

# The Essex Beekeeper

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Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex  
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## Look Out for the National Honey Show Schedule

There is no County Honey Show this year so why not support the **Essex Section at the National Honey Show** and make it a real showstopper. The show schedules are online now just go to [national honey show](#) There are three trophies to go for plus prize cards & money

The Essex Classes are numbered 261 – 274 on p34 of the schedule.

I will take all your entries to the show & bring them back with all winnings so if you can't get to the show that is no problem. All you have to do is get your entry form in as soon as possible so you have time to get the exhibit labels sent to you. **DO Read the rules in the schedule.**

If you have any problems, get in touch with me, **Jim McNeill** on 07743310143 or e-mail [jimandliz44@aol.co.uk](mailto:jimandliz44@aol.co.uk) & I will do my best to help

The exhibits need to be delivered to me on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> October at  
44 Ascension Road, Chase Cross, Collier Row, Romford, RM5 3RT  
Packed to travel but not too excessively

## WHAT'S ON IN OUR DIVISIONS

September 2021	October 2021
<p><b>2nd: Romford: Glands, pheromones</b> and their influence on how and why the colony behaves as it does. Margaret Thomas NDB. Zoom meeting.</p>	
<p><b>21st: Chelmsford:</b> <b>Chelmsford BKA Honey Show.</b> 19:30 – 21:00 Margaretting Village Hall, Wantz Rd, CM4 OEP</p>	<p><b>19<sup>th</sup> : Chelmsford</b> <b>Bumble Bees</b> 19:30 – 21:00 Margaretting Village Hall, Wantz Rd, CM4 OEP <b>John Taylor</b> will give an overview of the work of BumbleBee Conservation Trust with particular reference to the various outreach and conservation programmes. He will also update us on his project in the Thames Estuary and Essex Coast involving the shrill carder bee. John will also explain the possible conflict between preserving bumblebee habitats and using hives of honey bees to pollinate crops. There will also be an opportunity for <b>Mike Abel</b> to, once again, present his work with bumble bees and the pollination of indoor crops.</p>
<p><b>26th Braintree: Apiary meeting</b> at Daws Hall Trust, Henry Rd, Bures CO8 5EX. (Tel Anthony Start on 07769 681 135)</p>	<p><b>26th Braintree:</b> Sunday <b>Braintree BKA Honey Show.</b> 2pm. White Notley Village Hall Talk on Mead Making whilst judging takes place</p>

- Articles appearing in The Essex Beekeeper are not necessarily the views of either Essex Beekeepers' Association or its Editor.
- To ensure inclusion within the diary of county-wide events would divisions please provide the editor with details of local meetings by the 20th of the previous month.

Many thanks, Dee Inkersole: [editor@ebka.org](mailto:editor@ebka.org)

## Chelmsford Beekeepers' July Meeting - In Person - YAY!



It was a huge pleasure to welcome our members back to a face-to-face meeting, the first in 18 months, on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> July. This was held outside Margaretting Village Hall to be as Covid safe as possible. Despite the heat wave and a tropical downpour 2 hours before the event, more than 70 people turned up to celebrate, chat and buy second hand beekeeping equipment. There were lots of bargains and it was a lovely warm evening.

What became clear as the fun progressed was how much beekeepers need to compare notes and seek advice of each other. None more so than our new beekeepers who have had to take up their hive tools in very difficult circumstances. 2020 and 2021 have been challenging years for all of us and it was lovely to talk things over as well as investigate/purchase all the different bee equipment for sale.

After an initial glass of fizz our Chair, Brian, opened the sale. Pam Mortimer (Hughes as was) put on an astonishing spread of yummy food, which we all really enjoyed, and Fiona generally mugged people over to buy raffle tickets - Juliette won the gin in case anyone wondered. Jan had all the CBK fleeces, badges, caps and polo shirts for sale and a Flow Hive was put up for sale in a sealed bid format. David Cameron manned a wax exchange and our Library books were available to hire. The beginners were finally able to receive their goody bags (thank you Wendy B) and Wendy Swift brought a good selection of things, including my personal favourite Bee Quick, from The Bee Shed.



The array of beekeeping paraphernalia for sale was staggering, things you certainly didn't know you needed as well as actual hives, brood boxes, supers, crown boards, foundation and suits. The 'Communal Table' run by Mike Abel and his lovely assistant Nick Cutting also benefitted from equipment gifted to Chelmsford - thank you to those generous people.

