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## Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

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### 2016 AGM

All members are invited to join us for the branch AGM on Thursday 11 February, commencing at 7.30pm at Stoneleigh. Many I know are put off by the thought of an AGM. We try to keep our light, interesting and informative, but reasonably brief whilst giving members the opportunity for involvement if they wish. The key elements will be a report by the Chair covering our activities in 2015, a summary of our financial performance and consideration of future subscriptions, followed by election of Officers and committee members for 2016/7.

The AGM will be followed a talk by Liz Bates about her recent experience of travelling to Kenya to see a Bees Abroad project.

Her talk is entitled:

### Maasai, Mellifera, Mobiles and M-PESA

How low-income communities are keeping bees, developing hive products, and making an income using mobile phone banking

Tim Foden

### Preparing for the Basic Assessment

If, by the Summer, you have been keeping bees from 1 to 4 seasons, the branch would very much encourage you to take your BBKA Basic assessment, if you have not already done so. You may then be regarded as a "Beekeeper", rather than a "keeper of bees". The assessment is practical and involves going through a hive and discussing what you find, then answering some questions. It is very much an extended conversation. To help our members, we offer a three evenings "Preparation for the Basic" course, followed by a mock "basic" if required and then we arrange for you to take the assessment itself.

The course will be run by our member Jane Medwell, who is a Master Beekeeper and qualified Basic Assessor. It will be held at BBKA Stoneleigh from 7pm to 9.30pm on Tuesdays, 1st, 8th and 15th of March. The fee for the course is £23.00 per person which includes the cost of taking the "Basic". Jane takes a discussion based approach and focuses on topics members want to discuss and explore.

The syllabus for the Basic Assessment may be found at <http://www.bbka.org.uk/local/alnwick/bm~doc/bbka-basic-syllabus.pdf>. Whilst it is quite an extensive list, I think most experienced beekeepers really would regard it as "the basic stuff".

To enrol, please click the following link <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1m-drBqD0QNeFv5NeIYaz10O77m4jWXXdgm6WoZutbc/viewform> or the appropriate link on the homepage of our website.

If you have any queries about this, please have a word with Steve Cox, who is helping Jane with the course admin, on 01926 859808

Tim Foden

### Product Review

We trialled one of these re-usable trickle bottles to apply oxalic acid to our girls this year and found it far easier and quicker than using a syringe. It holds enough liquid to treat 20 seams of bees, can be carried without spillage, and the rate of trickle is controlled quite evenly by the nozzle and gently pressing the sides of the bottle. The reservoir is charged by squeezing the sides of the bottle and automatically holds 5ml - sufficient for one seam - so the risk of over-dosing is eliminated. The whole operation is carried out one-handed and quickly learned. Available from bee equipment suppliers for around £1.

Bernard Brown



## Branch Library

A reminder to members who may have had books out for more than six months - please could you return them so that other people can use them? We have recently added some titles to the collection and I must admit it is very enjoyable to get lost in a book when I should be doing something domestic.

These titles have recently been added:

Understanding Bee Anatomy: a full colour guide by Ian Stell;  
Form and Function in the Honey Bee by Lesley Goodman (lots and lots of fabulous pictures);  
Mating Biology of Honey Bees by Koeniger, Koeniger, Ellis and Connor  
Beekeeping Study Notes for BBKA Examinations Vol 1 by J D Yates.



There is also a small collection of bee fiction, given as donations after folk have read them. We already have The Beekeeper's Pupil by Sara George, The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd and The Hive by Gill Hornby. Santa bought me The Bees by Laline Paull and this will eventually find its way into the Warleambees collection, although the synopsis makes it sound rather creepy.

Jane Rigby

## A place to keep bees

A while ago I wrote describing a garden orchard site at Priors Hardwick where we have been invited to keep bees. The owner has again contacted me to see if anyone is interested. It is a most attractive and suitable place for a few beehives so if you are interested please contact Mike Townsend 01926855080 for further information.

Mike Townsend

## Volunteers required to staff the BBKA "Swarm Line"

The British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) headquarters is situated at the National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh. During the swarming season they receive many telephone enquiries from the general public about bees and insects in general. The BBKA administrative staff would welcome assistance from Warwick & Leamington Branch members during weekdays in dealing with these calls. We have some past experience in dealing with these enquiries which has been very interesting and enlightening.

You may remember that the Branch agreed to assist last year by manning a telephone at the Headquarters and dealing with all enquiries relating to swarms ('swarmline'). It was extremely successful, we covered 63% of the sessions, and BBKA have asked if we would do the same again this year.

