



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

TWINKLY BEES BRING FESTIVE JOY



The outcomes of Branch meetings are not always what I expect. Our Top Tips session this month resulted in a surprising number of internet purchases - and getting beekeepers to buy anything is quite an achievement! The plastic bags Clive identified as cheap, effective feeders were probably a foregone conclusion. After all, what beekeeper has space to store large feeders? However, Paul Day's tip about bee solar lights was a surprise. As a result, I now have a hedge full of twinkly solar-powered bees, like the image above. It really cheers up the dark days, but has also led to lots of enquiries from neighbours who need another pot of honey. Our branch has tips for everyone!

It was a wonderfully warm November, and the bees are only just ceasing brood production. This has been reflected in the NBU starvation warning. My colonies are still heavy, but I shall

be ordering fondant soon and as the bees cluster in the colder weather I am hoping for a long-promised demo of vaporizing oxalic acid. Meanwhile, frame cleaning is the next job. The Branch Unit is now working and the first two dates have been booked. After using this facility last year, I can't go back to using a small boiler - getting it all done in an hour or so was brilliant. The work Alan, Clive and their team put into making this available is really appreciated.

As we crank up to Christmas there is always plenty of domestic activity, even this year. Luckily our bees are leaving us time to make Santa a list of bee books and obscure pieces of equipment. Have a great celebration!

Beekeeping tasks this month:

- Add mouse guards or woodpecker mesh - pests will be along when it gets cold.
- Continue to heft or weigh regularly to check your colonies have plenty of stores.

- Put a "test" block of fondant over a feed hole under the roof. If you don't have any fondant, a 2lb bag of sugar with half a cup of water poured into a slit in the bag will do.
- Check your entrances are clear - they can become blocked with dead bees at this time of year.
- This month (and the next two) are good times for frame cleaning, box flaming and wood treatments. But there is no hurry and it's too early to put in foundation (unless your storage is warm).
- You might want to stack your supers of frames (with comb in) out in a cold snap, protected from rain, to prevent wax moth.

If you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at warleambees@warleambees.org.uk. Stay safe!

Jane Medwell
WLBK Chair

HILL CLOSE GARDENS APPLE DAY

Once upon a time, long ago, in a world so different to ours, a group of people from eight different households met indoors. They were huddled together around a table to discuss some adventures they were planning. But then their plans were smashed asunder by a wicked virus called Covid.

And so it came to be that of the 18 adventures they had planned for 2020, they were only able to go on the last one, which was on a Sunday in October and was being held in Warwick at an event known as Hill Close Gardens Apple Day.

Because of this virus, the safety of the stewards at the event was uppermost in mind and the group had to get their risk assessment revised to take into account the risks from Covid. This was done by Graham Day, the husband of Marie, who was part of the group. As a result, they had to micro-manage a plan as to how they could operate safely and they scoured the country for sanitiser, wipes and visors, only to find that things were completely different on the day giving legs to the adage "man plans and fate smiles".

The day arrived and the sun was shining. An excellent start. The blow-up marquee was soon erected and the stall set in place with honey and wax products from 11 members of the community of beekeepers who they represented. It was manned by David Faulkner, Chris Price and Val Dillon, ably assisted by Tim Geater.

There were lots of other stalls in the Gardens, one selling paintings, another selling jewellery. Also a blacksmith selling his wares, plants to buy and, of course, many stalls displaying and

selling apples of every kind as the trees were heritage varieties. There was a mud pit for the children to play in and another beekeeper, Helen Essex, was demonstrating her skills spinning wool.

Of course, there were refreshments, including home-made cakes, the staple diet of beekeepers.

There was a steady stream of visitors throughout the day and many beekeepers popped in to say hello. It soon became obvious that many people at the show were not wearing face masks or visors, but they were social distancing and as the marquee was surrounded with notices asking people to stay safe, everyone was being very sensible, with only one person at a time being allowed to approach the front of the sales desk to choose their honey or wax product. Sadly there were no live bees to see as it was felt this might cause people to group too closely together as they tried to find the queen and watch the girls at work and. There was, of course, no honey tasting either.

Despite these restrictions nearly £400 was taken on the stall and, at the end of the day, the group finished their day with the time-honoured tradition of a group hug, usually done with their arms wrapped around the folded marquee. This time it was a virtual hug held over a crumpled deflated marquee!

