

The Essex Beekeeper

2022



Monthly Magazine of the
Essex Beekeepers' Association
www.ebka.org

Furthering the Craft of Beekeeping in Essex
Registered Charity number 1031419



What's happening in our Divisions?

Braintree

White Notley Village Hal

Friday 28 January at 7.30pm. AGM followed by coffee and biscuits and a bee-related film

Saturday 26th February ANNUAL DINNER at 7.30pm at Rivenhall Golf Club, Witham.

If members of other divisions would like to attend, contact Brian on 07979 837974. The cost will be £30 with payment being required by the first week of February

Chelmsford

Margaretting Village Hall, Wantz Rd, Margaretting, Ingatestone CM4 0EP, UK

18 January at 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm

Zoom: AGM followed by Alternative Beehives & Alternative beekeeping with Richard Alabone

15 February at 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm tbc

Colchester

Langham Community Centre, School Rd, Langham, Colchester CO4 5PA

Thursday, 27 January 19:30 AGM Meeting

Thursday, 24 February 19:30 Subject tbc

Harlow

The King's Church, Red Willow, Harlow

3 Feb 2022 at 8:00 pm – 10:00 pm. Subject tbc

Maldon & Dengie

The OAKhouse, High Street, Maldon CM9 5PR

Monday 17 January 7.30pm for 8pm with Guest speaker

Peter Aldridge – "Top Bar and Warré Hives"

Monday 21 February 7.30pm for 8pm guest speaker:

Ted Gradosielsk "*Queen Rearing*"

Romford

Chadwick Hall rear of St Michaels Church RM2 5EL

Thu 3 February, 20:00 – 22:00 Spring Preparation with Pat Allen

Saffron Walden

Fri 21 January 08:00 PM Zoom: Virtual AGM

Thu 3 February 08:00 PM. Zoom: Beekeeping in Skeps - with Chris Park

Thu 24 February 07:45 PM. Zoom: Apitherapy with Dr Gerry Brierley

Southend

Weds 26 January at 7.30 Zoom: EGM to present the End of Year Accounts plus Margaret Thomas NDB will give a talk.

Weds 23 February 7.30. Zoom: Planting for Bees – a talk by Rosi Rollings (from www.rosybee.com a specialist plant nursery and research centre, providing the best plants for bees and other pollinating insects)

AGM of Essex Beekeepers' Association

Date: Saturday 12 March 2022, at 2pm

Venue: New Hall School, Chelmsford



The meeting will follow the normal format: EBKA business, followed by refreshments, and a lecture from a guest speaker.

Speaker: **Dr Paul Hurd**, Queen Mary College, London. He gave a lecture at the 2021 National Honey Show and his topic will be: **“The effects of diet on honeybee development”**.



We are planning to hold an event where EBKA members can meet in person but concerns about Covid will need to be considered. Further information about the AGM will be published in the February issue of the *Essex Beekeeper*.

Vanessa Wilkinson

EBKA Secretary: secretary@ebka.org

Top-bar and Warré hives: Report of a talk given by Peter Aldridge to Braintree Division.

Peter Aldridge visited Braintree Division at White Notley Village Hall on Friday 26th November and gave a talk on top-bar and Warré beekeeping. It was so good to meet inside face-to-face again and have Peter sharing his wealth of knowledge on these more natural (Post Modern[!]) techniques.



preventing wasp attacks, how searching for queen cells is easy and how splitting and combining colonies is convenient and quick. These hives are excellent for someone wanting to use a more natural method and keen to learn to follow the natural instincts of bees. However, honey yields are lower and the need to crush comb rather than use a centrifuge will deter some.

Peter showed us a top bar hive (see left) and later a Warré hive (below), explaining their management and advantages before showing video footage of checking populated hives.

Both are more natural methods of keeping bees. They simulate conditions in the wild, in tree trunks; horizontal in the top bar, vertical in the Warré hive. Both are frameless and don't use foundation so avoid the concerns of introducing chemical residues via wax foundation.

(photo on next page)

Peter showed us how entrances are effective in





Peter warned us about the dangers of incorrect and misleading material online, and the poorly designed top bar hives produced by a major beekeeping equipment supply company. Instead, he suggested the following books which are valuable sources of information.

