



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## FINDING THE QUEEN: PART ONE

**T**his past Spring was ideal for finding queens. The unseasonably warm weather meant you could open the hive and search for the queen at a time when the nest size and number of bees was low. So, here's how you go about finding her:

- Firstly, try to be relaxed about it. After all, if you can see eggs, particularly one day old ones that are pointing straight out of the cell, you know your queen has made it through the winter.
- Experiment with how (little) smoke you need to use to calm the bees, avoiding them running about, and allow plenty of time before taking the roof off. Singing 'Happy Birthday' once is probably long enough. Hmm... I think I've heard that somewhere else before.
- If the weather is a little on the cool side or windy use a bit of heavy cloth as a crown board that you can peel back as you go through the hive. Incidentally, cloth crown boards pre-date what we use now.
- Start removing the frames, giving only a quick glance over the outer ones containing stores. Unless she is nervously running about or you have over smoked why should she be on there?
- Once you reach brood, particularly where there are eggs and especially one day old ones, hold the frame in the best available light (if it's sunny, let it shine over your shoulder) and have it elbow to hand length away from you. Straightaway look around all the edges of the frame in case the queen is moving to the underside as she tends to go where it's darkest. Then look at the centre area of the frame followed by scanning the frame outward.
- Turn the frame over, ensuring that you



minimise the chance of her falling off, and repeat on the other side. Work your way through the rest of the frames, glancing down into the hive as you sometimes spot the queen on the frame next to the one you are removing.

- At all times keep the frames you are holding over the hive. It rarely happens, but it can and if you don't find the queen it's always prudent to investigate any clump of bees on the grass to see if she is there. When choosing an apiary site avoid overhanging branches which may cause you to step away from the hive to get more light in order to have a good look at the comb.
- Don't disturb or try and move bees about on the first pass through the hive. If I have to go through them again (and I only go through a hive twice at most) you can move bees by gently blowing on them. I find this leads to rather rapid scattering so I prefer to herd them with a finger. You will see a lot of bees covering the arcs of honey because the smoking has led them there to eat stores, and although it can happen it is rarely her hiding place. Keep looking at the frame for a while as she sometimes

breaks cover from here.

- Older frames in particular will have all sorts of hiding places so you have to be patient again to see if she breaks cover. These are places where I do gently breathe on the comb to get the bees moving.
- Although I said queens are rarely found on frames of stores, some queens remain one frame ahead of you stepping off frames and moving to the end one so have a good look at this one as well as the frame you removed at the start of your inspection.

If you've been through the hive twice and still failed to find the queen the good news is that there were day old eggs, so she is in there somewhere for you to find next time. But horror, next time you find uncapped queen cells so all of a sudden finding her becomes important. You now have to resort to some alternative methods of finding her and that's the subject of Part Two, which you can read in next month's Bee Talk.

**Mike Townsend**

# MESSAGE FROM WLBK'S CHAIR

**T**he end of the season has come upon us fast - or, in reality, the start of the new season. I hope everyone has had a good harvest of honey. I have had a much greater range of honey colours than in previous years so there must have been a wide range of nectars this year. There are still drones in my hives, so they have not all been expelled yet!

I have put on my big feeders, and filled them with ambrosia (purchased from our co-op at a great price) and I can see the bees are topping up with ivy honey. The ambrosia is so convenient. For many years I mixed up sugar syrup and drove around with it in the boot of my car. I don't miss that.

My husband starts saying "The nights are drawing in - soon be back end" on June 23<sup>rd</sup> - the day after the longest day. But now the nights really are starting to draw in. This is a sure sign that I should be staying in with some good beekeeping books. In this edition of Bee Talk we have a profile of John Home and his book, which I shall be reading soon. We also have the suggestion of a book group from both Jane Ford, our librarian, and Barry Meatyard, Branch Education Coordinator, in their articles. We will be looking for participants, so do give it a go.

