



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

THE BAD STUFF AND THE GOOD

It's about a year since the first lockdown began and we have just had our AGM (see page 3), so it seems like a good time to reflect upon this year.

Last year we were hit hard. We couldn't do our ITB course, regular apiary training or BBKA assessments. The training apiary was closed and we could not go to any honey shows that we so enjoy. But let's not underestimate what we have achieved this past year.

In a bid to keep in touch with our members we have used Bee Talk and emails but 2020 has certainly been a year of beekeeping on Zoom. Together with a lively programme of monthly talks and quizzes, managed by Rachel Dove, there has also been county lectures and talks from The Central Association of Bee-Keepers (CABK). It's still been a learning year - though different from usual.

This year we have also learnt more about our members and what they want. Chris Cox's fascinating survey reveals that our members would like more training for existing members and have many skills they can offer to enhance the activities of the branch. We are keen to get as many as possible involved. Over the winter Barry Meatyard, our Education Coordinator, has had (virtual) training groups running - including microscopy, a reading group and Honeybee Health - and we are looking forward to re-starting practical training activities. The training apiary has been re-configured to make it a better setting for training and allow Steve Poynter to increase shed space! We have also had more volunteers participating, including Liz Gurney as membership secretary working with Val Dillon. Volunteers have been supporting extraction, loans of equipment and frame boiling, and we are looking at our social media presence (a bit timidly).

The co-op has sailed through this year under Clive Joyce, Val Dillon and the team. If Clive can shift 8 tonnes of ambrosia in a pandemic I don't know why they didn't ask him to manage

track and trace! Through the turmoil of the last year, we have enjoyed keeping our bees tended, and had a decent crop of honey.

We are looking to this year hopefully. Collectively, we did less last year so we spent less, and Jane Brown and Val have managed a stable financial picture. In the coming year we will run ITB, training for experienced beekeepers, BBKA assessments practical and written, stands at shows and events, the branch library, facilities for extracting and cleaning and more talks and events for our members. Exactly how and when we do this affected by regulations we can't control but we will go for it safely.

This year we can return to contact and support for members and the basic pleasure and normality of working with the bees. Beekeeping, talking about beekeeping and learning about beekeeping remain great pleasures.

One of the great sadnesses of this year has been the death of Paul Kerr, our past Chairman and enthusiastic beekeeper. Barry has taken the lead on creating the Paul Kerr apiary in a secondary school working with special schools, a project dear to Paul's heart.

I want to thank the committee and every member of the branch for their support and goodwill. This has pulled us through a difficult time and we look forward to a better year.

BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH- A MONTH OF RESTRAINT:

- Prepare your hive records- the game is afoot!
- Revise for you Module exam as you are doing one on April 24th- the practice for the computer system is March 20th.
- Make sure your colonies are where you want



them for the season- if not move in a frosty snap.

- Resist the urge to go and inspect too early- leave them alone and watch to see whether they are bringing in pollen. There is plenty of willow, hazel, snowdrop, crocus pollen about. Pollen means brood rearing.
- If you are very keen to know what is going on put in a varroa board- the wax dropped will tell you the brood pattern of the growing colony.
- Continue to heft or weigh regularly to check your colonies have plenty of stores. This is the time of year they run out of carbohydrate.
- Check your block of fondant if the colony is light - any colony may run out of stores now.
- If the bees are flying a good deal remove the mouseguards (and if you have hard floors, scrape them). Woodpecker guards can come off (but not mine yet- the birds are devious).
- If the weather is very good (for more than a few days at a time), towards the end of the month, the first inspection is due. Is the queen laying? Is there pollen and stores? Is there too much pollen choking up the brood? Mark the queen- white this year.

As ever, if you need help with your bees please email (warleambees@warleambees.org.uk). Stay safe, stay warm and lets look forward to beekeeping to come!

Jane Medwell, WLBK Chair

NEGLIGENCE OR MISFORTUNE?

Winter losses, or losses at any time of year can be very distressing and those who have suffered this blow feel a real sense of bereavement and guilt. Was it their fault? What did they do wrong? What if the same things happen again?

