

• sourcing bees • badgergate • BBA biog • amnesty • proverbs • mining bees • school news • reviews • swarm collector list • for sale •

Welcome to our spring 2021 newsletter.

Chairman's Notes

Suddenly it's spring and the beekeeping season is in full swing. The pandemic has had a strange effect on time; I found the weeks passed slowly but then almost without noticing the days had lengthened and we were opening up beehives again. The association has been flourishing in these hard times, membership continues to grow – now at around 120, and for the first time for a while we have a full committee. Like in so many walks of life, the Covid-19 has made us look at how we do things and make changes – and a lot of these for the better. Our on-line meetings have worked really well and we've had more people at these meetings than ever we had in the past. We've also been able to draw on speakers from far and wide, unconstrained by distance. Even the AGM was the best attended I've ever known. We are holding more regular short committee meetings 'on-line' which also seem to work well. So undoubtedly some of these changes will continue. I think we are likely to have a mix of on-line and face-to-face meetings next season. Please send me suggestions for topics and speakers. If the rules permit, we hope to arrange some outdoor apiary visits later in the year – again if you want to volunteer for one of these please get in touch.

I hope you find this newsletter interesting, and thanks to our contributions especially those from our new committee members.

John Wilkinson

Obituary

Fred Mitchell 1925–2021

By Norman Jarvis

We are sorry to say that BBA member Fred Mitchell died on 5th May aged 95. When learning his trade as an apprentice builder, Fred was introduced to beekeeping by one of his employers and remained a beekeeper for 70 years. Fred was a well-known member of the former Kelso and Berwickshire Districts Beekeeping and in 1994 founded the Borders Beekeepers Association. An honorary member of the Scottish Beekeepers Association, he also had connections with other associated beekeeping groups from Aberdeen to Stranraer either through lectures, showing, judging or selling honey. Fred and Bill Smith attended the Scottish National Honey show at Ayr competing with their honey on many occasions. His input was to assist with secretarial, financial, correspondence and learning which he did for most of his time with bees. At his apiary visits he showed a benevolent gentleness when demonstrating his handling of the bees. Fred only took holidays every 2 years, for the biannual Appimonde Conferences, where with Bill and his wife they would attend many events. They visited many countries on every non-polar continent in the world. The first winter beekeepers' meeting would be a debrief of all that was heard about new beekeeping information, then after meeting friends, their visit was more a sightseeing, cuisine and local beverage safari! Over many years, taking modules with the SBA culminated in achieving the No. 1 certificate in Honey Judging. For his work and participation in the associations he received the prestigious SBA John Anderson Medal.



Where to source bees?

By Kate Atchley

Okay, I admit it: I'm somewhat prejudiced about where to source bees. As a founding trustee of the Scottish Native Honey Bee Society and a breeder of native Amm bees for some years perhaps that's not surprising!

Putting prejudice aside, let's 'follow the science'. Is there evidence to help us decide where to source bees? The data is clear: local bees thrive best. And by thrive I mean bees adapted over time to their locality will tend to harvest, survive winters and propagate more successfully than imported or non-local bees. Rather than explain the evidence of the large-scale COLOSS research here, do read the long, detailed blog from *The Apiarist*, Professor David Evans': see [here](#). There David quotes the report: "colonies with local queens survived on average 83 ± 23 days longer than those with non-local queens". Unequivocal!

As next-day delivery via the internet becomes a norm, patience on the part of beekeepers seems to be in decline. Online offers of queens and bee packages are tempting, especially if you are starting out or have lost bees during the winter. They often carry information suggesting the bees are the best ever and local, or at least bred in the UK. But if large numbers of queens or colonies are being sold, and you were able to enquire further, you would almost certainly find importing and non-UK sub-species are involved at some recent stage in the process. I know of no large-scale bee seller in the UK who is genuinely rearing and selling what we would understand as 'local' bees. Ergo, the bees being sold are not of the species/genetic type prevailing locally nor are they locally adapted.

Characteristics of Borders bees

Here in the Borders our bees are generally less hybridised than in most parts of the UK because imports have been fewer. The local strain is predominantly native *Apis mellifera mellifera* (Amm): a dark, black and brown bee with no gold stripes. These bees demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Brood nest is modest in size
- Queens stop laying when there is no incoming forage (eg June gap or prolonged wet weather)
- Overwinter well and use less stores than other species
- Fly and mate at lower temperatures than other species
- Almost always end season with surplus stores even in poor seasons
- Low swarming inclination and tendency to supersedure.



A good frame of sealed brood.