One positive aspect of the current situation is access to a wide range of webinars, which have inspired my choice of winter reading. Tom Seeley spoke so well at the Scottish Beekeeper's webinar that I have bought his latest book: *The Lives of Bees*. I also have the paperback edition of Prof Dave Goulson's book *The Garden Jungle* to



Autumn in one photo - uniting and feeding.

read before he delivers the Warwickshire lecture in February. We will shortly have our own Branch programme of speakers up for members and we have a number of training initiatives for members in this edition of BeeTalk too. As a branch, the time may not yet be right for meeting inside face-to-face, but we can meet online to share our interests. There is a new BBKA YouTube channel with some interesting videos, and books can be borrowed remotely from Leamington library as ebooks - for free.

Enjoy your beekeeping this September 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). Stay safe!

**Jane Medwell, WLBK Chair**

## WLBK BRANCH BEES ON HOLIDAY

**F**ollowing on from the last committee meeting, the Bees on Holiday hosts had a zoom meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September to decide the short term future of the hives. It was decided that the bees will stay with their host families over the winter. This decision was taken as we do not have an Apiary manager at the moment so it is difficult to know exactly what will be required for next season. We considered the needs of the training Apiary and the ITB course. The bee's health, temperament, tendency to swarm and productiveness has been logged, so we are in a position to pass reliable information over to the new manager when the time comes.



The bees have had a varied year. One or two of the colonies has been a pleasure for the hosts. The remainder have been rather feisty, with one host reporting 'gaffer taping her zips to ensure the persistent little devils did not gain entry'. Obviously bees that are that feisty are not suitable for the training apiary and are not a pleasure to deal with in any circumstances. These hives have been re-queened and hopefully will calm down.

All colonies have had Varroa treatments and have been or are in the process of being fed.

It is difficult to calculate exactly how much honey these colonies have produced as some have not yet been extracted but it seems to be in excess of 90lbs.

There will be an excess of colonies and Bernard has a possible out apiary in mind for them. When we have a new manager we can hopefully think about these excess colonies producing honey for the branch or providing training for experienced beekeepers.

**Liz Gurney**

# IN THE APIARY

**S**eptember feels like the end of the year (especially this year where the whole season has been early) but is really the start of the new beekeeping cycle. We are making sure we have the colonies we want, that varroa are controlled, that the basic colony is strong and we feed for the winter. It is deeply satisfying to "prepare the bees for winter".

Tasks for this month:

- Wasps are a real nuisance - they will prey on your weakest colony. Narrow all entrances to one bee space. You can use wasp traps but once they have selected the weakest colony it is futile. In desperation, move the colony to another apiary (that's what friends are for).
- For those with bees at the Heather - the heavy work of bringing them back and extracting the jelly-like honey is ahead!
- Unite weak colonies - the newspaper marriage is the surest way. Make sure to re-arrange the frames into one brood box before feeding.
- You will have removed most of the honey by now, but if you have given them the frames to clean up you may still have supers on. Clear and remove the final supers before you feed. Some people find that putting supers over the crown board encourages the bees to "take down" the remaining honey. Some colonies do not cooperate and may need to have a bit of unripe honey spun out for storage, but this honey can be given back to the colony.
- Feed with syrup or fondant. The colony needs around 20kg of syrup (1kg sugar to 600ml water). Remember not to heat syrup (just the water) as heating sugar produces HMF, which is toxic to bees.
- If you feed fondant, make sure you use enough. The bees will need at least a 12kg block to give them 18kg of stores. Make sure the outside is wrapped so that it stays soft as they use it (plastic or put it into an inverted washing up bowl) and place the unwrapped side onto the queen excluder above the frames. Make sure the bees have a close source of water they can use to turn this fondant into syrup.
- Treat for varroa if you need to and have not done it yet. If using strips (amitraz or pyrethroids) make absolutely sure you remove both strips from each colony. Leaving them in promotes resistance and does not do a better treatment job.
- Wrap your supers for winter storage carefully- mice and wax moths are a pest.
- Dig out your mouseguards and anti-woodpecker wraps for next month.
- Choose your winter reading and viewing.

Jane Medwell

# STARVATION ALERT

**B**ee Inspectors across the UK are reporting that many colonies are in need of food where honey has been harvested. The advanced nature of the season and the extremes of weather currently being experienced is producing a starvation risk. So, check your hives and, where starvation is a risk, replacement food needs to be provided.

