

Wharfedale Beekeepers' Association



COMBINGS

Volume 27 Number 1
April/May 2016

Patron The Duchess of Devonshire



Honey bee covered in white pollen collected from mallow flowers in my garden

photo Rhona Finlayson



Swarm Officers for
2016



Pesticide free honey production in Cuba



Diary Dates



Where did Varroa come from and how did it get here?

Your Committee

President: Bruce Speed 01943 862273 brucespeed@waitrose.com

Chairman and secretary: Anne Jones 01943 863760 anne@birchgarth.co.uk

Treasurer: Sue Hobson 07714702920 sue@prospool.co.uk

Membership and Education: Jill Campbell 01274 569238 smithchristopher41@sky.com

General members: Toni Killingray, Rob Claxton-Ingham, Laurence Truman and Sophie van Berckel. Co-opted member, Linda Beattie.

Special responsibilities

Course organisers	Jill Campbell Chris Smith	01274 569238	airedale@uwclub.net
Equipment co-ordinator	Sophie van Berckel	01943 609402 Or text	sophievb@blueyonder.co.uk
Website and Library	Laurence Truman	01943 875665	wbka_librarian@wharfedalebka.org.uk
Editors Combings	Toni Killingray Rhona Finlayson	01943 865749 01943 875665	stonib@googlemail.com rhonacombings@gmail.com
Social Secretary	Toni Killingray	01943 865749	stonib@googlemail.com
Swarm co-ordinator	Geoff Halsall	01943 608652	liz-geoff@talktalk.net
Deputy swarm co-ordinator	Bob Hodgson	01943 839857	hodbob@hotmail.co.uk

National Bee Unit Bee Inspector for 2016

The bee inspectorate, part of the National Bee Unit, is no longer with Fera but is part of the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

Regional Bee Inspector - Ivor Flatman contact 01924 252795 or 07775 119436, email - ivor.flatman@apha.gsi.gov.uk

Combings is the newsletter of the Wharfedale Beekeepers Association and the views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association or editors. Combings is usually published three times a year, in April/May, September and December. Contributions from members are always welcome and should be sent to the editors.

Queen colour for 2016 is White

Confessions of a New Beekeeper

It all started so well. I was enjoying a pint or two on the boundary at Otley Cricket Club, when I noticed a beekeeper doing I knew not what amongst the hives in her garden. When she had finished doing I knew not what, we had a lovely chat about the joys of beekeeping. Jenny (for it was she) invited me to the next MOB meeting.

I was made to feel very welcome and, at the same time, out of my depth at this meeting, but I did enjoy my couple of pints. I have been to many meetings since - Beer, Bees and Banter - what's not to like!

Before I knew it I was on the Beginners Course, where my poor brain was overloaded with information and admiration for the experienced beekeepers I met. I really enjoyed the practical sessions in Chris and Jill's apiary. I was also lucky enough to be at the famous frame-making evening at Rob's house.

I got fully equipped at Claro Bees and spent forever constructing my hive. When my mentor brought me a swarm, he patiently rebuilt my hive correctly. Shortly after getting my bees we had an apiary meeting at Clifford's house. What a fantastic afternoon that was. John and I, as the newest beekeepers took turns inspecting Clifford's hives. The five or six experienced beekeepers watching us gave plenty of advice (some of which was helpful!) by the end I was absolutely shattered. Brilliant!

Clifford gave me the best advice about beekeeping during the afternoon. Many thanks Clifford. My own bees are a delight and very forgiving. On my fifth inspection they let me watch the queen laying- breathtaking. On my sixth inspection I forgot to zip my suit! And I only realised midway through the inspection. Two of the workers had a close look at the unzipped gap but let me off. Phew. Goodness knows what I can use the two gallons of sweat that I produced for? My first self appraisal many years ago said that "Bob learns from his mistakes" my second stated that "Bob is still learning from his mistakes!" nothing changes. Many thanks to everyone who has helped me to get through this first year. You are too numerous to mention individually.

