

December 2012

BEE LINE



Julie Williams

East Riddlesden
Hall -where we're at

Neonicotinoids
in your compost
-is that what you
want?

BEELINE

Julie Williams Co Chair of ABKA

Julie died this November after almost proving that she would live forever. Lots of you will have known Julie well and lots of you won't but most of you will know who she was – I still want to say 'is'!

Julie married Pete in her forties and he died 15 or so years ago (but she constantly referred to him) which will have made her a widow at about 70. They saw their first swarm when they were out walking years and years ago and took an impromptu decision to collect it – but first they had to walk home and get something to collect it with. They didn't have a car so they tramped back to the swarm, put it into a cardboard box and walked back home again. A jolly old 15 miles round trip. No one would do that today would they? Except probably Julie if she was still around!

As Pete was a joiner by trade they had their own mini hive making factory – lucky. When Pete died Julie kept up the beekeeping herself. Her preferred method was a kind of barefoot beekeeping; hands off and gently, gently. She was an absolute demon at spotting queens.

Collecting our first swarm by Julie Williams (2008)

Pete, my husband had been to all the beginners' classes and we were very anxious to get our own bees. A hive was waiting for them at the bottom of the garden. We were out walking over Harden way and on the way home we saw a swarm of bees (hooray) in a wall, but had nothing to put them in. So went home and got a good strong box and went back. They were still there. We collected them in the box and went home.

We were very pleased with ourselves as we had no veils or anything and did not get stung (we had read in the book that bees can't sting when they swarm because they are full of honey). We arrived home, hived them, all was well; fed them and appeared quite happy, flying in and out.

After about a fortnight we looked in at them. To our dismay there was no queen. The moral to this story is to make sure you've got the queen when collecting swarms.

Julie was amazingly kind and helpful to me as a new beekeeper setting up in 2011. Not only did she help me gather in a swarm, she was always on hand to give advice, support, and some amazing mead! She had a fund of great stories about both beekeeping and life generally and I shall miss her as a true example of how to live life to the full. Penny Richards

Picture is Julie beekeeping in a shower.



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East Riddlesden Hall apiary

The new apiary site in the grounds of East Riddlesden Hall is taking shape. Suzanne Starling has been working with the National Trust to ensure that we can move in early Spring. The NT has agreed that ABKA can pay a peppercorn rent of £1 per year.

We still aim to keep the East Morton site but instead this will be our bee breeding site.

It's going to be pretty good and brings lots of other benefits to ABKA. Our new tenureship means we will have toilets, parking, use of their training facilities and the spectacular barn for events. Lets not forget that they have a great tea shop there too.

We aim to make the site a wildlife haven over the next couple of years and will be working closely with other groups to achieve this. Do any of you have any wildlife expertise you want to bring to the project?

We will need all hands on deck for the shed building project we're planning- so if you're handy with a hammer your labours would be appreciated.

Here's to a long and fulfilling collaboration with East Riddlesden hall.



photo by Awo Subris

Systemic insecticide in garden centre bought plants

Alice Fowler, BBC Gardener's World presenter has written in last week's Guardian supplement that it is quite common for neonicotinoid based insecticides to be found in abundance in the compost of garden centre bought plants. It is apparently common practice without ever being mentioned on any labels you might peruse when contemplating a purchase.

She is suggesting that as responsible gardeners we ask if it is in the compost and make our purchases based on knowledge. It is like putting chalk in flour really.

The argument rages on against the use of neonicotinoids and the devastation it continues to cause in our wildlife. Can we stop the inevitable? Can we as beekeepers in good conscience not ask questions and use the power of our money to put a stop to our bees' demise. After all we are all working hard to keep our colonies strong. Neonicotinoids may be old news but they're still bad news.

'Why neonicotinoids are bad for bees

Bee numbers are rapidly dropping. There is strong evidence that neonicotinoids – a class of pesticide first used in agriculture in the mid 1990s at exactly the time when mass bee disappearances started occurring – are involved in the deaths. The evidence against these chemicals is strong enough that they have been banned or suspended in France, Germany and Italy – but not yet in the UK.

