

Beeline



Not just a flower

A plant's only reason to produce a flower is to entice a third party or vector to come into contact and pollinate it. As plants don't have wings or legs and it is firmly planted in the ground by its roots a flowering plant requires the mobility of something like an insect to aid it in its reproduction. The plant invests a lot of energy in a flower and the sole purpose of this is to ensure its own survival. Plants which rely on insects to pollinate them are known to be entomophilous and will more than likely produce extraordinary structures to lure insects to make a visit. Flowers are designed to be irresistible to pollinators through their colour, design, scent and texture and finally when the insect has chosen to make its visit; it is rewarded with nectar and pollen.

A flower is the agent which physically attracts its pollinator and within it are contained the plant's sex organs. The male part of the flower is the anther, the part which produces the pollen. The female part of the flower is the stigma which sits atop the style which forms a tube to the plant's ovaries. The insect ensures that the pollen it collects on its body from the anther rubs off on to the stigma of a plant of the same species because the insect has been very generously rewarded with food. The plant will produce no more nectar once it has been pollinated and the insect will be forced to go elsewhere.

Grasses and many trees do not require insects to pollinate them, instead they use wind to do the job and produce trillions of pollens to ensure that this haphazard approach does the trick. Plants that pollinate in this way are known to be anemophilous and do not produce sensual lures like flowers because they have evolved to use only the wind as a vector. This category would include wheat, maize and pine trees for example. (I think I'm anemophilous as I get a lot of wind! Just threw that one in to make sure you were still awake!)

So next time you bend down to sniff a flower you may consider a whole other side you may never have contemplated before: that it's not here for us at all, it's here for the pollinators.



More learning anyone?

You're a member of ABKA because more than likely you took Sue Chatfield's beekeeping for beginners class at some point in your illustrious career as a beekeeper. After a hard winter's extracting and bottling up the last of your 500 jars of honey (ha, I wish!) you might be ready to do a bit more learnin'.

If I told you, you could do it for nowt, would that make your ears twitch? That's exactly what you can do if you want to build on your bee keeping capabilities by sitting in on the modules offered by the BBKA. Two modules have just been taught over 6 very pleasant Saturday mornings – Module 2: Honey products and forage and Module 7: Selection and breeding of honey bees.

It's a bit daunting because it's been such a long time since school but easily very worth the time. Five of us from ABKA attended the lectures in Harrogate, each lasting a couple of hours. All of us then went on to take the associated exams – this is voluntary and not a necessary part of doing the modules. The lectures are for the time being, freely provided as part of your membership and are worth doing.



The next set of modules will be module 1: Honey Bee management and Module 3: Honeybee pests diseases and poisoning. I'm not sure what the dates for these are yet but as soon as we find out we'll pass it on. I hope you can come.

Our man in South Africa

Zena and I have been doing our bit to educate a novice beekeeper here in the Karoo. We went to an artists village called Nieu Bethesta just outside Graaff-Reinet. Being a Sunday most things were closed but we did manage to see a sculptor and her husband a potter. All very nice stuff but the suitcase is already full.

The village also had a micro brewery, which of course I could not resist. As we approached along a dirt road we saw a man bare foot but in a bee suite. He went into the shed which served as a brewery, bar, cafe and restaurant. I managed to catch up with him and told him I was also a beekeeper. He said he had just been stung on his finger but managed to pull a pint of honey beer which was delicious. Zena just wanted a coffee so he went up into the cafe to make that. He again told Zena he had been stung on his finger. She realised it was his ring finger and because of her experience of having rings cut off at Airedale, she told him to take the ring off immediately. He could not do it so went inside to get soap and water. Fortunately he was successful. We must have been 50km from the nearest hospital! He said he had only just started to keep bees as the honey he used in his beer was so expensive. All his knowledge had come via the internet.

He asked me if I would like to see his hives, they were only about 100 yards away across the garden. He had about 10 in total and he had started by collecting colonies from holes in trees. He regarded these as swarms. He showed me one that he thought was queenless. I asked him what he was going to do about it? He did not know so I suggested he combine it with another hive using the newspaper method. That should make a stronger colony and the stronger the colony the more productive it would be.

I could have stayed longer but we had 150km journey to our next overnight stop. He was off to get another swarm out of a hole in a tree. Zena told him to wear Marigolds on his hands but I can still see him getting into his truck with nothing on his feet.

Keith Hebden

Honey and grain mustard dressing

It lasts for ages, you don't need to keep it in the fridge, and it wants to be made of only the best ingredients – one of which will be some of your own excellent honey...

I'm going to propose that you use all organic ingredients. Extra virgin olive oil is the main ingredient, but if this is too strong for you then use another organically produced oil such as flax, cold pressed rape seed, pumpkin seed or cold pressed sunflower. By buying organic oils we are supporting farmers who choose no spraying regimes, so these large tracts of flowering pastures are great places for pollinators to forage in.

4 tblsp organic olive oil
1 tblsp organic cider vinegar
1 tblsp coarse grain mustard
2 tblsp your own honey - ever so gently warmed to soften
Pinch salt

Put all of this into a bottle with a screw top lid and shake until it's mixed up – if you do this to loud music and dance around the kitchen at the same time you achieve 3 things: 1 you get a great salad dressing, 2 you look ridiculous and 3 you get a bit of exercise –win,win,win!

Dos and don'ts

Don't peek into your hives just yet unless you suspect something is seriously wrong.
Do check your feed. My bees have taken more this last week than they have all winter.
Do make sure you are ready for the season with clean equipment, new frames are made up for swapping out with grotty old comb.

Once again I've delivered the March issue on time - like Ryanair only just! I hope you have a great beekeeping year.

I'll be putting together a precis of the National Pollinator strategy document prepared by Defra - from fifty odd pages. You should have been emailed a link to this earlier by the BBKA. Beekeepers have a chance to influence this consultation with an online feedback mechanism. **This must be done by the 2nd May.** I urge you to do this. I will email what I believe to be the significant omissions to save you the tedium of reading the whole doc. Then I'd ask you to go on line and fill out their form. (Link for this will be attached to the email.)

No doubt I'll bump into you soon.

Cheers Chris

All photos in this edition have been taken by Awo Subris.

Diary

3rd April 7.15pm
Last ABKA winter talks at Riddlesden Institute

12th April Yorkshire BKA Annual conference see
YBKA web site for all details on this

18th May 12.30 noon
ABKA beekeeping auction at East Riddlesden Hall. See website for details

8/9/10 July Great Yorkshire Show

6th September Keighley Show

28th November ABKA Bees Knees Up

6th & 7th December Xmas Fayre at ERH

