

Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association

Newsletter – December 2019

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**Contributions for the January newsletter
should be received by Friday 27 December.**

From the Editor

As we draw to the end of the year, there is some reflection on this year's activities and recent learning events, and an opportunity to thank a number of people without whom those things would not have happened. We are also looking forward to the new season and the move to the new apiary, with some tips from Roger to get us well-prepared, and a chance to book early for the WSBKA Convention in February.

I would like to add my personal thanks to Roger and all the other demonstrators and experienced beekeepers who have helped and advised me this year, and to wish all members a very Happy Christmas.

Tamsin



Image by [jhfl](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Dates for your diary

West Sussex Beekeepers' Association Annual Convention - 29th February 2020 – full details follow below.

Patterson in Print

I have been reviewing the **lecture videos** from the National Honey Show and working with the production team and speakers to edit them before displaying on the NHS website. This needs to be done with care, as some speakers take material off the internet without checking to see if it is free of copyright or royalties. Those where royalties are due are embedded with information that can be detected, often resulting in hefty claims. Unfortunately some speakers are rather relaxed, but it is a real problem for organisers of events where presentations are displayed online. One of the previous lectures had so many images of unknown origin the lecture won't be displayed, which is a pity. There are other things that have to be edited out, such as a reference to Harrods, whoever they are.

The 2019 programme should be displayed soon as they become available, so not all together. Take a look to see what you missed.

For the **Beginners Programme** at the NHS on the Saturday, the person I had lined up to chair it was unfortunately the victim of a road rage incident where he nearly lost his life. I asked two of our members, Lisa Park and Tamsin Farthing to step in to cover for him. They both did a brilliant job and I hope they enjoyed themselves.

The winter is a good time to have a **look at your kit** and overhaul or replace if needed. It is much better to do it in a relaxed manner than in a hurry when it's too late. Clean up **supers and frames**. If there are any holes in **combs**, then place them next to combs with no holes opposite, but on narrow spacing. I have seen many good combs thrown away that with careful management would easily be repaired by bees. If you have combs that have had brood in, don't pack them together, as the greater waxmoth will enjoy wrecking them for you. Always keep a gap between, such as on narrow spacing. Making sure that frames have nails in every joint will avoid annoyance later when they fall apart.

Clean up all spare **boxes**. I have never flamed equipment, as it removes propolis that bees have put there as a self medicating shield. If you want to flame it won't do much harm, so don't let me stop you. Make sure that joints are firmly nailed or screwed.

If you need any extra equipment, then make a note so you can visit one of the **sales** in the spring that are well publicised, or buy at the West Sussex BKA auction in April.

At around this time of year we are often asked to publish suggested **honey prices**. Many years ago we were advised not to do this as it could be seen as price fixing. The sensible thing to do is not to see what others are charging and knock 50p off, but to pitch it at a price where you can sell at a steady rate without running out. Be aware that sales can fluctuate, often governed by the weather.

Roger

WSBKA Annual Convention

29 February 2020

9.30am – 4.30pm, Lodge Hill, Pulborough

Not to be missed! Booking opening early.

The 2020 Convention has attracted such exceptional speakers and we anticipate the demand to be particularly keen, so booking is opening earlier than usual to give members a better opportunity to book.

Lodge Hill, Pulborough will again be the venue for our Annual Convention in February. Details are now finalised and we have an exceptional blend of lectures and seminars to look forward to. The main speakers are Marin Anastasov NDB, Professor Robert Pickard and Dr Anna Oliver.

Marin is passionate about sustainable food production and his entire working career has been in organic food and farming. He currently manages 30+ colonies in Gloucestershire, is a Master Beekeeper and gained his NDB in 2017. He serves on the BBKA Examinations Board and is co-author and implementor of the BBKA Certificate in Honey Bee Breeding. Marin will be presenting a main lecture on *'Father of the Drone'* and also a seminar on *'Management of Mating Nucs'*.

Robert is an international authority on the biology of honeybees and provides scientific advice for the media, government departments and a wide range of institutions. He holds a number of trustee and professorships in the UK. Much of his work has been involved with protecting consumers, the food chain and the wider environment. He is Chairman of the International Bee Research Association and President of the Cardiff Beekeepers Association and the UK Central Association of Beekeepers. Robert has studied bees since 1956 and his students are spread through 50 different countries worldwide. He will be presenting a main lecture on *'Wonderful things about Bees'* and running a seminar on *'Queens'*.

