



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

SEPTEMBER TASTER DAY REPORT



WLBK's most recent Taster Day was held on Saturday 1st September at BBKA headquarters in Stoneleigh.

The day started with an anxious eye on the weather which had been looking good all week, then suddenly changed on the day to having rain in the afternoon. Fortunately, this failed to materialise. Twenty one delegates signed in ready for the days talks and activities.

The morning consisted of talks introducing our craft to the eager ears of those in attendance. As you saw in the last edition of Bee Talk, the feedback was very positive, enhanced by the brief appearance of the Reverend Langstroth (aka Marie Day) during the talk on the hive by Nicki Maritz. Lunchtime gave the opportunity to taste the various honeys produced by members.

After a morning of presentations, including the delicious honey cake, ginger bread, chocolate cake, lemon drizzle and honey flapjacks (lots of cake which went down very well), the delegates donned their bee suits and were treated to a live "bee experience" in the BBKA apiary.

As a side element, using the BBKA apiary introduced them to the barrier infection control that is sometimes needed to protect the bees. The one thing we had not envisaged when we wrote our risk assessment was that people might have to experience how uncomfortable being in a bee suit on a very hot afternoon can be. Who would have guessed how hot it was going to be on the day!

The feedback forms received back from the delegates showed their enjoyment of the day. In response to the question "did we achieve the course objectives?", 19 said Yes. The majority rated the

day as excellent overall.

The purpose of a Taster Day is to provide an unbiased, objective view of beekeeping – a task which, given the enthusiasm of our presenters, is very difficult to achieve. The inclusion of the presentation entitled "Beekeeping; The Downside", highlighting the cost, time commitment, challenges of factors outside beekeeper's control, disappointing honey yields, stings, neighbours etc. etc. was an essential component of the day to give a balanced view. As with previous Taster Days, the inclusion of a beekeeper still at the beginning of the learning curve was a big plus. 17 of the delegates said they would be interested in hearing about next year's Introduction to Beekeeping course.

It was an enjoyable day for all and well worth the effort put in. It is, however, a team effort and our thanks go to everyone who helped make the day such a success (Nicki Maritz, Bernard and Jane Brown, Mikki Blackwell, Marie Day and Jane Medwell). Thanks also to the BBKA for allowing us to use their apiary for the afternoon and for providing additional bee suits for the delegates. Thanks to Marie, Jane M and Bernard who volunteered to wash a few bee suits, which was much appreciated and it's a great help.

If anyone is interested in helping out at future Taster Days, you don't have to be an experienced beekeeper to help out. In fact, having someone who is new to beekeeping is an advantage as the delegates always appreciate learning from a new beekeeper's experiences.

Paul Day



BEEKEEPING TASKS — OCTOBER

I love it when we have done everything we can to protect the colonies and we just have to monitor and wait. This year my bees are supplementing their feed with a powerful ivy flow and the hives all seem very heavy. I would love to have Himalayan Balsam, but alas, it's not invaded my patch.

Now that the heavy lifting is over, I am going to settle down to catch up with all the talks online and our WBKA talks in person as well. I love a chance to learn something new. There are several past talks on the BBKA website: [here](#). The next one is Mead making on 15th October and one each month thereafter. I shall be going to our branch talks (next meeting 17th October) and talks by our own **Warwickshire Beekeepers Association**, and also watching the **Scottish Beekeepers Association**. There is a lot of interesting stuff from reputable and reliable sources I aim to catch up on these as the days get shorter.

The other thing on my agenda will be dealing with the piles of extracted supers (some of the frames need boiling up), boxes which need to be flamed and floors, roofs and queen excluders to clean. I can probably displace these jobs for a few months yet. The task I really hate - but mustn't leave - is putting on the woodpecker guards and mouseguards.

I am looking forward to seeing you at branch activities this autumn. Judith has organised our next meeting on 17th October and there will be cake. The major beekeeping work is over for the year but there is a lot of fun to be had.

