

COMBINGS

The newsletter of the York and District Beekeepers Association



Issue No. 88
Autumn 2024

YORK AND DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS 2023/2024

President	Sue Hesp	01904 489449
Vice Presidents	John Fuller	01757 638388
	Rob Coleman	07930 893383
Committee		
Chairman	Bob Parnaby	07831 658124
Vice Chairman	Bruno Hannemann	07854 020879
Secretary	Alan Addison	07771 671721
Treasurer and Membership Secretary	Jonathan Sanders	07551 386550
Equipment Officer	Rob Coleman	07930 893383
Education		
Web Master & Publicity	Bruno Hannemann	07854 020879
Events	Christine Johnston	07899 007880
Librarian	Paul Appleton	07764 655718
AHAT Coordinator	Bob Parnaby	07831 658124
Other committee members		
	Adam Fairweather	07948 481947
	Andy Marsden	07703 120606
	Matthew Roberts	07810 473751
	Steve Kritikos	07899 007880
Other post holders		
Combings editor	Kate Wallace	07842 703984
Assistant Editor	Alan Johnston	
Apiary Manager	Ben Morgan	07723 036897
Regional Bee Inspector	Dhonn Atkinson	07775 119437
Seasonal Bee Inspector	David Bough	07824 408973

The password for the members area of the YDBKA website is: beesatyork

“Combings” is the newsletter of the York & District Beekeepers Association. Views expressed in the newsletter are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Association as a whole or of the editor.

Contributions to, and comments on “Combings” are always welcome. I would particularly appreciate your pictures for “Reader’s Hives”.

Please send any copy or comments to: combings@gmail.com

Combings is published quarterly.

Please note the last date for copy for the next edition is: 18th November 2024

TWO EDS.

The autumn season is a busy time for beekeepers, bringing home our bees from the heather moors, taking off and spinning out the remaining honey, feeding bees and varroa treatment application, and with the cleaning and scorching of kit ready for next year still to look forward to!

There has been some advantage to the wet weather this year, there have been fewer wasps than most seasons, though those that have been appeared at the hive entrance have been as dogged and persistent as usual! The usual advice still applies, reduce entrances to help the bees deter the attack, ensure there are no gaps in the hive woodwork, close up Porter bee escape holes. If the attacks are too much for your colony, you may have to relocate the hive.

I dare say the wasps will be back in their usual numbers next year.

The front page photo by Bob Parnaby is of the Bailey comb change demo at Murton.

FROM THE CHAIR

I started writing this article on 5th September, the first week of meteorological Autumn.

Since the issue of the summer edition of "Combings", there has been some fine weather and the bees have been busy making up for the prolonged wet winter and spring. I hope most of you have benefited from this, especially the early flowering of Himalayan balsam.

Time seems to rush by nowadays and as it is early September it is opportune to remind members that our Annual Honey Show is due to take place on Wednesday 23 October. Details of the show are attached elsewhere in this edition.

I do hope it will be successful evening and I encourage members to enter some exhibits and also attend for the evening's bring and share buffet and quiz with prizes.

Several members took the BBKA Basic assessment this year and special thanks go to Alan Johnston who took on the task of one-to-one tutorials prior to the assessments.

YDBKA apiary manager, Ben Morgan, myself and Alan ensured that the apiary and colonies were in good order, which was commented on favourably by the Assessors. A photo of the Association's apiary is shown on the next page.



YDBKA APIARY AT MURTON, SUMMER 2024

DID YOU KNOW?

In the Eva Crane book “Honey”, Dr Crane describes a Himalayan black bear bawling with pain as it raided a colony of tree-dwelling bees for their honey, the bear rolled on the ground to dislodge the stinging bees but eventually it prevailed and got its reward.

Some of us may identify with that...

BASIC ASSESSMENT 2024

Thanks to Bruno Hannemann for the following report on the YDBKA entries for this year’s BBKA Basic Assessment.

The Basic Assessment is the first of the BBKA examinations, which provides newer beekeepers with an opportunity to gauge their progress in mastering the fundamental skills and knowledge of the craft. It is expected that this will serve as a stepping stone toward more advanced assessments.

When we decided to offer the assessment to our members this season, we were very pleased with the response. Eight candidates came forward and took the assessment. Four of them on Tuesday 20th August and four more on Sunday 25th August.

I am delighted to share that all candidates were successful.

