
THE BUZZ

Westerham Beekeepers'

newsletter

December 2024

Issue Five

Welcome:

Welcome to the fifth & final 2024 edition of our new look newsletter. As ever, it's packed with updates, tips, reports and recipes.

I'm very pleased to be able to say a special thank you to our outgoing Chairman Steve Riley in my first Chairman's Chat.

Additionally, we'll discuss how to prepare your hives for the next season's activities, ensuring they are strong and ready to flourish come spring.

It looks as though we are finally settling into winter proper, and thankfully the wasps seem to be calming down allowing the colonies to settle into clustering before building up again in the spring.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue.

Mark Waddington

Chairman's Chat:

Thank you for support at the AGM in electing me as your new chairman.

When I joined Westerham Beekeepers in 2016, it was already a friendly and welcoming club with a wide range of interesting and experienced members and a commitment to help beekeepers in our area to learn and develop their craft. Since then, it has stayed as friendly as it was, but at the same time become more varied and fun. Thanks to the efforts of the "varroa sensitive" movement, led by Steve Riley, which is becoming widely

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recognised nationally, and internationally, and who knows, may one day lead to changes to the BBKA education syllabus.

Steve has done everything anyone could ask to look after the club. He works hard to ensure that the club runs for all its members and isn't focused on just one set of interests or individuals.

He has actively promoted beekeeping education in the branch, including running several study groups for the Basic Assessment. As part of that, he has also been a big supporter of the training apiary,

including being a keen cake taster (but not a baker?). Jacky notes that “on one occasion, he tried to eat the cake before he had removed his suit veil”.

The "varroa resistant" project has been a massive success and has shone a new light on the Westerham branch. Steve has been instrumental in making it a part of the way we do beekeeping at Westerham. He has also eagerly promoted it with neighbouring branches in the region and is part of a community that is trying to change the way we manage the varroa issue in the UK.

Topsy adds, “I am not sure if either we or our bees realise how lucky we are to have been involved in this research project, which over the last seven years or so he has developed into a management methodology. Based on scientific experimentation and careful observation, as explained in his book, this approach is now being adopted by many other beekeeping associations. Steve has done a great job in protecting honeybees from the danger of both varroa mites and chemically heavy-handed beekeepers.”

And, from Alban, “I want to thank Steve for his support and guidance since I started beekeeping in 2016. Like any other beekeeper, my beekeeping has experienced ups and downs, and at every stage Steve was there with his enthusiasm and deep knowledge and experience to ensure I never came off the rails. Steve has helped make this club enjoyable, fun and welcoming. Thank you, Steve.”

Steve has a warm and easy-going nature and is always ready to thank people for their efforts for the club with a gift of a bottle of wine (are all chairpersons expected to do this?).

Thank you all for making the club the friendly, supportive and pleasurable place to be that it is.

Mark Waddington

Things to do:

It's almost the time of peace and winter feasting. But this is also a great time to make sure you have everything ready, both for the colder months and for next season:

1. Make sure you have winter protection in place on your colonies (mouse guards, insulation, protection against green woodpeckers, strapping or weighing down any colonies that might be exposed to strong winds).
2. Keep checking your colonies through the winter for stores. The simple test is “hefting” by lifting on either side to check there is still a reasonable weight of stores. If not, feed with fondant. Syrup should NOT be used in the colder months.
3. If you haven't already done so, this is a great time to get your equipment cleaned up. For plastic or polystyrene kit, washing in strong hot washing soda solution, sterilising with a bleach solution. For wooden equipment, scraping and torching wooden equipment is fine. Any old brood frames should by now have been in the freezer for 48 hours to kill any nasties before packing away securely.
4. Make sure any old comb you store away can't be turned into a nesting spot for mice!
5. Take the time to browse the suppliers' catalogues once you have decided what your plans are for next season.
6. Study for your next module and/or read Steve Riley's book.
7. Enjoy the quieter months!

Mark Waddington

What's On – Recent talks, dates for the diary, & future events:

On Wednesday 25th September, Norman Carreck gave a very stimulating talk on **The future of the British and Irish native bee** (*Apis Mellifera Mellifera*).

Norman is a researcher on many aspects of apiculture that we can relate to as a branch. He is interested in the genetic lineage of our native honeybee. He is part of several initiatives that monitor winter losses, the success of both managed and wild/feral colonies, as well as trying to understand what the genetic make-up of our bees is and how that might lend them success. For example, how much better do locally adapted bees overwinter?

