



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## UNVEILING THE NEW WLBK LOGO

**F**or some time WLBK's committee has been looking at launching a new logo for our branch. We wanted something different from Warwickshire Beekeepers, which has taken the Warwickshire County Crest of the Bear and Ragged Staff.

We did a call out on Bee Talk and had numerous suggestions from our members. Not quite suitable, we approached a retired advertising executive in Leamington Spa to see if he could suggest a way forward. Something to do while in lockdown was the excuse.

His design was met very favourably by our committee and we hope it will be met similarly

by our members too.

It is a very simple logo but as its designer says, "Simplicity is the key and it is that which gives the design cut-through. The human brain has less than a second to absorb logo information against a wallpaper of some 15,000 brandings per day (and rising). Plus, the flower is the very essence of a bee's existence. By introducing details like wings, the communication integrity of the design would fall apart plus it would become boring through being "yawn, yawn", predictable."

So, there you have it.

We hope to move to this design in the near future but we would welcome members' views.

**Chris Cox, WLBK Secretary**



WARWICK &  
LEAMINGTON  
BEEKEEPERS

## LOCKDOWN BUT THE BEES BUZZ ON

**T**he spring rush in the apiary is reassuringly familiar this year. The surge in colony size and nectar flow always seems sudden, though we expect them. I have enjoyed beekeeping this spring precisely because it feels normal. It has been a lovely month and we have had a strong flow – filling supers and causing the usual scrabble to make more frames. My mum always said the bees swarm when the lupins flower – but the bees are not hanging around this year and have not waited for the lupins. At the moment, branch members are all thinking about swarm prevention and finding enough kit. The bee world goes on, regardless.

The experience of beekeeping is slightly

different this year. There was no National Convention and our branch activities are suspended. I miss working with new beekeepers, our branch meetings and, of course, the cake! But there are new things to try. This month, our lecture programme will jump into the unknown with a virtual Beekeeper's Question Time. Please give it a go – to keep contact and say hello – but also to ask any questions you might have. We can certainly offer several opinions for each problem!

This less-hurried year might also be a good time to try new things. I have done a Bailey frame change on a colony which is not thriving because of Nosema. I am also trying to re-use everything, including wax scraps and frames I would usually have burnt, so I have got a solar wax extractor. It's like having a new pet – I



spend quite a bit of time tending it and offering encouragement.

Enjoy your beekeeping this May and if you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at [warleambees@warleambees.org.uk](mailto:warleambees@warleambees.org.uk). Enjoy the bees and stay safe!

**Jane Medwell, WLBK Chair**



# BUZZING FOR VICTORY

**T**he pandemic and the test of the national resolve to overcome it has prompted comparisons with that victory of the British people 75 years ago. This landmark anniversary of the “Victory in Europe” was due to be commemorated on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May and a huge family day out was to be held at Warwick Racecourse, which has now sadly been postponed. Never known to miss such an opportunity to promote our cause, WLBK was intent on creating a World War II themed display depicting the role of bees and beekeepers. Unable to present our research as intended, we thought we’d share it with members via the pages of Bee Talk.

The Romans came up with the idea of catapulting beehives into their enemies’ ranks but there are even earlier reports of honey being used against advancing troops intent on pillaging and foraging. With honey being so irresistible, it was laced with poison and caches of it left out to tempt the troops. In Asia, local residents knew that some honey was naturally toxic, for example honey produced from *Rhododendron Ponticum*, but, much to their detriment, invaders were unaware of this. And whilst not poisonous, mead was also left out for advancing troops to pillage, rendering them a tad wobbly and less able to function. Again, we can all identify with that!