Anna is a senior molecular biologist working on the National Honey Monitoring Scheme. The scheme, backed by both the BBKA and the Bee Farmers Association is monitoring how the foraging habits of UK honeybees respond to a changing environment. It is the first UK-wide analysis of its kind, and uses advanced DNA barcoding techniques to identify traces of pollen in honey. Beekeepers have been participating from across the UK, including from West Sussex, and analysis has identified plants favoured by honeybees, regional differences in foraging habits as well as showing the importance of some invasive plant species. Anna will be giving a main lecture *'National Honey Monitoring Scheme: Using Citizen Science to Understand the Honeybees'*. She will be presenting the story so far as well as giving a sneak preview of the first 2019 results, concentrating on the region which includes West Sussex.

Further seminars to choose from:

- *'Honey Bee Behaviour and Water'* and *'Drones' Life and Behaviour'* by Sean Stephenson. Sean's first seminar describes how the colony regulates and manages its water supply and gives an insight into some things a beekeeper might do to support the water needs of their bees. His second seminar looks at the colony drivers to produce drones and drone comb, examines drone biology and the mating process, highlights the overhead of drones on honey production and finally summarises how we use drones to help us read a colony.
- *'Healing Properties of Honey'* by Geoff Blay. We know that honey has special properties and this is an opportunity to learn all about them.
- *'Going with the Flow'* by Adrian Dwyer. Having completed 3 seasons of owning a Flow Hive, Adrian will be discussing the concept and innovation, both the advantages and disadvantages.

Refreshments and a simple lunch will be included and there will be many opportunities to meet up with fellow beekeepers from around the county and beyond. Paynes will bring a range of bee equipment and books to sell and so there will be plenty of opportunity to spend your money!

The Details and Booking Form are attached with this newsletter and details will also be available on the WSBKA website: www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk.

2 Million Blossoms

Roger received the following request from Dr Kirsten Traynor, Editor of a new quarterly magazine aimed at anyone interested in understanding and supporting pollinators, whether honey bees or other species:

Dear Roger,

*It was a pleasure seeing you this spring. Thank you for inviting me to potentially speak in London. As you know, I was the former editor of **American Bee Journal** and **Bee World**, two positions I absolutely adored. Helping to build a bridge between science and practice is important to me. Bees are in trouble. Not just honey bees, but all of our bees. We're losing our pollinators at an alarming rate. In the last 3 decades we've lost more than 70% of our insect biomass. If we work together, we can help mitigate the crises our pollinators face.*

*For this reason I am launching a new magazine **2 Million Blossoms: protecting our pollinators**. Why launch a new magazine? Because there is a growing and troubling divide between beekeepers and native bee enthusiasts. We have many of the same goals—keeping pollinators healthy and improving forage for all. Also many people want to help “save the bees” and the best way to harness that energy is encouraging them to plant food for bees.*

***2 Million Blossoms** gathers the best writing, science, and new developments in a single place. Our inaugural issue in January 2020 includes articles by Marla Spivak, Mark Winston, Dave Goulson, Rusty Burlew, and Kim Flottum. We're currently running a Kickstarter campaign and could use your help in spreading the word. Please share this email with your bee or gardening club. We're trying to reach as many pollinator lovers, beekeepers, bee enthusiasts, and gardeners as possible. Check out our Kickstarter campaign for more details: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/2mblossoms/2-million-blossoms-protecting-our-pollinators?ref=53qth0>*

Thank you so much for your help. Sharing is caring and we really appreciate you circulating our campaign or website 2millionblossoms.com via email or on social media.

*Warmest wishes for a holiday season,
Kirsten*

Kirsten S. Traynor, PhD

Editor

In addition to the website www.2millionblossoms.com, the project can also be found on Facebook www.facebook.com/2MBlossoms and Twitter [@2MBlossoms](https://twitter.com/2MBlossoms).

The Apiary and Learning

The “**Improve Your Beekeeping**” events, “Early Years” and “Intermediate/Advanced”, both attracted 40-50 attendees. They came from a wide area including London, Kent, Hampshire, Surrey and even further afield, with several from Wokingham. I was disappointed that the numbers from Wisborough Green BKA were rather low, when the events were staged to augment the teaching we give at the apiary. We covered many topics and management techniques, some of which won't be found in books, but have been gleaned from over 50 years of beekeeping. Feedback was brilliant, with some long - term beekeepers from other areas particularly complimentary.

At both events there were many questions, either at question time or afterwards, that started something like “I thought that bees did.....”, “I read/saw online” or “I was told differently by my mentor/tutor”. I see little point in undermining other resources, which I hope I didn't do, but I find it frustrating when beekeepers are taught the same old cut and pasted misinformation that may be of dubious accuracy or inappropriate to their locality. I hope I got the message across to learn the “basics”, use observation and lateral thinking, challenge what you are told and work things out for yourself. I am fully aware that I get criticised for this approach from outside, but in my opinion alert beekeepers will learn far more by listening to bees than some of the rigid stuff that is taught, often by quite inexperienced people.

