



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## BUZZING BACK INTO THE PAST

Judging by my name, which is neatly written in the front of this book, my copy of *Insect Life* must be nearly 70 years old. Its board covers are worn and tattered, and its illustrations are all in black-and-white on cheap, post-war paper. It is one of a series called 'The Visual Library', combining cartoon and accurate life drawings, first published by Winchester Publications in 1947.

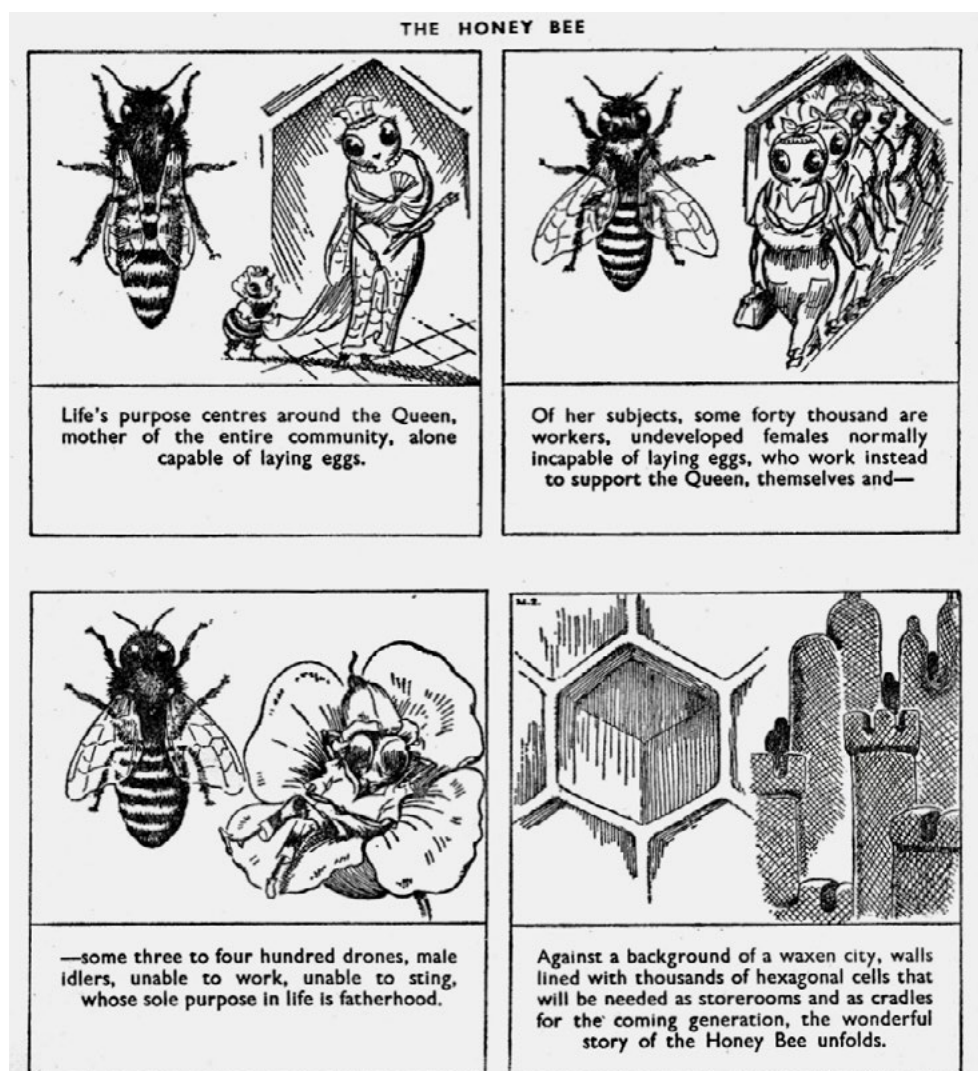
A frontispiece declares that 'Seeing is believing' and goes on to explain that the combination of pictures and words makes learning 'easier and more complete'. 'The reader, of whatever age, learns while being entertained by the association of pictures and words, and retains the knowledge so acquired'. A bit like a Haynes Manual, then. Other books in the series included 'man's progress from his earliest years' and 'the romance of industrial development'.

My precious volume is devoted to insects, including not just the honeybee, but termites, ants, the common fly and the Colorado beetle – bringing back memories of posters illustrating the beetle larvae, displayed outside Hornsey Police Station in the 1950s.

The *Life of the Honey Bee* is, it told me, about 'a strange community of individual lives dedicated to a communal (sic) cause, with all the toil and, at times, ruthless sacrifice that such a cause entails'. It's not really surprising that political movements throughout history have drawn parallels from the life of the beehive; and in 1947, Russia was still in the hands of Joseph Stalin.

And so 'Against the background of a waxen city, walls lined with thousands of hexagonal cells needed as storerooms and cradles, the wonderful story of the honey bee unfolds....'

Worker bees are drawn in dungarees and headscarves like wartime workers in munition



factories; drones idle on deckchairs in flower sunhats; queens, of course, wear a crown.

