



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

SADNESS, CHANGE AND HOPE

WLBK starts the year with some sadness, some changes and many hopes for the year ahead.

It was with enormous sadness that we lost Steve Bates at the end of 2022. Steve was an influential member of the committee and a valuable part of the team engaging with the public at a local and national level. He will be greatly missed. Turn to page three for his obituary and some personal tributes from our members.

We have welcomed Jackie Ledwidge as our new librarian. Jackie will build on Jane Ford's successes in sharing beekeeping knowledge and we wish her well. There is always room for any WLBK member to get more involved in any way that time allows. Do email me at suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk or speak to any of your contacts who'll pass the word on. We'll do what we can to support you in supporting the branch.

Planning ahead, we are represented at the 2023 BBKA Annual Delegate Meeting on 14th January by our Warwickshire Delegate Douglas Netherclef. To find the propositions, go to bbkanews.com, log in with your WLBK member number and select BBKA Documents. Nominations and Propositions are one of those documents.

The diverse range of topics being debated this year include: the examination board; using adrenaline 'pens'; promoting local honey; and beekeeping's role in global warming.

Best wishes for the year ahead.

Suzanne Bennett
WLBK chair



PLANT OF THE MONTH: WINTER ACONITE

I have always known Aconite as the tall, elegant, Monkshood with its dark blue flowers adorning the summer borders. When Barry Meatyard, WLBK's "Botanist in residence" sent me this lovely photo of small yellow flowers, I was certainly confused!

Apparently, the winter aconite (*Eranthus hyemalis*), is not a true Aconite, like the Monkshood, although it is also a member of the buttercup family (*Ranunculaceae*). The plants form extensive carpets of bright yellow flowers in January and February and naturalise widely in woodland, brightening any walk on a dull winter's day. Also a great attraction for any bees venturing out. The cup shaped flowers have three sepals situated above a collar of three bracts. After flowering, it dies back completely to its underground tuber.

Fun fact – in Suffolk, winter aconites are called "choirboys" because of these ruff-shaped collars.

Maggie Curley



BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

The solstice has passed, the days are getting longer by a minute a day and we can look forward to spring and summer beekeeping. There is still plenty of reading time for those Christmas bee books, planning use of all the beekeeping "bits" you got for Christmas and planning any assessments you might want to take next year.

- Heft often. As the bees fly more and brood production starts they use up their stores faster.
- Consider putting on blocks of fondant if your hives feel light. Wrap blocks in cling film or put into takeaway containers and place them over the feed holes under the roof.
- Check your hives have decent ventilation- especially if we get snow, which can block entrances- open mesh floors are great for this. You may need to remove dead bees from the entrance if we get snow.
- Keep the woodpecker protection in place and remember to put the wire over the unprotected top of polynucs. Green woodpeckers appear when the ground is frozen and they cannot get their favourite ants.
- Check your mite drop (use boards) - and use Oxalic acid if you need to, even in early January.
- Start to prepare kit for next season. It is a good time to flame broodboxes and repair woodwork when it is cold (and there are no bees about).
- Review last year's records. What do you aim to achieve in the apiary this year?
- Think about what modules or assessments you might want to take this year- as a branch we have preparation courses for the **Basic Assessment** and **Honeybee Health Assessment** coming up. If you want to do the Honeybee Health Certificate this year you need to enrol by 28th February- email examsec@BBKA.org.uk
- Have you considered a visit to the BBKA Spring Convention (21st -23rd April at Harper Adams in Shropshire)? The trade show on the Saturday and is the best in the country and there are some great lectures.

Jane Medwell



WLBK TASTER DAYS

As some of you know, Jane Richmond and I have taken over the organising of the Taster Days from Bernard and Jane Brown, who have been very successful in providing an insight into our craft to many, including Jane and I. We wish to maintain this success. The taster days give an understanding of beekeeping for those who have an interest in bees, allowing them to decide whether they would like to learn more by joining the ITB course and, possibly, joining the branch.

