

• Inside: nutrition • spring diary • book review • interview •

Welcome to our spring 2020 newsletter.

Chairman's Notes

I'm just writing this in the middle of storm Ciara, having just been to check the hives in the garden are still upright – they are! We start our beginners' course today with 28 new beekeepers starting their journey into beekeeping. With today's weather it seems an eternity before the season starts, but unless we have another late beast from the east, I suspect things will get going pretty quickly in March. With the mild winter, the queens will have kept laying, maybe without a break, so the brood nests will be getting full of brood rearing to go. It's good timing that our March talk is on that horny old chestnut of swarming. Having had too many swarms last year, I'm hoping for better results this year and am looking forward to hearing Matthew Richardson's advice. Kate's article on feeding is also a reminder to make sure our bees have enough food to get them through to the spring. With the mild conditions, they will have been consuming stores rapidly, so don't stint the fondant, which you can obtain through the association. This year we have made it available to collect from two places across our vast area (see website).

The association goes from strength to strength, and it is a great credit to members that this is the case as it's not only people on the committee who help keep us going but many others, and we extend our thanks to all who make the association a success.

A number of our members have had bereavements in the past year and our thoughts go out to them. I have been moved by how our community of beekeepers support one another in challenging times.

John Wilkinson



This photo, by Wes Robertson and taken in Stichill last July, won first prize in the photographic competition at the Honey Show. Amazing pollen colours!

A Well-Nourished Bee is a Happy Healthy Bee

By Kate Atchley

If I had to restrict guidance to new beekeepers to just one message, it would be “ensure your bees are well nourished”.

That may sound simplistic but it deserves your attention, and not only in the late Summer. We all know the dangers of starvation through the Winter but what about the rest of the year? During the ‘June gap’ the bees can run out of stores because forage is unavailable. Likewise in persistent poor weather, foraging may not be possible and the bees run short. In both these circumstances, the bees are much more vulnerable if we have already harvested a crop of their honey. So always be prepared to check the frames for stores and feed syrup or fondant (or baker’s candy) if there is no incoming nectar.

At the end of the season, many beekeepers will remove only part of the honey crop, leaving bees with their own honey for the Winter. Some argue that the bees do better on concentrated syrup stores than with their own honey. In practice, some experienced beekeepers habitually leave honey for their bees with no problems. It comes down to the bees’ ability to ingest the pollen in honey without it causing them dysentery between ‘cleansing flight’ opportunities. The more ‘southern’ the sub-species of bee – such as golden-striped *Apis Mellifera Ligustica* (Italian) – the less well able they are to retain the pollen husks in their gut for long periods, causing fouling in the hive. The more locally-adapted and near-native (*Apis Mellifera Mellifera*) the bees, the better able they are to retain the pollen waste until a flying opportunity occurs.

DON'T LET YOUR BEES STARVE! Every year we hear of colonies failing in January through March, having consumed their stores or been isolated from them by cold. **This is entirely avoidable** so please peep into the top of your hives. If the bees are at the top of the frames in the top box, feed a block of candy/fondant in an upturned plastic container or covered with plastic to keep it moist. Ideally use a shallow eke so the fondant can be placed on the top of the frames rather than over a hole in the crown board. Also, make sure it is directly above the brood nest. Then check every two or three weeks until late March, though syrup can be fed instead of fondant from around mid-March, to stimulate brood development.

If you haven’t already come across the excellent Dave Cushman website, with its great range of advice and resources, do check it out and look up winter feeding: <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/feeding4winter.html>. If you read the basics and follow the links, you can learn about feeding only fondant rather than sugar syrup which is becoming more popular.

My own preference is to feed a small amount of syrup in the late Summer: enough to stimulate breeding of the winter bees but not to pack the brood space. Then I pile on plenty of fondant/candy which the bees take down slowly. You need an eke to enable this but ekes can be useful for certain *Varroa* treatments too or to surround a plastic syrup feeder.

Whatever your chosen feeding method, each full-sized colony needs some 15–18 kg of sealed sugar/honey stores (a full super holds nearly 15kg). Again, there are marked sub-species differences in winter consumption: the native species are more frugal and may consume less than 15kg; more southern sub-species are known to eat half as much again, or even more (another excellent reason to keep local, ideally near native bees!)