An excellent day, with lots of fun from everyone who took part. ...and they all lived happily ever after, with no symptoms from their shared experience.

Let's hope next year we can enjoy a return to normality, in a time before the virus.

Val Dillon

A BEEKEEPERS ALPHABET SOUP

As you would have read in last month's article, the matter of charity governance is a routine task that creeps up on us during the winter months. Yes, we have our Annual General Meeting in February, but we are only a branch of WBKA, the registered charity for Warwickshire. WBKA holds its own Annual General Meeting where the main business, beside deciding on its officers, is the consolidated financial position of the county association with its eight branches to be approved, before onward return to the Charity Commissioners. This is all relatively straight forward, even in the times of Covid-19. As a member of WLBK you are also a member of WBKA, hence the county capitation fee (currently £7.50 per annum). We are also in the fortunate position that the county treasurer, Jane Brown, oversees our own financial affairs as one of our members.

Now there is also the BBKA, which also has to be considered as WBKA is, in turn, an "Area Association" Member of that organisation. The Governance of the BBKA is centred on the holding an Annual Delegate Conference (ADM), normally in January, where matters like those considered at other charities' Annual General Meetings are considered. Here again a capitation fee (currently £19.00) per annum is levied for each individual full branch member. Propositions to direct the BBKA officers looking to the future are normally brought to this meeting by individual member organisations like WBKA. WBKA is represented at the meeting (a virtual one this year) by Douglas Nethercleft from the Shipston branch and he will seek an opinion on each relevant resolution before attending the meeting.

This link are for those who wish to investigate further the workings of the BBKA ADM (an alphabet soup).

Most interesting this year is the proposition by the BBKA Trustees to raise the capitation fee in 2022 due to the planned forecast shortfall in funds shown in the September 2020 Management Report. Although the increase is small, you may consider this inappropriate at this time on a matter of principal. If so, let Bernard Brown or I (as the branch WBKA trustees) know, and we will feed the branch view to Douglas.

Chris Cox
Branch Secretary

CHRISTMAS ROSE

December's Plant of the Month had to be the Christmas Rose didn't it? This lovely plant is in fact not a rose at all but a hellebore, which is part of the buttercup family. Folk lore has it that it was so named because a little girl went to visit the baby Jesus in Bethlehem but had no gift for him. As she cried into the snow, a hellebore plant sprouted where her tears had landed, and it became known as the Christmas rose.



Hellebores are such wonderful plants for winter interest in the garden. I just love the great range of colours from almost pure white through cream, pale pinks, dark reds to almost black. With their evergreen foliage, love of shady areas, and their long flowering period from December through to March, they are a gardener's delight. And not only for gardeners, the bees love them too! As they emerge on a sunny day in early Spring, they will head straight for the welcoming open flower heads which nod in the breeze and show off the easily available pollen sitting above the nectar. As with most plants, it is the single headed varieties which are best for the bees as in doubles the forage tends to be inaccessible.

Now is a good time to plant them and the garden centres will have plenty on sale as Christmas gifts – go on treat yourselves and the bees.

Maggie Curley

WHIZZ WANTED

For many years, Josie Cassell has been our person to turn to for WLBK's Social Media presence with both Twitter and Facebook posts. However, Josie has now the additional demands of her new family member along with her demanding career, especially at this time, and as a result she has indicated a wish to step back from her role in posting WLBK news on social media.

Consequently, we are looking for a member to step into the breach. We have both a branch Twitter account and a branch Facebook account and it will be down to the account holder if we should also have a presence on Instagram and TikTok.

One result of the membership survey was the relatively low penetration/usage of Social Media amongst our membership. Clearly this may have much to do with our membership's age profile as, from my perspective, it appears Social Media is a "young person's thing". However, it could also be a little to do with how we as a branch alert the Social Media account holder of information, news, forwarding posts etc.

If you are interested in taking on this role from Josie Cassell please let me know:

secretary@warleambees.org.uk

Chris Cox

We are planning on organising a **New Year Sale** of surplus beekeeping equipment probably in February ahead of Beetrade. We will be contacting you with the details after Christmas so do keep an eye on your Inbox.

So, it may be a good idea to spend some time during the current restrictions decluttering your beekeeping kit.

