



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

HAPPY NEW BEEKEEPING YEAR

Post-equinox, the days are getting longer and we can look forward to Spring and Summer beekeeping. Now is when hives are lost but "winter losses" are not inevitable- they are usually down to varroa or starvation.

The very warm Autumn and early Winter meant our bees were not fully clustered then, and many colonies were still laying, depleting stores and breeding up new varroa mites. The cold snap will not have been a bad thing. The colonies are now clustered, working their way through the stores accumulated in Autumn and will soon start producing next year's bees.

STARVATION

Hopefully, your colonies went into winter well fed and heavy. It's really too late to feed now, but in an emergency, you can add some fondant over the feed holes. I get it from the branch co-op at a bargain price. My top tip for cutting fondant is to do it over the sink so that the slab falls away into the sink. However, the bees need to stay clustered and can't use it across a gap. If you are preparing for the OSR, you might want to feed a supplement with pollen at the start of February- but remember you have to keep feeding it if you start.

Whatever you do- practice your hefting- you need to get a "feel" for how heavy the colony is.

CHECK FOR MITES

Put the boards in and see if you get a mite drop- if so, now is a great time for Oxalic Acid treatment (I trickle). With all the move to "no treatment" I now check for drop first and only treat where there are mites- but if there are mites it is good to treat now because then the spring larvae aren't damaged. It will really help your colonies.

MAINTAIN GOOD VENTILATION

A warm wet Winter seems to support viruses. Bees are a northern sort of insect and can manage their own thermal and humidity regulation if they have enough food and ventilation. Check entrances and keep varroa boards out unless testing.

PREVENT PESTS

The woodpeckers and mice will move in during a cold snap- check your netting and mouseguards.

That's all we can do! Time to pick up a book (or, increasingly, a video).

BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

January feels so optimistic- and it's a low effort month and there is still plenty of reading time.

- Keep checking your hives are well fed after the long, warm Autumn. Heft often.
- 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. If you can do it without an eke it is best not to make spaces the bees will have to heat.
- Check your hives have decent ventilation- especially if we get snow, which can block entrances. You may also need to remove dead bees from the entrance.
- Fit woodpecker protection (image above). Yes, they will go for poly hives AND NUCS- remember to put the wire over the unprotected top of polynucs. Even if you haven't seen a woodpecker all year they will appear when the ground is frozen and they cannot get their favourite ants.
- Check your mite drop after this warm early Winter- and use Oxalic acid if you need to.
- 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).
- Think of some questions for our next branch meeting. Beekeepers may not all agree but we will get interesting opinions.
- Think about what modules or assessments you might want to take this year.



Jane Medwell, WLBK Chair

2024 – THE YEAR THAT WAS

Last year was another eventful year for WLBK. Here is a recap of the year that was and a few things the branch achieved:

THE SEASON

Every beekeeping season is different which should be not unexpected with its reliance on environmental factors but 2024 was stranger than most. The impact of climate change on the weather confused beekeepers and bees alike with the wet spring coinciding with blossom time resulting in no spring honey for many and indeed the necessity to feed the bees to avoid starvation. Nevertheless, the bees responded magnificently when the better weather arrived, providing what, for many, was the most successful honey yield for many years. It was not just honey production which was unconventional but problems with queens getting mated and being superseded were also reported.

TRAINING

Microscopy - The microscopy group is all about learning and developing our skills and has gone from strength to strength using a combination of zoom and face-to-face meetings. We also had success at the National Honey Show with our first entries of prepared slides being commended.

ITB – a single ITB course was held over the two days of a weekend with 17 delegates. Ten of whom went on to the apiary training. This was a deliberate reduction on previous years in order to alleviate the pressure on the training apiary. Of the 17, nine went on to join the branch

Taster Day – again only a single taster day, held in September, was arranged and with 23 delegates was very successful. We abandoned the May taster day this year as we encountered difficulty in getting sufficient numbers. This was due to the lack of opportunity to market it as the public shows had yet to start. Also, the wait of almost 11 months before the next ITB deterred all but the keenest from progressing their interest.