It is wise to monitor your colonies throughout the coming months and feed as required to ensure your bees do not starve. A standard full size British National colony needs between 20-25 kg of stores to successfully overwinter. Sugar syrup should be made with 1kg of sugar to 650ml of warm water or Ambrosia, a commercially ready-made bee syrup, available from our co-op, can be given.

**REMEMBER** - if you are late taking action on this it could be too late.

# VARROA TREATMENTS

Jane Medwell has written a very useful document outlining the varroa treatments available generally and those available from our Co-op. It has been circulated by e-mail so if you missed it check your inbox/spam box/junk box.

Contact [messengerbee@outlook.com](mailto:messengerbee@outlook.com) if you want it resent.

# HONEY SHOW

After much fact finding and deliberation it has been decided to defer this year's Branch Honey Show due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Its future will be discussed further at the next Committee meeting in October. The National, County and other Warwickshire branches have already cancelled their shows.

# CO-OP VALUE

Supplies of Ambrosia are going down fast so don't delay your orders. At £9.50 per tub and £36.50 from Thornes ..... well, you can do the sums. Whilst in calculator mode, Apistan via the branch, costs £16 whereas at Thornes it costs £23 +£4.

The co-op has also managed to secure a supply of Apiguard at last year's price of £1.75. Order as usual via the members' area of the website.

# CHRISTMAS CARDS

Sorry to bring this subject up, but our usual WLBK Christmas Card artist has hung up her brushes so we are inviting any artistic member who feels inclined to produce one to let us know.

# BEE LINES

Branch profile. Did you know:-

44% of active members have been keeping bees for less than 5 years

26% of active members have been keeping bees for 5 -10 years

20% of active members have been keeping bees for more than 10 years.



# BEE FRIENDLY PLANTS: THE MICHAELMAS DAISY

**A**fter the rather washed out colours of the August garden, the lovely Michaelmas Daisy heralds the early Autumn in glorious shades of blues, purples and pinks, and the bees take full advantage of its rich source of nectar and pollen.



The old saying goes – “Eat a goose on Michaelmas day, want not for money all the year”.

And here we are coming to the end of the active beekeeping season, the honey has been harvested, winter preparations are being made, and the bees are enjoying their own Michaelmas feast!

**Maggie Curley**

From the Aster family (*Aster amellus*), Michaelmas daisies are particularly easy to grow. They are perennial and form large, almost bush-like clumps of strong, erect stems topped by masses of beautiful little flowers. Once the flowers and foliage has died off, they are very forgiving about being split. I usually do this in early Spring when I am trying to fill gaps in the borders.

Michaelmas or the Feast of St Michael and All Angels celebrated on 29<sup>th</sup> September, is the day traditionally associated with the beginning of Autumn and one of the four “Quarter Days” (the others being Lady Day on 25<sup>th</sup> March; Midsummer on 24<sup>th</sup> June and Christmas on 25<sup>th</sup> December).

Michaelmas marked the end of the productive season and the beginning of a new cycle of farming. New servants were hired, land exchanged, and debts paid. Goose was always eaten on Michaelmas Day and the Nottingham Goose Fair still takes place around the 3<sup>rd</sup> October.



## MEMBERS' WINTER PROGRAMME

**I**t is a shame we are unable to have a Honey Show this year and so our winter programme gets off to a slightly earlier start on 17<sup>th</sup> September with a talk by Jim Vivian-Griffiths on Spring management. Jim has been keeping bees for 20 years and qualified as a master beekeeper in 2014 and won the Wax Chandlers award the same year. He, as some of you may know, is an assessor for the BBKA and so he will certainly help get us organised with some forward planning for next season.

For the time being, our Winter programme will be virtual and so usual Zoom rules apply; muting your microphones, please type your questions into the chat box so that everyone can read them as well as hear them.

I will be sending out emails with the links to all the meetings nearer the time.

Here is the programme so far.

- **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September at 7.30pm** - Jim Vivian-Griffiths talk on Spring Management
- **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm** – Film showing of The Pollinators followed by discussion
- **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm** – Scott Dwyer Talking about his research into Varroa controls
- **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30pm** – Something Christmassy to be announced
- **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January at 7.30pm** – Gordon Bull on The Asian Hornet (to be confirmed)

I hope to see you all virtually very soon.