• **Balanced Beekeeping I: Building a Top Bar Hive** Phil

Chandler 2013 £7.95

- How to Build a Simple Top Bar Hive. Philip Chandler 42 pages of designs by Philip Chandler 2013 see: <https://www.satonmybutt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Phil-Chandler-Top-Bar.pdf>
- Thinking Outside the Box: A Beginner's Guide to Top bar Beekeeping. April Kirkendoll 2019 £15.51
- Advanced Top Bar Beekeeping: Next Steps for the Thinking Beekeeper; Christy Hemenway. 2021, £22.77

The proceeds of the talk were donated by Peter to Bees Abroad. He told us about his involvement with the organisation and how they support female beekeepers in Africa. The income generated can make a tremendous difference to their lives. It's estimated that £1.00 is equivalent to £100 in the world's poorest countries so to "do good better" this is a good investment.

With thanks to John le Seve of Braintree Division for writing this article and to Peter Aldridge for his photos.

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The Handy Book Of Bees



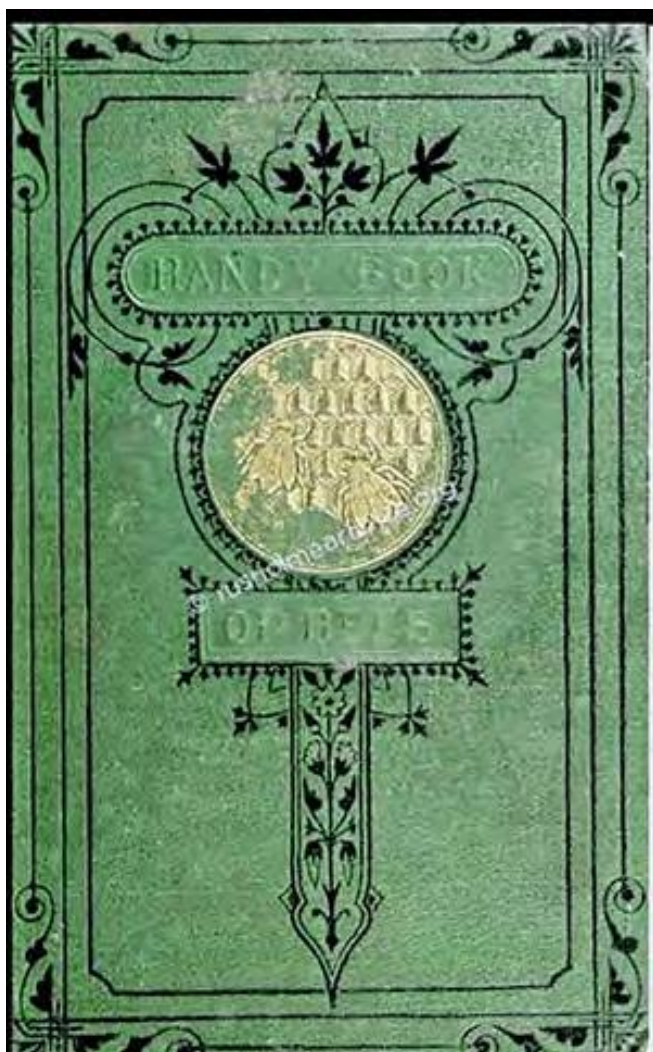
I have always enjoyed reading and, at one time, read everything I could on beekeeping. One of those was 'The Handy Book of Bees' published in 1870, 2nd edition 1875. I have a copy.

Alexander Pettigrew, the author, was a gardener by trade from Carlisle, known as the 'son of the beeman'. He was living at the priory vineyard, Sale, at the time but had previously lived in Rusholme near where I went to school. What caught my eye was his account of loading 15 skeps onto a greengrocers cart at 4 am, then a train at 5.45 am and taking them 25 miles into Derbyshire, leaving them in the care of the stationmaster. His expected yield was 40 to 60 lbs per hive of heather honey.

Pettigrew advocated that cottagers keep bees to supplement their income. He said, "stings do not seem half so painful to the man whose annual proceeds of beekeeping amount to £10 or £20, or £50." His estate on his death in 1884 was £1,327-10-3d, no mean feat for a gardener.