Safaris – Five evening safaris to members' apiaries were met with mixed attendance levels but measures to improve attendance will be considered and taken into account in this year's programme.

Members' Meetings – five meetings were held this year at our new venue, the Kenilworth Senior Citizens' Club (KSCC) covering a range of subjects both topical and of more general interest. The Summer barbecue morphed into a Summer picnic and along with the Christmas party were also held at KSCC.

FINANCE AND MEMBERSHIP

Finance - Despite the loss of income from the restriction of attendance at ITB and Taster Day courses, the finances are in good shape with balances showing an increase over 2023. Membership fees for 2025 were increased for the first time in 12 years.

Membership – Overall, Membership fell in 2024 by 29 from 2023



A prime swarm retrieved in Burton Green by a member of WLBK's swarm collecting team.

levels. 49 members did not renew but there were 20 new members joining. The reduction in ITB and taster days may have contributed to this. We are still the largest branch in the county at 259 members

OUTREACH

Public Shows – Two major shows did not take place this year – the Kenilworth Show and the Leamington Peace Festival – but our displays team still managed to support 12 public shows under the leadership of Chris Price. The "Little Buzzers" kiddies' corner saw seven different activities and was well received by the kids, parents and show organisers alike. Honey sales on behalf of members topped £7,000 boosted by the inclusion of taster jars of all the honeys on display rather than just one of each type. Another new feature was the distribution of Asian hornet information.

Talks to the Public – Members continued to give talks, not only to the public but also to schools and other branches on a range of bee-related topics.

Corporate Displays – We mounted a lunchtime display at Aston Martin Lagonda and strutted our stuff at two events organised by the British Motor Museum providing holiday entertainment for underprivileged kids. All events were very rewarding and likely to be repeated.

Permanent Observation/Demonstration Hives – We maintained observation/demonstration hives in 4 locations accessible by the public at Warwick Museum, the Glass house in Jephson Gardens – both observation hives – and demonstration hives at the East Lodge in the Jephson Gardens and by the Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth Castle.

CO-OP

Sales – The co-op this year was as popular as ever with sales this year totalling some 7.68 tonnes (615 tubs) of ambrosia were dispensed, 194 Buckets, 244 boxes of jars 84 tubs of apiguard, 70 slabs of fondant

Shop – Work has been undertaken by the co-op team to create an online shop to streamline the ordering process which was introduced successfully in December.

EQUIPMENT

Home loan equipment – Extractors have been the most popular home loan equipment, followed by the Burco boilers. The hive barrow and steam wax extractor have also had outings.

Frame Cleaning – Two frame cleaning sessions, using our bulk frame cleaning tank, have been held to much acclaim by participants.

Honey Bottling – New this year is a honey bottling machine which dispenses the correct weight of honey automatically for the popular sizes of jars. Bottling days will feature in 2025.

Extraction Unit – This has been much used over the year, particularly as the honey yield has in many cases been exceptional with over 30 members availing themselves of this facility.

SWARMS

Swarm collection and donation – the number of swarms reported and hence collected was well down on previous years and we struggled to meet the demand from members although all those who had no bees at all were supplied.

EQUIPMENT SALES

2024 Sale – an equipment sale of over 70 items of kit and bees from members who decided to hang up their hive tools and from those with kit surplus to requirements, was held early in the year.

APIARIES

Out Apiaries – We continued to seek out apiary sites with some success with 11 new sites being offered either by landowners contacting the Association Branch direct, or by members of the public approaching the WLBK stand at various fairs and festivals held during the year.

