



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

BEEKEEPING IN THE TIME OF CORONA

A great deal has changed in the world since the publication of March's Bee Talk. In a space of a month, many have set up office from their dining room tables whilst others have found themselves forced to stop working. With schools, colleges and universities closed, most families are now together in the same space 24/7 and if we do venture out for essentials or daily exercise, we need to give everyone else a two metre wide berth. Very strange times indeed!

Thankfully, we don't need to self isolate from our bees or adhere to social distancing, which would make inspections rather tricky! It does mean, however, that beekeeping is now a solo endeavour and many of our social branch activities such as meetings and training sessions have been cancelled. This includes our popular Introduction to Beekeeping course, with some 50 participants, as well as Preparation for the Basic.

Below is a message from our Chair, Jane Medwell, regarding our current situation:

Spring is sprung and there are bees everywhere. Unaffected by the human disaster around us, our colonies are bringing in pollen and expanding - and it feels good. I was astounded to find one of my colonies had seven full frames of brood - on March 21st!

So where does that leave us - a bunch of locked-down beekeepers? The National Bee Unit (<http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadNews.cfm?id=170>) makes it clear that bees are livestock and we must tend to our bees. Continue good beekeeping practice, effective stock management and health checks whilst observing the Government's guidance on COVID-19. Make sure you are registered on



Beebase (<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/public/register.cfm>) so that you get automatic updates from the NBU.

If your bees are in your garden, you are very lucky. For many of us, visiting the bees will involve small, necessary, amounts of travel to apiaries, which DEFRA permits. Our goal this year is to try to prevent swarming - we can only collect a swarm if we can respect the guidelines on social distancing. Preventing swarms is the best approach - and one which tests our skills. Challenge is the joy of beekeeping.

This will be a less sociable season of beekeeping than usual. I shall miss meeting beekeeping friends, the Branch barbecue, training courses and bee safaris. But as a branch, we aim to maintain contact with our Facebook group, Twitter feed and newsletter - and we want your thoughts and photos. Sharing opinions is one thing all beekeepers are good at, and supporting each other is another. If you need help with your bees,



You may want to consider a similar sign for your car when parking to inspect your bees.

contact me or any other member of the committee at warleambees@warleambees.org.uk

Enjoy the bees and stay safe!

Jane Medwell

IN THIS ISSUE

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IN THE APIARY IN APRIL

My first apiary visit did not disappoint. One colony had seven full frames of brood and needed a super and one had less than a cupful of bees but plenty of stores. The ways of bees are endlessly fascinating.

So, what is on the TO DO LIST now?

- Remove woodpecker and mouse protection
 - Maintain vigilance on feeding emergency fondant - a cold snap or low stores can be lethal
 - Change broodboxes - give the bees a clean home
 - Flame and treat used brood boxes for later (polystyrene needs a good scrub in a bleach solution)
 - Make frames to fill supers and re-wax cleaned frames (I hate this job)
 - Start your records for the year - with a review of last year
 - Do a varroa count and use the Bee Base calculator to decide when to treat
 - Begin routine inspections - I add a super when I have 5 frames of brood or 7 frames of bees in a National
 - Unite colonies which are queenless after the winter
- For me, this will be a very different season as there is no oil seed rape. What will replace it?

Jane Medwell



Changing bees from a full brood box into a new box

PHACELIA – BLUE BEE FORAGE

Phacelia Tanacetifolia is the botanical name for the flower also

known as Lacy Phacelia or Purple Tansy. It is increasingly being grown by farmers as a "green manure" as it naturally adds nutrients to the soil.

This easy-to-grow annual, standing at about 100cm tall, has the most beautiful blue to purple bell-shaped flowers which have protruding whiskery stamens. The leaves are deeply cut into toothed lobes which give the whole plant a lacy appearance – hence the name.

Nectar rich with a long flowering season, Phacelia is hugely attractive to the bees. I sowed a patch in my vegetable garden last year and it was covered in them from dawn to dusk. This year I plan to give them even more and will sow in succession from now



through to September. A very experienced beekeeper I know in Northumberland puts his hives on the Phacelia fields, much like taking them to the heather or the borage and sells his monofloral "Purple Tansy Honey" for £12 a pound!