I loved the book. Already besotted with wildlife, I went on to hatch and release butterflies (including an unsuccessful attempt to introduce the Camberwell Beauty to my local park), kept stick insects and silk moths, wrote to David

Attenborough (and received a personal reply) and later went on to study zoology at University.

I hope the books and schools television I wrote later in life, with all the benefits of colour illustration, inspired younger generations as much as this simple cartoon book did me.

**John Stringer**

# MESSAGE FROM WLBK'S CHAIR

**B**eware bonfire night! November has not always been good for my bees. A couple of years ago someone decided to have a huge bonfire right next to my hives. I will never know what happened (and nor does the landowner) but a week after bonfire night I went up to heft my hives and found two badly scorched and four completely empty of bees - all partly melted inside. It must have been some fire! I can't even imagine how anyone could build a huge bonfire right next to a cluster of beehives and I couldn't find anyone who knew anything.

The moral of this tale is to check your hives regularly and be very suspicious if the beginnings of a bonfire appear! At the moment, checking the hives is pretty much all I have to do in the apiary. I heft to check that they have plenty of stores, but they have just been fed and with the ivy going over, they are heavy. My colonies still have brood, so it's too early for oxalic acid, but friends have promised to come and demonstrate vaporisation to me - perhaps after the lockdown is over.

This lockdown will not feature the apiary maintenance trips, which saved my sanity last time, but there is still the flaming, scraping and treating of beehive parts to be done, and the many zoom webinars available now. I had a good experience with insulating roofs last month. I faced the usual dilemma - the expert advice about what to use was different from each expert. In the end, my neighbour wanted to get rid of a pile of huge cork tiles and I gratefully accepted them to put over my cover boards. As we all know, free beekeeping equipment is indubitably the BEST beekeeping equipment!

This November let's settle down to enjoy the reading that is

winter for beekeepers. Why not think about preparing for one of the assessments next year? But keep an eye on those hives!

## BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

- Make sure any treatment strips have been removed and settle the hives down.
- Add any forgotten mouse guard or woodpecker mesh.
- Check your hives weigh around 55lb (depending on their size and what they are made of - I am thinking wooden nationals) and heft or weigh regularly to check that they have plenty of stores.
- Order fondant from the co-op if you are going to use it as emergency feed later in winter.
- Review your records. Which hives were productive? Which ones were nice to handle? This is the time to plan next year. Are there any of these colonies you'd really like to breed from (or requeen) next year? Now is the time to tidy up the records, print out next year's sheets and plan.
- November is a good time for a tidy - make sure there are no frames lying about and collect all the wax bits together for melting. When melted down all the wax can either be used for candles and products or re-cycled by exchange for new foundation.
- Finally, choose a good book or two (or podcast, webinar or video) and settle down to dream of Spring.

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**

# NEW WLBK COMMITTEE MEMBER

**D**uring August's Committee Meeting, Suzanne Bennett was co-opted to join the merry band of branch committee members. Although Suzanne had only recently re-joined the Warwick and Leamington Branch, she is already well established within the beekeeping fraternity of Warwickshire Beekeepers.

Suzanne is a beekeeper of many years' experience having originally started with our branch in 2011, currently keeping bees with a buddy beekeeper in our branch (Rachel Dove), then as a member of the Solihull Branch and is currently a Trustee of the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA). Suzanne wishes to continue her role within the BBKA with her professional background in environment, governance, marketing communications and education and with this in mind the committee were of the view that Suzanne's nomination as a BBKA Trustee at the Annual Delegate Conference 2021 was better supported by her being a committee member.

To bring members up to date, Suzanne's name was brought forward to Warwickshire Beekeepers and in turn her name has now been formally submitted to BBKA for consideration at the 2021 Delegate Conference. Having one of our own "at the top table" as it were within BBKA is seen as a considerable plus. Over recent years the BBKA procedures, its governance and management have been troubling at branch level. The committee look forward to working with Suzanne at both local and hopefully national level to keep beekeeping relevant.

**Chris Cox, Branch Secretary**



# BEE IN TIME

**W**ith Christmas just around the corner there are a few Bee-themed gifts around such as this Bee Clock Kit from Bees Abroad. It can be purchased through its [web shop](#) for £15 with all profits going to support the work of the charity.

These layered wooden wall clocks make the perfect statement piece for any room, and offer a versatile wood blank for all manner of crafters.

Each circular base measures approximately 20cm, with a laser cut bee shape to attach to the top.

Clock KIT contains:

1. 1X Wooden clock base, and 3D bee feature
2. 1X Clock mechanism inc.
3. 1X Set of three silver hands

Laser cut using the highest quality 3mm birch plywood, the shapes can either be left natural, showcasing the beautiful natural wood grains, or can be decorated using a range of different mediums, such as paint, glitter, and decoupage. This clock uses 1X AA battery.



## B MOVIE PROJECT

**I**n the last Bee Talk we reported on the Branch's project to produce a set of Training Videos to support good practice and knowledge of a range of beekeeping topics and management activities. As this Bee Talk goes to press we are progressing with the first two of these and have draft 'storyboards' for others, including a disease inspection. The first two going 'into the can' cover the use of the extraction facility and the diagnosis of Nosema. The latter was temporarily held up by my camera operator (my daughter Hannah) walking off the set in a huff having been stung while filming the collection of a sample of bees.