In World War II, honey bees also played a part. Less so as an offensive weapon, although there was an account of Belgian soldiers holed up in a ‘beehouse’ throwing frames of bees at the enemy to make good their escape, but in other ways:

- Resistance workers used hives as safes where they could stash stuff to avoid detection.
- Honey was a sweetening agent that existed outside the rigours of rationing and so beekeepers suddenly became everybody’s friend.
- Self-sufficiency was encouraged, which included the keeping of bees. Note the envious spectators in the illustration above.
- Honey was also used to dress burns and wounds where its antiseptic and anti-microbial properties helped prevent infection and encouraged healing. An age-old remedy.
- Such was the importance of bees for pollination and honey production that beekeepers were permitted a supplementary ration of 10lbs of sugar per hive to feed bees over the winter. Shortly after this was announced, the number of beehives in the country rocketed. It was only after the size of the honey crop was found to be inconsistent with the number of hives that it was suspected that the sugar wasn’t reaching the bees. The Government’s answer to prevent it from reaching the black market was to dye it green. Unfortunately, this resulted in the honey taking on the colour of the dye. A similar effect was seen a few years back when bees were seen to be producing blue honey having foraged on the spent candy tins in M & Ms’ factory in France.
- Beekeeping also received a boost by the issue of a supplementary petrol ration for beekeepers to take their bees to the orchards
- Bees wax was also put to use, which included the making of candles, leather balm for straps and belts, boot polish, as a preservative, waterproofer, rust inhibitor, lubricant and hair product, particularly for styling the Sergeant Major’s moustache.

The fascination with honey bees continued despite the war. Company Sergeant Major Savage gained his BBKA “Experts” award while in a Stalag and there were a further 26 prisoners of war who



gained BBKA “Craftsman” status. Just how this was achieved is not recorded.

By 1945, beekeeping numbers reached a peak which then fell dramatically once sugar rationing ended in 1953. In WLBK, membership rose from 30 in 1939 to 80 by 1953. It then declined and would be another 55 years before branch membership reached that level again.

So, why was this?

The “Dig for Victory” scheme led to the ploughing up of pasture land to grow crops. When this land, which amounted to 6.5 million acres, including many wildflower meadows, was being ploughed it prompted dormant weed seeds to pop up. A particularly invasive weed called Charlock – a member of the brassica family and not dissimilar to oil seed rape – proved very troublesome to beekeepers as its nectar caused the honey to crystallise rapidly making extraction difficult. Don’t we just know it!

Additionally, bees that survived in the vicinity near recently bombed properties were killed to avoid the hampering of rescue efforts.

After the war, there was a dramatic fall in the number of hives in this country. The wildflower meadows were not reinstated. Official government policy encouraging the introduction, often disastrously, of pesticide and herbicides and their indiscriminate spraying together with hedgerow removal and the felling of ancient woodland, all in the pursuit of food production, significantly reduced the forage available to honey bees and other pollinators. This led to a decline which continued to the turn of the century.

By 2002, there were only 30 WLBK members. However, shortly thereafter there were signs that this decline was beginning to slow. Under the infectious enthusiasm of members such as Bernard Collins, Clive Joyce, Mike Townsend, Peter Spencer and John Home, to name but a few, the popularity of beekeeping today sees Warwick and Leamington’s membership reaching 250. Despite this, honey bees continue to be under threat.

So, one may ask, where was the victory for them?

**Bernard Brown**

*Thanks go to David Charles, John Home and Steve Bates for their help in providing information for this article.*



# IN THE APIARY IN MAY

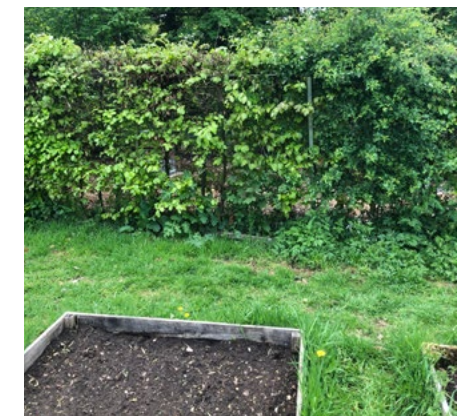
**T**here are two types of hives in my apiary now – big ones and small ones. Colonies that came through the winter well are making swarm preparation. But a couple of colonies are still small and need further investigation. For May, the priority is to make sure there is enough space for bees and nectar. This helps prevent not only swarming, but also CBPV.

