July 2020
Issue 196

BEETALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

A TALE OF A BOY AND HIS BEES

As soon as he was old enough (3.5, in case you are wondering), my son Freddie has been coming with me to visit my bees. In the early days, it was one long risk assessment. 'Can I hold a frame, Mummy?' Ummm….yes. 'Can I puff the smoke, Mummy?' Ummm…. Sure. 'Can I light the smoker?' Ummm…. No, the grass in the field looks pretty dry right now, I don't think that's a great idea. 'Can I go and look at that pond over there?' Ummm… can you wait until I can come with you?

However, now at 9.5 he has become a real help. His little sister has not wanted to join us, and so it has become an activity that we have done together, just the two of us. We are fortunate that our apiary is close enough to walk to, so we load up with equipment needed for that day's jobs and stroll up the road together, chatting as we go. He is particularly skilled in lighting the aforementioned smoker these days, and is now tall enough and strong enough to help me lift off heavy supers. He also loves hacking back the foliage around the hives, so often gets on with that whilst I am squinting to see what is going on in the colonies, and if he does want to wander off and look at the pond then that's fine.

Last week, we went for a routine visit to the bees. As we were strimming the grass we spotted a lot of activity around a spare hive at the end of the apiary. When we peeked inside we discovered, to our joy, that a swarm had moved in. Freddie spotted the queen before I did (she was marked green, so definitely not one of mine, but maybe last year's vintage?) – so, in the spirit of finders keepers, these are now his very own bees. He is beyond proud of them and has high hopes for a small crop of honey – if not this year then next – and already has his first customers lined up.

I was hoping that Freddie would write this article for BeeTalk, thinking that maybe it would occupy him in a homeschooling / educational kind of way (possibly while I got on with a couple of work calls??). However, today he learnt the most important beekeeping lesson of all: always make sure your veil is zipped up before you start an inspection. So he is nursing a very swollen lip and eating ice cream as I type, and I don't think he will be in the mood to extol the joys of beekeeping before the editorial deadline.

Hi. This is Freddie. I did manage to write this after my… incident.

I have been helping my mum with the bees since I was 3.5. Sadly not lighting the smoker as I am now, but still fun to go. I used to help with my mum's bees but now as I have my own colony I do them. I can work on them without having to wait for a turn to do something.

I like beekeeping because every year we get honey and it's really tasty. I have it on toast in the morning and sometimes on my cereal.

My mum has about 50,000 bees but as mine is just a small colony I have about 10,000. Fun fact: the queen lays about 2,000 eggs every day. That's incredible! Another fact: in one trip a worker bee can carry half its body weight in pollen.

The best bit about going to see the bees is the noise they make, because it is nice and calming. When my lip is fully un-swelled then I will go and see them again and check how they are doing.

Nicola and Freddie Owen

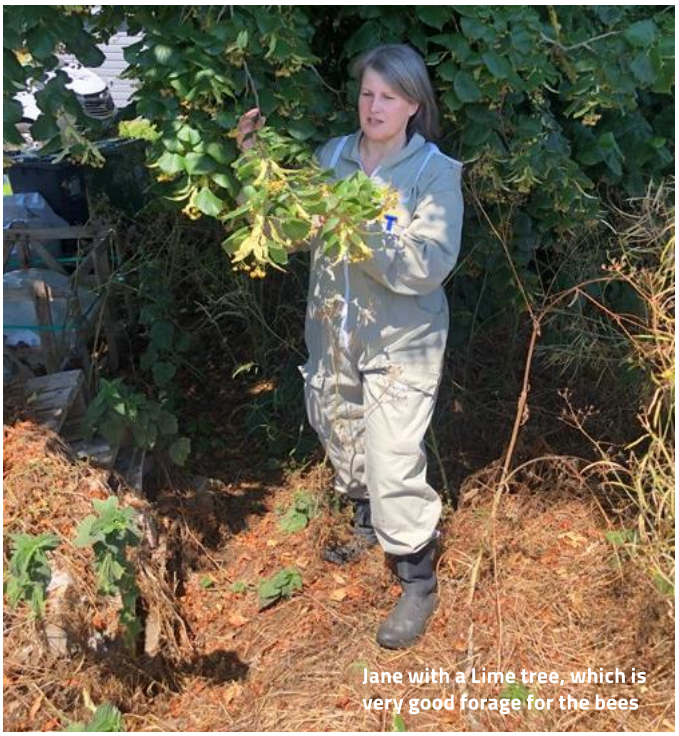
MESSAGE FROM WLBK'S CHAIR

The bees are oblivious to the changes in our lives caused by the easing of restrictions, but it is a good thing for Warwick and Leamington beekeepers. Both the Branch Cooperative and Branch Extraction facilities are opening up as lockdown lifts (see page 10). These facilities are really a major asset for us all - saving money (an issue dear to the beekeeper's heart) and making extraction and feeding so much easier.

