

Beemaster

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Cover photo: Bee taking on water whilst standing on water mint, Stuart Humphreys, April 2020

Other photo credits: Griff Dixon (page 9), Stuart Humphreys (pp11-13), National Bee Unit BeeBase (p16), Maurice Jordan (p17), Anne & Rob Mason (pp19-20), Naomi Brake/Daily Mail (p21)

Please note:

Beemaster is published monthly. Contributions by 25th of prior month, please, to the Editor. Copy received after this date may have to be held over to the next Beemaster. The Editor retains the right to amend submitted articles or to reject articles which appear, in his opinion, to be unsuitable. Views expressed in Beemaster articles are not necessarily those of the Editor and may not reflect the opinions of the Council of the Nottinghamshire Beekeepers' Association.

Diary dates

Some videos for you to watch whilst *Staying at Home, Protecting the NHS & Saving Lives*

One 'virtual' event to publicise:

Wednesday, 6 May
8.00pm

Bees Abroad 'Big Birthday Pub Quiz'

Hosted by Professor Adam Hart

Go to www.beesabroad.org.uk for details of how to join or to make a donation. See also Anne Mason's article on page 18.

Otherwise, the current restrictions during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic mean that Nottingham and Newark regional meetings are cancelled until further notice. The same applies to all practical apiary training sessions and assessments.

As a reminder, the excellent **NBKA website** is regularly updated by Griff Dixon, so please keep an eye on that for the latest updates on the situation.

www.nottsbees.org.uk

On the home page of the website you will see a link to a video that is well worth watching – **Our Year in Beekeeping (2011/12)**, by **Linda and Maurice Jordan**. Watching this will definitely represent a good investment of just under an hour of your time, especially on one of the cold, miserable days that seem to have returned lately.

Also, below you will again find the link (first included last month) to videos of the three lectures **Professor Tom Seeley** had been due to give at the **BBKA Spring Convention**.

www.bbka.org.uk/spring-convention-videos

Prof Seeley is the Horace White Professor in Biology in the Department of Neurobiology and Behavior at Cornell University. He has published several books on honey bee behaviour, including *Honeybee Democracy* (2010) and *The Lives of Bees: The Untold Story of the Honey Bee in the Wild* (2019).

From the Editor

Stuart Humphreys welcomes you to this month's newsletter

Just as the weather seems to have turned from summer back to wintery-spring, welcome to May's *Beemaster*!

Inevitably perhaps, this month's issue contains several coronavirus-related articles. Given that we have new members joining all the time who may not have seen previous newsletters, I have taken the liberty of repeating the National Bee Unit's latest guidance re: COVID-19 and Beekeeping. This has been marginally updated from the version included last month. This is followed by an extract from the *Financial Times* on the same subject.

Thanks go, of course, to all of this month's contributors... **Griff Dixon** celebrates his fifth year of keeping bees and reflects on his trials and tribulations during that time. The lockdown has at least afforded him (indeed, most of us, I suspect) the opportunity to get on top of our beekeeping duties. As regards the Association, he suggests there may be some merit in forming a 'Bees for Business' group. Griff would be delighted to hear your views on this.

Penny Forsyth anticipates the onset of the swarming season and includes a handy list of jobs for May in our apiaries. Also, she keeps us up-to-date on the Asian Hornet Action Team who attended a call from a member of the public (fortunately, a wasp nest rather than anything more sinister, but a helpful practice run).

Maurice Jordan finds particular pleasure in looking after his bees during the current situation, and **Anne Mason** celebrates Bees Abroad's 21st birthday and invites us to participate in a virtual pub quiz (by Zoom, naturally) to help raise funds for this brilliant charity. Anne also kicks off a new feature looking at bees in our gardens, starting with the Ashy Mining Bee. Anne and I are looking to you, dear readers, to contribute articles on other species of bee for future editions of *Beemaster*.