He covered all these in his talk and in case you are still wondering, he gave a resounding “yes” to the future of the British and Irish Native bee. Even with all the introduced queens and nucs (and these are reducing in number), the impact on the gene pool is not as bad as many may fear. He also argued that there is no justification for importing bees for managing inbreeding or poor stock, as local adaptation is shown to give better results.

His talk was peppered with references to some of the great names of beekeeping and honeybee research, including Beowulf Cooper (founder of BIBBA), Brother Adam, and Professor Tom Seeley (Honeybee Democracy).



A Westerham Member reviewing the “Norman Carreck bookstore” – *photo: Mark Waddington*

Norman concluded with a few cautionary remarks on the ingress of the Yellow-legged Asian Hornet into the UK (“they are established”) and shared a new vaporising lure which has been distributed among branch members.

Mark Waddington

Making queen rearing simple by Kevin Thorn 30th October:

I was really looking forward to this talk because not only is Kevin Thorn, as a bee farmer, an expert on queen rearing, he also leads the Abberton Native Honeybee

Project. The project started eight years ago with Colchester BKA, BIBBA and the Essex Wildlife Trust all working together to raise native queens and flood the area with their drones - the exact aims of our own bee breeding project. I was able to catch Kevin before and after his presentation and gain some invaluable advice and insights, and an invitation to go and see their project. Come and chat to me if you want to know more.

Kevin started with the traits he selects for when raising his own queens: good temperament, strong spring build up and low swarming tendency. He then ran us through different methods of queen rearing, from grafting - "It's not as hard as people think - if you can see the right aged larvae, you can do it! - to doing a Demaree. He ran through queen introduction, using mating nucs, and why drones are so important to queen rearing. There was a lot as you can imagine, but Kevin ended with a very simple method for raising new queens that we could all do very easily. Here it is:

- Grab a spare brood box
- In your selected hive, find two frames of sealed brood, one frame with a small patch of eggs and young larvae, one frame of nectar/honey and two frames of open brood
- Shake all the bees off (that way you don't need to know where the queen is) and

place those frames into your spare brood box

- Fill the gaps in both brood boxes with foundation frames
- Place the spare brood box on the hive above the original brood box and a queen excluder
- Nurse bees will move up and cover the frames in the spare box
- An hour or a day later return to the hive with a nuc
- Out of the spare brood box, take, with attached bees, the two frames of sealed brood, the frame with the small patch of eggs and young larvae and the frame of food and place in the nuc
- Take the two frames of open brood and shake all the bees from them into the nuc, but don't put them into the nuc, instead returning them to the original brood box. Fill out the nuc with frames of foundation or drawn comb

You now have a strong nuc that will raise its own queen (remember to check five days or a week later and knock down queen cells to one), while the original hive will recover in just a couple of weeks.



Kevin reminds us it can take 3 to 5 weeks to see a mated queen – *photo: Steve McGrath*

Kevin's final advice was to pick one method of queen rearing out of the many choices available and stick at it. He also busted some of the myths in beekeeping, reassuring us that emergency queen cells don't necessarily make poor queens, that

there's very little risk of inbreeding given drones can fly a long way to congregation areas, and that bee calmness does not depend on the weather - in his experience, grumpy bees are grumpy bees no matter the weather and he should know as he has done inspections in thunderstorms.

Steve McGrath

Forthcoming Events:

Please save the following dates in your diaries, for what will hopefully be an entertaining and informative series of winter talks.

All are held at:

Westerham Hall
Quebec Avenue
Westerham
TN16 1BJ

Talks start 8.00 pm with doors opening at around 7.30 pm.

Winter Talks:

Wednesday 29th January 2025 –
Derek Mitchell - Thermoregulation in hives

Wednesday 26th February 2025 –
Tom Bickerdike - Southeast bee inspector and Asian Hornet catcher

Wednesday 26th March 2025 – Sarah Wyndham Lewis - The work of a honey sommelier

And, if you need an extra dose of Steve Riley, he is one of the speakers at the BIBBA Varroa Resistance through Bee Improvement day-long conference in Coventry on Saturday 15th February 2025.

Full details can be found [here](#).

Mark Waddington

Membership:

Thanks very much to everyone – both long-standing and new members - who have renewed their membership for 2024/25.

If you have not yet renewed, please do so in the next week or two, before the distractions of Christmas preparations take precedence. A reminder that the renewal invitation email was sent out on 2nd October from 'Kent Beekeepers - Westerham Branch', with the subject 'Membership Renewal Invitation'. If this has got lost in your email's digital dustbin, please let me know and I can send another invitation.