- Continue weekly apiary visits.
  - Prepare spare brood frames for artificial swarms and nucs – the surest ways to prevent swarming.
  - Prepare super frames ahead of the flow – you will need them suddenly.
  - Give super space if there are five frames of brood or six frames of bees in a super.
  - Keep ahead of the bees’ space needs.
  - Take a sample of 30 bees for nosema testing if a colony is not growing.
  - If you see unfilled queen cells begin to think about how you will prevent swarming.
  - When you see filled queen cells, split the queen from the brood to prevent swarming. The artificial swarm or nuc are easiest.
  - Do a full brood disease inspection and check the health of the brood in each colony.
  - Identify colonies for wax change using Bailey frame change or shook swarm, which will also slow down swarming preparations.
- I spoke too soon last month – my bees have found OSR and fly straight past an orchard to get it!

**Jane Medwell**



Two of the branch hives on holiday



# ROAD WORKS SOLVE MYSTERY

**D**o you recall the mystery of the missing shed door? After a break-in at one of our Dalehouse Lane sheds, the perpetrators confounded us by ignoring two mowers and a strimmer but took the door they had ripped off to gain access. We searched the site but couldn’t find a single trace of it. Speculation as to why the door was of such interest and how they spirited it away caused much merriment at the time.

Well, I can now shed some light on the mystery.

Whilst passing the site the other day, the road improvement works which prompted our vacation of the site, have continued despite the current situation. The site had been completely transformed. The scrub had been cut and mulched. More trees,



particularly by the river, had been removed as had all of the hedges along Dalehouse Lane and Stoneleigh Road. I took the opportunity to take a closer look, taking several photos and a couple of short video clips. During the filming in the bottom meadow, a rather large piece of wood caught my eye. You’ve got it – it was the shed door.

There it was, covered in mud, badly broken with the padlock still attached. I entered the code and it popped open. I was very surprised to find it, having spent a lot of time searching, not only for the door but my brains to fathom out what had happened to it. So that tells us “what” happened but the “why” still defeats me.

**Mick Smith**





# REVIEW OF STING-PROOF SUIT

There are many highs to beekeeping but these highs do come with a sting in the tail, quite literally. By surrounding ourselves with tens of thousands of stinging insects it's inevitable that we'll suffer a sting at some point.

We all have our memorable sting tales. Mine was in my third year of beekeeping. The hive was in our back garden and excited about seeing the bees flying out from the hive in early March I stuck my head a bit too close to the entrance. A guard bee took objection to my intrusion and stung me on the forehead. Of course I'd been stung before and my stings do tend to come up in red, itchy lumps but I wasn't prepared for what a sting on my face would do. Let's just say that my husband likened my fat face to that of Shrek and was so shocked by it that he made me go to A&E. However, the A&E doctor was more interested in talking to me about my beekeeping hobby than the effect the hobby had just had on my face!

Since then I have been stung a few times through my bee suit and latex gloves. Two particular stings on one hand in summer 2018



caused a feeling of breathlessness and a thickening in my throat. I got an immediate appointment at the doctor who suspected an allergic reaction. I was then transferred to the Immunology service in Birmingham and after skin prick tests and blood tests it was confirmed that I have a mild sensitisation to bee venom. Unable to say whether further stings would lead to a more severe reaction, I now carry an epipen with me and make sure that all my skin is covered when near the hives.

I wasn't particularly after a new bee suit when attending Bee Tradex at Stoneleigh in March but I do remember seeing adverts for Old Castle Farm's "sting proof" bee suit in the BBKA magazine, so thought I'd make a 'beeline' for their stand. With a special show price of £130 for their **Sentinel Pro II Beekeeping Suit** I decided to try one on. A lovely Welsh lady helped me pick out a suit with a hat rather than a veil, as that is my preference, and I tried on a size 10 in lavender, not my colour of choice but that is the only option for ladies currently. For men it's white or light grey. It is a snug fit, which is in complete contrast to the very roomy bee suit I currently have and felt deceptively lightweight and comfortable. It is made from what looks like a thick gauze-like material which is thicker than the average bee sting and so apparently makes it unlikely that the wearer will be stung. I completed my purchase with a pair of matching sting-proof gloves.