As ever, **Linda Jordan** has a recipe to tempt us – Honey Ginger Biscuits – though for some strange reason she suggests that these might be destined for the store cupboard rather than wolfed down straight away! And, finally, a bonus recipe from **Alan Moulton** who shows us how to use readily available ingredients to make Beekeeper's Chutney which, he claims, is pretty much on a par with Branston Pickle ('other pickles are available').

I hope you enjoy the read. And stay safe.

COVID-19 and Beekeeping

From the National Bee Unit, with 3 April updates highlighted in red

As beekeepers, please be aware of the following guidance when looking after your honey bees. Updates to this guidance will be provided where necessary. You should keep up to date with the latest guidance issued by the Government as it is subject to regular change.

Defra, Scottish Government and the Welsh Government ask you as beekeepers to be responsible and to ensure that you continue good beekeeping practices, effective stock management and health checks whilst observing the Government's guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) on COVID-19.

You should follow Public Health guidance on social distancing. Everyone, including beekeepers, should avoid gatherings of more than two people and this includes at your apiary. You should maintain a distance of 2 metres between yourself and others to limit the spread of COVID-19.

General advice for beekeepers is as follows:

- You should continue to work and care for your animals in the normal manner, as far as possible. You should not take measures that compromise the welfare of the animals in your care.
- You should maintain good biosecurity at your apiary (<http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>).
- You should not share beekeeping equipment with other beekeepers, particularly hive tools and other handheld devices and protective clothing.
- In line with the general advice on COVID-19, you should wash your hands for at least 20 seconds using soap and hot water before and after you come into contact with any animal. Use hand sanitiser if that's all you have access to.
- There are currently no restrictions on the movements of bee colonies **that you are managing, such as** moving bees to fulfil pollination contracts. However, you should observe the public health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 when carrying out these activities, including the guidance on social distancing **and essential travel**.
- If you are required to visit premises other than your own, you should familiarise yourself with the public health guidance on infection prevention and control and take measures to minimise the risks from contaminated surfaces. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>
- If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, you should be self-isolating at home and should not be visiting other premises. Ideally, another beekeeper should take on this duty wherever possible. We are suggesting that local associations consider how they can support those confined or unable to attend their bees at this difficult time for all of us.

- If your bees are due an inspection by a government inspector, you should be aware that this may be subject to a delay depending on available resources within the inspectorate.
- If your bees are due an inspection by a government inspector, and you are in a high-risk group, or are showing symptoms of COVID-19, you must let your inspector know ahead of the inspection. Arrangements will be made that will limit the chance of COVID-19 being spread. This may include the inspection proceeding without the beekeeper being present or delaying the inspection.
- For all inspections, 2 metre social distancing will be considered the minimum and so the beekeeper will not be able to stand at the hive side with the inspector while the inspection takes place.
- Imports of bees are still permitted. There is no evidence to support restrictions to international movement or trade in bees, and the UK has no additional rules for bee imports with respect to COVID-19.
- You should report any suspicion of notifiable diseases or pests to the authorities in the usual way – please see the bee health page on gov.uk for further information. (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bee-health>).
- You should use husbandry techniques to minimise swarming. If you have to respond to collect a swarm you need to ensure that you use the guidelines on social distancing when collecting the swarm. If that is not possible, then the swarm then should not be collected. Therefore, trying to prevent swarms is the best approach.

The economic impact of COVID-19 on beekeeping

This is now making news in the *Financial Times*, writes **Stuart Humphreys**

Last month Alison Knox introduced an article written by Laura Zhou, a reporter for the *South China Morning Post*, about the impact of COVID-19 on beekeeping in China.

A couple of weeks ago the *Financial Times* contained an article entitled '**Crops at risk as coronavirus lockdown grounds bees**', sub-headed: 'Movement restrictions limit pollination, threatening food production.' As you know from the 'In the news' section of *Beemaster*, normally it is the *Guardian* that features such reports, so the fact that the FT had picked up the theme was noteworthy in itself. You may be able to google the full article but, as it is probably behind a pay-wall, I have included salient extracts below. NB. I have excluded references to the Californian almond industry, having covered that at length in last month's newsletter.

