



December Newsletter

2025



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Welcome

A new feature this month - Eva Crane 'Snippets'. Avid readers will know I have mentioned her a couple of times before. I'm a big fan and am trying to (slowly) work my way through her bee related work. It's a huge task as she wrote and contributed to hundreds of articles or books.

So, who was she? Dr Eva Crane was born in 1912 and died in 2007. She spent decades researching and writing about bees, travelling the world to gain information for her work. She established the Bee Research Association in 1949, which became the International Bee Research Association in 1976. She then formed the Eva Crane Trust in 2002, with the aim of advancing the understanding of all species of bees and beekeeping by the collection, collation and dissemination of worldwide science and research. You can find out all about her at the link below, as well as gain access to much of her work. The Trust has kindly given me permission to reproduce items that I think you might find interesting. I hope you enjoy reading about her work and findings as much as I do.

<https://www.evacranetrust.org/>

The elephant in the room is that Christmas is nearly upon us. I hope you have all been good this year, as well as dropping hints as to what you would like to find in your stocking or under the tree on Christmas morning. One of the best things about being a beekeeper is that when someone asks what you would like for Christmas or a birthday you are never short of ideas. Books, kit, gadgets, tools even the odd pack of foundation - I always have a long shopping list of things I want (but in truth don't always need!). Winter has been pretty benign to us this Winter so far and the shortest day is almost upon us - fingers crossed for all our bees as they do their level best to come through strong and healthy next Spring

Happy Christmas

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 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>
Without a Programme Secretary we are unable to run our usual Winter talk programme. We still hope to run something and if we do it will be on the following dates 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

Ventilation!!!

First up, an interesting piece from David Evans' 'The Apiarist' blog. I don't recommend this as often as I used to, simply on the basis that I assume everyone already subscribes and sits waiting for his Friday email. But I couldn't resist this one as it tackles a contentious topic that sometimes splits the beekeeping community - Winter Ventilation and Condensation.

I won't spoil it by revealing what he says here, but only note I agree with what he says and think it is simply common sense.....

<https://theapiarist.org/temperatures-high-and-leau/>

National Bee Unit (NBU) 2025 Hive Count

The NBU launched its 2025 National Hive Count on 1st November. Please take a few moments to log into BeeBase and update your records.

The survey runs until 31st December and really helps the NBU in its planning for how to cope with outbreaks of disease by knowing where and how many, apiaries and hives there are. It directly influences the number of Bee Inspectors we get and where they are based.

<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/2025-hive-count#>

National Honey Show 2025 Lectures

The National Honey Show 2025 lectures have started to appear on their YouTube channel. If you couldn't make it in person, settle down in a comfy armchair with a cup of hot chocolate and browse the offerings below:



<https://www.youtube.com/@NationalHoneyShowUK/videos>

These include important updates on Asian Hornet and Tropilaelaps

Tips for December

- Lots of bees die over the Winter (bees die all the time, but normally out in the field so you don't notice). Make sure your visits to heft hive weight include running a hive tool inside the entrance to make sure it isn't blocked by dead bees.

- Hives should be tilted very slightly forward (especially if you have solid floors). Condensation will then run down and out rather than sitting above the colony and dripping onto the brood.
- Storms are upon us. Straps and bricks will help stop your hive blowing over or away! Also, heavy rain can mean localised flooding. Bees and damp do not go well together, so if your hives are in a wet spot try and raise them up or (if practical) move a couple of feet away from water.
- Heft at least every 4 weeks to check for stores. If feeding is necessary, packs of fondant are best in the cold.
- Between Christmas and early New Year the colonies should be broodless - a good time to administer an oxalic acid trickle. Apibioxal and Varromed are 2 treatments that spring to mind. This is the only reason you should even think about opening the hive at this time of year. Choose a sunny, calm day and keep the hive open for the absolute minimum time.
- Check mouseguards and woodpecker guards are in good order.
- Choose a good beekeeping book for your Christmas list and read it.

Meet the work of Eva Crane

The first work I'd like to introduce is 'A Book of Honey', published in 1980. Despite its name, this is much more than just a book about honey. The first few chapters deal in detail with the lifecycle of the honeybee and how honeybees collect honey, from where and what they do with it. Then a chapter about what honey is and its properties, followed by the use of honey in food and drink. Finally, the history of honey and its use throughout human history and even its influence on religion and philosophy. The Appendices contain some of the most interesting information, much of which is hard to find elsewhere. For example, if you ever wanted to understand why we don't heat honey for long periods of time, this table explains it

Table 8. Inactivation of enzymes in honey at different temperatures. Temperatures listed below reduce enzyme levels to half, in the period stated.

Temperature		Half-life	
$^{\circ}\text{C}$	$^{\circ}\text{F}$	Diastase	Invertase
10	50	34 years	26 years
20	68	4 years	2 years
30	86	200 days	83 days
40	104	31 days	10 days
50	122	5 days	1 day
60	140	1 day	5 hours
70	158	5 hours	47 minutes
80	176	1 hour	9 minutes

You can see that at some of the high temperatures used by commercial producers to pasteurise honey, enzymes are very quickly destroyed - these are the very constituents that mean honey isn't just sugar syrup.

You can buy the book for around £30 from Northern Bee Books or used from Amazon for £12. You can also download a pdf of the book from the Internet Archive and read it on your tablet: <https://dn710101.ca.archive.org/0/items/a-book-of-honey/A%20Book%20Of%20Honey.pdf>

I'll leave you with this snippet:

"The performance of bees is truly astonishing. The fuel consumption of a flying bee is about $\frac{1}{3}$ mg honey per kilometre, or 3 million km to the litre. In providing one kilogram of surplus honey for market, the colony has had to consume something like a further 8 kg to keep itself going, and the foraging has probably covered a total flight path equal to six orbits round the earth – at a fuel consumption of about 25 g of honey for each orbit. In British units, this means 7 million miles to the gallon; a pound of honey on the breakfast table necessitates a total flight path equivalent to three orbits round the earth, each orbit using up an ounce of honey as fuel.