Ivan A Perry

Starting to plan next year's Beekeeping?

We have the offer of **out-apiary sites** in the following locations:- Alkerton; Charwelton; Chesterton; Claverdon; Fenny Compton; Lower Hunscombe; Lowsonford; Priors Hardwick 1; Priors Hardwick 2; Temple Balsall.

If interested contact Bernard Brown:

bernardnrown@outlook.com

Bernard Brown

As many of you will know, our training apiary at Kings Hill Nurseries has been out of operation since the bees were "sent on holiday" at the beginning of the first lockdown. Through the summer there were a couple of working parties to keep on top of the weeds but now we are going up a gear and getting everything ready for the bees to be returned before Christmas. Our wonderful quartermasters, Steve Poynter and Richard Mountney are overseeing all the equipment while Maggie Curley will take on the lead/co-ordinating role of the training team and apiary.

Being ever optimistic that **ITB 2021** will be able to go ahead in the last two weekends of March, we hope to start training by mid-April. Both weekends -20/21 March and 27/28 March - are now fully booked and we will be starting a waiting list.

Let's hope we don't have to cancel again!

Maggie Curley

BEE LINES

Warwickshire Beekeeping Association has the 7th largest membership of all BBKA Area Associations.

Given that there are 74 Area Associations our "County" is quite a significant player.

Hampshire 1,326; Devon 1,193; Essex 1,074; Surrey 989; Somerset 903; Kent 827

Warwickshire 806

UPCOMING WLBK 88TH AGM

Here we are at that time of the year when the committee members have to address the bureaucracy of the branch and, more particularly, the requirements of the constitution of the charity, The Warwickshire Beekeepers Association (WBKA). With Covid-19 restrictions, whatever they are at the time, there is still a need to have our Annual General Meeting in February 2021.

Clearly the opportunity to meet in person is extremely unlikely and the committee took the early decision to build on the experience of the County Association, which conducted a very successful (special) Annual General Meeting earlier in the year. We decide to bring together those who wish to be virtual attendees using Eventbrite. Following on from this, the meeting itself will be held using Zoom. Only those who have expressed a wish to virtually attend will be given the meeting logon details. This evidently is considered "good practice" in the new virtual world.

At the County Association (special) AGM the Zoom facility to register attendees voting was extensively used and we anticipate also using this facility. Clearly there is some work to be done by the committee members to ensure the smooth operation of the meeting on the day.

As an early notice, the formal dates for notifications, etc. are set out below:

Notify Members of AGM	by 21 January 2021
Deadline for receipt of proposals	by 4 February 2021
Circulation of Agenda for AGM	by 11 February 2021

Chris Cox, Branch Secretary

NEXT DATE FOR BOOKISH BEEKS

There will not be a December meeting of Bookish Beeks as it falls on 24th December and I'll be otherwise occupied with fizzy drinks that evening! So... the next meeting of Bookish Beeks will take place on Thursday 28th January at 7.30pm via Zoom. We will be discussing **Buzz**:

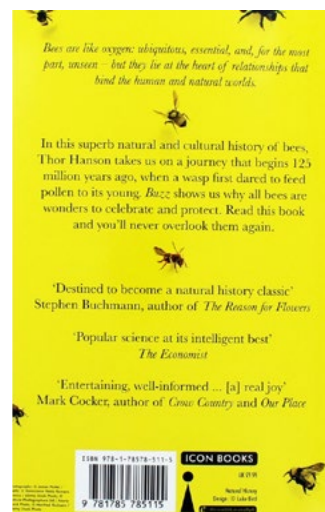
The Nature and Necessity of Bees by Thor Hanson.

About the Author: Thor Hanson is a biologist whose research and conservation activities have taken him around the globe. His previous books include *The Impenetrable Forest*, *Feathers* (longlisted for the Samuel Johnson prize), and *The Triumph of Seeds*. He has appeared on BBC Radio 4 and contributed to publications including BBC Wildlife and the Huffington Post. He lives on an island in the Pacific Northwest, USA.

