



Image: *Colchicum speciosum album; Autumn crocus...* by Tim Dale

October 2018

WVBKA Charity Registration Number: 517008

Wax workshop
Saturday, 3rd November
 Master Beekeeper Val Vivian-Griffiths, will be holding a Wax Workshop at Moccas village hall from 11.00am to 3.30pm. Val will explain how to deal with wax from comb through to a candle-grade product. There will also be demonstrations on how to use the wax to produce candles and simple creams. Please bring your own lunch.



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The National Hive; its dimensions
 David Williams, Vice Chairman has obtained detailed drawings of the National hive with exact dimensions for construction. Anyone interested please contact David for a copy.

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- Upcoming diary dates 2018**
- October 27th Visit to Gwatkins Cider
 - November 3rd Wax workshop
 - November 28th Planning meeting
 - December 8th Pre-Christmas Lunch
 - January 9th Committee meeting
 - February 16th AGM

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Queen Colour of the Year
 2018 is: **RED**

Kington Show

Not sure how it happened, but suddenly I found myself as coordinator for the WVBKA Kington show stand – a bit like the blind leading the sighted, as I'd never even been to the show before! Never a problem though, when you've got Peter on board – efficient as ever, he got all our resources to the show ground on the Friday evening, and ably supported by Geoff and Fletcher, erected our gazebo and display boards.

Saturday morning was very disappointing weather-wise, with a steady drizzle and quite a breeze when I arrived to set out our display. Undeterred, I 'unzipped' and 'set up shop' to await our first visitors. Within half an hour I had company – Geoff and Fletcher were back to help out. Fletcher looked grand in his bee suit and I'm sure it helped to create interest. Our first visitors were actually the Stand Judges and so we entertained them by 'whizzing' the honey spinner and dismantling and re-building the model WBC hive – it must have worked, as they appeared later in the day with a certificate and rosette – we'd won second prize!

As the weather improved, numbers increased and we had a steady stream of visitors. Parents with 'little folk'



were entertained with our graphic description of the life of a bee in its little hive of a home. We also got them spotting the queen, to win an 'I saw the queen' sticker and then they went on their merry way with a 'cut out and stick together hive kit' and a bee picture, to colour in at home. More seriously, we also had several potential future bee keepers visiting, who took away details of both the club and our novice courses.

Changeable weather conditions ensured that we kept alert., We had one alarming episode where one of our display boards made an escape bid, whilst the gazebo started to resemble a parachute – Geoff and Fletcher held on tight as I carried on calmly talking to a potential enthusiast. The boys did well – we didn't take off and they re-staked our canvas shelter!

With a prior engagement calling me, I had to depart early afternoon but Peter and Sue were on hand to take over. I assume that the afternoon was as worthwhile as the morning with lots of interest in the association, some potential new members and the sale of quite a few jars of the apiary honey. HUGE thanks to Peter, Geoff, Fletcher and Sue for making this another successful event.



Juliet

Head on with bees

An extract from 14 year-old beekeeper Fletcher Barker's school essay, prompted by an exciting experience with a swarm clustered on his head! Shortly after this experience, Fletcher gained another hive when a second swarming occurred. Well done!

"It was quite an experience. I could feel the weight on my head down to my shoulders; it was incredible! I had seen photos of this before in bee magazines, but I never thought that it would happen to me. There might've been about 20,000 bees on me, I'm not entirely sure. The heat didn't help either; it was boiling! Anyway, I'll tell you what happened but there is something you need to know first.

Swarming

Swarming is a natural process that the bees go through when the queen inside the hive wants to leave, for whatever reason. So, the queen lays an egg that is transported to a large cell by worker bees and is fed a special food called Royal Jelly. This food makes the egg grow differently to the other eggs that are laid, and forms into a new queen. When this egg develops and the larva is sealed in, the old queen flies out of the hive, and settles on a branch of a bush or tree with about half of the bees from the hive (they seem to like hawthorn). So now, a new queen will hatch and will continue with the remainder of the colony inside the hive, while scout bees from the 'cluster' that the old queen formed around a branch, will go off to find suitable places to build a nest or home; likely in a tree.



Me and the swarm

What happened?

So, the colony that swarmed went and settled on branches of a bush in five clusters. I got a large cardboard box, a stick that was about 10cm taller than the box, along with my smoker and a pair of secateurs. I cut the branches and shook the clusters off into the box. I then turned the box upside-down with the bees inside, and I put a stick in one corner so the box balanced on it and there was a gap for the bees to fly in and out and keep the box ventilated. I waited 'til early next morning and then I got a sheet of wood and leaned it up against a hive stand where a small hive-box (a nucleus or 'nuc') was waiting to be inhabited. I shook them onto the wood and encouraged them to run up the wood into the nuc with smoke. All was going well until I felt a heavy weight on my shoulders. I found out that there were A LOT of bees on my head. Meanwhile the bees running up the wood had accidentally shut the entrance and were now clustering underneath the box. But, eventually, everything was sorted and I got the bees off with a little help.

Even though I got stung, it was thrilling, though I don't think I want it to happen again!"

By Fletcher Barker



A swarm in September – they've lost the plot!

To get a call for a swarm in May and June is quite normal; however on 1st September a neighbour popped his head through our back door and in an alarmed way said there are thousands of bees in my back-garden. I quizzed him to find out what they really were – maybe a swarm of flies? He was adamant they were bees so I went to take a look and there hanging in his cedar tree was a small swarm of honey bees. It was a warm afternoon and my neighbour was trying to have a small garden party. I kitted up knocked the swarm into a box and waited while all the stragglers came down. I became the entertainment for the party and fortunately the bees did a perfect job for me and I was able to tell everyone about bees while the last few went into the box.

