



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

BEEKEEPING 2022 – HERE WE GO

The weather is giving us all the signals we need to start doing varroa checks, worrying about whether we need emergency fondant and doing all the maintenance jobs we meant to get round to in winter. And we have had several chances to meet and see other beekeepers, before the more solitary work of maintaining summer hives starts. We even had a “boiling frames” day on 13th March – so it’s not too late to get those chores done.

The county microscopy course (led by our own Barry Meatyard) was a great opportunity to learn some new tips. This time we actually had a sample of bees with nosema and were able to take photos of slides with hundreds of spores on them. Though this might not always be a cause for celebration, it really made our day. I must admit that the following day I went and tested all my hives to make sure none of them were infested. It’s now that nosema can finish off a colony – it’s not called “spring dwindling” for nothing! I have also put in the varroa boards for a test of mite drop. It’s a bit early, perhaps, but, if they need treating, I will be able to use the first warm weather we get and I might try the new product which uses formic acid. The pollen going in tells me that brood is being reared at a good rate.

This month we met at the Branch Apiary to admire the new layout and look at an exciting new piece of equipment. Paul Stephenson has kindly donated an “Ezeebeevac” – a portable, battery-operated bee vac for collecting swarms or extracting bees from inaccessible places – on the condition that we named it “Pamela” after his mother.

Paul’s mum died recently aged 97 after an eventful life which included time with the codebreakers at Bletchley Park. At



first, it struck me that this was a rather pedestrian piece of kit for a woman with that background but, Pamela loved to Hoover – and it had to be a proper Hoover – and was also very fond of Paul’s honey, so the association of “hoover” with bees would have amused her greatly. We hope it will make Paul smile when there is mention of “Pamela” in years to come. It certainly is a cleverly designed, light and, most importantly, an easily cleanable piece of kit which is available for loan to members. If you’d like to use “Pamela”, or any of our home loan equipment, go to the Resources and Facilities section in the members’ area of the website warleambees.org.uk where details of who to contact can be found.

.... It could be a very busy swarm year this year, given the way the colonies are building.

If you need help with your bees, or would like to give us ideas and feedback about Bee Talk, contact me or any other member of the



committee at:

warleambees@warleambees.org.uk.

Jane Medwell

WLBK chair

BBKA CAMPAIGNS UPDATE – NEONICOTINOID SUGAR BEET BAN

The BBKA have been actively promoting a campaign of concern to members against relaxing the ban on neonicotinoids on Sugar Beet and we have received the following update on progress from Anne Rowberry, BBKA President:-

"We asked to you to sign the petition on the website requesting government to overturn the derogation issued for the use of a neonicotinoid on sugar beet to control yellow virus. The petition has reached its threshold mark and the government will now have to justify the decision in Parliament.

In the meantime, the campaign needs to be maintained in the public eye and a poster for local replication is available at Sugar Beet and Bees - Google Docs. This explains why the use of seeds coated with neonicotinoids and spraying the verges of the fields with herbicides has such a devastating effect on our pollinators and environment. Please post it wherever it may have the desired effect, on noticeboards, face book groups and other social media etc."

And if you haven't already, please sign the petition at: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/606788>

Anne Rowberry
BBKA President

BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

This month we really turn a corner- if we were expecting March winds and April showers we'd better get out the umbrellas after all those storms. This month we may get our first inspections and treatments. Change brood boxes and even (if it is warm) super. It's so exciting!

- Keep checking your hives are well fed after this long, warm winter- it's not quite over yet.
- Later in March we can remove those mouse guards and woodpecker protection (she says with her fingers crossed behind her back).
- Have you established your goals for this season and printed out new record sheets? If not, be quick.
- Put in the varroa boards for at least 7 days, count the mites and put the numbers into the Beebase calculator. If you are going to treat you will need to wait for around 16 degree days.
- You might want to take some varroa samples. If you need a test and can get a sample of 30 bees to Jane Medwell or Barry Meatyard, we will test for you.
- If it is warm enough, do a first inspection- but be swift. Check for colony build up, and stores. If it is warm you can feed syrup now.
- Do not add supers when you have fondant on or are feeding.
- If it is warm look at the brood. Is there brood in all stages? This is when we might see drone layers and know we need to unite colonies or replace queens.
- If a colony has expired, make sure you clear up carefully to prevent robbing and spread of any pathogens.
- A clean up is in order- new brood boxes and floors are traditional at this time of year- but only if the weather is warm enough.