Finally thank you to all the members who made it such a good evening including all of you who helped clear up, Brian and Jon who masterminded the whole operation and Margaret for producing a thorough risk assessment to make us Covid secure. These events would not be possible without the lovely group of people that make up Chelmsford Beekeepers. See you in August!

***Fiona Cutting, Chelmsford BKA***



## EBKA General Husbandry Course Training - Queen rearing with Ted Gradosielski

We have been extremely fortunate in Essex to have been supported by our expert beekeepers in preparation for 'The General Husbandry' examination. The course is very thorough and has greatly developed the beekeeping skills within those of us who have done our Basic exam and have kept bees for some years. I wish the best of luck to those of us who are ready to be examined this summer.

One of the requirements is to 'Evidence the breeding of queens by a simple method from a chosen colony'. We have all put test frames into colonies we think are queen-less, and split and combined colonies, thus promoting the production of new queens. However, technical queen rearing by grafting has been read about, but not undertaken by many of us.

Ted Gradosielski is an expert Essex beekeeper. He offered to show us how it is done. A group of us signed up for the training at Ted's Apiary in Nazeing. Visiting other people's apiaries is always an education, and Ted's set-up is most impressive and professional.

The process of grafting involves identifying appropriate donor colonies; collecting a frame with eggs or very young brood; returning them to a host colony; and growing them on to adult queens ready to introduce to colonies.

Ted had selected appropriate colonies for us to use, and we trotted out into his apiary to choose a frame with eggs.



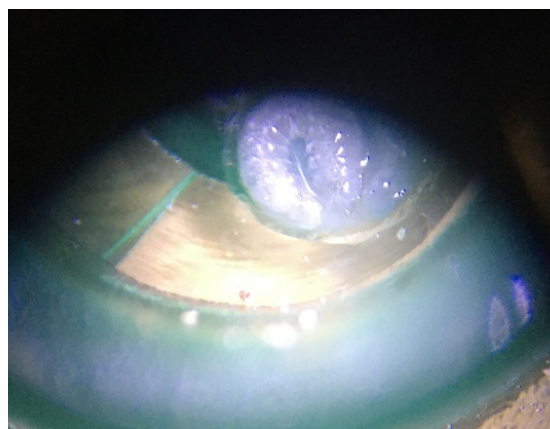
On returning to his lab, we each filled a frame, which is designed for Queen rearing, with 14 cell cups, with one grub in each cell. This involved removing a grub from the brood frame and placing it into the cell cup without damaging it. Grafting tools and fine brushes were used, along with a magnifying glass and very steady hands!

The cups were then inspected under a microscope

to make sure they were still alive and well, and fit to grow on into queens. Ted encouraged us to grade the grubs in order to anticipate which might be most successful.



These frames were then placed in a receiving colony above the queen excluder, for bees to work their magic and feed the grubs into queens. Careful records are kept, and critically, the queen rearing calendar needed to be worked out.





The photograph above shows a 50% success rate for sealed queen cells from queen cell cups. Not bad!

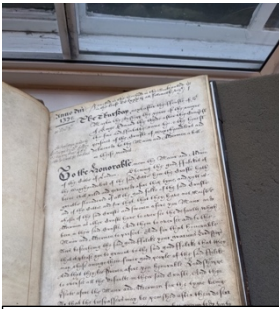
Ted then collected the queen cells and put them into his incubator. Thirteen days later we returned, hopeful to check the progress. Some queens had hatched, others were still tucked up in their cells. Ted very generously allowed us each to take a few home. So, now I have a hive with good tempered, productive Essex bees, and the confidence to graft my own queens next year, courtesy of Ted Grads. Many thanks from us all.



**Margaret Cameron** (*Chelmsford Beekeepers*)



# Harlow Member Becomes Master of the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers



The Original Ordinances of 1371

On 5<sup>th</sup> August, **Anthony Bickmore**, a long-time Harlow Division member of EBKA, became Master of the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers before a service at St Vedast-alias-Foster in the City of London.

A skep and beautiful tablet of moulded wax was presented at the altar.



The installation ceremony in the Wax Chandler's Hall



St Vedas - alias - Foster Church

Anthony follows a long line of Masters since the Company was granted Ordinances by Edward III in 1371. The Company was formed by those in London involved in the beeswax trade. The Company controlled the quality and price of the wax, employed apprentices and undoubtedly worked closely with the many beekeepers who were their suppliers.