I have been to my hives a handful of times sporting my new suit. The first thing I noticed when stepping out the car wearing it is how breathable it is. This will be a welcome relief in the summer months when I no longer have to wear layers to prevent stings through my suit.

There are also some features that I really like such as the Velcro fastening at the cuffs, waterproof kneepads, elastic band round your chin, a zipped breast pocket so that my phone doesn't drop out when leaning over and the two lined hive tool pockets.

All in all, I'm pretty impressed and it has definitely increased my confidence around the bees.

**Tanya Weaver**

# SWARMING DURING COVID-19

The swarm season is about to kick off so, we may ask, what are the implications for swarm collection under the present restrictions? Here are some thoughts.

Defra has not specifically banned swarm collection, so it is very much a case for personal discretion and assessment of the risks involved. But is swarm collection an "essential activity"? After all, the bees will usually depart the staging post by evening.

Agreed that, if not collected, the bees will fly off and, in spite of the government's edict on house moves, find a home somewhere, possibly in someone's roof or chimney. It is also agreed that feral colonies can become a sink for disease but on the other hand we are told that 75% of them do not survive the first season. So, is

swarm collection really essential. Well, perhaps in the case of public danger, disruption or nuisance but otherwise? How does it compare with the risk from unnecessary journeys?

If swarm collection is proposed, then the principle of social distancing needs to be observed. It is sensible for initial enquiries of the landowner to include this as well as whether access can be gained without passing through accommodation.

If you have signed up as a swarm collector but now do not wish to participate, you can avoid phone calls from the public by contacting our swarm co-ordinator, Chris Price, who will remove your details from the BBKA register.

Whatever you decide to do, stay safe, take care and enjoy all that the season brings.

**Bernard Brown**

# ARNIA UPDATE

Although the University is closed, we have been fortunate to inspect the hives on a regular basis. The Arnia colony was moved from a poly nuc into a Standard National at the end of March, and a super was added on 6<sup>th</sup> April to provide additional space to deter swarming. This can be seen in the stepped changes in the weight graph below. You can see a gradual trend upwards as the colony expands and nectar is stored away (top right).

The temperature graph this month was interesting (bottom right). Up until the end of March the colony had been queenless, however once the new queen right colony was added you can see in the below graph how the temperature immediately stabilises at 35 degrees. In mid April the temperature becomes more unstable and this is most likely due to the central brood nest moving across the frames. Once the temperature probe was moved, the temperature stabilises once again.

We do have spare equipment to set up once we are able to buy some crucial pieces of kit from Arnia, who are currently in lockdown.

**Alan Deeley**



# LOCKDOWN JOB

A number of years ago, on becoming the Secretary to the branch I attempted to do a Membership Survey. This was a spreadsheet driven exercise and although a limited success it was quite insightful. Well, now that we are in the state of purdah set by HMG's rules this has given me time to consider a repeat exercise using a more modern platform - Survey Monkey.

To date a sample questionnaire of ten questions, to keep to the free version of Survey Monkey, has successfully been circulated to the committee members. As a result a further iteration of questions is now necessary. So this note is just a "heads up" that you will all be receiving the survey in your email inbox in the near future and I look forward to a more comprehensive response from my first attempt as the Survey Monkey platform is very straight forward. From this, the branch committee will be able to take account of the membership's wishes in its decision-making once things return to normal.

**Chris Cox**



# FOR SALE AND WANTED

Don't forget that you can list beekeeping kit, books, foundation etc. on WLBK's website in our **For Sale & Wanted Listing** section. Please contact Ray Summers [raysummers81@gmail.com](mailto:raysummers81@gmail.com) about this.