Jane Medwell

ARE WE A HELP OR A HINDRANCE?

I, like many others, was inspired to take up beekeeping after hearing so much about the problems they were facing. They needed our help. That was about 11 years ago. Many new beekeepers are still heeding the call for help.

But an article in the Stratford Herald a few weeks ago gave me cause for thought. Written by a vegan and member of Extinction Rebellion the newspaper gave prominent space to promote her Vegan ambitions, which included abstaining from honey. Not only that but she cited a Cambridge University study and concluded that honey bees and beekeepers were to blame for the decline of 'native bees' in this country. The study suggests that honeybees compete disproportionately with the 'native bees' and we shouldn't eat honey, or keep bees.

Vegans don't eat honey.

Some of her claims -- Honey bees are non-native species. They spread pests and pathogens to native bees. They compete for forage with native bees. There are too many colonies and beekeepers.

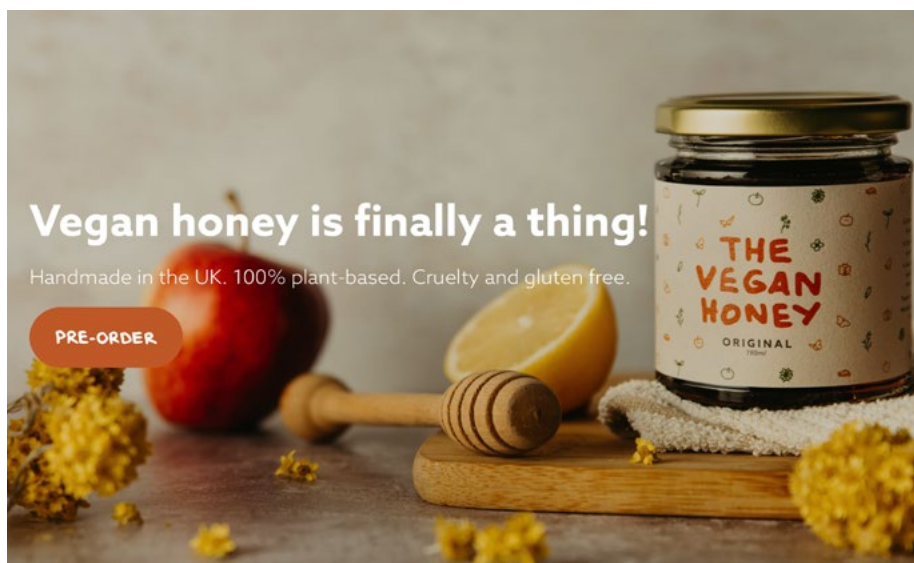
We all know that all bees are at risk because of loss of habitat, modern agricultural practice, pesticides and the introduction of pests and pathogens. But is there some truth in what the author claims?

Are honey bees non-native as she claims? You will have to make up your own mind but the following suggests otherwise.

It is likely that honey bees arrived by their own initiative across the land link between Great Britain and the rest of Europe after the retreat of the ice. They therefore arrived without human help. They have been here before recorded human history began. Adapting to the environment, they have been fully able to survive without our assistance. This, of course, is pertaining to the British black bee. Most locally adapted bees retain some DNA from the original inhabitants, which suffered a deep decline after widespread disease in the early 20th Century. Bees were then imported from mainly European countries to bolster the stock. Although I think the author may have put her own twist on the facts somewhat, I can't help feeling that some truth lies within.

Are honey bees responsible for introducing and spreading pests and pathogens? Well yes, but not so much as the beekeepers who are ever seeking to 'improve' their bees. There has been an emphasis recently on reducing importation of bees and queens to prevent more pests and pathogens from entering the country. Locally adapted bees have been promoted and also the practice of small-scale queen rearing to replace failing queens and colonies.

Are there now too many bees causing them to compete with 'native bees'? Well yes, in some areas. It is widely known that areas such as London and Paris have a density of colonies which is, or is becoming, unsustainable. A few years ago it was true to say that honey bees fare better in the cities than they do in arable countryside. But this is changing fast. It is not because conditions are better for bees in arable farmland but because the availability



of pollen has worsened in the cities, often man-made due to overpopulation and density of colonies. The consequences of too many bees are allegedly increase incidences of disease particularly foulbrood and competition for forage.