My spring honey is already solid in the buckets and ready to be turned into soft set honey- and for that I need jars. I am also thinking ahead to varroa treatments and feeding. In the last few years, our super-value Ambrosia, organised by Clive Joyce, has been a real cause for celebration. I am so glad it will be available again, amid sensible safety precautions.

The June Gap was a bit alarming in my apiary this year - two queens stopped laying and even though I found one, it worried me a bit. But combs of eggs added to the colonies went unused so the queens were still there and not "faulty". They are both laying again now, and the flow is well under way, with copious yields of bramble, clover and mixed wildflower nectar. The rain seems to have freed up the nectar flow and I am looking forward to the summer crop.

By now, my colonies are mostly split, so the swarm risk is greatly reduced, but queen rearing has meant I have been using frames of brood to supply split polynucs for mating. This, in turn, has meant I am still doing my least favourite job - making frames. There seems to be no end to it. One day, there will be another way - or maybe I need to go for topbars?



Jane with a Lime tree, which is very good forage for the bees

Enjoy your beekeeping this July and if you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at warleambees@warleambees.org.uk

Stay safe!

Jane Medwell, WLBK Chair

SWARM REPORT 2020

The swarm collectors have reported 34 call outs so far this year, some of them quite eventful. Not all have turned out to be honeybees with quite a few call outs from the public for bumblebees. The swarms collected have either been kept by the collector replacing lost colonies from winter or passed onto other local beekeepers.

There have been some straightforward collections from trees and fences but there have also been some interesting collections to report.

Emma Baylis's collection was going well; the bees were going into the box but when she returned in the evening they had relocated to the top of a tree. The landowner kindly transported Emma to the tree-top in a tractor's bucket in order to gain access to the swarm.

Alistair Walker patiently and gently removed bees from a caller's bathroom. The bees had gained access via a hole from an old overflow pipe and a gap between the skirting board and floor. His reward was a bottle of wine from a very happy customer.

Alan Deeley had a few call outs, three of which were for honeybees that he treated for varroa with oxalic acid vapour. The bees were then quarantined for two weeks before he took them to one of his apiaries. Alan currently has three trap-out exercises: in the cavity of a garage wall, in the wall cavity of an engineering company's building and another in a willow tree on the 14th tee at Coventry Golf club.

A friend of David Faulkner got in contact about a swarm that had located themselves on a fence. Whilst in the process of persuading the bees into his skep, a woman turned up claiming the bees were hers as one of her colonies had swarmed that morning some 3 miles away. David says she went home rather disappointed.

We look forward to hearing other interesting stories from our collectors.

Chris Price, Swarm co-ordinator

ARNIA HIVE'S JUNE REPORT

Well, it has been quite an interesting month with the Arnia hive. After a great build up during the Spring, the bees were well on their way to filling a third super by mid-May. It looked destined to be a great harvest. However, I unfortunately had to go up to Scotland for a few days to attend a funeral. When I next inspected, it was clear that the colony had swarmed. Despite attempts to reduce subsequent swarms, it seems the colony got locked into a death spiral of swarming and ultimately became queenless.

The colony was then united through newspaper with a quarantined and treated swarm, which had been collected in early June. It has a well laying unmarked queen and, hopefully, they can now focus on the current healthy nectar flow and re-fill the supers. They also have a nice new brood box with a smart blue paint job, which they should have no difficulty finding!

It was interesting to see what effect being queenless had on the hive's humidity levels from 14th June, until the hive was united with a queen right colony on 21st June.

If anyone has any questions about the Arnia hive, please get in touch.

Alan Deeley
aldeeley@btinternet.com

IN THE APIARY: JULY

July feels a bit like the end of the season this year. The bramble will eventually run out, and though there are plenty of nectar sources, this is definitely a month of summer stability.

Tasks for this month:

- Maintain weekly inspections - swarms are possible.
- Add supers if the flow is good - you need space both for bees and to ripen that honey.
- This is a good month to requeen (with a mated queen) and really the last month for getting queens mated, as the drones will get excluded in August.
- In late July you may need to clear and remove the supers - a job best done in the evening.
- Assess your colonies and decide what you want to go into the winter with. Now is the time to plan to unite colonies. If you are going to the heather in August or September, now is the time to plan the super-colonies you need.
- Check the varroa count and treat if indicated. Remember, whilst the honey is on you need a treatment which won't taint the honey (Maqs, Apivar, etc) but aim to use a different treatment each year.
- After the honey is removed you can use apiguard and other varroa treatments. Though this may be done in August, July is the time to do a seven day drop test.
- Watch for the first wasps and reduce entrances so the bees can defend themselves.
- Watch out for Asian Hornets (vespa velutina)

The end of July is a time of tricky decisions. Do you take off the honey now or wait for it to be more fully capped? When will the bees start to "take it down" into the brood box?