It took a couple of weeks to recruit a new cameraman and to get suitable weather! Finding the right combination of weather, suitable light, bee activity, people and time is an interesting challenge – and gives an interesting insight into the skills and patience of David Attenborough's team.

As we move into the Spring there will be more opportunity to get out 'in the field' and do more. It's proving to be fun and hopefully will produce useful and informative training resources. Hannah has forgiven me.

**Barry Meatyard**

## DID YOU KNOW...

Drones have no father but they have a grandfather!

A worker bee is eviscerated if it stings and so dies. How come the Queen can sting and still live?

*(The sting on a worker is barbed so cannot be withdrawn but a Queen has an unbarbed sting which can be used more than once.)*

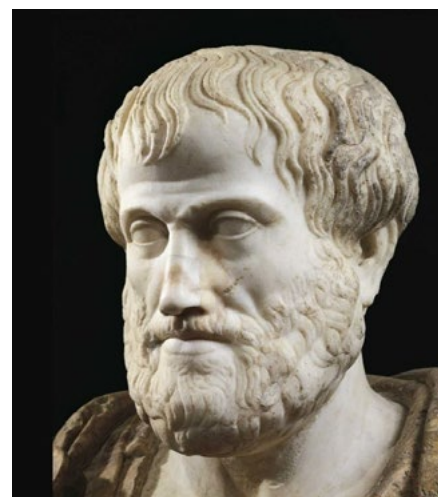
**Helen Essex**

It is reported that Beekeepers are less prone to the effects of COVID-19 isolation. This is supposed to be because it's an outdoor activity and of its solitary nature leading to comfort in their own company and being alone with their own thoughts.

**Bernard Brown**

Did you know that the Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle studied honeybees, which he kept in primitive hives? Although many of his observations were sound, some of his conclusions turned out to be questionable but they reinforced existing myths about honeybees, which were then passed down to later generations, acquiring the status of authority. Some of his howlers were that bees do not give birth, but find their young in flowers; that what we now know as the queen bee is in fact a "king"; and that honey is not made by bees at all, but is distilled from dew or falls magically from the air. He also believed that bees live for seven years. This just goes to prove you should never believe what a beekeeper says.

**Bernard Brown**



# GET CRAFTY THIS CHRISTMAS

**W**ith most of us in the doldrums with COVID-19 and Lockdown 2.0, it makes a pleasant change to start thinking about Christmas and how we can increase sales.

At BeeTradex this year, I purchased an Abelo Solar Wax extractor which has produced the most beautiful yellow wax, even from old brood comb. Rather than trade in the wax for foundation, I made candles in preparation for my daughters planned wedding in July. Unfortunately due to COVID-19 the wedding has been put back until next year, so I did have rather a lot of them in stock.

Stretching my limited creative abilities, I started casting around for ideas for Christmas presents.

I came across a website called Lovejars.co.uk, which supply a range of products mainly for preserves. I found a presentation box for 8oz jars that can be supplied with different themed stickers. I bought a few of the Nordic Christmas design and a Traditional Holly design.

By presenting the beeswax candles and 8oz jars of honey in the

right packaging, they do make a wonderful Christmas gift, and they have been very popular with my customers.

The plastic bee pins come from Thornes, and I include a small piece of paper with a choke warning for young children and babies, plus instructions on standing a candle on a fireproof base etc. (Yes, I'm afraid there's no such thing as common sense these days!).

I just hope I can accumulate more wax next year in time for the rearranged wedding!

Alan Deeley



# THE BOOKISH BEEKS OF WLBK

**T**he next meeting of Bookish Beeks will take place on Thursday 26 November at 7.30pm via Zoom. We will be discussing **A Honeybee Heart Has Five Openings** by Helen Jukes, a memoir of a beekeeper's first year.

**Here's the blurb:** Entering her thirties, Helen Jukes feels trapped in an urban grind of office politics and temporary addresses – disconnected, stressed. Struggling to settle into her latest job and home in Oxford, she realises she needs to effect a change if she's to create a meaningful life for herself, one that can accommodate comfort and labour and love. Then friends give her the gift of a colony of honeybees – according to folklore, bees freely given bring luck – and Helen embarks on her first full year of beekeeping. But what does it mean to 'keep' wild creatures? In learning about the bees, what can she learn of herself? And can travelling inside the hive free her outside it?

**About the Author:** Helen Jukes is a writer, writing tutor and beekeeper. Her writing has appeared in many publications, including *Caught by the River*, BBC Wildlife, *Resurgence*, the *Junket* and *LITRO*. She tutors on the creative writing programme at Oxford University, and also works with the Bee Friendly Trust, a London-based charity founded by beekeeper Luke Dixon to promote our understanding of honeybees and help nurture sustainable habitats. She lives in the Wye Valley.