In our erratic Scottish weather the bees have adapted over the years to cope as well as possible with the conditions they are likely to experience locally. This is of benefit to the wellbeing of the bees (and therefore the beekeeper).

Another often-misunderstood aspect of introducing different sub-species is temperament. A bought non-local queen and colony may be wonderfully calm year one. But her daughters, or granddaughters, when mated locally outwith their strain of bees, are likely to be far too feisty for comfort. These descendent queens are likely to look dark and near-native, as that colouring is usually dominant. And this has given native bees a reputation for

being aggressive but in their more settled or less hybridised state they can be good tempered and a pleasure to manage.

OSR produces a bumper honey crop for those whose bees can harvest from it. But it flowers early. This had encouraged the keeping of sub-species such as Buckfast and Carnica (Italian) which build larger and earlier brood nests, so being able to bring home more of the OSR nectar. If it is heather honey you are after on the other hand, our more native bees have adapted to be at maximum strength for the moors and will withstand raw upland conditions with fortitude.

Simple solutions: patience required

Let's consider then, how the beekeeping community itself can thrive without resorting to bringing in non-local bees. When I began keeping bees umpteen years ago, few beekeepers reared their own queens and most of us squashed some queen cells whenever swarm preparations were afoot.

If we could turn that around and rear more of those queens, instead of destroying them in their cells, there would be a multiplicity of new queens and baby colonies available to requeen or pass on to others towards the end of the season. And that is now happening in many apiaries in the Borders. Over the last few years more nucs have become available within BBA and we are usually able to meet the call from beginners and others for colonies.

The rearing of queens can be simple but takes some time. I recommend novice queen rearers adopt one of two straightforward methods to raise a few queens:

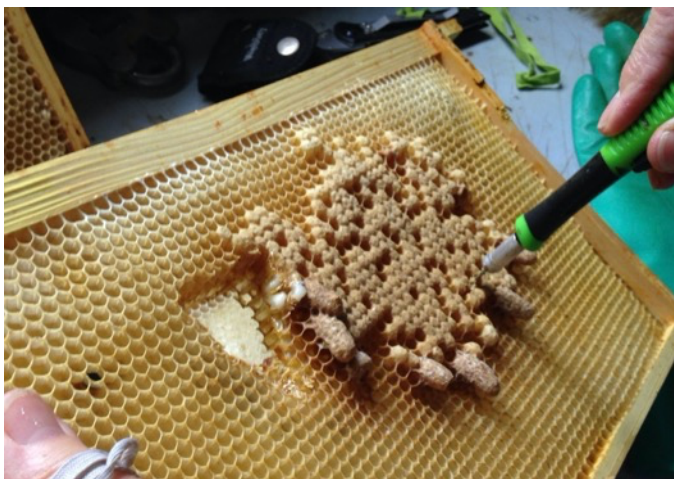
1. Create a vertical split (artificial swarm) or 'Demaree': see Phil Moss's article, p.111 of *The Scottish Beekeeper*, March 2021 (or ask me for a copy)
2. Remove the existing queen to a nuc: see *The Apiarist* again [here](#), from his subtitle *Plan B* onwards

Both methods are effective in controlling swarming whether they are applied before or after queen cells have been started.

Those of you who watched Stewart Spink's recent BBA talk on queen rearing will be well equipped to try: see [here](#) (the passcode is SL@yLV75). He includes a clear explanation of splitting a colony.

Do have a go! For me this is the most interesting and satisfying aspect of beekeeping.

Below left Cutting out some of the queen cells from a frame to add to nucs. Before doing a split it can be helpful to add a recently drawn frame in the centre of the brood nest where the queen will quickly lay it up. Newer wax is easier to cut and softer for fitting tightly into another frame.



Above A queen cell cut out ready to fit into the frame of a nucleus colony for emergence and mating.

Contact me at bees@kateatchley.co.uk.

Badgergate!

By Fiona Hawkes

“Badgergate” started early one morning when we noticed during the early animal round that the lid of the beehive had been pushed off. It had been a cold night so the lid was put back on and the hive investigated when the temperature rose. The bees were fortunately all okay. We have often been pestered by foxes and deer so we put heavy stones on the lid of the hive to secure it and set up our outside camera in the hope of catching images of our visitor. Next morning the lid of the hive was on the ground and the pouch of candy pollen had been removed. The poor bees had been left to the mercies of the weather. The hive was moved into an empty locked kennel to protect it from the frost and again it was checked when the temperature rose. The good news is that the queen is okay and the bee numbers are recovering after their ordeal.

We searched through the footage from the camera and found this badger pushing the stones from the top of the lid, clawing off the lid and trying to pull out frames from the hive. The bees were angrily buzzing him and he left the premises with speed.