So, honeybees are being blamed for the demise of so-called native bees. Most nectar sources are not accessible both to honeybees and solitary/bumbles. EG clover- white- honeybees pink- bumbles- In their defence, it is rarely mentioned in research studies that honeybees are limited in their choice of forage because of the shortness of their tongues. They can normally only access open flowers. Other bees and butterflies have much longer tongues and can therefore access deeper flowers. Also most nectar sources are not accessible both to honeybees and solitary/bumbles such as clover- white- honeybees pink- bumbles- it's all in the tongue length.

So honey bees are not always in direct competition with other pollinators. Nevertheless, there are extreme views about the threat posed by our girls as articulated in [this post](#) on The Vegan Honey's website (above).

Although the current trend to take up beekeeping to save the bees is well intentioned, it can be doing just the opposite if not carefully considered beforehand and without basic training. Too many colonies per given area causes problems amongst the honeybees. Insufficient forage causes stress and consequently the spread of disease and pests. Too many honey bees creates competition also for other bees and pollinators which causes them problems too. EFB is spreading in some city areas known to have too many colonies of honey bees.

Perhaps we should start considering where we site our hives and keep only as many as the environment can sustain. I am guilty, unwittingly, of keeping too many bees. Now I am aware of this I have merged many of my colonies and have a much more sensible number. I now realise that I was overstocked for the environment. My bees have never been very productive and I have tried to remedy this by rearing my own queens to improve my stock. But little has changed. We know how easy it is to expand an apiary, but it takes much more of a will and an effort to downsize.

Tim Newcombe

PLANT OF THE MONTH: BLACKTHORN



Image courtesy: Barry Meatyard

Spring is (just about) here, and hedges are being covered in clouds of creamy white flowers of the blackthorn, a real sight for sore eyes.

Official name *Prunus spinosa*, the blackthorn (so called for its blackish bark) is a species in the rose family Rosacea. The term "spinosa" refers to the spiky, thorn – like spur shoots which cover the bush and create a dense cattle-proof barrier. The delicate, five – petalled flowers open in early Spring before the leaves appear and are insect pollinated, hence an early feast for the bees. Sunny, calm weather at this time of year will ensure a good set to the fruit, which we all know as the sloe. These beautiful little purple-blue balls, much the size of blueberries, appear in clusters in late summer and ripen with a dull, waxy bloom. October is the best time to harvest and to make the sloe gin ready for Christmas. A good tip when preparing your brew is to put the fruit in the freezer for 24 hours before adding the gin. It saves the tedium of pricking each berry and draws the juice out much faster.

The wood of the blackthorn makes excellent firewood as it burns slowly and produces very little smoke. It also polishes well and can be used for tool handles. Straight stems have been traditionally made into walking sticks. And here's a fun fact - the sticks carried by commissioned officers of the Royal Irish Regiment of the British Army are made from blackthorn!

Maggie Curley and Barry Meatyard

CHARITABLE STATUS AND AGM

The proposal to change the charitable status of the Warwickshire Beekeepers' Association has taken a major step forward with the acceptance of the Charities Commission of the application to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This will have little impact on individual members but will set the Association up to meet the demands of the future more readily. The next step is to ratify this proposal at a Special General Meeting, the date of which, although yet to finalised, may well follow the **County's 2022 AGM on 30th March at 7.30pm**. This is a significant moment for the governance of the Association in its history and all members are urged to attend. It will be held virtually so you may do so from the comfort of your own home (see page 5).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Don't forget **Beetradex** on 12th March at Stoneleigh Park and the **BBKA Convention** on 10th – 12th April

TASTER PROMOTION

We're planning on giving a taste of things to come to the attendees at our Taster Day on May 8th but need to enlist your help in promoting this event amongst your network of friends face book group, work colleagues etc. To this end there is a flyer for local replication at [Taster Day 080522 - Google Docs](#) with the details.

REPORT: THE 89TH WLBK AGM

As last year, we held the AGM via Zoom, but unfortunately the log on process this year proved difficult for some and impossible for others. Fortunately, we were able to achieve an attendance target of 25 as this is the number necessary for the meeting to be quorate (legal).