They are:

Greg House
Christine Johnston
Matthew Roberts
Daniella Brook
Karen Johnson
Carol Flint
Steven Kritikos
Jill Cheney

Instrumental to their success was the work done by Ben Morgan, Alan Johnston and Bob Parnaby at the apiary, ensuring the quality of the bees and equipment. More importantly, Alan Johnston spent several hours over a few days providing one to one tuition to all the candidates, both on the theory and practical aspects of the assessment. The assessors were very complimentary of the apiary, the bees and the candidates.

The BBKA exams are a great opportunity to focus the mind, to motivate learning and to ensure we keep up to date with our knowledge of all aspects of beekeeping. I hope to see similar interest next year!

UNITING COLONIES

One of the end-of-season tasks usually involves making a decision about whether and which colonies to unite. The temptation is to try and get every colony through winter, however small, in the hope that at least some will get through. There's a natural reluctance against putting one's eggs into fewer baskets.

Its faulty logic, however. Nucs can be brought through winter but it's a difficult skill. Generally, one large colony has a far greater chance of surviving than two smaller ones.

Uniting is a relatively straightforward affair. Both chosen colonies should be queen-right to begin with: it won't work where one colony has been queenless for more than a week or so.

Bring your two chosen colonies together, over time if necessary. Select the queen you wish to keep based on whatever traits are important to you – age, temperament, disease resistance, honey gathering ability etc.

Find and kill the unwanted queen.

Wait 20-25 minutes (the time required for that colony to realize that it has no queen). Remove the hive roof and crown board and place a single sheet of newspaper over it (Daily Telegraph or Yorkshire Post broadsheet size). Make a few small nicks in the paper with the end of your hive tool to begin pheromone transfer between the colonies.

Place the queen-right colony on top of it, ensuring that the upper unit has no unintended entrances.

After 24/36 hours, inspection should reveal that the bees have chewed through the newspaper and mingle successfully.

You can then rearrange the brood and stores frames in the manner of a standard configuration.

There are variations to this basic manipulation.

The prime concern is that your chosen queen doesn't get overwhelmed and killed by the workers from the queenless colony, hence her placement above the newspaper in the process just described.

Another modification would be to actually place the queen in a queen cage within her own colony where she could be touched and "sniffed" by the queenless workers before chewing her way out of the cage after a further couple of days. (In most cases this is unnecessary where both colonies are reasonably tempered.

Do try and overcome a natural reluctance to reduce colony numbers. The old adage that "the best packing for bees is more bees" remains ever true.

YDBKA HONEY SHOW 2024

The Association's 2024 annual honey show will be held at the Yorkshire Museum of Farming, Murton on Wednesday 23rd October.

TROPHIES

The Bill Bell cup will be awarded to the entrant with most points awarded in the Novice classes namely 1a, 2a and 3a.

The John Fuller Trophy will be awarded to the winner of Class 12

The David Gray Memorial Shield will be awarded for the best honey in the show.

The Johnston Shield will be awarded for the best exhibit in the show.

The Alf Race Memorial Cup will be awarded to the member with the most points in the show.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

- Class 1. Two matching jars Honey light clear.
- Class 1a. One jar Honey light clear. Novice.
- Class 2. Two matching jars Honey medium clear.
- Class 2a. One jar Honey medium clear. Novice.
- Class 3. Two matching jars Honey dark clear.
- Class 3a. One jar Honey dark clear. Novice.
- Class 4. One jar Honey naturally set. Not stirred.
- Class 5. One jar Honey soft set.
- Class 6. One jar Heather honey.
- Class 7. Jar of honey presented as for sale.
- Class 8. 8 oz. cut comb.
- Class 9. Dry mead.
- Class 10. Sweet mead.
- Class 11. Block of beeswax less than 1 lb.
- Class 12. Block of beeswax more than 1 lb.
- Class 13. Plain moulded beeswax candle. Minimum dimensions to be 1½ in diameter and 3" high. (Excluding the wick).
- Class 14. Beeswax candle. Any shape or size or method of production.
- Class 15. One shallow frame suitable for extraction.
- Class 16. Honey cake made to the standard recipe. {Please note that the recipe is changed again this year as the lemon cake recipe from last year overpowered any taste of honey}
- Class 17. Honey cake to your own recipe.
- Class 18. Any item made from hive products please make sure entries are described and labelled correctly.
- Class 19. Any beekeeping related photograph.