Reviews of the book: *'Buzz is a must-read for anyone with an inkling of an interest in the natural history of bees. Thor Hanson tells the story of bees, right from the beginning, from their evolution to how ancient civilizations recognised their importance to become honey hunters and beekeepers. The book goes well beyond the story of honeybees though, accounting for the lives of a multitude of species from bumblebees to leaf-cutters, and the hugely important role they play in pollinating our crops and wildflowers. Eloquent and captivating throughout, Hanson writes in a way which is accessible for all; his appendices, notes and glossary provide more detailed information and are as highly recommended as the main text.'* -- Darryl Cox

'Popular science at its intelligent best' -- The Economist

'Thor Hanson is a gifted story teller and naturalist. In Buzz, he takes us along on a wondrous, action-packed journey to discover the secret lives of bees, flowers, and the unconventional men and women who study them. This book really is the buzz about bees, and it's destined to become a natural history classic.' -- Stephen Buchmann



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

Time: 28 January 2021 at 7.30pm

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/96136382696>

Meeting ID: 961 3638 2696

Passcode: 408879

Any questions please email Jane:

fjordie@btinternet.com

Jane Ford
WLBK Librarian

HONEY! IT'S NOT WHAT IT SEEMS



Not the classic response of a guilty partner but the result of research presented at Apimondia, the International Beekeeping Conference held in Montreal, Canada.

You would think that with all the problems facing honey bees – colony collapse, loss of forage, pesticides etc. – that the supply of “honey” would be declining. But far from it. The international market is being swamped with so-called honey, mainly from Asia. This is depressing the price, which has a knock-on effects on the viability of “pure” honey production throughout the world. These effects are particularly serious in those countries where charities such as Bees Abroad and Bees for Development are helping to reduce poverty among poorer populations through beekeeping. With commercial beekeepers being forced out of business, the number of bee colonies worldwide is reducing and, with it, their contribution to crop pollination. Some believe that low honey prices are a greater threat to honey bees than pesticides and pests.

In the past, adulteration was carried out using syrups made from plants of the C4 group such as corn and sugar cane, which can be detected by current tests. Now substitutes from the C3 plant group,

which include rice, wheat and beet syrups, are being used and prove difficult to detect in tests. Precise quantities of pollen, diastase and the amino acid proline from plants bees forage on are added to mimic genuine honey.

These adulterants are widely available on Asian internet sites where they are advertised as intended for use as counterfeit honey able to pass international tests as the real thing. The price of this counterfeit honey is around US\$500 tonne compared with an international average of US\$3,800 for the real thing. Chinese honey prices (or what purports to be Chinese honey) is around half the international average price for honey.

The words “sourced from EU and non-EU Countries” on food labels has an altogether new significance by the statistic that in 2018, 47% of the honey entering the EU from China came to the UK. Of this, eleven samples, purchased at nine retail supermarkets – The Coop, ASDA, Aldi, Lidl, Tesco, Morrisons, Waitrose, Sainsbury’s and Poundland – selected on the basis of low price and all but one being own brands. The test results showed that all contained substances not collected by bees to one degree or other.

This report brings a whole new meaning to the term “honey trap”.

Ivan A Perry

FRAME CLEANING FRENZY

We thought it exceptional that all 9 frame cleaning slots on the 12th December were snapped up in a little over an hour from the e-mail being sent out. But we were completely blown away when, for the 20th December session, it took only 25 minutes for 8 of the slots to be taken.

For those who have missed the boat, do not despair. By the time we had sorted out all the conflicting bookings and adjusted time slots for the number of frames to be cleaned, etc. further slots have become available on both days as follows (and we shall also be arranging further sessions in the New Year) :

Saturday 12 December

14.00 – 14.45

14.45 – 15.30

15.30 – 16.15

16.15 – 1700

Sunday 20 December

13.45 – 14.30

14.30 – 15.15

15.15 – 16.00

Bernard Brown

BROODLESSNESS AND TREATING

We all are, or should be, aware that oxalic acid treatment should only be applied when our colonies are broodless. Given too early, the varroa snuggling in the capped brood escape the treatment. Given too late, it will kill the unsealed brood which are desperately needed to take over from the winter bees and kick start the development of the colony.

So how to tell if a colony is broodless? It was originally thought that oxalic acid treatment should be a task carried out between Christmas and New Year. Current thinking, however, suggests that this was more for the benefit of the Beekeeper wanting to escape the festivities, rather than knowledge of the state of the brood. Research has shown that the timing of broodlessness depends on factors such as the temperature, the weather, day length, latitude and the individual characteristics of each colony.... and probably many other factors of which we are unaware. In other words, it is impossible to predict a general onset of broodlessness with any confidence.

