

Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association

Newsletter – January 2024

Website: www.wgbka.org.uk

Facebook Group: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/wgbka>

Library, Shop and WhatsApp group – see end of newsletter

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Contributions for the February newsletter should be received by Friday 26 January.

From the Editor

Happy New Year! I hope that you all enjoyed the festive break and are ready for 2024. The diary is already filling up with conferences and other dates, so do note the ones that interest you. Please also let Martina know if you would like to be part of a study group looking at the BBKA Basic syllabus (you don't have to do the Assessment).

Best wishes to Roger as he recovers from a recent operation, and to all members for a healthy and productive year for you and your bees.

Tamsin

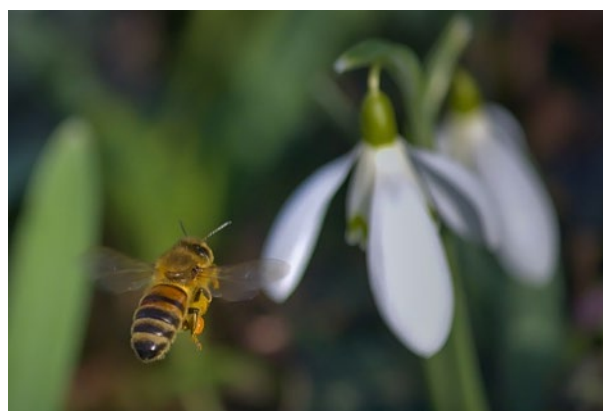


Image by Sigurd Rille from Pixabay

Dates for your diary

Winter Meetings

Wednesday 17th January

Wednesday 31st January

Details to be confirmed – watch out for emails.

Special Asian Hornet Briefing for Beekeepers - Update for 2024 (BBKA)

Tuesday 16th January at 7:00pm via Zoom

Andrew Durham gave two very informative presentations earlier in the year and his briefing will cover:

- The situation as at the end of 2023
- The effect of beekeeping
- The prospect for 2024 and beyond
- A report on the first year in operation of the new French National Plan for fighting the hornet. This talk is open to all members via the Zoom link:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84767178392?pwd=NT1mSPDmsDEuJ06dIOF5EN0X7asjHg.1>

BBKA Asian Hornet Conference

Saturday 17th February

Speakers are being finalised and more information will be available from the BBKA in the New Year.

West Sussex BKA Annual Convention

Saturday 24th February, Lodge Hill, Pulborough

Please see the information below, and the booking form which accompanies this newsletter.

BBKA Spring Convention – 150 Years of the BBKA

Friday 12th – Sunday 14th April, Harper Adams University, Shropshire, TF10 8NB.

www.bbka.org.uk/pages/category/about-spring-convention.

West Sussex Beekeepers' Bee Market & Auction

Saturday 27th April from 8:30am at Brinsbury Campus, Pulborough, RH20 1DL.

www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html

Basic Study Group

We are occasionally asked about the BBKA exams, the “basic” assessment in particular. The “basic” syllabus has many topics that are relevant to all beekeepers, whether they wish to take the assessment or not, so well worth learning. I am putting together a study group of people interested to go through the BBKA basic syllabus. It will be over a few evenings/afternoons, depending on what suits everyone. This is to help and encourage members to learn more about their bees, only taking the assessment if they wish to.



If you could let me know if you are interested as soon as possible then we can agree suitable dates and place.

Martina

WSBKA Annual Convention

Saturday 24th February 2024, 9.30am – 4.30 pm

Lodge Hill, Pulborough, West Sussex.

The Convention has again attracted exceptional speakers to cover a wide range of topics with the main lectures being presented by **Professor Lars Chittka, Margaret Murdin and Lynne Ingram**. There is something for everyone, beginner to expert.

Apart from the three main lectures, you can choose to attend two out of the six seminars and in between times it is a great opportunity to catch up with beekeeping friends throughout the County and beyond.

Seminars:

- Margaret Murdin - *Keeping Healthy Colonies*
- Lynne Ingram – *The Importance of Drones*
- Sue Remenyi – *Where do Honey Bees Travel for Pollen?*
- Sue Remenyi – *Wasp Control in the Apiary*
- Andrew Gibb – *Environment, Food and Bees*
- Andrew Gibb – *Simple Queen Rearing*

The day promises to be both entertaining and stimulating. Tea and coffee will be served during the breaks and also a simple lunch. **Advance booking per person for WSBKA members, £30.** Members of other Associations and non-members, £37. On the day if space allows, £37.

More details and the booking form accompany this newsletter.

The Teaching Apiary

As I have previously mentioned, we now have an **apiary maintenance team**. During my enforced break, I understand they organised the trimming and clearance of the track and areas around the bees. As far as I'm concerned, I'm happy for them to do what they think is needed, providing it is safe. The area is cleared woodland and as with all cleared woodland the habitat changes, allowing different species to establish. In a few years we have seen the introduction of plants such as violets, primroses, common spotted orchids, milkmaids and common centaury. The brambles have done well too, but they will soon snuff out the plants, so what I want to do is regularly trim the taller vegetation to let them thrive.

I don't know all of those who helped, so I can't name individuals. I will find out, but in the meantime, **thanks to all who contributed**.