Jane Medwell

FOR SALE

- Nucleus of bees in a quality hand made wooden nuc box, £150.
Contact David Phillips: 07769641118 / enquiries@dpphotos.co.uk

- Thornes Midi Mel 4 frame tangential stainless steel extractor. 2014 model. In good condition and in working order, but the gear does not run smoothly hence the handle turns to a clicking sound. £35
Contact Jane Traynor: 07512 859014 / pippajanetraynor@gmail.com

BEE LINES

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

For the first time since 2003 branch membership has fallen from 282 last year to our current level of 245. You don't have to look far for the reason. Abandonment of the ITB, taster days and our public displays have all impacted on this.

GET UP TO DATE WITH CBPV

Chronic bee paralysis virus (CBPV) is not new - Aristotle described "small black hairless thieves"- bald, shiny, shaky bees we might recognise as CBPV victims. At the moment, cases seem to be on the increase and research by Budge et. al. found that though CBPV was first recorded in Lincolnshire in 2007, by 2017 it was found in 39 of 47 English counties. This rise in cases is even greater in other countries. As beekeepers we need to be familiar with the signs of CBPV and know how we can try and limit the harm to our colonies.

WHAT IS CBPV AND HOW IS IT SPREAD?

CBPV is a viral infection, affecting mostly the adult bees. We used to identify two types of this virus, accounting for the two main signs: shaking and hairlessness. Now these are thought to be forms of the same disease. It is worth noting that these symptoms usually take around five days to appear in an infected bee, and signs may not appear in all infected bees.

Type 1 (paralysed bees):

- Quivering or trembling of adult bee's wings and abdomen and damaged wings.
- Bees crawling on the ground or on the top-bars of the frames.
- Bloated abdomens from liquid filling the honey stomach.
- Death within a few days of symptoms.

Type 2 (small black hairless thieves):

- Loss of hair on the abdomen.
- A shiny or greasy black appearance.
- These bees will often be driven out of the hive by other bees like robber bees.

Current research (as well as the NBU advice) suggests that there is no evidence to link Varroa and CBPV. Instead, studies suggest the virus is transmitted through the faeces of the bees and is transmitted particularly when bees rub against each other and damage body hairs. It is a disease of crowding, so the high incidence we are seeing after 2020's long wet Spring is not a surprise.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY BEES HAVE IT?

CBPV kills bees fast! Large amounts of bees may perish in the time between regular inspections. The first thing a beekeeper may notice is a large pile of dead bees at the entrance of a hive. Could it be poisoning, rather than disease? If the pile of dead bees keeps growing, it is not poisoning, but the virus taking its toll.

CBPV infection is not always a death sentence, and it is possible for colonies to recover from CBPV even after some losses. It is also possible to spot symptoms before the worst of the disease sets in, using the points above. As with all disease, the earlier it is identified the better prepared beekeepers can be to minimise its impact.

WHAT CAN I DO?

There is no direct treatment for CBPV and management of the disease falls onto beekeepers husbandry practices. Good hygiene - not transferring frames between hives, frequent changing of gloves and the washing of kit- is vital, especially as we are currently unaware of how long CBPV can survive outside a bee to infect other bees. Quarantining hives and preventing robbing will reduce the spread of disease between hives.

There are also some CBPV specific steps that we can take. Simply reducing overcrowding in the hive by adding supers will slow spread of the disease within the colony. Devices such as pollen traps are also thought to cause damage to the hairs of the bees and should be removed on any suspected infected colonies. The NBU also advise that feeding the infected colony helps survival and recovery, perhaps by compensating for loss of bees and forage.

A novel treatment method for CBPV that has been reported by Vita, is the shaking out of the bees away from the hive. This process involves taking the brood frames a distance of around 50m from the hive, separating out the queen, and then shaking off all of the bees from the frames and replacing the hive and brood frames (and queen) in its original location. From here, bees affected by CBPV will not be able to return to the colony whilst healthy bees will. This process can be repeated in five days' time to catch bees that were infected but not displaying symptoms during the original shake. In theory this should greatly reduce the number of infected bees in the hive and slow the spread of the disease. However, this is quite an extreme measure, and whilst it seems to make sense, we have seen no evidence for its efficacy beyond anecdote. Moreover, I would not want to start robbing or drifting, so I would use this with care.

A bee with "Hairless Black Syndrome." The infected bees quiver and their coworkers pick at their wings and pluck the "hairs" from their bodies, revealing the dark exoskeleton.
(Source: scientificbeekeeping.com)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- The best advice and science from **David Evans**
- **NBU advice**
- Budge at al- an important **study**

Alexander Wray

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF CBPV

Having done a full inspection on 23rd April with no concerns, I was stunned at my next visit on the 1st May that the first colony in the apiary had piles of dead bees on the ground in front of the hive and hundreds more on the floor and at the entrance. Was it poisoning?

I cleared them all up then went through the hive fully expecting there to be hardly any bees left. Being that it was a very big colony, I was surprised how many were still there – including the queen. The next day, another few hundred were piled on the ground with several crawling and quivering on the alighting board. None were black and hairless. At this point I rang our chairman, Jane Medwell!