To do this we require volunteers who would be prepared to spend a half day, morning or afternoon, sitting at BBKA HQ taking telephone calls from the general public and advising accordingly. We are also approaching the County.

It is envisaged that we would be required from the beginning of May until mid July, but this will be dependent on the weather.

Please do volunteer if you feel that you have the time. Identify a vacant half day slot from the diary accessible via the link on the home page of our website [www.warleambees.org.uk](http://www.warleambees.org.uk) and email Peter Stanworth, who will make an entry in the diary – [peterstanworth@btinternet.com](mailto:peterstanworth@btinternet.com) or Tim Foden - [tim\\_foden@hotmail.com](mailto:tim_foden@hotmail.com)

The BBKA staff will be very grateful for our assistance, which will go some way in thanking them for the help they give us.

Peter Stanworth

## Calling Potential Swarm Collectors!

We need extra volunteers to help collect swarms over the summer! It is not difficult (full training is offered - there is no reason why even novice beekeepers should not get involved), does not require any expensive extra equipment and can take up as little or as much time as you can spare. Collecting swarms is an excellent way to improve your beekeeping skills, and never fails to gain admiration from the public! If you would like to expand your own stocks, or help meet the needs of other members requiring colonies,

Barney Ward [barney@barneyward.co.uk](mailto:barney@barneyward.co.uk) for further info - no commitment implied!

## Oxalic Acid Varroa mite treatment - delivered by the vaporisation method

Liz and I have just completed Round 1 of our oxalic acid vapour treatments and here are some thoughts....on what is very much a work in progress.

We have both done the summer Apiguard (now MAQS) and winter oxalic acid treatment for every year we have kept bees. We both felt that the syringe and syrup 5ml per seam in winter was an unsatisfactory delivery method but did it anyway. The vapour delivery of oxalic acid was in our thoughts for a while but a recent paper from Sussex University reporting that the vapour method was achieving higher success rates led us to wider reading on the topic, including David Evans 'The Apiarist' blog; we were convinced we should have a go.

Our Varroa counts were typically zero or 1 after 2 weeks during the spring/summer but I must admit I was not that good at keeping up regular measurements by inserting the varroa boards. On the other hand although convinced our varroa counts were low, we kept to the discipline of the twice a year treatment just in case.

We thought the Varrox at £140 was a bit expensive (it is cheaper if you look around) but the Bienoxal from Germany via eBay looked robust and a reasonable price at around £50. It needs a 12v car battery of at least 40AH (as per Varrox instructions) or 70AH if you ask Bienox but I did say I wanted to do 20 hives in one go. We bought a 40AH off eBay for £24 delivered. Oxalic needs a breathing mask of the right type, we got a 3M version, type4277, but there others out there, cost around £27.

Varrox instructions say 2.7g per colony, Bienoxal say 2g for colonies and 1g for smaller hives. We chose 2g, somewhat helped by getting 1g scoops with the oxalic acid powder we bought.

We have not treated our nucs yet, but will need to devise a process suitable for a polynuc.

We went into inventive mode and designed:

- A strap handle for the battery as it needs to be carted around, and weighs about XXX kilos – the built in one looked flimsy
- A strip of rigid plastic that tapes across the front of the hive, with a bespoke entrance flap the width and height of the vaporiser tray
- A foam block that goes around the stalk of the vaporiser when in situ – that blocks the entrance hole completely
- A system by which we use phials (bought for microscopy work) of premeasured 2gm of oxalic acid, so that cold hands do not have to be handling powder accurately. We just open up each phial when needed.

A minor observation is that in some hives the heating pan is completely clean after use, yet in others it has a pile of black material which on closer inspection could well be a few partially cremated bees. You have to wait a while for the pan to cool, can take quite a few minutes. We got 4 hives done in 1 hour, sealing, treating(2.5 minutes) leave in for 2 minutes, leave hive sealed for 10 minutes, move on to next hive (already sealed using extra kit) and so on.

After 24 hours my three hives at home showed a mite drop of around 200. This rose to around 600 to 750 for two of them after 3 days. I had no idea that varroa loads were so high. Liz's were much the same.

We plan a Round 2 in a day or so, as those in sealed brood would have escaped the vapours and possibly a round 3 depending on the weather and varroa counts.

We are both happy that we have taken this route. The natural count for all our colonies has been on the low side in the past. It is sobering to think what the varroa load could have built up to in the spring if left untreated and what that would have done to the colonies.



