

Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association

Newsletter – January 2019

Website: www.wgbka.org.uk

Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/486401598062884

Officers and Contact Information:

Life President: Roger Patterson	01403 790637	roger-patterson@btconnect.com
Hon. Secretary: Tess Clarke	07773 413025	secretary@wgbka.org.uk
Hon. Treasurer: Murray West	01798 867048	murray@mt-w.co.uk
Membership Secretary: Richard Gibby	01403 588092	membership@wgbka.org.uk
Newsletter: Tamsin Farthing		tamsinfarthing@mac.com

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Contributions for the February newsletter should be received by Friday 25 January.

From the Editor

Happy New Year! I hope that you had an enjoyable Christmas period, and that you remembered to renew your WGBKA subscription. If you didn't, please do so as soon as possible.

There are plenty of events to look forward to in the next few months: not just our own EGM and other meetings, but also the WSBKA Annual Convention, with an array of speakers and workshops, and Roger's one day presentations on *Sustainability - Bees and Queens for Everyone using low-cost, simple methods*. Please also read the proposal for a Microscopy Day, and contact Roger to confirm your interest.

It may be winter, but Roger has been spotting signs of spring, and has some reminders and advice on how to make sure that our bees come through the winter in good health. He's also been looking back to forty or so years ago to reflect on changes – and similarities – in beekeeping.

Finally, I am sure that we will all join Roger in thanking Tom Moore for his years of service to the Association in numerous different ways. Very many members have benefitted from his calm efficiency and practical advice, most recently in the October meeting when he shared a large number of useful tips. We should also thank Tom and Gordon for their generous donation of a solar wax extractor.

Tamsin

Dates for your diary

Extraordinary General Meeting

Tuesday January 8th at North Hall, Loxwood. *EGM to discuss and vote on the proposed new WGBKA rules. This will be followed by a beekeeping quiz where members will be put into teams. Formal notice has been sent to members separately. The EGM is important, as the rules should reflect how the members want their beekeeping association to be run. Please attend and give your views. They are valuable.*

Winter Meetings

These will take place in Wisborough Green Village Hall unless otherwise advised, with a 7.30pm start. The dates are as follows:

Tuesday February 12th – *topic to be advised.*

Tuesday March 12th – Annual General Meeting

Please support winter meetings as they are arranged to help learning.

Introduction to Beekeeping

Rudgwick Village Hall, **Saturday 2nd March 2019**

A day for those who haven't started bees or only just have. Details are now on the website.

West Sussex Beekeepers Annual Convention

Saturday 23rd February 2019

Lodge Hill Centre, Watersfield, Pulborough

Not to be missed!

Enclosed with this month's newsletter are the details and Booking Form for the WSBKA Spring Convention 2019. As mentioned in the last newsletter, we have a renowned group of speakers and an impressive mix of lectures and seminars with something for everyone.

A simple lunch will be included and there will be many opportunities to catch up with fellow beekeepers from around the county. As always, Paynes Southdown Bee Farms will bring a range of equipment to the Convention for you to purchase.

Special bonus for Beginner Beekeepers! In conjunction with Paynes, we are pleased to offer a £10 Payne's voucher to the first 10 beekeepers from WSBKA who book a place at the Convention in 2019 and who have attended a Beginners' training course at any Division of the WSBKA in 2018. It is a special opportunity to make a beekeeping purchase with a high discount! Qualifying members will receive separate notification in the coming days.

As always we are hoping for record numbers to attend and encourage you to book early to ensure that you secure a place on your preferred seminars.

Microscopy Day

We are hoping to have a couple of microscopy days that are scheduled for **Sunday 31st March and Monday 1st April**, probably 10.00-4.00. These are themed "*The internal and external view of the honey bee*". They are intended to help beekeepers understand their bees and how they function. No previous experience is necessary.

The main tutor will be Jim Pearson who lives in Yorkshire, but we can bring in other tutors depending on the numbers who book. This will be similar to workshops run by Jim at the BIBBA Conference in Cirencester that Meriel Bottle and Richard Gibby attended. If you want to know more, I'm sure they will answer questions.

The venue and numbers we can accommodate will depend on the response, so **please reply ASAP**. There is no cost for WG members, but there will be for non-members to help pay for expenses. The number of microscopes will also limit the number we can accommodate. We will be using x10-20 magnification stereomicroscopes (also called "binocular"). We have managed to source 5 so far, but we are in need of others. Has anyone got an instrument we can borrow please?

It will help if attendees are willing to purchase their own instruments and I offer some options. The *Brunel MX2* <http://www.brunelmicroscopes.co.uk/stereomicroscope.html> is recommended as a beekeepers' microscope. If you wish to purchase your own please let me know as we may be able to negotiate a discount for several.