The romantic idea of beekeeping that you put bees in a box in spring, harvest honey in the autumn and let them do their own thing over winter, doesn't quite tally with the day-to-day realities of beekeeping. In fact, it probably never did.

Worldwide commerce and travel have opened nations to a panoply of perils as coronavirus has demonstrated. This has given bees a host of ailments from all over the world including tracheal mites, brood diseases, varroa mites, small hive beetles, nosema strains and Asian hornet to name but a few. Consequently, our hobby can be tiring and frustrating but that is the challenge of beekeeping. If it were easy would it be as interesting or even worth doing at all? Of course, different people have differing levels of patience with such trials and tribulations, but these can be met successfully and, when they are, bring an intense pleasure and sense of achievement.

In the face of the loss of a colony you may well ask "have I mismanaged my bees"? Well, in true beekeeper fashion the answer is "that depends". Certainly, another beekeeper with more experience might have had better results, but no one knows all the variables your individual apiary is facing. Perhaps other

beekeepers in your area are letting their bees go untreated? Perhaps you have neighbours who have weakened your colonies by using pesticides or perhaps the forage in your area is of low quality? Perhaps the critters which wreak so much harm to our girls are becoming resistant to the treatments we use and perhaps the very combination of these treatments are having unintentional consequences weakening the general health of the nation's bees? Such issues may not be obvious to even experienced beekeepers let alone to those of us still wet behind the ears with only one or two winters under our belts.

So, no one knows all the answers to these questions but don't be despondent. You will have learned so much in your first few years so build on that. Pick yourself up and have another go. But don't struggle on, on your own. Talk to your mentor or other member beekeepers for advice. I did when I started and still do. You will find them very willing to help. Of course, in days of yore, they often would pop over and see things for themselves but in these restricted times this is not always possible. Mind you, photographs and hive records help a lot. Interaction at members' meetings, helping out at our public displays and attending training workshops are all opportunities to quiz others but the current absence of these events may have made it difficult to know whom to consult. But don't let that stop you. If you contact messengerbee@outlook.com we will refer your query on to someone who will get back to you with help.

Ivan A Perry

THE TIM FODEN AWARD 2021

This year's Tim Foden trophy for the member who has made a significant contribution to the functioning of the branch has been awarded to Alan Deeley. Alan started beekeeping in 2016 and has really got the bug. He currently runs 16 stocks in two out-apiaries and has built up a network of outlets for his honey and gift packs. He is on our panel of public speakers and contributes to our Taster Days and ITB. An enthusiastic collector of swarms, he responded to 10 calls in a single day in 2019. Extracting bees from buildings is yet another of his skills. In his spare time, he helps Clive with the operation of the facilities at our resource centre at Hurst Farm. This can involve getting there at 6.00 a.m. to switch the frame cleaning tank on. How about that!

Lockdown prevented Ann, Tim's wife from presenting the trophy this year but the honours were performed by committee member Steve Poynter at the Kings Hill Training Apiary. In reply, Alan said "I am truly honoured to receive this award. Tim was a huge influence on me wanting to become a beekeeper in the first place, and he encouraged me to develop my beekeeping skills and experience. A big thank you to you and your committee for this. I am truly humbled".



Alan is pictured at the Tim Foden bench at Kings Hill with his well-deserved trophy.

Bernard Brown

SWARM COLLECTING 2021

It is now time to take stock of your colonies. Have all your colonies made it through the winter? Are you planning on increasing the number of colonies at your apiary? One way is to either be a swarm collector or to request a swarm on the WLBK website.

So, if you are up for collecting swarms, whilst respecting the current social distancing and self-isolation restrictions, and wish to receive swarm calls from the public, register your details on the enrolment form at the following [link](#). This is replicated in the Members' Area of the website.

This will put your details on the BBKA's swarm collectors' map whereby the public can enter the postcode to get the details of local collectors.

When collecting swarms, you must abide by the government advice on 'social distancing'. Take time to assess the risks

involved and only collect swarms that are safe to do so.

