



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## TIPS FOR A SWARM COLLECTION

**O**ver the next couple of months experienced swarm collectors will be giving their advice on how to collect swarms in different situations. This month Steve Sidaway has reported on how to collect a swarm from a brick gate post and a fox-carving.

Bees in a swarm are always inclined to walk 'uphill' so this trait can be utilised to capture them. If a skep, box or nuc can be placed or secured next to or just above the swarm, a little stimulation either by brushing with fingers or a tiny bit of smoke beneath them will encourage the bees to start walking up towards the receptacle. Try to avoid smoke if you can because it masks the nasanov gland pheromones, however smoke can be useful if the location is awkward and the area from where you are trying to remove the bees is amongst foliage.

The swarm of bees on the brick gatepost pictured was caught by placing an overhanging skep above the bees. Within seconds the bees started to move into the skep and were collected later that evening.

In the fox-carving scenario, where you cannot secure a box/skep above or next to the bees, ideally place a sheet on the ground beneath and around the object on which they have settled. Hold your box/skep beneath the swarm and use a bee brush or your hand to brush the bulk of the bees into the box/skep. Place the box/skep on the sheet (create a large entrance in the box or prop open the skep). The sheet will help the bees to march quickly into the box/skep and increase the chances of spotting the queen.

Stand back and observe the activity. A reassuring indication of the queen's presence in the box/skep will be seen in the form of bees fanning with nasanov glands open and the last remaining workers will follow in time. If a



significant part of the swarm was not caught, gently and slowly lift handfuls of the bees from where they have settled and shake them onto the sheet in front of your box/skep and watch them march in. Keep repeating this process until you either see the queen enter the box or the majority of the bees are either on the sheet or in the box/skep.

Always remember when collecting a swarm to take time to assess the risks involved and only collect swarms that are safe to do so. Please also abide by the current government advice on 'social distancing'.

**Chris Price**  
Swarm Co-ordinator



# CHAIR'S APRIL MESSAGE

**D**oes our long cold Spring count as "interesting times"? It would certainly be nice to have a longer period of warm weather to get the flow going!

This chilly, wet March has been a zoom-intense experience. There have never been so many excellent talks about beekeeping- all accessible to us. The problem seems to be knowing what is on and when, so we are hoping to find someone who could re-tweet all these opportunities to members. In addition to the Branch meetings organised by Rachel Dove for us, we have had meetings of the Honeybee Health group, Microscopy group and presentations by members. We have also been adding to the great pool of talks nationally- Barry Meatyard had around 50 for his microscopy talk to Birmingham and I had 35 for Northampton. Lockdown has brought about some great sharing. Don't miss the April talk about remote monitoring by Paul and Alan this month- Rachel manages to find a huge range of topics.

We have maintained our bees through lockdown, but opening up will let us open the apiary and begin practical training and assessments- it's so exciting. The Apiary Team have been reconfiguring the apiary and we have a large number of entries to the basic and Honeybee Health certificates to plan for, when restrictions allow.

Personally, I am paying the price of over-feeding fondant. A peek into my hives shows some of them have six or seven frames of

liquid stores- a good deal of which is the fondant I kept adding as a spring precaution! I don't want this in my supers, so I will be making sure no colony has supers and more than four frames of winter stores!. It's so nice to have some beekeeping to do.

If you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at ([warleambees@warleambees.org.uk](mailto:warleambees@warleambees.org.uk)). Stay safe, stay warm and lets look forward to beekeeping to come!

## BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH- REALLY GETTING GOING

- Begin your regular hive inspections (weather permitting, of course).
- Mark your queens whilst the population is low.
- Inspect for: queen; space; stores; swarming; disease.
- Do a varroa drop test- because you may need to treat before supering (or you might want to do a shook swarm and sacrifice comb when it warms up).
- If you replace your combs gradually, start moving the four mankiest out towards the edges of the brood.
- If you have colonies you might need to Bailey (weak, noseema or old wax that needs replacing) start when the weather has been warm for a couple of weeks.
- Add your QE and first super.
- Add supers in plenty of time- if you have OSR (and there isn't much about) make sure you are vigilant as a strong flow can need to be removed quickly.