A cheaper alternative at less than £50 is the *Bresser Biolux ICD 20x Stereo Microscope* from <https://www.bristolcameras.co.uk/p-bresser-biolux-icd-20x-stereo-microscope.htm> at £49 <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bresser-Microscope-Biolux-ICD-Stereo/dp/B0017J7NW6> at £49.99 and https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bresser-Junior-Stereo-Microscope-20x/dp/B001UJGV4?psc=1&SubscriptionId=AKIAJJRY7MSLSE45JVFA&tag=d5t5w_1-21&linkCode=xm2&camp=2025&creative=165953&creativeASIN=B001UJGV4%20at%20 at £39.76! This is battery powered so it can be used in the field. The eyepiece tubes are vertical, so may be a little uncomfortable to use for long periods.

An option is a *Solomark* at £69.99, also battery operated, but this has 45° eyepiece tubes, so it is easier to operate and it has an adaptor to take a Smartphone, so you can photograph what you see. https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B06XP8D4G9/ref=sspa_dk_detail_2?psc=1&pd_rd_i=B06XP8D4G9&pd_rd_w=LilmL&pf_rd_p=8e5be0e3-b258-4b06-8b6e-695b24f935a4&pd_rd_wg=n45qa&pf_rd_r=7850TRSBJWW6VKHSRVZD&pd_rd_r=5a0e0f5d-09fc-11e9-b808-fdb51f2211df

A look online will show several alternatives of the above, all at roughly the same prices. I have checked with Jim Pearson and he says the *Bresser* and *Solomark* will both be suitable, but you need to satisfy yourself before buying. They are very affordable as a starting point. Another option is to buy one for a child or grandchild, then borrow it!

I know I have asked several members at meetings, but I need a firm commitment please. Please **email me** roger-patterson@btconnect.com stating:-

Which day(s) you are available? If both, then indicate both, so I can allocate the most convenient. I need to know, so I can do some juggling.

Have you a suitable microscope you can lend us for a couple of days?

*Would you like to order a Brunel MX2?

*Are you willing to purchase your own microscope from the options above?

*This will guarantee you a place, as other places will be limited to the number of microscopes we can source.

If you need any further help please email Roger.

Tom Moore

At the end of December Tom Moore retired from all WG posts. He has done many tasks including chairman, demonstrator, delegate to WSBKA where he became chairman, the shop, beginners packs, making up and distributing oxalic acid, etc, etc. Many of you will have first met Tom when he shared the presentation at the Beginners Day.

A Beekeeping Association can't function efficiently without such input from members. On behalf of WGBKA I wish to thank Tom for his commitment and dedication.

Roger

Solar Wax Extractor

Tom Moore and Gordon Allan have kindly donated a solar wax extractor to WGBKA. This should be useful for melting the wax we accumulate during the season, allowing us to exchange it for foundation, so helping to reduce the cost of running the apiary.

Patterson in Print

At the time of writing (26th December) the winter has been very mild. I am struggling to find a day when the temperature is low enough to dribble **oxalic acid**. In one 24-hour period recently the temperature apparently didn't get below 10°C. We are advised not to dribble O/A above 5°C as the bees won't be clustered tightly enough. During an all-day walk on 24th December I saw bluebells forcing their way through the ground and very long hazel catkins fully out (see photo). We often get plant-life playing tricks on us, but by August it is back to normal. As the old saying goes March is usually colder than December, so watch out!

The days will be getting longer now and the bees will react in their usual way. **Brood rearing** in the next few weeks will be increasing, bringing increased use of stored food, both to feed it and increase the brood nest temperature. In the past I have removed many wild (probably feral) colonies from trees and buildings during the winter. In the early part of the year, January/February, I have seen brood of the same age and of varying age, suggesting that some queens lay a batch of eggs, then go off lay until it emerges, then lay some more, other queens laying a fairly small number of eggs, but more regularly. It is often stated that queens it is the genetics of the queen that governs it, but there may be other reasons. I think we need to find out much more about the behaviour of bees before we decide what is happening in a colony. I'm not always sure the scientists come up with the right answer, as I suspect location and bee types has a great bearing on it. Is it the queen who decides at which rate she lays eggs at or the workers who do it by the

amount they feed her? We know that some bees behave differently than others. As an example I have inspected colonies during the winter on many occasions. Very often in December I have seen big slabs of brood in Italian colonies, where less prolific queens may be off lay. If the queen lays in response to feeding, what happens in a heavily mongrelised colony? Are some groups of full sisters (patrilines) trying to feed her when others aren't? I don't know the answer, even if it is a sensible question to ask in the first place.

From now on I suggest hefting your hives every couple of weeks to **reduce the risk of starvation**. Use scales if you like, it won't matter as long as you know what the situation is. If you are in doubt, then on a cold frosty day have a glance down through the slot in the crown board. If the bees are several inches down and you can see sealed stores, they will be O.K. for 2-3 weeks at least. If you are in any doubt, then light your smoker, wear head protection and quickly whip off the crown board. If you can see several seams of sealed food they will be O.K. for several weeks. Don't worry about "chilling" bees, they will be O.K. In a 10-20 second inspection you won't do any harm, but you can do a lot of good by assessing the food situation and understanding how your bees winter. You should notice that the warmer the temperature, the more bees will break cluster, the colder it is, the tighter they cluster. In doing this simple manipulation you will be able to assess each colony. If one is a bit short of food, you will be able to remove a frame or two of food from other colonies that can afford it and give to them.