Stephen Bates

## **Hive Building Day – open to ALL Branch members Saturday March 19th 2016**

To round off the Introduction to Beekeeping course, Tim Foden is kindly leading a workshop where the participants are invited to bring along their hive kits, and get support in making their first hive – or some parts of it. It's a nice event – lots of drinks and biscuits, lots of hammering and banging, and the pleasure of seeing people walking away with their first hive.

If you have the odd brood box or super, or even just frames waiting to happen, why not come along and join us. We start about 10.00, with Tim demonstrating building a brood box or super, after which everyone has a go...

Confident hive-builders are very welcome to come and help newcomers, or if you want to come for a reminder on how it's done, or just for fun – please come and join us. People leave when they've had enough – and it finishes around late lunchtime.

If you are definitely planning to come and let me know, I'll make sure there are sufficient biscuits! However, don't worry if you forget to tell me and want to come anyway – you'll still be very welcome.

As well as basic woodworking tools, please bring along a large sheet of cardboard, or the like, if you have got one, on which to put the piece you are working on, to protect the table. There will be some spares.

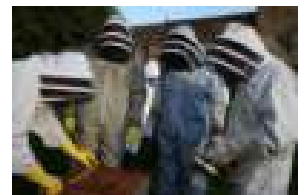
Liz Bates



## **Practical Beekeeping Training Course 2016**

We will again be providing practical beekeeping training for novices or near novices at our Dalehouse Lane training apiary, situated at the junction of Dalehouse Lane and Stoneleigh Road near Kenilworth.

Subject to demand, we will provide training from 7pm until approx. 9pm every Tuesday and Thursday for separate groups commencing Tuesday 26 or Thursday 28 April



The training will involve:

- carrying out the necessary seasonal husbandry as the colonies require,
- addressing fundamental manipulations eg opening, examining and closing a hive, queen marking & clipping, comb changing, queen introduction, swarm management, adding and removing supers, disease inspections and much more,
- a series of short discussions about key aspects of beekeeping eg hygiene, safety and protective clothing, swarm control, diseases, managing a smoker, beespace, types of queen excluder etc.

Participants will be encouraged to attend our branch-wide presentations on swarm control and honey processing. There is a great deal to cover and those joining us are expected to attend most weeks in order to get the most from what we offer.

This training complements the knowledge acquired on an Introduction to Beekeeping Course. Attendance on such a course is not a pre-requisite. Anyone attending who has not acquired the fundamental theory will be directed to text books.

This training is available to all Full, Partner and Junior members with no fee being payable.

Please enrol for this training by completing the booking form on the home page of our website

[www.warleambees.org.uk](http://www.warleambees.org.uk)

Tim Foden

## **Out –Apiary Opportunity**

We have been offered the opportunity of siting an out apiary on land adjacent to the Vicarage Road allotments, near Packwood in the Lapworth area. The site has the potential to accommodate say up to 8 hives. This is a rural site and consists of a piece of scrubland adjacent to, but separated from, a well-established, secured allotment site by a car park area for the allotment users. Access, forage availability and security are all reckoned to be good. The site is generally flat but requires some clearing of brambles etc. to create space for hives and access thereto. Should any member be interested in pursuing this opportunity, please contact Bernard Brown at [bernardnbrown@aol.com](mailto:bernardnbrown@aol.com) or on 01926 843416 for more details.



## New Training Apiary Shed at Dalehouse Lane

Having run the gauntlet of getting it included in the budget, surveying the market and getting three quotes, getting agreement to purchase finally placing an order, Saturday 16 January saw our new shed, supplied by Rossler Maidla, finally arrive. I am very grateful to Colin Spracklen, Ray Summers, Bernard Brown and Charles Smith for helping with the assembly of the shed on what was a dry, still but very cold morning. This shed will enable the training team have its equipment stored in a more organised and accessible manner and to exercise better control of our stock. It will also free up space in the cabin for the improved storage of our public display equipment.



Tim Foden

## Something new for 2016!!

With the ITB course for this year fully subscribed there will obviously be a demand for bees!! Last year Barney Ward did a presentation to your executive committee laying out his idea to be able to offer newbies the opportunity to purchase overwintered nucs. This was considered to be an excellent idea and a wanted list of those requiring a nuc will be compiled towards the end of the course and this will be circulated to members offering nucs.

Barney has taken his idea to another level:-

'I have three nucs which I am overwintering as part of my 'nucs for newbies at sensible prices' campaign! Assuming they survive the winter I will be asking £75 each in early March. Included in the price I will help the buyer introduce the nuc to a hive (if required, obviously!). In addition (as I have no track record of raising nucs) if the subsequent colony turns out to be bad tempered I will help with requeening.'