In 2022, we had an innovative approach to presenting the history of the hive from Nicky Maritz and her sister, which brought many compliments from the delegates. We are hopeful this can be repeated in one form or another. We had great help from members who were prepared to spare their time to present, and to share their experience to the eager potential beekeepers. This was most appreciated by all, particularly as we had a mix of new beekeepers and more experienced ones.

We have had some initial interest expressed already but we are always seeking more delegates so, if you know anyone who may be interested, please let them know of our offerings. All are welcome.

We will be maintaining the established format of two sessions in the year, one in May and one in September. This year's dates: 13th May and 10th September. (We did consider the 6th May but were beaten to that date by someone called Charles). Similar to last year, we will be using two different venues for the talk sessions - Kingshill Nursery and BBKA headquarters - with the practical session being undertaken at our Training apiary at Kingshill for both occasions.

There will be a plea coming in the next few weeks for presenters and help for the above sessions so, if you feel that you can help, please pencil in the dates in your diaries.

Paul Day and Jane Richmond



STEVE BATES OBITUARY

Like several other WLBK members, Steve Bates & his wife Liz, 'discovered' the world of honey bees when they called in branch beekeepers to help deal with bees on their property. From this initial kindling of interest Steve's enquiring mind lead him to explore many of the fascinating facets of beekeeping, not just dabbling but serious investigation, bringing to bear the skills he had honed in his industrial career in research and operational management.



He contributed in so many ways to share his love of beekeeping. He set up and ran one of the first branch study groups; he was an enthusiastic member of a stock improvement queen rearing group; and was a dedicated member of the BBKA Shows Committee. In that role he designed, built and staged very impressive & innovative show displays that would capture the imagination of adults and children alike.

Steve was a conscientious member of the WLBK Exec and went on to become a Trustee of Bees Abroad helping the charity gather the information it needed for Trustee decision making and support of life changing overseas bee related projects. The same thirst for knowledge that gained him his doctorate helped him rapidly gain a strong scientific understanding of bees and beekeeping. He recognised other beekeepers had differing perspectives on the craft and had the gift to be able to share his knowledge generously in their terms too. I will always be grateful to Steve and his comprehensive approach for an understanding of winter feeding and the practicalities of Spring shook swarms. Even when his illness prevented him from handling the bees he was still gathering data via walkie-talkie from Liz as she inspected the colonies.

Bees and beekeeping in WLBK, Warwickshire and the country will miss Steve's input but I am sure his legacy will persist through his many friends.

Dr Steven Bates died in Myton Hospice, 20 Dec 2022. Our thoughts are with his wife Liz and their children and grandchildren.

David Blower

PERSONAL TRIBUTES FROM BRANCH MEMBERS:

Steve was the "Compleat" beekeeper. He, along with Liz, embraced almost every aspect of beekeeping becoming proficient in all and expert in many. The quality of his honey and candles was exceptional and the quantity per hive, enviable. But it was not just the practical side of beekeeping that benefitted from his talents. He led a module study group, lectured at the ITB, mentored lucky new beekeepers, successfully marketed his wares, served on both the Branch Committee and as a Bees Abroad Trustee, and was a key player in the BBKA Shows committee. His thirst for knowledge was accompanied by a rigorous analytical approach to the world about him which was probably why the challenge of Beekeeping was so appealing. On top of all this he was a good and generous friend.

Bernard and Jane Brown

Steve and of course "Liz", first got into Beekeeping over a decade ago when a colony moved into their house roof which Clive Joyce then removed, returning it to them the following season in a real beehive.

At about this time they joined the BBKA Shows Committee but not at the same time in order to maintain domestic harmony, (their words not mine) attending all the exhibitions we built at Chatsworth House and Country File to name a couple.

Steve was the 'expert' on the Microscopy side of the show ensuring the slides used were a fascination to the hordes of children, big and small, who made a 'beeline' for the display tent.

He also prepared many of the pictures for the artwork on the backdrops behind our tables and delighted in solving intricate engineering puzzles to enhance the exhibition.

Always fun to be around, whose company and sense of humour always shone through, especially when it all went wrong!

..... just before the dozens of children arrived dragging along Parents or Grandparents to make Beeswax Candles.