**Rachel Dove, Members' meetings co-ordinator**

# TAKING THE BEES TO THE HEATHER

**R**eading Mike Townsend's recommendations on getting the best out of a visit to the heather in last month's Bee Talk and following a recent zoom meeting with him, I felt ready to take my bees to the heather!

The night before the planned trip I dropped my single (but heavy) 14x12 hive plus two supers with Bernard Brown, who kindly offered a space on his trailer, and all I needed to then do was ensure I arrived on time to meet them the next morning at the hill farm near Chatsworth Estate on the Derbyshire Moors. **BUT** having missed my 5am alarm, I raced for the car desperate not to be the last there. Halfway up the M69 with the Mercedes running on afterburners, Bernard called to say they were just setting off. Phew! I could relax and enjoy the rest of the trip.



The Farm sits 1100ft above sea level and, given the instructions, it is easy to find although bumpy once you're off the A619 – a 4X4 helps of course. We gathered over the next hour and chatted with Francis who has managed the farm for many years.

We then headed up to the apiary.



The site is just a few yards away from the heather, which was just coming into bloom, and already had some hives installed on it, so we picked our places and installed ours. A big thank you to Mike Townsend who imparted small but vital details such as putting wood down on the ground in front of the hives to minimise weeds obstructing the entrance and also strapping up over the crown board and the roof of the hive.

The bees were not full of joy once we'd got them in position. Alan was seen padding himself some 200 yards away from his hives in an attempt to shake off some unfriendly bees (definitely a candidate for next year's 'Strictly'). Meantime, Bernard and I made a very quick exit, clearing the field gate in a single bound when we took the screens off the top and cleared the front entrances of our hives. But if you think about it – if somebody comes along and rips your roof off, gives you a winding drive for an hour, leaves you overnight all sealed up, followed by a three hour high speed journey, culminating in a very bumpy half mile of farm track only to deposit you in a cold unfamiliar field, it's hardly surprising they were rather miffed.



Although the day we dropped them off was cold and drizzly and despite having driven a long way to put the hives there, if you ask me, I'd say do it – there is so much help available and this hill farm on the Chatsworth Estate is such a beautiful place.

What's next? I'll pop up to see if I need another super in the next week. By mid-September we'll be back to move our hives home in order to press out and jar up whatever this season has brought us.

**David Faulkner**



# ENJOY A GOOD READ?

## JOIN OUR BEE BOOK GROUP

**A**s winter draws in we are considering a new book group for branch members where we can share our ideas about bee books. These can be fiction, research, manuals or handbooks. As long as it's about bees somehow. We're going to start with **'The History of Bees'** by Maja Lunde.

The blurb goes:

*"This dazzling and ambitious literary debut follows three generations of beekeepers from the past, present, and future, weaving a spellbinding story of their relationship to the bees, to their children, and to one another against the backdrop of an urgent, global crisis."*

Here are some reviews:

*'Is climate-themed fiction all too real? As scientists' projections about the effects of climate change have increasingly become reality, some works of apocalyptic fiction have begun to seem all too plausible. Maja Lunde's first book chronicles three generations as they exploit, try to save and eventually mimic bees.'* NEW YORK TIMES

*'Maja Lunde will reach a big audience with The History of Bees. (...) She has written a novel many will read in one go, and then sit down and think, about life, the world and the future. That is unique and it is very well done'* ANNETTE ORRE, LITTKRITIKK.NO

### WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO?

First of all email our librarian Jane Ford to express an interest: [fjordie@btinternet.com](mailto:fjordie@btinternet.com)

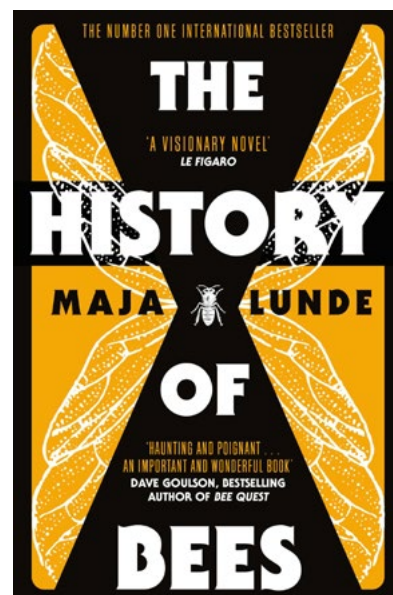
We will then select a date, probably a Thursday evening, where you can tune in for a discussion over Zoom. Don't forget a cuppa or whatever you fancy!