The seeds are readily available online at very reasonable prices. Having never grown them before and unsure what I was doing, I simply raked an area of soil, scattered the seeds somewhat haphazardly then raked it over again. Mother Nature did the rest; within weeks there was a blue haze covered in contented bees.

Happy gardening everyone!

Maggie Curley



WLBK BRANCH'S ARNIA HIVE

In 2015, the natural snack bar company Eat Natural recognised the importance of bees in our environment, and they set up their 'Pollenation' initiative to help encourage more people to become beekeepers. Each year Eat Natural sponsor 100 new beekeepers to take up the craft of beekeeping. Working with the London design company Something and Son, together they came up with a new low cost hive which is based upon the Langstroth design with some interesting new features (eg: extendable pins to hold brood frames during an inspection).

The hive is made from upcycled pallet wood from Eat Natural's factory using the packaging from their overseas fruit and nut suppliers.

Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers (WLBK) were one of the first pioneer groups who assessed this new design, and fed back suggestions on how the hive could be improved for further generations. Tim Foden was one of these early adopters, and he made many recommendations that have led to the latest fifth generation model being launched.

We found significant challenges in using the original hive design, which have since been addressed through upgrades. For instance, the hives were lined with wood pulp to provide insulation but, in practice, the bees chewed at this pulp. Additionally, if the pulp became damp, it would affect the brood temperature.

The Eat Natural hive donated to WLBK came together with the Arnia Remote Hive Monitoring system. This system collects vital information on colony status. This is then fed back to a central server, which can then be accessed via a phone, tablet or PC.

The Branch Arnia equipment is currently hosted in the Warwick University Apiary and is maintained by Steve Poynter and Alan Deeley.

The useful information that the Arnia system collects, which includes hive weight (electronic scales), brood temperature (thermometer), humidity (sensor) and acoustics (microphone), is then sent to the communication gateway.

External data from the Apiary (rainfall, external temperature etc.) are also collated and fed back to the gateway. The gateway is mounted on a post in the Apiary (right). This contains a SIM card which periodically sends data back to the central server.

Once collected, the information is presented in the form of graphics making it easy for the beekeeper to understand what may be happening in the colony. For example, in the WLBK Apiary it has been very useful to monitor the consumption of winter stores. In the graph below, a sharp rise is seen in weight when fondant was added.

Email notifications can be configured when certain information falls outside of user set parameters such as weight, temperature or weather. This can help alert the beekeeper if the colony shows signs of swarming or if the colony becomes queenless as brood temperatures become erratic.

The Arnia system can support multiple hives within an Apiary, and we are currently trying to configure some spare equipment that was discovered in the Kings Hill storage area. Once set up we can compare different hive types (e.g. a poly hive with a standard national), which will allow us to assess if there are significant advantages of one over the other.

We are also in the process of setting up a solar panel with the intention of removing the need to replace the batteries in the communication gateway.

All WLBK members are welcome to access the live information in our Arnia environment. Visit <https://myhives.arnia.co.uk> and then enter the following:

Account: ENAlanDeeley

User name: AlanDeeley

Password: Honeybee135

If you have any questions about the Arnia set up, please contact Alan Deeley on

aldeeley@btinternet.com.

Alan Deeley



VESPA VELUTINA: ASIAN HORNET

With the world in the grip of the Covid-19, it is difficult to think about another invasion that could wreak havoc among beekeepers in the UK. However, as beekeepers, we still need to care for our bees, and ensure that this unwanted invader does not take over our hives.



to egg laying as the workers take over other duties. The nest expands rapidly.

- Later in the summer, the queen switches to laying eggs which become sexual males and females.
- By the end of summer, the colony can reach a maximum size of more than 1000 adult workers and hundreds to thousands of potential queens and males.
- When the new sexually active hornets start to emerge, the virgin queens build up their fat bodies, then leave the nest and mate, usually up in the tree canopy.
- The mother queen lives for about one year. After mating the males die. The workers die of starvation at the onset of winter.
- The fertilised queens hibernate during winter alone or in clusters of 2 to 3 under the bark of trees or under stones. The mortality rate of overwintering queens is not known.

WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING NOW

As beekeepers, we are urged to tend our hives even during the Covid19 crisis – particularly to avoid swarming. Why not enjoy a few extra minutes watching the outsides of our hives for this unwanted guest? If any colonies were missed last year, now is the time that Velutina queens will be making an appearance.