Beeswax found many uses but most particularly for church candles. At the time

**Richard Ridler** - Saffron Walden Division

we were a Roman Catholic country, and the Catholic Church required all candles to be of beeswax. Huge quantities were used, and it also explains why monasteries became centres of beekeeping.

You probably know about Brother Adam and the Buckfast (Abbey) strain of bees.



Our Chair, Jane Ridler and Anthony Bickmore (with his skep)

The Company continues to provide candles to St Paul's Cathedral today, but members now limit themselves to charitable activities and to enjoying each other's company. Congratulations to Andrew!

## Our Journey to the Basic Assessment

There, on the ground behind the hive, we spotted the Queen bee, clambering awkwardly up a bright blade of grass. Moments earlier she had been busily inspecting cells on a brood frame, deciding if they were up to scratch for her to lay an egg into. Then, suddenly, she fell.

Disaster! How on earth had this happened? OMG.....Help!!

Hopefully we're not the only ones who make mistakes in our beekeeping, but immediately after this incident, once we'd carefully rescued the Queen and placed her back in with her colony, Jessie and I decided it was high time we improved our bee husbandry skills.



Paul and Jessie Hood

We've been keeping bees for 3 years and were mostly self-taught, supported mainly by tips picked up from some excellent beekeeping books.

Generally, we felt that we were doing ok at it, but from time to time things would happen that reminded us we didn't have a firm grip on the basics. That almost fateful day when our poor handling of a frame could have cost the colony their Queen showed that our intervention as beekeepers was sometimes risking more harm than good to our bees, so we took action to change and improve. Later that same day we enrolled for the BBKA Basic Assessment Exam

To spoil the story, 6 months later we received an email from BBKA to say we had both passed the Basic Assessment with Credit!

In the time between the terrible incident of the dropped Queen bee and taking the Basic Assessment, we learned a lot about beekeeping and highly recommend the process to anyone who hasn't yet taken the plunge. We know that many, if not most people reading this will have vastly more experience than us at the art of beekeeping, but if you know anyone who might be thinking about taking their Basic Assessment, show them this article and tell them from us that they should go for it!



Over and above improving our general knowledge about beekeeping, we also discovered:

- That studying for an exam really focuses the attention and makes the process of learning about beekeeping more likely to be retained.
- The basic do's and don'ts that make hive inspections safer and less stressful for the bees and more efficient for the beekeeper.
- That we really didn't know enough about two key areas of successful beekeeping; swarm prevention & control and inspecting for diseases.
- There are some lovely people in local BBKA groups who are happy to give their time and share their knowledge to help you improve your skills.

We owe a big thank you to two people in particular who helped us on our journey to passing the BBKA basic assessment. Firstly, to Alan Hayden-Case who is forever generous to us with his time and support whenever we come unstuck; and also to Jan French of Braintree Beekeepers' Association, who helped us with the exam preparation and very kindly gave her time to put us through a mock exam.

We are now confident that the embarrassing episode of almost losing her majesty the Queen bee through our own lack of skills will not be repeated! Thank you to all who helped us on this first stage of our journey to become better beekeepers!

**Paul and Jessie Hood** (Braintree Beekeepers' Association)



## Taking your Basic Assessment

If you've been keeping bees for a year or two you may well have heard talk of the basic assessment. If like me, you know of it but not really what it's all about or why you would want to do it then hopefully I can answer these here and also throw in a few tips.

I started keeping bees in 2019, I'd joined Chelmsford division and completed a beginners' course with them. My first colony like many others was a nuc which I moved into my apiary and away I went. The following two years were a bit of a rollercoaster and a very steep learning curve from believing I had diseases I didn't, to splits, queens in supers and even a queen right colony in the brood box and another in the super! Thinking about it that was my first year, the second has been lots easier because I've read everything I can get my hands on and to be honest, relaxed. The biggest thing I've learnt is sometimes you just gotta let 'em sort out their own dramas.



*Figure 1; First nuc transferred to full hive*

So, fast forwards to this spring. I feel I have a good knowledge and feel for my colonies. I've got to know them and their moods and their behaviour tells me almost as much as an inspection does. My colonies have expanded to five across two apiaries and I decided to do my basic assessment next year in 2022. I decided to prepare for next year by attending a division preparation course consisting of theory and practical sessions which were very informative and well run. However, about 5 minutes into the practical I realised that I'm ready for my assessment now.