She felt it was almost certainly CBPV, possibly due to overcrowding after a spell of wet weather at the end of April. As the other colonies were not affected and this one was located right on the edge of the patch, she reassuringly said not to move any of them, just keep a very close eye, which I did every single day until the end of May. I also added an extra half brood box and three supers.

Here we are at the end of June and there have been no excessive deaths for several weeks, the colony is thriving, the queen is still laying and, interestingly, this was the only one that made no swarm preparations.

Things I have learned:

1. Give them plenty of space.
2. Clear the dead bees up every day and check all the other hives.
3. Inspect the affected colony in fresh suit and gloves.
4. When in doubt, ask Jane!

Maggie Curley

HELP! BEES IN THE ROOF

I received an unexpected call from a friend who described having a colony of bees in his roof. He didn't want to exterminate them and so asked if I could come have a look. Upon arrival I realised this was not your average colony, there were hundreds of bees coming in and out of a small gap in the flat roof and regularly stinging the family members. The home owner told me that he had tolerated the colony for five years but this Spring they had completely changed temperament (possibly a new queen had taken over) and had become hostile and aggressive, so it was time that their squatting in his property came to an end.

That evening I went home and read up as much as I could around the subject of "cut outs" and bee removals. I decided to try the cut out method where sections of the colony are removed and secured to a frame using elastic bands, and then placed in a new hive.

When we started to remove a section of the living room roof it become clear that this was going to be a lot more complicated than the youtube videos had made out. The hive was enormous and sprawling between different levels of wall, roof, brick and insulation. It was impossible to reach the entire colony without doing significant damage to the house. The homeowner, however, was adamant that he did not want the bees destroyed so we carried on knocking down walls and tearing up roofing.

After five hours of dismantling, plenty of stings and a now fully exposed colony we methodically began removing the comb and brood and placing as much of it as we could into a new hive. After lifting handfuls of bees into this hive and praying that we hadn't missed the queen we left them that evening, hoping that we'd done a good job.

Sadly, I returned the next day to find that the bees had left the hive and also the wall space. Perhaps they did not fancy the confinement of a hive.

Overall, it was a brilliant experience for a new beekeeper. Many lessons learnt and delicious honey gained!

Dani Black

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

I was recently sent a question (actually a series of questions) from a new member, Nanda van Marsh, about the 'June Gap' and whether it happened this year and if it was affected by climate change. This article is based on my response.

The 'June Gap' has woven its way into the fabric of the beekeeping year, yet the beekeeping literature is almost silent. The relatively new (2014) Haynes Bee Manual refers to it as 'may happen' and mentions climate change as a possible factor. However I can find no index reference to it in any of my collection of older beekeeping books (one of which dates back to 1893!). So does it exist and is it universal to beekeepers even within a local branch? There may not be a clear answer.

The key factor is where your apiary is located, and what forage is available to the bees at different times of the year. For example, some members of WLBK were reporting full supers by mid-May this year. That was almost certainly due to the availability of oil seed rape. I'm fortunate in living on the edge of Warwick next to a plant nursery on one side and a housing estate on the other. In between are hedgerows with hawthorn, blackthorn, brambles, ivy, lime trees and a number of herbaceous plants such as white deadnettle, greater stitchwort, bluebells and cow parsley - all of which have overlapping flowering seasons. The nursery has a variety of flowering plants throughout the year - including fruit blossom early on, and the housing estate gardens (at least those that haven't replaced their front ones with tarmac) provide a wide variety of nectar sources throughout the year. My bees are also in range of a number of arable fields which rotate oil seed rape with cereal crops and occasionally beans - so in some years I get an OSR flow, and in others I don't. No two years, or seasons, of honey are ever exactly the same. So on balance I don't really notice a 'June Gap', but is, as Nanda asked, climate change a factor?

The study of the seasonality of biological processes is called phenology, and we now have very good data sets stretching back many years - over 100 in some studies. There are some interesting snippets of phenological data on this **link**.

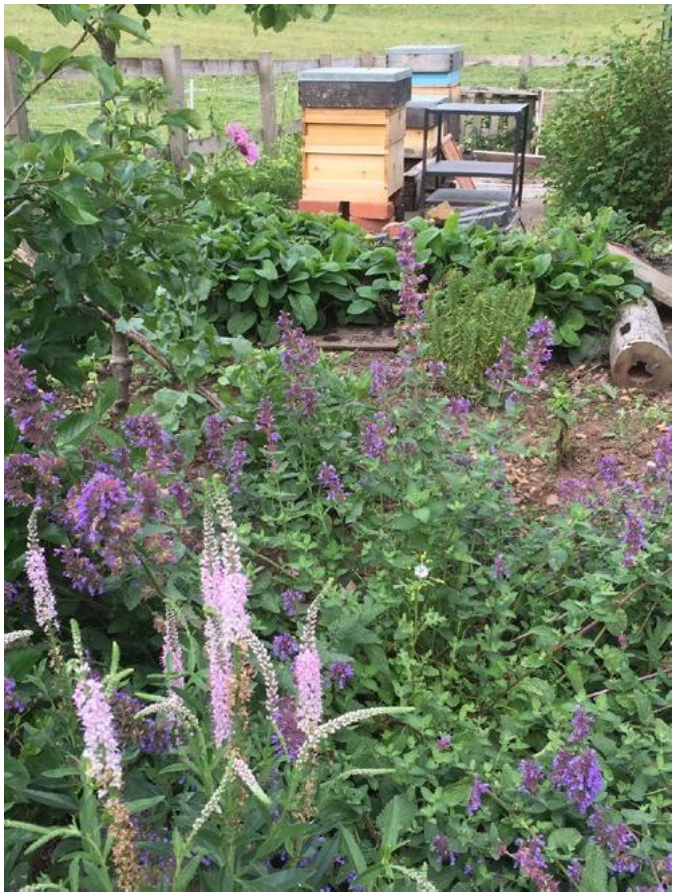
The pattern is that biological phenomena are happening earlier in the year, and that this is correlated with increasing average temperatures, and changes in weather patterns.

