



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## THE SECRET TO SOFT SET HONEY

**W**LBK branch member, **Bev Oakley, walked away with the Bernard Collins Trophy for Best in Show at this year's WLBK Honey Show for her soft set honey. For any beekeepers who have tried to make their own soft set honey and haven't achieved the desired results, Bev has let us into her secret below.**

**Not only is Bev a deft hand at producing soft set honey, she is also a talented photographer. At the Honey Show she received first class in the 'Photograph' class for the photo on the right, which is of a bee visiting the crab apple tree in her garden taken in April 2017.**

I started beekeeping in July 2017 with one hive in my back garden. My first honey harvest was in Summer 2018 and I managed to get about 15lbs in total, perhaps not as much honey as other beekeepers would have succeeded in harvesting, but I'm happy, and it has been prize-winning.

I scraped off the super frame cappings and honey into one metal sieve lined with muslin over a large pan. I followed the instructions from training sessions and poured the honey into warmed jars. I managed to get everything sticky - me, hob, floor, cupboard doors and handles, utensils etc. The happiest of our family was the dog!

I was keen to ensure I could present the honey well and my efforts paid off because having entered the Medium Honey class at the Tysoe Honey Show, I was awarded third place.

Following the advice to get rid of the 'froth' of bubbles around the rim (with a warm spoon), I entered the WLBK Honey Show and went on to win first place for Medium Honey and the Best in Show, Small Apiary and Novice. I was

speechless! It was suggested that I enter The County Show and I was awarded a first place and Preston Cup for the Medium Honey.

I then decided to have a go at producing Soft Set Honey, which was the result of attending 'The WLBK Preparing Hive Products' presentation by David Blower at the end of August. I had harvested 2 1/2 lbs of very 'white' liquid honey from the lone super in the Spring and the remaining light honey from the same super had crystallised after extraction. I hadn't really put too much thought to what I was going to do with this honey, other than thinking my son could use it to make mead.

When David mentioned Soft Set Honey and 'seed' I asked what that meant. When I got home I started investigating online and found a site suggesting grinding crystallised honey in a pestle and mortar and then adding liquid honey at a ratio of 1:10. I have a stone pestle and mortar, which is very heavy and unwieldy but I think may now have found a new use for it!

The crystallised honey ground down quite quickly and I transferred the white honey into a warm bowl set over another bowl of warm water. I then added the 'seed' and stirred until it was well mixed. I put the resulting mix into jars and brought one along to the WLBK Honey Show.

On the note of the WLBK Honey Show, I would like to say how honoured I was to be asked to steward - what an amazing experience! I also enjoyed talking with new beekeepers exhibiting at their first show. I had taken some cardboard strips to help with the height of exhibit labels and was pleased to share them.

**Bev Oakley**



Bev Oakley's award winning photograph is of a honey bee visiting the crab apple tree in her garden taken in Summer 2017.

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# 2019 HONEY SHOW WINNERS

The annual WLBK Honey Show took place at Kings Hill Nurseries on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019. In October's Bee Talk we included an event report from Helen Essex with a list of all the results for the different classes. As an addition, in this issue's Bee Talk we wanted to include the photographs of the overall winners who received trophies on the night with a special thanks to Paul Stephenson for taking them.

We were particularly pleased to see relatively new beekeepers entering and picking up awards. Congratulations to them and, of course, everyone else who took part.



**Clockwise from top left:** Alex Wray was presented with the Nancy Wiltshire Rosebowl for Honey Cake, Richard Mountney was presented with Novice Mazer, Helen Essex was presented with the Thorpe Cup for most points, Best in Show was Bev Oakley's Soft Set Honey and she was presented with the Bernard Collins Trophy and Paul Stephenson was presented with the Jack Taylor Plaque for Cottager Class.

# SMELLY FEET & COLONY COHESION

On Monday 17<sup>th</sup> October at our Members Meeting, Celia Davis gave a talk entitled "Pheromones in the Honeybee Colony". Her talk commenced with an example of the potency of pheromones in organic moth traps used successfully by gardeners to prevent damage to apples and plums and went on to explain the huge impact of pheromones in the honeybee colony. She spoke in turn about queen pheromones and brood pheromones, giving possible answers to questions that so many beekeepers ask like:

- How do the worker bees know when to cap the brood?
- How does a swarm keep together?