The bad news is that the badger was so annoyed at not getting into the bees that the next night he broke into a chicken ark and killed two chickens. All was quiet for a week or so but there has been a repeat visit when he broke into another chicken house by tearing off the rubber roof and killed the elderly chicken who called this her home. The war continues!

Beekeeper Biography

Beekeeping Memories by *Ruth and David Macadam, BBA members*

Ruth began beekeeping when she and her family moved to Strathellie in Aberdeenshire and the cottage they lived in had beehives. There was a beesuit and a smoker, so having read Ron Brown's book (*Beekeeping, A Seasonal Guide*) she set to. Having discovered that the three hives were all different – a Langstroth, a WBC and a national hive – she set about checking them to see what was what and discovered the cover board at a jaunty angle in the National hive. Later on she heard from a neighbour that the previous occupant had only

ventured in once and was seen running away from the hive pursued by invisible bees convinced they were attacking him, so in that foray he'd dropped the cover board back in any old how, put on the roof and never went there again!

On moving back to Duns, Ruth and her daughters obtained some local hives and kept them at the back of the long garden learning new skills of making up hive parts and tending to their new girls. Initial worries about the neighbours were allayed on discovering one was a seasoned beekeeper with an out apiary and the other worked with beekeepers in Africa. In those days you couldn't buy a child-sized bee suit so Ruth made one, a cotton pull-on top elasticated at the bottom with a hood fashioned from plastic petticoat stiffener and black netting, and pull-on elasticated trousers with elasticated ankles.

Years later and shortly after Ruth and David were married and moved to Duns, David said he would like to keep bees. His granny and great grandpa had kept bees in the Far North of Scotland. No suits or veils for them! This was music to Ruth's ears!! Together they joined the Borders Beekeepers and went to the classes to clear up Ruth's patchy knowledge. It was one of the best things they ever did, not only for the education but also getting to know other members and then learning from them in meetings and apiary visits ever since. One particular delight was the stand-making class they attended; the stand has proved invaluable, saving a lot of creaking and groaning to get down to the brood box! It also has the advantage of being slightly more than two hives' wide so spare supers etc can be put beside the hive. When not in use it makes a lovely place to sit and watch the comings and goings.



Since then Ruth and David have had bees in the garden, but having lost their hive last year to wasps, they realised during the winter how empty it seems without the hives to visit to share their news and watch their bees' amazing behaviours. David once sat in front of one of the hives when it was swarming and learned a great deal about their behaviour when doing so. Meantime, Ruth was in the garage working away like Gepetto making frames for a new hive as fast as she could. They've avoided that scenario

since by ensuring they always have a spare brood box and a super's worth of frames!

Exploits include collecting swarms; one notable one was when they were called out to the Knoll, but unfortunately a few days after the swarm. It would appear the swarm had been on the wall on the patio area and moved on, but stragglers had got left behind and taken up residence in the electric awning. After checking out the roof to ensure the main swarm wasn't there David was dispatched to walk down with a ladder and brush and he and Ruth swept the remaining bees out of the awning. One of their own swarms into a yew tree took them three attempts to capture; each up a ladder, David with the collecting box on his head (an underbed storage box makes a great swarm collector) and Ruth shoogling the branch like crazy to shake the bees in. All seemed well, they took the box to the hive, shook them out onto the sheet and they all walked in nicely over an hour or two. Next morning the hive seemed very quiet, and yes, the yew tree was anything but! They repeated the

procedure with the exact same result, so on the third occasion Ruth sawed a chunk off the tree to drop into the box, but it was too heavy, so a strange parade akin to a Palm Sunday procession with the aforementioned branch, a huge dunt onto the sheet and finally they had them home! Thank goodness that rigmarole was collecting one of their own swarms!



All three of their grandchildren are very interested in the bees and always wanting to plant bee-friendly flowers. Sophie (9) has been in the hive with Ruth, and very quickly picked up the terminology – children love new words and beekeeping is an ideal activity for this. Georgie (5) was too small to do this before lockdown etc but will doubtless be keen to have a wee look in this summer when they are finally allowed to visit. Becca (3) is already planning to see the bees with her Papa when she comes up in July and talks so excitedly about it on facetime chats, so the future looks bright!

Amnesty!

Please can you search your consciences and/or bee food stocks for the following...

Fondant/Syrup: We had a loose arrangement for supplying fondant and syrup via Finlay's office at Swinton Mill. Unfortunately this has resulted in quite a substantial amount owing to the association by people picking up stock without paying for it!!! Please, if you picked up any syrup or fondant from Swinton Mill since lockdown, can you search your records/bank statements and check if you've paid for it, or contact Craig Fenton at theoldhospitalbees@gmail.com and he can double check the records we have.

