



November Newsletter

2025

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Welcome

Well, I went away on holiday for a week and when I came back it was Winter. I'm almost considering putting the heating on.

October saw the 94th National Honey Show being held at Sandown Park from 22nd to 24th October. I have a short report which hopefully gives you a flavour of the event.



Otherwise, I hope you have your bees nicely tucked up - I thought by now I would be kicking my heels and looking for things to do but, as always, beekeeping finds a way to keep me busy. I also have a double brood abelo mating hive overwintering in my garden. This is unusual for me as my garden is really too small and too close to neighbours for a full size Summer colony, so it is a real treat to see the bees busy still collecting, often at temperatures where you think they would have more sense. And, no, it's not that they are desperate for stores, the 2 boxes are really heavy.



If you are taking BBKA Module exams on the 15th of November, then the best of luck. Even as an adult I woke up each exam day a bagful of nerves - ridiculous really.

Finally, I had to share the photo alongside. Sheenagh and I have just been on holiday to Turkey and when I'm overseas I always try and buy a jar of the local honey so that I can see how it compares to ours. All beekeepers will know the pain of trying to make sure our labels have every bit of the required information, in case trading standards decide to check... In Turkey, not so much... The only marking was the price - 205 Lira, about £4 for what I think is an 8oz

jar. For those wondering, it is very dark and tastes of caramel. I think it has quite a high level of honeydew in it.

Finally, finally, a reminder that the V&D Fun Honey Show is on the 15th November. V&D members can expect to be bombarded with reminder emails between now and then 😊

John

Dates for your diary

<u>Newbury & District</u>
NDBKA members winter venue same as last year. Tuesday 7:30pm-9:30pm at St Mary's Church Shaw cum Donnington in the Church Hall RG14 2DR <u>First Tuesday of every month – October – April</u> Tuesday 4th November - AGM as well as our black wrap honey show (taste each other's honey and award a best taste trophy). Adrian is stepping down as Chairman, and it would be nice to give him thanks at this AGM with a good group of members. Tuesday 2nd December - Christmas fun with an additional focus tbc Tuesday 6th Jan, Tuesday 3rd Feb, Tuesday 3rd March, Tuesday 7th April Please look out in Newsletter for planned talks.
<u>Vale & Downland</u>
Saturday 22nd November – Fun Honey Show & Pre-Christmas Social Friday 23rd or 30th January - Winter Zoom talk date tbc Friday 27th February - Winter talk, Drayton Village Hall, tbc Friday 27th March - Winter talk, Drayton Village Hall, tbc
Saturday 21 February - The Beekeeping Show, Telford 17th – 19th April BBKA Spring Convention

Seen around the internet

I've added in 2 show events to the calendar - The Beekeeping Show at Telford and the BBKA Spring Convention. I attended both of these in 2025 and thoroughly enjoyed them. You can find out more details about the **Telford Show** here:

<https://www.thebeekeepingshow.co.uk/>

Details are a bit sparse at the moment, but there is a good list of exhibitors building up. Usually, there are also a number of exhibitors giving talks about their products, but I couldn't find any details of these for the '26 Show yet. Tickets are available now at £15 advance, £20 on the day or £24 premium (which gets you in 1 hour early). I think that's quite a lot to basically go to a shop. At the end of the day, though, it is a good opportunity to handle, choose and buy all the different kit you might need very shortly after.

Second on my list is the **BBKA Spring Convention**, which in 2026 will be held 17th - 19th April. Tickets generally go on sale around the end of January. Be warned, bookable (extra cost) classes or workshops can sell out on the day. There are also lots of free lectures, by internationally recognized speakers, which you don't need to book and which you can just turn up for. It's worth keeping an eye on the web page and BBKA social media for updates. More details here:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/category/about-spring-convention>

2026 prices haven't been released yet, but last year entry to just the (Saturday only) Trade Show was £6, while a 3 day ticket was £33, Single day tickets were £17, £23 (includes trade show) and £12 for Fri, Sat, Sun respectively. In 2025, over the 3 days, there were 25 lectures and 70 Workshops and Seminars. There is (fairly) cheap on-site accommodation and nearby Travel Lodge or Premier Inn type places to stay. You can download last years programme at the link below to get an idea of the sort of thing that might be available:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a1f41d0b-f0e1-4b05-bf0c-e4834712014f>

There is what looks to be an interesting talk on '**Low Intervention Beekeeping**' by **Paul Honigman** hosted by Cambridgeshire Beekeepers Association on Wednesday 12th November. V&D members may remember that Paul, who lives in Oxfordshire, came to our fun honey show last year to promote his book 'The Observant Beekeeper'. I got his book for Christmas and have really enjoyed reading it - even the bits I don't agree with 😊

Tickets for the talk are free and can be booked here:

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/cambridgeshirebeekeepersassociation1/1910995>

I always enjoy hearing about how other people manage their bees - especially if it makes me question the way I do my own.