Celia explained that the tarsal glands on the queen's feet deposit an oily secretion on the comb that contributes to the cohesion of the colony. It seems that bees don't bother with referenda!

Many thanks are due to Celia for a fascinating and thought-provoking talk.

Beekeeper cohesion was aided by slices of lardy cake and the chance to taste specialty honey from Branch members.

Next month's meeting on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November at 7.30p.m at

Kings Hill Nurseries will be a talk about queen rearing. This will be of interest to novices and experienced beekeepers alike – everyone is very welcome.

Buying queens from an unfamiliar supplier can be a dodgy business, whereas if you're able to rear your own you can be sure that you're breeding from healthy stock suited to your local environmental conditions. And you'll know that you're not inadvertently importing any nasty pathogens into the country. Queen rearing can be done without a great deal of expensive equipment and, as always with beekeeping, the techniques used give us fascinating insights into the behaviour of honeybees.

Our speaker, Ged Marshall, is a Master Bee Farmer who has been keeping bees since the age of 15. He runs British Honey Producers Ltd, a business marketing home produced honey in bulk, raising high quality queen bees, and providing pollination services.

We understand that the Warwickshire Beekeepers' Association is intending to run a Queen Rearing Course next spring, so Ged's lecture will give a useful and timely insight into the topic for anyone interested in attending this course.

**Jane Brown**

# DID YOU KNOW...



This amazing shot of a honeybee producing wax flakes was taken by the Peruvian honey company [Anaqmisk'i Miel](#). Did you know that bees can produce eight wax flakes in about 12 hours.

# BBKA CHARITY NO.

At the 2018 British Beekeeping Association (BBKA) Annual Delegate Meeting it was agreed that the charity should move to becoming an Incorporated Charity Organisation.

Following considerable work, a revised draft constitution was approved at the 2019 Annual Delegate Meeting and with small alterations, the Charity Commission have approved the new constitution with effect from 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019. Hence the new charity number of 1185343. The reason for the move to a become an Incorporated Charity Organisation is that it better suits a charity like BBKA, which employs staff and has significant assets. It also has the added benefit of removing the personal liabilities on its trustees that are a consequence of the old arrangement.

The relationship between BBKA and Warwickshire Beekeeping Association (WBKA) is unchanged and WBKA's own trustees are considering whether it should also become an Incorporated Charity Organisation in the future. Watch this space.

**Chris Cox**

# OUT-APIARY SPOTS

WLBK branch members are often emailed about available apiaries that have been offered to the branch. From now on these out-apiaries will also be available to view on our website [warleambees.org.uk](http://warleambees.org.uk) in the Members' Area underneath 'Available Apiaries'. Each has been assessed for its suitability. If you are interested, further details may be obtained from the member listed as the contact.

# EVENTS

## BRANCH TRAINING APIARY TIDY UP

The last training session at our Branch Training apiary at Kings Hill Nurseries was held on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September with further planned visits only to maintain and overwinter the apiary.

On Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> October we held a 'tidy up' where members spared a few hours from 10am to help with a variety of tasks from gardening to carpentry to bee feeding to get the site in a fit state for winter.

On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> November we'll be holding another tidy up at 10am. Please come suitably attired in beesuits and if you have any hand tools bring them along too.

## WAX INTEREST GROUP

A small group of WLBK members meet occasionally to play with beeswax. We experiment with skin care recipes etc., and share and experiment other ideas for what we can do with beeswax (we talk about wax cloths but don't do any making as this activity is not suitable for the rooms we meet in).

We are next meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November. If you are interested in joining us, please get in touch with Gill Grimshaw - [gill@gillgrimshaw.com](mailto:gill@gillgrimshaw.com)



## INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING 2020

A six session course in the theory and practice of beekeeping. Taking place on Monday evenings during March 2020 at Kings Hill Nurseries.

Still only £70



# FRAME CLEANING SESSION

**O**n Sunday 29th September, the branch held its inaugural frame cleaning session in our very own Frame Cleaning Tank at Kings Hill Nurseries. Nine members attended and it was so successful that we're holding another session on Sunday 17th November. To entice you to come along, below is a glowing report from a member, Elizabeth Holding, who attended:

When I mention to people that I keep bees the reaction is always the same "Oh that must be nice", "Do you get stung?", "Is it easy?" We all know the answer to the second two questions!