The meeting was opened by Jane Medwell with a review of the year highlighting the healthy membership position, an increased membership yet again, the successes of the co-purchasing arrangements and the ever-improving facilities at the Hurst Farm Resource Centre for the use of members. She also reported on the way our excellent apiary team managed the European Foul Brood outbreak and that we are now looking forward to the new season of training with an improved layout with strong colonies on new comb.

As in past years the financial affairs of the branch were presented to the meeting by Jane Brown, the County Treasurer, for our own treasurer Val Dillon. She was able to report our accounts had been Independently Examined and a statement provided. Comparisons with the prior, Covid-19 affected, year showed the expected increase in all areas and at the year end there was a healthy bank balance (see figures at the bottom). Jane set out the future budgeted spends, including the refurbishment planned for

the extraction unit, which will reduce the reserves in the coming year. The meeting approved the accounts, the subscription, the reserves policy, and the reappointment of the Independent Examiner. Following the review of the year and the accounts the meeting then progressed to the appointment of the officers, the announcement of the Foden Award winner(s) and the confirmation of Honorary Members.

As an interim arrangement and due to unforeseen circumstances, it was agreed that the current officers would remain in place with Jane Medwell acting as interim chair until the next branch committee meeting. At this meeting the new chair would be agreed and advised to the membership. All the current committee members would continue into 2022. The Foden Award was awarded jointly to Chris Price and Andrew Threlfall to recognise their contribution to the working of the branch over this demanding pandemic year.

At the meeting Terry Dillon was put forward by the Branch Committee to be a Honorary Life member for his considerable unseen support for both our treasurer and for the branch as a whole over many years and this was unanimously supported.

Note – The 89th AGM Minutes are on the WLBK Website.

Chris Cox

WLBK - Branch Accounts for the year ended 30th November 2021

	£k	£k	2019/20 £k
Receipts			
Subs collected for BBKA/ WBA/ BDI	7.05		6.57
Less subs paid to BBKA/ WBA/ BDI	-7.00	0.05	-6.54
Branch Subscriptions		3.47	3.09
Gift Aid, donations and grants		2.15	2.13
Course fees		1.85	1.65
Public events		0.42	0.01
Income from the co-op	17.00		13.10
Less cost of goods bought by the co-op	-17.16	-0.16	-14.55
Miscellaneous		1.64	.62
Total Receipts		9.42	6.08

WLBK - Branch Accounts for the year ended 30th November 2021

	£k	2019/20 £k
Total Receipts	9.42	6.08
Running Costs	7.64	3.59
Equipment Purchases	1.43	2.45
Net position	0.35	0.04
Bank balances brought forward	37.79	37.75
Bank balances carried forward	38.14	37.79

COUNTY AGM – 31ST MARCH

We are encouraging as many members as possible to join us at the County AGM this year, which is being held, via Zoom, on **Thursday March 31st at 7.30pm**. On the agenda is an item necessary for the Association's agreed move from being a Charitable Trust to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This change gives the Association more powers to meet its operational needs in the modern world. To complete this change, the Charities Commission requires the membership to formally approve the transfer of assets from the existing charity to the new "Charitable Incorporated Organisation" and the dissolution of the existing charity. It is on this that a vote will be taken and your participation would be very much welcomed.

The link to join the AGM is <https://zoom.us/j/3385064083>

Bernard Brown

STRUTTING OUR STUFF IN 2022

The catkins have been out for some weeks as have the snowdrops and buds are swelling - all of which are harbingers of Spring and, whilst Winter is still not quite over, the Branch's displays subcommittee is already turning its attention to summer and to the programme of events at which we will promote our craft.

Bringing awareness of bees and beekeeping to the general public is part of our charitable remit and we have the kit to mount a range of different activities for which we rely on you, our members, to help deliver.

Helping on our stand involves sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with the public, making sales of honey and wax products (playing shop), demonstrating various pieces of beekeeping equipment and answering queries and is well within the capabilities of anyone who has been on our introductory course.

We arrange the stewarding in shifts and, volunteering for a couple of hours on our stand, usually entitles you to free admission to the show, so there is time to sample the wider delights of the event.

Rubbing shoulders with more experienced members on the stand provides a unique opportunity for one-to-one training.

We seek volunteers a few weeks before a particular event and publicise this, together with the arrangements for registering your interest, in Bee Talk and by e-mail. At this time, you will be able to find a link to enable you to volunteer on-line. You will also find these links on our website.