If you have previously been a swarm collector and would like to be removed from the list, please contact me using the following email address: swarms@warleambees.org.uk

If you are interested in taking on a swarm this year, please register your details on our "Swarms Wanted" list at the following [link](#). This can also be accessed via the Members' Area of the Website.

Collectors will try and give preference to members that currently do not have bees. Members requesting swarms may be asked to contribute up to a maximum of £20 towards the collector's expenses. Please be ready to receive a call from a swarm collector.

Chris Price
Swarm Co-ordinator

A "GREASED LIGHTNING" AGM

On Thursday 18th February 2021 the required AGM was held successfully via the modern Covid-19 essential business tool of Zoom. Not only did the use of this virtual meeting management facility result in a larger attendance than we have experienced in recent years, 41 members, but also the quickest meeting of recent years with the business being concluded in 25 minutes. The clear Chairmanship of Jane Medwell in this difficult year and the brilliantly managed financials by Val Dillon and Jane Brown ensured that there was quick agreement to both the Chair's and Treasurer's reports with unanimous agreement to all the resolutions put to the meeting.

Jane Medwell pointed out the pluses and minuses of the year and portrayed a more positive picture for 2021, contingent on HMG lockdown decisions. Jane Brown, the county treasurer, set out the 2020 financial picture. The most notable feature of the finances was the 60% fall in income from £15K to £6k when compared with 2019, with this being closely matched by an equivalent fall in expenditure (see right).

The result was that the overall cash position of the branch was very similar to the prior year and the branch is in a very sound position moving into 2021. Jane Brown also set out the forward-looking planned expenditure position but cautioned that any commitments would be dependent on the ever-changing prevailing Covid-19 circumstance.

One very noticeable feature of the activities this year, despite the social restrictions, was the co-purchasing of beekeeping consumables with a turnover of some £13k, including the distribution of 8 tonne of ambrosia to members. Yet again Clive Joyce, Val Dillon and the team have excelled themselves in their support of the membership.

The meeting agreed the committee for next year is Jane Medwell – Chairman; Peter Stanworth – Immediate Past Chairman; Val Dillon – Treasurer; Chris Cox – Secretary; Liz Gurney – Membership Secretary; Maggie Curley; Clive Joyce; Nicki Maritz; Bernard Brown; Steve Poynter; Rachel Dove; Suzanne Bennett; Barry Meatyard and Chris Price.

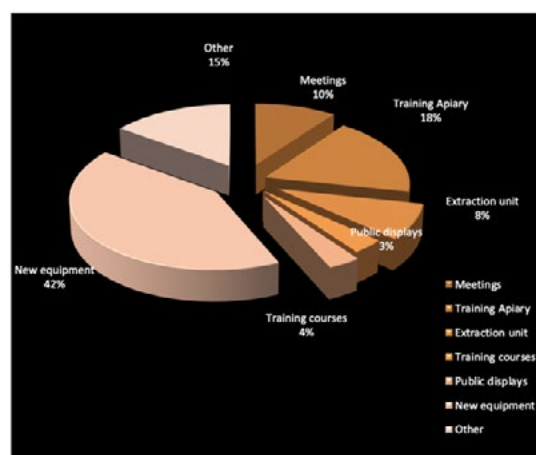
Jane Medwell closed the meeting by thanking the membership and the committee members for their support throughout this strange year.

If members wish to see the full minutes of the meeting and a copy of the slide presentation by Jane Brown they are on the branch website.

Chris Cox, Branch secretary

WLBK EXPENDITURE 2019/20

Total £6.0k



FORAGE OF THE MONTH: WILLOW

No doubt by now you are all seeing the girls bringing in their first loads of pollen, some of it from the snowdrops and crocuses, but a lot from the burgeoning willow.

"Weeping Willow"

Gentle giant

I sit in the oasis of your shade.

I peel your bark and

It is like skin

Transparent

Jennifer Russell Fay

The willow, that fascinating species which is not only a source of forage for the bees but also of huge importance to mankind. Of the genus *Salix*, there are some 400 species of willow, ranging from large deciduous trees to small shrubs. They flourish in damp soil in the cold and temperate regions of the northern hemisphere – just think of those magnificent "giants" weeping into the river Avon at Stratford.