* * *

Lockdowns, quarantine requirements and border closures... are threatening to hit food production by limiting the movement of bees, agriculturalists have warned.

Farmers around the world growing fruits, vegetables and nuts rely on bees to pollinate their crops. In many cases bees are trucked through agricultural areas rather than staying local to one area – but now they cannot travel. "A third of our food depends on pollination by bees. The production of those crops could be affected," said Norberto Garcia of Apimondia, the international federation of beekeepers.

In Europe, many beekeepers have been able to move around within state borders, but in some countries like Greece beekeepers have been banned from travelling long distances to allow the bees to pollinate. "In some cases bees will starve," said Fani Hatjina at the Hellenic Institute of Apiculture.

Farmers in the UK rely on replenishing their colonies with bees from southern Europe, but imports have become difficult, said Luke Dixon at Urban Beekeeping, which looks after hives in and around London. Logistical issues and the inability to obtain paperwork are causing a bottleneck.

In India, a national lockdown has hit Narpinder Singh, who keeps colonies in Punjab and surrounding states. His business produces honey from mustard plants for export to the US, and also pollinates apples, lychees and walnuts. He and his workers cannot travel across state lines to move the hives around and feed them. "As the temperature increases, we have to shift the bee boxes to the shade, otherwise they will die from the heat," he said.

Farroq Ahmad Lone and his workers migrate across large swaths of India from Kashmir to Gujarat pollinating mustard crops and apple orchards. Travel restrictions have meant that they have had to abandon their normal routine of travelling at night to avoid the daytime heat. "If we travel in the day the bees will die because of the heat. This is the first time we have witnessed such hardships," he said.

* * *

Original article by Emiko Trazono and Benjamin Parkin, *Financial Times*, 17 April 2020.

Notes from Norwell

By **Griff Dixon**, including his Honorary Secretary's report

Learning from experience

An ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION – on 14 April 2015 I purchased my first nucleus of bees which I gingerly transferred to my brand new Thornes National Hive in my back garden...

After much beginner's mismanagement – and after I extracted my first honey on 7 June – they duly swarmed on 16 June. Serves me right for cramping the hive up below the super when using porter escapes and not allowing space for them to go! Then, of course, my first colony of bees died of isolation starvation in early January 2016...

Learning the hard way is often the best way as you remember not to do it again!

Beekeeping I have found is not all about reading books but all about doing it and learning as you go along. From time to time you need a little bit of advice. But try not to overdo it with your mentor who expects you to remember what you were taught on the beginners course and what you learnt on those very important apiary training visits.

Not wanting to be defeated by my lack of beekeeping experience I started again and purchased another nucleus of bees on 7 April 2016 and two more on the 23 August that year. This was the start of exploring ways in which to make beekeeping a profit-making enterprise and the various directions you need to take to make the profit and loss columns at least balance.

I have kept meticulous records of everything I have purchased since I started. Last year actually had an income greater than the outgoings – only for 2019 I might add! Trying to recoup previous years will take a bit longer!!

I may be in my sixth season but, in reality, my first year was a bit of a write-off, being timid with the bees and allowing them to manage me. However, the journey so far has been a fantastic experience made up of many highs and lows, but that is beekeeping for you.

From this in 2015



To this in 2020



NBKA matters

Over this past month I got into conversation with a member who commented that the Association was too 'cliquey'. Apparently, some members find it difficult to find their way within the Association and that there is no scope for the development of new things and ideas. Not everyone wants to be on the Council or on committees as they tend to be close-knit in spite of volunteers being requested and little membership response. I think members are not just looking for beekeeping guidance but also for some sort of refreshing of the Association with projects and new direction involvement.

I suggested to this member that perhaps the Association requires something new such as a 'Bees for Business' group that looks at developing the Association in a collective way rather than individuals going off at a tangent.

Bridging the gap between hobbyist level and onto a business footing is not the easiest of things to do. Growing into the Bee Farmer status requires business experience, time, energy and funding. The leap is bigger than you think.