At the start of 2024 there were eight sites listed on the schedule of available Out Apiaries and during the year there were 11 new sites added to the eight available sites listed at the beginning of 2024. Three of the available offers of sites have since been withdrawn and five were taken up by beekeepers from the Association. There are currently 11 sites listed on the available Out Apiary schedule of which three have been on the list for more than five years. The total number of Out Apiaries on the register which are occupied by a beekeeper is currently 57 (excluding the two branch apiaries).

Training Apiary – The training apiary, thankfully, avoided EFB this year although a scare of an outbreak at BBKA, subsequently found to be a false alarm, did cause much concern. 14 new members took advantage of this facility over the year with attendance figures

between four and nine on any one of the 20 days of training provided. Only two swarms occurred, both clustering at Kings Hill and were caught. There was an exceptional honey crop of 260 lbs which will go towards the payment in kind of various rents to landlords.

Dalehouse Lane – Full re-occupation of our Dalehouse Lane site has been frustrated by continued delays in the A46 Stoneleigh roundabout road works, although we are able to access the storage cabin with the permission of the contractor. The committee has agreed to retain the site for Branch purposes rather than as an out apiary for members, as it is strategically located and close to the Kings Hill training apiary. We have managed to secure a donation in the form of hedging and path creation by the nearby HS2 Contactor to help with the reinstatement after what is seven years since we vacated the site.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Bee Talk – Bee talk continued to flourish with special feature serials covering aspects of bee anatomy, bee behaviour, and the duties of bees over their lifetime, to supplement the topical news, views and reviews not forgetting the timely advice on husbandry for the particular month. It achieved highly commended status in the National Honey Show this year. Typically, Bee Talk was opened (and thus presumably read) regularly by 75% of the membership.

Website – Our website encountered some challenging times this year. We were targeted by hackers – up to 30 times a day. We quickly got hold of some software which prevented them from gaining access but attempts are still being made. On one occasion the website content was changed into Korean. The current website is several years old and parts of it were not working as we would wish, so we are embarking on a revamp which should be up and running early next year.

Hurst Farm Resource Centre – The Hurst Farm Resource centre has been very busy this year and space is at a premium. Negotiations have been started to acquire the adjacent bay with a view to providing a new extraction unit, converting the existing one into a much-needed additional store.

Committee – The executive committee of 10 members met formally six times during the year, mainly face to face and only occasionally by Zoom. Providing the range of activities described above takes a lot of organising and the committee is supported by other individual members taking sole responsibility for some of the one-off activities such as Out apiary co-ordinator, swarm collection and frame cleaning whilst others are dealt with by small sub-committees such as the co-op, displays and training teams. A burning topic for the committee is to attract members to shadow and ultimately take on the posts of treasurer and of secretary which will shortly fall vacant.

Asian Hornet – The feared threat of spread of the Asian Hornet incursion did not, in the event, materialise but much effort was put in by the branch Asian Hornet Action Team to train members and the public to identify and report any sightings. There were three suspected sightings all of which turned out to be false alarms.

Bernard Brown



YLH – LATEST BUZZ

Recently published statistics reveal that of the 28,000 suspected sightings reported via the Asian hornet watch app, mainly in the South in 2024, only **55** proved to be correct. Such mis-identifications pose a considerable strain on the local AHAT's limited resources and is something we need to address. Pressure on these resources have been further increased by a recent decision by NBU.

The reduced number of reported occurrences in 2023 has been acclaimed by the national press as evidence that the strategy and diligence of the NBU is working. Part of that strategy is to follow up reports of YLH nests, but this is to change in 2025. From then on NBU will only follow up reports of nests if the report is accompanied by an image of the suspected occupants. Given their own advice is that no-one, not even a beekeeper, should attempt to approach a nest, they should have a much quieter time in 2025.

So, what will happen now when Mr Observant spots and reports a suspected YLH nest? The answer is that the NBU will email the respondent recommending that they contact their local Asian Hornet Action Team Co-ordinator. But what is expected to happen next? In response to the dumping of this role onto its members, BBKA has made it clear that they **DO NOT** expect AH Coordinators, or any other BBKA member, to verify nests and most certainly **DO NOT** advocate anyone investigating nests in a manner that could put themselves, or anyone else, in harm's way.