A must have on your Christmas list ☺

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Vale & Downland BKA – John Broadbent

Annual Fun Honey Show

Phew! Another Honey Show has been and gone. On Saturday 15th November we held our annual Fun Honey Show at Drayton Village Hall. Despite a worry about numbers, they were up on last year (and higher than many previous years) - 97 entries from 22 members. Attendance was also up with over 40 members appearing for all or some of the show. Thank you to everyone who turned up and took part, brought food, or donated raffle prizes (or all 3!).

Big thanks to everyone who helped organise and run the event including John (general organisation), Sheenagh and Andrew (running the kitchen with 37 meals served), Helen and Caroline for running the booking in and collation of results, Sam and Heather (Raffle, which raised a record £106 for the social fund), Simon (general dogsbody and setter-up!), Matthew Frost (Steward & Judges Assistant), Olivia Hilsdon (photography and social media) and Michael (on holiday, but still managed to make a fantastic curry before departing).

The entries were interesting - slightly down on honey, but quite a marked increase in many of the creative classes. Mead has grown from a couple of bottles a few years ago to 6 high quality entries this year. Interestingly, nobody entered a frame for extraction class - a reflection of the difficulty many had in producing a suitably finished frame this

year. I was very pleased at the high number of entries in the Bake-Off. It's interesting to see how a simple recipe can produce such varied results.

Results

Wantage Challenge Cup (Honey Classes)	Simon Rogers
Peggy Mein Trophy (Sweet & Savoury Cooking)	Helen Davison
Harmsworth Trophy (Wax Classes)	Helen Davison
Valentine Trophy (Creative Arts & DIY)	Andrew Bax
Mattingley Cup (Novice)	Matthew Frost
Dawson Cup (Beginners')	Matthew Frost
Tracey Rogers (Bake Off)	Paul Hatcher
Ian James Trophy (Highest Basic Mark)	Robert Scotland
Iliffe Cup (Highest points over all classes)	Helen Davison



More Creative Arts entries this year

Andrew Bax entered this interesting hive he'd made from pallets



The ever popular 'Black Wrap'



Honey entries down this year but still high quality. Nobody could find a decent full frame to enter!



Impressive 'Display of Bee Products'



A lot of cakes!



Very high-quality wax

The Cup Winners (Robert & Matt pics to follow)



Clockwise, from top left:

Helen, Andrew, Helen,
Simon, Paul



Wasps, Wasps & more Wasps

This is a brief record of my experience this season which I hope may be of some use.

My fourth season started off well, with a fantastic spring harvest. I had eight healthy colonies, a couple of nucs and a mating nuc, all doing well. Note that the apiary is positioned in an Apple orchard which may or may not have contributed to the situation I found myself in.

The first sign of a problem came in the form of a wasp attack on my weakest colony.

Not just one or two wasps but a whole army of wasps. There had been no sign of any trouble on inspection the previous week and how the attackers knew which the weakest hive was, I have no idea.

I reduced the entrance and put out four standard wasp traps. Within three days the traps were full. I emptied the jars and refilled them with jam. Within a week wasps were once again attacking my hives. I have never experienced anything like this before. I installed entrance blocks and reduced the entrance further with grass. Unfortunately, within two weeks there was no stopping the onslaught. Eight were now seven.

Two of the colonies were on under floor entrances and I was foolishly confident that they were safe. The wasps moved on to the next weakest hive, how do they know?

Now I was emptying the wasp traps every two days, but the situation was getting worse. Two weeks later, the second hive had fallen victim and eight was now six.

I installed under floor entrance conversions to the remaining standard floor hives. I was at the point of disbelief and despair. Having killed my seventh colony, they appeared to systematically move on to number six, my next weakest hive.

This was my WBC hive. It seemed to fare well to start with, but sadly I can confirm that wasps can get in and out of the bee escapes in the roof of a WBC. And then there were five.



This year the WaspBane seemed to be the only trap that could cope with such large numbers of wasps. 'Standard' traps filled within a day. Shame they are so expensive – but cheap compared to replacing a colony



'Conventional' traps filled up too quickly and couldn't cope with the huge number of wasps

The fifth hive was not a weak colony and the bees started bearding at the entrance and a valiant defence was mounted. My confidence was high. I ordered a Wasp Bane trap (In my best BBC accent "Other types are available" *[but these do seem to be the gold standard – Ed]*) but by the time the Wasp Bane had arrived the colony was seriously weakened.

The Wasp Bane was the turning point. Overnight the large holding tank was half full and the tide seemed to be turning.

Within a week, numbers were down considerably, but sadly eight was now four.

The mating nuc which was loving raised was an early victim. The other two nucs survived.

My Conclusion

- Early intervention is needed as watchful waiting is simply not going to work.
- Reducing entrances quickly can have a positive impact.
- Deployment of at least one large wasp trap, as soon as the first wasps are seen is essential, but maybe not prior to this as it may attract the wasps.
- Under floor entrances help but merely slow down the attackers rather than stopping them.

This has been just a brief description of my experience this year. It would not be an understatement to say that I was devastated to lose 50% of my apiary despite trying everything that I could think of. I even considered moving the remaining hive to a different location. (*Sometimes the only answer – Ed*)

If this sorry tale can prevent anyone experiencing the feeling of helplessness that I went through, watching the systematic destruction of my colonies, it won't be in vain.

Adverts

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.