Finally, a mention of IBRA, the International Bee Research Association. Initially formed in 1945 as a science research committee of the BBKA, it became independent in 1949. It has contributed enormously to our knowledge of beekeeping. The story of IBRA is also the story of Dr Eva Crane, simply an amazing person. I'll be honest - I have really included IBRA this month as a sneaky introduction to her work. I am currently reading her 'A Book of Honey'. If you are interested in Honey this is the seminal work (and covers a lot more than just honey). It is a great book. You can still buy it new (Dr Crane died in 2007) or it is widely available second hand. At the National Honey Show, I was trawling through Northern Bee Books'



second hand section for some of her other books - sadly at £100 plus they are not in my budget....but if I win the lottery.....
You can find out more about IBRA here

<https://ibra.org.uk/>

and Eva Crane, here:

<https://www.evacranetrust.org/en/page/about-eva-crane>

Tips for November

- Winter Storms have appeared. Make sure hives are well strapped down or weighted with a big rock.
- As frosts appear, make sure that mouseguards are fitted and woodpecker guards, if you use them, are correctly placed over the hive, A new colony can cost £200 - £300 in the Spring, a mouseguard costs 85p...
- Check hives every few weeks. If you fed them well, or left them lots of honey, you shouldn't need to worry about starvation. But heft anyway just for peace of mind. If you need to top them up, feed fondant while it is cold, not syrup.
- When checking, make sure all gaps are closed and boxes fit together well. Views on ventilation differ according to your views on condensation. I like to seal the top of the hive and have an insulating pad in the space above the crownboard. This way the inside above the brood nest will maintain warmth and any condensation should form on the colder sides and run down and out. In Winter, a small amount of condensation is a useful water supply when the bees can't get out. I know some beekeepers like to keep things fresh and allow for some ventilation, aiming to keep things dry. To me, this must make it harder for the bees to maintain warmth, creating work and burning stores. Do what works for you.
- When you are checking your hives, run your hive tool into the entrance to make sure it's not blocked by dead bees. When it is very cold, the undertaker bees can't carry the dead away and they tend to pile up.
- Leave them alone. If you open up a colony in the cold 'just for a look' it will take days to get everything how they want it again.

Vale & Downland BKA – John Broadbent

AGM 28 members attended the AGM on the 24th of October. As is normal process, all the Trustees stood down and then were re-elected. Michael remains as Chair and most other positions are unchanged. Robert Scotland stood down as a Trustee, and we thank

him for his time on the Trustee group. You will be pleased to know he will still be running his Botany for Beekeepers course next year.

We heard reports from the Chair, Treasurer, Apiary and Education. Copies of their key points can be found in the minutes.

Key Takeaways:

- From the Chair, the association, apart from lacking new Trustees, is in fine shape. We have spent money renewing equipment and creating new facilities. We have had a number of training and social events, including a successful Summer BBQ
- We remain short of Trustees to fill various positions (or non-trustees). The following positions are vacant - can you help?
 - Programme Secretary/Event Coordinator
 - Press Officer/Digital & Social Media Coordinator
 - Librarian
 - Accountant/Treasurer
 - News Editor/Coordinator
 - General Committee Member
 - Apiary Mentors
- Thank you to Anne Andrew who has volunteered to act as our Delegate to the Annual Delegates Meeting in January.
- Thank you to Matt Frost who is now our very own 'Apiary Grounds Manager'.
- Financially, we are following our plan of improving equipment and facilities whilst maintaining a sensible level of reserves. The association assets are currently:
 - Main Funds £17,118
 - Apiary Fund £1,052
 - Social Fund £28 (need everyone to put more money in the tin!)
- The membership voted and agreed that we would maintain the V&D element of the annual fee at £12, but that the BBKA element would increase in line with the BBKA published increase.
- From the Apiary, we have recovered from high Winter losses with some careful management of the remaining colonies. Upgrades have been carried out to the Barn and apiary, special thanks to Helena and Lyn for a lot of work cleaning kit (plus everyone else who helped) and to Matt for considerable help keeping the apiary undergrowth under control. Thanks to Pete and Andrew for making and fitting additional boards and tables in the Barn and general fettling.
- From Education. We have run Basic and Bee Health courses for BBKA qualifications as well as Association courses on Botany and Queen Rearing and a 'Wax Day'. John & Sheenagh have spoken to many scouts, cubs, Rainbows, Primary School classes about Beekeeping and Sheenagh has carried out inspections of the Steventon School hive with 28 children and their teacher Ms Jaeger.
 - 2 members took their Basic and gained Distinctions
 - 1 member passed Module 5, thereby gaining Intermediate Theory
 - 3 members passed the BBKA Bee Health Assessment
 - 1 member passed BBKA Advanced Husbandry and became a Master Beekeeper
 - A busy year!