His beekeeping skills I will leave others to comment on but he did try breeding Queens to swap with other colleagues but had to move "his" Apiary out of the village of Combroke due to their aggressive nature - or did I just make that up. Either way, Steve would smile at my questionable memory as he always did.

Brian Donley

It has been a great privilege to have known Steve through our shared interest in beekeeping

A few years ago, Steve accompanied his wife, Liz, when she visited our DFID projects in Laikipia for Bees Abroad to monitor their sustainability. Their time with us was of great value and Steve's observation on the groups they visited was always very helpful and informative for our Kenya Beekeeping Trainers. With his camera, he found ways of capturing aspects of the groups and the environment within which they undertook the challenges of their beekeeping.

True to form Steve was appointed a trustee for the Bees Abroad Charity and was always appreciated because of his approach to a situation and the outcomes, particularly the help in streamlining our procedures in selecting suitable new projects to take forward for funding.

He had a special talent in his evaluation skills when reviewing new proposals that were being compiled by our team in Kenya regarding their effectiveness and outcomes to take forward for funding of new projects. This was always helpful and valued.

Thank you, Steve, you will remain in our memories, for all the help you gave us.

John & Mary Home

WLBK MEMBERS' MEETINGS

For the first time in three years, we held our traditional Christmas Party – mulled wine, mince pies and (thanks to Clive) mead. The exceptionally cold weather and the Highways Agency (who had closed the bridge over the A46 near Kings Hill Nursery) conspired to discourage attendance, nevertheless 30 members and partners braved the elements to celebrate, socialise and generally have fun. When the party had to come to an end at 10 pm the last few foragers were still going strong! Committee members provided the food – with Chris Price's sausages, Chris Cox's sausage rolls, Judith's vegan mince pies and Jane Medwell's pavlova earning many compliments. Food and drink were accompanied by an exceptionally puzzling quiz, the result of Barry's long hours trawling the internet for obscure answers beginning with a bee (or a B) and Judith's identity parade of Committee Members in their bee suits. Chris Cox and Maggie Curley (with a luxurious Santa beard) were the most challenging, whilst everyone spotted Clive in his usual (non bee suit) attire. Chris Price was easily identified up a very high ladder – on the Committee only Clive has an equal head for heights and Chris was wearing a bee suit! Our Treasurer showed her acumen – inside Val's brainbox there were more right answers than in any other team.

Thanks to everyone who helped to make the party, not forgetting Sophie, the manager at Kings Hill Nurseries, who ensured that the heating was on and we could mull the wine and heat the mince pies.

Why not make it your New Year's Resolution to attend more WLBK events this year starting with our next meeting.

January Members' Meeting:

Thursday 19th January 2023 at Kings Hill Nursery, 7.30 pm

Dave Bonner, Master Beekeeper, will give a talk Honey Bee Democracy, based on Thomas Seeley's book. For those of you who, like me, have been meaning to read this, the talk will hopefully provide a flavour and give encouragement. You might not have read it, or if you have, do not remember all that was written but now you can meet someone who has and fill those knowledge gaps. There will be cake, or possibly, mince pies!

Judith Masson



Can you guess the beekeeper?

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Happy New Year to every member of Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers. Welcome to 2023 and another exciting year of beekeeping.

Thank you to the members who have already renewed their membership for 2023, and a reminder to the other members that your membership payments are now due please.

You should have received an email at the beginning of December asking you to complete the attached link to confirm your personal details and then requesting you make your payment.

A number of people have already completed this link, but have yet to pay, so this is a nudge for them to complete the process please. If you can't find the link in your email, please try your Junk Mail and if it's not there you can contact me and I will resend the link.

If you no longer wish to be part of our branch, could you let me know please, and I will remove your details from our files and you will not receive any more emails from us.

To all our wonderful members who want to continue keeping these amazing creatures and sharing your experiences with us, I wish you a happy and healthy New Year....and lots of honey in 2023.