Instead, they have decided to create an online map where reports of the locations of any suspected nests can be recorded and that information shared with local coordinators to aid future monitoring efforts.

If anyone is contacted about a suspected nest, they will need a photo of the nest and its location, which can be sent to the BBKA outreach officer, Kirsteen Thorne at outreach.officer@bbka.org.uk – who will then input the details onto the map. The map can be viewed [here](#).

If no photo is taken and the AHAT co-ordinator feels the need to visit the location themselves to obtain a photo, the advice is that the image should be taken from a suitable distance to avoid disturbing any live nests (at least 10 metres away) and NOT to take any unnecessary risks.

The what3words location will be really helpful in plotting the exact location.

Just how this advice is going to be communicated to the public is still the subject of consultations with the NBU. It strikes me that the public may not take kindly to having to report the suspected nest a second time and that our volunteer AHAT may not be able to respond in a timely way, if both of these are realised there is a risk of nests not being recorded or monitored. Me-thinks that there is still work to be done on this proposal.

As if we hadn't had enough of invasive species, the Southern Giant Hornet (right) has been found nesting in Northern Spain. Not to be confused with the Northern Giant Hornet aka the "murder" hornet, this beastie, *Vespa soror* is native to a broad swath of tropical Asia.

At 3 cm long it is larger than the YLH but smaller than the northern giant hornet *Vespa mandarina*. A ferocious predator, *V. soror* is a known aggressive honeybee eater. Like YLH attacks wasps, insects and even small vertebrates like geckos. It nests in the ground and poses a real threat to humans. At least one overwintered Queen has been identified and if it becomes established and abundant our girls could be in even more trouble than at present. Hopefully, the experience of the mismanagement of the YLH incursion will mean that lessons have been learnt to lead to early and effective eradication measures.

Bernard Brown
AHAT co-ordinator



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Time is running out to renew your membership and pay your subscriptions for 2025 and this is the **FINAL REMINDER** to those members who have yet to renew.

After the **14th February**, your membership will automatically lapse and you will have to re-apply to access the benefits of membership.

A link from Membership Services was sent to you in early December asking you to renew your membership. If you can't find the link, please first check your Junk Mail and, if you still can't find it, then contact lizdinks@hotmail.co.uk who will send you another link.

When you have completed the form, please submit it and make your payment as soon as possible.

We are unable to accept payment without the completed form.

If it is your intention not to renew, it would be appreciated if you could let us know at lizdinks@hotmail.co.uk

We really don't want to lose you, but we can't keep you unless you renew your membership.

Val Dillon, Treasurer
Liz Gurney, Membership Secretary

WLBK SURVEY

We want the Branch to prosper too, and that involves providing you with the facilities and activities you want. As it is the start to the year, we thought we should canvas our members to find out a) what they want from WLBKA and b) whether you can help the branch in any way, so we have produced a short survey which will allow us to gauge how to go forward and also allow the current committee to follow up the suggestions made and seek the resources to implement them.

The survey can be found at this link - [Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers Survey 2025](#) - and we would appreciate if you would spend five minutes completing it.

The deadline for submitting this survey is Sunday **19th January 2025**.

The time for gifts is not quite over as each returned entry will be entered into a prize draw for a £25 voucher.

WLBK MEMBERS' NEWS

The annual WLBK Christmas party was held during December. Here is a poem written in its honour.

