

CBKAA Honey Show report November 1st 2025

The Honey Show was attended by 41 people: this included 5 presenters and delegates from across Cumbria and other associations in the north of England.

The day began with a presentation by Stephen Martin which outlined the ways in which the varroa mite manages to mimic the scent of the bees making it more difficult for bees to detect them within the colony. However, there are colonies of bees who use their sense of smell to detect the presence of mites within cells where the attack on the pupa causes additional odours. These sniffer bees react to this by uncapping the cells, devouring the pupa and re-capping the cells when they are used again. This hygienic behaviour disrupts the reproductive cycle of the varroa mite. Bees have evolved this efficient 'cleansing' behaviour over hundreds and thousands of years. It is now becoming recognised that applying chemicals to kill the varroa mite is probably preventing the bees from developing their own hygienic behaviour. Stephen advocated 'monitoring more and treating less' in order to give the bees the best chance of developing and applying their own hygienic behaviours. Examples of the behaviour of different colonies from across the world and the extent to which they protected themselves/succumbed to the varroa mite and related viruses, provided a fascinating insight into the variations of bees behaviour in different environmental contexts.

Stephen's presentation was followed by a demonstration of encaustic art by Lorraine Priestly. People were amazed at the speed with which beautiful landscapes were created with wax and a heated iron and stylus. Delegates were given the opportunity to 'have a go' at the technique during the extended lunch break.

Suzi from Northumbria Honey Company described how she had developed the company's production of wax candles with an anecdotal account of the mishaps that they had occurred occasionally causing batches of wax to be destroyed, before the procedures that they now use to produce consistently high quality candles were achieved. Delegates had the opportunity to watch Suzi producing candles and purchase candle making kits before the afternoon session began.

As well as the practical activities, delegates were invited to complete a quiz about pollinators. The feedback to the quiz was led by Julia Hoggard, recently retired Bee Inspector, who had compiled it. The answers provided interesting information about pollinators. The highest score was achieved by Lorraine Priestly who won the prize hamper.

Northern Bee Books kindly supplied an extensive range of books for delegates to browse and purchase during the breaks.

The final presentation of the day was provided by Jenny Roberts of Lancaster University, who shared with us information about propolis – the sticky substance which bees collect from trees and plants to seal up the gaps in their hives and they value for its antibacterial properties. Jenny, a Mechanical Engineering student, described her research journey, from the starting point of investigating the strength of propolis in order to ascertain how much pressure would need to be exerted by a custom made gadget designed to prise open hives that had been sealed with it. From collecting samples of propolis from beekeepers resident in different parts of the UK, Jenny was able to show the different colours of the samples, linked to the environment in which the propolis had originated i.e. open grassland, urban areas, coastal regions. More recently Jenny's research has progressed to focus on the

identification of the properties of propolis which may be useful for the further development of medical products. It had been necessary to find ways to separate other ingredients such as wax, benzene and soot from the propolis in order to purify it for medical applications. Overall, Jenny's talk provided fascinating insights into the different types of propolis and its value to bees but also its potential for the development of products beneficial to human health.

Although there were less entries to the Honey Show than in recent years, the Honey Show Judge, Peter Lewis, commended exhibitors on the quality of their products. He particularly commended the wax model made by Les Nicholson. Peter's feedback included the advice for entrants to make sure that any jars of honey were full, as a few had been disqualified on this occasion because they did not fulfil this criterion.

Two members, Eleanor Mason and Sandra Wallace, received their awards for achieving the Advanced Theory Module3 Certificate.

Feedback from those who attended included the following comments:

They **particularly enjoyed**:

- 'the morning and really liked the painting with wax demonstration'
- 'the whole day!'
- 'Stephen Martin's - varroa talk'
- 'the talk by Stephen Martin very informative and useful (I also purchased the book he recommended)'
- 'the quality of presentations, demonstrations and exhibits.'
- 'the format of day, which all ran smoothly with about right time allocations for various activities.'
- 'the variety of supporting attractions, the photo competition, the book sales, the bee related information, quiz etc.'
- 'the two demonstrations were interesting and enjoyable very engaging'.
- 'I've heard Steve Martin before and find his observations inspiring',
- 'Lorraine Priestley and Suzie from Northumberland Bees, both their talks and demo's were excellent.'
- 'The lecture about bees adapting to pests and how chemicals slow up natural resistance processes.'
- 'Julia's quiz about pollinators.'

They were **particularly interested** by:

- 'The quiz about pollinators because it helped me learn some new things about pollinators and pollination which I did not realize previously.'
- 'The two demonstrations which were very engaging.'
'The information about moving to Varroa resistant colonies'
- 'The wax artwork. I had heard about it and am interested in crafts generally but thought it probably wasn't for me, but the images created were amazing and so quick to make. Now I have seen the demonstration, I definitely want to try it.'