**Reviews:** *'This book has found a special place in my heart. It's as strange, beautiful and unexpected, as precise and exquisite in its movings, as bees in a hive. I loved it'* Helen Macdonald, author of *HIS FOR HAWK*

*'Everyone should own A Honeybee Heart Has Five Openings, which*

*moved and delighted me more than a book about insects had any right to ... Jukes is a gloriously gifted writer and her book ought to become a key text of this bright moment in our history of nature writing'* Alex Preston, Observer  
*'Finely written and insightful'* Melissa Harrison, Guardian

Why not join us and our book chat - it's bound to make for an interesting conversation:

**Time:** 26 Nov, 2020  
07:30 PM

**Join Zoom Meeting:** <https://zoom.us/j/92783297709>

**Meeting ID:** 927 8329 7709

**Passcode:** 375836

Any questions please email Jane: [fjordie@btinternet.com](mailto:fjordie@btinternet.com)

Jane Ford, Librarian



# GRAB A BARGAIN

To put it simply, the **BBKA's Healthy Hive Guide**, which is written by Dan Basterfield, Roger Cullum-Kenyon and Ivor Davis, is the single most useful beekeeping book I own. It covers all of the major problems and points of bee health. It has fantastic, clear images of every possible brood, comb and UK bee situation you could need. The pages are wipe-clean so it's ideal for use 'over the hive' and although it would be ideal to have in your toolbox, it will actually fit in your beesuit pocket. I have already recommended it to several of our beekeepers, but now I'm recommending it to you all.



Here's the exciting bit: The book usually costs £7 from BBKA but if you order it via the Google form below, you can get it for £5. Now Christmas is coming and this would make a brilliant stocking filler for any beekeeper or, alternatively, treat yourself – and your bees!

To access the Google Form, cut and paste this link into your browser:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfNcVYSdJm-SwDfgnZ4jFLNZXrvo-qPjrJultqIEWj76yJCpw/viewform>

Jane Ford, Librarian

# A COMB CHANGE

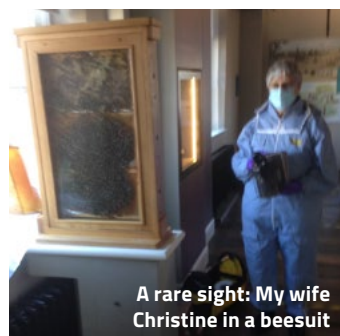
I have managed the Warwick & Leamington viewing hive in the Market Hall Museum in Warwick for many years and they usually overwinter very well. However, this year I have had a lot of trouble encouraging them to take syrup from the concealed feeder in the top of the hive. The final option seemed to be to insert a whole frame of food into the hive.

Clive Joyce offered to assist me in removing a glass side and changing one of the three frames to allow a frame of food to be put into the hive with it remaining in place in the museum.

Now, my wife Christine has been a very supportive and bee knowledgeable partner over all the years of me keeping bees but has not been minded to help manage them despite the fact it was her father who introduced me to beekeeping. Imagine my surprise with her offer to help, which went very smoothly especially as the fire alarm system was able to be switched off for a short time allowing me to give the bees smoke to help keep them on the frames.

I have often said bee behaviour can be better observed when they are undisturbed in a viewing hive and this especially proved to be the case. The bees immediately rushed to the food, feeding in perfect formation and at last exploring the feeder, which I was able to make more accessible. I'm always amused at the way all the bees rush out of the entrance when bees are fed since all their knowledge when seeking food is based on the entrance even though they are being fed within the hive or 'upstairs' via a feeder.

Mike Townsend



A rare sight: My wife Christine in a beesuit

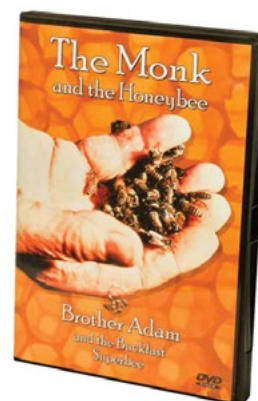
## EVENTS

In the topsy turvy times we are living through, nothing can be sure from day to day, but we are remaining optimistic that **Introduction to Beekeeping 2021** will be able to take place at the end of March. As explained last month, the plan is to run two identical weekends 20/21 March and 27/28 March, accommodating 20 participants at each. The response has been fantastic – we now have just one place left for the first weekend and eight for the second.

Beekeeping must go on!

Val Dillon and Maggie Curley

For October **Member's meeting** we were planning on a film night. We had the popcorn popped and we thought we were ready..... unfortunately our planned presentation of **The Pollinators** had to be postponed. Apparently Zoom isn't a good way to share movies.



At the last moment Clive Joyce stepped into the breach with a DVD called **The Monk and the Honeybee**. A film about Brother Adam and his search for the

Buckfast honeybee. This was a charming film giving the history of Buckfast Abbey and Brother Adam's work producing a docile but super productive bee. During the film we followed Brother Adam in his eighties being carried up Mount Kilimanjaro on a cane chair in the search of the black honey bee *Apis Mellifera Monticola*. It was fascinating to hear stories about Brother Adam. Once he stopped the army shooting his beehives while on manoeuvres on Dartmoor.