Check to see that the Asian Hornet Watch app is still on your mobile phone – or download it. Make sure you'd recognise it, compared to the European Hornet – the version we fear in the UK has a black thorax, a couple of bright bands on the abdomen, and bright yellow legs.

Make sure that the location of your apiary /apiaries is correct on BeeBase.

If you belong to other societies interested in entomology, make sure they are well-informed on what to report.

Stay safe – if you spot Velutina, or a nest (even an embryo nest), photograph it, but do not try to destroy it, and contact either your AHAT team leader, your local organisation, or the National Bee Unit – making sure you have solid evidence on which they can act.

Liz Bates

WLBK – Asian Hornet Action Team representative

LIFECYCLE IN THE UK

- Nests are founded in Spring by a single queen after being in over-wintering hibernation. The queen (known as a foundress) builds an embryo nest the size of a lemon in an enclosed and protected place, such as a wall cavity, tree hollow, shed, porch etc.
- The queen rears the first batch of female workers consisting of 30-40 cells. It takes 30-50 days for the first batch of workers to emerge.
- The colony often relocates and builds a secondary nest up to 200 m from the embryo nest. The queen's role becomes confined

SWARMS AND SWARMING

It is now time to think about becoming a swarm collector and/or increasing the number of your stocks for the forthcoming season.

So, if you are up for collecting swarms respecting the current social distancing and self isolation restrictions and wish to receive swarm calls from the public, register your details on the enrolment form at the following [link](#).

This will put your details on the BBKA's swarm collectors' map whereby the public can enter the postcode to get the details of local collectors.

When collecting swarms, you must abide by the government advice on 'social distancing'. Take time to assess the risks involved and only collect swarms that are safe to do so.

SWARMS WANTED

This year we are looking for experienced beekeepers to register for "Swarms Wanted". Unfortunately, mentors will not be assigned to new beekeepers due to the government policy of 'social distancing', therefore new beekeepers will not be eligible to receive swarms. If you can assist in homing a swarm this year, you can register this on our "Swarms Wanted" list at the following [link](#).

Chris Price

Swarm Co-ordinator

NOSEMA – AN INTRODUCTION

Nosema is a very common, very destructive disease that affects adult bees. Workers' ability to fly is reduced, their life span may be shortened by 50% and the ability of the colony to build up is reduced.

WHAT IS IT?

The disease agent is a single celled organism – Nosema apis (most common in the UK) or Nosema ceranae (most common in the US) which both occur in our hives. It was originally considered to be a yeast-like fungus but is now reclassified in the Microsporidia. Nosema reproduces in the gut of the bee and forms spores that pass out in the faeces. Infection occurs by ingestion of spores by bees that are on hive cleaning duty. The ingested spores then produce new cells that subsequently form more spores.

Nosema thrives on confinement - during the winter or adverse weather conditions, infection can spread rapidly. It can also spread from hive to hive in an apiary through drifting of transfer by beekeepers.

HOW DO I KNOW MY BEES HAVE GOT IT?

If your colonies do not build up, or seem to dwindle, Nosema might be a problem - but you really need a microscope to be sure. The best method of detecting Nosema uses a gut sample examined under a microscope at x400 magnification to look for spores that resemble 'grains of rice' (see photo above).

A sample of 30 flying bees (these are older and more likely to have an established infection than younger ones) is collected. A simple, easy way is to use a toilet roll tube and a poly bag – shown in the photo. An extract of the guts can then be examined for spores. I'll spare the mathematical detail but the average number of spores in given area (e.g. the field of view) can give an indication of the level of infection.

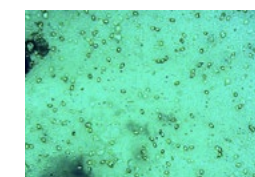
CONTROL

The overriding principle to prevent Nosema, is to maintain colony strength and good apiary hygiene. Replace brood comb every 2-3 years, provide good ventilation and protect colonies from high humidity.

There is no licensed chemical treatment for Nosema, but Dr Bailey gave his name to what remains the most effective ways to combat Nosema- the Bailey Comb Change. It effects a full change of comb without the trauma of a shook swarm, which tends to spread Nosema.