I am pretty sure that there are a number of parts of beekeeping that do not classify in any way as "nice", and one of my least favourite is the thought of cleaning up piles of sticky wooden frames, covered in propolis and honey, scraping off the wax and dipping them individually into a steaming, bubbling vat of gunge until they are clean. The activity leaves you and anything within a five metre radius covered in hot water and blobs of an unidentifiable grey amorphous mass consisting of wax, honey, pollen, propolis, wood bits, dead flies, random bits of bee, spiders and wax moth (hey, I now have a recipe for my Halloween brew!)

Well, across the Kenilworth hills comes the charging of the WLBK Bees cavalry to rescue us from this ordeal ..... thanks to the ingenuity of Roger and Clive all we now need to do\* is take a big box of frames, pop them in a metal cage, and watch while the frame cleaning machine does its magic. The result is a pile of shiny\*\* clean

frames, and apparently it is also fabulous for cleaning polyhives too! Thank you, yet another great bit of support from our Branch.

\* well, sadly we still have to scrape off most of the wax before the frames go in, and I am still carrying the scars from a sharp hive tool sliding across the frame and embedding itself into the skin between my thumb and first finger :-(  
\*\* maybe not that shiny once they dry, but sounds better that way.

**Elizabeth Holding**

*If you're interested in attending the next frame cleaning workshop on Sunday 17th November, please complete this [Google form](#). Time slots are limited so will be allocated on a first come first served basis. If you want to come along, please use the Google form to express your interest. As you will see from the form, we ask you to select at least two slots to give us some flexibility in arranging a programme. We also need to know the approximate number of frames involved so that we can assess the amount of time required.*

*It is essential that you remove all comb and scrape as much wax from the frames as practicable before coming to site. In this regard, the Branch does have a Steam Wax Extractor for home loan which does, generally, leave the frames ready for cleaning. This injects steam into a brood or super containing the frames with comb and melts the wax off of the frames.*

*To borrow the Steam Wax Extractor please contact Bernard Brown at [bernardbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardbrown@outlook.com)*

# HOME, A-LOAN!?!

**O**ver the years, the Branch has invested in a range of equipment that a beekeeper wouldn't necessarily purchase themselves as they either cannot justify the cost of acquisition nor the inconvenience of storing it, especially as it might only be used a couple of times per season. Details of this equipment - together with its custodian, where it is located and the contact details for booking - are on the website in the resources section of the members' area. Just click on the home loan equipment button.

This kit is in the custody of individual members whose role is to store it, make it available upon request and track its whereabouts. These custodians undertake this role entirely voluntarily and it is incumbent upon us to make it as easy as possible.

To ensure the continuity of this facility there are some simple guidelines you can follow:-

1. It is to be used for beekeeping uses only
2. It is not to be loaned onwards
3. It is not to be passed to other members without the custodian's knowledge and agreement

4. Kit can only be retained beyond the agreed return date with the agreement of the custodian so that subsequent bookings can be honoured

5. Kit is to be returned in a clean condition ready for use by the next borrower. If it isn't, its return may not be accepted until it is satisfactorily cleaned. Such lack of consideration may result in future access to this scheme being denied. If necessary, advice on cleaning may be sought from the custodian.

6. Any defects, whether through wear, tear or accidental damage should be reported to the custodian as soon as it is noted so that contingency action to arrange repair, or to forewarn the next borrower, can be taken.

7. Custodians also have a life outside beekeeping and thus the timing of the issue and return of the kit should be to your mutual convenience.

With a little co-operation and consideration, we can make this useful facility work.

**Bernard Brown**

# WHAT'S THE BUZZ

THE LATEST BEEKEEPING BOOKS, PODCASTS, ARTICLES, RESEARCH, PROGRAMMES AND DOCUMENTARIES THAT ARE CREATING A BUZZ.

It turns out bees are pretty good at maths. According to an article published in [The Conversation](#), they can count up to four and even understand the concept of zero. However, in a new study published in the [Journal of Experimental Biology](#), it shows honeybees can also understand numbers higher than four if the question and training are presented in the right way.

The links above provide some enlightened reading and suggest that bees' brains are incredibly flexible helping them to become maths stars. The wonders of bees never cease!