A Swarm of Bees in May....

From 'The Dictionary of Proverbs and their origin' by Linda and Roger Flavell (1993, pg. 14/15) found by Meike Schmidt

'A swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay'
Activity at the proper season produces good fruit; lateness reduces the yields.

The following is from *The Times*, 12 August 1992

"In the first week of August, a swarm of bees came to stay with me in Derbyshire. It was too late for them to make honey. The tedious English proverb says:

A swarm of bees in May
Is worth a load of hay.
A swarm of bees in June
Is worth a silver spoon.
A swarm of bees in July
Is not worth a fly.

But I was honoured that the swarm should have chosen my door above which to hang, though to enter my office you had to duck. A dark night, a moment of absentmindedness...it didn't bear thinking about. Still, I thought, the bees, like new age travellers, would soon move on.

The days passed. The swarm grew. Worker bees returned with full pollen sacs. They were making honeycombs. Plainly there had been a misunderstanding. Overnight hospitality is one thing; permanent houseguests, another. Yet dispersing them now, with autumn approaching, would be heartless. And besides, this was the week of my birthday. To kill or scatter them could anger the gods."

Earliest written records of the proverb dates back to the mid-seventeenth century but it must have been a pearl of household management long before. Honey was the main ingredient used to sweeten food, so the productivity of the bees was of prime importance. No farmhouse would have been without a cluster of plaited straw hives. The repair of the hives, the well-being of the bees and collecting the honey were all the responsibility of the busy housewife. Some of the honey would be kept for her own household's use, the surplus would be sold.

The unknown author of *Reformed Commonwealth of Bees* (1655) records the rhyme thus: *"a swarm of bees in May is worth a cow and a bottle (bale) of hay, whereas a swarm in July is not worth a fly."*

John Ray has: *"A swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay, but a swarm in July is not worth a fly."* (*English Proverbs*, 1670)

The line *"A swarm in June is worth a silver spoon* is a later addition, possibly nineteenth century. A correspondent of *Notes and Queries* (1884) gives this fuller version:

*"A swarm of bees in May
Is worth a load of hay.
A swarm of bees in June
Is worth a silver spoon.
A swarm of bees in July
Is not worth a butterfly."*

The proverb is still as true since honey is a natural and seasonal product. By July it is too late in the year for the bees to store up honey before the flowers fade.

Miner/Mining Bees

By John Dow

Around the end of April I received a message from a lady asking for help to resolve a problem with bees on and around her property which she lets out during the summer. She sent me a photograph and they did look like honey bees. I popped over (as it wasn't far) and found hundreds of bees flying around, many all over the house wall. Immediately I knew they were not honey bees. On further inspection I noticed there were hundreds of volcano type holes in the lawn and around the paving slabs. Bees were entering with pollen attached to their legs just as honey bees do. It was very clear that with all these entrance/exits that they were solitary bees. The area with all these holes was roughly 12 square metres and I found the sight extremely interesting. A chair and a packed lunch would have been ideal. Speaking with the lady I suggested I would do some further research as like me she was very intrigued.

My research found that these bees were miner/mining bees but not the common "tawny species". From the website photos I identified them as very like the *andrena scotica* species. These bees have a life cycle above ground of about 6 weeks. The females forage for nectar and pollen and the males are similar to the honey bee drone having one purpose, mating with the female, and like the drone honey bee, they die after mating. There is no queen bee. The females dig tunnels into the light soil or sand to a depth of up to 60cm; the tunnels have 5 branches leading off where they place the nectar and pollen and lay one egg in each. The female can only lay 5 eggs and dies soon after. These eggs hatch into larvae within 3 days and the larvae feeds on the nectar and pollen until the metamorphosis stage begins. This process takes 12 months when the cycle begins once more.

On returning to see the lady, I explained to her that these bees were solitary miner bees and would only be there for up to 6 weeks. Only the female bees can sting and this is very unlikely. Their sting strength is only about one third the strength of a honey bee. She was quite happy to leave them (bee) for this year. Next year she plans to plant some lavender plants and spray the area with some essential oils they would not be happy with and hopefully they will move on to pastures new.

There is a You Tube programme on the garden seekers website showing these bees.