Oh yes, the best advice about beekeeping that Clifford gave me?
"If in doubt, do nowt!"

Bob McLaughlin

Digital Download Copy of Combings

In the last issue of Combings we offered members the choice of opting for a digital copy of Combings. About 25 members took up the option and downloaded a copy in addition to receiving their paper copy. A few members have let us know that they would like to opt to receive a digital copy only.

We are still assessing the demand for a digital copy so let us know if you would like to opt for digital copy (email rhonacombings@gmail.com). You can always change your mind and opt back.

Rhona Finlayson and Laurence Truman

WBKA Diary Dates

Sat 24th April

Otley Green Fair at The Courthouse Otley

WBKA will have a stand to promote understanding of bees and beekeeping.
Bee-friendly plants, honey and cakes will all be on sale

Sat 21 May

Otley Show

WBKA will have a stand to promote understanding of bees and beekeeping.
Bee-friendly plants, honey and cakes will all be on sale

Sat 28th May

**Bradford Beekeepers and WBKA Disease Recognition Workshop at
Bradford Beekeepers apiary at Knowles Park**

Bradford Beekeepers and WBKA are having a practical session on Disease Recognition at their apiary at Knowles Park on Sat 28th May. This is particularly useful for all as there will be hands-on teaching, examining a hive for disease, an opportunity to see an expert at work. The day is being financially supported by the two associations and is free to attendees but we do need to know who is coming as there is a limit on numbers. Please let Anne Jones know if you wish to attend.

See <https://bradfordbeekeepers.co.uk/event/disease-recognition-and-practical-apiary-workshop>.

Sat 25th June

Bee Health Day at Bradford University, 10am to 4pm

Places on this bee health day can be booked on line. Talks and workshops will be provided by staff from the National Bee Unit, Fera Science and Bradford University with the aim of helping beekeepers to maintain healthy and productive colonies of bees.

See <http://bradfordbeekeepers.co.uk/event/be-health-day>

June and July

**Groups' apiary meetings
venues and dates to be arranged by the Local Groups**

Sat 20th August

Gargrave Show

WBKA will have a stand to promote understanding of bees and beekeeping.
Bee-friendly plants, honey and cakes will all be on sale

Airedale Beekeepers Association will make members of WBKA welcome at all of their events and vice versa. See <http://airedalebka.org.uk/members-2/calendar-of-events/> for their programme of events

Volunteer for Claro Bees

Harrogate and Ripon Beekeepers run a shop every Saturday morning and many of our members make use of it for very competitively priced beekeeping products. Details are at <http://hrbka.org.uk/shop/claro-bees.html> where you will find their catalogue and prices.

The shop is run by volunteers and several WBKA members help on the rota (usually about once every 6 weeks). In return HBRKA make a generous donation to WBKA. The more volunteers there are the fewer the days anyone works there. There is no need to be an experienced beekeeper,

novices are welcome, and you will learn a lot from your fellow volunteers and customers. So if you would like to know more about it, ring Anne Jones or send her an e-mail (01943 863760, anne@birchgarth.co.uk) with your contact phone details if you are able to join the list of volunteers.

Swarm Co-ordinators

This year, continuing on from previous years Geoff Halsall and Bob Hodgson have undertaken to liaise between those who have bees/swarms they wish to dispose of and those who want bees.

Please register with Geoff and Bob if you want bees and get in touch with them if you have a swarm to dispose of or can supply a nucleus this year. Even more importantly **please** remember that if you no longer need to be on their list, to let them know. It saves a lot of wasted phone calls. Contact Geoff – 01943 608652 (Ilkley) or Bob -01943 839857 (Addingham) if you want to be on their list.

PS. Bees are valuable livestock and you should expect to pay a fair price.



Bob has made the generous offer that he is happy to take someone with him when collecting a swarm if they haven't collected one from someone else's' property in the past, so that they can learn the ropes of swarm officer duties.