Currently there is a range for sale from national super frames, a swarm trap and foundation to a variety of beekeeping books.

# BEST OF THE BLOGS

Here are some suggestions for some beekeeping blogs to while away the time.

[The Apiarist](#)

[Beekeeping Forum](#)

[The Scientific Beekeeper](#)

[The Honey Bee Suite](#)

# GET TOGETHER

Membership secretary, Rachel Dove together with Barry Meatyard, education co-ordinator and Pares Pankhania, IT whizz, are exploring the practicality of a zoom-based get together for members later on this month to which you will all be invited to log on. O not fear. For those of us who are not zoom aware, guidance will be given.

It will be good to chat again!

By the way, technology has not helped us overcome the cake problem. We shall have to leave this to your own devices. Keep an eye on your inbox for more details.

# BEE LINES

We have dug up some fascinating facts about WLBK that many of our members may not know and may find interesting:

- Did you know that there is a Branch History page on the website. It has recently been updated. Do take a look.



# PROFILE: CLIVE JOYCE

**W**e'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. This month it's Clive Joyce.

Clive Joyce has dedicated more than half his life to bees and beekeeping. An imminent beekeeper being both a BBKA Honorary Member, serving as BBKA apiary manager for many years, and an Honorary Life Member of our WLBK branch, his career in beekeeping is really a journey with not only the bees but the beekeepers he has met a long the way who have provided invaluable support, guidance, inspiration and knowledge.

It all started about 40 years ago when Clive made an off-the-cuff remark to his wife Eileen that he was going to buy bees having seen a colony advertised for sale in the Coventry Telegraph. She was fully supportive of the idea but did think it wise that he went on a course before bringing bees into their lives. This is how he met another imminent member of our branch, Peter Spencer, who at the time was running a six-week beekeeping course at a local high school. "I thoroughly enjoyed the course and gained a lot from it. Being a carpenter to start with, I decided to make my own hive over the winter period," says Clive.

In the meantime, he decided to glean as much as he could about bees and beekeeping. So he went along to The Royal Show where he watched a demonstration by Anthony Rawlings, who was the apiary manager of Stoneleigh at the time. Striking up a conversation with him after the demonstration, Anthony invited Clive to join him at the apiary whenever he was there. Discovering that Anthony was also a professional beekeeper who bred queens and nucs for sale, Clive decided to buy a nuc for his newly built hive, which would be placed in the small garden of his Kenilworth home.

"Anthony duly arrived with his box of bees and the first thing he realised was I didn't have a national hive. Although the frames were the same size, the lugs were shorter and so we set about cutting off the ends of the lugs with a pair of secateurs. I used to watch the bees spiral in and out out of this courtyard and we never had any problem at all with them being there," says Clive.

## LESSONS IN KEEPING BEES

Anthony introduced him to other imminent beekeepers including Stan Allsop, the manager of Cherry Orchard Brickyard in Kenilworth, who he also went to visit regularly. "To me, Stan had always been a very old man, but he had a fantastic outlook on life. His beekeeping kit consisted of an old tweed coat and a trilby hat with a lace curtain around it. I remember saying to him one day that I was really worried because I had noticed that there was a small hole in this curtain just below the peak of the hat. He replied by saying yes, that's for letting the bees out. He went on to explain that if a bee happens to get into your veil that bee absolutely does not want to stay in there. The solution is to remain calm and the bee will find the hole and fly out. It was little bits of information like that that really gave me confidence, and I remained friends with Stan right up until he died," says Clive.

Stan encouraged Clive to join WLBK. "A more friendly bunch you would never come across. All of these beekeepers, including



Bernard Collins who used to look after the bees for the branch, were feeding me with information whether they knew it or not. They were all very helpful," he admits.