If you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at (warleambees@warleambees.org.uk). Our bee inspector is Colleen Reichling and her mobile number is: 07990 138898 (colleen.reichling@apha.gov.uk).

BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

- October is the last feeding month and our role is ensuring bees are well fed and protected this month.
- Check your hives have decent ventilation. Bees set up very efficient "air con" and can manage the circulation of air to prevent frames going mouldy. These days an open mesh floor is plenty. But if you are still using solid floors (or are going back to them in preparation for Asian Hornet invasion), remember to check the vents and put matchsticks under the corners of cover boards.
- Feed so that your colonies have around 20kg of stores to go through the winter. Don't try to feed bit by bit in winter- it needs to go down now.
- Be sure the bees have enough feed before the temperature drops. Late syrup will cause dysentery so a big block of fondant is best now.
- Fit mouse guards. A mouse can easily get through a standard entrance. And for me, one did last year. Luckily they went straight up to the fondant and filled up on sweeties (rather like me over Christmas) but if the mouse goes for your combs it causes a lot of damage.
- Fit woodpecker protection. Yes, they will go for poly hives AND NUCS - remember to put the wire over the unprotected top of polynucs.
- Prepare for the "big clean"- but maybe put it off for a while- again.
- If you are not treating varroa right now, it's a good time to put in the varroa boards and see how the mite drop is going into winter. It will tell you when to do oxalic acid.

Jane Medwell
WLBK chair




SAVE THE DATE

Friday 13th December
7.30 – 10.30pm
WLBK Christmas Party
Hot Food, Live Music and Fun

MEMBER'S MEETINGS

BEE ON BEEBASE

With the beekeeping season winding down, this is a good time to remind our members how to join BEEBASE and how to make sure you get disease notifications. These notification tell you when the bee inspector has found a notifiable disease within three kilometres of your apiaries. It is a really useful service. The notification does not reveal identity of the beekeeper with the bad luck, but it does put you on alert.

To register on beebase go [to this page](#) on the internet and this is what you will see. Please make sure you click YES to the periodic notifications button right at the bottom. They will ONLY send disease notifications, starvation warnings and job adverts- no spam.

You must enter the locations of your apiaries when you register- they can only send you notifications if you do this, because otherwise they do not know where your bees are.

LET'S TALK BEES

Each year WLBK gets a few enquiries from schools, youth groups, societies and organisations who want someone to talk to their pupils or members about bees. If you think that you can be informative and entertaining, give a talk which is suitable for the audience and fit it into the time slot given, please join our speakers list. Contact Judith Masson, who has taken on the role of Talks Co-ordinator to find out more about what is involved.

Email: Judith.masson@bristol.ac.uk

BBKA CAMPAIGN

It's National Honey Day on **21st October** and as part of the day the BBKA has launched the 'Bee Smart, Choose Local' campaign to encourage consumers to choose honey from their local beekeeper.

According to the International Trade Centre, the UK imported an average of 50,917 tonnes of honey in 2023. Some of this will have been adulterated and may feature a blend of products from a number of different countries. We want people to be able to recognise honey produced here in the UK and be able to have a choice in what they are buying.

There are downloadable resources [here](#) if you want to help spread the word.

Thirty members came to the first meeting in our new venue, Kenilworth Senior Citizen's

Club, to hear Gerry Collins tell us what we needed to do (or to have done!) to ensure our bees survival over the coming winter. Gerry is an exceptionally experienced beekeeper - he has been keeping bees for 66 years (since the age of 11 years), is a Master Beekeeper, holds the National Diploma in Beekeeping and has acted in many roles for the BBKA.

On average, around 15% of colonies do not survive the winter. There are many reasons for colonies failing: poorly mated queens, disease and starvation are the main ones. Older queens and late-mated queens may not be able to produce enough worker bees to sustain the colony. A heavy varroa load (did you treat your bees?) weakens the colony and varroa are also a vector for diseases, especially DWV. Starvation and isolation starvation (where there are enough stores in the hive but the cluster is too far away) are also major causes, especially in February and March. Checking the availability of stores and feeding syrup now while it is still warm and fondant later in winter. So by considering these factors when preparing for winter, preferably in August, you can do the best to help your bees.