NOTES FOR THE CLASSES

Classes 1 to 6 – To be in 1lb round squat honey jars.

Class 7 – Can be any shape or size.

Classes 9 and 10 – To be shown in 26 oz clear glass bottles of round section, with rounded shoulders. White flanged corks to be used.

Classes 11 and 12 – Moulds without a pattern are to be used.

Class 16 – The honey cake is to be made to the following recipe.

PLAIN HONEY CAKE

Ingredients:

227g (8oz) self-raising flour
113g (4oz) unsalted butter
227 (8oz) honey
2 medium eggs (original size 3)
Pinch of salt

Method:

1. Set oven to pre heat. Cream the butter and honey together.
2. Beat the eggs well, alternately adding sifted flour at intervals, and salt. Add a little milk if required.
3. Bake in buttered deep 16.5-19.0cm (6½ to 7½") round tin ~ 1¼ hours at 160°C, Gas Mark 2½ -3.

NB. Cooking temperatures and times given are guidelines only: you may find through practice and experience that the baking methods need adapting slightly to suit your own oven. Ovens should be pre-warmed to temperature prior to baking.

In practice "longer, slower, cooler" seems to work best: 140-150° with a high/raised paper liner and using a strong-tasting honey in preference.

GENERAL NOTES

The Honey Show is open to paid-up members of the York and District Beekeepers Association, for the fiscal year which commences on the 1st of October.

A novice is a person who has taken up beekeeping since the start of the previous year's beekeeping season i.e. April 2023. The entrant with most points awarded in the Novice classes namely 1a, 2a and 3a will receive the Bill Bell cup.

Novices may also enter classes 4 to 20 on equal terms with experienced exhibitors.

Only one entry per person per class.

Candles entered in classes 13 and 14 may be lit at the judge's discretion.

The honey and wax used in exhibits shall be from the exhibitors' own bees.

Points will be awarded to prize winners thus:

3 points to the winner of each class, 2 points will go to second place and 1 point to third place.

The John Fuller Trophy will be awarded to the winner of Class 12

The Alf Race Memorial Cup will be awarded to the member with the most points. In the event of a draw, the member with the highest number of first places will be the winner.

The judge will decide on the best Honey in the show regardless of the class entered in and the winner will be awarded the David Gray Memorial Shield.

The Johnston Shield award for the best exhibit which will take account of all entries.

The judge 's decision will be final.

Entries will be accepted from 15.30 to 19.15 on Tuesday the 22nd of October at Murton Park and it is expected that any late entries could be submitted in a short window on Wednesday the 23rd but this will only be for an hour 15:30 to 16:30 as judging will start by 17:00 hrs at the latest on the show day to ensure an earlier finish, as trialled successfully last year.

WINTER PREPARATION

Apologies for giving the same advice every year but we have a steady flow of new members, so here is a quick guide.

- **Colony size:** colonies of 12 – 15000 bees will winter better than small colonies. Unite small units together around your best queen. You can always split them again in spring to build up your numbers. Uniting colonies is explained on pages 5 and 6.
- **Varroa treatments:** varroa is an ongoing problem. Applying both autumn and winter treatment is useful. Check the instructions for product use if you still have supers on the hive at the time of application.
- **Weatherproof** and pest proof hives are essential. Ensure you have no resident mice before you put the mouse guards on! Strap the floor, boxes and roof together if your bees are on an exposed site.
- **Queen-right.** Young, proven queens are always better than the older ones. They've less chance of becoming a "drone-layer" in early spring, when it's difficult to get replacements, so careful assessment is required before uniting.
- **Sufficient stores.** Assessing the weight of a hive by "hefting" i.e. lifting the hive from behind is an acquired skill. The bees will need as close to 60lbs of winter stores as possible, so whether you are leaving honey on, or topping up with syrup, you will need the equivalent of six full National frames of food in the brood box and a full super. Feeding syrup should be completed before the end of September, as the bees must "ripen" the syrup sufficiently to prevent fermentation, and the air temperature must be warm enough to enable this.
- **Ventilation** – there always disagreement between those who chose moderate ventilation for their hives and those who insulate with polystyrene and carpet! Gentle ventilation prevents damp, which kills more colonies than a cold winter does.

ACARINE

Recently I was asked about acarine, and had to stop and remember what I knew of it (senior moment!) Although it appears on various exam syllabi, few people have ever seen the causative mite, *Acarapsis woodi*, and fewer still could identify the symptoms of its infestation within a hive.

