



## **BATH BEEKEEPERS NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2017**

Welcome to the December 2017 Newsletter. The format is slightly different due to my being dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st Century World of IT. When Nigel asked for volunteers for the Newsletter Editor, and I said that I was interested, he basically told me that I had got the job! So, as they say, be careful of what you wish for.....

In this month's edition there is an article by our very own new Honorary Secretary Philippa on the trials and tribulations of being a novice beekeeper, in which she recommends some sage advice; an article by yours truly on the protection and breeding of the native British black honey bee; yet another article by me on my visit to this year's Bee and Pollinators Festival (which I know that some of you attended), some cultural references, dates for next year and miscellaneous stuff.

As this is my first foray into being Newsletter Ed do let me have your comments as to articles you would like to see, suggestions on speakers/workshops etc. and anything else you would like included. Answers on a postcard please to my email address which is on the website on the Contacts page.

At the moment it is planned to publish the newsletter quarterly in March, June, September and December each year. The deadline for articles etc. for the next Newsletter is 23 March 2018 with publication planned at the end of the month.

I remain your obedient servant

Francesca Knight  
(Newsletter Editor)



## **NOTES FROM A NOVICE**

When I sat down to write this article, I thought I'd start when I first began to keep bees as that seemed to be the logical starting point. It's been a few years now and I couldn't quite remember when it was. What I did recall was that the queen marking colour code in my first year was red making it 2013 - nearly five years ago - and I can't believe how much time has passed!

I first became interested in bees when the site rep at my allotment, (Alan Stephens – one of our members), asked me if I would be interested in going on a beekeeping course. The allotment office had agreed that if enough people from the Rock allotment went on the course, then we would be allowed to keep hives on the allotment. Alan managed to gather a group of 5 or 6 enthusiasts. I thought "Why not?". "It's something different". The course was good value for money (and still is I might add!). Up until that point, I had never seen a honey bee and thought all bees were bumblebees. It's surprising how many people think the same!

I remember coming along to the course, listening to all the lectures (realising that honey bees were in fact completely different to bumblebees), absorbing all of the information being imparted to us and thinking "This is quite good, I think I'd like to do this" but not even thinking about the physical aspects of beekeeping. But then, on the final day, the word "practical" arose. I don't know why but I hadn't even thought about the practical element and I became quite unnerved. We donned our suits and gloves and headed out into the Teaching Apiary – I made sure I was the last one to leave the safety of the building. If anyone was going to get stung it was the others in front of me! I stood at the back of the queue when it came to looking in the hives, making excuses to stand at the back because of my height. The plan was to allow other people to stand in front of me under the pretence that they would be able to see better but really putting as much distance as I could get away with between me and the bees! My blood pressure was definitely rising! Thankfully, as part of the training, you are encouraged to handle frames which helped to build my confidence and overcome any fears.

When the course finished, the party from the allotment decided to club together to get some bees and manage them as a group. This was a valuable learning experience giving us all a good grounding and building our confidence during inspections. After a few months, I decided to go it alone. It was a decision that helped grow both my knowledge and confidence as it was now all up to me to read the signs in the colony and make the decisions. There have been a few stumbling blocks along the way, as the bees always throw a spanner in the works, just when you think you've got it all under control! I am by no means an expert and, as beekeepers, we will never know it all;

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we will always be learning. There will always be something new and unexplained to keep our minds active. In the last five years I have bagged a few experiences under my belt and along the way, I have learned some very important lessons, three of which I thought you may find useful...

### LESSON 1 - Always, ALWAYS, **ALWAYS** have your smoker lit and smouldering well!!!

There have been numerous times when a few of my bees, (in fact hundreds of my bees), have been a tad miffed at having the roof of their home lifted off and their walls pulled apart and my smoker has gone out or I thought to myself "I'm only going to be a couple of minutes so I won't bother with the smoker. It'll be alright..." WRONG! Oh so very wrong! A lesson reinforced by my very own bees torpedoing me with their stings - armed and ready and doing their utmost to penetrate the mesh on my hood to deliver their biological weapon!