So, what did I discover during the course? That the basic assessment is not a big scary test, more a session demonstrating your knowledge and skills to a fellow beekeeper who wants you to pass and will guide you and teach you some new skills too. You have to be prepared to learn and do things the "right" way but that's basically the way we are taught in beginners' courses. The syllabus is available online and a book or two and some Googling can get you up to speed with everything you need to know. Driving home from the course I made the decision to book my assessment this year if it was still possible. Assessments run from spring to July/August, and I was able to get booked up with about 2 weeks to prepare and so started reading and getting to grips with the syllabus.



There may be one or two diseases/pests you won't know and probably a few more you should know better. Read about them and learn the signs, effects and treatments. Know which ones are notifiable and the actions to take if you suspect you have them. Remember there's two strains of Nosema and that Acarine is not a medicine for humans! And finally, be sure to know the differences between EFB and AFB.

Get some spare kit out or cardboard boxes if you've no spare brood boxes etc., set them up and go through the process of combining colonies and swarm control so it's fresh in your mind. Just learn one technique don't confuse yourself when the nerves kick in with more. Get your head round Varroa detection and treatment, also that they are responsible for many viruses and know the main ones. Brush up on your basic knowledge, don't just assume you know it. The BBKA Guide to Beekeeping book takes you step by step through the areas of the assessment and their healthy hive guide is perfect for the assessment and beyond. I've used other books but I think these two in particular are aimed at this level. And the BBKA writes the criteria assessed during the practical test.

The assessment itself takes place at the assessor's apiary not your own. It states that it should last an hour but there's a lot to get through; mine was an hour and a half and I've heard of them lasting much longer. It is defined in the syllabus what the hive and colony must consist of so you will know what to expect and there's nothing to trip you up. I'd done my homework and felt confident but still had a few nerves. Like always impressions count, a new hive tool and gloves, clean smoker, suit and wellies will go a long way to a good start. Link this with an organised bag/box and you've demonstrated a knowledge of several points on the syllabus already. Remember everything in general chat with your assessor reflects on your knowledge and can help your pass.

We started with the practical first, don't rush to the hive. Take your time to light your smoker properly, check your suit zips too. From this point on your hive tool doesn't leave your hand, keep smoker within reach but don't put your hive tool down. Ask for background information of the colony, is the queen marked, if so what colour. Ask if the brood box is warm or cold way. As you approach the hive concentrate, acknowledge it, mention the type, look for the entrance what else is around it. From here on in explain everything you're seeing and doing, answer any questions accurately but don't stop concentrating. After smoking the entrance step back, watch the bees, comment on what they're bringing in, what this tells you. If you remembered to ask cold or warm decide now where you wish to stand and where the roof etc. will go.

Name the parts as you remove them, remember this is someone else's hive and colony. Show it respect ask before doing things like using dummy boards to cover frames. Work slowly, confidently and with purpose like you would in your own colony describing and explaining everything you see. Comment on the healthy brood and laying pattern you see (sealed, larvae decreasing in size, egg, stores). Mention any disease you see, there shouldn't be much but maybe a little chalk brood. Ask questions like, are you intending to swap out the very dark comb on the outside of the brood box at the end of the season? The answers probably yes but it's a good way to demonstrate your knowledge. If you make mistakes, say you're not happy with that and make it right or do it again. Know what's on the syllabus so you know what to comment on.

After the practical if you're as unlucky, as I was, you'll be followed and dive bombed by a couple of the colony and then stung! Not ideal but use it to discuss the first aid stuff and colony traits you do and don't want to see. After a brisk exit (scurry away) get your bits back from the assessor, thank him/her and apologise for running away and being stung! Now it's onto the theory and you're on the home straight. Relax, this is a chat with a beekeeper, answer the questions, stick to what you know. The required knowledge is quite basic if you know anything on the question it's likely enough blagging more could demonstrate a lack of deeper knowledge. This all done, it's time for the frame build, I was lucky and the assessor provided the frame, foundation and tools but take your own. Worst case it looks good, best case, you need them, so you don't fail!

I passed my assessment but it's so much more than a result; it's a confirmation of knowledge and skills. I picked up some tips and learnt about the [Demeree](#) swarm control method which I intend to try instead of my usual [Pagden](#) swarm control. It feels like I've formalised my journey; committed to my new hobby. Members of the club have a warmer attitude to me as well, I think they respect the commitment and demonstration that I'm serious about wanting to progress.



If you can keep bees confidently for a few years you can pass the assessment with maybe a little bit of reading. A training session with a division would confirm to yourself you are ready. With the right preparation it's possible to get a good mark and learn a bit on the way and it's also great seeing someone else's colony and to receive their feedback. I enjoyed the experience and would highly recommend it. Don't put it off, commit and go for it, you'll walk away a better beekeeper more confident beekeeper. More importantly, enjoy it, it's your hobby!

