



April Newsletter

2026



It is Magnolia week! Enjoy them while they last...

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Welcome

Have you seen the Magnolias? They are magnificent and, unusually, haven't been blasted to bits this year by a storm. Enjoy them while they are at their best. Fun Fact: Magnolias are among the most primitive of flowering plants, dating back at least 95 million years to the Cretaceous period. This means they appeared before bees and were, in fact, originally pollinated by beetles.

How are your bees? On a (very) warm day last week (20C according to my Van) I went through the colonies in my main apiary. Although I have had a few losses, my remaining colonies are very strong, some with more than 8 seams of bees. These all got the

overwintering feed super moved from under the brood to above the brood with a queen excluder between. Yes, I know it is very cold, but I only did this with strong colonies able to cope. I also found several drones and quite a lot of drone brood hanging off the bottom of frames. A friend from the Maidenhead area tells me they have already had a swarm....

Some of you may know I've just returned from a holiday visiting family in New Zealand (It was fab). Unfortunately, they have also succumbed to the dreaded Asian Hornet and while it is still contained to the Auckland area, they have found 60 queens and 72 nests this season, which is thankfully ending as they go into Winter. I do hope they are able to eradicate this pest. Interestingly, I saw an awful lot of wasp trap bait stations set out in public areas, so I'm guessing their wasp season has been as bad as ours was last year. These had danger signs attached noting that the bait stations contained Fipronil, the same stuff we use here as a pet flea treatment, but which is mostly banned because it has ended up contaminating water courses where it kills the bottom layer of the food chain. I know on the continent it has been used to dab on Asian hornets visiting bait stations - they take it back to the colony where it spreads and kills them. I wonder if we will have to start doing this here at some point.



As always, when overseas, I bought different honeys to try, from general flower honey, to Clover honey, to Manuka honey. I have to say all were excellent. Although much of the honey in supermarkets is sold in glass or plastic jars, they also sell it in cardboard containers (think small ice cream tub). I have never seen honey packaged like this in the UK and, having just had to pay the governments new 'glass recycling tax' on my latest jar purchases I wondered if anyone had seen anything like this here? It seems ideal to me - sustainable, with low environmental impact, totally recyclable and without any silly taxes imposed on them. If you know of someone selling packaging

like this, please do let me know. The only drawback I can see is that you can't see the honey, but that doesn't seem to put the Kiwis off.

In August I will have been editing (and mostly writing!) this newsletter for 5 years. I think that is a good stretch and I have probably said most of what I know, often more than once. So, I have decided I need to hand the Editorial reins over to someone else from September onwards. Please email news@valeanddownlandbees.org.uk if you are interested in taking over this role. I'm sure there is someone out there who would enjoy doing this.

John

Dates for your diary

<u>Newbury & District</u>
First Tuesday of the month, 7:30pm-9:30pm at St Mary's Church Hall, Shaw cum Donnington RG14 2DR
7th April - Pests & Predators with Adrian Connington 7th March - Frame building - 11am - 1pm St Mary's Church Hall
<u>Vale & Downland</u>
Friday 27th March - 7.00 pm The Simple Sustainable Apiary for the hobby beekeeper - Kevin Thorn (on Zoom) Saturday 28th March - Red Barn Build Day 17th - 19th April BBKA Spring Convention - Bookings open

Seen around the internet

BBKA Spring Convention

It's almost time for the Spring Convention, which this year is held from 17th - 19th April at Harper Adams University, Shropshire. A full programme can be found here:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/Pages/Category/about-spring-convention>

Hope to see you there.



Pesticide Impacts on bees

This article is a study from Queen Mary University of London, investigating the effects of neonicotinoid exposure in bumble bees, presumably with read across to our own honey bees. The study shows pervasive effects 'akin to aging or cancer'.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/01/250115165339.htm>

Plants for bees and other pollinators

While researching for a recent school talk I came across the page below on the best plants for pollinators. To be honest, I'm not totally sure who or what 'Apicultural' are, but it's a useful page. At the bottom are links to downloadable pdfs listing best garden plants,

best shrubs and best trees for bees which I found particularly useful and clear and better than most other offerings on the internet

<https://apicultural.co.uk/plants-for-pollinators>

Tips for April

Colonies are expanding rapidly, time to get on top of everything.