It is useful for you to have a sample of bees from each of your hives tested. Because of the Covid-19 situation we cannot run our planned 'Nosema Clinic' this year, but hope to be able to offer a limited service to those are concerned (e.g. if a colony has struggled to come through the Winter and is not building as it should in the Spring). If this has been your experience please email barry.meatyrd@gmail.

Barry Meatyard



GRAPHIC DESIGN SKILLS WANTED

We have a couple of projects which involve developing artwork for banners and the like that we use at our public displays and, occasionally, for flyers advertising branch events and wondered whether any member with graphic design skills would be prepared to share their expertise in promoting the branch in this way. If so, please contact Chris Cox, secretary@warleambees.org.uk

NEW BEE SUIT?

For a bit of light relief in these anxious times, here is Paul Day wearing his new bee suit, a birthday gift from his grandson. Not sure how effective it would be when carrying out inspections!



BEE LINES

We have dug up some fascinating facts about WLBK that many of our members may not know and may find interesting. We'll share one or two of these in each issue.

- 111 members accessed the co-op in 2019 and made 1000 financial transactions.

PROFILE: MIKE TOWNSEND

We've introduced a new monthly profile section to Bee Talk where we find out how some of our members came to be beekeepers and their various adventures with the bees. First up is Mike Townsend.

When he reached the grand old age of 90, my father-in-law, a heroic Polish army officer, knew that he would need a successor for his hives. James, the youngest of my three children, quickly quipped "I will Grandad". And so my career in beekeeping began.

We started by moving two of his hives into our back garden and invested in equipment, including bee suits because although I've been able to tolerate stings quite well, I knew we needed more than Grandad's rather minimal dress code of an old straw hat and curtain netting.

My early pleasure watching the bees coming and going from the hives soon turned to concern as I realised they were bringing out their dead. I had already contacted Warwick and Leamington beekeepers about membership and was pleasantly surprised when I phoned Brian Milward for advice to be told, "I am on my way round to have a look". Even in those pre-mentor days, in fact pre-almost any organisational sophistication days, I quickly found I was engaging with a supportive group, which has set the precedent for how the branch continues to operate today.

We were a small group of around 30, which together with Brian, included Peter Spencer (master beekeeper and BBKA General Secretary), Dr David Stott (entomologist at Warwick University), Clive Joyce (BBKA apiary manger since year zero), John Home (who made his living as a commercial beekeeper with a few hundred hives), and Jane Medwell (who was starting down the examination road to become a master beekeeper). Being one of the lippy ones patched in nicely with a Branch desperate for Committee members and after a while I was bullied into becoming Chairman.

Like bees in Spring, something was stirring and we sensed a need to welcome new members and improve our resources. This coincided with the launch of the National Lottery which proved to be an ideal foraging opportunity for money and after filing an application we were awarded £5,000.

With a very generous discount from Thornes we established a model teaching apiary adjacent to the church in Bubbenthal. I was apiary manager until Roger Wilkes took over and established our later apiary at Dalehouse Lane.

Clive Joyce also swung open the doors of an unpromising lorry container with a view to having the fully equipped honey extraction facility we have today. Clive's vision has given us what is probably a unique facility for beekeepers nationwide.

I had been 'trained', as all beekeepers are, to keep a tight wallet and this ambition led to the setting up of our purchasing co-operative and particularly the buying of the high quality winter bee food, Ambrosia; all eight tons of it managed by Clive. Another unique Branch benefit.

Within the large geographical area of south Warwickshire we also recognised the difficulty of becoming a beekeeper in urban areas, which was addressed by establishing our 'community apiary scheme'.

All of this activity coincided with the BBKA offering its first ever Training for Trainers Course, which Brian Milward, Clive Joyce and I attended. There seemed little point in investing in a Saturday



unless we did something about it, so using the training notes provided we ran our first Introduction to Beekeepers Course in 2002. This very first one attracted eight delegates. Although our offering might have been deemed unsophisticated, it was those early principles of wanting to do our best for and encouraging new beekeepers that has held through to the courses we run today.

Communicating only via Warwickshire Beekeeper meant long lead in times in getting information about Branch activities to our growing membership, so I took to producing an occasional letter. This was the birth of Bee Talk.