Liz Gurney
Membership Secretary
lizdinks@hotmail.co.uk

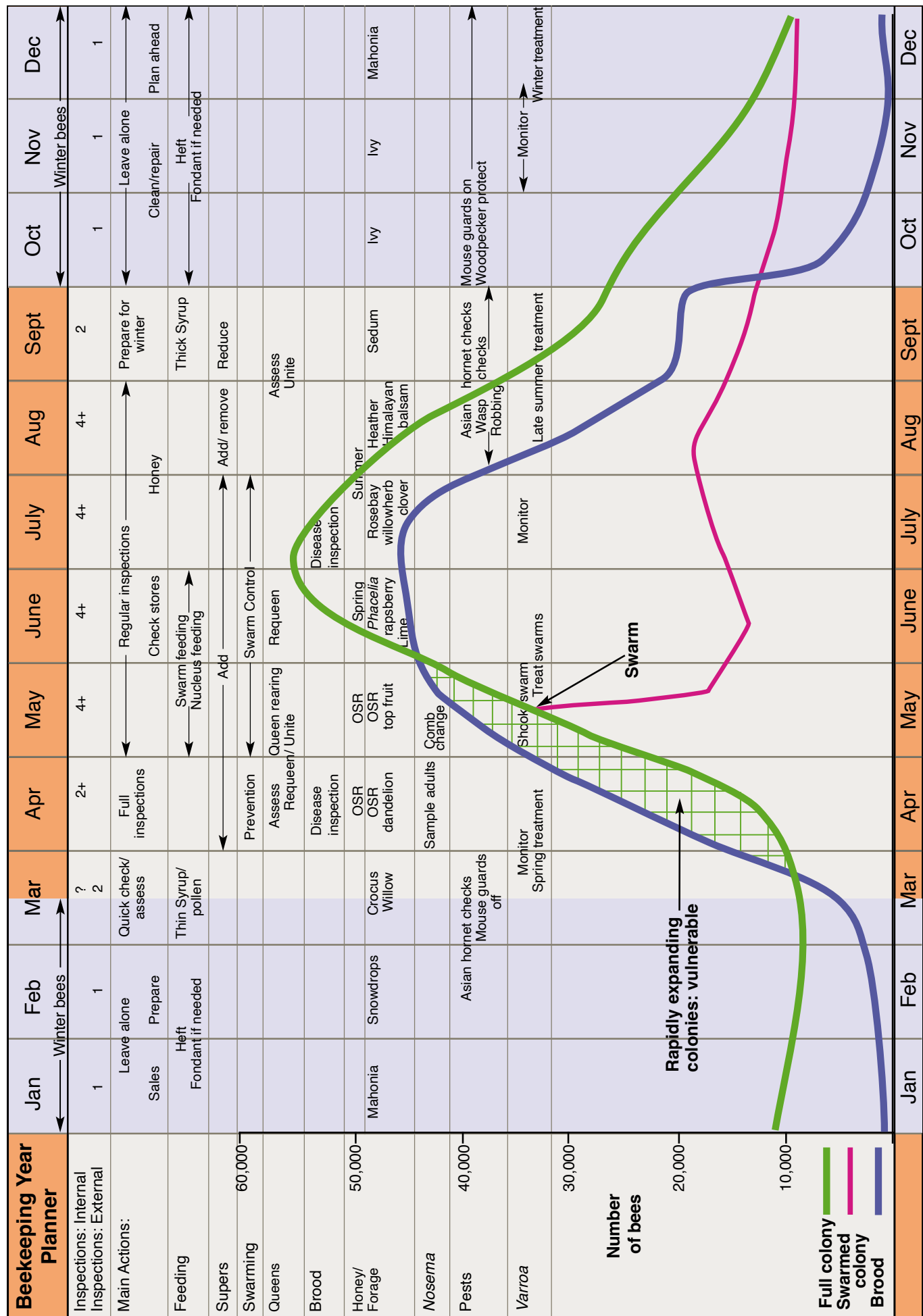
WANT TO BE OUR NEW TREASURER?

Would you like to become part of our Committee and be involved with every aspect of how it runs? As Treasurer you would be in the thick of everything. I've loved this position, but after 13 years it's time to move aside and find a younger member to take my place.