On NBKA matters the BBKA spring capitation should have been sorted and many of the planned NBKA activities shelved due to the government's COVID-19 guidance. It hasn't stopped beekeepers, who have the freedom outside lockdowns to tend their livestock. Not having business work to do, regular beekeeping has taken over and – dare I say – I think I am ahead of the game this year...

In the apiary

At the moment supers should be full from oil seed rape then moving onto hawthorn. I have 42 on at the moment and am considering clearer boards with extraction to follow. So it's: get the tubs cleaned, extractor washed out, and get geared up for the spring honey crop.

Now that drones are starting to appear it's time to think of queen rearing. Preparing the rows of cups on frames and deciding on the best approach and perhaps ordering some breeder queens. Followed by nucleus raising and the selling on of starter bees or full hives to beginners depending on where newbies want to start. Because the NBKA Auction was cancelled various items prepared for the event were not sold and therefore starter funding for the season's beekeeping costs will be an issue to be resolved. Some members rely on this platform to raise beekeeping income to contribute for the season's running costs. The website has seen a number of members requesting the placement of advertisements to sell their own nucleuses and other items.

Then there is swarm management to come – is it a queen cup or a cell under construction – will they, won't they? Do I know how to do an artificial swarm – get some extra hives prepared ready. Set out a few bait hives with swarm attractant – this worked for me last year!

This lockdown has worked wonders for me: I have not done so much continuous beekeeping since I started – I can actually plan ahead – it's great!

Stay safe and healthy.

View from the Vale (of Belvoir)

How bees are faring in the south-eastern corner of Notts by **Stuart Humphreys**

As Griff implies in his article, the coronavirus lockdown (coupled with my retirement from work) means that during April Erika and I have had the time to honour our New Year's resolution of undertaking weekly inspections. Touch wood, these have gone well: all colonies developing well (some rather too well, of course); four of our six queens spotted (with all colonies containing brood at all stages); and, all but one well-behaved (we'll keep an eye on the one that appears to have taken some offence at being inspected – I have Andrew Barber on speed dial!).

Andrew Barber always reminds me that drones are an under-appreciated part of the colony. So I was pleased to see drone brood in the 'correct' pattern towards the base of brood frames. But I am conscious of Gerry Collins' observation (see last month) that one of the prerequisites for swarming is peak drone population...



Shortly after musing last month as to whether we would see any oil seed rape, several patches of yellow appeared in the Vale about a mile away, followed by fields of beans flowering closer by. This, coupled with 66% more sunshine than average in April, resulted in us extracting our first honey in the last week of April – 2-3 weeks earlier than normal. In the 9 years we have been keeping bees, 2014 was the only other year in which we have had honey in April. A quick check of temperature records on the internet suggests that year also saw a warmer than average spring.

One of the advantages of having a garden apiary is that you tend to know more or less what your bees are up to 24/7. One of the disadvantages is that when they 'misbehave', you have no escape... So, speaking of swarms, we did in fact experience a one on 21 April – though not one of ours, I hasten to add!

It was a hot sunny day and around 2.30pm I heard that dreaded noise and looked up from the gardening I was doing to witness a swarm arrive from the direction of the other apiary in the village. It hovered over our garden for a couple of minutes before thinking better of it and alighting on a fencepost in a neighbour's garden just down the road. Despite the other beekeeper's best endeavours, the swarm absconded the following day to who knows where...

With newly-found time on my hands, I have been engaging in a spot of macro (close-up) photography. (Beautiful creatures that they are, bees don't seem to mind having their photo taken!) Rather unexpectedly this has given me a new insight into the life of our bees. For instance, I had never before appreciated quite how foragers' wings wear out, as in the example below.



Naturally, for the photograph on the front cover, I chose a relatively young looking bee with a pristine set of wings!

Our bees avail themselves of water from our pond; sadly, the occasional gust of wind sees one or two swept into the water. Some swim their way to safety, some are fished out by me if I spot them in time, others are less fortunate. That possibly explains this rather evil-looking frog seen hiding amongst the pond weed and water mint, waiting to pounce on any snacks that might come its way. I imagine this would include bees – if you look closely you can see the remnants of a bee wing on the surface just in front of its mouth.