That just leaves reading the book. Try to think about its impact on **you**, the reader. Don't worry about what others might think or not – reading response is personal.

Then put together some questions, comments, ponderings, thoughts etc. and come armed and ready to chat about it.

Happy reading!

**Jane Ford**



## WELCOME NEW WLBK MEMBERS

**W**e're pleased to welcome 21 new members who have joined us this year. It's so disappointing the we've not been able to meet many of you face-to-face this year and I know a number of you are still waiting to begin your beekeeping in earnest, but, hopefully, 2021 will bring a change for the better.

Benn Lane  
Kate and Gareth Ladd  
Stephen Buck  
A J Ashton  
Pippa Green  
Antonia Derrick  
Jennifer Higton  
Anita & Joseph Draper  
Debbie Dann & Alan Hunt  
Sarah Griffiths  
Alex Haldane

Napton  
Middleton Cheney  
Leamington Spa  
Stockton  
Haseley  
Kenilworth  
Stockton  
Frankton  
Stoneleigh  
Leamington Spa  
Leamington Spa

Simon Rawlings  
Dave Miller  
Andrew Crompton  
Simon Winnett  
Geoffrey Marston  
Suzanne Bennett  
Sylvia Green

Leamington Spa  
Fenny Compton  
Southam  
Coventry  
Harbury  
Solihull  
Haseley

Here's a bit of number crunching for you about our branch: Currently we have 251 members. Of these 201 are Registered members, 32 are Partner members and 18 are Associate members.

We have 43 members who live in or around Kenilworth, 64 in Leamington Spa area, 20 in the Southam area, 31 in the Warwick area, 15 in the Coventry area and 10 in the Rugby area, besides many more members who live in small villages and towns in Warwickshire. We also have members in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Birmingham, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Leicestershire.

**Val Dillon**

# BEE TRAINING DURING COVID 19

**A**s a branch, our training work has been badly affected by the pandemic as it's usually done in groups. However, there's no reason why we can't use the winter months, while our girls have got their heads down, to expand our knowledge and experience of bees and beekeeping, and to share experiences and ideas online.

The BBKA has a national **framework** of assessments and exams that lead to certification designed to develop knowledge and good practice. These are divided into two categories:

- Practical **assessments** covering husbandry, bee health, breeding and microscopy, and
- More formal 'modules' assessed by written examinations that extend these themes in more detail and depth. These include honeybee management, hive products, pests and diseases, bee biology, behaviour and breeding.

The website ([www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)) gives the range of module topics under the 'Exams and Assessments' tab and we would like to suggest online groups that focus on any that are of interest. The Branch has a history of informal study groups in which members have met to explore the above themes for their own interests without necessarily working towards a 'Sword of Damocles' assessment or exam. The magic of Zoom has worked for Branch and committee meetings, and so could be used to offer some study groups remotely. There is interesting background theory in all of the assessments that can be explored, discussed and developed via Zoom.

If you let us know what module or topic you are interested in, we will circulate members and see if a group can be formed about the topic of your choice. (Contact below).

There are also some study resources online that you can use completely independently. The National Bee Unit (NBU), under the umbrella of **BeeBase** offers a wide range of Advisory Leaflets, Best Practice Guidelines and Fact Sheets under the 'Publications' tab. The NBU also offers e-learning study units about bee health. If you are registered with BeeBase (as you should be in order to log your colonies!) you can access some e-learning resources by clicking

on 'Go to my records' and then to 'eLearning'. Currently there are a number of resources for 'Pests Diseases and Viruses' with 'test yourself' quizzes which are fun to do, and on which you can score 100%. Always worth celebrating with a glass of mead!

Exams and assessments were cancelled last year, but the BBKA is exploring new ways to do them next year in our new world situation. Who knows? - BBKA may break new ground with socially isolated assessments

Reading is the other major beekeeper activity for winter. This year there have been a number of new beekeeping books and there are some great books which have been around some time. Our librarian, Jane Ford, has kickstarted a branch book club. See her piece on page 6.