If you would like to talk to me about it, please contact me either by phone or email.

Val Dillon
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THIS BEEKEEPING PLANNER ORIGINALLY FEATURED IN *BBKA NEWS*, WHO HAVE KINDLY ALLOWED US TO REPRODUCE IT. WE SUGGEST PRINTING IT OUT AS IT WILL PROVE TO BE A VERY HELPFUL AT-A-GLANCE RESOURCE FOR THE YEAR AHEAD.



BEEKEEPING REFLECTIONS

Former WLBK Chair, Peter Stanworth, is retiring from the committee. Below he pens a few words on how he came to be a beekeeper and his experience keeping both bees and being part of WLBK.

Apart from his life in beekeeping, a lesser known fact about Peter is that he has an OBE: *Lieutenant Colonel Peter Stanworth, a Territorial Army officer who, as a hospital consultant, pioneered neurosurgery on the front lines of Iraq and Afghanistan received the award in the 2009 Queen's Birthday Honours List. Having served more than 49 and a half years' continuously in the Territorial Army, he was the first neurosurgeon to be sent to Camp Bastion, Helmand province.*

"Talking to a colleague in the mid-1970s he told me that he kept bees in his back garden. We had a large garden at Oxford and I thought that I should do the same. I read all the books and bought a nucleus together with a WBC hive. I had to have a WBC since that was the one that was portrayed as the typical country hive. A few weeks after they were established off they swarmed and I soon realised I needed a larger hive, so this time a National. Still they swarmed. I read about swarm cells and thought I must destroy them. A local commercial beekeeper was giving up and he let me have his MD hives, the largest ones made. I thought I had the answer but still they swarmed!

We moved to Manchester and I joined the local beekeepers' branch. They were very welcoming and friendly and I learnt a few tips. However time was very limited for beekeeping and I had read about the Buckfast Bee. I visited Brother Adam at Buckfast Abbey and was convinced that changing the Queen every year for a Buckfast one, a very docile one with a low propensity for swarming was the answer

and so be it. We later moved to Scotland and with the heather next door enjoyed the delights of taking the bees to the moors.

In 1985 we had our final move to Burton Green. I thought as time was short it was not worthwhile joining the local beekeepers. How wrong I was. I was deployed to Iraq in 1999 and needed help with caring for the bees. It was then that I sought advice from WLBK. Who turned up but Mike Townsend and I suddenly realised I was meeting someone with a huge amount of sensible practical experience. Even 30 years later I continue to learn.

A few years back, Tim Foden approached me and persuaded me to join the committee. He also said that it was only proper that I took the Basic Examination, which I am delighted to say that I passed! I was soon approached about taking the Chair. I was apprehensive; it was a time when I was trying to shed myself of all committee work. However, again it was an interesting enjoyable experience with members who were full of knowledge and enthusiasm and were able to clearly explain matters which I had difficulty understanding. One very profitable aspect was a 'Coffee Shop Meeting' with the secretary and past chairman a few days before the main committee one when ideas were clarified and allowed us to progress quickly through the agenda at the main meeting.

One question that has been on my mind for some time. The 'British Standard National' hive was defined by the MAFF in 1946. Since then Queens have become much more prolific and there is thus a need for a larger national hive, should we not be moving over to a larger hive such as the Langstroth like many of our Continental colleagues.

Finally after lifting a 50lb. MD super, I have a good attack of back pain and sciatica. Perhaps MDs are not to be recommended!

Peter Stanworth

HINTS AND TIPS

- The bees require ten to fourteen pounds of honey to make one pound of comb, so it will always pay you to use full sheets of foundation. In addition to saving the bees time and honey you will secure straight, easy to handle combs. So order your wax in plenty of time and get your brood frames ready to go!
- Do not feed at the entrance or out of doors as this could encourage other colonies to rob. It is always best to feed on the top over the brood nest.
- Never open the hive unless you have a good reason for doing so. Over manipulation can only disorganise the bees.

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to h.essex211@gmail.com

Helen Essex



The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.
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