



■ In this class 'Twelve jars of honey labelled as for sale' the jars have been opened by the judge

# National Honey Show time

*Brenda Davies discovers that there will be even more to do and see at this year's event*

**I**t's October, the summer is over and the bees are settling themselves down for the winter. This has been a very difficult year for beekeepers with unseasonable and unpredictable weather.

Although the bees did get off to a flying start with a good warm spell in March, any hopes of a bumper honey year were dashed by a cold, wet April followed by a wet May and an even wetter June. July was not much better in many places.

Whether or not you have been able to harvest any honey this year will depend on which part of the country you live in and how badly the wet weather affected the local forage for your bees. Many beekeepers will have taken off no honey at all. Some beekeepers even had to feed sugar syrup during the summer to prevent their bees from starving.

Summer 2012 is one that most of us will be happy to see the back of but before summer officially ends, when we put the clocks back later this month, there is one last big beekeeping event to enjoy. It's October again, it's time for the National Honey Show and that means the annual battle for the Smallholder Shield.

The seeds of what was to become the National Honey Show were sown back in the 1920's but this year it will only be the 81st show to be staged. The reason that the



■ The Smallholder Shield was won by Yorkshire BKA last year

numbers don't appear to add up is because the show for 1939 had to be cancelled owing to the outbreak of war and there were no more shows until 1947.

Unfortunately, with the country struggling to get back to normality after the war, the 1947 show was not a success and it made a loss of £201. That was great deal of money in those days when you could buy a jar of honey for less than five shillings – 25p in today's decimal coinage.

A number of changes were made to the schedule for the following year including some new trophies. The Smallholder County Challenge Shield was given by Smallholder magazine to be presented at the 1948 show.

Exact details seem to have been lost over time but its introduction was probably to stimulate the competition between county beekeeping associations and so help to revive the show. It did. The show was a great success financially and that year made a profit of £220. Perhaps not entirely due to the Smallholder Shield but it undoubtedly played a part.

The Smallholder Shield has been hotly contested at every National Honey Show since. That is all apart from 1954 when it was such a poor season that the show was cancelled.

Even though we have had a very poor summer this year it is very unlikely that the 'National' would be cancelled again because of bad weather. Fortunately, despite its name, the National Honey Show is more than just a show of honey. All aspects of beekeeping can have a competitive side and most of them are represented in this year's schedule of more than 200 classes.

As well as the classes for the different forms of honey: runny, set, chunk, comb, heather and sections there are classes for beeswax blocks, beeswax models and candles; mead and other honey fermented drinks; honey cooking, confectionery and other home produced products. It doesn't stop there, beekeepers have many skills and there are classes for bee related arts and crafts as well.

Although this year there may be fewer honey



entries than normal because of the wet weather, it is still the biggest display of honey, hive products and bee related things that you are likely to see anywhere.

The competitive classes only make up a part of the National Honey Show as we see it today. Over the years the 'National' has developed into one of the most important educational events in the beekeeping calendar.

Over the three days of the show October 25-27 there will be a will be an impressive lecture programme with top speakers from around the world. This year's line up includes Keith Delaplane, Margaret Couvillon, Marla Spivak, Dr Saad Masry and Mark Greco. For further details of the speakers and their lectures visit [www.honeyshow.org.uk](http://www.honeyshow.org.uk).

New for this year will be an extra programme of research lectures scheduled for the Friday of the show. Subjects include 'Behavioural effects of Nosema ceranae on honeybee flight and orientation performance revealed by harmonic radar', 'New oilseed crops' and 'Controlling varroa mites with gene knockdown: hype and reality'. There will be five speakers giving five up-to-date lectures and these alone would be worth going to the show for. Fitting everything in is the big problem. There is so much to see and do this year.

This will be the fifth year of holding the show at St. George's College in Surrey. One of the advantages of this venue is the availability of space which allows more practical workshops to be offered. This year there will be more than 30.

The workshops were introduced a few years ago to help exhibitors improve their show preparation and technique and the workshops have proved so popular that the topics have expanded. This year you can still learn how to prepare honey and wax for the show bench but you can also find out how to use a microscope, how to keep your bees healthy, how to take better bee photographs, how to market your honey – and those are just the choices for the first day of the show. At other workshops you can learn how to rear queen bees, how to make candles, mead and toiletries and get some useful tips regarding the BBKA Basic Assessment and Husbandry Assessments.

One of the unexpected bonuses of the move to St George's has been the praise which the catering department has received. So this year Richard from the college will be joining in the spirit of things with his own workshops 'Cooking with honey' (bring your own apron).

For more details of the workshop programme visit the website. Booking is essential as the



■ A large piece of beeswax being judged

number of attendees will be limited to allow for discussion and to ensure that each person receives proper attention.

Anyone wishing to attend a workshop must book either online at <http://snipurl.com/23jrje> or telephone 07729 424002.

There will be a £5 non-returnable booking fee per workshop to prevent spaces being booked and not taken up. The system is now fully automated, accepting advance bookings via PayPal.

For those who enjoy some retail therapy there will also be a large number of trade stands where you will be able to stock up with almost any beekeeping equipment that you may need. It is a good opportunity to try on a new bee-suit or to see how new gadgets work.

Make sure you take your shopping list so that you don't forget to buy that important something you know that you need. It may only be October but it is never too early to do some Christmas shopping and never too late to make a donation to one of the beekeeping charities that will be there.

The show closes with the presentation of the trophies on the Saturday afternoon. There are

more than 80 trophies and awards to be won at this year's show but few trophies are as fiercely fought over as the Smallholder Shield. Prizes for points always add to the excitement of a show and the Smallholder Shield adds more than most.

It is awarded to the county beekeeping association (including the Channel Islands) whose members gain the most points in the open classes numbered 9-88. That means accumulating the most points from over 70 different classes.

The Smallholder Shield is the ultimate test in combined showmanship and Yorkshire beekeepers are the current holders. They will be doing their best to take the shield back to Yorkshire again this year and it will take a very good team to stop them. ■

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**Further information:**

- The 81st National Honey Show
- When: October 25-27
- Where: at St George's College, Weybridge Road, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 2QS
- Website: [www.honeyshow.org.uk](http://www.honeyshow.org.uk)