I still have plans for a showing of **The Pollinators** film and I am now in discussion with the production company about how best to go about this so watch this space.

Our next meeting on 19 November at 7.30pm will be a talk by Scott Dwyer from Warwick University on Varroa Controls.

Rachel Dove

# BEE FRIENDLY PLANTS: SEDUM

I didn't think I'd have anything to talk about this month, I'd tucked the bees up for the winter, temperatures were dropping and there was very little left flowering in the borders. Then, lo and behold, on a particularly sunny day last week several of the girls had ventured out for a little picnic on the lovely sedum which is still hanging on to its autumn glory.



Beloved by the bees, the sedums are commonly known as stonecrops. The genus comprises some 400-500 species, all succulents and ranging from creeping plants to sizeable shrubs. They are particularly easy to grow and being clump forming, make excellent ground cover. As they take kindly to being split, one plant will go a long way. I have a well-known Autumn Joy in my garden, like the one shown in the picture. It is a large upright variety which in the height of its flowering season, August/September, will be covered with a mass of happy pollinators.

The properties of some of the low growing, creeping varieties, being both mat forming and succulent are now widely used in the construction of "Green Roofs".

Perhaps sedum mats could be used to adorn and insulate our



beehives, then our "ladies who lunch" would only have to nip up to the roof to meet their friends and neighbours – and still be within Lockdown rules!

Maggie Curley

## JOIN A WLBK TRAINING GROUP

We have a number of Training Groups available to members:

**1. Honeybee Health Group:** In the coming months we will run a group to support members to prepare for the Honeybee Health Certificate OR Module

3 Honeybee pests, Diseases and Poisoning, which we anticipate will resume next year. We will aim to meet for a discussion about specific aspects of disease on the following Nov 17, Dec 15, Jan 19, Feb 16, March 16. (using Zoom at the moment and starting at 7.30pm). In the spring we will arrange 3 practical sessions in small groups for disease inspection, shook swarm, sample collection and Nosema diagnosis. There is no charge for the group, but if you decide to enter for either qualification you will be supported to put in an application and pay the assessment fee.

**2. Microscopy Group:** With the help of Zoom we will also run a group to help members prepare for the Microscopy Certificate, which we also anticipate will resume next year. We will aim to meet on Zoom for a discussion about specific aspects of Microscopy on the following Tuesdays: Nov 10, Dec 8, Jan 12, Feb 9, March 9 starting at 7.30 pm. When the COVID situation allows we will organise practical sessions in small groups to cover techniques such as slide making and dissection. There is no charge

for this group, but if you decide to enter for the Certificate you will be supported to put in an application and pay the assessment fee. The assessment for the Microscopy Certificate requires a candidate to have produced a set of pollen grain and anatomy slides selected from a prescribed list. The Branch has some equipment for loan but a number of members have already had support and advice in buying their own microscopes. There are some bargains to be had on-line, but you need to know what to look for!

**3. Towards the Basic Group:** We anticipate basic Assessments will resume next year and so we are running three Zoom online preparation sessions on the following Tuesdays to cover the main parts of the assessment: Jan 26, Feb 23, March 23, all starting at 7.30pm. In the Spring we will add small group sessions to cover the expectations of the practical elements of the Assessment. In essence, this is a conversation over a hive that enables you to discuss your practical techniques. There is no charge for participating in the group but if you want to take the assessment you will be asked to fill in a form, and pay the BBKA fee, in due course.

*If you'd like to join any of these groups please go to the link on the Training Groups page of the website.*

Barry Meatyard

# THE ICING ON THE CAKE

**A**s avid readers of **"The Apiarist's" Blog**, we decided this year to adopt his advocated use of fondant as our main autumn feed ..... for the bees that is!

Opinion is divided as to whether this or syrup is the better, but the alleged advantages of fondant swayed us into giving it a go. These advantages are that it is simply added under the crown board. You don't need specialist feeders only an eke or an empty super. There is no risk of spillages when putting on the hive which reduces the risk of robbing by other bees. The bees take fondant down more slowly which seems to avoid the brood box getting packed out with stores which can leave the queen with nowhere to lay. Usually, it's a once only application, and thus is a good option for an out apiary which cannot be visited frequently to top up syrup feed and the fewer visits reduces disturbance of the bees. The sugar in fondant is more concentrated than in syrup which has a large water content which the bees have to expend energy evaporating. This is offset, somewhat, by the bees having to use water to take down the fondant but this is in plentiful supply and readily available close by at this time of year. Stored, fondant takes up less room than syrup and has a long shelf life. We used some this year dating from 2017 and it was totally viable.

So, at the end of September, our 8 colonies were treated to a full slab of fondant each, laid on top of a queen excluder directly over the

brood frames.

The Apiarist claims that the bees can wolf this lot down in 3 to 5 weeks. We checked after 3 weeks and two colonies had scoffed the lot whilst the others had taken between two-thirds to three-quarters. The hives all hefted OK, so we closed them back up and left the fondant on.

This was not a one-off. A least two other members reported a similar experience.

Yes, with the ekes it means that the bees have a bigger volume to keep warm but only until the winter oxalic treatment when the hives can be hefted again, ekes removed and fondant patties added, if necessary.