Newbies must have must have a hive ready and waiting!

If you would like to join this scheme to help newbies please send your details to:

Paul Kerr at [kerrbees@gmail.com](mailto:kerrbees@gmail.com)

Please don't forget that you are welcome to come along to some or all of the ITB sessions to offer support, advice or just a chat to the potential newbies.

## Do you want to go down in history?

You may have read in the local papers that our County Museum in the Market Place, Warwick, where we have looked after a free flying observation hive for about eighty years, (not in all that time by me of course as I am not that old), is undergoing a complete refurbishment following a £975K lottery award. All of you that did not win a mega million lottery rollover prize have made your contribution to the refurbishment already. However there is another opportunity for you to contribute.

Mick Smith and I had a most interesting tour of the county archives and was surprised to see they have a small collection of historic beekeeping exhibits and was even more surprised that my name was catalogued with these bygoners having made a very modest donation of some comb and a queen cell now catalogued together with the takeaway food container with the exhibit therein preserved for all time.

How would you like your name, together with an interesting and historic piece of beekeeping paraphernalia to be preserved for all time?

Donated items may be used within a display cabinet, rotated from time to time, placed adjacent to the observation hive or brought out for special events.

I have already had the offer of one of the old pattern smokers (yes even the modern old fashioned ones we use now had a grand-daddy) by Peter Spencer so clear out your bee shed and see what you can offer too then contact Mike Townsend 01926 855080.

Mike Townsend

## Hints and Tips

Remember to check on the stores available. Honey bees will tend to use more stores in warm damp winters than in cold dry winters as the cluster formed in winter will be looser and lose more heat, in addition if the weather is warmer the brood laying will continue later and start earlier requiring the brood area to be maintained at 34-35°C rather than the 19°C required when there is no brood. In cold dry winters the cluster is very tight and loses little heat and uses far less energy. (Thanks to Julian Routh for this contribution.)

Spring checks should be completed by late February or early March. You must not wait until April. This is the period of the year when many colonies are lost and feeding a starving colony in February or March can be a miracle cure enabling it to survive and become productive. On fine days colonies can be fully inspected. As a general rule colonies should not be examined below 10°, quickly between 10° and 14° and above 14° there will be no problem. Bees do not usually fly below about 10° so this is a very useful guide. Many early spring days March are warm enough for full inspections but conditions and geographic variation will dictate a suitable time. The NBU apiary team carry out a detailed inspection of all their colonies on the first warm days in late February or early March but will postpone if the weather is bad. (NBU Spring checks document)

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to [h.essex@virgin.net](mailto:h.essex@virgin.net)...  
Thank you Helen Essex

## Bees Abroad

The entry fee for Octobers Honey Show was either a jar of honey or £4.50. Ten jars of honey were donated to Myton Hospice. £42 was donated to Bees Abroad and is to be allocated to John Home's project in Kenya.

## Varroa Check

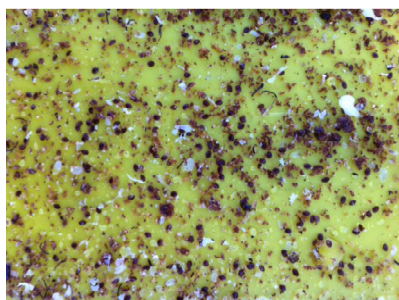
I thought you may be interested in a Varroa check I have been doing through the year I am interested to see if taking bees to the heather made any difference.

I selected 10 hives 8 strong 2 not so strong, each check during the summer the count was no more than 5 on all of the hives.

Then at the beginning of August I split the hives taking 4 strong 1 weaker one to the heather, the remaining 5 I treated with Apiguard but again mite drop was relatively small on all 5 hives.

I brought the bees back from the heather in September and treated them with Apiguard as I have done in previous years, very little mite drop from 4 hives but the weaker colony was quite considerable.

I treated all of the hives with Oxalic Acid first week in January then a mite check a week later, the mite drop from the heather bees was very minimal and acceptable the weaker colony the worst of the 5, whereas all of the hives staying in my apiary had a very large drop (see photos this represents about 2 square inches of the board.)



Roger

Editor Roger Wilkes, email address is [roger.wilkes@kenilworthhoney.co.uk](mailto:roger.wilkes@kenilworthhoney.co.uk) or hard copy can be posted to him at: 12 Mercia Avenue, Kenilworth, CV8 1EU. **Content to him for next month by February 27th, latest!**

Please send in plain text, unformatted, using Microsoft Word or another common program.

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