### LESSON 2 - **Never give your bees too much space**

When I went it alone from the allotment group we had nine colonies between us. I took one of the colonies with me. Infact I deliberately chose a colony that was only on three frames in a standard National hive which did not seem to be expanding despite being fed sugar syrup. As complete beginners, fresh from the course, the group thought it may have been Nosema but we were unsure. Some may have thought I was foolish to take on what clearly was a very weak colony but I saw it as a challenge. I got the colony home to my small urban garden and fed them leaving them to their own devices for a couple of weeks. I spent a fair bit of time watching the comings and goings of the hive which was not particularly active. I also noticed the front of the hive was not plastered with bee poo so I started to consider to ruling out Nosema. When I opened up the hive, the colony was still on three frames. By pure coincidence, I acquired another fairly large colony and I needed the brood box that the small colony was in so I transferred them into a five frame nuc box and continued to feed them. After a couple of weeks, I checked on the nuc to find that they had expanded onto to four and a half frames. I was curious as to why, when for months there was hardly any expansion but then, in the space of a few weeks, they had multiplied considerably? I wondered what this meant. Basically, I learnt that the colony was too small to heat the whole of the brood box so they had had to concentrate their efforts on keeping a small patch of brood warm hence their very slow expansion. After a few more weeks in the nuc and its subsequent extension they were transferred into a standard brood box and they never looked back!

(On the flip side of this point of giving too much space, I also discovered that if you put a super on top of a brood box too soon, they won't fill up the brood box like you want them to! They do their own thing and build upwards leaving you with a battle of your hands to manipulate them back down!).

My third and final lesson on my never-ending learning curve is...

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### **LESSON 3 - Never, ever, try to move a colony when it is raining**

A few years ago, my parents kindly gave me permission to keep a colony in their back garden (in fact it was the nuc I spoke about earlier). In the first year that the hive was in the garden the bees were very happy and calm going about their pollinating business (as a side note, the bees were introduced in an effort to pollinate an old apple tree in the garden that my mother had threatened to dig up if it didn't produce any fruit that year - it had hardly ever produced any fruit in the last 20 years). You could walk around the garden and pass behind the hive without any issues and my parents were never bothered by bees leaving or returning to the hive. My Dad even braved pushing the petrol lawn mower almost right up to the entrance (but not quite!) without any guard bees coming out to see what was going on - that's how chilled out they were!

The following year turned out to be a different story. The very calm and gentle bees turned into what I can only describe as 'evil' even with the same queen heading up the colony. My relaxed and chilled out parents now became too scared to walk down into their own garden without fear of being chased or stung. My Dad seemed to fare okay without getting stung at all whilst my Mum got stung several times (must have been her perfume) – this was all too hilarious to my Dad who thought he was safe until one day they came for him! The final straw occurred when their neighbour, who had loved the honey produced from the previous years' crop, (and who always stood by the 4' high fence in his shorts and T-shirts less than 2 metres away whilst I was carrying out hive inspections fully suited up! (Go figure!), got stung three times in one go and subsequent stings in the following weeks.

The bees had to go and soon. I was due to go on a week's holiday, after a friend of mine got married, so I offered to move them the day after the wedding - the day before I left on holiday. The forecast was not great. In the morning the weather was grey and overcast but, because I was removing the whole colony, I had to wait until late evening once all the bees were back. By this time, the weather had changed and it had started to tip down. None the wiser, I donned my suit and gloves and lit my smoker (which kept going out, see Lesson 1). The colony was quite large and filled a brood and two supers so I couldn't move it in one go and had to split it to get it in the car. Despite having smoked the colony, I took the roof off - but they were not best pleased. In fact, they were so unhappy that I was again being torpedoed and smoking them with a barely lit smoker was not helping! Talk about getting cramp whilst furiously trying to pump your smoker! Panic set in. At one point I had so many bees on me that my Dad ran out and threw a tin of fly spray at me to use to try and get them off me – they were having none of it (Lesson 4 – fly spray doesn't work on bees!). After what seem like an eternity, I managed to temporarily split the hives into sections, seal them up and load them into the car. After that stressful event, I took my bee suit off, dried myself down, had a cup of tea and counted the number of stings on the suit – 200 no less! Apart from the stress of having all these bees trying to kill me, I came out unscathed and grateful that my bee suit was quite thick! No embarrassing red marks or swellings to explain on holiday! I'm sure, had the weather been dry and warm, the bees would have been (a little) more receptive to being moved.