Gerry keeps 20 colonies on double broods, which this year produced over a ton of honey - needless to say he sells this by the bucketful. His best hive filled 11 supers and gave him 275 lbs.



Gerry Collins with his most productive hive

OCTOBER MEMBERS' MEETING - A TASTE OF HONEY, PETER LEWIS

Thursday 17th October

7.30pm

Kenilworth Senior Citizen's Club

Abbey End CV8 1QJ

Fine honey is like fine wine but often seen only as a sweetener, not valued for its different notes, mouth feel and after taste. Peter will introduce us to the world of the honey sommelier. How he learned to really taste honey and what to think about when trying to describe how honey tastes. Of course, your honey may taste and feel better than anyone else's but can you put that into words? Come along and find out.

THERE WILL BE CAKE.

Judith Masson
WLBK Meetings Secretary



ASIAN HORNET – LATEST BUZZ

Figures released for August showed a minor increase in Asian Hornet sightings and nest destruction over July's making it 10 in total for 2024. Not unexpectedly, September has seen an acceleration in the numbers seen and nests destroyed with a further 9 being reported up until the middle of the month.

Location-wise, all sightings and nest destructions bar one were in Kent, East and West Sussex, the exception being one in Southampton. So far, it would seem, that there has been little spread outside the immediate area but of course they may just not have been spotted. In a couple of instances, active primary and secondary nests were found together indicating the later than expected founding of the colonies – a feature of the weather perhaps, which is also suspected as the cause of the low numbers generally encountered.

Asian Hornet Week, held over 2nd– 8th September, to raise public awareness promoted by BBKA, prompted extensive coverage on BBC Southeast and mention on numerous other media outlets. This "must-see" BBC programme can be viewed on the iPlayer at this [link](#).

At least one positive sighting, was made by an allotmentee in Lydd as a result. The nest was found and destroyed.

Asian Hornet week was also marked by an update on the overall Asian Hornet situation by Andrew Durham in a lecture organised by BBKA. Part of this talk reviewed the danger to humans from Asian Hornet stings and gave the lie to the assertion that they were "no worse than those of bees or wasps" – a myth pedalled by the British

non-native species secretariat. The toxicity of the venom in an AH sting is greater. Whilst a single AH sting has caused an anaphylactic reaction in one extremely rare case, it is multiple stings (10+) where the amount of toxins can cause a systemic reaction more commonly which not only on its own can be serious but in combination with other medical conditions can be life threatening. These include those with cardiovascular issues – often the over 65 year olds – and those who already suffer systemic reactions to bee/wasp stings – e.g. beekeepers. Multiple stings are usually suffered by the frenzy of aggression shown by the Asian Hornets whilst defending their nests, so whilst the risk of encountering Asian Hornets in this country is, in itself extremely low, the consequences of so doing are high so it is best to stay well away from their nests.

As we enter the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, Asian Hornets are taking to forage on fallen fruit so those in the apple orchards of Kent have to beware of their windfalls.

Finally, we are being encouraged to refer to this beastie as "the Yellow-Legged Hornet" (YLH), a term which will increasingly be used by officialdom.

Bernard Brown
Asian Hornet Action Team Co-ordinator
Warwickshire Beekeepers' Association



TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Beekeepers never stop learning! It seems that bees know how to train their beekeepers by giving them new problems to solve on an annual basis.

WLBK traditionally supports a number of opportunities to provide support for members to develop their experience, skills and qualifications. We recognise that taking formal exams is not a high priority for everyone, but informal practical assessments can provide excellent opportunities to hone and fine-tune confidence with basic skills and to share experiences (good and bad!) with others.