In the last 15 years or so there has become a culture of feeding bees whether they need it or not, which I think can be a great mistake. You can over-feed bees, which may encourage quicker build-up than is good for them, or if you feed too fast it can crowd queens out, giving less room for them to lay in, so retarding natural expansion. As always, I only advise feeding bees if they need it. Having said that, beginners need to be aware that some colonies, especially those with prolific queens can use up food very quickly, especially in March (yes, I know it's still January, but we need to be looking forward), so keep an eye on them.

It is often said that if bees are bringing in pollen the queen is laying, but on many occasions I have seen bees bringing in pollen when the queen hasn't been laying. Bees don't just need pollen for brood rearing, they need it for feeding adult bees too. On 22/23 December many of my colonies were bringing in pollen, but I suspect the queens weren't all laying.

I won't mention names, but I visited a beekeeper in December whose colonies had died. That had produced a reasonable crop in 2018. I asked a few questions on the 'phone and I was fairly sure they had starved, although the beekeeper assured me they hadn't. When I arrived there were few dead bees in the hives, with both brood and food in the combs. Closer examination of the brood showed the colonies were suffering from **Parasitic Mite Syndrome**, which isn't a disease, but a condition aggravated by varroa and its effects. The colonies had been treated with Apiguard in the Autumn, but my guess is they were fairly heavily infested with varroa when treated and never recovered. I suggest that those who don't know what the symptoms look like or how to deal with a colony should look online to get information.

I am giving a series of **one day presentations** in 8 locations around the country in February and March called *"Sustainability - Bees and Queens for Everyone using low-cost, simple methods"*. These are to encourage beekeepers and BKAs to produce their own bees and queens that suit our fickle climate, rather than buying them, often imported, as many do. Even Fera have finally decided that relying on imports is not a good idea, perhaps persuaded by their recent survey where beekeepers told them they wanted home reared queens and to be shown how to produce them. The event closest to us will be in **Rudgwick on Saturday 30th March**. If you are unable to make it there will be one in Kent on Sunday 3rd February. There should be details with this newsletter. You would expect me to encourage you to attend, but we can't do it all at the apiary.

I am amazed at the speed that bookings are coming in at. In 8 days 22 have booked into Rudgwick, in 9 days 81 booked into Cheshire and in 7 days 80 have booked in for Kent! That was before details were released to the general beekeeping community! They are far more popular than I expected and show that if you put on what beekeepers want they will respond. It also shows that beekeepers appreciate good sound practical information, rather than theoretical stuff straight out of a book. I haven't started the programme yet, so that shows how important some beekeepers see this issue! I strongly suggest early booking as I suspect some venues will reach the number stipulated by the fire certificate.

I have recently found a book where I used to write **various things** connected with my beekeeping. Here are a few selections:-

1975. Sold ½ ton honey at 50p wholesale.

In those days there were around 20 commercial orchards locally, mainly top fruit. I pollinated about half of them.

1976. Sold ½ ton honey at 55p wholesale

Earliest bees in orchards for pollination 1st May, latest out 17th May. Varieties varied, but apples were mainly Cox, Worcester Pearmain, Bramley, Laxton Fortune, King Pippin, Howgate Wonder and Egremont Russet. Some were grown as pollinators.

This was the "drought year" when despite cloudless skies for weeks the ground was so dry that flowers didn't secrete nectar and we had to feed bees in summer.

I bought bees and equipment from an old member, Tom Haffenden, because he was losing his sight. There were about 40 colonies, 19 of which he had imported as "Italian" type package bees from the U.S.

1977. The 1976/77 winter was long and damp. I lost all the 19 Italian colonies through nosema. That finally taught me about Italians (yellow bees)!

Couldn't supply all hives for pollination I had agreed to. Asked another beekeeper to help out. I noticed the bees weren't flying very well. He had split up colonies and supplied nucs! We had a short sharp discussion!

Late frosts wiped out much of the apple crop.

Had 14 honey outlets, one taking 842lb during 1977, another 403lb.

Honey now 60p wholesale.

1978 Late spring. Earliest in for pollination 10 May, last out 25th May

Sold 2 tons honey at 70p, then increased to 80p. Supply and demand, etc!

The above is a short account covering a few years, but it reminded me of some of my most enjoyable beekeeping years. I was working full time too! This was at a time when OSR was becoming established and coincided with the "self-sufficiency boom", which really only lasted about 5 years. Many of those commercial orchards (including Dounhurst) were grubbed up long ago.

All it does really is show that no two years are the same.

Roger



Membership Renewal 2019

Membership subscriptions are now OVERDUE. Renewal forms were sent with last month's newsletter and will accompany this one if you have not yet renewed. Please complete one form for each BBKA member.

If making payment by bank transfer/internet banking, please include the reference details as per the membership form, i.e. 'Member - A Bloggs'. Please complete all sections of the membership form, including the total sum due; and ensure the payment sent is for the correct amount.