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While I'm sure my antics may amuse some of you with that sense of knowing, I have hopefully imparted some useful knowledge to some of our new beekeepers. I'll not bore you with any more of my novice tales only to say that we never knew if the old apple tree that my mother had threatened with extinction had actually heard and understood the physical threat of its impending doom or if it was the bees that saved it but, that year, it produced the biggest crop of its life and now they get so many apples that they don't know what to do with them all!!! (Make cider I say!).

Philippa Burgess  
(Honorary Secretary)



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## **THE BLACK BEES OF MOUNT EDGCUMBE**

Two years ago a group of beekeepers in Britain, concerned by the welfare of the native black honey bee (*Apis mellifera mellifera*) formed a Community Interest Company, called the B4 Project, in order to preserve and promote the cause of the bee.



Both Tim Smit of the Eden Project and The Lost Gardens of Heligan fame and Michael Eavis of Glastonbury fame, launched the Project at Mount Edgumbe on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

Some of you may have watched the episode of Countryfile broadcast on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017 which highlighted the project.

The B4 Project gained funding from various sources and was able to pay for genetic testing on black bees. It was found that black bees on the Rame Peninsula in Cornwall, still contained a large proportion of comparatively pure genetic material. A number of sites were established where apiaries, mating apiaries and observation hives were placed for ongoing research.

Click on the link for more information: <http://www.b4project.co.uk/>

One of these apiaries has been established at Mount Edgumbe House and Country Park which is situated on the Rame Peninsula near Plymouth Sound and the River Tamar. The house is Grade II Listed and the park comprises 885 acres. I happened to be visiting the park on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November when I came across the B4 apiary and also, fortuitously and co-incidentally, the Head Gardener, Lee Stenning (see picture). I asked him if I could go into the apiary and as I had my magic BBKA membership card with me, I was the only one of my party allowed access.

The apiary is situated in the old 18th Century Frame Garden and Pineapple House which were not being used and so it is good to know that they are being put to good use for this lovely purpose. It has been set up on a number of shallow long steps (see picture). Lee confirmed that the apiary is for research purposes only; it is not used for honey production.



I had a chat with Lee who has worked as the Head Gardener at Mount Edgcumbe for 25 years, and sees the job as his hobby which he loves (if only we could all think that about our working lives!!!!). He told me that he had always wanted to keep bees but had no space at home and now the B4 Project apiary had given him this opportunity. When the project was given the go ahead, Lee attended a training course and a local beekeeper who keeps black bees, donated three colonies to the project.

Lee told me that as part of the breeding programme, the area had been swamped with black drone bees on order to ensure that the queens mated with them and to maintain as pure a genetic line as possible. The bees apparently do not like flying over Plymouth Sound and instead fly inland from the apiary. This additional natural control helps strengthen the bees' genetic material. Lee talked about inspecting the hives which became all too familiar when he discussed looking for the queen, eggs and larvae, checking food stores, splitting the hives, feeding the bees with syrup etc. He described the bees as having a dark thorax and golden hair on their legs.

It all sounds rather poetic to me and I think that, as we all belong to the bee community in one way or another, there is a commonality about it when we meet other beekeepers.

I concluded my visit by purchasing a jar of local honey made by the black bees.

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## THE BEE AND POLLINATION FESTIVAL 2017



Some of you will have attended the annual Bee and Pollination Festival this year which was held at Bristol Botanical Gardens on 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> September. The purpose of the show was to celebrate and promote all the pollinators such as bees, butterflies, moths, bats and birds. I attended on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> and heard two very fascinating lectures.

The first was called 'Hot off the Press: The latest Pollinator Research' by Professor Jane Memmott, Professor of Ecology, University of Bristol. This was a fascinating lecture on the decline in flowers in the UK which goes some way to explaining the decline in pollinators. The study looked at the various amounts of nectar yielded by a wide diversity of plants and concluded that nectar declined between the 1930's to 1970's then proceeded to rise again.