Like varroa, it is classified as a mite. One of a mite's defining features is that it possesses "piercing mouthparts" and both these hive mites most certainly do.

It was identified and named in the UK about a hundred years ago and was, probably incorrectly, named as the principal villain in what is historically referred to as the Isle of Wight disease, which devastated the country's bee population in the Edwardian era.

It is invisible to the naked eye, and requires a dissection and then a microscope to be made visible. Bees breathe by use of spiracles and trachea (holes and tubes respectively). Ten pairs of spiracles run down the sides of each bee, becoming progressively smaller from the thorax to the abdomen. Each spiracle has a covering of fine hairs, which are soft in newly-hatched bees but which stiffen into hard bristles after about three days.

The acarine mites target young bees, push past the soft hairs and lodge themselves in the bees' trachea where they feed and reproduce. The larger spiracles, located in the thorax, are particularly vulnerable to infestation.

Once inside, their mouthparts pierce the tracheal tubes and they feed on the bees' haemolymph. The infestation causes the bee several problems: they are weakened by the loss of haemolymph; mite numbers, particularly after reproduction, can increase to such an extent that they effectively block the trachea and make respiration very difficult; and the soft, flexible tracheal tubing becomes brittle and cracks like a perished hosepipe.

Visible signs of acarine infestation are debatable. Some say that slow crawling bees in significant numbers are a sign, but not all infected bees do this, and other disease problems can cause bees to crawl. The only (fairly!) definitive symptom that I've ever seen was bees, in large numbers, spinning on their backs on the landing board.

There are currently no approved treatments available.

There may be an assumption that acarine is not as prevalent as it once was. Perhaps the strong-smelling varroa treatments, such as the thymol-based ones are keeping both hives mites in check...?

TOP TIP

If you are making up sugar syrup to feed your bees, remember that for winter feeding it is critical to use the correct ratio. Traditionally its 2lbs of sugar to 1 pint water. Only use white sugar as brown sugar causes dysentery.

THE MIND OF THE BEE, A BOOK REVIEW.

Eliza Middleton reviewed Lars Chittka's book *The Mind of the Bee*.

You can read the full review at: <https://theconversation.com/what-constitutes-a-mind-lars-chittka-challenges-our-perception-of-sentience-with-the-smallest-of-creatures-182855>

“Lars Chittka has been researching honeybees for the past 30 years. *The Mind of a Bee* is a collection of his research stories. It also covers the influential figures in bee research and provides a historical perspective on the research that much behavioural work is built on today.

While it is impossible to prove consciousness in another organism, the research Chittka has collated provides a compelling argument. In *The Mind of a Bee*, you will read that bees feel emotions and pain, display metacognition (that is, they know what they know), and show individual differences in their ability to learn, with fast and slow learners. Bees are aware of their bodies and the outcomes of their actions, and they display intentionality through tool use – previously only recognised in humans, primates, and the Corvidae family of birds.

Regardless of whether you believe a bee has a mind or not, globally there has been a change in research practices as invertebrates are seen to experience the world more fully.

Ethics approval is required for work on some invertebrates, including crustaceans and cephalopods, and statements of ethical treatment of other invertebrates are required for submission of manuscripts to some journals. To suggest an invertebrate, such as a bee, may have these fuller experiences of life is no longer attracting ridicule, but instead is creating an uncomfortable space for insect researchers, who may not wish to confront the reality of their experiments.

We have underestimated the intelligence of bees and other “lower” species for far too long; it is time to pay attention. Chittka shows us that bees have the key ingredients of a mind: they have a representation of space, they can learn by observation, and they display simple tool use. Bees have demonstrated a flexible memory, with ideas of what they want to achieve, an ability to explore suitable solutions to get it, and an awareness of the possible outcomes of their own actions.

Experiments have further shown that bees appear to attach emotional states to rewards and punishments. While their biology and experience of the world is very different to ours, it is reasonable to believe that they do indeed possess a mind capable of experiencing the rich tapestry of life we have so long thought only available to us.”

Chittka's book is available from the usual UK suppliers, the price is around £16.

READER'S HIVES



Bob Parnaby sent this picture of what happened to his top-heavy hive.

Bob says there was no permanent damage incurred but he should have remembered his Mechanics lessons from school!