Please see back page for full list of swarm officers for 2016.

WBKA Local Association Groups

Support your local group this season. All are very welcome.

If you want advice and a useful exchange of views and ideas you can do no better than attend your local group meetings. These are nformal sessions where you can meet experienced bee keepers and those who have just started keeping bees for the first time.

These are friendly events where members support each other; attendance at local shows is organised; monthly reminders of what should be happening in the apiaries are discussed and much, much more. Or just go enjoy a drink and listen to all those beekeepers coming up with a hundred different solutions to one problem!

If you would like to join a local group, contact Rob or Janet to be added to the email contact lists or just turn up to a meeting.

MOB (Menston, Otley, Burley) and COW (Central Wharfedale)

Contact Rob Claxton-Ingham rob@leecottage.com

MOB/COW Meetings on last Tuesday of the month at the Fleece Pub in Otley at 7.30pm

WOW (West of Wharfedale) and NOW, (North of Wharfedale)

Meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Cross Keys Pub in Skipton at 7.30pm

Contact Janet Hartley janethartley@live.co.uk

or Matthew Mason matt@john-mason.com

Where did Varroa come from and how did it get here?

“All bee keeping is local” - this often phrase crops-up in bee keeping articles however recent history tells us something different, with Varroa being an example of what can happen when it becomes a global activity.

Varroa comes from the Far East, where its a natural parasite on the Asian Honeybee *Apis Cerana*. It seems that European honey bees were first exposed to the mite about 150 years ago when Ukrainian migrants moved, with their bees, to the Primorsky region of eastern Russia, which borders on Korea.

High honey yields reported by these bee keepers led to queens (and mites) being transported back to the west in the mistaken belief that the eastern bees were more productive (the truth is that this was due to high flows from limes and other plants in the region). The completion of the Trans-Siberian railway in the early 1900s made this traffic much easier and more frequent.

During the 1950s Varroa was known to Russian bee keepers across the Asian part of the country (east of the Urals) but apparently not considered to be a major problem.

However by the early 1980s it was wiping-out thousands of colonies in eastern Europe and had soon spread to Asia, North Africa and South America. Behind the old 'Iron Curtain' thousands of colonies were systematically destroyed in a futile attempt to create a 'fire break' to stop the spread. Although the mite moves naturally between colonies, a combination of migratory bee keeping and the global trade in queens (particularly by air) seems to have been responsible for the huge acceleration in the spread of Varroa during the last 30 years.

In the UK Varroa was officially recorded for the first time in Devon in 1992, however it was likely to have been present for 3-4 years before then. Prior to this, numerous bee keeping organisations and individuals had lobbied the government to ban imports of queens, however these calls fell on deaf ears and official bans were only imposed when a country was officially designated as infected, by which time it would have been too late. Still, this would not have been a problem if British bee keepers had worked together to keep the mites at bay, however to quote one writer on the subject “Apathy won the day. And lost us the war!”.

Today, the only honey-producing country to remain free of Varroa is Australia, due to government intervention through the use of sentinel hives and inspection regimes at ports. There have been some near-misses; in 2012, thousands of infested Asian honey bees were found on a ship docked in Sydney and destroyed before they could come ashore.

Nearer to home, the Isle of Mann, which has banned bee imports for over 20 years, remains unaffected – an indication of what might have been achieved had the UK authorities and bee keepers taken a truly local perspective and acted together in the 1970's and 80's to protect our bees.

It is to be hoped that we will learn the lessons of Varroa and react in a more timely and

responsible way in the face of new threats to our bees which will no doubt come, starting with Small Hive Beetle which is already on its way.

Laurence Truman

Secretary and Chairman

Anita Banks has resigned as secretary and I have agreed to temporarily take over the role of secretary in addition to that of Chairman.