My top tips for April

- If you haven't already, pick a warm day (15C+) and do your first inspection. You don't have to see the queen, but you do need to see eggs so that you know she is there and so you can assess for a normal laying pattern. Check that the brood is worker and that you haven't come out of Winter with a drone layer. This is also your chance to have a good look in cells for any signs of disease. I found a little bit of sacbrood in one of my colonies.
- If you have the kit, you can combine the inspection with replacing the floor with a nice clean one and take the old floor away for cleaning. You can also start replacing horribly dirty frames with new frames with foundation (if it is warm and there is a flow). Mouseguards can come off to allow bees easier access to the entrance.
- Continue to monitor for starvation - the bees have lots of jobs on at the moment, including keeping new brood warm at night. If it is cold, they may consume stores quicker than they can bring it in.
- Once the bees are covering 7 or more frames you can add a queen excluder and the first super. The OSR is just starting to flower, and you can expect a heavy flow if there is any near you. A good flow and strong bees will fill a super each week.
- Swarm prevention starts now (or very soon). You will need to be doing weekly inspections. Decide on your swarm control method and be ready.
- **Forage Watch:** There is now a lot for bees to collect pollen and nectar from.



Do a bit of revision to remind yourself what healthy brood looks like. If you find brood that looks different in any way, you need to investigate....

Hellebores: Still going

Flowering Cherry: Now in full flower

Pears

Dandelions

Willow

Oil Seed Rape

Blackthorn (and very soon Hawthorn)

Calendula

Early garden plants



The OSR is coming....

Newbury & District BKA - Louisa Houghton & Rebecca Hall

Looking ahead to spring, summer and swarms!



School visits begin

As a teacher, it was perhaps only natural that my beekeeping journey would also lead me to sharing knowledge about bees with children. School visits are a wonderful way to do this, and this week I was delighted to be invited to launch a Year 3 project about bees.

Some schools run bee projects at this time of year, often linking them to learning about the environment as well as information writing in English. It provides a fantastic opportunity for children to explore the natural world while developing their curiosity and communication skills.

The children were hooked from the start. They asked brilliant questions and shared lots of their own stories and experiences with bees. A big part of these sessions is not only introducing new knowledge but also answering questions and helping to correct some common misconceptions about bees.

We had fun playing a game of “Bee or Not a Bee?” and even learned about the different parts of a bee’s body through a song. Activities like these make learning memorable and engaging.

At this time of year, I bring along an empty hive with old drawn wax. This allows the children to see what the inside of a hive looks like and helps me explain how a honeybee colony works. We explore the life cycle of the colony and how bees build and organise their home inside the hive.

Over the past few years, I have developed PowerPoint slides and activities suitable for a wide range of learners, from preschool children right up to Explorer Scouts (around 14

years old). We have also purchased a Teaching Hive, which contains frames with information and pictures to help explain different aspects of bee life.

As an Association we are also supported by the BBKA with resources to help lead school visits. During the warmer months we will be able to take observation hives into schools so that children can safely see live bees up close.

If you would be interested in leading a school visit, or supporting alongside myself or other members, please send me an email with your details:

Becca Hall chair@newburybeekeepers.org.uk

Don't miss our final speaker for Spring

Event to be held at St Mary's Church, Shaw-Cum-Donnington, RG14 2DR from 7.30pm – 9.30pm.

Pest and Predators with Adrian Connington – Tuesday 7th April

A look at some of the most prevalent predators threatening apiaries, how they attack, and what defences bees and beekeepers can put up to repel invaders.