So much for nectar/sugar (the carbohydrate source) for the bees. What about pollen (the protein source)? Typically as beekeepers we leave it to the bees to find all the pollen they need but this too deserves attention. Pollen availability varies through the season, as does nectar. It

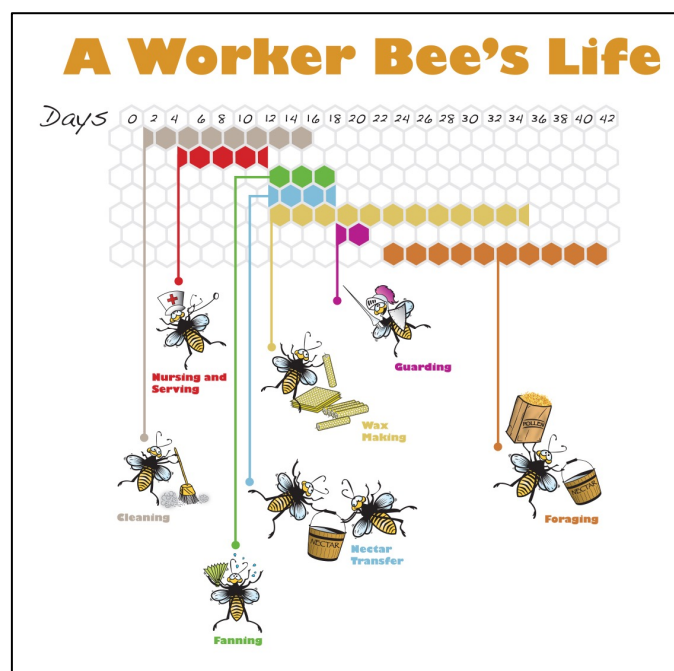
is especially plentiful in the Spring, supporting the fast build-up of our colonies. Gorse, willows and hazel produce copious amounts of early pollen, followed by hawthorn, sycamore and top-fruiting trees.

Beekeepers who rear queens often collect pollen during these months of plenty. Special pollen ‘traps’ are available which knock larger pollen loads off the incoming bees’ corbiculae on their back legs. It fall through a mesh onto a tray. A strong colony will suffer no harm if pollen is collected in this way for 2 or 3 days every couple of weeks or so. A supply of fresh pollen (it keeps well in the freezer) is essential for stimulating the drawing of queen cells and feeding the queens generously. So if queens are reared when little pollen is available the beekeeper can provide collected pollen to ensure success.

For those keeping bees on arable farmland with few fallow or set-aside areas, both nectar and pollen can be very scarce from July onwards. The over-wintering bees, reared in late Summer and early Autumn, need to be well nourished to survive the winter and feed the brood as it builds up from January onwards. So September/October feeding of pollen substitute, if pollen is unobtainable by the bees, may be advisable. Likewise, if your colonies lack stored pollen in late Winter, they may welcome pollen substitute, though you will find they soon spurn it in favour of the real thing once they can bring in fresh pollen. Pollen substitutes are becoming more widely available. Those containing real pollen are preferable. (Do ask me if you want a recommendation!)

Let’s also consider the feeding of brood. This is done by young worker ‘nurse bees’ aged 3–11 days old (timing advice varies). (The exception is in late Winter when over-wintering bees reactivate their hypopharyngeal glands to feed the first brood of the season.) If you perform an ‘artificial swarm’ to prevent a swarm, give some thought to the feeding of the brood in the colony with the original queen. She will be housed on the original site. If, as is generally recommended, you put her in a brood box of fresh frames with only one frame of brood, how many young worker bees will be present to feed her progeny? Yes, the flying bees will *all* return to this hive but the only nurse bees will be on the comb you added with the queen or that emerging from sealed brood on that frame. To provide more nurse bees to enable a faster build-up of that colony, you may want to shake in the young bees (those still on a comb after giving it a gentle shake) from two frames with open brood from the brood box the queen was taken from (but beware shaking queen cells ... queen larvae are very vulnerable until a couple of days before emergence).

The illustration below is helpful in reminding us of the changing duties of worker bees:



Worker bee timeline: bees.techno-science.ca

Spring Diary

- Mar 5** *Swarms* by Matthew Richardson, Duns
- Mar 8** *Skep Workshop*, Newstead
- Apr 20** **AGM** followed by *From hobby beekeeper to lead bee inspector for the Scottish Government* by Luis Molero, Kelso

See website for all details.
www.bordersbeekeepers.org

Book Review

By Wendy Frost

The Beekeeper of Aleppo

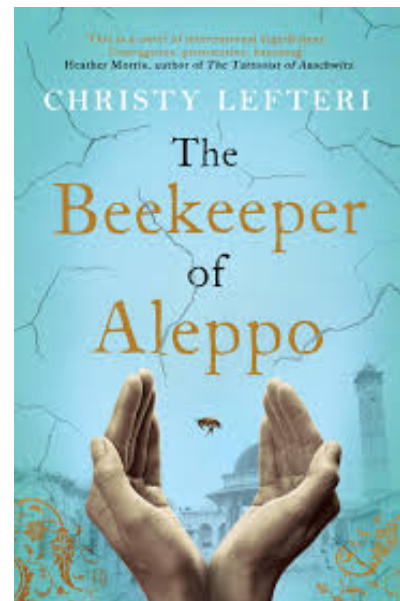
by Christy Lefteri

Powerful, compassionate and intelligent, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* is compelling for its raw honesty and its relevance to the present heart-rending situation in Syria. It tells the story of Nuri and Afra, fictional characters with a basis in fact. Nuri is a beekeeper who, while suffering unspeakable grief and trauma, finds solace and strength in memories of his bees and his dreams of a future where beekeeping will again be possible. This book cannot fail to appeal to anyone who knows the joy of beekeeping. As well as taking us to familiar places with its references to bees and beekeeping, the novel takes us beyond our experience, into a world of war, inhumanity and loss. Above all, it is the story of survival, resilience and the triumph of the human spirit.