We have a strong recent history of members being successful in attaining 'The Basic' – the 'foundation stone' for beekeeping qualifications that opens the door to other opportunities. The assessment requires experience of maintaining a colony of bees for a year and comprises making a frame with wax foundation, a discussion of your beekeeping practice, lighting and maintaining a smoker, and a conversation over a hive while working through a routine inspection. All well within the capabilities of those who have done our ITB programme and attended training apiary sessions throughout the last few months. To support candidates our 'Towards the Basic' (TTB) programme comprises face to face

sessions, on-line resources and 'dummy runs' through doing inspections – describing what you are doing and why, what is being seen, what is going on in the colony and what the next steps might be. Assessments for the Basic are arranged with an assessor on an agreed date in late Spring / early Summer.

For those already holding the Basic and who wish to extend their experience in a more formal way the BBKA also offers a set of qualifications via 'modules' and 'certificates' that can lead to the 'Master Beekeeper' qualification. There are a number of these and the full programme (see BBKA.org.uk) would normally take several years to complete – and may not appeal to all beekeepers. Experience suggests that for most 'early career' beekeepers the most useful and logical start of this journey is to work towards Module 3 (Honeybee Health), and to do the W&L 'Beyond the Basic' (planned for February 2025) that is designed to build on previous experience for those who passed their Basic in 2024. For more information on these contact our Exams Officer, Jane Medwell on examsec@bbka.org.uk.

Barry Meatyard



THE AUGUST BEE SAFARI



The August Bee Safari was the last for the 2024 beekeeping season, and really rather late in the month. Despite the timing, Tim and Bernie Newcombe provided their two visitors, Gill and Steve, with a very interesting experience, including an introduction to their flock of Soay sheep, and great hospitality complete with lemon drizzle cake.

Tim and Bernie have a lovely eight-acre smallholding in rural South Warwickshire. The lateness of the hour limited inspection of the bees to simple feeding (syrup not lemon drizzle) and a tour of the apiary layout.

The highlight of the trip, particularly for Gill, was the visit to Tim's bee shed, a veritable Aladdin's cave! Gill commented afterwards that she could have spent hours exploring the Bee shed and was impressed by how clean and tidy it was. Both Steve and Gill were impressed by Tim's extensive knowledge, experience and willingness to answer their questions.



Tim feeding the bees

Photos courtesy of
Steve Penny

BEE SAFARIS FOR 2025 – YOUR CLUB NEEDS YOU!

There were three Bee Safaris and a drone Congregation hunt this summer. The plan is to run three more from June to August in 2025.

Safaris provide an opportunity to see how other beekeepers run their apiaries, to ask questions, meet other beekeepers and reflect on your own practice, whatever your level of experience. Safaris rely on individuals to open their apiary to visitors AND members to go on safari.

In 2023 and 2024, safaris have been held early in the evening but in 2025 there will be at least one at on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. If you would be willing to host a safari, please speak to the Meetings Secretary, Judith Masson (Judith.masson@bristol.ac.uk) about what is involved and the precautions the club takes to protect your bees by ensuring hygienic arrangement.

Judith Masson

MUSEUM BEES ALIVE & THRIVING

Recently a beekeeper went into the museum and somewhat vociferously announced for all the world to hear that the bees were starving! In actual fact, this was actively being addressed and it would be more helpful when beekeepers visit and have concerns, that they contact me before sounding forth.

A member of staff feeds the bees under my direction, makes observations and send me an image of both sides of the hive and I can then decide if I need to visit and take any action. I do make a routine visit myself every week to ten days.

The hive has a feeder at the top and, as Ambrosia syrup does not have aroma to attract the bees up to it, I have to try to take action to get them understanding where the syrup is. This is made more difficult just now because they have to walk across an empty frame.

The way I try to deal with this is to overfill the feeder so that syrup runs onto the bees so that they track its path up. If this

does not work, they will be fed wholly on honey with the aroma hopefully making food easier to find. I hesitate to do this as I will be feeding them with honey from another hive. The final action I will have to take if necessary is to remove the bees, re-hive them at home and put them back into the museum, an action I am hesitant to take at this late time in the year.

I would like to reassure members that the condition of the hive is closely monitored by me, supported by staff who love the bees. Together with their help I have overwintered bees in this hive for 25 years with just one winter loss in all this time.