If you prefer not to use the online renewal process, please contact me and I can send you the paper renewal form.

Just as importantly, if you are not renewing your membership this year, please let me know so your record can be updated to show this. If nothing else, it will ensure you don't get any more emails from me chasing you for renewal.

Robert Ambroziak

Treasurer's Report:

The 2023/2024 season has not been a bad year for us, although with a loss of over £1,800, one might think so.

But that loss is matched almost exactly by our expenditure on readiness for the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet. Lecturers' fees are up too, and we have bought several items (posters, business cards, pop-ups etc.) to make our stand more impressive when attending local Fetes. Many thanks to Sue Bradshaw Smith for her efforts on this. We have also a little more interest on our Charifund savings again this year. So, despite these costs the club remains on a stable financial footing. Thanks again to Jacky and Steve Riley, plus other helpers, for the continuing success of the Training Apiary

and, thanks to Steve McGrath, we now have a Bee Breeding apiary up and running.

Keith Masters

Asian Hornet Matters:

There isn't much to add this month to what was circulated in the last newsletter. Note that there has been a total of 24 nests found this year, with the latest in Bexhill on Sea.

Check your emails for details of the Asian Hornet Awareness Team (AHAT) Zoom meeting with Kent Beekeepers on 6th December 2024. The details have been circulated already.

Mark Waddington

Bee Podcasts:

Nicola Spreckley continues her enthusiastic foray into the world of bee podcasts:



Queen Bees with Jane Horrocks & Ester Coles. Beekeeping and a good old catch up, as Jane Horrocks calls up her friend Esther Coles; actress, writer and beekeeper, to have a weekly chat checking in on Esther's bees as well as each other. Sometimes they might even allow a guest to join the fun. Follow the podcast on

Instagram @queenbeespod for more pictures and videos from the hive. Listen [here](#)



Beekeeper Confidential - Bees & Beekeeping by Mandy Shaw. A Podcast about the curious lives of beekeepers and their bees. Listen [here](#)



Two Bees in a Podcast – UF/IFAS Honey Bee Lab. Two Bees in a Podcast is hosted by members of University of Florida's Honeybee Research and Extension Laboratory. Learn about honeybees, beekeepers, researchers, and specialists from around the world in educational, fun, yet practical episodes. Listen [here](#)



The Bee's Knees by Jacy Meyer. Bees are intelligent, compassionate creatures responsible for 90% of the world's food. They contribute to sustainable farming, biodiversity, environmental protection, and more. Listen in to learn about the wonderful world of native bees and how you can nurture the literal busy bees of Mother Nature. Listen [here](#)



Teach Me Bees – Honey 4 Hope. Teach Me Bees, a captivating weekly podcast hosted by Dave Wescott who illuminates the untold mysteries of these tiny ecosystem engineers. Each episode invites experts from various fields, sharing their knowledge and passion for the fascinating life of bees. From the art of beekeeping to

the science behind honey production, diving deep into every aspect of bee lore.

The mutual goal? To unlock the secrets of bees, aiding in their preservation, and enhancing awareness of nature's harmony. Listen [here](#)



John and Nathalie in the US talk with Steve Riley and discuss his new book “The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa.” Steve, along with the Westerham Beekeepers’ Association have done a lot of research into how Varroa was affecting their bees, and how the bees responded when they were not treated. Listen [here](#).

Nicola Spreckley

Prize Winning -Greek Honey Cake:

My family and I enjoyed a similar cake to the recipe below in Greece this summer, taking it to the beach for tea – it uses a similar method to lemon drizzle cake, where a syrup is poured over the cake when it has cooled.

In Greek mythology, bees were supposed to be the messengers of the gods and honey to be a source of wisdom and poetry.

Greek honey from wild thyme fields is particularly highly regarded, although it's not necessary for this recipe.



Photo: Mark Edwards

Ingredients:

220g plain flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
A little freshly grated nutmeg
1 teaspoon orange zest
200g butter
200g of coconut sugar (any sugar will suffice)
3 eggs
100ml milk
200g walnuts (divide in two - half finely ground for the cake mix and half lightly chopped for scattering on top)
200g honey (half for the cake and half for the syrup)
Juice of the orange (see above)
Star anise
4 whole cloves

Method:

Pre heat your oven to 175C

Syrup:

Combine the ingredients: 1/2 the honey, 1/2 the orange zest, the orange juice and the lemon juice, star anise and the cloves in a

pan, and gently bring to a simmer. Then set aside to cool.