He used straw supers weighing 6 to 12 lbs which he sold complete, whereas the ones heavier with honey did not sell so readily. Bees could also build comb in a bell jar. If doing this, he used an attractive shape to get the best price. The supers were detached from the main skep using wire, and then he smoked out the bees. He employed nadirs on occasion - another skep below the brood nest, allowing the queen to go down and build a new brood nest and let the old hive fill with honey. This could then be sold.

Artificial Swarming to him was drumming the bees, including the queen, out of the strong parent stock into a new hive, leaving it on the old site and moving the old hive to one side. To get honey in early June, when it commanded a better price, he employed 'turnouts'. Twenty-one days after he had swarmed a colony, the old hive would have no brood save a few drone cells. Driving the bees out meant he could sell the honey from the hive when honey was scarce before the main flow.



Hives full of combs, well-built and as free from drone-cells as possible, with a young queen, were preferred for keeping as next year's stock. He condemned sulphuring (killing the bees with the fumes from burning sulphur) and he advocated driving the bees out and uniting to have strong overwintering stocks.

Pettigrew's advice was initially welcomed in articles in the *Beekeepers Record* and *British Bee Journal*, but the BBKA was strongly advocating the use of frame hives, and he lost favour. The book is an interesting read, giving glimpses of Victorian England; there were several reprints, and facsimile copies are available.

With thanks to Ian McLean NDB, of Cheshire Beekeeping Association via eBees.

There is more fascinating information available [here](#):

Surviving Winter

I took the liberty to re-print the 'Beekeeping Year' centrefold item featured in my first edition as editor of this newsletter (pages 10 and 11). It's not perfect - for a start, we are not in Devon, but I think it can help us collect our thoughts as we plan the season ahead. There is a lot of information packed into those two pages.

As you can see, right now, we are in the 'leave bees alone' winter period, except for possibly treating for varroa mites. This assumes that we got things right in the autumn, ensuring plenty of stores are available to the bees. As soon as I shake off my current illness (COVID), I shall be visiting an apiary armed with oxalic acid. Most of the research I have seen shows that the most likely time for colonies to have no brood in winter is November or very early December, although it can vary enormously. I'm not going to pull brood frames out in the middle of winter to find out what's going on either.

I have other apiaries that had Apivar strips in them up to mid-November, so they will not be getting further treatment. As I tried to explain in my 'Meeting Randy Oliver'¹ Zoom talk a while ago, I monitor mites with an alcohol wash and use Randy's spreadsheet varroa model to see if or when I need to treat my bees [[click here to see more information](#)]. I was pleased to see that Prof. David Evans² recently posted an article featuring the very same model. [Prof. D Evans at St Andrew's University – Ed]

I don't stay away from my hives throughout the whole winter. After every storm, I drive to each apiary to check that hives are still intact. My main concern is that lids haven't blown off or that trees haven't fallen onto the hives. I lost five out of six colonies in my third beekeeping season because they blew over, and I didn't check on them for weeks. There's always something waiting to catch you out. I also check the weight of nucleus hives in particular, especially in February, and feed fondant if they are light. I have used fondant infused with pollen at this time to good effect, but some people say that's just very expensive sugar!

For beekeepers who were new in 2021 and probably started with a nucleus colony or a swarm, next year will be your first full season. Exciting times. If your colony is healthy and strong, you may be surprised at how rapidly it

¹ Randy Oliver is a bee farmer in the west of the USA and does some research on various bee-related issues including alcohol wash. He has a [website](#) which contains lots of interesting articles

² [[Prof. D Evans](#) at St Andrew's University.

grows from March onwards. The chart shows that March can be a 'crisis time' because starvation can often occur in early spring.

The bees will collect pollen if the weather is fine in February/March, but nectar may not be so plentiful. They may need some fondant to tide them over until the dandelions are in bloom. Of course, if the weather is grim (not entirely unlikely), the bees will be stuck indoors. I have found that most of my full-sized colonies do well through this 'crisis period' but that the smaller and more vulnerable nucs need some help. It does pay to check the stores situation on all colonies, though.

With many thanks to David Buckley of Cheshire Beekeepers via eBees.