Preparing for swarm season

Join the Swarm Team or get on the recipients list

As the active beekeeping season approaches, the association is preparing for swarm season. We are looking for members to support this vital community effort, whether you are ready to collect swarms or simply willing to provide a home for them.

1. Join the Swarm Collection Team (volunteers) We are looking for members to assist with swarm collection. While experience is valued, you do not need to be an expert to join; less experienced members can learn alongside seasoned collectors. **Full details on how the team operates will be explained at the March meeting.**

- **How it works:** Volunteers are added to a WhatsApp group for real-time alerts. When a swarm is reported (often using what3words), local members are prioritized to minimize travel.
- **Donations:** While the service is free to the public, collectors are encouraged to request donations to the Association via the [Newbury Beekeepers GoFundMe page](#).
- **Interested?** Please complete the volunteer form here: [Become a swarm collector](#)

2. Can you offer a home to a swarm? (recipients) If you are unable to collect swarms yourself but are ready to provide a home for rescued bees, please join the [NDBKA Swarm List](#).

- **Step 1:** Read the **Swarm List Document** attached to understand the protocol.
- **Step 2:** Complete the [Swarm List Form](#) to register.

For questions regarding the team or the list, please contact **Mark** @ swarms@newburybeekeepers.org.uk

Volunteers needed!

The events we hold as an association are a critical way for us to connect and engage with the public, highlighting our work and putting education at the heart of everything we do. We need your help to be able to take part, so whether it's giving a hand with the set up or being present for a morning or afternoon to be an extra pair of hands, if you can volunteer some of your time, please let us know.

- World Bee Day - Thatcham Discover Centre Saturday 16th May*
- Highclere Village festival - Saturday 13th June*
- The Swallowfield Show - Sunday 30th August and Monday 31st August 2026
- Newbury Show (including our honey show) - Saturday 19th September and Sunday 20th September*

If you'd like to get involved, please take a couple of minutes to let us know when you're free to volunteer [here](#) or email chair@newburybeekeepers.org.uk.

Hive Hefting – an essential part of our winter checks

On a bright sunny day at the tail end of February, our merry band of Hive Hefters headed for the small NDBKA apiary at the Mary Hare School near Chieveley. We've been checking the hives regularly over the autumn and winter to make sure the bees are OK, with enough stores to keep them going, and topped up with fondant where needed. Woodpeckers have been a particular thorn in our sides at the apiary, so the hives are wrapped in chicken wire to protect them, although a few do bear the scars of an overenthusiastic beak and will need repairing as spring draws nearer. For now, any woodpecker holes are plugged with grass or sponge to keep the heat in and robbers out.

We recently moved the hives, picking the coldest day possible when the bees were dormant, to move them to a sunnier location a few hundred yards from their original spot. Seeing the colonies out and about on our most recent hefting trip was food for the soul. It always brightens my day to feel the warmth of the sun on my back and see the bees out and about laden with bright yellow pollen.

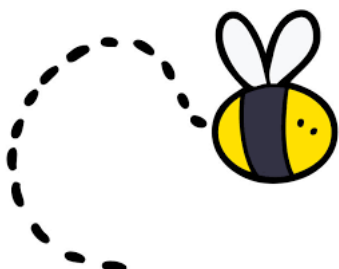
It's rare for a February day to be over 15C, but we were lucky and took the decision to open each of the five hives and take a look - something we would never do at this time of year unless conditions permitted. A full inspection is not advisable this early in the season, but given the warmth of the day, we were able to check levels of fondant, and lift the brood boxes to check on each cluster of bees looking for:

- How many bees there were in the hive
- Where they were located on the frames
- Presence of varroa (where there was a tray)
- Remaining stores and fondant

Visiting the apiary to heft the hives over the winter months is a great learning experience. The more you do it, the more you start to get a feel for when a hive is light and needs support, when it's full of stores, and even where the cluster is located within. Who knew that if you use just one finger each side of the brood box, it makes it easier to

sense the weight distribution? As we're fond of saying, 'every day is a learning day.' So true when it comes to beekeeping.