These events range from village fetes to those on a regional and national scale, but all provide a thoroughly enjoyable day out in this delightful County of ours and, of course, there is plenty of opportunity for "Bee Talk". So, if this prospect appeals to you, please note the dates of events listed below in your diary now and keep your eyes on your in box and on Bee Talk nearer the time. A full list of these events is included in the Branch Diary section of our website.:-

DATES OF UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2022

4 June	Saturday	Kenilworth Agricultural Show
7 June	Sunday	Queen's Platinum Celebrations - Wroxall
11- 12 June	Saturday - Sunday	Leamington Peace Festival
2 July	Saturday	Shotteswell Village fete
21 - 24 July	Thurs- Sun	Warwick Folk Festival
29 - 31 July	Fri - Sun	Ragley Game Fayre
6 August	Saturday	Lowsonford Flower Show
6 August	Saturday	Dassett Country Show
September	Saturday	Kings Hill Nurseries
2 October	Sunday	Kenilworth Eco Fayre
9 October	Sunday	Hill Close Gardens Apple Day

The display kit we own can be made available for the promotion of bees and beekeeping by members should, for instance, you be involved in a local community event. To take advantage of this please contact Bernard Brown at bernardnbrown@outlook.com

Bernard Brown

Public Display Co-ordinator

BEES FOR HEROES



It's Winter – the house move to Kidsgrove has gone well. I met Gill (a potential new beekeeper) and we marry April 2023. So, all was going well until I came out to look at potential places for my Warwickshire based bees (11 hives) from 4 apiaries and guess what – nothing! But, once again, a lucky turn. Gill, who has been on the Council here for years, said "why don't you speak with the Tri Services & Veterans team who are kicking off a new site at Mow Cop" (which is local).

This is a project to provide support for those troubled ex-forces veterans having served their time in the service of our country, so a very deserving group. This support will include offering basic services and refreshment and accommodation for a couple of nights in residential pods soon to be built on the site.

An abandoned, derelict, former light industrial site littered with old concrete floors from demolished buildings revealed when the scrub, which covered the site, was cleared by the volunteers, is situated on the western edge of the South Pennines at 1000 feet above sea level with the Cheshire plain to the west. Compared to the 300ft above sea level of my sheltered leafy Warwickshire apiaries, this is some exposed site.

I discussed things with John Painter who is top man on the project (and whose wife Mary is keen to become a beekeeper) and we agreed to meet – long story short - we agreed a site on one of the concrete floors so no mowing - great!

Our intention is to introduce some of the veterans to beekeeping while they are there - early days of course but having met some of the veterans up there that afternoon, two have already expressed an interest. I am looking forward to meeting my new beekeepers at



the apiary and having a brew (that's a cuppa in Warwickshire) with them.

Moving a lot of bees a long way is always a challenge, although better in the Winter as they're dormant, of course, and the hives aren't as heavy. I had 9 live colonies to shift and, logistically, thought I could get them strapped in a small pick-up truck or run several trips with the windows open in my car. Then I thought "I wonder if Bernard Brown fancies an expedition". So, on Friday 11th Feb (still a bit wet and nippy) we set off – strapping up carefully, loading them into the trailer – a few bees escaped here and there and then the 90 mile haul up to Mow Cop. We had a good and busy day, and I was eternally grateful for his help.

You can see the area in the photos. The project is in the very early stages, but it is good to be involved at the beginning. The hives need tidying up (the grandchildren want them in different colours), some form of shelter organised, and the hives lifted onto higher stands. The pallets were all we had on the day. There's a lot to do here but the days are getting longer.

David Faulkner

THE WAR YEARS



Continuing the history of WLBK discovered in the vaults of the County Records office, compiled by the late Brian Milward, we now track the fortunes of the Branch during the war years.

During this period of history, it becomes clear that younger beekeepers were being called up for national service and older members were becoming involved in various specialist jobs related to the war effort and time was not always available for proper attention to their colonies. There was an increased effort to sustain beekeeping by providing sugar rations for feeding bees and promoting an increase in the number of colonies raised. It was also clear that subscriptions were falling well below the levels needed to maintain proper levels of service to the membership.