So, so far so good. Mind you, the acid test will be whether the bees come through the winter.

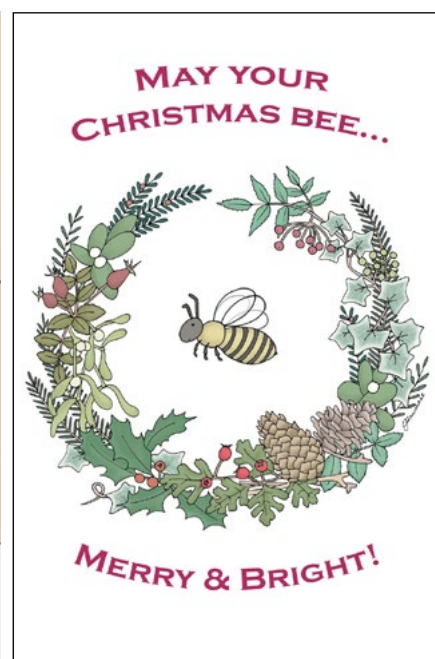
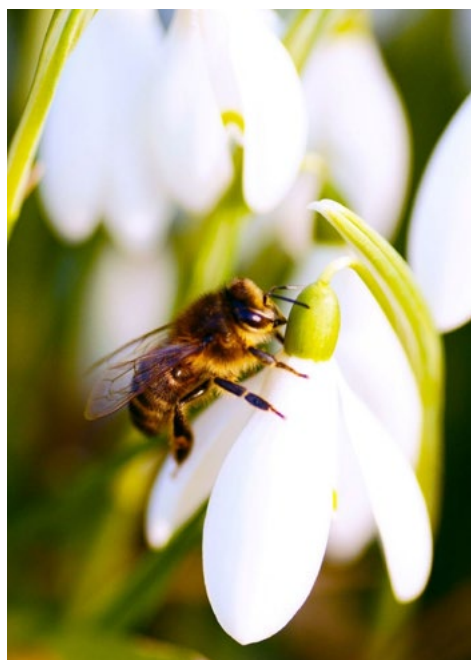
**Bernard Brown**



The Apiarist, aka David Evans, using fondant as Autumn feed.

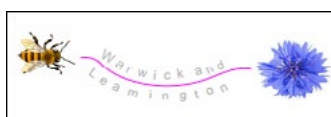
## BEE-THEMED CHRISTMAS CARDS

We have not been able to produce a Branch Christmas card this year, but you can still send bee-themed cards and support our favoured charity, Bees Abroad, which is hard-pressed for support in the current circumstances. The range of cards can be found in their web shop <https://beesabroad.org.uk/product-category/uncategorised/>. They come in packs of 5 and cost £5-£6. Here are a some examples:



# MEMBERSHIP SURVEY FEEDBACK

The Membership Survey using Survey Monkey closed on the 30<sup>th</sup> September and the results were considered at the Branch Committee Meeting in October. A striking feature of the survey was the completion rate where 130 of our membership of some 240 let us know their views. As we were using a proprietary survey package this high number is despite some emails being routed to members junk email folders, so frustrating their involvement.

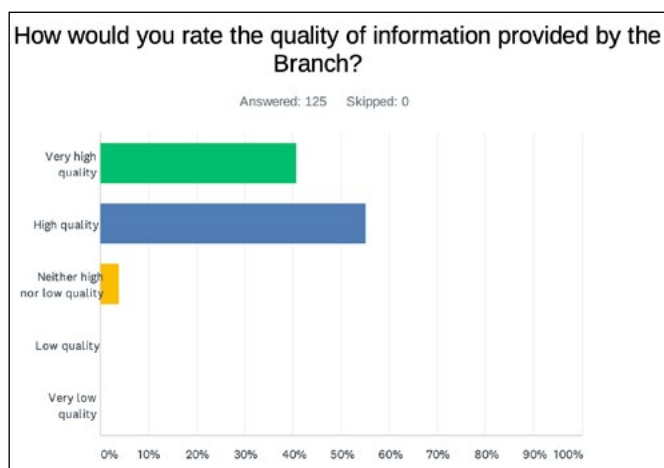


The structure of the survey was that the question of the branch logo was mandatory with over half the membership selecting the concept one

shown above. We now have a logo and its use will be rolled out next year once things return to normal (ever the optimist).

As indicated last month there is a very high-level satisfaction (93.5%) with the way the branch supports the membership's beekeeping.

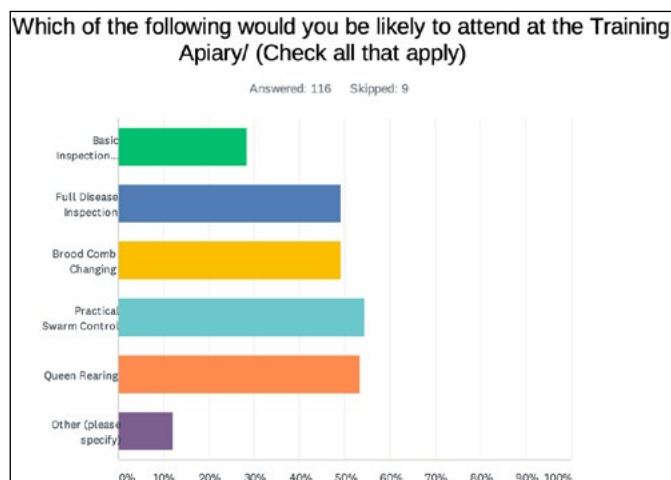
It was also pleasing to note the view of the membership on the quality of information provided.



