

## **Keeping bees – why we need bees and why bees need us**

*Notes on the talk by Dave Elliot, National Trust head ranger for Black Down, given on Thursday 4 May at Transition Haslemere green drinks*

Dave has kept bees for 12 years. Although at one time he made something of a commercial venture out of it, including breeding and selling queens, now it is more of a hobby – but a vital and joyful one, he says.

“Keeping bees is the most beneficial things you can do for the countryside”, says Dave. Because of disease and loss of habitat, there are no viable feral honeybees left in the UK. But bees are essential for pollinating our crops, trees and flowers. So bees need us now just as much as we need them.

Although it takes some time to learn the ropes, it is not that difficult, expensive or time consuming to keep bees. And it is rewarding – not only in terms of the honey, and possibly earning some income if you want to get serious about it, but also in terms of the satisfaction it brings.

“It's a joy to be with a colony of bees on your own,” says Dave. They seem to communicate with their beekeeper.

The 20-40,000 bees in an average hive are “a massive pollinating force” that helps keep the natural world around us functioning.

You can get going as a beekeeper for an outlay of around £500 for a hive, suit, smoker and a queen and colony of bees. It is best learn more and get some experience of handling bees before setting up on your own. Dave went to 'bee school' at Blackhorse Apiaries in Woking, which runs beginner and other courses. Dave is now a member of the Wisborough Green Division of the West Sussex Beekeepers Association, which also runs courses.

You can find out more about bees and the courses at [blackhorseapiaries.org](http://blackhorseapiaries.org) and [www.wgbka.org.uk](http://www.wgbka.org.uk) (Wisborough Green Division of the West Sussex Beekeepers Association).