By the AGM in October this year I will have been Chairman for three years and have already indicated that I intend to resign at this AGM. It is my vision to have a committee of new and old members of the Association (i.e. those with an in depth knowledge of the Association, not ageism) and a regular turnaround of officers both to spread the load and to encourage new ideas and directions. So urgently I need a secretary to help me now and a new chairman by October. Duties are not onerous and, in fact, are a lot of fun much of the time. I have certainly learnt a lot about beekeeping that's not in books.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Anita for her work for WBKA and wish her all the best in the future.

Anne Jones

Bumblebees

We were treated to a wonderful presentation about Bumblebees by Anne Riley at our first meeting of the season this year at Christchurch, Ilkley. As always with Anne, the photographs were of the highest quality, showing all of the eight common species and most of the 24 British species, and in sufficient detail to be able to distinguish one from the other.

Anne's talk covered identification, habitat, forage and threats, and the changes in the concentration of the species in Britain as the climate and environment has changed. Some of the distinguishing features of bumblebees are subtle – particularly between workers and queens - and will trap the unwary into wrong identification. Some of the species are now more common than they were only five or ten years ago, such as the Common Carder with its brown and ginger striped body, and the recently arrived Tree Bumblebee that nests above ground and seems to like bird nest boxes.

Although the bumblebee species differ from honeybees, as we well know, there was much common ground in the way that forage, climate and agricultural chemicals are having an impact on all insects including bees, hoverflies and wasps. We are still at an early stage in understanding the impact of, for example, neonicotinoids on the long-term health of our colonies and their bumblebee cousins. Anne also thought that the importation of bumblebees to pollinate commercial greenhouses may pose a risk of unwittingly bringing diseases to our environment.

“The busy bee”, I've always thought that it is the bumblebee which gives us that phrase: up early, working into the dusk and often in poor weather, with an almost clumsy gait that makes every gardener smile.

This was a highly professional, well illustrated talk up to the high standard we have come to enjoy in Wharfedale.

Bruce Speed

Graham Royle talk at Emsay

This was a fairly well attended meeting with thirty beekeepers enjoying a splendid talk from Graham as he talked us through shortcuts and inventions he has thought of through his years keeping bees. Firstly he made a plea for us all to join Beebase so we can fill in their yearly census of colonies in UK. The number is important for EU funding i.e. the more colonies we prove to have the bigger our country's share of the money available.

His three main aims for beekeeping equipment are:

- * keep it simple
- * save time
- * add interest

Here follows a few of Graham's ideas that he generously shared with us.

Mouse Guards

Firstly leave your blocks in all year. The hive has plenty of ventilation through the mesh floors and bees do not like a large entrance. Bees would always choose a small entrance to defend, preferably around 7sq cm.

Secondly if you drill holes approximately 9/10 mm in your entrance block, it just needs turning round in winter to become the mouse guard! Brilliant, no more mouse guard purchases because you can't find them from last year.

Smokers

Always practice lighting your smoker if you are a beginner. Then there will be no dramas when you actually come to use it with the bees. If you dilute 50gms of saltpetre in 1 litre of water, then soak small pieces of old towel in the solution, let them dry naturally and they will make an excellent starter in your smoker. A warning, treat them like fireworks and keep the bits in a sealed tin.

Gloves

Leather gauntlets are difficult to clean and the pheromone from a bee sting stays on them for your next visit to your colony. They are always sticky with propolis. Use plastic washing up or latex disposable gloves. They are cheaper, easier to keep clean and so no lingering smells to attract the bees.

Cleaning

An easy way of cleaning your boxes: pile the boxes on top of each other, put a saucer of acetic acid on top of the boxes and wrap them securely in a wheelie bin plastic liner and leave them out in the sun for the acid to evaporate.

Washing soda dissolved in hot water will clean your frames (once you've taken the wax off).

Extracting

The wax in frames can be uncapped easily by using a hot air gun. Run the extractor really slowly for a long time before raising the speed. This helps with the balance, the heavier frames having longer to expel the honey, so all the frames become more evenly balanced.

For those of you who weren't there on the night, this is only a taste of tips you have missed!