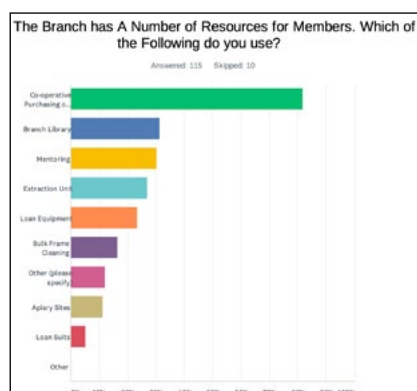
The follow up question on how members received information was particularly illuminating as it reaffirmed the importance of both MessengerBee emails to members and the monthly BeeTalk newsletter. Clearly Twitter and Facebook have little penetration, which may be a reflection of both the memberships low engagement with social media and the equally low broadcast usage from the centre. What we do know is the efforts of both Bernard Brown (alias MessengerBee) and Tanya Weaver, our BeeTalk editor, are both invaluable and highly regarded.

We also used the survey to determine what kind of activity members would be likely to attend and the responses indicated a broadly similar result for all our current (under normal circumstances) routine events and little interest in an Annual Formal Event.

Looking ahead to the future, the questionnaire raised a number of subject areas to be covered at the Training Apiary. This this will be used in the planning for 2021, again taking COVID into account.



As members will be aware the branch has the significant resource of the Co-operative Purchasing arrangements for beekeeping consumables and the survey showed over 80% of returns used the current arrangements. This high level is down to Clive Joyce and his merry band of helpers active and efficient



management: seven tonnes of Ambrosia distribution per annum being one small part.

The use by over 30% of the membership of the Library run by Jane Ford was another pleasing feature and showed the value placed on this facility by the membership and backs up the decision

to increase the Library budget in recent years.

It should be noted that the survey was also a flag waving exercise for some of the other branch resources like the new Bulk Frame Cleaning facility. Another Clive Joyce managed initiative.

Out of curiosity the survey posed a Value for Money question in light of the complicated membership arrangements with the BBKA/WBKA(County)/WLBK Branch and BDI. Some 90% of members considered the WLBK element was value and the other elements slightly lower with the County at 55%. In the feedback comments it was clear that some of the members were uncertain as to the BBKA/WBKA(County)/WLBK Branch structure.

The other questions in the survey were to give a steer to the committee of members who would wish to be involved in aspects of running the branch as well as to give the education coordinator names of members who wished to follow up aspects of beekeeping certification and modular learning. Work still to be done here but those who put their hands up under these questions will be hearing from us.

Chris Cox, WLBK Secretary

# PROFILE: MICK SMITH

**//** It's Mike Townsend's fault that I got into beekeeping," jokes Mick Smith.

It was around 2000 and Mick was attending either the Royal Show or The Town and Country Show at Stoneleigh Park. Always having had an interest in bees he found himself at the BBKA stand and questioned one of the stewards about how one might go about getting into beekeeping. They pointed him in the direction of a marquee where Mike Townsend was.

"And that is where the story starts. Mike took me by the hand so to speak and helped me get started in the branch," reveals Mick.

"We found someone who had recently given up beekeeping as he'd been badly stung whilst mowing his lawn. So I bought all his kit off him, which included two fully stocked hives, a bee suit, smoker, tools etc., all for £150. I thought that was a deal!"

Having joined WLBK, Mick enrolled in the Introductory to Beekeeping course, which in those years was attended by just a handful of beekeepers and was run by Celia Davies from her home. He then joined the committee and became Branch Secretary from 2005 to 2006 and then Branch Chairman from 2010 to 2011. During this time he was also on the BBKA's Show Committee. "I really enjoyed that because we went to a lot of good shows like Gardener's World Live at the NEC. It was interesting and I also showed honey and got a couple of prizes, particularly for the heather honey that I pressed out with Mike Townsend following my first trip up to the heather moors in Derbyshire," remembers Mick.

## FINDING DALEHOUSE LANE APIARY

Starting out with just two hives, Mick finished his beekeeping with 12. He no longer keeps bees having had to give up due to back problems but he is still Site Manager for the Branch Training Apiary and Community Apiary at Dalehouse Lane in Kenilworth,



which he originally founded in 2013 although it's currently not operational due to ongoing roadwork development.

The Dalehouse Lane Apiary is on a 1.5 hectare patch of land at the junction of Dalehouse Lane and Stoneleigh Road. Mick who lives in Kenilworth used to walk past it on the way to a farm shop off the Stoneleigh Road. Having always seen ponies in that paddock he noticed that one day they were gone.