We are keen to respond to the needs of members – both newer beekeepers and the more experienced, so we are reviving the Honeybee Health Group. This was created last year for members working towards the Honeybee Health Certificate and used WhatsApp for communications. We intend to expand the provision so that anyone can join and so that you can prepare for the practical certificate or the module. Details of this, and how to register interest, will be in the Members' section the Branch website shortly. We also have a Microscopy Group, for members who would like to explore the many applications of microscopy to beekeeping at introductory or more advanced levels. There is a registration of interest form for Microscopy (the Branch has a number of microscopes for loan) in the Members' area.

In March we aim to run the very popular 'Introduction to Beekeeping' course for new or potential beekeepers. For the first time it will be a weekend course, that will run on two occasions to tempt more people into beekeeping. More details will be released when we know what the situation is. We will also offer the "Towards the Basic" sessions online, as soon as we know what the assessments will be like next year.

We welcome your suggestions for training, support and ways to keep in contact me ([barry.meatyard@gmail.com](mailto:barry.meatyard@gmail.com)) with your ideas.  
**Barry Meatyard, Branch Education Coordinator**

## NEW PAINT JOB FOR LOAN HIVES

**“**Make the kit distinctive” is what I was told when, earlier this year, I took over the management of the Branch's hive loan scheme.

The scheme consists of four complete hives and associated accessories. The bees are supplied either as a nuc or a swarm and the whole caboodle is lent to a newbie for one year. At the end of this period, it is returned for onwards loan to the next cohort of trainees. The majority of the scheme's beneficiaries become smitten and go on to taking up the craft more seriously, which is the whole objective.

So, why make the kit distinctive? Well, over the years the hive parts have been subsumed into the branch's training apiary kit. One advantage of COVID 19 is that it gave me the time to do this as we weren't loaning any hives out. So I got some new paint and bee stencils (a birthday present from my daughter) and set about making the hives distinctive. I think I achieved it, don't you?

**Andrew Threlfall**



# PROFILE: JOHN HOME

**W**hen I decided in 2012 to take the plunge into beekeeping, following the WLBK Taster Day and then the Introductory to Beekeeping Course, it was John Home who I bought my first nuc from. I collected it from his home in Depper's Bridge and he was very generous with his time sensing that I was somewhat anxious about driving off with a box full of stinging insects. A box that he had actually skillfully made himself using plywood featuring a small round hole as an entrance (blocked up with foam, thankfully) and a gauze strip integrated into the roof. With the hive secured in my footwell, I made the very slow and cautious drive back home to the buzz of 10,000 bees.

This was in John's retirement years having officially retired from being a commercial bee farmer in 2005. But, of course, he hadn't retired from beekeeping entirely and was still a very active hobby beekeeper. And he was also still using his wood working skills to make hives for his own bees and the nucs he was selling.

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

John's beekeeping career can be traced back to the time his youngest sister burst into the kitchen of their family home in Clifton, Bristol, declaring that there was something very weird in the garden. Following her outside, they were met by a rugby-shaped swarm of bees hanging from a branch of a small tree. Having already left home at that point, John had completed his agricultural training course at the Gloucestershire Farm Institute at Hartpury (now known as Hartpury College) and was working there as an assistant. So he knew what needed to be done with these new visitors. Throwing an old net curtain over his head and using a pair of secateurs, he snipped the branch and gently lowered the swarm into a tea chest.

That nuc soon grew into two hives, and his beekeeping hobby continued through a change of careers that saw him become a travelling rep for a number of agricultural supplies companies. In 1963 he married his wife Mary, a nurse, and their two children were born a few years later whilst still living in Clevedon. The move to Harbury in Warwickshire happened a few years after that when John accepted a job in the Midlands.

The hives moved with the family and it wasn't long before there were over 70 hives dotted on a number of farms in the surrounding area. A bit more than a hobby now, John was producing quite a reasonable amount of honey for sale locally. He decided to call his brand Fosse Way Honey and in his spare time kept busy in his workshop making his own hives from salvaged wood.

He turned down a job to run Chiltern Honey Farm, which was founded by legendary beekeeper R.O.B Manley in the 1930s, for personal and family reasons but it did give him a boost of confidence and sowed the seed that perhaps he could set up a commercial beekeeping business on his own. And that is just what he did when a short while later he was made redundant from his job.