**Dave Garratt**, (Chelmsford BKA and Essex Bee Health Officer)



## Prices of Granulated Sugar



Here is a comparison of the main supermarket prices for granulated white sugar as of July 3<sup>rd</sup> [Editor: and updated on 22 August 2021].

Eric McLaughlin raised the point at our July committee meeting that food deliveries have already been seriously compromised by the shortage of HGV drivers. We will all be needing sugar during September to feed our bees because you must leave them enough honey to see them through the winter.

Retailer	Cost for 1kg	Cost for 2kg	Cost for 5kg	Bulk Buy
Aldi	65p			
Sainsbury	75p		£3.50	
Tesco	65p	£1.25	£3.15	
Morrison	65p	1.24		
Waitrose	65p	£1.25		
B & M	65p			
Booker Foods	66p	£2.09	£6.99	25kg – £16.50
M&S Foods	65p			

Best Buy for each retailer (except Sainsbury)

Cheapest sugar per kg of all retailers in table

They will need approximately 40 lbs (or about 20kgs) of stores per full hive. That's equivalent to 10 brood frames full. If you don't provide sugar, your bees could well starve, so think ahead.

Booker Foods are wholesalers and have branches in Yeovil and Taunton, but interestingly, they are more expensive than every supermarket, bar one, and their 25kg sacks also work out at 1p dearer per kg than every high street supermarket and so there is absolutely no saving in buying in bulk.

The message is simply this. Think ahead as prices are on the rise and there could well be shortages.

*[I have highlighted the best buy for each retailer and in red for the cheapest per kg in this table, i.e., Tesco's 5kg bag. - Ed.]*

***With thanks to Somerton and District BKA via eBees.***

## Reuse of Honey Jars – the Regulations

There has long been debate about whether it is permissible to re-use honey jars and lids. Several years ago I contacted the Food Standards Agency and was told categorically that it is **not** permissible to re-use either jars or lids. However, I contacted them again recently and this is the response I received.

Please read it very carefully as it is open to misinterpretation

Thank you for your enquiry, I hope the following proves of assistance to your members.

Food Business Operators (FBO) are responsible for ensuring the food they place on the market is safe under retained European Regulation (EC) 178/2002 - Article 14, and thus the duty and onus is on the FBO to ensure that the food they place on the market is fit for human consumption. Decisions on whether to re-use returned jars and how potential risks should be managed is a decision of the business owner.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2002/178/article/14>

Re-using glass containers like jam jars occasionally to supply food does not present a food safety concern. This means it is safe to sell home produced honey in re-used jars at village fetes **and other occasional events**. The key thing is good hygiene – if the jars are re-used they should be free from chips and cracks, and should be clean and sterilised prior to each use. **The regulations on food contact materials apply to businesses** and these regulations are unlikely to apply to the use of jars for occasional community and charity food provision.

It would be the decision of the local enforcement authority as to whether any particular reuse constituted an infringement of the legislation, as they are tasked to examine compliance paperwork for food contact materials and the circumstances of the placing of the packaged food onto the market.

For the lids, it is advisable not to re-use these as they have a gasket within that is designed for single use. In this instance, appropriate lids will therefore need to be procured as films are unlikely to be suitable for honey.

The legislation on the safety of the packaging your membership will need to comply with is can be viewed at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-contact-materials-regulations>

For any food contact material or article placed onto the market in England, the relevant regulations will be the Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended\*)



<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/2619/contents/made>. \*The original Regulations for England have been amended as per the following individual amending Regulations and will also need to be referred to:

The Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) (EU Ex- it) Regulations 2019: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2019/704/made>

The Food and Feed Hygiene & Safety (Misc. Amendments etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020:  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/1504/contents/made>

The Food and Feed Hygiene & Safety (Misc. Amendments) (England) Regulations 2020: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/1410/body/made>  
Unfortunately there isn't a consolidated version that you can refer to at the moment.

I hope this proves of value to you and your membership.