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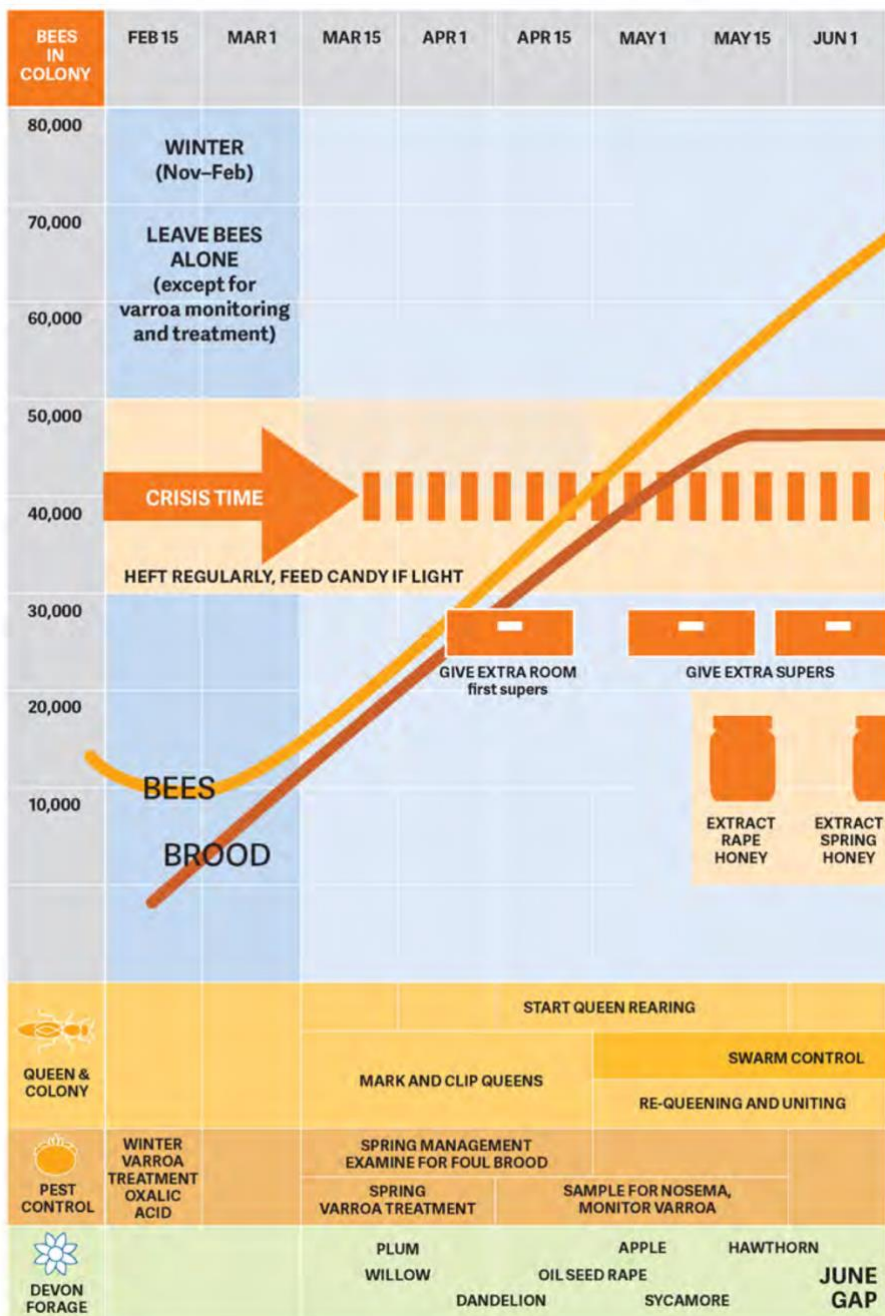
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