Photo credit: Scarlett Howard

# WINTER SUPPLIES

While the beekeeper may not need to go into their hives during winter, there are still things we can do to help our girls like give them a welcome treat of fondant and perhaps a not so welcome but very necessary dose of oxalic acid.

These can be purchased from our WLBK Cooperative Purchasing Scheme. This can be found on [warleambees.org.uk](http://warleambees.org.uk) in the Members' Area under Co-Op Purchasing.

Oxalic Acid (or Api-Bioxal) is sold in sachets - either 35g or 175g, fondant comes in 12.5kg blocks and Candy Polline Gold, which is fondant based supplementary feed, comes in a 0.5kg or 1kg pack.

# FOR SALE

Quiet colony of bees, treated for varroa and fed for winter, this year's queen (marked).

£100 including brood frames.

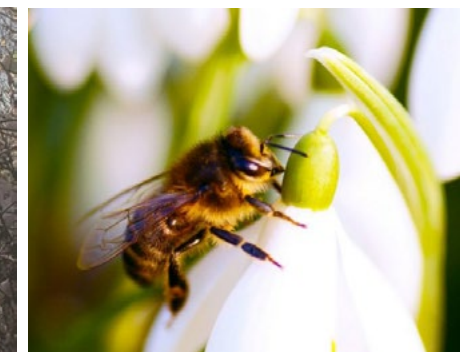
Contact: Lynn Pearson  
01295770580  
[Penn.house@btinternet.com](mailto:Penn.house@btinternet.com)

*If branch members want to buy and sell equipment, please visit 'The Beekeeping Equipment For Sale and Wanted' section in the Members Area of the website.*

# BEE-THEMED CHRISTMAS CARDS

Christmas won't be quite the same this year without a Branch Christmas card but fear not, you can still get bee-themed cards, as illustrated below, from Bees Abroad, a charity we support in several ways. They cost £5 per pack of five and can be ordered by following this link:-

<https://beesabroad.org.uk/shop/>



# HINTS AND TIPS: METHEGLIN

Metheglin is a honey based liquor (like mead) in which spices or herbs are used. It's slightly more complicated to make than mead but not difficult as this recipe shows.

As with all recipes, you can vary it to suit your tastes, what you have growing in your herb bed or balancing the individual flavour of the honey used. In the past, when mead was used as a celebration drink for weddings etc., it was technically metheglin. The makers were more interested in the final flavour than the name! Most often they would be beekeepers rather than brewers – an early example of 'added value' for a smallholder business.

Give this recipe a go, not least of all because there is a Class in the County Honey Show for Metheglin and we could always introduce a class in the Branch Show in the future.

## INGREDIENTS FOR METHEGLIN RECIPE

- 4lbs Honey
- 1 Lemon
- Sprig of rosemary
- Sprig of balm
- ½oz of root ginger, chopped and bruised or grated
- Water
- Wine or Mead Yeast
- Yeast Nutrient



## METHOD FOR METHEGLIN RECIPE

1. Start the yeast 2 days ahead. Take a sterilised jar and add a tablespoon of honey. Pour on ½ pint of boiling water and stir to mix. When cooled to 20°C or below, add the yeast and yeast nutrient. Keep covered but not airtight, a muslin cover affixed with a rubber band or string is ideal.
2. Put the rosemary and balm into a large pan along with the ginger and zest of the lemon. Add about 4 pints of water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 20 minutes.
3. Put the honey into a fermenting bin or lidded wine bucket and strain the herb liquid through a jelly bag or muslin cloth onto it whilst still hot. Stir the honey until dissolved.
4. Add the juice of the lemon
5. Allow to cool to 20°C and then add the prepared yeast starter.
6. A fierce fermentation should begin quickly. After a few days to a week the rate will have slowed and the must can be poured into a demijohn and topped up to the gallon with cooled boiled water prior to fitting the air-lock.
7. Keep in a warm place until fermentation stops
8. Move the demijohn into a cool place and when ready to drink, rack off into bottles.

You can use most any herbs and spices in metheglin: cloves, cinnamon, marjoram, lemon balm, rue and hops. As well as or instead of the lemon you could also add orange zest and juice.

Mead improves with age and is best stored for at least a year prior to drinking. Some of the best meads mature for 7 years prior to drinking..... patience is a virtue, but to some an impossibility!

## 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:  
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