**Mr Vincent Greenwood** Policy Advisor | Food Contact Materials

Food Standards Agency 6th Floor | Clive House | 70 Petty France | London | SW1H 9EX  
[Vincent.greenwood@food.gov.uk](mailto:Vincent.greenwood@food.gov.uk)

*With thanks to Somerton and District BKA via eBees.*

## Honey Buckets – Food Grade Quality

Capacity: 11.3 litres / 32 pounds

With lid and reinforced handle

Price: £2 each

Telephone: David Tyler

01279 730 228 or mobile: 07955 768 124



# 90th National Honey Show:

**21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2021**

[www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk)

We are delighted to be planning a live National Honey Show this October, and to invite you to join us at Sandown Park and/or online. With lingering uncertainty about whether there will be any restrictions due to COVID-19 this Autumn, the committee have instigated some contingency planning, so please take note: some things will be a little different this year.

Of course, we hope these advance preparations will prove superfluous in hindsight, but they will nevertheless smooth the way for reduced queuing for the show to take place as we hope, just as normal.

Admission to the Show: ONLY by prebooked tickets/paid up membership

- To reduce queuing at the show, admission to the show **MUST** be pre-booked.
- Day admission tickets can be purchased from the website shop: [www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk) from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 11<sup>th</sup> October.
- National Honey Show membership, giving the usual admission for all three days of the show, can be bought or renewed also from the website shop [www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk)
- Printed Show Schedules will be posted to members and UK day ticket holders who choose to receive a posted copy.
- The shop will close on 11<sup>th</sup> October to allow admission tickets and Show Schedules to be posted.

**Admission will be STRICTLY by pre booked ticket.**

## Show Schedule 2021 and new classes

Our spectacular display of entries, the Show Schedule of Classes, (especially adapted for the 2021 show), is now available on our website:

[www.honeyshow.co.uk/files/2021/Full-Schedule-of-Classes-Guidance-Rules.pdf](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/files/2021/Full-Schedule-of-Classes-Guidance-Rules.pdf)

Please visit the website for further details, including planned lectures and workshops.

## Lecture Programme and Live Streaming

We are keen to ensure the lectures take place safely, all within the large halls as usual. But please bear with us: if we have to implement distancing and a one way system, there will obviously not be the usual amount of lecture hall and workshop spaces available.

We also plan **live streaming** to National Honey Show supporters who are not able to attend the show. Members can watch online using the email address lodged with the membership secretary. For non members worldwide, tickets for access to the live lectures will be on sale on our website after

1<sup>st</sup> September for £5, to cover viewing of the entire lecture programme for the duration of the show.

The main lecture programme will be available for all to view, free of charge, on The National Honey Show YouTube Channel in the usual way a few months after the show.

Please visit the website of the National Honey Show for further details including: the venue and planned lectures and workshops

[www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk)



## A Case of the Vapours

*"Life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent."* [1]

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

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A strange thing happened in the out- apiary last week.

*"To begin at the beginning."* [2]



I inspected the colonies in my apiary in Derbyshire last week (mid-June) intending, amongst other things, to mark and clip two queens from this year. I routinely catch the queens with my fingers, wearing nitril gloves, and place them in a marking cage with a foam plunger. I find it convenient and easy to do, avoiding the need to take off my gloves to handle the queen further (especially after showing off my skill in queen-handling to a mentee last year and having the queen fly off my finger, never to be seen again.)

*I applied mild pressure to the queen with the plunger, and before I had the chance to mark her, she stopped moving. Releasing the pressure revealed a motionless queen who rolled over onto her back, legs in the air with a definite dead look. My first thought was that I had squashed her. Closer inspection showed some signs of movement in the abdomen. I marked and clipped her anyway and watched for further signs of life. After a few minutes, she started moving, rather unsteadily at first, then more strongly, and I returned her to the colony...*

Half an hour later, precisely the same thing happened with another new queen in the apiary. This one took a little longer to come round but recover she did. On inspection a little while later, both queens were doing their business as if nothing had happened.

In all my queen-marking days, this has never happened before and to happen twice consecutively was very strange. So, I set about finding more about this 'fainting' phenomenon. It seems pretty common, judging by comments in online forums in the UK and the USA. I would be interested if any readers have had similar experiences.