The flowering seasons for many plants are happening earlier - in some cases significantly earlier. For example, horse chestnut trees are now getting into growth around two weeks earlier than they were just 20 years ago. This means that there may be greater overlap in the flowering seasons of forage plants. In the UK, and elsewhere, there is a shift in seasonality as one moves from the North to South and it is the specific microclimate and availability of forage that determines honey production. If you add this to the variety of plants that your bees might have access to, you end up with a wide range of factors that determine the nature and volume of a honey crop in any one month.

Looking further ahead, climate change is likely to mean that we gain some species adapted to warmer climates and lose others because they prefer cooler conditions. This is particularly true for plants growing at their ecological margins, where the number of 'frost free' days in a year is more significant than absolute temperatures. A good example is on mountains in the European Alps where there has been an upward migration of whole plant communities over the last 100 years in response to an increase of temperature in the range 1.5-2.0. degrees. The question, of course, is what happens when they get to the top? I should add that I'm a botanist with a specific interest in mountain plants and climate change in Scotland. But that's a digression!

Perhaps in the years to come we will be talking about a May Gap.

Barry Meatyard



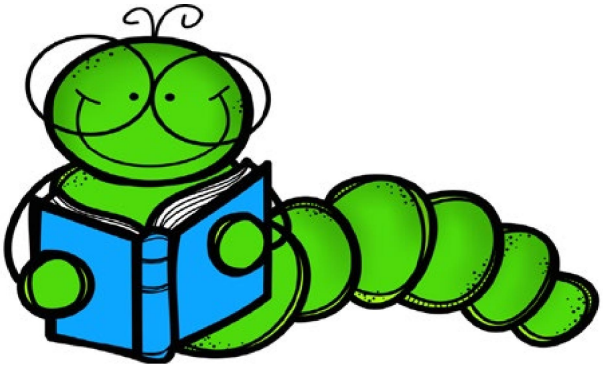
The changing seasons and forage at Barry's apiary.

WLBK LIBRARY NEWS

I took on the Warwick and Leamington Branch Library around 18 months ago from another member Jane Rigby – there are quite a few of us Janes about!

Although we already had quite a lot of books, there were a few gaps which I decided to prioritise. We are a branch who believe in education and that by offering learning opportunities, both practical and theory-based, we will raise better beekeepers who in turn will raise better bees – win win. At times when members are studying for Modules and examinations there can be high demand on single copies of some titles. I found that members were also spending money on –often expensive - books which they would need only for a relatively short time during their studies. With the help of the Recommended Book List for the BBKA Examinations I have plugged some of those gaps. We now have multiple copies of some key texts and a wider range of the excellent BBKA Special Issue Journals. I am also building a bank of resources for the Bee Health Course and aim to have publications freely available from The Bee Unit/Bee Base/APHA etc.

I have found some terrific bargains in charity shops and we continue to receive kind donations of books from current and previous members. One such donation came via someone who had kept bees only briefly. He had been given some beekeeping books by the daughter of a late beekeeper. She had said that they could be passed on to anyone who might find them useful or could go to a charity shop. She had also mentioned that her father had had a connection with WLBK – his name was Bernard Collins! Many of you will remember Bernard in his role of Branch Chair in 1983 and 1984, but he was also Branch Secretary from 1964 to 1978. He received the BBKA Long Service Award, which is presented



to members who have been keeping bees for over 50 years. As a stalwart of the honey show and a regular prize-winner, we also have a Bernard Collins branch trophy which is presented every year for Best in Show. How fortuitous that some of Bernard's bee books have made it back to us!

Around the same time as these books arrived, the County decided to disperse the remaining part of its Library to branches who were interested. As a result we have acquired several interesting – and sometimes quirky – beekeeping books. I look forward to sharing these with you all when we can be together again.

For the next piece of library development, I need your help! Having invested in the education part of the library, I am now keen to address gaps for the interest groups within our membership. So if you see a cracking bee book or the best reference ever for beeswax, microscopy and so on please do let me know.