Members having concerns may contact me on 07983 339612, 01926 855080 and michaelatownsend@hotmail.com.

Contingency plans, involving other beekeepers, are in place if I am not available.

Mike Townsend



ASIAN HORNET IN THE ARCHERS

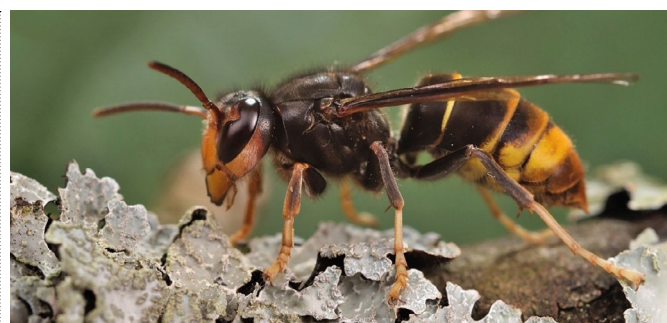
Something of a coup occurred in the Asian Hornet public awareness campaign when avid fans of the Archers heard in the episode on Sunday 29th September that an Asian Hornet had been spotted in Ambridge, which is thought to be not that far from Warwickshire!

The Asian Hornet was spotted by Ben in the Brookfield orchard, which is feasible, and he and David set off to confirm its identity. They managed to get a photograph and confirmed that it had yellow socks. The conversation between Ben and David alluded to the main threats from the beastie – chomping on 50 honey bees a day, the consequences for pollination etc.

Purely by happenstance, they had been accompanied by a new character, a lass called Vena, who had made her first appearance only a few moments earlier in the same episode. Vena got stung on the face and David and Ben obviously had mugged up on what to do in such an event and checked for symptoms of anaphylaxis of which none were apparently present at the time, but of course could be delayed. They got her back to the farmhouse while Ben reported the sighting via the Asian Hornet Watch App.

A sting by a loan hornet, unprovoked, is a little unusual but I suppose that a nest may have been close by and the hornet may have felt threatened. I think we can give them the benefit of the doubt on this. Anyway, they were expecting the arrival of the NBU Asian Hornet team to arrive to track the nest.

All in all, it was a pretty good reflection of current advice.



Of course, Jill is now worried about her bees and David is worried about the pollination of his crops. It will be interesting to hear how the story line develops.

As reported in this issue of Bee Talk, the AHAT team has been in contact with Sybil Ruscoe, the agricultural advisor on the programme, to use the programme as a vehicle to promote awareness among the public, particularly to those who work and play outside and thus the more likely to spot and disturb them. As it happened the BBKA/Non-native Species Secretariat had already been in touch with the programme editors, but we had a long conversation with Sybil herself putting some flesh on the bones. This really is a feather in their cap – hopefully from a native bird species.

Isn't it good when a plan comes together?

Bernard Brown

POLYETHISM IN BEES:

UNDERTAKER BEES



Continuing our series on polyethism in bees we turn our attention this month to Undertaker Bees.

Continuing our series on polyethism in bees we turn our attention this month to Undertaker Bees. Honey Bees die every day. After all, if a queen is laying several hundred eggs a day in a physically restricted space, it would soon become overcrowded. At the height of the season as many as 1,000 bees each day are thought to shuffle off this mortal coil. In summer, the majority die outside the hive but in winter, although the winter bees live longer, death occurs at home. Generally it is the older or diseased bees that die who tend to carry a high pathogen load. If allowed to decompose the pathogens would be released into the hive rapidly spreading infection.

To prevent this happening some bees detect the corpses and drag them from the hive from where, in summer, they are flown some 50-100m away before being deposited. This is no mean feat particularly if dealing with a beefy drone. Were they just dumped immediately outside the hive, they would attract predators such as hornets who could then turn their attention to the live bees in the hive. In winter, however, the dead tend to be left on the landing board or on the ground outside the hive when fewer predators are about. The sight of an accumulation of dead bees outside a hive in winter is frequently a matter of great concern to a beekeeper but in fact is quite normal and, as a hive has to contain healthy bees to be able to eject the dead, can be reassuring. Indeed their absence may well indicate that all is not right within.