I found a link to a Q+A page in the American Bee Journal from November 2020 addressing this phenomenon by Prof. Jamie Ellis of Florida. He saved me a lot of leg-work by searching the sources, most of which seem to be old books, unsurprisingly primarily American. No academic papers. The behaviour has been termed 'catalepsy' [Brunnich 1922],

fainting' [Miles 1922], 'shock' [Latham 1922], 'epilepsies' [Laidlaw and Eckert 1962] and 'a case of the vapours' [Fray 2021]



*A Fainting Queen?*

To quote from 'Honeybee Pests, Predators, & Diseases' by Calderone and Tucker from 1997; "When it happens, it occurs just after a queen is picked off the comb by her wings. According to Latham (1922), the queen hooks her abdomen forward, stiffens momentarily, becomes motionless for a few minutes, and then gradually revives and returns to normal activity. Not every queen who hooks her abdomen is so affected, but Latham believed it most

likely to occur in large queens with enlarged abdomens that are laying heavily. In Miles' (1922) experience, catalepsy happened only to young queens; moreover, most of the cases described by Brunnich (1922) were also young queens. In some cases, the queen does not revive, and death results (Miles 1922). The cause of catalepsy is unknown but may result from a temporary nervous disorder." [3]

We tend not to handle older queens, so it is hard to accept that this occurs predominantly in young queens. 'A temporary nervous disorder' covers just about anything! Certainly, insects do not faint as humans do from a drop in blood pressure. Interestingly, both queens affected in my case were related; they shared a grandmother, and they were both mated in Derbyshire with local drones. Could there be a genetic propensity for this, given that I have not seen it with queens at home in Cheshire from the same queen lineage?



*Foam plunger device commonly used for marking queens*

Jamie Ellis wonders if this is a 'playing dead' behaviour useful at times of stress facing a predator. He also suggests that it could be a stress response like 'shock.'

There is a well-recognised phenomenon in the animal kingdom called thanatosis, seen in many different creatures, including reptiles and some mammals (including opossums, hence the term 'playing possum'.) Many of you will have seen this with newts if you try to pick them up. They lie motionless with legs outstretched until left alone. Ladybirds are probably the most familiar insects to do it as well as click beetles.

It appears to be a behaviour 'in extremis' to reduce predation risk by playing dead. We know that in honey bees, movement is an essential visual signal. Playing dead may, in some instances, cause a predator to lose interest and look for something more challenging.

The one thing that seems common to all those exhibiting thanatosis is being forcefully held. This triggers an unlearned reflex mediated by the insect's brain and basal ganglia.[4] So, unlike Sherlock Holmes, (who took up beekeeping in his retirement), I have not really got to the bottom of the conundrum, but at least some light has been shed on a strange phenomenon. Holmes retired aged 49 to keep bees on the Sussex Downs and wrote a



popular beekeeping manual (though I have not seen it in the South Cheshire library catalogue). He never lost his mistrust of the countryside, however.



*"It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside."*[5]

Perhaps he visited Derbyshire...

[Ed: I think this is a joke understood by those from Cheshire!].

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With thanks to David Fray of Cheshire BKA via eBees



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# Grilled Avocado Chicken

Grilled California Avocado Chicken is tender chicken marinated in an amazing honey and garlic balsamic sauce and is grilled to perfection! Topped with a thick slice of mozzarella cheese and avocados, tomatoes, and basil, this chicken is INCREDIBLE!!

## Ingredients:

Balsamic vinegar	Chicken
Honey	breasts
Garlic	Mozzarella
Olive oil	Avocados
Italian seasoning	Tomatoes
Salt & pepper	Basil

1. Marinate chicken: In a medium sized bowl, whisk the balsamic vinegar, honey, garlic, olive oil, Italian seasoning, and salt and pepper. Add the chicken breasts and coat. Marinate for 30 minutes.

2. Mix avocado topping: Meanwhile, in a small bowl add the avocado, tomato, basil and salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

3. Grill: Heat the grill to medium high heat. Grill the chicken on each side about 6 minutes or until cooked throughout and no longer pink.

4. Dress chicken and serve: Top with mozzarella cheese and avocado, tomato basil mixture. Drizzle with balsamic vinegar and serve immediately.

Usually, when something looks and tastes this good, I know I am going to have to put in lots of ingredients and lots of time to make it. However, this avocado chicken comes together so quickly and easily. One of the best things I have thrown on the grill.

You will find more information, including a video, at the following site:

<https://therecipecritic.com/grilled-california-avocado-chicken/>



***With thanks to Cheshire BKA via eBees***

## The Fly?!

Raising queens has helped my beekeeping enormously. I have been able to compare hives headed by home bred queens with 'self-made' queens. The latter tends to occur when bees swarm or when I make a 'walk away split'. I leave them with one queen cell from which to create a new mother. It's a comparison between average and selected queens. The average queens are often fine, but they tend to be slightly more swarmy and a bit grumpier than daughters of my best stock. I graft from queens that haven't swarmed, make lots of honey and don't sting very often. I can choose to control the queen half of the equation; the drones are up to nature.

