

APIARY NEWSLETTER

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BEE BUDDIES

"A mentor is an experienced, trusted advisor who guides, supports and counsels a less experienced person (mentee) to develop skills, knowledge and career growth....."



Gill Stanford- My Bee Buddies

I completed my 'bee theory' course during the winter of 2012 and was so excited to start the practical 'hands on' part of the beekeeping for beginners course which began in Spring 2013. I had already met Kate & Charles during the theory sessions and I was keen to be part of the group that they led on Saturday mornings. The training was very different back then, almost a 'free for all' for students to gather around the hive of your choice – students and trainers were not matched as now.

Kate & Charles were among the most popular tutors and I would rush to their hive to listen and absorb everything that they said. Their united, gentle, calm, practical approach fascinated me and I remember one of the first pearls of wisdom from Charles, which has stuck with me forever:

"The bees know what they're doing"

As a solitary beekeeper, I soon discovered that Kate & Charles lived close to me and I have to admit that they became my mentors by default! I was inspired by their knowledge and felt comfortable asking numerous questions in my desire to learn – no question was ever off limits or deemed stupid.



A bonus too, that Charles was a skilled carpenter!! I cheekily asked if he would make me a beehive; we struck a deal and in July 2013, my first colony of super calm bees was delivered with TLC in their bright yellow hive.

Like most 'newbees' I would seek help when things went wrong (often in a crisis) and no matter when I rang, Kate & Charles would always pick up, even if just to acknowledge my call and ring me back.

Looking back on my beekeeping records, my first cry for help was in August 2013, when my colony was under serious threat from wasps. I soon learnt that both Kate & Charles had a very clever way of getting me to solve my own dilemmas by saying "what do you think" or "how do you think you should deal with it"; etc. For me it was my own self doubt that hindered my progress and their approach made me stop, think and reflect, enabling me to find the answer, which in turn helped me grow in confidence.



Kate & Charles encouraged me in every step of my beekeeping journey. After about 3 years, following a winter loss I was about to give up, but a visit and pep talk from my wonderful mentors, persuaded me to carry on.

I had a 'light-bulb' moment in my fourth season! Following an inspection, where everything had gone to plan, I sat writing up my notes when the realisation hit me – I know what I'm doing!!

At a social event in 2022, Kate introduced me to Charlotte who had been beekeeping for a couple of years; within a fortnight, she rang me for some advice. Reacting exactly as I had been taught, I met at her apiary and our relationship has grown from there.

Not intentionally setting out to be a mentor, I remembered how invaluable the support of Kate and Charles had been for me and so I instinctively helped Charlotte move her beehives, tackle a

wasp invasion, battle crop spraying, re-queen colonies, extract honey etc and eventually we shared an apiary.

Charlotte is enthusiastic and reminds me of my younger self – she has grown in confidence (along with her number of beehives!) and she is a competent beekeeper.

She keeps me on my toes regarding inspections, feeding, treatments etc and it is so beneficial to share the beekeeping experience with someone who 'gets it' and enjoys the hobby as much as you. Within a short space of time we have a mutual respect and understanding of each other's ways in handling our bees, we challenge each other, ask questions and problem solve, ultimately coming up with an agreed solution.

The wider benefits are also cost saving, ordering equipment, such as feed, treatments, jars etc but most of all, after a hot, hard day of inspecting bees, enjoying a pint in the local village pub!

I hope that every experienced beekeeper will try mentoring – it increases your own confidence and there is an immense feeling of satisfaction, when watching someone grow, learn and become successful.

I learned from the best of course and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Kate and Charles for always being there for me (even now), for their patience, advice, practical help and time but most of all for their continuing friendship and support.

Gill Stanford

Rob Philpott – My Bee Buddies

Ten plus years ago, I did a Honeybee Experience Day at Keele University with the North Staffs BKA. Frustratingly, I didn't have the time to take up the hobby at that time.

Years later, I was chatting with my neighbour, Gerry Round, she had just completed the Beginners course. It was Gerry that let me know when the Association released the dates of the next course. I completed the Beginners Beekeeping Course in July 2022.

I got to know Jan Horstink through Thursday evening Bee Chats. The one evening, I was asked if I could help him move a defensive colony from

Shugborough back to his own apiary. Jan lives about a mile from me, he showed me around his Apiary and Bee house.

Whilst we were chatting he mentioned about an electrical issue with his outside lights. I'm a qualified electrician, so I helped investigate & resolve the issue.

In return, Spring 2023, Jan helped me set up my Apiary by giving me two of his colonies. It was an amazing starting point.

Over the last three years, Jan has been there at the end of the phone when I need advice. The course teaches you the basics, then you see a few challenges.

When I call with a query, Jan often pops round, has a look, and helps me think through what's happening. He helps me learn by asking questions, rather than telling me what to do. When I've been away on holiday, Jan has helped me by doing my weekly inspections.