Clive was now going over to the apiary at Stoneleigh on a weekly basis to give Anthony a hand. "One day he invited me to his house and when I arrived he had about 15 nucs out on the lawn at the back. What happened next was a great lesson in observation as he had terrific observing powers. Outside one of his breeding nucs he noticed that there was a tiny circular bit of wax, which was the end of a queen cell that a queen had bitten off as she emerged out of it. He very quickly realised that the ten queen cells inside were hatching sooner than he expected. All of a sudden, he ripped the roof off and started pulling the frames out and laying them away from each other against the side of the nuc. The emergency then was to keep those queens apart, so they did not kill each other. It was an absolutely intriguing lesson in observation," says Clive.

## NEW ROLE AS BBKA APIARY MANAGER

One day, Anthony very matter of factly announced to Clive that he was retiring from his BBKA apiary manager role and that he was passing on the baton to him. "I then received a letter from Harry Grainger, chairman of BBKA, saying that as I was Anthony's apprentice would I be happy to look after the bees? I said I would but would need help to which he replied that I was in the best place because experts from all over the country came to the BBKA. Although he did warn me that they all have their own ideas and will tell me what I'm doing is wrong but I'll learn," laughs Clive.

As well as managing the apiary, Clive also built up his own stocks running about 50 at one stage. During this time he became great friends with John Home, a professional beekeeper who set up Fosseway Honey and ran over 300 colonies. "The things I learnt from John, there are no books that can impart everything that he told me. Together we'd also take the bees, up to 60 hives, on a trailer to the heather in Derbyshire and the apple orchards in Kent. It was a fascinating time.

"A funny story was when we were stopped by the police. You can imagine that driving very early in the morning in a big white van with a trailer and sheet over the back would draw attention. A police car pulled us over and the officer came up to the window. He asked why the side door was open with wire mesh over it. John replied that it was to give the bees in all those boxes inside

ventilation. The officer very quickly backed off and told us to be on our way," smiles Clive.

Clive was also heavily involved in running shows, notably the Royal Show and Town & Country. It was here that he met Jim Watson, who was the chief steward of the Royal Show for many years. "A fantastic bloke who knew everything there was to know about bees. He was a great showman as he was often interviewed for TV during the Royal Show and he also showed honey at Honey Shows. He probably won more prizes for showing honey and beekeeping products than any other person I know. That is the caliber of person I was able to meet through working at BBKA.

"Others I'd like to mention is Walter Cole, who used to look after the gardens at Stoneleigh. A beautiful old fellow who I think was well into his 90's but he was so dependable. Then, of course, there is Peter Spencer, who became general secretary to the BBKA, and Brian Millward, who together with Peter were the only two in BBKA's offices at the time and ran the whole thing. There is also Miss Lillian Bunn and her dad Harry Bunn, both beekeepers who used to sell beekeeping equipment from home," says Clive.

## BUILDING UP WLBK BRANCH

Of course, Clive was also instrumental in helping to build WLBK into the successful and thriving branch it is today. About 17 years ago WLBK, much like other beekeeping branches across the country, was struggling for members. Together with Mike Townsend, WLBK's chairman at the time, and Brian Millward they went to a seminar called 'Teach the Teachers' run by the BBKA. "We picked up a few tips and decided that we'd run a course for WLBK. That really set us in motion to build our club up. The first course we ran had six people, the following year ten and gradually we gained more members and today we have over 250," says Clive.

However, the downside of all this interest in beekeeping,

according to Clive, is that equipment has become so expensive. This was the reason for setting up the branch extraction facility and later the branch co-op. "Of course, Tim Foden organised so much of this and he was fantastic at it," comments Clive.

## REPAYING THE KINDESS

Clive remained BBKA apiary manager until about six years ago. "Harry Grainger was right - I met some of the leading lights in beekeeping. Those already mentioned above but others such as George Knights, former chairman and president of BBKA, Dr Harry Riches and Adrian Waring, who were all so fascinating and taught me so much. So all the way through, my beekeeping life has been possible by all these different people that have had an impact on what I've done but, more especially, on beekeeping itself," says Clive.