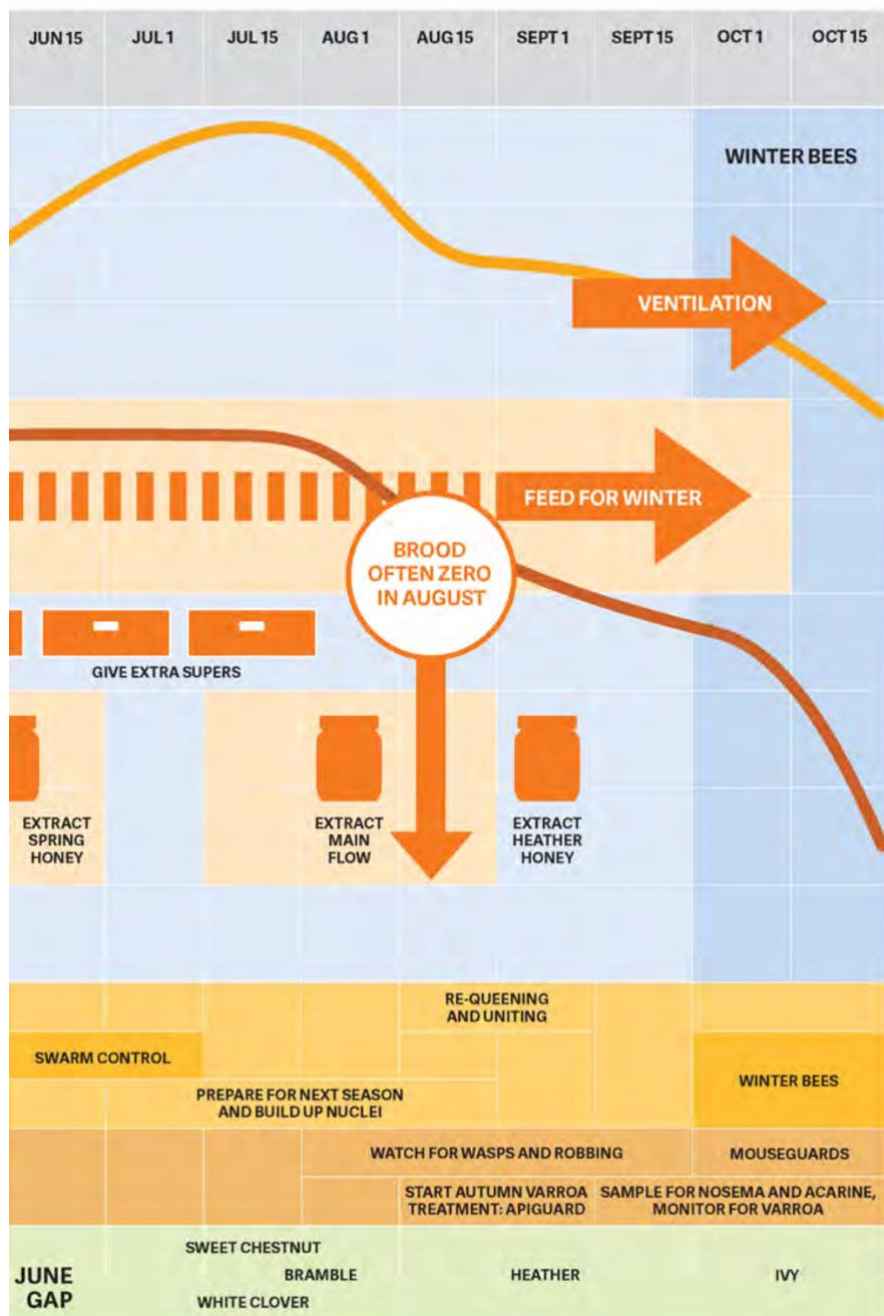
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Address: Meepshole, Great Prestons Lane, STOCK, Essex, CM4 9RL