Jane Ford
fjordie@btinternet.com

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MIKE RIGBY

Sadly, member Mike Rigby passed away in the early weeks of June aged 66, three months after having been diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour. An electrical engineer by training, Mike spent much of his working life in programme development at IBM – a role which combined highly specialised and detailed work with that of communicating the results to potential customers. Mike applied these particular traits to his several passions, some of which were more obscure than others. He was a member of the Scotch Malt Whisky Association and became something of an aficionado on the subject. He was a hill walker and life member of the Mountain Bothies Association. But his main passion was bellringing. He even gave branch members, on a bee safari at his Lighthorne apiary, a guided tour of the belfry at Lighthorne church. He took a lot of pleasure from bellringing but also gave much back in the form of his time and expertise in fostering and promoting the local bellringing community.

Mike got into beekeeping, together with wife Jane, because he

liked honey, but, as with so many of us, found it a fascinating and absorbing hobby well suited to his aptitudes. I remember well the transformation of his persona when, with uncharacteristic animation, he talked himself hoarse from explaining the wonders of our craft to members of the public at our various shows. Mike also contributed to the branch through his support for Jane during her stint as a branch committee member and as librarian. Their bee colonies have now been taken over by Laura Taylor with Elizabeth Holding in support.

Bernard Brown

WHAT VARROA TREATMENT TO USE

The varroa mite consumes the fat body of the adult bee and transmits viruses to the bee at all life stages. It weakens and kills colonies and, if left untreated, colonies collapse. Late summer is the time to do a count of the mite drop for at least seven days and enter your daily figures in the Beebase calculator here.

This tells you when to treat but the range of authorised varroacides (veterinary medicinal products fully tested for efficacy and safety) has expanded in the last few years. What you choose to use may depend on when you need to treat. This article concentrates on authorised varroacides, but biomechanical methods are also very effective.

TREATING DURING THE HONEY FLOW OR WITH SUPERS ON

Your options are limited if you need to treat and your supers are still on. MAQs - **Mite Away Quick Strips** (Formic Acid) are acid impregnated strips laid across the brood box, which do not taint honey and take seven days. They are highly effective (greater than 95%). Despite being a naturally occurring organic acid, formic acid smells terrible and precautions must be taken when handling the strips to avoid contact or inhalation, but formic acid does not promote mite resistance. These strips are not suitable for small colonies or at temperatures over 29°C.

MAQs strips on Tanya Weaver's Beehaus colony

In the flow, you could try queen trapping or a shook swarm, but these require effort and equipment, as well as catching the queen (see the NBU for advice).

TREATING AFTER THE HONEY FLOW WHEN SUPERS REMOVED

Thymols:

- **Apiguard** (Thymol gel in a tray) is placed on top of the brood box to be "taken down" by the bees. It takes 4-6 weeks and you need two trays per colony. You need to close up vents and the open mesh floor whilst treating. The efficacy is temperature dependent, but it can be very effective (greater than 90%). Thymol does not promote mite immunity.
- **Thymovar** (sponge strip with Thymol in) and **Apilife-Var** (a wafer with Thymol and other aromatics in) take only 3-4 weeks when placed on the top bars of the hive. They should not be used above 29°c and have variable efficacy (between 70% and 90%). The NBU recommend using these in rotation with Oxalic Acid during a broodless period.

Chemical Strips:

- **Bayyvarol** and **Apistan** (pyrethroids) are acaricides of long standing. These plastic strips dangle between the frames in contact with the bees and are highly effective (greater than 95%). However, there is a strong likelihood that at least a proportion of all mites are resistant to these chemicals, so you should only use one of these chemicals every few years. Apistan has the potential to leave residues in wax.

Beekeeper putting in varroacide medicament strips (source: BeeBase)

- **Apitraz** and **Apivar** (Amitraz) are also chemicals in suspended plastic strips which take 6 – 10 weeks. They are highly effective (greater than 95% effective) and do not penetrate wax. However, they are likely to promote mite resistance and should not be used every year.

TREATMENT IN WINTER OR BLOODLESS PERIODS (NO SUPERS)

- **Api-Bioxal** and **Oxuvar** (both oxalic acid) come as a powder which can be mixed with syrup for trickling on the seams of bees or administered with a passive vapouriser or a sublimator. Vapourising is most effective, but requires equipment. Oxalic acid works by evaporation and contact and all the colonies in an apiary should be treated at once. It is highly effective (greater than 90% trickled and 95% vapourised) and is acceptable for organic beekeepers.

Oxalic acid treatment applied with syringe and backpack (source: BeeBase)

- **Oxybee** (oxalic acid) is a liquid to be mixed with powder but keeps well. It is used to trickle on the bees and is as effective as other oxalic acids.

Oxalic acids may be a useful treatment to use in rotation with either biomechanical methods of varroa control, like shook swarms or queen trapping, or with thymols. Oxalic acids can be used on swarms and shook swarms to knock down the parasitic mites, because they are broodless.