Clive is involved in so many aspects of WLBK's branch from training new beekeepers to coordinating and distributing equipment to members, but he is very modest about his involvement saying that if he can pass on a bit of knowledge and support it's his way of repaying all these people who have shown such kindness to him over the years.

"You can't put into words the amount of enjoyment I've had not only in beekeeping but the interaction with other people. I have had so much kindness shown to me. I received an award from David Cameron a few years back [The Points of Light award recognises outstanding individual volunteers who are making a change in their community] and I still don't know who put me forward for that. Likewise, they made me an honorary member of BBKA and, again, I don't really know who put me forward for that. There are only eight honorary members and it is such an honour but I don't really think I deserve anything like that," he says.

But, of course, we all know that he does!

Tanya Weaver

# BEE-FRIENDLY PLANT TO GROW

**D**on't you just love plants that more or less look after themselves and at the same time attract the bees?

The Spanish Broom, sometimes called Spanish Gorse or Spanish Furze, is a wonderfully reliable, clump forming shrub, best grown in warm, dry sites on poor soil. It is said to thrive on neglect!

Reaching some 30 inches tall, it will spread over about 5 feet and in the late Spring is covered in clusters of bright yellow pea-like flowers. In my garden I have noticed that bumble bees are as attracted to it as the honeybees. It is virtually disease free but just be careful not to be tempted to cut it back too much, it will not tolerate hard pruning. It is also extremely prickly so that might put you off!

One fun fact about the Genista family – did you know that the emblem of the kings of England from Henry II, 1154, to Richard III, 1485, was the broom or in Latin, Plante Geneste – and hence they were known as The Plantagenets?

Maggie Curley





# GET BUZZING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In these strange times it is more important than ever to stay connected. WLBK has had a social media presence on Twitter and Facebook for a few years now. We have used these platforms to publicise our beginners' course and association events such as talks and fairs, as well as to spread the word about bees and beekeeping. There is often a lot of activity on the accounts during swarming season from concerned members of the public, and our Twitter account currently has over 600 followers who receive every message (or tweet!) we post.



We are looking for members to help boost our social media presence. There are three easy ways you can do this:

1. Like, tweet, retweet and share our posts. This helps us to reach more people and raise our profile within the local online community.

2. Engage with our accounts. Any photos, videos or stories about beekeeping can be posted on the facebook page or tweeted at the twitter account.

3. If you don't have a Twitter or Facebook account of your own, send us new content for us to post by email, to [wlbktwitter@gmail.com](mailto:wlbktwitter@gmail.com).

Lastly, as announced in the February issue of Bee Talk I have recently had a baby, so I haven't been quite up to managing the accounts as usual! If anyone would like to help with this please let me know, for example by posting regular bee pictures, "live-tweeting" a swarm collection or simply using the accounts to engage with the public on an ad-hoc basis. If interested, please contact me using the email address above and I can get you set up with direct access to the accounts.

We would love to have your help in getting our social media accounts buzzing!

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/warleambees](https://www.facebook.com/warleambees)

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/warleambees](https://www.twitter.com/warleambees)

**Josie Cassell**

# BRANCH BEES ON HOLIDAY

As we cannot use the Training Apiary this summer, we had to decide whether to maintain it in situ or disperse the colonies. The committee was split but after much soul searching and discussion, our Branch Bees went on their holidays. They have been evacuated to experienced members and will be coming home to the Training Apiary when we can use it again. I took a hive to a rural retreat hoping the bees would enjoy it. I don't think they were impressed.



Unfortunately, when I checked the hive a week later the bees had not drawn the comb in the top box. I put a frame of brood into the top box in the hope that this would encourage the bees to draw out the foundation. They still did not draw out the new foundation.

I decided to shook swarm them. All went well and the following week when I looked they had drawn four frames and the queen was laying. I am going to suggest that we teach the bees to read so they know what we are trying to achieve when we decimate their home. I hope now that they are happy and will be strong enough to produce a surplus of honey later on. If not then all is not lost as it is more important to have healthy bees that are disease free and strong enough to go through winter.

