeeping. I'd begun to feel it was taking over and getting out of hand. Has anyone else felt that? I had close to fifteen hives in the summer and was determined to reduce to single figures.

At the end of last year, I found I had quite a number of mating failures. I think the weather was to blame (as well as the beekeeper), and queens (certainly mine) didn't get mated. I ended up with a number of drone layers and some hives that just fizzled out. So with combinations and failures, I went into the winter with six colonies. Five of them were very gentle, but one was an absolute fiend. I resolved to deal with that one at the beginning of the season.

I needn't have worried, storm Arwen sorted it for me. It was the only hive of the six that blew over, I had my suspicions that it wasn't doing terribly well before the storm but after the storm, having seen no activity, I decided to take a look. All dead, looked like starvation, despite an abundance of fondant and honey in the brood box, but the bees had become separated from the food supply and the characteristic signs of bees with their heads in the cells was evidence that they'd starved. This was "isolation starvation". I felt very bad that I had let them down.

However, today on 10th March I've been checking the apiary. Having consolidated all my hives in my garden, not having out apiaries makes life much easier. I've built an extra stand, solidly fixed into the ground so I shouldn't get colonies blown over in the future. All five hives were flying with the temperature just into double figures, and to my great joy all were bringing in pollen, a good indication there's a laying queen inside. Making sure that they all had enough accessible fondant, I left them alone, and resisted the temptation to look in the brood box.

In a couple of weeks I hope it will be warm enough to make a first full inspection. Last year I was adding supers by the end of March! I've got five newly-painted floors to swap with the existing ones which will be my first job.

Last year I had a bumper honey crop of over 250 kilos. I'm hoping to reduce that this year and perhaps spend a bit more time raising nucs and queen rearing and less time filling jars with honey. For me, this year will definitely be less is more! I hope you all have a good season and that we get chance to meet up a little more than we have over the last two years.

Book Reviews

The Murmur of bees is the first book by this author (Sofia Segovia) to be translated to English. It is a slightly fantastical book about an orphaned young boy who is found as a baby, being protected by a colony of honey bees.

It is set during the Mexican Revolution, and follows the family who adopt the young boy and how his strange powers and bond with the bees help them. Sadly also during that time the 1918 'Spanish flu' and its effect is also taking place.

I found it a beautiful story, although reading about the flu as we went into the pandemic, was strange, but didn't put me off – I had to finish it, as you want to hear what happens to the amazing boy.

It is not 'about' bees but does capture the magic of them. It's about families, and farming life – I loved it and the language was so well chosen by the translator. It made me want to go and visit Mexico.

Alison Ramcharran

Grey Bees, Andrey Kurkov, 2020, MacLehose Press.

In their Saturday edition 'The Scotsman' has started to showcase Ukrainian literature to bear witness to the country's rich and unique cultural heritage. On the 19th March they published an extract from Andrey Kurkov's book. He is a Ukrainian author who writes in Russian. His 2020 novel *Grey Bees* tells the story of Sergey Sergeych, a beekeeper who has decided to continue living in his small, almost deserted village in the no-mans-land between Ukrainian and Russian-backed forces in the east of the country in order to take care of his bees. The extract in 'The Scotsman' ends: "...It was as if he had lost all feeling, all his senses, except one: his sense of responsibility. And this sense, which could make him worry terribly at any hour of the day, was focused entirely on one object: his bees. But now the bees were wintering. Their hives were lined on the inside with felt and covered with sheets of metal. Although they were in a shed, a dumb stray shell could fly in from either side. It's shrapnel would cut into the metal – but then maybe it wouldn't have the strength to punch through the wooden walls and be the death of the bees?".

The Bad Beekeepers Club – How I stumbled into the curious world of bees – and (perhaps) became a better person, Bill Turnbull, 2010

Bill Turnbull is a prominent British journalist and presenter. He is less well known for being a beekeeper. His book begins: "Hello. My name is Bill, and I'm a Bad Beekeeper. A really Bad Beekeeper. I've done bad things with bees. Terrible things. Things you wouldn't understand unless you were a beekeeper yourself." His book is an account of his beginnings and later experiences as a beekeeper. Despite many setbacks – including being stung in the head on his first day of training – he perseveres and develops his passion. Like so many, Bill makes mistakes throughout the process but adores his bees.

I always enjoyed reading Margaret Forrest's 'My Beekeeping Year' in *The Scottish Beekeeper*, the monthly magazine of the SBBA but also Alex's 'Diary of a Novice Beekeeper'. One was extremely educational and helpful, explaining the beekeepers' tasks and challenges throughout the year. The other one is an honest, charming and often hilarious account of all those mistakes but also successes of a beekeeper learn-

ing the trades. Bill Turnbull's novel is both and has already proven to be engaging for both 'species of beekeepers' within the Borders Beekeeping Association – as the edition I read has been passed through several hands. His book covers the basics, from how a hive works or varroa treatment but also highlights the threats to Britain's bee population, and what we can do to create a better environment for them. 'The BBC (as he calls it)' is universally appealing.

The Bee Book, Charlotte Milner, 2018

What's the buzz about bees? What do they do all day? Why are bees important? Find out why bees need your help – and what you can do!... In this beautiful book, children can discover more about our fuzzy little insect friends with award-winning author and illustrator Charlotte Milner. It is a perfect introduction to bees and their conservation for children of all ages. They will learn lots about the world of bees and find out just how much they matter, why they are declining, and what we can do to help. Children will be fascinated by the beautiful pictures and learn plenty of fun facts in every chapter, such as covering types of bees, beehives, beekeeping, how they pollinate plants, make honey... A celebration of bees, packaged in a gorgeous hard backed book made with high-quality paper and spectacular illustrations.

Meike Schmidt

Stop Press

News just in from Thornes: National Honey Show Ukraine Appeal

"Like all of us I look in horror at the events in Ukraine and wonder what to do. I thought it was time The National Honey Show took the initiative and set up a Just Giving page to give UK beekeepers a focused way to show their support for Ukraine.

"At the moment, any funds donated to our Just Giving page will go directly to the Disasters and Emergency Committee as the best advice we currently have is that cash donations to this group of 15 major charities is the most effective way to help.

"I'm sure many of us are already donating in many ways so why do it via the National Honey Show? In the short term, this is a gesture to show Beekeepers in Ukraine that beekeepers in UK have not forgotten them. [see article page 4]

"For now, the money will go to supporting all Ukrainians. Let's face it - before we can help the bees we need to keep the Ukrainians alive and well. As time moves on, we can review our giving and look at direct assistance for Ukrainian beekeepers but that is for the future.

"The National Honey Show has a long association with the Brotherhood of Ukrainian Beekeepers and for ten years they sponsored the Medal of Ukraine as one of our trophies. This trophy will be immediately re-instated by the National Honey Show as a gesture of support for our Ukrainian friends.

"I hope that beekeepers and beekeeping associations throughout UK will be kind enough to support this project.

"You can [DONATE HERE](#) (link to their JustGiving page)

"You can find more information at www.honeyshow.co.uk"

Bob Maurer, Chair National Honey Show

Beekeeping teaser crossword answers

1 Fondant
2 Larval
3 Royal jelly
4 Water
5 Honeycomb
6 Nasonov
7 Crocus

8 Varroa
9 Across: Queen cage
9 Down: Queen cell
10 Beesuit
11 Propolis
12 Ling heather
13 Orange

14 Green
15 Apiary
16 Hivetool
17 Eke
18 Five