Martina suggested that we offer potential beekeepers the opportunity to visit a scheduled meeting as a "taster", before Prelims, so they can see inside hives without handling them and have the chance to chat to member on an informal basis. I thought it was a good idea, as it may reduce the number of Prelims who don't turn up or only come once, so for a trial we will run with it this summer.

Roger

Beekeeping

Apart from one brief cold spell, the winter has been mild, so there shouldn't have been any **losses** so far, but I have lost three of my larger colonies out of 25 in my garden in December. They probably gave over 100lb of honey each in 2023. All were treated with Apiguard in Aug/Sept, so varroa should have been low. I noticed them dead when I trickled oxalic acid. They all had plenty of food left. Pre-varroa, we never had anything like this. It's about time those higher up the beekeeping ladder started looking for the causes. I would certainly allow researchers to climb all over my bees. It's **worth checking your colonies** every couple of weeks or so. With a little smoke, just quickly lift the crown board to see how many seams of bees you have. It will only take five seconds, so no problem to the bees. Don't forget that the colder it is, the tighter bees cluster, giving the impression the colony is smaller. You can't do much about a decline in numbers at this time of year, but you can probably learn a lot.

Roger

Patterson in Print

I have been waiting for an **operation** for several months, which eventually resulted in a call late afternoon on 23rd December from Redhill Hospital "Can you come in at 7am tomorrow"! They had previously decided that as I live alone, I would need an overnight stay. A quick

phone call to John Glover to take the dogs, grabbing enough kit for an overnight stay and I was ready for an early start next day. I am grateful to all those who offered help at a time of year when they may have had their minds on other things. In the end it was a 2½ days stay, so a good job that I took enough reading material, which included a book ***The Downland Shepherds* by Barclay Wills**. He wasn't a Sussex man, but born in London and moved to Sussex in his later life. The downland shepherds, although incredibly skilled at their work, were mainly illiterate, so one of the few sources of information we now have over a century after the demise of the shepherds is Barclay Wills, who the shepherds accepted and freely gave information to, where they were suspicious of the motives of others.

In reading the book, as someone who has been used to the land all my life, I understood much of it, with admiration for these men being out in all weathers and away from their families, with little help or equipment and on wages of 5 shillings (25p) a week. I found many **parallels with beekeeping**, especially my own, which at one time was semi-commercial. The skill of the shepherds was built up over many years, by observing the flock, copying others and using a bit of gumption to solve problems when you are on your own. A dog, or two, drove the flock where the shepherd wanted, in a similar way to how I use smoke on bees. The flock was moved to fresh pastures, like moving bees to orchard pollination or OSR. Sheep were shorn to harvest the wool, equivalent to extracting honey, or driven to market to be sold, as if selling bees, the ewes being left behind to produce next year's lambs as colonies are to produce honey and bees. I'm not sure much of this will interest the reader, but it certainly got me thinking about things a little bit differently than I have done previously. In addition to the above, these men, some over 80 years old, worked on their own all day, not just wandering around aimlessly with a crook (hive tool?) in their hand, but doing hard physical work (lifting supers?) to look after a flock of up to 1,000 sheep. On many occasions I have been out beekeeping 12 hours a day, or when I was younger, doing such winter work as coppicing, where in a short break for lunch, the wildlife that had disappeared because of my presence when working, would come flooding back for me to enjoy. These men had an incredibly hard and difficult life that modern people wouldn't tolerate, but they must have enjoyed it, as I have my beekeeping, but they had things much more difficult than I have.

Roger

Learning

As you should see above, Martina is trying to setup some **learning sessions** that are based on the BBKA "Basic" assessment syllabus, which in my opinion is a good list of topics, the learning of which, to a reasonable level, should help members to become more knowledgeable and understanding beekeepers. Within reason, the more you know, the better you can manage and work with your bees, in line with their needs, rather than simply doing what you are told without knowing the reason why.

As should be indicated elsewhere, this isn't an attempt to force members down an exam route they don't want to take. I see too much of that in other BKAs. The sessions are **open to everyone**, even beyond the beginners stage, but of course, if you do wish to take the "Basic" assessment, you should be in a better position to do so. We will cover topics in a greater depth than is required for the assessment and it will all help members to be better beekeepers, which is what WGBKA has always strived for. We won't just give information with no indication of the purpose, but will discuss the relevance of it to your beekeeping. These sessions will be held in a relaxed manner, with general discussion throughout. I urge members to take part. Please **book early with Martina**, so she can find suitable venues. Even if you don't have bees yet, but have been to the apiary several times, you should gain from attendance.

Roger

WGBKA Shop

The shop is for members only and open at WGBKA apiary meetings. In an emergency, please contact Martina. You can see the price list at <https://sites.google.com/view/wgbka-shop/home>.

WGBKA WhatsApp Group

If you would like to be a part of this informal members only group, please contact Martina with your mobile number and she will add you to the chat. It's a great way to compare notes, get advice from others and generally keep in touch with members.

WGBKA Library

The Association has a collection of books for loan to members, covering not only many aspects of beekeeping, but also guides to hive products, honey recipes and memoirs. The full list is [here](#); to borrow any of the books, please email Martina secretary@wgbka.org.uk.