Our friendship has grown as we regularly share lifts to Thursday Bee Chats along with Gerry.

As a novice beekeeper, it is amazing having the support from an experienced beekeeper. The bees definitely don't always follow what you read in the books.

Gerry has helped with advice on occasion too. We help each other out, for example when the delivery of a new queen she had ordered was delayed, and Gerry was away on holiday, I introduced the Queen into her hive.



A friend asked if I could remove a feral colony from a building for him. Doc Martin had bought a Bee Vac which he brought along to a Bee Chat. I asked if I could borrow it, but he offered to come along and help. It was a massive job which took around three hours but it was so much easier doing it together. It was a great experience, which we both enjoyed. The control of the Bee Vac helped us to find and cage the Queen which in turn helped us to successfully hive the colony.



Alan and Chris Brewin have helped me with both practical training at the Training Apiary along with advice too over the years.

As well as all the practical help provided by a Bee Buddy, it's good to have someone at the other end of a phone call who I can run any scenario past. Talking through with a Bee Buddy can help you understand when things go wrong or are not as expected.

Rob Philpott

Tracey Knowles - My Bee Buddies

I've been asked to write a little about bee buddies, having thoroughly enjoyed the introductory course last year. Every member at Hilton was kind, friendly, accommodating and passionate about bee keeping, and very willing to share their wealth of knowledge and experience.

I recognised over the weeks beekeeping is not something I could jump into head first, and that more experience was necessary. It was there I met Chris Shaw. Her easy-going relaxed approach to beekeeping was just what I needed, just my cup of tea!

So plucking up courage I asked Chris if I could possibly allow me to visit some of her apiaries. Chris was very kind and accommodating, and has shown me nothing but kindness from the start. Chris having began her beekeeping journey in the 1970's

has an extraordinary wealth of knowledge and experience- that she is willing to so generously share. Something money can't buy.

I would recommend anyone feeling a little lost or



overwhelmed, or new to beekeeping to approach an experienced keeper.

I believe you will naturally gravitate to a person of similar approaches as yourself. But the great thing about the beekeeping community that there are a vast array of personalities and methodologies to suit all types.

New buddies can also help those who have many years under their belts, and sharing the physicality can benefit both. I would most wholeheartedly recommend a bee buddy. I am lucky to have found new friendships.



Kerry and I support each other as we navigate the joys and challenges of beekeeping.

The SS&DBKA community encompass all of the attributes mentioned earlier, kindness, knowledge, experience, generosity, etc; so don't be afraid to ask!

You can only benefit from having a bee buddy.

Tracey Knowles

David Primrose – My Bee Buddies

My bee buddies are those who have spent time with me in my apiary. I value them all.

When Alison and I did our Beginners Course, there was a series of weekday evening lectures at Wolseley Centre over the winter, then practical sessions at the Shugborough apiary in the summer. The legendary Geoff Hopkinson MBE began the lectures, with Stuart Roberts as his able pupil. In my early months as a beekeeper, Stuart would bring Geoff round to our house. Geoff and Alison enjoyed lively debates about education, with Geoff adopting provocatively contrary positions whilst Alison plied him with cake and appropriate beverage.



Stuart would graciously take me through my hives, asking questions to tease out my learning, helping me think through my decisions, and occasionally intervening to find the queen. As Geoff became more frail, Stuart would come on his own in response to my queries. We always looked at the bees first, and often there was time for a chat afterwards. As I grew in confidence, I was more able to message him describing a situation. I would then follow through with the advice he would give me. Later when I sat my General Husbandry (twice), Stuart was able to critique my practices, making many helpful comments which enabled me, eventually, to pass.

The first time I prepared for my General Husbandry along Trevor Smith, Jan Horstink and Alan Brewin. Together we shared much learning and, appropriately, the other three passed. Trevor Smith's enthusiasm for education had been infectious and, with his support, I had sat Modules 1,2,3, 5 and 6, of which I passed 4. As a good teacher, Trevor was always ready to offer helpful advice and encourage/cajole me to improve my practice.

The second time I took General Husbandry, I studied along with Steve Gibbins. As well as looking at the theory, we visited each other's hives and tackled various tasks together. We were able to cover for each other when either of us were away and inspections were due.

I've welcomed the opportunity to encourage others. Andrew Stead was a colleague, and when he and Alison decided to take up beekeeping, I

relished the opportunity to introduce them to bees. I knew that they were, by nature, more meticulous than me, hence with them as keen students, I had to improve my own practices. Indeed when I inspected their hives whilst they were on holiday, I was reminded of how much easier it is when hives are set up properly. We have a little WhatsApp group where they post pictures and ask questions. If I'm not sure how to answer, they have several others with whom they can consult.