Unfortunately, the cold, showery weather that arrived at the end of April thwarted our scheduled weekly inspection – we really cannot justify opening up the hives when it's barely 10 degrees C with rain in the air. We just hope that our bees behave themselves and don't make us regret not being able to inspect for a couple more days. As we are on high alert for queen cell preparation, that does rather leave us on tenterhooks...

This month in your apiary: May

Penny Forsyth tells us what to watch out for as colonies develop in the spring

May is usually a delightful month for beekeeping, with orchards, hedgerows and gardens in full bloom and some very welcome long warm days.

In those areas where there is a spring flow the honey will be ripening in the supers and our hives will be full of bees – it's swarming time! The very thought often fills the novice beekeeper with dread but there's no need, swarming is what honey bees do and we need to understand why they do it and how to handle it.



Why bees swarm. It's the honey bee colony's natural way of replication and without this process honey bees would have died out many years ago. The queen produces 'queen substance' (a set of pheromones) from her mandibular glands which is taken up by the worker bees and passed around the colony. All worker bees need to receive a minimum level: this communicates to the bees that they are 'queen-right' and it is a stimulus for foraging and other activities within the hive.

If the colony is overcrowded, then not only may the queen not have sufficient space to lay, but her pheromones may not reach all the bees in the required quantities – leading to swarming preparations. You will see drones present, or at least drone brood, and the bees will begin to build little acorn-shaped queen cups (play cups) around the edges of the

comb. Keep an eye on those queen cups – when they have a rim of new white wax you can be sure that preparations for swarming are afoot.

So what can you do about it? We can manage the impulse to swarm by keeping young queens. It is thought that a young queen will produce larger amounts of queen substance than an older queen. We can ensure that the bees have enough room by supering early. Nectar takes up a lot more space than honey because the bees spread it out to evaporate the water and ripen it so add another super when the last one is full of bees, not honey.

Make sure that the colony has plenty of ventilation as this ensures that the queen substance can be distributed easily: it also helps in the ripening of nectar. Repeatedly destroying queen cells will demoralise the bees and will not delay the swarming process for long once the colony has started making preparations. Plus, bees are very good at hiding a cell or two! Work with your bees to your mutual advantage – practise swarm control by performing an artificial swarm or making up a nuc or two. Read up on it or ask for help – this month's *Beecraft* has an excellent article for beginners.

Be on the look-out for Asian hornet queens. We don't know if there were any Asian hornet queens over-wintering in the UK this year, but any that have survived will now be out and about searching for sugary foods to build up their energy: look for them on flowers such as camellias and around trees that ooze sap. These queens will also be constructing embryo primary nests, very similar in appearance to wasps' nests, so look for the first signs in sheltered spots like sheds and porches. The continuing COVID-19 lockdown, although irksome, allows us to extend our vigilance as we will be spending more time in our gardens and apiaries and on walks around our neighbourhood.

Jobs for May



If you have not already done an artificial swarm, continue 7-day inspections for occupied queen cells and take swarm control measures immediately if necessary.



Add supers ahead of the bees' requirements, i.e. when a super is full of bees, not full of honey. Remember: space for bees and space for nectar!



Remove 'ripe' oilseed rape honey: give super frames with unsealed honey cells a firm shake and if nectar flies out, leave it a little longer – it will ferment if the water content is too high.



Order your nucleus if this is how you want to start your beekeeping.



Book the loan of a honey extractor from NBKA or arrange with a fellow beekeeper to use or borrow theirs.



Maintain vigilance for Asian hornets. Check traps regularly and release non-target insects (they will not drown if you put a piece of foam or crumpled kitchen roll in the bait reservoir) and look out for possible primary nests.

NBKA Asian Hornet Action Team news

Penny Forsyth reports on the current UK situation

Jersey's first Asian hornet primary nest was found on 16 April inside the porch of someone's front door; the second one was discovered by a member of the public when he looked up at his balcony ceiling. More reports are coming in as established queens come out of hibernation.