Toni Killingray

Organic honey is a sweet success for Cuba

When the Caribbean state of Cuba was no longer able to afford pesticides – which have been linked with declining bee populations – it made a virtue out of a necessity and organic honey is now Cuba's fourth biggest agricultural export. Local producers hope that with investment they can expand their market.

Organic honey has become Cuba's fourth most valuable agricultural export behind fish products, tobacco and drinks, but ahead of the Caribbean island's more famous sugar and coffee. Organic honey is a key agricultural export creating a buzz among farmers.

After the collapse in 1991 of the Soviet Union, Cuba's main trading partner, the island was unable to afford pesticides due to a lack of foreign currency, coupled with the US trade embargo. By necessity, the government embraced organic agriculture, and the policies have largely stuck. Because no pesticides are used all of Cuba's honey can be certified as organic. Its honey has a very specific, typical taste and because its organic a high monetary value.

Now that the United States is easing its embargo following the restoration of diplomatic ties Cuba's organic honey exporters could see significant growth if the government supports the industry, bee keepers said. Cuba produced more than 7,200 tonnes of organic honey in 2014, worth about \$23.3m.

Cuban bee farmers sell their honey exclusively to the government, which pays them according to the world market price and then takes responsibility for marketing the product overseas. Most of Cuba's honey exports go to Europe. Cuban bee farmers cite the fact that they do not use chemicals as a possible reason why the bees are not dying here as they have been in other places. Cuba's small, organic honey industry aims to reap the rewards of increased trade with the United States. Bee keepers in the United States, Canada and other regions have long complained that pesticides are responsible for killing their bees and hurting the honey industry more broadly.

The US Environmental Protection Agency released a study in January this year indicating that a widely used insecticide used on cotton plants and citrus groves can harm bee populations. Norman Carrack, science director of the UK-based International Bee Research Association has stated that there is no doubt that populations of honeybees in the United States and Europe have declined since the second world war and the reasons can be found in climate change, fewer places for wild bees to nest, shifts in land use, diseases and use of pesticides.

When pesticide producers argue that trials to show the potential harm their products cause to honey bees and other pollinators are not valid because they do not replicate use of the products in the field, Cuba may be accidentally providing a very large scale case study. Because it is pesticide-free, Cuba's organic bee industry could act as protection from the problems hitting honey exporters in other countries Cuba appears to have been immune to the bee die-offs seen hitting be farmers in other regions.

Reported in The Guardian Feb 9th 2016

! Sale of the century !

! Plus umpteen bargains and give-aways !

Beekeeping equipment up for grabs.

Phone Brian Spence on 01943 862125 for an appointment to see the beekeeping goodies displayed in his garage.

The star item is a fully functioning Dartington hive (see illustration to the right) with all its bits, together with instructions about using it. The Dartington is a new take on an old method but can be used as one or two separate hives. Originally the hive used 14x12 frames but I have modified it to take the standard 14x8½ seen in the commonly popular Modified National hive so it is easier to use it along side normal equipment.



Other items, in no particular order, include a table top extractor, numerous honey buckets and jars, a home made solar wax extractor, honey warmer, a couple of hive stands, various swarm control boards, Varroa and solid floors, supers with frames, queen marking kit, a couple of brood boxes and a lid together with personal equipment such as hive tool, smoker, plastic buckets galore etc. etc.

Plenty of things which could be useful as cheap starter kit.

Please arrange to come along and see if anything suits you.

Brian Spence



FOR SALE

Evan Johns has 6 unused ex-display large capacity smokers for sale at £15 each.

Height 18.5 cm. Diameter 10cm. With wire heat shield and hook.

Evan John contact telephone - 01943872892

USA - Bee Preservation

The US Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is creating a National Bee Gene Bank in Fort Collins, Colorado as part of the agency's response to ongoing problems facing the country's beekeepers. In the past three decades or so, new pathogens, pests, parasites, and other pressures, such as sub lethal impacts of pesticides and deficient nutrition, have increased average losses of managed honey bee colonies in the US to more than 30 percent a year.