Professor Memmott set out those plants beneficial and not so beneficial to pollinators. Hot off the press for us beekeepers is that she said the following plants are the top for pollinators:

1. Borage (not just for Pimms)
2. Buddleia - we've all seen butterflies jostling for space when it is in flower.
3. Marigold - good for organic pest control as well
4. Lavender - known for its lovely relaxing effects - a must for beekeepers after a hive inspection!
5. Comfrey
6. Native Creeping Thistle
7. Cat's Ears - mine was not amused when I suggested that she donate hers....
8. Buttercup – ah! that flower reminiscent of lazy childhood days when you held a buttercup under your chin. I think that we are all genetically predisposed to liking butter, preferably in copious quantities on a hot crumpet!
9. Dandelion - enough said about the scourge of the garden but makes good wine.....
10. Hogweed - avoid planting near horses
11. Ox Eye Daisy - not to be confused with the common daisy (see 2. below)
12. Autumn Hawkbit (No, I'd never heard of it either. It is a yellow wildflower which looks a bit like a dandelion and is in flower between July and September).



Autumn Hawkbit

The following flowers are apparently the worst for pollinators;

1. Top of the list is the lovely hydrangea followed by
2. Common daisy
3. Poached egg plant (although I find this quite interesting as mine are usually covered in Hover flies.

Professor Memmott was part of a research team which published its results in Nature magazine. This is the link to the relevant article:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/nature16532>

The second lecture that day was given by Dr Rowena Jenkins, Cardiff Metropolitan University on "Honey a Magical Medicine". Dr Jenkins discussed modern antibiotics and the problem of bacteria becoming immune to their effects. She discussed the historical use of honey in medicine and current research being carried out on the antibacterial benefits of honey. Honey packs are being used in hospitals to fight infection especially where the use of antibiotics has been ineffective. The honey packs used for medicine have been irradiated. She advised beekeepers not to use their own honey on wounds as it may carry bacteria and infect wounds.

There were a lot of exhibitors and also included was a Honey Show and pictured is the beautiful Silver Queen which is awarded to the person who wins the most points in the honey and wax categories. As she is so valuable, the winner has to make do with a facsimile! The runner up is awarded the Bronze Queen - pictured in the foreground.



## **BATH BEEKEEPERS HONEY SHOW AND SHIRLEY NEEDS CUP 2017**

Talking of Honey Shows congratulations to the winners of our very own.....

Photograph - Cindy and Andrew Jackson  
5 blocks of beeswax - Angela Lucas  
2 beeswax candles - Angela Lucas  
3 bee related products - Glenys Lunt  
1 bottle of mead - The Hillmans  
3 jars of soft set or set honey - Daniel Job  
3 jars of runny honey (medium) - Angela Lucas  
1 jar of runny honey (light) - Angela Lucas  
2 jars of runny honey (light) - Monica and Pete Davis  
1 jar of honey (taste and aroma) - Monica and Pete Davis  
Honey Cake - Cindy Jackson  
Honey biscuits – Monica Davis

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Cups were awarded to:

The Shirley Needs Memorial Cup - Cindy Jackson for their honey cake

Novice Cup - Angela Lucas

Open Cup - Monica and Pete Davis

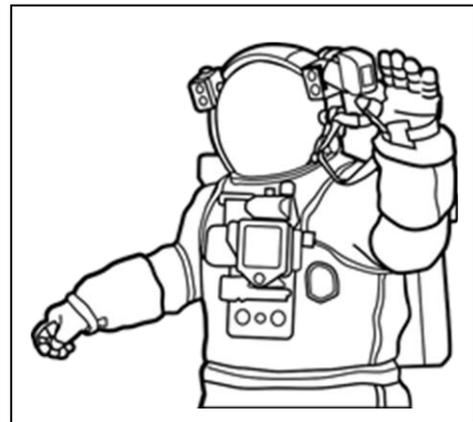
Congratulations to all the winners and for the rest of us who competed, it's back to the drawing board especially to learn how to prevent fruit from sinking in a cake. Answer? *Dust it in flour before adding to the mixture...*

## **BEE NEWS**



In France beekeepers are furious that an insecticide, called sulfoxaflor, has been approved for use as it is said to damage bees' nervous systems.