Historically, willows have been planted along the borders of streams so that their interlacing roots formed a protective barrier against erosion. The high water content of their branches produces a very pliable material with which to work and weave as it is much less likely to split than other natural products. Hence items such as baskets, fences, and wattle for house walls have been produced for centuries. The traditional Welsh coracle boat is built on a framework of woven willow. And the musicians among you will know that the raw wood is used for making flutes, whistles and double basses. The cricket lovers amongst you will no doubt know the phrase often attributed to the late John Arlott: "There's nothing more English than sitting in a deck chair at the Worcester county ground watching the match and hearing the



sound of leather on willow" Yes, all cricket bats are made of this beautiful wood (the leather being the ball of course).

From ancient times, willow has provided man with one of our best-known medicines. Hippocrates in the 5th century wrote about the benefits of chewing the watery bark for the alleviation of aches and pains. Thousands of years later, the sap was found to contain high levels of salicin which in the human body is metabolised into salicylic acid. In 1897, Felix Hoffmann, a German chemist created an altered version of salicin called acetylsalicylic acid, which caused less gastric upset than the pure salicylic acid. His creation was named Aspirin.

Now, I wouldn't recommend you go out and chew the willow trees to ease your aching back after a hard day's work in the apiary, it may give you indigestion!

Maggie Curley

BBKA CONVENTION 2021

The BBKA Convention is a gathering of the nation's beekeepers held over a weekend in early April at, in normal times, Harper Adams University near Newport, Shropshire.

The Convention covers all aspects of beekeeping delivered in the form of top quality lectures presented by internationally, as well as nationally, renowned experts, often at the cutting edge of research. Workshops, demonstrating beekeeping crafts, are also run by expert proponents of the skills.

This year, the BBKA has decided to stage the 2021 Spring Convention as a virtual event to be held from **Friday 16th April to Sunday 18th April**. So, rather than braving the M6 to access this event, you will be able to enjoy it from the comfort of your armchair.

Speakers this year include Keith Delaplane (USA), Steve Pernal (Canada) and from the UK – Steve Martin, Celia Davis, Nicola Bradbear, Marin Anastasov, Rinke Vinkenoog, Colin Pavey, Lynfa Davies, Matthew Pound, Shirley & Richard Bond and our own chair, Jane Medwell.

The trade show, which is so much a part of the attraction of the convention, at which UK beekeeping companies (and some from overseas) peddle their wares, will also be held virtually.

The programme will be published shortly on the BBKA website as will the booking arrangements.. Whilst access to the virtual trade show will be free, that for the rest of the Convention will be £10 in advance and £12 on the day. We will include final details in next month's Bee Talk. So, put these dates in your diary and watch this space.

Ivan A Perry

ARNIA HIVE REPORT



It has been interesting monitoring the Arnia hive over the past month as we go through this critical period for honeybee colonies. There is a real benefit of having key data related to the colony automatically posted to a server for access via the internet. Seeing this data gives a useful insight into what may be happening within the hive itself, although it cannot fully replace the need to do physical periodic inspections.

This month we can see that the weight of the hive has steadily declined as the colony consumes stores by approximately 1lb per week. This allows us to accurately predict when we need to add extra fondant to prevent the colony from starving. There was an unusual sudden increase in the weight towards the end of January, and before I was tempted to hastily add a super, I quickly realised that it had been snowing!

The internal hive temperature (green line in the above graph) has been held at a relatively constant 20C compared to the external temperature (blue line) On warmer days you can see that the cluster has broken, and the hive temperature has increased due to the increased activity within the colony.

The bees in this particular hive tend to fly when the external temperature is above 10C and they will initially go on cleansing flights before foraging for water and pollen.

The Arnia temperature sensor hangs between two of the brood frames, and if it isn't close to the bee cluster, then it only gives an indication of the actual temperature. If the queen is actively laying, then the brood temperature is usually held at a constant 35C. Hopefully, we will see this happening soon indicating that the next generation of bees will soon emerge.