Last year I adopted a lazy policy towards nucleus colonies that I sold. I would move five frames and the queen from a strong 'double-nuc' to a correx box and, after that, to a new owner. I left the remaining bees to re-queen themselves, and within six weeks, I could do it again. Some of the nucs that I sold have done exceptionally well, and the owners are delighted. However, a few swarmed in May, and a couple have been bad-tempered. I'm not going to do that again. I know swarming could have been due to a lack of space, particularly as beginners only have foundation frames, but I'm not too fond of the feeling it gave me. From now on, the nucs that I sell get a queen from my 'queen unit' if I can call it that.

Each stage of making queens started off being tricky until it wasn't. Having tried a few things, I have now arrived at my preferred way of making a cell builder colony. It's a Demaree with the grafts going into the top box once I've made sure any emergency queen cells are gone. Periodically I rotate brood frames from downstairs to the top. I have done three rounds of grafts this season, and it works well. I only have 15 or 16 grafts on the frame, which suits me. Presumably, if I wanted to scale things up to 40 odd grafts, I would have to make a giant queenless cell builder with loads of nurse bees, like many commercial queen producers.



*A couple of bars of queen cells*

I leave the grafted cells in the cell builder until they have been capped. About nine days after grafting

day, they go into mating nucs or the incubator. Now, I'm sure there are catastrophes to come, but this stage of the proceedings has become relatively straightforward. Practise makes perfect and all that.

Speaking of mating nucs, I have Kielers, mini-plus and full framed nucs with a divider (three frames on each side). I also have some homemade three framers. A bit of a mixed bag, you might say. I used to find the Kielers very tricky, but this season, after reading 'Managing Mininucs' by Ron Brown, I have seen the light. The only problem is that the smaller the mating nuc, the quicker they fill it up with brood, meaning they could fly off if you aren't on the ball. I love the mini-plus hives, although I'm not experienced enough to say they are my favourites. But they are. Second place goes to the poly nuc with a divider down the middle. So far.

Now that I am proficient at producing queen cells from my best queens (grafting is easy now) and getting them mated is simple when the sun comes out, my next



hurdle has loomed before me. Catching queens shouldn't be that hard, should it? They are in a small box with only a few frames...how hard can it be? Finding the lighter coloured queens is easy, but the dark ones are trickier. Having found her, I have to mark her thorax, maybe clip a wing, and put her in a cage with some attendant workers. Easier said than done, but it's another of those beekeeping skills that becomes second nature over time.

The main problem I have is that the thin rubber gloves I wear become sticky with propolis and nectar. I don't want to pick the



*Sticky fingers - propolis gets everywhere*

queen up with those, but if I take my gloves off to pick her up, my fingers soon become a sticky mess too, so that if I'm catching several queens, it's a problem. The

answer appears to be to unglove myself to pick up the queen and then re-don the gloves once she's in the cage. Bit of a palaver.

The answer, in my limited experience, is NOT to pick up the queen with some device. I tried that twice today, and after a bit of fumbling, the queens took flight! After all the effort to get to this point, I can tell you it's not a pretty sight. Apparently, if you stand still and leave the lid off for a few minutes, the queen usually returns. They did. Surely this is the last piece of the puzzle to solve. After that, I'll be a queen raising master – no? I asked Mike Palmer, and he said that sometimes queens fly off, especially in hot weather. He said it's best to catch queens on cooler days or cool mornings. Another piece of knowledge that

I could have done with sooner, but good to know anyway.

I got some other advice from an old beekeeper that really helped. I now spray some water onto the queen or bees that I'm going to pick up. It makes things much easier and so far, she hasn't flown off. Peter Carefoot told me about something sold by Thornes which dissolves propolis on gloves but I haven't tried that yet.

The way I get attendant bees with the queen is not something that I've read about, but it's bound to be used by somebody else. I put the queen in a cage on her own. Then I scrape up some workers into another cage and seal that up. Next, I put one cage alongside the other and slide the plastic screens back a little on both, holding them together so that the bees can wander between the two cages but can't escape. Once the queen has most workers with her, and she's away from where the plastic slider is open, I close it up. It works very well, and I don't have to pick up



*Caged queens with some workers*

workers. However, after reading a piece by 'The Apiarist', I ordered a load of JZ-BZ cages to try. That will be back to picking up workers, I suppose.

I make the queen candy for queen cages by combining powdered sugar with corn syrup.

**Steve Donohoe of Cheshire BKA via eBees**

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