We will keep members updated on the Training apiary Bees, whilst they are on their holidays and we aim to make sure they come home suitably refreshed and ready for action when we can open up the Training Apiary to members.

**Liz Gurney**

## ISOLATION APIARY

At WLBK we have an isolation apiary for members' use. Established two years ago, it is located in an unused corner of farmland between Warwick and Henley- in- Arden. The site is 500m from the nearest habitation and over a kilometre to the nearest known apiary. Access is 24/7 over a rather deeply rutted farm track direct from a tarmac road but a vehicle can get within barrowing distance.

Whether for quarantine purposes, as a borstal for recalcitrant bees or as a temporary home whilst moving colonies less than 3 miles, contact Bernard Brown – [bernardnbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardnbrown@outlook.com) to take advantage of this facility.

# HINTS AND TIPS

This winter has been mild and so swarming preparation is likely to be early. Here are some tips with help from Clive Joyce on how to be prepared:

When carrying out your weekly inspections in May, June and July keep a close eye out for these signs that may indicate swarming preparations are taking place:

- An increase in the number of drones or drone cells.
- Play cups (vertical, empty hemispherical wax cups) suggest the colony is practicing the art of making queen cells.
- During swarm preparation the young bees stay in the centre of the frame and the older bees collect around the outer parts.
- The number of bees around the queen increases as she is fed more. This leads to increased egg laying and eventually the space is not available so possibility of swarming increases.
- Scout bees will be out about 14 days before a swarm. They will be looking for a favourable site for the swarm to go to. Look out for bees with no pollen doing a waggle dance on the comb, these will be the scout bees communicating their findings.
- Set up a bait hive and look for interest being taken.
- Look out for bees zig- zagging across the comb. This recruits bees and stirs up the colony to prepare for swarming.

..... BUT after all this, if they still swarm then collect them up and rub carbolic soap on the area they chose to swarm to. Then they will not all abscond back to that place as soon as your back is turned!



Mike Townsend has provided a brilliant tip below on how to find an elusive queen, which I too have experienced and is especially difficult with a hive rammed full of bees.

I have never been very good at finding queens, which I try and do as early as possible when the hive is less populated. I want to do this in preparation for swarm minimisation later on and although there are swarm control manipulations that do not involve finding the queen, it is more straightforward if you do find her.

After going through a couple of times the bees can get ratty and by the next time I go into the hive the population has probably doubled making her even harder to find.

I have used the method where you put an additional empty brood box above the floor, shake all the bees into this box, put a queen excluder over the top followed by the original box with all the brood. The theory is that the worker bees rise up onto the brood and after a couple of hours you will find the queen on her own under the queen excluder. This means having to return to an out apiary quite soon and sometimes I have found the queen is surrounded by a ball of bees, either side of the queen excluder, which when you move it about to find the queen means she may run away; in my case will run away.

As finding the queen has been in preparation for carrying out an artificial swarm some time later I have been filling the lower brood box with foundation together with a couple of frames of brood of most stages but still have room for the queen to lay up. I have shaken all the bees into this bottom box put the queen excluder over and the original brood box with the rest of the original brood frames over the top. When I return several days later even I can find the queen as it involves just looking over the couple of frames down in the bottom box. If the bees have been particularly busy and drawn out some of the foundation which the queen is using she will be easy to spot. I can now put them down into the one box, keep the partially drawn foundation for later use, or carry out an artificial swarm straightaway.

I am currently looking after one of the Branch training hives and can see from the hive records that many had tried and failed to find this queen, except apiary manager Dave Phillips who noted he had spotted her only for her to then give him the slip. I could see why. Being dark black and slim she is certainly one of those elusive types.

**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](mailto:h.essex@virgin.net)

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver. Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28<sup>th</sup> of each month:

[tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk)

WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH  
OF WARWICKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

REG CHARITY NO. 500276

[WWW.WARLEAMBEES.ORG.UK](http://WWW.WARLEAMBEES.ORG.UK)