In general terms, it is felt that queens stop laying towards the end of October. Allowing for 21 days for the last egg laid to emerge as a bee, the colony could be broodless by the beginning of the fourth week of November. Could be! I guess, like my bees, yours were out gathering pollen in the relatively mild October/November when, from all normal experience, they should be hunkered down for the winter. So, is the pollen supply an indicator of the presence of brood? We really need to find out just what the situation is.

There are several tricks up the beekeepers' sleeve to attempt this:-

- Carry out an inspection. I am reluctant to go into my bees at this time of year, breaking the propolis seals and exposing them to the cold weather but some do, choosing a warmer day and inspecting the frame at the centre of the cluster for brood.
- Get a neighbouring beekeeper to carry out an inspection of their bees and extrapolate the outcome to your girls. This actually happened to me this year when one of my mentees acquired two colonies which had neither been treated for varroa in August nor given any supplementary winter feed. Under these circumstances, it was worth the risk to establish the state of the colonies. So, on 16th November, on a warmish day, she carried out the inspection. She found only sealed brood so we concluded that the Queen had stopped laying and, by simple arithmetic, that the brood should all have emerged by the 30th November.
- Monitor the wax dropped from the brood box. By inserting the varroa board and regularly inspecting the fall out, when the biscuit coloured brood cappings stop accumulating and only the white honey cappings are evident, the chances are that the colony is broodless.
- Monitor the temperature of the hive. Once all the brood has emerged the temperature of the hive drops as the bees conserve energy for the uncertain future.

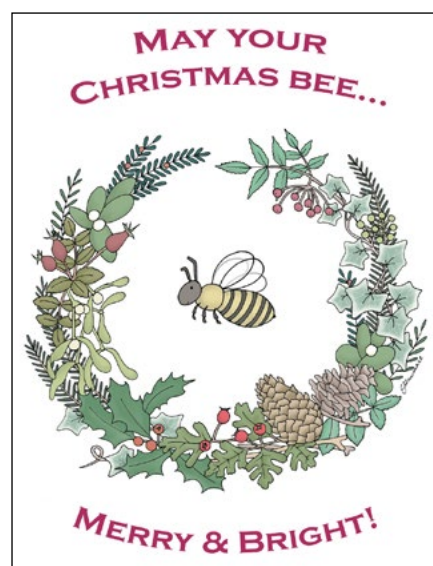
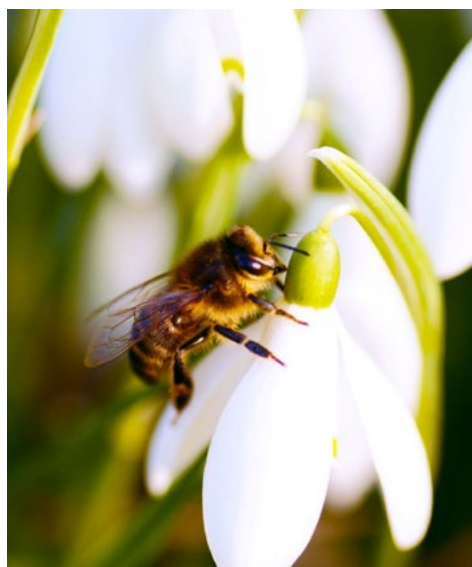
It has also been recorded that the queen can start laying again as early as Christmas Day and with the trend towards warmer winters, this could well mean that the window for treating with oxalic acid is quite short.

For my girls, I am planning to treat them in the second week of December but will check the cappings drop beforehand.

Bernard Brown

BEE-THEMED CHRISTMAS CARDS

If you haven't bought your Christmas cards yet, there's still time to get them from [Bees Abroad](#) and to support this charity.



LEO TOLSTOY: A PASSIONATE BEEK



'So in the same way Moscow was empty when Napoleon, weary, uneasy, and morose, paced up and down in front of the Kammer-Kollezski rampart, awaiting what to his mind was a necessary, if but formal, observance of the proprieties - a deputation.'