Cake:

Sieve the dry ingredients: flour, baking powder, salt, cinnamon and nutmeg into a mixing bowl.

Cream together, in another mixing bowl, the: butter, sugar, 1/2 the honey and 1/2 the zest. Then add the eggs and the dry ingredients from the other bowl together with the finely ground walnuts and finally the milk. Combine to form the cake mixture.

Grease and line a 9-inch cake tin. Add the combined cake mixture and bake for 35-40 minutes. When baked, set the cake aside to cool.

Place the roughly chopped walnuts on a baking tray and gently roast for a few minutes to promote their flavour. Then set aside to cool.

When the cake has cooled, drizzle over the syrup mixture and sprinkled with the roasted chopped walnuts. Enjoy.

Mark Edwards

World Museum Liverpool: Bees: A Story of Survival

If you happen to be in or near Liverpool before May 2025 you may like to try this [exhibition](#) at the World Museum.

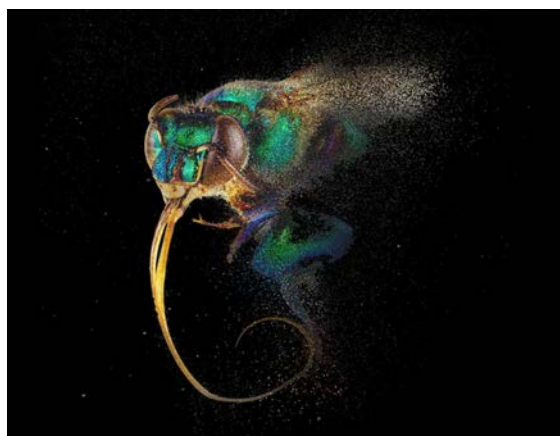


Photo: World Museum, Liverpool

And, if you can't make the exhibition, do watch this short [video](#).

Summer Fetes Roundup:

2024 proved a busy year with 4 village fetes- Limpsfield in June, Crockham Hill (new for '24), Four Elms in July, and Westerham in September, with the addition of the Edenbridge & Oxted Show in August where the club was invited by the organisers to put together an education stand to bring local beekeeping to the public.



photo: Andrew Smith

We obtained some eye-catching banners this year to increase public awareness of the impact of Asian Hornets (KBKA) and Honey Adulteration and Fraud (BBKA) highlighting the effect both are having on local beekeepers and the wider environment.

At the Edenbridge & Oxted show we were joined by the Kent AHAT group who gave out free Asian hornet trap kits with advice on what to look out for and how to report any possible sightings. Many people still thought Asian Hornets are just a beekeeping problem and didn't affect them.

The observation hive is the main attraction on our stand and can become quite busy - take away activities for children kept everyone happy including the adults. The new "I found the Queen" @ Westerham Beekeepers sticker stamp was a real hit, giving encouragement to others to visit our stand at these events.



photo: Andrew Smith

Paying with cash at these local events was still popular and with patchy mobile signals it proved very reliable.

Reintroducing honey tasting this year boosted sales and enhanced our message: buy local honey. Many people were wowed by the difference in flavours of the honey on sale, clearly illustrating why our beekeepers charge more per jar than the local supermarket brands. Even if people didn't particularly like honey, they were often willing to try, and the children proved to be very discerning customers.



photo: Andrew Smith

We would like to thank our volunteers this year for coming along to help put up the stand, talk all things bees for a couple of hours, sell our wonderful honey and introduce treatment free beekeeping to a wider audience. We couldn't do these events without your help.

If you feel you would be able to spare some time in 2025 and join our band of regular helpers, the club would love to hear from you. Please contact me at susan.bradshaw.smith@gmail.com

Sue Bradshaw

Picture Post Cards:

Wish you were here

Holiday photos of the Salt Spring Island Mead Company's location and products on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada.