It was proposed to increase the subscription from 5s-0d (25p) to 6s-6d however this was amended to 6s-0d (30p) for full members and 3s-6d (17.5p) for associate members but included BDI and postage for Bee Craft (which was offered as part of the membership until a decade or so ago) It was also decided to restrict the number of meetings to two per year — one in March (presumably of a practical nature) and the AGM and annual lecture in November.

Occasional meetings were suggested from time to time at members' apiaries and Miss Ironside (of whom we learned last month) offered the use of her garden and bees as such. Mr Crouch offered to pay the postage for the invitations to members and Mr Rollings offered the use of his car for transport of lecturers (as well as the use of his microscope for disease recognition).

It was at this period that the sugar rationing for beekeepers was introduced and every member was entitled to 10lbs of sugar per colony for feeding the bees over winter. The association ordered and paid for one and a half tons for distribution to the membership. This seems to have had the effect of increasing and the membership climbed. Shortly after this was announced, the

interest in keeping bees by local residents rocketed. It was only after the size of the honey crop was found to be inconsistent with the number of hives that it was suspected that the sugar wasn't reaching the bees. The Government's answer to prevent it from reaching the black market was to dye it green. Unfortunately, this resulted in the honey taking on the colour of the dye. A sub-committee was set up to regulate the sugar rationing.

Meetings during the evenings were difficult due to blackout regulations and so meetings were generally held on Sunday afternoons.

Another interesting point arose when it was recorded that a cheque for £2 -0s-9d was received from Solihull branch as a donation towards the failing funds of W&L branch — apparently Solihull had made a profit from an auction sale of queens. Money had also been saved on postage by making delivery by hand of many copies of Bee Craft to members.

At this time honey was being collected from members to be sent to the Red Cross, Seamen and Sub-mariners. This was all part and parcel of the lifestyle forced upon people by the war. There was a compelling desire to share and pull together for the common good. During this period the branch opened a bank account and the upturn in fortunes resulted in the balance in the account rose from £15-16s-1d to £24-12s-10d in the first year.

Liaison between the branch and the Leamington Horticultural Society was formulated — the secretary of the society happened to be Stan Allsop who was the foreman at Cherry Orchard Brickworks in Kenilworth and also a member of the association committee. In later times he became a senior figure in the Association as Chairman - twice - as well as becoming well known in the county for his articles in the newsletter.

During this time a new member, Mr Coughlan, offered to make and donate an extractor for the branch which was the beginning of the loan system which developed over the years and which continues to this day.

Next month we move into the post-war era from 1946 - 1982.

THE QUEEN AT KENILWORTH CASTLE

It's all systems go for WLBK and Kenilworth Castle to receive a Queen's visit in time for the Jubilee!

The grant of planning permission for the apiary fence!!! – well it is a grade 1 listed site – saw this final hurdle cleared and planning to populate the apiary can now commence in earnest. We have not been idle in the interim. Skip

beekeeping, reflecting the Elizabethan heritage of the Castle, features in our plans. Bees will be kept in two skeps woven by master skep maker David Chubb and in a couple of WBC's in a new 30ft x 20ft apiary on the visitor route in the orchard alongside the Elizabethan Garden.

This project will be led by Clive Joyce and we are looking for volunteer "apprentices" to learn this ancient craft from him and to support this initiative. Skip beekeeping is often seen as being a more bee-friendly form of husbandry and its use of natural materials for the hive is very much in line with current pre-occupation with sustainability

If anyone would like to participate in this unique learning opportunity, please contact Clive Joyce on 0779222251, or Bernard Brown on bernardnbrown@outlook.com

Additional opportunities to promote bees and beekeeping with information boards and, perhaps, an observation hive in the visitor



centre, are also being explored.

Things should be really buzzing in time for our own Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee.

Clive Joyce and Bernard Brown

HINTS & TIPS

- If you go to feed your bees and find a colony on the point of starvation with bees immobile you can spray them with warm syrup. Once they have recovered then more permanent feeding will be needed to get them through to when they can once more support themselves.
- Fresh onion applied to a bee sting is soothing and healing. Scrape out the sting then apply onion juice or rub the freshly cut surface of the onion onto the stung area (Thanks to the Montgomeryshire BKA for this little gem)
- The swarm season will be upon us soon so why not finish off that skep you started last year? Make a good job of it and then it will be ready to enter into the Honey Show.... it's not until September 24th so plenty of time!

HELEN ESSEX

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

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.
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WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
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