The next day I set them up in a six frame nuc with a couple of frames of feed from a colony that didn't make it through the winter (sterilised of course), plus a bit of syrup. After a week I checked and they looked fine with no sign of eggs, however they had polished a few cells up so maybe they were expecting a queen to perform.

I was thinking that if it was a virgin queen it might be too late to get her mated as all the drones have gone from my other colonies so I would end up combining these bees with one of my other colonies.

I checked them again after another week and there were two frames with brood in all stages. So I have a small colony with a laying queen, what on earth were they thinking of swarming so late in the year? Can I get them through the winter? That I guess will depend on the weather in the next few weeks as to how well they can build up and they will need some support from me to make sure they have enough stores.

What on earth were they thinking of swarming so late in the year? Maybe there were absconding from a hive with problems? Wasps can attack weak hives and rob them out, maybe the swarm I collected were escapees from wasp attack, or maybe from some other calamity that befell their nest. There is always something going on with bees!

PW

DAVE'S BLOG

October notes

By now most if not all colonies should have been fed and set fair for winter. If the colonies have been fed and are queen-right and any medication strips have been taken out, then little more needs to be done for the next three to four months. During this period bees do not consume much food; the food consumption will gradually take place from February onwards. Of course there will be variations, some colonies may start consuming their food much sooner, depending largely on the size of the colony and how well fed they are in the first place. If when you get to February you find some colonies are lighter than others, the standard process to keep them alive is to feed candy or fondant.

This will enable the bees to survive if they have run short and it will keep them up together until such times as they can forage naturally for their food.

Now that we are approaching the winter period, hives should be tied down to stop any roofs being blown off. The other thing to watch out for if we have any flurries of snow is to provide some kind of protection from the woodpeckers. This can be achieved in many different ways; some beekeepers place wire mesh round their hives and others will drape material over them. Personally, I find the wrap from round bales very useful and it has served me well over the years.

To conclude I do hope you have all managed to obtain some surplus from your bees this year, according to reports it has been one of the best years for a long time. May I take this opportunity to wish you all well in the future and may all your supers be full.

Well done!

Dave

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Association apiary and developing your skills

Over the last two years the association apiary has grown in strength both in numbers of those attending and colonies available for various demonstrations. I'd like to thank all those that have been using the facilities at Shenmore; it is very rewarding for the various tutors and those who organise these sessions.

There is a nice new building being built this year which I believe we will be able to use to augment our various talks and demonstrations. David and I have built the hive numbers up to their present level which gives more scope to develop training on a practical level. We can of course go further if required. If any members have any ideas as to the further development of this facility then do get in touch with either one of the committee members, David or myself – your ideas as members are important.

Most beekeepers want to be taught how to examine a colony and carry out normal procedures in order to maximise their honey crop, this is what we do at Shenmore. Understanding can be achieved by careful planning and delivering what is needed on a practical level. Reading a colony is one such skill.

Confidence in handling bees

This is a very basic skill level which can depend on the size of colony, how calm the bees are and what you need to do as a beekeeper to keep them calm. This may sound

very patronising but even the most hardened beekeeper who has gained confidence in many aspects of bees, will be put off by an aggressive colony. This is something of a skill which you have to learn to overcome and adapt to get the best out of your colonies, aggressive or not.

Reading a colony

This is yet another skill which beekeepers have to learn. It should be possible for any beekeeper to ascertain the health and status of the colony almost when you take the crown board off. Of course it's not that simple but it is something which is gained by experience. It will only come with many years of understanding the various conditions within the hive. Good stockmen can tell by the look of the animal whether it is doing well or not and bees are much the same.

Basic skills

Once you have learnt the basic skills, most other things in beekeeping will follow naturally but you must get the basics right first. Understanding the life cycle and the rise and fall of a colony will all help build confidence. Indeed when these processes are understood, you will then move on to the more advanced features of beekeeping such as queen rearing, queen introduction, managing bees for honey production and examining bees for disease to name but a few.

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Beyond the basics

Beekeepers can study many aspects of beekeeping such as microscopy, pollen identification and the anatomy of the honeybee. Showing and exhibiting are other examples of what beekeepers can take part in if they wish, gaining experience and confidence as they go.

Qualifications

WVBKA have been lucky enough to put hundreds of people through their Basic examination. Having reached that goal doesn't mean to say you should stop there. You can go on and take other modules which lead to becoming a Master Beekeeper. We can help with your endeavour to gain experience, beekeeping isn't black and white as there are many different roads all leading to the same objective.

Development

If you wish to extend your knowledge further then the team need your input. We have covered many practical subjects during the course of the last two years and we can expand on this. I have ideas to drive things forward however, it's not me that is important – it is you as members. If you wish to discuss any aspect of what we do or how we can improve what we provide then do give me a ring on 01981 550320.

Training for members

- If there are sufficient numbers then we can provide training.
- To this end we need to train more people who are able to deliver the training.

As one of the apiary managers, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss further developments with the executive committee.

Dave



Visit to Gwatkins Cider

October 27th at 2.00pm

We have arranged a visit to Gwatkins Cider to have a talk, tour and tasting on everything you need to know about cider and its production.

There will be plenty of cider available following the tasting to take home and enjoy.

All members of WVBKA are invited to what should be an interesting and enjoyable afternoon. Please plan to arrive before 2.00pm so that we can start the tour on time. On arrival, turn down into the yard and park up.

The address is:

Moorhampton Park Farm, Abbey Dore, HR2 0AL.

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