The gene bank, which will be located in Fort Collins, Colorado, will help preserve the genetic diversity of US honeybees, especially for traits such as resistance to pests or diseases and pollination efficiency. The gene bank can help ARS and other researchers around the country to breed better bees now and in the future.

It will also provide ARS and other scientific organizations access to resources from which to breed better bees. The ARS Honey Bee Breeding, Genetics, and Physiology Research Unit in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Danka will be helping shape the bee gene bank with the Russian honey bee and bees with Varroa Sensitive Hygiene lines developed at the Baton Rouge lab being among those to be conserved first.

To help make the gene bank a reality, researchers in the ARS Insect Genetics and Biochemistry Research Unit in Fargo, North Dakota, are developing better long-term storage techniques for honey bees, including cryopreservation of bee sperm and embryos. Their work will include creating a way to reliably revive the embryos and grow them into reproductively viable adults after storage.

Importing and storing germplasm from these types of foreign populations can provide long-term opportunities for researchers and industry to develop new bee varieties as they deem appropriate.

"New Bee Germplasm Collection" was published in the January 2016 issue of AgResearch Magazine

CLARO BEES LTD. for all your beekeeping supplies

Opening times: Saturday mornings from 9am – 12.30pm during the beekeeping season:
March 21st - October 31st inclusive

Very keen prices on all items. A comprehensive stocks of hive parts & accessories, foundation, tools, smokers, clothing, queen rearing equipment, medications, jars & lids, candle making equipment and books.

Knowledgeable beekeepers are always present to offer impartial advice on suitability of equipment prior to purchase as well as beekeeping problems. Payments by cash and cheque only.

Ample FREE parking adjacent to shop. **Find us:** first left after the RHS Harlow Carr Gardens, Crag Lane, Harrogate, HG3 1QA
e-mail: ClaroBees@hrbka.org.uk

Please remember that Claro Bees cannot accept cards, payment by cash and cheque only please

Swarm Officers for 2016

This is the list of swarm officers for 2016, listed by the area that they will cover.

Addingham

Bob Hodgson	01943 839857	hodbob@hotmail.co.uk
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Barnoldswick

Waleed Al-Muhandis	01282 812353	waleedalmuhandis@hotmail.co.uk
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Bolton Abbey

Dean Abdel-Rahman	07801 702479	s.tawfik@doctors.org.uk
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Burley in Wharfedale

Anne Jones	07967894801	01943863760	anne@birchgarth.co.uk
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Toni Killingray	07790409311	01943 865749	stonib@googlemail.com
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Earby

Margaret Brown	07879447438	01282 843932	margaret.brown2869@hotmail.co.uk
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Embsay

Monty Pugh		01756 799093	montypugh@ymail.com
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Ilkley

Sophie Van Berckel	07880806013	01943 609402	sophievb@blueyonder.co.uk
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Kettlewell

Sara and Peter Spillett		01756 760 229	petensara@btinternet.com
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Menston

Mark Cade	07814530628		markcade62@gmail.com
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Otley

Rob Claxton-Ingham	07961423216	01943 468353	rob@leecottage.com
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Jenny Liston	07743330264		jenny@greenroyd.org
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Silsden

Ray Clarkson	07905356516	01535 655715	r655715@icloud.com
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Skipton

Peter Longbottom		01756 792837	longbee@btinternet.com
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Smith Hartley		01756 797611	smithhartley@icloud.com
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The contact details for the swarm officers are on the WBKA web site and on the BBKA web site. It is a voluntary job and swarm officers are under no obligation to remove swarms. The officers have third party insurance through WBKA/BBKA full membership but this does not cover going up high ladders. You may ask for expenses from the person requesting your services but any charge will invalidate your insurance.

Details of the BBKA insurance can be found at <http://www.bbka.org.uk/members/insurance>