On the UK mainland the first reported sighting of a potential nest was actually on our patch, in a garage in Ruddington. Mick Flower from our team attended and took away a rather beautiful last season wasps' nest, photos of which were sent to the NBU for confirmation. The householder contacted Defra and the BBKA and accessed the BBKA interactive map via online searches: Mick was on his way at the same time as I was speaking to her to gather details and give advice and reassurance. The whole incident was dealt with swiftly and effectively with all social distancing and safety measures observed and was a very useful exercise for us and BBKA, showing that the information and reporting system is accessible to the public and that it actually works.

We don't know if there are any Asian hornet queens overwintering in the UK this year or whether any mated queens will make their way into the UK post-hibernation but we need to be prepared, even though traffic from Continental Europe and the wider world has been greatly reduced due to the coronavirus crisis.

Since we are largely confined to our homes and apiaries at the moment we have the ideal opportunity to spend time monitoring for Asian hornets, so please observe any flowers where the queens may be feeding, particularly camellias, and any trees that may be oozing sap – very attractive to queens in the spring who are searching for sugary foods to build up their energy.

Monitoring stations are greatly to be preferred over kill traps as they give us the evidence we need without killing our beneficial insects. Position stations where they can be easily seen and monitored and release non-target insects daily. From mid-May Asian hornet queens will be mainly in their nests and so monitoring stations can be removed but until then use liquid baits such as Suterra (now sold as Trappit wasp attractant) or a mix of beer mixed with Ribena. You could also try these French recipes: dark beer mixed with 25ml strawberry dessert sauce and 25ml orange liqueur or sweet white wine (or white wine sweetened with sugar) mixed with 20-30ml mint syrup. The familiar Thorne's traps can be adapted to hold the wick stations recommended last month: follow the link below for instructions.

It goes without saying that we should also be alert for any signs of primary nest building: look in sheds, porches, garages, carports, under the eaves of houses, in stacks of old hive boxes, etc...

<https://www.ahat.org.uk/article/asian-hornet-queen-monitoring-13-30-april-2020>

The coronavirus crisis is, quite naturally, at the forefront of everyone's mind and it will inevitably impact upon the fight to contain the Asian hornet threat to this country. The nationwide lockdown and tight restrictions on movement will greatly hamper response to sightings and tracking and this will impact on nest destruction. It remains to be seen if restrictions will be lifted or reduced once sightings begin to come in. In the meantime, AHAT Co-ordinators will continue to function as points of contact and conduits for information. As always, vigilance is key.

The BBKA has now launched an interactive map on its website giving the locations, names and contact details of AHAT members across the country. This works in the same way as the Swarm Map and is drawing data in real time from the information in the eR2 database. Anyone requiring help or advice about a suspected sighting simply enters their postcode and the relevant section of the map comes up showing coloured pins: blue for the co-ordinator, red for verifiers. Clicking on the pin gives the name and contact details. NBKA makes a good showing with 10 members visible: you will find the map via the Asian Hornet tab on the BBKA website.

Don't forget..... **See it, Snap it, Send it!** Non-Native Species Secretariat

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org> If you think you see an Asian hornet or nest be sure to report it immediately, preferably with a photo, via the Asian Hornet Watch app, downloadable for smartphones, or email details to: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk and please let me know.

Finally, if you would like to be involved in the NBKA Asian Hornet Action Team please contact me at pennyforsyth16@mail.com.



Pleased to be a beekeeper

Maurice Jordan finds sanctuary with his bees

Because of this damned coronavirus, like everybody we are advised to stay at home and because we are in our seventies we are deemed at risk. So I am pleased to be a beekeeper as my bees are classed as livestock and we can tend to their needs and as it happens they are looking after mine because when I have got my head inside a beehive all thoughts of the coronavirus disappear. My only concern is where is that queen, I am happy to be a beekeeper.

I have three out apiaries all in remote locations so we can visit the bees without the chance meeting of anybody. I am pleased to be a beekeeper.