REMEMBER!

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using these products and check the expiry dates. You should keep a veterinary medicines record of the purchase, use and disposal of these products (and serial numbers) with your apiary records. Retain this for at least five years (your bee inspector can ask to see it).

The NBU does an excellent, detailed and updated guide to varroa which you can download for free here.

Jane Medwell

PROFILE: PETER SPENCER

We've introduced a new monthly profile section to Bee Talk and this month we feature Peter Spencer, an eminent beekeeper who has received both the BBKA Long Service Award, for having kept bees for over 50 years, and is also a County Honorary Life Member.

Born and brought up in north Birmingham, Peter's initial interest in bees was piqued when a swarm landed in a tree in a neighbouring garden from him and his wife's house in Sutton Coldfield. As it was a rented house that at the time was vacant, Peter called the police as he wasn't sure what else to do. "This was pre-computer days," he laughs.

A short while later he heard of two hives that needed to be moved off the allotments in Perry Barr and were going for free. "I didn't have a clue, but I knew that the deputy head of the primary school across the road from the large secondary school I taught at kept bees. So one day after school I went to ask whether he'd help me and we could have one hive each.

"So that was how my beekeeping hobby began. My first crop of honey was about four pounds, which wasn't very much but I thought it was some of the best honey I'd ever tasted."

Peter then joined the Sutton Coldfield branch in 1964 and when him and his wife relocated to Kenilworth he joined the Coventry branch, which he is still a member of today. It was through volunteering at the Kenilworth Show that he became a member of WLBK. "In those days the Kenilworth Show was held in Abbey Fields and was reportedly at that time one of the biggest one-day farming shows in Europe. We didn't live far away and so I went down and introduced myself to Bernard Collins from WLBK and asked if they needed any help setting or clearing up their stand.

"After the show, Bernard said that there was a show committee meeting the following week and I replied saying that I'm not on the committee. To which he said, you are now," laughs Peter.

Over the years Peter's honey bee stocks increased and he recalls many fond memories of taking his bees to the heather in Derbyshire with Mike Townsend as well as to several other sites, particularly in Wales. He also kept bees with the pupils at the secondary schools he taught at, which he thoroughly enjoyed.

"I recently looked back through some old photographs and came across one in particular that was of a boy who was holding up a frame of bees barehanded and with no veil or suit on. It was interesting because in those days the demonstrator wouldn't wear a veil, gloves or suit and you'd have children sitting around watching with shorts and skirts on. Funnily enough, I knew the daughter of that boy holding up the frame as she was a part-time accountant at BBKA so, I handed the photograph to her and told her to show it to her dad," recalls Peter.

As well as being a very active member of WLBK and Coventry branches, Peter was also on the executive committee for the BBKA and eventually became its general secretary at the turn of the century, a role he undertook for four years. "That was a most interesting job. It was just Brian Milward and I working in the office but we had great fun together," he remembers.

Just before Peter's retirement from teaching, he really began to expand his hives and so became a member of the Bee Farmers Association.

Peter Spencer at the 2013 Honey Show Presentations where Peter and his wife Rosemary were Bernard Brown's guests of honour as Bernard was in the last year of his WLBK Chairmanship.

Then, shortly following his retirement in his 60s, Peter went on a beekeeping trip trekking in Nepal. "Funnily enough, one of our party was Brian Sheriff, the man who invented the modern bee suit. The trip was very exciting. We walked uphill for three days and for two of those days we could see where we came from. We eventually came to the honey combs, which the bees build in the cliffs. When one of the combs was lowered by our guides it was something like four foot across and very thick," says Peter.

Today Peter is still managing up to 16 stocks, excluding nucs, and has always had his two grandchildren help him, who are actually both beekeepers now themselves. "It's obligatory really," he laughs. "Both my daughter and son helped me when they were growing up. In fact, my daughter Jane and I did quite a lot of honey shows together over the years and we did pretty well with them," smiles Peter.

Peter still gets immense enjoyment from his bees and although a seasoned beekeeper they can still offer up surprises. He recalls an incident that happened just last weekend whilst he was looking in one of his hives, located in The Pleasance in Kenilworth, with his granddaughter and her boyfriend. "In this hive I'd lost the main swarm and so there were a lot of capped queen cells, some of which we decided to use in some nucs whose queens had failed. My granddaughter's boyfriend was holding out his hands as we were carefully cutting out these queen cells into them and then suddenly he announced in horror that he could feel one moving and he thinks that she's hatching out. I rushed off to the car to get a container just as she came out into his hands.

"That was certainly a first for me. I've seen queens hatch out, and that's not too often, but this one hatched in his hand. After she emerged, we dropped her straight into the container and she's now in a nuc. It was quite exciting and I came home having thoroughly enjoyed myself."

Tanya Weaver

RESUMPTION OF THE CO-OP AND EXTRACTION UNIT

The operation of the extraction unit and the supply of goods from WLBK's co-op have now been resumed albeit with different arrangements to safeguard those dispensing, using the facilities and collecting goods.