## STARTING OUT AS A BEE FARMER

Although 70 hives was a good basis on which to start a business, John aimed to have a total of 200-300 hives so he needed to expand fast. To help him do this he imported Caucasian queens



from Australia each April. It only took a few years, and with all these extra hives he was producing a crop of up to eight tonnes of honey a season. Instead of selling his honey to one of the big honey packers, he decided to rather brand and sell it directly to local shops and other outlets. He felt that by marketing his honey himself he would get a better price and it would also ensure steady sales and a regular cash flow.

In those early years, John was certainly a jack-of-all-trades taking on all the roles in the business from the beekeeping manager, marketing and distribution manager, packing manager, transport manager, stock controller to the woodworker building the hives and frames.

As well as driving honey to shops and other outlets, John also took on two annual pollination contracts - the apple orchards in Kent and the bean fields in Evesham. Not to mention taking the bees to the heather in the Derbyshire moors each August. He has very fond memories of these forays across the country in the night and early hours with the bees strapped down in the trailer behind the van. Of course, this drew the attention of suspicious police officers who often stopped him to enquire what he was transporting. But he was very quickly told to get back on the road when they found out, especially one curious police officer who encountered a roar after shining a torch on the cargo!

John would often be accompanied by willing beekeepers on these trips who were only too happy to help, including WLBK's own Clive Joyce.



## FOSSE WAY HONEY MOVES TO DEPPERS BRIDGE

By the late 1970s Fosse Way Honey was fully established with around 350 hives in more than 30 different locations spread all over Warwickshire. By 1982, having expanded out of family home in Harbury, John and his wife moved to Deppers Bridge where they have been ever since.

While still pretty much running his business single handedly, apart from employing the part-time services of two local ladies during the week and a student during the summer months, John also became fully involved with the UK Bee Farmers Association. Between 1980 and 1986 he was, successively, Vice-Chairman, Chairman and then Immediate Past Chairman of the Association, having previously been Chairman of both the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association and our WLBK branch.

Being a critical time for the beekeeping industry, John was heavily involved in campaigning against the upsurge in the spraying of agricultural pesticides and insecticides. Outspoken in his views he also often rallied government to lend greater support to bee farmers, which he felt was frustratingly lacking.



In 1993 he took his campaigning to Brussels where, dressed up in a giant furry bee suit (left), he demonstrated along with other European beekeepers outside the headquarters of the European Economic Community in a bid to secure EU financial support for commercial beekeeping through the Common Agricultural Policy.

Over the years his honey has been enjoyed beyond the residents of Warwickshire. For a time it was served at the Ritz in Piccadilly and he has even had members of the Royal Family visit

his Fosse Way Honey stall at the Royal Show. At these national shows he would show his honey and often walk away with a prize or two. In fact, he briefly came out of retirement in 2008 to show at what turned out to be the last-but-one Royal Show and he swept the board, winning four first prizes, one second prize, one third prize, plus three special awards and, to top it all off, the Best in Show award for his dark honey.

## RETIREMENT AND BEES ABROAD

When John did retire in 2005 he sold Fosse Way Honey to Chris Atkins, who still owns it today and is a flourishing business.

Now in his retirement years and being 65 you'd think he'd be ready to wind down and enjoy the quieter life but, having been recruited by the founder of Bees Abroad to join the charity, new adventures were just around the corner. Bees Abroad promotes beekeeping in developing countries around the world, mostly in the poorest parts of Africa, as a sustainable and environmentally sound way of alleviating poverty by providing income, employment and nutrition for families and communities.

Following his first visit to Malawi in 2005 to see what Bees Abroad and its volunteers were doing, John returned with his wife Mary in 2006 to take over a project in Kenya and assess other possible projects in the country.

Often shocked by the level of poverty but also humbled by how cheerful, enthusiastic and grateful the people are who they are trying to help with their volunteer work, John and his wife have committed to a number of projects over the past 15 years. They



A couple of Kenyan beekeepers proud of the bee suits they made.

have helped encourage rural subsistence farmers in Kenya mainly in small to medium sized groups to see nectar as a natural recurring resource providing them with honey for health and income, and also improving many of the crops they grown through pollination.