The bees that undertake this task do so in the 10 days of middle age before they become foragers. Very often they only do this job for a day or so although a 13 day stint has been recorded.

It has been observed that dead and sometimes dying bees are removed within 30 minutes of dying. But how are the dead detected and so quickly? It is pitch black in a hive so there are no visual clues and to patrol a hive using tactile methods is a bit hit and miss. Recent research, as yet not peer reviewed, postulates that chemical cues are involved. Honey bees are covered in compounds called cuticular hydrocarbons (CHCs), which compose part of the waxy coating on their cuticles (the shiny parts of their exoskeletons) and help prevent them from drying out. While the bee is alive, these molecules are continually released into the air and are used to recognise fellow hive members. Experiments showed that the reduction in body temperature on death was accompanied by a reduction in the rate of emission of these molecules and it is this reduction which can be detected by the undertaker bee's antennae. This provides the early notice and location of the newly departed.

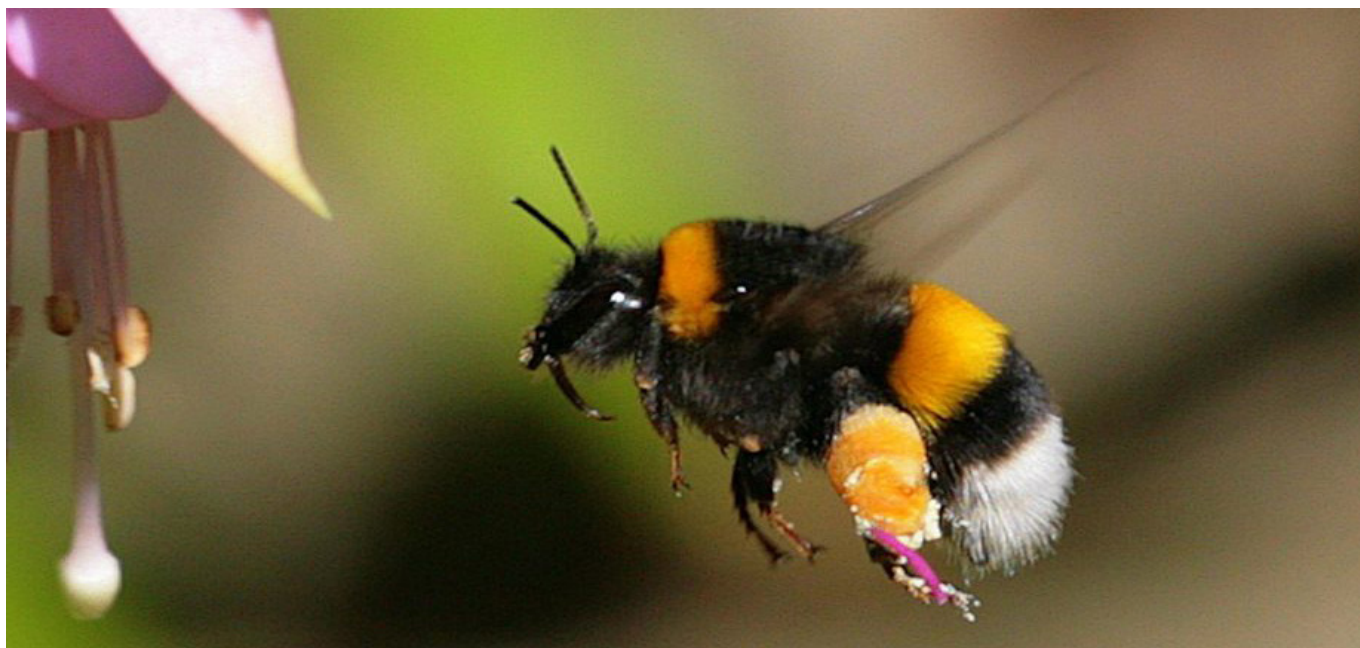
It is not just the dead that occupy the Undertaker bees. They fill their quiet periods by removing other debris from the hive so they are binmen/women as well.