The best Christmas Party ever and a really bad ditty

The hall was decked by Val and Terry,
Who brought lots of lights to make it merry.
Tables were laid and chairs put out
Ready in time? Yes! came the shout.
Bee keepers and friends came wanting to party
The Club came together, and the bee talk was hearty.
Lottie's glorious games meant we had a ball
Icebreaking anagrams, prizes for some and fun for all.
Crackers were pulled and hats were worn,
If it weren't for the booking we'd have been there 'til dawn!
Chris and Lottie cooked a really fabulous feast,
Their delicious plates filled the largest
leaving plenty for the least. Chris' carols and Adam on guitar
Bought songs we love and music from afar.
Our birthday choir sang The Twelve Days...
Filling the room with a laughter haze.
And in a twist to the plot
Jane Brown's birthday was not forgot!
Thanks were given, many more made it happen (and cleared away)
Our lovely members really made the day!
As the season ends and another year passes -
We must wait for next summer to raise our glasses!

Anonymous

(Images taken by Chris Price)



Next Monthly Meeting - 16th January 2025, 7.30 pm

Member, Ian Jamie will tell us about the highs and lows of setting up the Warwickshire Lavender Farm in Bubbenhall. If you haven't visited, plan your trip for next summer and you can walk through the lavender and hear the bees as they forage for the lavender nectar.

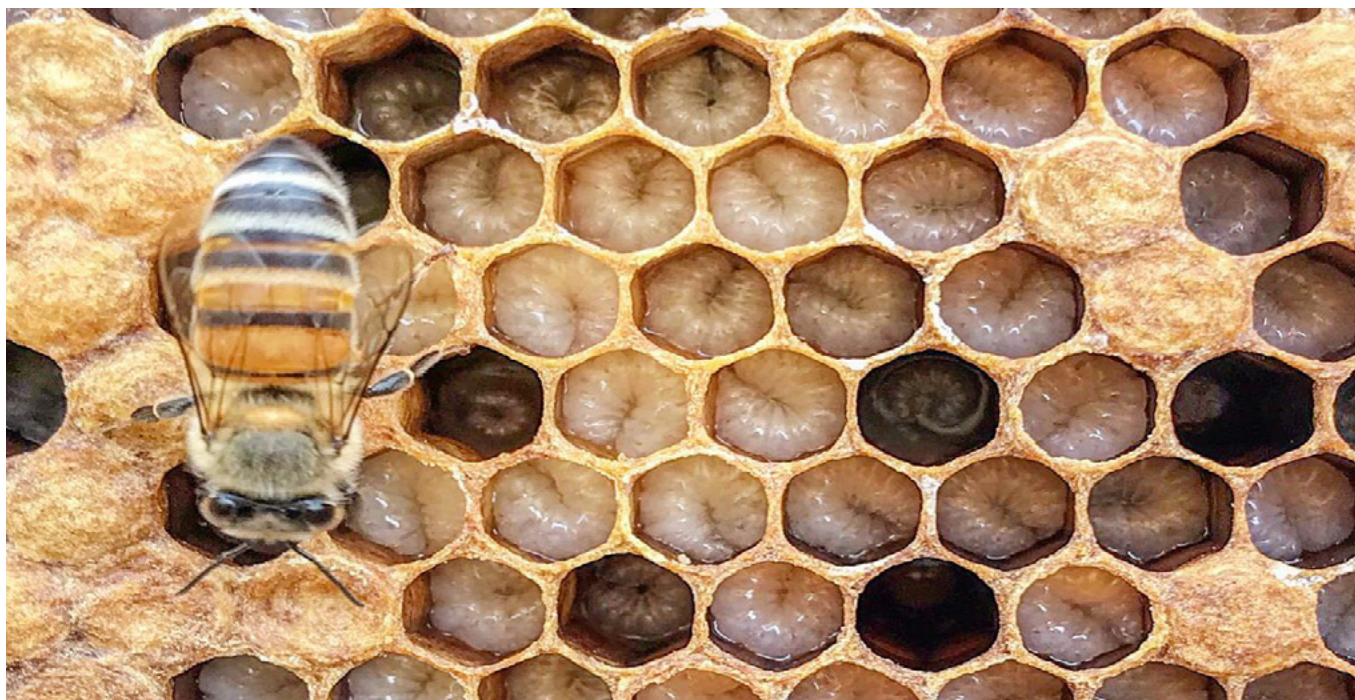
CHANGE OF VENUE FOR JANUARY ONLY – STONELEIGH VILLAGE HALL, HALL CLOSE

STONELEIGH (just off the by-pass)
Plenty of free parking AND CAKE!