It was about this time I offered to run the BBKA shows with Claire Waring, who together with her husband, Adrian, produced BeeCraft and most recently the Haynes Manual. I mention this because it brought me into contact with, and benefitting from, the advice of some of the nationally best beekeepers which is an opportunity for you too when supporting Clive Joyce and his team who now manage most of the big BBKA shows.

The local media were proving very helpful, providing front page coverage of our course, which helped swell our membership and so enabled us to be well resourced in carrying out training, showing off beekeeping at local events etc.

This media attention led to a most unusual request from the BBC - a sound recording of honeybees for 'The Archers'. I obliged by taking a lady and her sound recordist to a school in Leamington. All the children were ready on tiered benches like a football stadium to safely watch the collection of a swarm underneath a picnic bench. With the head teacher kitted up, we headed across the playground only to hear a whoosh as the swarm promptly flew over my left shoulder. As a result, I had to be a little rough on my own bees to get the sound clip required. So if you hear bees on 'The Archers' they are probably mine.

It was TV next with ITV wanting to do a 'Love your Garden' show from my garden. This involved the chef Valentine Warner taking honey from my hive to use in our kitchen (we had tidied up!). The best bit was when he asked my wife Christine if she had a sieve

because his ingredients had curdled instead of thickened and she told him, "what Delia would do is add a bit of cornflour." Even as a top chef he took the advice from a cook very well.

Always enjoying the craft element of beekeeping I thought I'd try a skep making course run at one of the Agricultural Colleges. Having completed the course I thought that our branch could do a better job and once Val Dillon realised it wasn't a straw hat making course, she has continued to support me very well in running this skep making course, which has latterly been supported by Mary Pemberton. This has led to Warwickshire Beekeepers being the core team of skep makers at the national BBKA shows as well as locally with skeps recently donated to the National Trust for the bee boles at Packwood House.

With concerns about viral infections in beekeeping, we were lucky to have David Evans, an eminent virologist at the Warwick University, join our Branch. David and his team of scientists were researching the interactions between the varroa mite and honeybee

viruses. I managed this project's bees, which included a colony donated by Jane Medwell. David's move to Scotland was a loss to our Branch but we can all benefit from his expertise through his website 'The Apiarist'.

Whilst I don't really show honey much these days, I did at one time win second prize for my set honey at the National Honey Show, so I have had my arm twisted in passing on what I know as part of our summer training programme. Apart from the fame, the best reason for showing honey is that it really increases your understanding of the care needed to produce a decent jar of honey for sale, so I do recommend you have a go at showing.

I've been keeping bees for many years, more than I dare count, and what's important for me is what you put back into it. In this respect, we are as a Branch very fortunate indeed. When I look at the commitment, quality and professionalism, especially latterly, going into all of our activities all I can say is well done and thanks to you all.

Mike Townsend

HINTS AND TIPS

- Being able to pick up a queen is a very useful thing to do. Practice by picking up drones in the hive or better still, practice by picking up workers from inside a window when they become trapped in the house. When you pick them up by their wings, their abdomens curve away from you so that worker stings are out of harm's way!
- Colony development is really increasing this month. Supers need to be added to prevent the hive becoming overcrowded. This is best done when the brood box is about three-quarters full of bees. As with many aspects of bee keeping there are divided opinions on how to add successive supers. However if they are added just above the queen excluder then the young bees will be able to occupy this space more readily and thus relieve the pressure in the brood box.
- On fine days the bees will be collecting early spring pollen. Without it the colony cannot expand and will not be able to take advantage of the approaching spring blossom. Crocus, snowdrop and willow are the principle sources. Remove the mouse guards to assist the pollen delivery!
- Make hygiene a priority this year. Always take a bag or box with you during an inspection to put those odd bits of comb, lumps of wax and propolis in.
- LOOKING FOR THAT SPECIAL PRESENT? I was fortunate enough to be given these as on Mother's Day. They are beautifully made by a local lady who has just set up her own company. 5% of her profits go to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. sharon@bee.creative.design or 07554440822.

Sharon also makes lots of other things as well as the tea towels, tote bag, including tablecloths, aprons, oven gloves, tea cosies, bunting.

(I am going to get some more tea towels for Father's Day)



HELEN ESSEX

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to Helen on h.essex@virgin.net

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver. Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month: tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
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