Please contact **Wendy** to arrange a time on the following days:





A Queen's Second Season

At the end of the 2020 season, I wrote about my first season as the queen, heading my colony from emerging from my cell to the honey harvest. Our beekeeper put a second brood box of foundation above our single brood box to clear the supers in early August. After the removal of 'our' honey, we were generously fed with syrup. It didn't have the aroma of honey. Still, my daughters rapidly converted this food into perfect honeycombs, which enabled me to continue laying late into the autumn. The combs were drawn to the bottom bars and gradually filled with winter supplies.

As the autumn drew into winter, we clustered close to the hive entrance due to the onset of colder weather and shorter days. My egg-laying reduced dramatically. Colony numbers were now about eight to nine thousand workers, no drones, and me. The beekeeper placed a metal mouse guard over the hive entrance before any unwanted visitors attempted to squat for the winter, thus protecting our beautiful combs.



Mouse guard across the hive entrance © Crown Copyright



Oxalic Acid Treatment during winter broodless period. © Crown Copyright

Food consumption was low due to the lack of brood rearing in any number, but a minimum of twenty kilos is required to ensure our survival.

Any colony with a lack of stores can be supported with fondant during the cold months ahead. However, once the fondant is introduced, it must be continued until spring nectar is available. Winter progressed, and around Christmas, the roof of the hive was removed, and cold syrup drizzled on our cluster. My memory recalled that this had happened once before during the previous winter. The beekeeper was following the guidelines for varroa treatment using oxalic acid. We didn't need this treatment, though, as we had started to eliminate the mites ourselves. Oxalic acid is only effective on the mites clinging to the adult bees. Any mites in brood cells are not killed! Fortunately, there is little brood in winter, so little opportunity for the mites to breed.

During the summer, my daughters began to open brood cells with developing sisters in occupation to check the mites' life cycle, and to a degree, this has been successful. Some bees can manage mite levels through hygienic behaviour, and beekeepers should be aware of this.

My second spring came, and our colony proliferated. The double brood chamber provided sufficient space and food to maximise the early season's pollen and nectar. The mouse guard was removed to prevent pollen from scraping off my daughters' legs as they scrambled into the hive with their treasure. At the end of March, two wet supers arrived above a queen excluder. Rapidly the workers set about cleaning these combs, and my young daughters had somewhere to hang out, relieving pressure on the brood nest through overcrowding.

It was a difficult season with very cold weather in May after a mild April when we stored surplus honey. In early June, wet weather intervened, and my workers started to feed one larva with a special diet to rear a queen. This did not worry me, as I thought we would be swarming soon. It did not happen, though.

Unexpectedly the beekeeper removed this cell on capping and three combs of our brood with two frames of stored honey. The removed frames were replaced with foundation, and again the workers set about this drawing new comb for both brood and food.

Early in July, a nectar flow began, and supers were added once again. No more attempts to swarm followed that first queen cell, and a good harvest was achieved. They produced five supers and a nucleus.

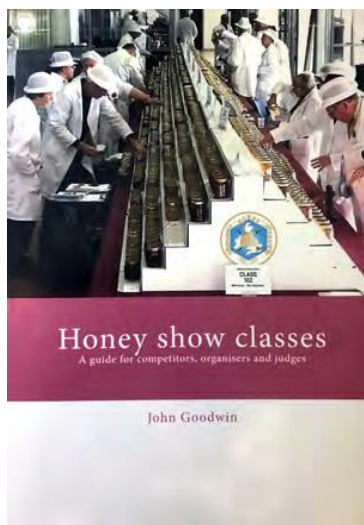
This colony is now heading into a third winter so next year, if she survives, I will be selectively breeding queens from this mother queen. She is proving ideal for propagation as a breeder queen after two seasons of evaluating her merits.



The colony is docile, productive, and dark. Dark docile bees are my focus in beekeeping and handling them without gloves makes our hobby so much more satisfying. The cell removed in a nucleus successfully reared a queen and is now a colony entering its first winter.

I hope the article was of interest and look forward to year three entering its first winter.

With many thanks to David Buckley of Cheshire Beekeepers via eBees



Honey Show Classes

A guide for competitors, organisers and judges by John Goodwin

146 pages

Publisher: Northern Bee Books (2021)

ISBN 978-1-914934-17-9

Price: £16.95 paperback, £33 hardback

Of all the areas related to beekeeping that we find in the published literature, relatively little is written about showing. There is even less covering the details of the show and the perspective of the judges as well as preparation of exhibits. So it is not before time that we have this comprehensive work, addressing all

of these areas. John Goodwin's book is a guide for everyone involved with honey shows – the organisers, judges, stewards and exhibitors alike. And the guidance given here is pertinent to shows at all levels, from a minor branch function to national scale events.

The first part of the book deals with the duties of the show secretary and the details of the show schedules that we see at both local and national honey shows. While some of this information may be quite niche for the average beekeeper, it provides an invaluable insight into the many considerations underlying any honey show. It is easy to take our county honey show for granted, not realising the dedication and expertise required to schedule and stage such an event. This book is undoubtedly enlightening in that respect and is essential reading for anyone involved with the show organisation at any level.