The Arnia company changed hands last year and their monitoring equipment has been redesigned, and the data hosting service enhanced. We are hoping to get a quotation for the new equipment and hosting from them shortly to determine if we will continue to use their services. We will also aim to get a discount for any members who might be interested in buying the Arnia equipment.

Alan Deeley

SPRING SALE OF KIT

How's the spring clean going along?
There is still time to add those unwanted items to the sale catalogue. Just go to **Items for Spring Sale of Kit Catalogue** that can be accessed here on this [Google Form](#).

FOR SALE

Brand new Thornes flat packed Langstroth hive

Comprises open mesh floor; brood body with ten self-spacing frames and foundation; wire QE; two supers, each with ten self-spacing frames and foundation; crown board and 4" roof.

Offers over £150 invited (current list price £312)

Please contact **Maggie Curley** on 07730 955127

A BIT OF NUMBER CRUNCHING

These figures are taken from our Membership records:

Total number of members currently is 216

Of these:

Registered members:	173
Partner members:	26
Non-BBKA members:	17
Number of men:	134
Number of ladies:	82
Number of Honorary members:	9

Val Dillon

WHY HONEY BEE IS TWO WORDS

Regardless of dictionaries, there is in entomology a rule for insect common names that can be followed. It says: If the insect is what the name implies, write the two words separately; otherwise run them together. Thus, we have such names as house fly, blow fly, and robber fly contrasted with dragonfly, caddicefly, and butterfly, because the latter are not flies, just as an aphision is not a lion and a silverfish is not a fish. The honey bee is an insect and is pre-eminently a bee; "honeybee" is equivalent to "Johnsmith."

—From **Anatomy of the Honey Bee** by Robert E. Snodgrass

Bernard Brown

STEPS TO MAKE YOUR OWN NUCS

Many will have seen this headline in the newspapers last month which was prompted by an importer of packages of bees falling foul of the new rules, introduced by the UK Animal and Plant Health Agency, banning such imports. This is something of a coincidence since we reported on these new rules in last month's issue. It was purported that, as a result of the ban, the exporter would have to destroy 15 million bees. More to the point, UK beekeepers would be denied the opportunity to take up the craft or replenish their stocks. This seems to ignore the possibility of alternative outlets for the exporter but the possibility of a shortfall in supply should be a shot in the arm for our policy of producing domestically raised packages, not only from other UK suppliers, but also by individual beekeepers.

Like most things in beekeeping, raising nucs is not as easy as it sounds and so we have called upon the experience of one of our members David Stott, who is also a bee farmer, to share some of his tips and tricks.

A straightforward and economical way to increase your bee colonies is to produce nuclei from your existing stocks. Generally, home produced nuclei perform better than swarms in the long term, and can either be built up into production colonies, overwintered for sale in the spring, or united with poor stocks to rejuvenate them.

Nuclei are produced by removing a few frames of bees and brood from a strong colony and establishing them in a separate box with a new queen. The first thing to bear in mind is to be sure that the donor colony, from which the frames of bees will be harvested, is free of brood disease. This means looking carefully to be sure you have a good brood pattern with no discoloured larvae or deteriorating cappings. I would also avoid colonies with obvious signs of other diseases including chalk brood and sac brood.

The next consideration is how you are going to provide a queen for your new colony. One option is to buy a mated queen and introduce it to the queenless nucleus. However, I prefer to provide a home raised queen as it gives me some control over the genetics of the stock. My own method is to provide a queen cell either produced by the bees during swarm preparations or as part of a queen rearing operation.

Finally, you can let the nucleus raise its own queen from an emergency queen cell. In my opinion, introducing a queen cell is the best option, both in terms of cost and reliability. Whichever way you choose to provide a queen, you should decide this before starting, as it will influence the approach you use.

Below is my approach to making a nucleus from a strong colony showing the first signs of swarming preparations.