<https://ssimead.com>

The island, named for the cold and briny saltwater springs on the north end, otherwise consists of forests & wide meadows creating beautiful landscapes surrounded by an emerald ocean, giving wonderful vistas.



photos: Sally Doyle-Linden



photos: Sally Doyle-Linden

Sally Doyle-Linden

AGM and Honey Competition:

On Wednesday 27th November Steve Riley chaired his final AGM after 5 years in post. Following a comprehensive round up of all the club's activities during in the year, the Committee was voted in. All the Committee members had indicated that they were happy to continue in post and Mark Waddington was voted in to be the next Club Chair.



photos: Paul Rhodes

We were delighted to receive several entries for the honey competition organised expertly by Sue Bradshaw. The winners were:

Runny honey – James Cash (1st), Andrew Smith (2nd)

Set honey – Keith Masters (1st), Mark Edwards (2nd)

Novices – Sally Doyle-Linden (1st), Paul and Fiona Rhodes (2nd)

Bakes (a first for the club) Di Pickard (1st), Mark Edwards (2nd)

Peter Cobley received the most votes for his cake but as it did not contain any honey, he was not able to be awarded a prize.

Sally Doyle-Linden

In My Apiary:

As I sit to write this it is the middle of November, I have just mown the lawn. I have never had to mow after mid-October; the grass was up to my ankles after the very mild autumn. It's not just the grass that's unseasonably active, my bees are too. Despite the lack of forage (not a complete lack as white clover, African basil, gaura and dandelions are still flowering here), the bees are active for at least a couple of hours a day in these mild temperatures.

That got me worried - are they using more stores than they're replenishing? So last week I went to see the nucs down in the breeding apiary. Normally, I'd put fondant on nucs a bit later, but when I lifted the insulation and hefted them, they were feeling light already. So, I had a peek inside (without pulling out the frames). I wasn't worried about doing that given it was 15C that day. Sure enough, I could see the stores at the top of the frames were uncapped and in one of the three nucs; the bees were skittish, suggesting they might be looking for food (if you see bees running around a hive like they're looking for something, check the stores). So, the fondant blocks went on and I now feel confident they'll be ok with 'cold' finally in the forecast!

I've also been round and hefted all my own hives. The way I do this is to heft in August to get a feel for the weight then, and then again when the ivy flow has finished. Remember, they need 35 lbs of

honey for the winter, so plenty of stores in the brood box and a full super. That's my starting point. I don't use a luggage scale but go on my own judgement. During my check, I hefted one hive to find it light as a feather. So, I took out the bottom board to find it absolutely covered in wax capping. In I went and there was nothing left. The Queen had obviously failed, and the weakened colony had been completely robbed out. Safe to say the next-door hives were so heavy they were pinned to their stands. Robbing out in November. I'm not sure you'll find that in the books. But I'll be hefting from now on right the way through the winter and if in any doubt I'll be feeding fondant.

It has been a bonkers season for us beekeepers, and the question for is whether this is increasingly going to be the norm? Undeniable climate change suggests it is. And that's why, for me, it's absolutely crucial we're focused on breeding locally-adapted, near-native bees which can manage colony size for the amount of stores they have and be frugal with those stores.



Cosy hives and nucs in our breeding apiary
photo: Steve McGrath

Steve McGrath

About Westerham Beekeepers:

Westerham Beekeepers is a branch of the Kent Beekeepers Association. Our aim is to promote the craft of beekeeping by helping to educate both beekeepers and the public. While we are mostly practising amateur beekeepers, membership is open to interested members of the public. We meet during the winter months in Westerham, usually for lectures by visiting specialists and our own members. During the active beekeeping season, we meet for demonstrations by experienced beekeepers in our members' apiaries.

Website: <https://westerham.kbka.org.uk>

Contact Information:

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Keith Masters – Treasurer
masterskeithmasters@hotmail.com

Peter Cobley – Asian Hornet Co-ordinator – p-cobley@tiscali.co.uk



To join the Westerham Beekeepers' WhatsApp group, please contact Mark Waddington



To join the Training Apiary's Facebook group, please contact Jacky Delooze

Committee Members:

Mark Waddington – Chairman & Events Programme

Topsy Rudd – Branch Secretary

Keith Masters - Treasurer

Jacky Delooze - Training Apiary Manager

Steve Riley - Education Officer

Robert Ambroziak - Membership Secretary

Alban Smith Brindle - Swarm Co-ordinator

Peter Cobley – Asian Hornet Co-ordinator & Branch representative on KBKA Council

James Cash - Branch representative on KBKA Council

Advice for Beginners & FAQs: [on our website](#)

Swarm Reporting: Please contact our swarm co-ordinator, Alban Smith Brindle on 07919 843 546, or the nearest contact from the [BBKA website](#) if Alban is not available.

Last Word: Waggle [Dance] Recently spotted preparing his performance of the Macarena ... is there no end to Steve Riley's talents? Note the energy drink (mead-based?) clasped firmly in the non-leading hand.



photo: Jacky Delooze