For most, the value of this book will be in those pages dedicated to 'The Secrets of Showing'. Here, the author covers every imaginable variable in the production of prizewinning quality exhibits. Even seasoned exhibitors will learn a thing or two from the hints and tips on these pages. It explains what is expected of the exhibit in each class and category and how to achieve those expectations, and includes some really useful detail on the techniques to

employ in preparation and the equipment you will need to do so. This is particularly useful for those tricky classes that seem to be a perennial struggle for exhibitors, chunk honey being a case in point.

A chapter on schedules provides an insightful view of what the judges are looking for in specific classes. Again, this is worthy of note for the exhibitor, too, as much of the content has a direct bearing on the preparation and staging of and of the ultimate success of the exhibit.

Like everything in beekeeping, showing has evolved over the years and we now see many categories that have been introduced relatively recently. It's good to see that these are covered, with sections dedicated to areas such as observation hives, nuclei, various handicrafts, microscopy and children's classes, as well as the traditional honey, mead and confectionery classes.

From what may seem to be a very specialist subject area, John Goodwin's work contains a wealth of helpful advice to ensure success in the show setting. And there is much to be learned by anyone selling their honey or hive products, as, arguably, we should all strive for the best possible quality of produce.

With many thanks to Lesley Jacques of Cheshire Beekeepers via eBees.

Photographs

The front cover of each magazine has a honey/bee related photo which I obtain from a website that makes copyright free photos available but how much nicer it would be if our own members were able to provide the photos.

During the long, dark, cold evenings maybe those members with a huge stack of digital photos might go through them and pick out a few that would be good for the magazine. Please bear the following points in mind:

- I need portrait pictures although it is often possible to crop a photo to change it from landscape to portrait.
- The picture will be covered by text etc so it would be good if the main action isn't happening where the overlays go.
- The image shouldn't pixelate when made large as on a computer screen.
- A group of people, i.e. established members or those doing their initial training or members involved in an activity at a divisional meeting.

These are just a few ideas. Just in case I get bombarded by huge numbers of images from heaps of members, could I ask that members send me their best 3 photos and we'll take it from there!

Many thanks, Dee; Editor

This Month's Recipe

Many beekeepers have had small yields of honey this year so their stocks are lower than usual, so I was looking for something that used only small amounts of our precious, sticky amber liquid. It being the festive season of Christmas and New Year I wondered about cocktails containing honey ... here are a couple you might like to try!

Pure honey is so viscous it doesn't mix with other liquids easily and so, the advice is to mix equal parts of honey and water to make a syrup; this might need a bit of heat but the resulting syrup can be stored in a fridge for a couple of weeks.

Bee's Knees Cocktail from [Cookie and Kate](#)

INGREDIENTS

- ½ ounce honey syrup (see step 1)
- 1 ounce lemon juice (about ½ medium lemon)
- 2 ounces gin
- Lemon twist, for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. To make the honey syrup: Combine equal parts honey and water (say, 2 tablespoons each if you're only making a few cocktails) in a microwave-safe bowl or small saucepan. Warm in the microwave or over the stovetop just until you can completely stir the honey into the water. Set aside.
2. Before juicing your lemons, use a vegetable peeler to peel off a strip(s) of zest for your twist.
3. To make the cocktail, fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Pour in the honey syrup, lemon juice and gin. Securely fasten the lid and shake until the mixture is very cold, about 30 seconds.
4. Strain the drink into a coupe or martini glass. Twist the lemon peel over the cocktail to release some of its oils, then drop it in. Enjoy while cold.

Bee's Knees Variations

- If you divide one drink between two Champagne glasses and fill the rest with bubbly, you'll find yourself with a French 75.
- If you want more of a casual, long sipper, pour the ingredients over ice and top it off with club soda (essentially a Tom Collins).
- For a fun floral drink, replace the honey syrup with St. Germain, an elderflower liqueur.
- For a sweeter drink, simply stir in more honey syrup, to taste.
- If you don't like gin, this cocktail would work with vodka, too.

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