Next month the subject will be Scouting for Girls.

Bernard Brown

Based on and with the permission of the Honey Bee Suite

STRESSED BUMBLEBEES LACK A BUZZ IN LIFE



Stressed bumblebees are much more likely to make pessimistic choices and lack a buzz in life, new research from scientists at Newcastle University has found. The research findings reveal that bumblebees reduce their expectations of reward when they are agitated, and this could impact how they approach and pollinate flowers.

Researchers trained bees to decide about whether a colour signalled something good or bad.

Bees learned to identify that different colours were associated with different outcomes, with one colour associated with a sweet reward location and another colour indicating a location that had a much lower reward. Bees learned the difference and visited the appropriate location when shown each colour.

Once bees learnt these associations, two groups experienced a simulated predatory attack, and a third group did not experience any external stress.

The bees who had experienced the attack were found to be much less likely to interpret ambiguous colours as indicating high rewards and in response visited low reward locations more than the control bees.

Dr Vivek Nityananda, from Newcastle University, said: "Our study shows that bees are more pessimistic after stress as their behaviour suggests that they do not expect to get rewards.

"Emotions are complex states and in humans involve a subjective understanding of what you are feeling. We might never know if bees feel something similar, however, what this research can say is that bees have similar responses when they

are stressed and make pessimistic choices.

"The best explanation for their behaviour is that they expect high rewards to be less likely and exhibit traits of pessimistic people."

The scientists say the research is important as it means stress can impact how bees approach flowers and pollinate plants, as well as their ability to access high-quality rewards.

Dr Olga Prochenko, who led the research at Newcastle University, added: "Our research suggests that like other animals including humans, bees may experience emotion-like states when stressed, as demonstrated by a clear shift towards pessimism. When faced with ambiguity, stressed bees, much like someone seeing the glass as 'half empty,' are more likely to expect negative outcomes.

"Besides suggesting that states akin to emotion may be evolutionarily conserved, our study opens up new possibilities for understanding how stress affects insect cognition and behaviour, which could provide insights into their responses to environmental challenges and inform conservation efforts."

The researchers say that further research is needed to understand what the exact implications are for the pollination of flowers and plants, and if bees in the wild show similar responses

These findings were published in a paper within the Royal Society's biological sciences journal: *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, which can be accessed via this [link](#).

Tanya Weaver



HINTS AND TIPS

Now is the time to remove queen excluders, particularly if you are overwintering on a brood and a half or double brood arrangement. The cluster will move around to find the stores and the queen needs to be able to go with them.

Store honey in air-tight containers of a food grade quality. Honey is hygroscopic which means it will absorb water. If this happens then the moisture content will rise above 20% and the honey will start to ferment.

Super comb is not usually attractive to wax moth, as the larvae feed on the bee pupal casings that are in the brood frames. However, rodents may be attracted to these so it is important to stack the supers so they are rodent proof.

Supplementary feeding with syrup or Ambrosia is coming to an end as the temperature drops. The bees will struggle to evaporate off the water and if left in the hive it may ferment and bees feeding on it could develop dysentery. If you think the hive is short of food then it is better to feed fondant if you think it is too cold for syrup.

Varroa boards need removing so that debris does not gather and attract wax moth (like the image on the right) and air circulation can be optimised.



With Guy Fawkes night approaching here's an alternative to bonfire toffee:

HONEY BONFIRE TREAT

Pour honey into a saucepan.

Heat gently to 115°C (240°F). Keep it there for 10 minutes. Don't let it burn!

Butter a dish and pour the honey in

When cool enough to handle put butter on your hands and work the honey by pulling stretching and folding it several times until it changes to a golden colour.

When it starts to go stiff shape it to a sausage and snip off sweet size pieces

Wrap individual treats in greaseproof paper.

Now it is your chance! If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to h.essex211@gmail.com

Helen Essex



The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.
Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
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