<https://www.gardenseeker.com/lawn-care/pests-diseases/miner-bees/>

School News



The Bee Club apiary from Kelso High School has moved to the grounds of Floors Castle. In their first hive inspection since lockdown, youngsters carried out their first practical assessment of bee handling skills. We cannot praise the youngsters enough for their courage, skill and beekeeping knowledge. Students confidently discussed the lifecycle of honey bees while spotting eggs and larvae to confidently conclude there must be a fertile queen in the colony. Thank you Floors Castle for such an amazing spot to learn about bees.



Book, Youtube Video and Film Reviews

The Barefoot Beekeeper (2007, 4th edition)

Phil Chandler is a well known and respected beekeeper, based in Devon. He has decades of experience, including working with Brother Adam at Buckfast Abbey and as a commercial beekeeper for a year.

This book inspires those who want to do more environmentally-aware beekeeping. Phil re-thinks the way bees are treated since the industrialisation of beekeeping back in the 1850s. Using home-made equipment and more natural ways of keeping bees, he has devised several hive types, including the Quadratic Hive, and the Zest Hive. He also works with top bar hives, using biodiversity of natural flora and fauna to replicate hollow trees. (Eco floors provide fungi, moulds, habitat for earwigs, and wood lice etc.) By placing wood bark, leaf mold, and dampened untreated sawdust on a mesh floor, the bees have a more symbiotic environment to live over.



Restoring a Brother Adam Apiary

Phil also has a YouTube presence, his channel is **Phil Chandler: Barefoot Beekeeper**. His videos are for the expert and novice alike and cover many aspects of beekeeping. One of his videos shows a bit of beekeeping history where he starts to restore one of Brother Adam's apiary sites established originally around 1970. This site was in use when Phil worked for the Abbey in 2005–6. He has some of Brother Adam's original Dadant Hives, and uses the hive bases Brother Adam made, to this day. The link is <https://youtu.be/5Pnd8cXCr-Y>

By Miranda Brackenbury



Keeping the Bees (2019) Film available on Netflix

“Keeping the Bees” is a Turkish drama set in the little-filmed northeastern region of the country, in the southern edges of the Caucasus Mountains. It’s a story about a woman who comes home from Germany, where she lives and was educated, only to find herself trapped in a place where she no longer fits in. Ayşe sets out to fulfill her mom's dying wish — to care for her bees. “Take good care of my bees.” Mom lives just long enough for Ayşe to complain that it’s “my biggest fear”, something she never got over growing up there. “I can’t do it!” She’s got Mum’s loyal assistant Ahmet to help teach her the peculiarities of “Caucasian bees”. The fact that it’s a wet year means there’s no honey money coming. But the college gal from the Big German City has her internet. None of your superstitions, thank you very much. She finds a Buckfast variety of bee “that can see in the rain”. “British bees,” Ahmet sniffs. That’ll

never work! The rest of the film then tells the story of conflicts between the ancient

traditions, secrets of beekeeping and new approaches and ideas researched on the internet. Oh, and you'll need some tissues ready when Chestnut makes an appearance!

By Ray Baxter

Updated Swarm Collectors List

Kelso and surrounding areas: Stuart Pike 0742514006; Norman Jarvis 01573 228276

Lauder and surrounding area: Ian Whittaker 01578 722670

Stow, Galashiels, Jedburgh, Kelso :Billy Kirkpatrick 07974 241445

Jedburgh, Hawick and surrounding area: Kate Atchley 07774 807645

Melrose, St Boswells, Earlston, Selkirk, Newtown St Boswells :John Wilkinson
07980 129996

Maxton, St Boswells, and surrounding areas: Justin Lanyon-Olver 07515 669749

Ancrum and surrounding areas: Louise Rawlins 07786 706530

Galashiels, Melrose, Lauder, Stow, Selkirk, Earlston: Emma Chapman 07931 336445

Chirnside to the coast: Alison Ramcharron 01890 771835 or 07768 266339

Duns to the coast: David Macadam 07876 535957

Duns and surrounding area: Andrew Mossop 07523 103113

Duns and surrounding areas: John Dow 07969 560097

For Sale/Wanted

- 3 National open mesh floors, brand new and still in packaging £10 each
- 7 National supers, old but clean, sound and well-maintained £8 each
- 1 Rhombus escape £1
- 1 National brood box with metal runners, unused but may need slight adjustment to bee space £10
- 1 National roof 4" flat pack £10
- Various odds and ends (castellations, mouse guards, queen cages, etc) – free to good homes!

Contact Wendy Frost on 07933 513450 or 01835 864226 or mandw.frost@btinternet.com

If anyone has a spare Langstroth hive and would like bees, there are some going free-of-charge in Pathhead due to owner unable to cope. You would need to supply replacement frames with wired foundation. Contact Billy Kirkpatrick ASAP on 07974 241445.

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!