It was quite interesting that during the day one attendee from outside WG wrote a whole A4 page of things I said that conflicted with what they were taught. They spoke to me afterwards on each point to confirm what I had said. In a fairly lengthy discussion I justified each point and advised them to check things out for themselves to see what bees actually do.

I was pleased at the way the days went and I hope they will help members to understand what we teach and what their bees are trying to achieve,

I think it appropriate to **thank those WGBKA members who helped** with the events, John Glover for taking bookings and Lisa Park, Maggie Turner, Richard Gibby and Geoff Wadge for their help at the events. A good all-round team effort.

I had several comments on how well-behaved Nell and Rosie were, even from those who had never seen them before.

Some of the bees are likely to be moved to the **new apiary** soon, so there won't be the usual session to finally close down for the winter. It will be difficult to move hives that are protected against woodpeckers, so we will try to move them before placing the protection around them. I hope we won't get a cold spell where woodpeckers damage hives before we can cover them up. The distance between sites is spot on a mile, so I don't believe we will have problems with bees returning to their previous site as bees don't usually fly far in the winter.

Many of you may be aware of my view that honey bee swarms select a nest site in a position where several **energy lines** cross. I have a page on Dave Cushman's website here <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/leylines.html>. To test this hypothesis we will be conducting an experiment at the new apiary in 2020. I have identified at least 9 positions where at least 4 energy lines cross. I want to place a bait hive on each of these and an equal number where there are no energy lines to see which, if any, swarms prefer. I am in the process of writing a protocol in the hope the results, whatever they are, will be accepted by the scientific community and beekeeping in general. I have no experience of writing such protocols, so if there is a member, or someone they know, who is able to help I would appreciate it. I will

be making sure that all bait hives are similar in size and set up in a similar way. In the spring I will be inviting members with empty hives, who have possibly lost colonies during the winter, to bring them along to take part. If a swarm enters their hive, they will be able to take it away if they wish. There will be more later.

For over 40 years our **apiary meetings** were held every third Saturday afternoon and third Wednesday evening in between during the active season. For 2016 the then committee decided to discontinue Wednesday evenings and meet every Saturday, that we have mainly done ever since. This has had a fair trial for 4 years, but it hasn't worked very well, as it meant that those who had other things to do on Saturdays couldn't come to meetings and many found that every Saturday took up far too much of their summer weekends, so got out of the routine of attending. As a result attendances dropped. I felt it was an unreasonable burden for the demonstrators, I know because I attended over 30 meetings in those years, which I felt obliged to do. I am pleased to say the current committee have decided to revert to the original format for 2020. This gives 10 or 11 days between inspections, so it suits the bees, allows those who are otherwise engaged at the weekends to attend meetings and is far kinder on the demonstrators. I hope the membership support it.

The apiary meetings for 2019 were a bit disorganised, mainly because of the problem with the dog and the potential move that was delayed longer than expected. I apologise for the lateness of some of the notices, but it was unavoidable. We will do better in 2020 and I am looking forward to it already. The vast majority of the demonstrating fell on Mel Robertson, Murray West, Richard Gibby and myself, with occasional help from Gordon Allan and Maggie Turner when they were available. I thank them all for their efforts to teach members. I would also like to thank John Glover for administering the Preliminary sessions, taking bookings for events and organising local publicity. These are all tasks that hardly get noticed, but are time consuming and an important part of what WGBKA does.

I intend to organise **queen rearing** at the apiary in 2020, as some members are reporting aggression in their bees and want to requeen them. I think the stock we have is as good as any I see in similar areas and worth propagating from. The alternative is to buy queens from a commercial supplier, but this may not be a good idea. Reading the persuasive catalogues and websites may appear attractive, but the queens may be imported, so posing threats such as introducing pests/diseases/pathogens we don't have, possible aggression in subsequent generations (F2 aggression) and possible unsuitability to our fickle climate, all of which are contributing to some of the poor bees I see. I am looking at raising queens and at the same time show members how to do it themselves. It is not difficult, but is made easier by knowing the various procedures. I would like to start with a winter session to help members understand what we are doing. If you would like to take part please let me know by the end of December, so I know what size venue to book. I can then find a date to suit everybody. If you don't let me know I may not get back to you and you may miss out. If only a small group we may have it in a house, if large enough we will book a hall, so please email me now if you are interested. There is no need to have previous experience or even bees, as queen rearing is applicable to all.

Roger