Debbie Gallagher helped out at a community apiary, but currently has no bees. She lives in the next village and whenever it's convenient, she's always happy to pop over to help. With Debbie and with my other bee buddies, there are often situations where four hands are better than two and I value the practical assistance.

With all my bee buddies there is an easy friendship which contributes to my on-going learning as a beekeeper.

This is true whether it is they or I who is the more experienced. A liberating feature is the shared desire to enjoy beekeeping. This means that mistakes, of which there are plenty, are opportunities to develop and successes, of which there are also plenty, are there to be celebrated.

David Primrose



Recent ground clearing - Photo provided by Jan Horstink



ricotta torte with nectarines, honey and walnut drizzle

Portion Size: Serves 10

Prep Time: 20 mins, Oven Time 1 Hr

Method

Heat the oven to 160°C/140°C fan/ gas 3 and line the base and sides of a 20cm loose-bottomed cake tin. Beat the sugar and butter together in a large bowl with an electric mixer for about 3 minutes or until light and fluffy. In a separate bowl, lightly whisk the ricotta with the orange zest and vanilla until smooth.

Add the eggs to the butter and sugar, one at a time, beating between each addition, then add the ricotta mixture and beat until combined. Sift over the flour and baking powder and stir gently to combine. Spoon into the cake tin, level the top, then bake for 60-70 minutes until it feels springy to the touch and a skewer pushed into the centre comes out clean. Let the cake cool for 15 minutes in the tin, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool completely.

Meanwhile combine the honey and 100ml water in a small saucepan, bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer. Add the lemon juice and zest, then bubble gently for about 5 minutes. Add the chopped walnuts and set aside to cool. It will thicken as it cools: if it gets too thick to pour, stir in a tiny splash of water and bring it back to a simmer. Stone the nectarines, then slice into crescents and arrange on top of the cake. Drizzle with the honey and nut syrup to serve.

Ingredients

- 150g caster sugar
- 250g unsalted butter, softened
- 500g ricotta
- Zest 1 large orange
- 1 tsp vanilla bean paste
- 3 medium free-range eggs
- 150g plain flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 5 ripe nectarines
- For the drizzle
- 150ml clear honey
- Finely grated zest and juice 1 lemon
- Handful chopped walnuts



APRIL - PLANTS FOR POLLINATORS



[Malus hupehensis](#)

A crab apple with a rounded crown and scented clouds of blossom. The Hupeh crab apple is a good food source for bees,



[Pulmonaria 'Diana Clare'](#)

Lungwort 'Diana Clare' has silvery leaves making it attractive as groundcover. Visited by emerging queen bumblebees and foraging solitary bees



[Ajuga reptans 'Catlin's Giant'](#)

Is a large-flowered native bugle. Its lipped, bluish-purple flowers provide landing pads for pollinators and bees.



[Acer campestre](#)

The field maple is a British native. The maple's clusters of lime-green flowers offer a food source to bees and hoverflies. .



[Muscari armeniacum](#)

Grape hyacinths provide cones of nectar for foraging bees. The Armenian grape hyacinth is a vigorous



[Crocus biflorus 'Blue Pearl'](#)

Crocus offer an early pollen source to bees and beetles. C. 'Blue Pearl' prefers a dry, sunny spot for a summer baking.



[Berberis darwinii](#)

Spring flowering barberry's warm-orange colouring is a striking sight. As well as supporting pollinators, blue-black berries in autumn are a *food source for birds*.



[Bergenia 'Eroica'](#)

Has magenta-pink flower clusters and rhubarb-red stems. Bees and other pollinators visit the flowers. Green foliage turns red in winter with good frost resistance.



[Primula veris](#)

A native of grasslands, hedgerows and woodland they bear clusters of warm yellow flowers in April and May. Occasionally, red or orange-flowered variants crop up.

RANDOM THOUGHTS FROM THE APIARY



A friend came up to me the other day quite concerned

She said*"My son won't eat fish....What else can I get..?"*

I said... *"A cat.....cat's love fish ..!"*

Is it too much to ask the Romans to re-invade Britain..?

Someone needs to resurface the roads !!

During COVID lockdown, if you had family round during Bank Holidays, Police could force entry to your house and make them go home.

Does anyone know if this service is still available, and if you have to book ???



If anyone has a 'Random Thought' or a Honey Recipe they would like to add to the Newsletter...then please send it to:

ssbka-mail@southstaffsbeekeepers.com

CAN YOU FIND THE QUEEN

Have a good look around this edition of the Newsletter and see if you can spot where she is ?



In the February Asian Hornet edition she was admiring the hard working members of the Hilton Apiary attaching new netting on Page 6



Click on any word in the Newsletter highlighted in **blue** for more detailsor Ctrl + Click the logos either side of here to go to the association website