"I asked one or two questions of people but no one seemed to know who owned the land. I eventually uncovered who did by enquiring with the Housing Registry. It was a lady who was currently living near Wellesbourne and the intention was to ask her if she would allow us to use it for beekeeping purposes. Having tracked her down, Bernard Brown and I went to meet with her and that's how we got to have the site," says Mick.

With the bees having moved on site in 2014 with eight hives placed in the training apiary in the top meadow and twelve members' hives placed in the community apiary in the bottom meadow, Mick took on the role of site manager. He soon realised that there was need for something a bit more substantial than a shed for storing equipment. Through a contact via branch member



What Dalehouse Lane Apiary looked like at the beginning of the project.



The bees fight back

Gill Grimshaw he came to hear of a portacabin from a local charity that Coventry Council said had to be moved. "They said we could have it for nothing as long as we paid to move it, which was great but the actual moving of it ended up being a nightmare. The lorries we hired got stuck on the grass because there was no traction however, we did eventually manage to bring it to site," remembers Mick.

In the meantime, with help from Roger Wilkes and a mini digger, they dug a pit to house the portacabin. However, some of the new residents (i.e. the bees) took exception to this intrusion and Mick

received a sting to his lip. "After all that hard work I was repaid by looking like Desperate Dan. It was absolutely awful," says Mick.

### THE APIARY COMES TO FRUITION

With the portacabin in place, Mick also managed to arrange electricity for it. "The neighbours have allowed us to have electricity from their garage and it all works very well as we just give them a few jars of honey every year and they don't charge us at all."

With the portacabin providing a store, kitchen and classroom it has been ideal for training sessions. Later on Mick also oversaw the installation of a grant funded, composting toilet. He's hopeful that in the future they'll be able to get water laid on too.

"It is a really good spot and when the roadworks finish I'm keeping my fingers crossed that we can go back as there is plenty of ground that won't be usable for anything other than beekeeping and storing equipment. It suits our purposes ideally and hopefully we can get it back to being a nice training apiary again as managing that has given me a lot of pleasure and satisfaction in seeing it come to fruition," he admits.

Mick has even had the pleasure in seeing one of his 'swarm catching methods' being used in other areas of the branch, and even shown as part of the slides in the Introductory to Beekeeping Course. The method was first deployed when he noticed a swarm hanging from a branch high up in a tree by the river at Dalehouse Lane Apiary. Taking a five gallon water container, the type found in water coolers in offices, he cut the bottom off to resemble a big transparent bucket. He then removed the lid and screwed in a decorator's extendable pole. "We then gave the branch the swarm was hanging on a good bash and the bees fell into it. It works really well and we've used it several times," smiles Mick.

Even though Mick isn't beekeeping himself any more he looks forward to when the branch can get back into Dalehouse Lane. In the meantime he enjoys the bees that visit his own garden. "I can sit for ages and watch them visit all the different flowers in our garden as they pick up pollen and nectar. They're always on the go. They're such fascinating little things but I just wish they didn't sting."

**Tanya Weaver**

## WINTER VARROA TREATMENTS

It's getting towards that time of year when winter treatment for the varroa is recommended by many authorities. The treatment of choice is oxalic acid available under the brand names of api-bioxal and oxybee. The thinking behind this is that varroa infect the brood with viruses which weaken and slow the development of the colony. Given the rate that varroa reproduces, the fewer mites at the beginning of the brood rearing season, the fewer infected bees there will be later on and the stronger the colony will become. The varroa spend the winter broodless period riding around on the bees waiting for the Queen to start laying. When she does, the varroa leap into the cell to start their wicked ways. Egg laying is subject to the vagaries of a range of environmental factors, amongst other things and can proceed in fits and starts. This can result in small patches of brood which are vulnerable to the attention of varroa so a large complement of varroa at this stage can have a serious effect on the development of



the colony.

Without brood to cuddle up to, varroa are vulnerable to oxalic acid treatment so, how do we find out when the colony is broodless?

**Bernard Brown**

# HINTS & TIPS: AUTUMN RECIPES

What we need this time of year is something delicious and comforting, so enjoy these two recipes below. Thanks to the North Staffordshire Branch for the first one, which has no added sugar with all the sweetness coming from the honey and fruit.... the way it should be!

## SULTANA APRICOT & HONEY CAKE

- 225g (8oz) self-raising flour
- 115g (4oz) Sultanas
- 115g (4oz) Butter
- 60g (2oz) Chopped Apricots
- 225g (8oz) Honey
- 1 teaspoon Lemon zest
- 2 eggs (size 3)
- 3 tablespoons Milk
- Cream the butter and honey together.
- Beat eggs and add alternately with flour.
- Add sultanas, apricots, lemon zest and milk.
- Beat well and lightly.
- Bake in buttered 180mm round tin for 2 hours in a moderate oven

## METHEGLIN

Metheglin is a honey based liquor, in other words a 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. Most meads in the past when it was the celebration drink for weddings etc. were technically metheglins. The makers were more interested in the final flavour rather than the name!

- 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
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 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.

## 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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