New Members We are still signing people up for the Winter Beginners' Course and now have only a few places left. Please welcome new members:

- Ian Cameron
- Alhana Danaher
- Simon Hogarth
- Jennie Ferris
- Martin Ferris



Left and Centre - Simon & Michael are presented with their Bee Health Certificates
Right, - John is presented with Advanced Husbandry and Master Beekeeper

Incubator Question At the AGM, I was approached by John Gillette - he is looking for a portable incubator to move queen cells around between apiaries and from home to the apiary. Did I have any experience with portable incubators? While I have used a converted hen egg incubator at home for keeping queen cells at the right temperature until they hatch, it is not portable. A search online shows some very nice, very expensive kit is available. Does anyone have experience with these? Or made their own portable incubator? If so, please get in touch. John would like to know how you get on with it and I would like to write an article on it as part of queen raising. In the meantime, I have found a portable heated polystyrene box on Ali Express that may be suitable - if so, I'll let you know if it works, or if I've wasted £11!



On Saturday 25th October, I set off with Beekeeping Buddy Simon for our annual pilgrimage to the National Honey Show, at Sandown Race Course. We are lucky it is only just over an hour away as beekeepers travel from all over the world to attend.



We normally go on the first open day, the Thursday, but I actually think Saturday is a much better day to visit. On a Thursday, the main exhibition hall doesn't open until after lunch, as the judging is all done on Thursday morning. It takes a while (like most of the afternoon!) to get all the prize stickers affixed, so in the past, we sometimes haven't been able to tell which were the winning entries.



Also, there can be delays (like when The Princess Royal visited), meaning that there isn't an awful lot of time to give the exhibits the attention they deserve - the impending drive back through rush hour is always at the back of your mind.

Going on the Saturday meant that we could take our time in the morning working around each of the stands in the Trade Fair, then a quick lunch, then a much more leisurely browse through all the exhibits. I was a bit worried that the trade stands would have been picked over, but that didn't seem to be the case and anyway, if there was something you really wanted

to buy, I would recommend ordering in advance. If you do, it will be nicely boxed and waiting for you to pick up.

Were there any massive bargains? Not really - the beekeeping supplies market seems pretty crowded at the moment and there is a continuous stream of 'online sales'



that give just as good prices. The major advantage is that you can 'feel the quality' of items you are buying and compare and contrast offerings from different manufacturers. It is also a chance to engage with them - I had a useful chat with a BBWear team member about repairs. Being able to try new beesuits on is also a big plus. Some of the manufacturers launch new items at the show and these can be interesting. Occasionally you think 'that's clever'. The trend for more eastern European presence in the exhibitors continues, with some really good (and really expensive) big ticket items like creamers, honey processors, automatic decapping etc etc. One very large extractor was about the size of my car - definitely not for the simple hobbyist. What do you do when it won't fit through the door? Although there were not many absolute bargains there was an

enormous range of products on sale. I can't think of any item (apart from a large dipping tube for candles that Helen asked me to get) that wasn't available. An interesting stand I hadn't seen before was from the Honey Tasters Guild. They had about 10 different jars of honey, a thousand tasting sticks and an invitation to taste and vote for the one you liked most. I still can't decide if I like heather honey - it is so strong and I could still taste it an hour later. Bizarrely, the winner by a country mile was Tree of Heaven, which I doubt many have heard of. By coincidence (or not, it seems) it is also a pollen source that frequently comes up in my microscopy group: not being familiar with it I have always assumed it has been mis-identified. Now it seems not. Tree of Heaven or *Ailanthus altissima* to give it its proper name, is originally from China, but now very common in the UK. If you Google it and look at the leaves I'm sure you will recognise it. It's honey is delicious.



On to the show. This year had a record 2,658 entries from 356 entrants from 25 countries. Laid out on all the show benches, I thought they looked spectacular. For some reason, mead has become extremely popular and there was a literal 'wall' of bottles of all colours. By popular I mean 'to show'. Surely nobody actually likes it or is it just mine that tastes like petrol? Sadly, there were less entries by associations in the 'Shop Window' Class this time. Last year I thought there were 4 or 5, this year only 1. I also felt there were less sections (square and round) entered this year - is this a reflection of the long hot drought?