Judith Mason
WLBK Meetings Secretary



BEE'S ROLES – NURSE BEES



This month, with birth being very much the theme, of the moment, we look into the role of nurse bees in the colony.

One of the jobs a worker will take on throughout her life is the role of nurse bee. These worker bees are a crucial part of raising a healthy colony. Without them, there would be no future generations of bees. Anyone who has acted as a carer will know that there's a lot that goes into the job. It's no different for bees except they have very little time to learn what to do.

A nurse bee is a young worker honey bee who, having emerged from her cell and cleaned it to prepare for another egg, pollen or honey, takes on what is her first real job in service of the colony. Eggs, larvae, and capped brood are their charges. Feeding larvae appears to be the main priority. Nurse bees produce the food themselves the form of Bee bread and Royal Jelly. Bee bread is a concoction of honey, nectar pollen and bee saliva. Royal Jelly is a secretion from the nurse bees hypopharyngeal glands and is fed to all bee larvae for three days and until cell capping for Queen larvae. They feed all the baby bees, workers, drones and Queens, and inspect the cells to see if anything is wrong or requires attention. It's believed that eggs and larvae emit different signals indicating their needs so that nurse bees know what to do for each one. Brood pheromones likely play a role in this. Nurse bees make many visits to each cell and are constantly monitoring the health and, with feeding, make up to 1300 visits per larva per day. These can be longer or shorter visits depending on what needs to be done. The average visit is usually just 2 to 3 seconds but sometimes can last 10 to 20 seconds for a quick check-up whilst feeding can take anywhere from 2 seconds to 2 minutes or more.

Each growing bee receives a lot of attention over time. For the

first few days, nurse bees give each larva more food than they can eat. The growing larvae will be suspended in the milky white substance while workers check the level within each cell to maintain a certain amount for them to consume. As of the third day, the larvae eat everything as soon as it's given to them and are too large to float around. When the larvae are ready to become pupas, nurse bees will visit twice as many times as usual on the last day. Then, they will cap the cell with wax to let the larvae finish developing on their own.

Nurse bees help raise new queens by feeding the larvae royal jelly in a specially built cell.

These developing queens can be attended by a single worker bee, but more likely, there will be several bees who tend to them. There doesn't appear to be a dedicated group of nurse bees that only attend to queen larvae, and all nurse duties are shared. Queen cells are usually visited more frequently than worker cells, and these visits typically last longer. As the queen larvae get older, they are visited even more often as they grow larger and need more to eat. Nurse bees need to make sure the queen doesn't fall out of her cell since it faces downward rather than horizontally as worker and drone cells.

During their regular inspections, nurse bees will identify and remove any diseased larvae to protect the hive. This is important because it can help prevent the spread of illnesses throughout the hive and make them aware of any potential issues as soon as possible.

Workers act as nurse bees for a couple of weeks only before moving on to other roles in the hive, their job being taken by the next generation of successfully raised nurse bees.

Ivan A Perry

Based on and with the permission of the Honey Bee Suite

HINTS AND TIPS



- Rather than throwing out your Christmas tree, leave it to dry out and then use the needles in your smoker.
- Bees 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. (a little gem from the much missed Julian Routh
- Pay association membership so you can be sure that you have the continuity of insurance cover and membership.
- Check on BeeBase to make sure that the colony numbers are up-to-date and that the apiary location details are all correct
- I think planning your equipment needs for the coming season is a really good way to be prepared. It also means that if you plan ahead, as far as is possible, then you can take advantage of any winter sales.

Now it is your chance! 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.
Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
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