Just as Napoleon treats Moscow, 'the beekeeper closes the living hive, chalks a mark on it, and when he has time, tears out the contents and burns it clean.'

An academic (Robin Feuer Miller) pointed out that the bees in Tolstoy's novels were

Have you, or anyone else, ever doubted your sanity in keeping bees? You are in good (indeed 'classic') company.

The author Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) drew on his observations and experiences of bees in many of his short stories, and in his two great novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.

He became a 'passionate beekeeper' in his thirties, to a point where his wife became worried about his sanity. He would crouch in front of his beehives, a protective net over his head, watching as they came and went. He was fascinated by swarming; and those who have seen a swarm marching into a new hive can understand him.

His vivid description of Levin's bees in *War and Peace* comes from first hand observation:

'In front of the entrances to the hives sparkling bees and drones danced before his eyes as they circled and bumped into each other on one spot, and amongst them, continually plying the same route to the blossoming lime trees in the wood and back towards the hives, flew worker bees with their spoils and in pursuit of their spoils.'

The nectar of the small-leaved lime trees was so strong that it rendered the bees almost intoxicated, and Tolstoy had observed them stumbling about in the grass around the trees.

In *War and Peace*, he vividly describes a queenless hive with its 'odour of emptiness and decay' and robber bees 'prowling the combs'. He compared it to the abandoned city of Moscow.

metaphors for individuals and communities, but because of his deep knowledge of beekeeping, he used them in other ways, naming characters after bee terms and behaviour and seasons, and even framing the book structure of *Anna Karenina* around the traditional beekeeping year.

Tolstoy's fascination, - 'obsessive but short-lived' according to his biographer - came at a time when there were great changes in Russian agricultures, including beekeeping. The old log hives were being replaced with the removable frames of 'Petersburg hives', invented decades before the Langstroth hive. The painting: 'At the Apiary' by Aleksander Makovsky (above), shows, I believe, both the older log hives and, in the background, the newer, Petersburg hives. It is to be hoped that none of the WLBK beekeepers feel quite so aged as the apiarist pictured here.

Pious Russian beekeepers would take a beeswax candle, anticipating Saint Zosimos blessing, from church on Maundy Thursday and place it in their apiary on April 4th. Saint Zosimos has two convenient Saints' days - April 4th, when the beekeeping season officially starts, and August 1st, when the honey was harvested - and for log hives, that would mean burning out the bees.

Tolstoy had a lifelong struggle with his Christian faith. It may be that as a beekeeper, experiencing the extraordinary mystery of life in the hive, he came face to face with God.

John Stringer

HINTS & TIPS

- If you are using oxalic acid as part of your integrated Varroa management, remember it is a short lived treatment that only kills the phoretic mites, that is those that are living on the adult bees. It does not remain active for long enough to kill many mites emerging from the brood. The mites in the brood are protected as the oxalic acid cannot penetrate the cappings. It is best to treat after a cold snap when the colony is, hopefully, broodless.
- If you are opening up the hive to treat then it is a good idea to look between the frames and check the stores. If the bee cluster is at the top of the frames it indicates a shortage of stores and additional feeding with fondant will be needed.
- Stored super frames need checking for wax moth damage (right) but if the frames have never been used for brood they should be alright. Wax moth larvae cause damage by eating the comb but they do need protein which they get from the remnants left in the cells after brood. Deep freezing kills all stages of wax moth. Never use mothballs or similar chemicals as they could prove harmful to bees and man and they are easily absorbed into the wax and then into the honey crop.
- Thoughts may be turning to Christmas gifts, so why not try this recipe. It is very easy, very yummy and would make a lovely gift:



HONEY FUDGE

115g butter
 450g granulated sugar
 1 (397g) tin condensed milk
 2 tablespoons honey
 140ml full cream milk
 A pinch cream of tartar

- Line or grease a 18cm (7inch)square tin.
- Heat all the ingredients together slowly until completely dissolved.
- Bring to the boil, stirring all the time, until it reaches 114C or 240F on a sugar thermometer.
- Remove from heat and continue to beat until it thickens. Pour into tin.
- When it has cooled slightly, mark into squares. Set it aside to cool completely
- Should make about 16 pieces. Enjoy!

HELEN ESSEX

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to Helen on h.essex@virgin.net

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver. Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

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