Of course, the bees are not concerned about coronavirus – they have enough viruses of their own to worry about. My bees have all come through winter well and I have only lost two colonies: I am a pleased beekeeper.

One of my out apiaries is situated in a fruit orchard and some colonies have two supers of honey already, once again I am an incredibly pleased beekeeper.

I will carry on doing what I'm doing and wait for someone to come up with the answer to the problem then I will be able to meet with you all again and talk about bees, then I will be a happy beekeeper.



Happy Birthday to Bees Abroad!

Anne Mason celebrates Bees Abroad's 21st birthday and invites you to a fundraising quiz

A couple of weeks ago (18 April) I was emailed this image to remind me that on that day it was exactly 21 years since the charity Bees Abroad was created by Claire Waring, Jeff Bee, Brian Durk and the late Pam Gregory.

So, if you're getting bored singing the usual version of 'Happy Birthday' as your 20-second handwash ditty, here's a tweaked version to try!

As a beekeeping charity, we are very dependent on the beekeeping community and we want to ensure that beekeepers across the UK get the opportunity to learn about us and to support our projects that enable communities to enhance their livelihoods and improve their quality of life.

At this time of uncertainty, we have had to cancel lots of fundraising activities and we need your help to continue our work.

With this in mind, I would be delighted if you could help Bees Abroad's raise funds by joining us on **Wednesday, 6 May at 8.00pm** for the **Big Bees Abroad Pub Quiz** hosted by Professor Adam Hart.

Adam is Professor of Science Communication, Environmental Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire, and says: "I have seen first-hand the empowering effects of beekeeping in the developing world, and the benefits are remarkable. They can be surprising too – some communities even use beehives to protect their crops from elephants! Bees Abroad is exactly the sort of initiative that really makes a difference to people's lives."

The quiz will comprise several rounds of general knowledge questions (not beekeeping). It will be a family night-in where you can just "have-a-go" at home and enjoy listening to Adam along the way.

Visit the Bees Abroad website www.beesabroad.org.uk where you'll find all of the details about how to join there.

Please join us, enjoy Bees Abroad's Big Birthday Quiz, and make a donation if you can.



Bees in my garden: the Ashy Mining Bee

Anne Mason kicks off this new feature

One of the best things about having taken up beekeeping is an increased awareness of bees, whatever species they are. Bees are fascinating!

With more time now spent in our gardens and outdoor spaces, I would like to invite fellow NBKA members to keep a close eye out for a species of bee that they spot themselves and send a short piece about it to Stuart Humphreys, the newsletter editor, for inclusion in future editions of *Beemaster*.

To kick-start this item I have discovered a new species of bee that I was completely unaware of until a week or so ago, the **ashy mining bee**.

I was sitting one lunchtime in a different part of the garden when I noticed a bee hovering about over the lawn. It appeared to be looking for something, going forwards and backwards repeatedly.



After several minutes it landed and I got the opportunity to take a photo of it before, to my amazement, seeing it disappear down a miniscule hole.

I waited for some time, expecting the bee to reappear but unfortunately, I never saw her emerge – would she have come out backwards or face first? The latter I suspect but it does make you start to think about how an insect developed to fly has evolved the ability to dig into the earth (a hard, compacted patch of lawn in this case) to create a home for her offspring!

Using Rob's phone and the 'Picture Insect' App we identified our little excavator as an ashy mining bee that appears just as the fruit trees in particular start to blossom. Our cherry tree had been loaded with blossom this year and literally buzzing with all kinds of bees and other insects. It was just going over with our apple trees then taking over – so plenty of nectar and pollen for an ashy mining bee that fulfils its life cycle within the months of late March to June.



Our bee seemed to be on her own but sometimes this species live in dense 'bee cities' with each female bee creating her own burrow, 10-20 cm deep with two or three cells per nest. Interestingly the burrow entrance remains open during the bee's foraging flights and afterwards, or if it rains or if she is disturbed, she closes it. As with other solitary bees the parent lays an egg with sufficient stores of nectar and pollen for each egg to develop into a larva. The offspring in this case overwinters as an adult.