Staying in France for the moment, French pest control officers have destroyed 900 hornet nests in the country this summer. They have been training their opposite numbers in Jersey where the first Asian hornet nest was found this year. All of the officers have been issued with extra thick "space suits" to protect them when dealing with hornets' nests.



Over here in the UK and, on a more optimistic note, the BBKA has reported an increase in the rate of survival of bees and whole colonies.



City beekeepers enjoy a more fruitful crop of honey - on average 27.5lb - compared to their rural cousins which produce an average of 22.5lb. This is because urban gardens have a rich diversity of flowers and plants for bees to forage pollen from compared to gardens in rural areas.

And from across The Pond....

John Symonds was pleased to meet Hope Pettibon, the 2017 American Honey Princess, at the Fryeburg Fair (a real country show) in New Hampshire USA in October this year

Me thinks a new category in next year's Honey Show...?!



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## **BEE CULTURE**

### **FILM**

“The Wonders”

This is a charming coming of age film featuring a poor Italian beekeeping family as they struggle to make ends meet. We beekeepers will be keeping a sharp eye on comparing methods of bee husbandry! Check the day the family go to hospital, as one of the children is injured, and the main protagonist cannot remember if she left the tap on... Oh, and the trick with the bees later in the film. Don't try this at home but you might venture to take the risk with a drone or two.....

Italy 2014

### **POETRY**

“The Bees” by Carol Anne Duffy  
Paperback 27 September 2012 Picador

In particular “The Bee Carol” given the time of year.

### **MUSIC**

Tie in with the above;

“Dark Rose for Christmas” by Little Machine. Words by Carol Anne Duffy.  
Hotel Zulu Records 2015

“The Bee Carol” is set to music in this lovely collection

For an article on the amazing sound spectacle of 40,000 bees used in a piece of music read the following link;

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/08/bee-band-the-hive-kev-bales-martin-bencsik-wolfgang-buttruss-nottingham-arts-theatre-be-one>

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And listen to the resultant music by BE on their album ONE at;

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/08/bee-band-the-hive-kev-bales-martin-bencsik-wolfgang-buttruss-nottingham-arts-theatre-be-one>

Classic hair on the back of the neck stuff. Also streaming on Spotify (search “BE” in artists). The question is, were the bees paid royalties?

And the rest.....

## **BATH BKA CLUB NEWS**

### **Diary Dates**

Sunday 21 January at 2.30pm at the Teaching Apiary (TA) - Talk on using a Zest Hive

Date in February (TBC) - Talk by Bob Needs on Morphometry - “The process of measuring the external shape and dimensions of landforms, living organisms, or other objects”. In this case, of course, our be-winged lovelies.

A short talk on Deformed Wing Virus is also planned - details to be confirmed.

### **Improvers Course (Basic)**

A reminder that North Somerset Beekeepers are running this basic course again in the New Year which can lead to the Basic BBKA Certificate.

Details of the course can be found at:

[http://www.bbka.org.uk/learn/examinations\\_assessments/basic\\_assessment](http://www.bbka.org.uk/learn/examinations_assessments/basic_assessment)

If you are interested please contact Avon Beekeepers direct as we are without an Education Coordinator at present.

If you are interested in becoming our Education Officer, please contact our Honorary Secretary. Send an email to [bathBKA.sec@gmail.com](mailto:bathBKA.sec@gmail.com)

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## RED REMINDER!

For those who have not yet renewed your membership please part with your hard earned cash and pay the relevant fee to Steve at the earliest opportunity! Remember you are not insured until you do!!!!!! Steve's details are on the Contacts page on the website.

### **FOR SALE**

A smart metal honey settling tank with strainer is to be raffled in a 100 square raffle - £1.00 per ticket as soon as we're ready to start the raffle, we'll let you know.

The club also has a plastic honey settling tank for sale at a price of £20. Please contact Pete Davis for details which are available on the Contacts page on the website.

## **BEWARE!**



Trevor Curry has unfortunately suffered damage to his hives from green woodpeckers who are clearly on the lookout for food in these frozen times....

*Merry*  
CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY  
*New Year*