Neonicotinoids work as an insecticide by blocking specific neural pathways in insects' central nervous systems. The chemicals impair bees' communication, homing and foraging ability, flight activity, ability to discriminate by smell, learning, and immune systems – all of which have an impact on bees' ability to survive.

It seems bees genetic make up makes them particularly vulnerable to neonicotinoids. Recent mapping of the bee genome has revealed that bees' capacity to detoxify chemicals is much lower than other insects. Instead bees have two strategies to protect themselves. On the first day of foraging in a new area, scout bees are sent out first to taste the nectar and pollens – if any are adversely affected they will be expelled from the hive immediately, and the colony will avoid the area.

In addition, once foraging begins, nurse bees in the hive clean foragers each time they return. These strategies protect the colony from mass exposure to lethal doses of chemicals, but they do leave honey bees particularly susceptible to sub-lethal exposures to any contaminants they encounter.

The other really important factor is the complex behaviour of honeybee colonies. It is no surprise that honey bees have been shown to have a higher number of neurological receptors than other insects. Honey bees live and work as a colony, not as individuals; what seems to be happening is that the cumulative impact of small doses of neonicotinoids on thousands of bees over time is affecting individual bee's ability to work and communicate effectively as part of a colony.

The Soil Association believes that there is already enough evidence to justify an immediate ban on neonicotinoids today. '

Edited and taken from the Soil Association web site. For more information go to www.soilassociation.org

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Diary dates 2013

Tuesday 5th Feb, Simon Croker, Chairman of Wharfedale talking on their new apiary at Tarn Moor, their involvement with the building of same, followed by a demo by Fred Martin of his vacuum swarm catcher!

Tuesday 5th March, mock Honey Show meeting with Honey Judge and ex chair of YBKA and all-round nice guy Dave Shannon so we want people to bring their honey, cakes, mead (both good and bad) for "judging" so that Dave can give us pointers on how to win!

Both the above to be held in the tithe barn at East Riddlesden Hall.

Wednesday 17th April joint meeting at Christ Church Ilkley, this time Halifax BKA are hosting, speaker to be announced.

Receipts

Old fashioned solid perfume

1 tablespoon beeswax
1 tablespoon sweet almond oil
8-15 drops essential oil
small clean container (1/2 ounce) to hold your solid perfume

Melt together the wax then add the sweet almond oil. You can either microwave the ingredients for a few seconds or heat the mixture over a double-boiler.

Once this mixture has liquified, remove it from heat then stir in the essential oils. Ylang ylang and orange are nice together. Or maybe just lavender or rose on their own.

Pour the liquid into your final container. Set the lid on top of the container, but leave it ajar. This will help prevent condensation inside your container while minimizing the chance of microbial contamination of the product.

Apply the perfume by rubbing a finger on the product to liquify it, then rub your finger on the area you want scented. Very good for travelling with.

For sale: Large and very heavy duty, white cotton, two piece beekeeping suit. Used a couple of times. Trousers and top both zip up together or top can be worn on its own. Good for a nervous beekeeper (as the fabric is so reassuringly thick!) or visitor. £40 ono

Contact Chris on 01535 600941 (Utley) - or email oldsalmon@gmail.com

Thanks to everyone who sent photos in of Julie Williams

We need YOUR help to make our new apiary site happen in January. The auction was a success because we all pitched in and someone even managed to catch a swarm! Suzanne is compiling a list of people who have already volunteered but we will always need more. How about just bringing a cake down to feed the builders and odd jobbers? Please email suzanne@suzannestarling.co.uk if you would like to volunteer and haven't already.

Tea and cakes and good humour supplied.

Thanks to Awo Subris for supplying me with stunning photos for every Beeline.

Is it just me...

Planning (that's a joke) for my next beekeeping season and assuming that my bees get through the winter, I am going to adopt the Rose hive method without converting to specially designed boxes and frames. Instead using the Nationals I already own I will just have to cope with tremendous weight of boxes burgeoning with honey as I stagger with the weight of them to my car. I'm reserving the honey spinner now. Seriously looking forward to next year!

Cheers Ed
oldsalmon@gmail.com

Merry Christmas and happy beekeeping for 2013