The photos show our ashy mining bee on the lawn, the result of her excavations (a mound of tiny soil particles) and her busy on some nearby apple blossom.

For more information about all kinds of bee species go to BWARS (Bees, Wasps & Ants Recording Society) – www.bwars.com . Here you will find information sheets to download or you may refer to a section called *Beginners bees, wasps and ants*.

I do hope reading this item encourages you to keep an eye out for what is happening bee-wise in your garden and inspires you to write similarly! As I said earlier, bees are fascinating creatures and there is so much to learn about those species that enjoy our gardens as well as us, especially in the current situation.

In the news

Stuart Humphreys is pleased to see newspapers displaying their sense of humour

The last couple of months have been rather full of bad news – e.g. the plight of the honey bee in the context of California’s almond industry and, of course, coronavirus. So, a lighter touch this time round courtesy of articles shared via the eBees circulation of county associations’ newsletters.

Firstly, this *Daily Mail* article from 26 March about cautious beekeepers in New Zealand wearing beekeeping suits at the supermarket to protect them from coronavirus, courtesy of Shropshire BKA.

www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8154585/Shoppers-seen-wearing-beekeeping-suits-supermarket-protect-coronavirus.html



And this Matt cartoon from the Daily Telegraph, 18 March, courtesy of Ipswich and East Suffolk BKA.

MATT



*‘Have you noticed you see
far fewer humans
around these days?’*

Recipe of the month: Honey Ginger Biscuits

Courtesy of **Linda Jordan**

One for the store cupboard...

Ingredients:

8oz (200g) self-raising flour

3oz (75g) soft brown sugar

3oz (75g) honey

1 heaped tsp ground ginger

3oz (75g) margarine

1 egg

Cooking method:

1. Mix the flour, sugar and ginger.
2. Warm the honey and margarine and beat together.
3. Beat the egg.
4. Add the flour mixture and egg a little at a time to the honey mixture. Mix well.
5. Roll out on a floured board and cut into shapes.
6. Place on a greased baking tray and cook at 180 degrees C (350F, gas mark 4) for 12-15 minutes. *NB. The times may need adjusting for a fan oven.*
7. Cool on a wire rack.

Lockdown bonus recipe: Beekeeper's Chutney

Alan Moulton suggests this recipe with ingredients available in the larder

So what to do in lockdown, having tidied up the honey house and the bees having been inspected, what else to do? Well, clean out the freezer!

I had plenty of plums from last year and found a recipe which I modified so that I did not have to go to the shops, and made a chutney of the same consistency and colour as Branston Pickle.

Ingredients:	Original recipe:	My modified one:
Plums	2kg	2kg
Apples	2 cooking	2 cooking
Onions	2 red onions	2 ordinary onions
Vinegar	600ml red wine vinegar	600ml balsamic vinegar
Sugar	600g muscovado	600g white granulated & honey
Cloves	1 teaspoon	None
Chilli	None	1 tablespoon chilli flakes
Salt	1 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Mustard	1 teaspoon	None
Honey	None	1lb jar
Chinese spice	None	2 teaspoons
Red wine	None	500ml

The original recipe says Demerara sugar and wine vinegar so I changed these to using the sugar I had bought for the bees' winter feed (beet) not the Demerara and added a 1lb jar of honey which had crystallised coarsely. For the vinegar I substituted balsamic vinegar (condiment not the real good stuff) and this gave the colour. I added some chilli flakes to the original recipe and half a bottle of over the top red wine (I do not drink much these days!) and then some Chinese spice instead of the cloves.

I followed the regular method for chutney preparation, cutting up the onions and apples, mixing in the frozen plums and allowing all the solid and liquids to stand for a while. Then I brought the whole lot to the boil and then allowed it to simmer for 4 hours... lo and behold, a consistency and colour like the Branston pickle that I was aiming at and an amount of 'confiture' of just over three kilograms which will last me for a couple years or more!

Ref: *Good Housekeeping*, Collins and Brown, 2007, pp 412 & 420.

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