Otherwise, it is hard to describe some of the exhibits. There were jars of runny honey that seemed to glow as if lit by the light of Galadriel. The clarity was incredible. Some



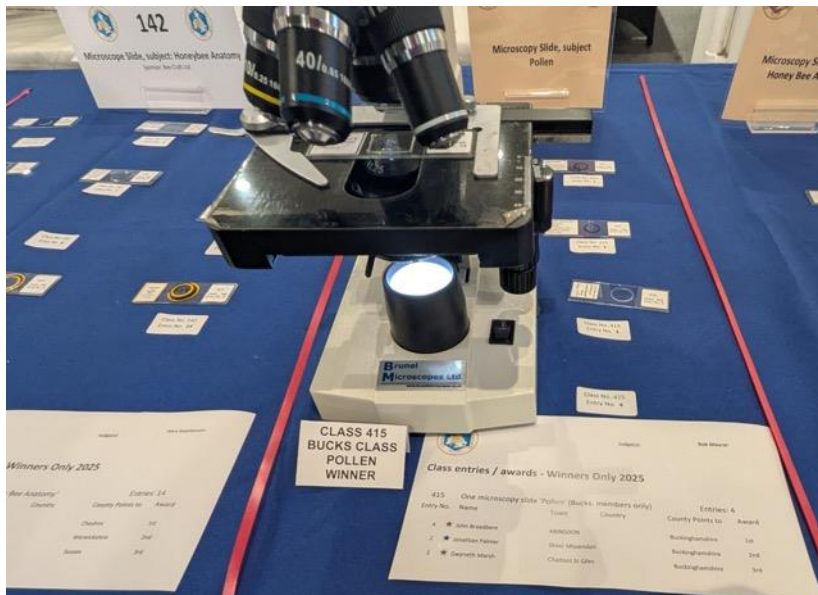
entries were an incredibly clear, pale, almost green honey. Neither Simon nor I had seen such clear glowing honey before - I'd love to know what arcane processes they go through to prepare it. The wax was

sublime, from dipped and moulded candles, through to models and artificial flowers. There were quirky exhibits and some incredible artistry and photography. If you haven't been before and you are a beekeeper, you should go at least once in your life. It will inspire you to try new things and learn more stuff.

After this, we attended one of the free lectures by Irish Beekeeper Jim Ryan 'Moving up from small scale beekeeping' which was interesting and entertaining. Then it was time to brave the traffic and return home (it wasn't too bad).

Entry for a single day was £16 and for 3 days £27. I counted about 20 free lectures were available over the 3 days and 32 (extra cost) workshops. I think that was good value. I think in future I will probably choose the day based around whether there are any lectures of workshops I particularly want to do. Once you go down this route though, you probably need a 3-day ticket.

PS. Looking through the results, I spotted that Ben Tichband (Newbury) entered and



gained prizes in several of the classes. Brilliant. I was pleased to enter and win the Bucks County Pollen and Anatomy Classes. If I have missed your name out, don't be shy and let me know for next month - you deserve recognition! I do wonder why more of our members don't enter. I have seen some very, very, good entries at both the Newbury/Berkshire and V&D shows, that I'm sure would at least place and maybe even win at the national level. Why don't you give it a go?



Wanted - Small Marine Ply Offcuts Simon Rogers and I are experimenting with a new way (to us) of making sheets of foundation. We need to start by making thin blank wax sheets that we then roll through 3D printed rollers. To make the initial sheets we need some pieces of marine ply that are the right size for National brood and super foundation. These are dipped in hot wax then the sheets peeled off. We think marine ply would be best for this. Does anyone have such offcuts going spare? Preferably enough for 2 of each. Contact John Broadbent at johnrbroadbent@gmail.com or message or call on 07588 824338. Thanks.

Beeswax Workshop – Candles and Polish

Award-winning candle-makers and commercial bee farmers, Rob and Jo Nickless from Meadow Honey Farm, are back again with their annual beeswax workshop on Saturday 22 November 2025. During the workshop you will learn about cleaning and preparing wax; making rolled, moulded and dipped candles; and also how to make beeswax polishes. More details, and information on how to book is at:

www.meadowhoneyfarm.co.uk/events

“Informative, absorbing and great fun.” 2024 attendee feedback. *“Was really good fun, learned loads and made some really lovely [beeswax] things.”* 2024 course attendee.

Ben Tichband - SIPA Honey Bees Limited

We have Buckfast mated queens, virgins, Nucleus and full colonies for sale. We can supply on National or 14x12, alternatively as packages for top bar and other hive types. All our bees are raised in our own West Berkshire apiaries. We offer a 10% discount to members of NDBKA and VDBKA. info@honeybeenucs.co.uk

John Belcher

Please call John Belcher on 01189842321 or 07929586037 or email john.r.belcher@talktalk.net for bees, hive equipment, extraction supplies, feed, and general requirements for beekeeping, mostly in stock in Pangbourne RG8 7LB or available online from supplier.

Beckys Beezzzs Ltd

Nucs of bees, UK Bred mated queens, beekeeping equipment, bee feed & treatments beckysbeesonlineshop.co.uk 01264 351104

Please note: All Newbury & Vale members can place an advert free of charge for up to 3 months. Adverts should preferably be 5 lines or less.