You will need a nucleus box filled with frames of either drawn comb or foundation. The box can be wooden or polystyrene but should be sufficiently robust to allow the new colony to keep warm enough to raise brood easily. Don't use a flimsy transport box. You are likely to want to move the nucleus to prevent bees from returning to the donor colony, so the box should be ventilated and bee-tight once the entrance is closed. You should also identify a site for the nucleus away from the apiary where the donor colony is situated. In addition, you need to be able to provide syrup as feed for the new



Image Credit: theapiarist.org

colony, either using a frame feeder in the box, or a contact feeder on top. When you are making up the nucleus, an additional empty box able to hold a frame securely is useful.

The period between mid-May and late June, when hives are full of bees and most likely to try to swarm, is the best for producing nuclei, and this allows you to use nucleus production as part of a swarm control strategy.

Have everything ready in advance, and when you first see attempts to make swarm cells, take bees and brood from the colony to make a nucleus. This operation alone can be sufficient to stop the bees actually swarming. It's important to leave the existing queen behind but, while it helps to actually find the queen, you don't necessarily need to see her to complete the operation.

In an undisturbed colony, the queen will almost always be on a frame with the most recently laid eggs, which is where the house bees are at the highest density. If you have an idea where this is within the brood box, you have an advantage.

Place your nucleus box next to the donor hive and remove the empty frames from the nucleus. Using minimum smoke and disturbance, strip the donor hive down to the brood box and look at the bees between the frames.

Start at the side of the box with the lowest density of bees. With luck, you will find the first frame out has only honey and pollen, and no brood. The queen is most unlikely to be found here but look carefully to make sure. If you do see the queen, you can leave her on the frame and place it in your spare empty box. Select frames with a good covering of bees to put in your nucleus box.

Proceed towards the centre of the box, selecting one frame with stores only, and two frames with sealed brood. The sealed brood need only cover a third or so of the frame. Often, as the queen is reducing laying in preparation for swarming, you will find frames with sealed but no open brood or eggs, which is ideal.

You also need a frame with a queen cell. The best situation is to have an open cell, as you can check visually to be sure there is a developing larva. However, a sealed cell with newly produced, light coloured wax will also work, though by that stage the colony may well have swarmed.

Be wary of sealed queen cells with older, dark wax, as these may be leftovers from previous swarming events, resealed by the workers after the queen emerged. A frame with open brood and early queen cells is more likely also to have the queen, so either very

gently shake, or brush most of the bees from this frame back into the hive so you can be absolutely sure the queen is not on the frame when you put it into the nucleus.

Your nucleus box should now have frames with sealed brood, a frame of stores and a frame with a queen cell and be well supplied with young bees. Don't worry about the bees which fly back to the parent colony while the nucleus box is open. These are older bees which you do not need in your nucleus.

Replace the frames you have taken from the donor hive with the empty frames from the nucleus box. I like to place each of these between drawn frames in the hive, so they reduce the density of the bees, thus reducing the swarming tendency.

Depending on the situation of the donor colony, you may wish to destroy any other queen cells, or make an artificial swarm at this stage.

As ever, if you destroy queen cells, you need to be sure you are not leaving the colony hopelessly queenless if the queen has gone (i.e. without eggs or young larvae from which an emergency queen cell can be produced).

The nucleus box should be closed up and taken to its new site. Leave

it for a day or so, then feed with syrup. It will be at least three, and more likely four weeks before the new queen is mated and laying well, so there is no need to disturb it before then except to top up the feed.

Once the queen is laying however, the nucleus will build up rapidly and you may need to move it to a full-sized box. You can return it to the original site once the queen is laying.

You can also use this approach to make a nucleus before any signs of swarming are evident. In this case you will either need to provide a bought in, mated queen or a grafted queen cell, or just ensure there are some eggs or very young larvae from which the nucleus can raise its own queen. In the latter case, be careful not to take the queen from your donor stock along with the frame with eggs, and be prepared to wait longer before a new, laying queen is established in the nucleus. I have found this method to be less reliable, but some large scale beekeepers use only this approach.

Good luck with making your own nuclei in the coming season. I have found producing new colonies of bees from my own resources to be one of the most satisfying aspects of the craft, and I hope you will too.

David Stott

THE BOOKISH BEEKS OF WLBK

On Thursday 25th February the Bookish Beeks met for the final time this season. We hope to be too busy beekeeping to have time to read any additional books over the Summer!