As John describes, one highlight has been funding of £250,000 over three years to introduce beekeeping to 900 households but this was exceeded with a further 300. It has also given them a team of Kenyan trainers who now manage the ongoing work.

As he says, his and Mary's involvement with Bees Abroad has not only broadened their horizons in a very literal sense but has also given them enormous personal satisfaction that comes with the success of an endeavour that is so clearly worthwhile and that rewards commitment with such encouragingly positive results. As well as at least one annual trip to Kenya there are also administrative and fund raising activities and, for a number of years, he was also Chairman of the Bees Abroad Management Committee.

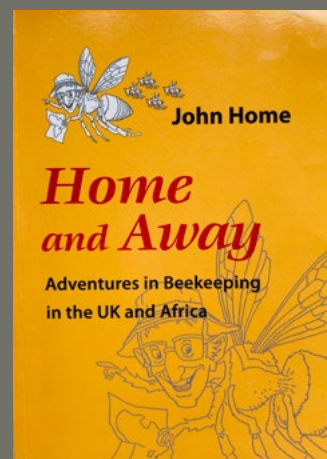
John is still a hobby beekeeper, albeit on quite a large scale with around 80 hives at home in Deppers Bridge and at various local farms. In his retirement he also wrote a book called 'Home and Away: Adventures in Beekeeping in the UK and Africa', which was published in 2012. As he says in the book, beekeeping was a passion that became a profession and he counts himself extremely fortunate to have been able to make a good living from what started out as a hobby.

**Tanya Weaver**

When I approached John Home for this article he very kindly sent me a copy of his book. I read it over one weekend and found it very interesting and readable (not all beekeeping books are!). I encourage you to purchase a copy if you don't have one already, not least of all because all profits from sales of the book are donated to Bees Abroad. Contact John for a copy:

[homeatnorthcote@gmail.com](mailto:homeatnorthcote@gmail.com)

You can, of course, also borrow it from our WLBK library.



# RECIPE: HONEYCOMB FLAPJACKS

Branch member and keen baker Nicola David has sent in this recipe for a traybake of honeycomb flapjacks. She has already made a few batches but claims that in her defence her young children are going through a growth spurt and so need fattening up. The photo on the right was taken before they could get their hands on them. Crunchy, gooey, sweet, chocolatey, honey-y and delicious. No wonder they couldn't resist, and it's so easy to make. (The recipe can also be found online [here](#))



## INGREDIENTS

### Flapjacks

- 200 g Unsalted Butter
- 200 g Demerara Sugar
- 200 g Honey
- 400 g Porridge/Rolled Oats

### Topping

- 250 g Milk Chocolate
- 4 chopped Crunchie bars (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Preheat your oven to 180C/160C Fan and line a 9x9inch square tin with parchment paper.
- Melt the butter, sugar and honey on a low-medium heat, stirring together until the butter has melted and the sugar has dissolved.
- Once the mixture has melted, add the oats and the honey mixture to a large bowl and mix together. Press down evenly into the prepared tin, and bake in the oven for 18-22 minutes until baked through. It'll start to go golden and crispy at the edges.
- Once baked, remove from the oven and leave to cool in the tin. Once cooled, melt the chocolate and pour over the top, and then sprinkle over and press in the crunchie bars. (As you can see from the photo, Nicola swirled hers with melted white chocolate)
- Leave to set, then cut into squares and enjoy!

## HINTS & TIPS

- Now is the time to think about uniting colonies. Bad tempered colonies and weak ones can be managed by killing the queen of the unwanted colony and putting it on top of the recipient colony. Unite through newspaper which has some small slits in and hold down with a queen excluder. Do this in the evening and look for chewed paper at the entrance in the morning. Unwanted queens can be euthanised by putting them in the freezer.
- A strong colony needs 20kg or more of stores to see it through the winter. It is not easy to judge the amount extra needed so just keep feeding until the bees stop taking the feed. Try to get feeding finished by the end of September so the stores can be ripened and capped before the weather gets too cold.
- If you find that the bees are not cleaning the wet supers but are adding to them then put an empty super between the brood box and wet super.

### 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)

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