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For information on **The Buzz Project**, visit their Facebook page or www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

The Buzz Project, (Standedge Tunnel Visitor Centre, Marsden, West Yorkshire) is a charity founded in 2017 and led by apiarist Professor Ryad Alsous, himself a refugee who was a beekeeper in his native Syria for more than forty years. **The Project teaches refugees and jobseekers about beekeeping and vegetable growing, providing training, enhancing employment prospects and promoting the native British bee.**



Interview with Norman Jarvis, longtime BBA member and beekeeper extraordinaire

By Joanna Payne

**Thank you for agreeing to share some of your beekeeping history with us.
How and when did you start your beekeeping career?**

In July 1994 I was asked to support a friend attend a weekend beekeeping course at the Chainbridge Honey farm. It was love at first sight. After several hours of lectures and handling bees I was smitten and asked if I could acquire two hives. That September my first

two hives were delivered by Murray and Audrey Kenny from Horncliffe, and were deposited in my garden.

Have you always been a member of a beekeeping association?

I enrolled in the Kelso BA in December 1994 which also meant I joined the Scottish BA as Kelso was affiliated to the SBA. The following January, Kelso amalgamated with the Berwickshire BA and was voted to become Border Beekeepers Association. (There was no "s" required at the end of Border as Scotland and England have their own Associations.) Between 1995 and 2000 the learning curve to handle my bees was a steep one. The BBA winter meetings weren't very friendly towards upstarts like me and members were quite secretive. However I was 48 years old and brought up in farming, livestock and farm management, so using those skills I allowed my bees to live as natural a life as they could in a man-made box, to aid the bees by gentle handling and only manipulating when necessary. I discovered that bees experience fear, stress and apathy and could abscond from the hive or just fail if not handled properly. If bees experience fear they will defecate on our gown, the car and washing on the line, so you may upset the neighbours. Hence I kept my bees in out apiaries; no point in the wrath of the queen bee!

What was your greatest challenge?

In 2001, varroa came to the border area and with that a demand for knowledge on how to control and prevent hives failing due to over population. SBA arranged an open day at Oatridge in Edinburgh and two of us went where we learned how to produce mesh floors and to avoid chemical use until all other practical measures had been used; South England were experiencing varroa immunity to the Pyrethrin treatments. We used the mesh floors to monitor for varroa and treat accordingly; and still do.

What was your worst disaster?

In 2007 at the age of 61 I decided to stop working and tried to be a semi-commercial beekeeper. I split my garage into a honey handling area and a storage/maintenance area. This was going well until my first major disaster hit. The worse time for any keeper is to lose a hive; the feeling of guilt and despair can be heartfelt. However I lost 16 hives in one year. This was caused by my apathy in thinking beekeeping was easy and I took my eye off the ball so to speak. I took 21 hives to the heather before the heather had flowered and two weeks of cold, wet and windy weather made the queens stop laying. This meant no young bees to follow next spring, so hives succumbed by the end of March; a hard lesson, but with others' help I recovered.

How has the BBA changed since you joined?

By 2008 the BBA was almost defunct, there were only 9 members and few funds, so action was required to revitalise the group. Three steps were taken 1) a BA website was prepared 2) we had a stand at Duns Show to recruit members and interest people in beekeeping and 3) I started teaching beekeeping for Beginners in 2009 and continued until 2016. In 2016 the BBA was 'swarmed' by an influx of new blood and with experts which superseded my capabilities, so now I am gratefully happy to support from the side lines.

How did you get into teaching?

I attended a course at BBKA York entitled “Teach the Teachers” in 2012. Then in June 2013 I passed my “Basic Beekeeping Certificate” with distinction. After only 20 years of beekeeping!! It’s much easier today to learn beekeeping with the support of the BBA including classes, meetings, mentoring and support which reduces the learning curve.

And finally, typically of Norman:

PS I am looking for a nuc for a young man age 11 to start this year, any offers?

Thank you Norman; you have, and continue to inspire so many novice beekeepers – from 11 year-olds to *ahem* much older newcomers and I for one am so very grateful for your help and support so generously given with humour and candour. Your apiary visits have always been very well attended, not only for Eleanor’s delicious tea!

And finally....

From Kate Atchley:

Bees enjoying a sound journey ... clambering on the bowls, calm and peaceful!



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 summer.

Please contact Joanna (jp@thepayneclinic.co.uk) or Kate (bees@kateatchley.co.uk).

We look forward to hearing from you!