We have read a mixture of fiction and non-fiction chosen by the group. These included **A Honeybee Heart has Five Openings** by Helen Jukes, **Buzz: The Nature and Necessity of Bees** by Thor Hanson, **The History of Bees** by Maja Lunde and **The Ardent Swarm** by Yamen Manai.

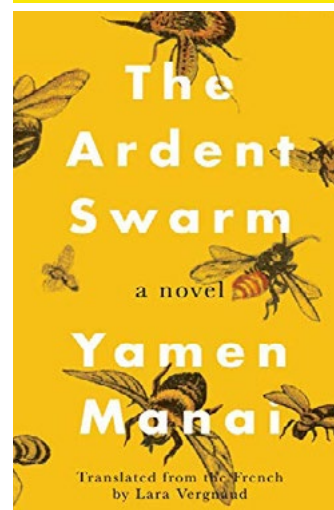
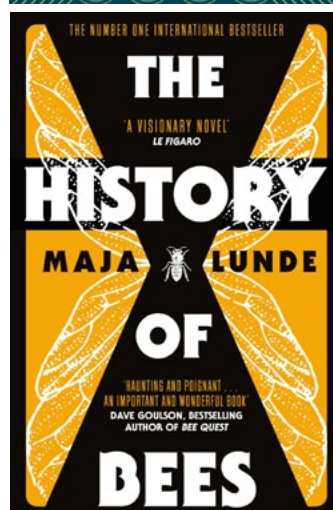
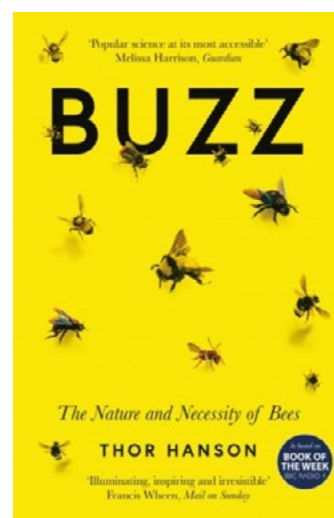
On balance, we preferred fiction with some of us already feeling as though there is enough non-fiction in our day to day.

Although each month we set out to talk about the chosen book, we talked about all kinds of other things too. Crucially we all kept in touch over a strange Winter without meetings "in real life".

Meeting remotely has meant that we could access the group over distances which might put us off travelling on a Winter's evening – not everything about remote learning and contact is negative!

We hope to be back next Winter in some form, so if you never quite managed it or always forgot (or thought we'd be a terribly serious lot – we're not!) then perhaps you'll join us next October when you'll be very welcome! Watch out for details in Bee Talk!

Jane Ford
WLBK Librarian



MORE WOMEN IN BEEKEEPING

There are more famous women in beekeeping than you might imagine at first sight. It is easy to research the men: Wikipedia offers you more information than you can reasonably need. But the women are harder to find; and unsurprisingly, this is often because they have less time for the activity. I can't imagine Mrs Tolstoy calling Leo in from brooding on his bees to lay the table. Many of the women are fairly modern, too. So here are another trio – very diverse and interesting.

THE BEEKEEPING BBC PRESENTER



Martha Kearney (Born in Ireland, 1967) is a 'passionate' beekeeper – her words, not mine. And if I sound embittered, I am. I've made my living for a few decades by writing books and television, and in 2007, with a Birmingham-based production company, I pitched a series on the then rapidly-expanding beekeeping hobby to BBC4 on beekeeping, with some original technical ideas like hood cameras and including the trials of an urban family over a beekeeping year. No luck. A year later, Martha appeared on BBC4 fronting 'The Wonder of Bees' (2009). Not that I'm really bitter. Well, yes I am.

Martha Kearney, like Scarlett Johansson, was given a beehive for a wedding present. She keeps bees at her home in rural Suffolk; but since her work as presenter of *The World at One* on Radio 4 and *Newsnight* on BBC2 must take her away from home a lot, her husband, Chris, admits to being a 'reluctant beekeeper'.