I always go hefting with a million questions and come back having learned so much from the beekeepers taking the lead and sharing their knowledge. For any beekeepers out there starting their journey, I would definitely recommend volunteering to help out with the hive hefting, it doesn't take up too much time and the benefits to the bees - and their keepers - are definitely worth it.



Share your stories!

If you have a great beekeeping story you'd like to share, we'd love to feature it! Please email **Louisa** at equipment@newburybeekeepers.org.uk.

Vale & Downland BKA - John Broadbent

Beginners' Course & Build Day

We finished the classroom part of the Beginners' course on Tuesday 17th of March. It was great to have such an enthusiastic group of people joining the association and we look forward to welcoming them to the Red Barn on Saturday 28th March for the annual build day. The Barn has been specially tidied (you won't recognise it) so that it is ready for frame and box building. It will also be a good chance to show new members what facilities we have and to look at the apiary from the entrance (we don't plan to go in as a group yet). The VDBKA covering email to this newsletter will include a map and details of how to find the Red Barn.



The Barn before being tidied.....

The day will run from 11am to 3pm and all members are welcome to come along to meet new members, have a chat and/or help make frames and boxes. If you have a hammer suitable for making frames please bring one. We will provide tea/coffee but please bring a packed lunch if you want to eat something.

The (emergency use only!) portaloo will be deployed.

Saturday apiary sessions

Members who have opened their hives already may have been surprised at how strong some of them are. Please keep your eyes open for any announcements about the start of member sessions. Full details of timings etc will be included in any such emails

Education

So far we have just 2 members who have registered for their Basic assessment. If you want to take yours this year (and if you haven't, you should) please email education@valeanddownlandbees.org.uk to register an interest. Likewise, Bee Health and General Husbandry. You need to let me know as soon as possible please, so that I have a decent chance of booking an assessor at a time that suits us.

Schools visits. Sheenagh has recently given talks to Moultsford Prep School and Longworth Primary School. The kids love these talks - you can tell by their questions, so if you know someone at a school that might benefit from a talk, please pass them the association's details. Teachers are really interested too - they always collar us afterwards with questions they wanted to ask.

Winter Talk

Our final Winter talk is by zoom on this Friday at 7pm. **Kevin Thorn** will be giving us his talk: **The simple Sustainable Apiary for the hobby beekeeper**. I have seen Kevin give another talk recently and he was very good - he is a very experienced bee farmer. The link to the talk has already been sent out and will be included in the VDBKA covering letter. Hope to see you online.

Adverts

Jim

- Three Langstroth hives for sale, plus frames and unmade frames
- Two Langstroth nucs also included
- No bees included
- **For more details talk to Jim on +44 7836 737785, or at the next Newbury meeting**

Andrew Fromant, Worlds End Honey, Beedon.

Bees for sale from my own apiaries. Productive strain of bee bred locally RG20 area, open mated for last seven generations, available early April.
Six frame overwintered stocks on Hoffman frames. Varroa treated, viable stocks with marked and clipped queens.

BS National £250, Deep 14 x12 £300, Commercial 16 x10 £270

Subject to availability. Prefer to deliver, Newbury region, VDBKA, NDBKA members and transfer into your hive. Experience of looking after bees or having attended beekeeping course is necessary.

Contact Andrew: and.fromant@gmail.com

Brian Hutchings

I have for sale,

A Paradise Poly hive, which consists of :- Varroa floor with a sliding entrance, 1 Brood Chamber, empty, Queen Excluder, 4 Honey Supers, all empty, Crown Board, Roof.

Only used for one summer; it has been thoroughly cleaned and in a very good condition. Price is £160.00 pounds.

I live at Buscot Wick which is between Faringdon & Lechlade. Phone 07395 059841

Vicky Johnston

Bees for sale

National standard hives with bees for sale. Please contact Vicky on 07773 211729

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 johnthebeeman8@gmail.com 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.