FOR THE USE OF THE EXTRACTION UNIT:

- To book the extraction unit go to the booking calendar in the resources booking menu of the members area or follow this **link**.
- Select a date at least three days from any other booking. Phone the Extraction Unit manager, Clive Joyce on 07792 222251, giving at least 24hrs notice to receive confirmation of the booking.
- The facility will be sanitised before anyone can use it.
- There must be at least 3 days between uses.
- When in use, only one person, or persons in the same household may use the facility.
- All those entering the unit will wear disposable aprons and gloves supplied by the branch
- No equipment including supers to be left outside, even temporarily. Take supers directly into the warming cabinet and return any used equipment direct to your vehicle.
- You must wash the whole facility (all surfaces and equipment) down after use, using the bleach and sponges and mop provided which also must be sanitised after use.
- All rubbish and user's equipment must be removed straightaway as it accumulates and disposed of by the user away from the site.
- Once finished ***and*** before leaving premises, telephone the manager who will meet you there to inspect the sanitisation. In the event of the manager being unavailable contact Alan Deeley 07785306669. Any shortcomings in the above are to be addressed promptly by the user.

Users are reminded that there is a comprehensive manual in the extraction unit which covers the use of the equipment and cleaning.

FOR THE SUPPLY OF GOODS:

- Goods must be ordered and paid for in the normal way through the google forms on the website followed by a phone call to the stock holder nominated on the form.
- They will arrange a mutually convenient date and time for pick up.

WHERE COLLECTION IS ARRANGED FROM HURST FARM:- (GLASSWARE, AMBROSIA)

- The organiser will unlock the outer gate to the yard.
- The order will be picked from the store by the organiser who will wear a disposable apron and gloves.
- The selected item(s) marked for whom they are destined swill be placed on the table. provided which has a plastic tablecloth sanitised by the organiser
- The recipient would approach the table only when the organiser was over 2m clear of the table, pick up their order place in their car and drive off.
- No one other than the organiser will be permitted to approach or enter the Glass store.
- Every effort should be made to adhere to the time agreed for collection to avoid clashing with other recipients. If unable to attend, please extend the courtesy of phoning the Stockholder

FOR COLLECTION OF GOODS FROM ELSEWHERE THAN HURST FARM, PLEASE TAKE INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE STOCKHOLDER. (WAX,TREATMENTS,GLOVES,FONDANT)

I'm sure that you will appreciate the reason for these measures and that, with a little co-operation, we can make these procedures work to the benefit of us all and to our girls.

Clive Joyce, Extraction Unit Manager

WLBK BEES IN 'THE ARCHERS'

You have to be of a certain age to have heard of, never mind being a listener of, 'The Archers'.

I am of that age and, in fact, through work some years ago had quite a lot of contact with 'Phil of the Archers' but it was not this rather tenuous connection that led to me getting an unusual request from the BBC programmes sound recordist.

I found it hard to believe that within the deep archives of the BBC they did not have a sound recording of buzzing bees. However, I was able to say 'you're in luck, I have just had a phone call from a Leamington school asking me to collect a swarm residing under one of the picnic benches on the playground'.

The school had prepared for the collection 'show' with tiered benches like a football stadium accommodating the whole schools' children viewing through the glass walled assembly hall.

With the headteacher and sound recordist fully suited together with a fluffy mic on a pole we headed out to the bees. Experience collecting swarms led me to recognise that these bees didn't fancy being shaken into my skep as I could see the bees churning around on the outside of the swarm. Then, sure enough, the whole swarm whizzed off over my shoulder. We had a report later in the day of a swarm hanging on a parking ticket dispenser!

Instead the BBC stuck their fluffy mic into one of my hives to get the recording.

Mike Townsend

HINTS & TIPS

- When adding another super have a look at the frames it contains. If the frames are drawn then it can be placed anywhere . If the frames only have foundation then it is best placed just above the brood nest. Temperatures are highest here and that makes the production and manipulating of the wax much easier for the bees.

- Towards the end of the month it is good to try to arrange things so as many frames as possible are capped. One way to do this is to go through all the supers and any that are fully capped can be removed for extraction or moved to the outside . Partially filled or partially capped frames can be moved to the centre, which increases the chance of them being completed. Bees work in a chimney pattern and hence will go straight up the middle ignoring the outer frames unless they are needed. It is good not to give too much room at this stage as you don't want a lot of partially capped frames.

- If possible remove supers in the evening when the bees have stopped flying. Once the super is empty of bees it is vulnerable to robbers and as bee communication is so effective they will recruit an army! So watch out for holes in your equipment and repair promptly, try to maintain strong colonies that can defend against robbers more effectively. Don't leave combs in the open where they can be accessed as then bees will look for other possible sources.
- If, after all that, you find robbing taking place either by wasps, other bees or hornets, then reduce the entrance or move the bees affected to another site for them to recover.

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:
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