Her other beekeeping programmes include 'Who Killed the Honey Bee' (2009) for BBC4 and 'Hive Alive' (2014) with Chris Packham for BBC2. Neither is currently available on BBC iPlayer.

To find out more about Martha Kearney, search for Country Life online, November 18, 2011.

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE....

Maria von Trapp (1905-1987) was a keen beekeeper throughout her life. After her family's flight from German-annexed Austria on the eve of the second world war, famously recorded in 'The Sound of Music', they settled on a farm in Stowe, state of Vermont. This has been the leading New England state for honey production since, I find, 1868. Her husband Georg, (Christopher Plummer in the 1965 film) encouraged her to take up beekeeping.

The Von Trapp family was wealthy in the early days of the marriage,



but they lost almost everything in the worldwide depression of the early 1930s. Maria helped save the family by making cuts, dismissing servants and imposing general belt-tightening on the household. The depression prompted the family to consider turning their hobby of singing into a money-making activity, and may have been instrumental (sorry) in her taking up beekeeping commercially when they later arrived in the USA. She ran a residential centre for musicians in Vermont, and later a lodge for holiday-makers. I imagine the hives were kept in the grounds.

BUSINESSWOMAN, WRITER, TELEVISION PERSONALITY...



Martha Stewart (born 1941) has an estimated worth of \$698 million, probably not all from her honey sales. She has been keeping bees since the 1970s, and I read that she has a personal beekeeper. But pictures show her in direct contact with the hives, and her beekeeping blog is both accurate and informative.

Martha's beekeeping progress is recorded on themarthablog.com
John Stringer

HINTS & TIPS

Hopefully the weather will encourage us to rediscover our gardens this month and here are some helpful tips to enable it to be a pleasurable experience for all.

Mike Townsend contributed these tips last year but i think it is a very informative and timely article to have a look at again just to remind us.

- Observe the beehive before starting work and be aware of the route the bees take so that you can avoid their flight path to and from the hive. The flight path may vary daily depending on where their food source is, so make this observation every time you work near the hive.
- Bees are less active on cool, gloomy days and early in the morning when the temperature is lower, so plan your work when their activity is lowest.
- Bees, along with most other insects including wasps and other stinging insects, generally are highly sensitive to body odour. Also their eyes work quite differently to ours having a high 'flicker factor', which means they are also highly sensitive to movement. With these points in mind make sure you are well washed, and in clean clothes, but avoid scented hair and body washes. Plan work around the hive for the morning before working up a sweat elsewhere in the garden later in the day.
- Carry out tasks such as weeding close to the hive by kneeling, working slowly and steadily and only work standing up, for example when hoeing, when you are well away from the hive. When standing you may be in their flight path and a bee may bump into you accidentally so wearing a hat is helpful. Bees will try to avoid or go around you. If one gets into your hair do not try and tease it out as the bee will become anxious and entangled; smartly smack your head and kill the bee instead.
- Working close to the hive may lead to a single bee coming to investigate you; just move steadily away from the hive and do not wave your arms about trying to 'swat' it as this will make the bee more anxious. However, if following persists it should be reported to the beekeeper.
- A swarm issuing from a hive, with lots of bees in the air can be quite an alarming sight. The bees are however in a benign state simply dividing their nest to start another colony somewhere else. The intense activity lasts only a few minutes before they fly away or land in a bush or tree nearby. Keep the public away and tell the beekeeper.
- Keep a special eye out for Asian Hornet primary nests, which the hornets will be building this month. Now is a good time to remember what these hornets look like:

The thorax is velvety black/dark brown with brown abdominal segments bordered with a fine yellow band.

Only the fourth abdominal segment is almost entirely yellowy-orange .

The legs are brown with yellow ends.

The head is black with an orange –yellow face.

They are 25mm about 1" long. Put out your traps in a sunny and well lit place and bait with a sweet syrupy apple juice. Remember to inspect the trap regularly to ensure other insects are released without harm.

If you would like to make your own Asian Hornet Monitoring trap, it's fairly simple and instructions can be found in this [document](#) from the National Bee Unit's website.



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

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