Jane Medwell

# SPRING SALE OF BEEKEEPING KIT

**W**e have now fixed some dates for our Spring Sale of kit. This includes the complete kit, including bees, of two very keen members, who, sadly, have passed away, as well as other members' surplus items. The arrangements for the sale will be:

- Entries, not already submitted, for inclusion in the sale catalogue, should be submitted by close of play on the **11<sup>th</sup> April** using the google form at Items for [Spring sale of Kit Catalogue](#) (google.com)
- The catalogue will be issued to all members by email on Friday **16<sup>th</sup> April**. This will include prices but not the details of the seller to allow time for you to browse its contents.
- The sellers' details will be provided by email on Saturday **24<sup>th</sup> April** when the sale will begin.

A few items will be offered for sale by sealed bid. These will be clearly identified in the catalogue together with a guide price. The vendor, when contacted, will provide further details of what is on offer to those interested to facilitate a bid, and of the arrangements for the receipt of bids themselves.

Please note that WLBK is acting as an intermediary in this



matter and accepts no responsibility for either the kit itself nor for the transactions made between the vendor and purchaser.

Bernard Brown



# EDUCATION NEWS

**T**he Zoom era continues! The well established Bee Health and Microscopy groups have met on a monthly basis and both have seemed like 'the norm'. It seems that we've got better at managing discussion and questions as we have mastered the technology! We will have got it cracked by the time we return to 'normal'! However, I think that the experience has been productive, both in terms of maintaining interests and interaction and also in reaching out to and engaging with people from further afield than our local patch. Members of the bee health group have enrolled for the Module exam and have engaged in on line quizzes and 'mock exams' in preparation for the real thing, that is scheduled for weekend of the 24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> of April. We wish them every success! Whilst Zoom has undoubtedly been a life saver in terms of keeping interests ticking over, we look forward to face-to-face sessions in the near future.

In the County's 'Warwickshire Beekeeper' you may have heard about 'WASPS' – the 'Warwickshire Apiarists Seasonal Pollen Survey' (groans all round!). This is in development as a pilot scheme this year as a piece of 'Citizen Science' stimulated by a recently published national pollen survey in Austria. The idea will be to sample the pollen going into our hives throughout the season, and to identify what is being collected. At a basic

level this will rely on the range of colours, but for those who are appropriately equipped and interested will involve the use of microscopy.

**Barry Meatyard**



## APIARY MAKEOVERS

**A** second-hand shed, donated over 10 years ago and suffering the ravages of time, has been restored to full vigour by the branch. Located at what used to be the Bubbenhall Training apiary (of happy memory) and now redesignated as a community apiary, this timely renovation, piloted by Val and Terry Dillon, now sports a rot free roof with new roofing felt, repaired rotten cladding and a couple of coats of sympathetic green preservative to see it, hopefully, through the next 10 years or so. Replacement of rotted fenceposts and sheep netting will complete this project rendering it fit for its occupation by the two occupant members at just the right time.

Whilst on the subject of community apiaries, a corner of a field at our newly acquired Deppers Bridge apiary has now been fenced off providing a generous apiary area of some 120 sq. metres. Thanks are due to David Faulkner who wielded the post thumper with much Vigour. For my part, I held the posts sort of vertically and every time I nodded my head he thumped it! His efforts were not entirely without an element of self-interest as he will be moving his bees on site shortly. However, there is still room for a couple more occupants ..... and a shed! Anyone interested in moving onto the apiary (or in donating a shed) should contact Bernard Brown on [bernardnbrown@aoutlook.com](mailto:bernardnbrown@aoutlook.com)

**Ivan A Perry**



Bubbenhall Training Apiary



Deppers Bridge Apiary

# THE “COUNTY” AGM REPORT

Even under the current pandemic environment the routines of charity governance must take place and as a result the Warwickshire Beekeeping Association, of which we are one of the eight branches, held a ZOOM AGM. This was attended by 65 members of which 55 were entitled to vote on the many resolutions put to the meeting. We, Warwick and Leamington, make up a quarter of the total “county” membership (Figure 1).



One interesting feature is the destination of your subscriptions (Figure 2) to the 4 elements that they fund. Especially as in the 2022 the capitation fee from BBKA is set to rise by an additional £2 per annum despite many members being surprised by both its timing (in the middle of a pandemic) and need (with a healthy reserve position).

A notable feature of the “county” membership is that despite the Covid-19 restrictions on activities and the overall circumstances the membership has held up across Warwickshire. When receipts for 2018/19 and 2019/20 are compared (Figure 3) all other sources of income are seen to fall but are offset by corresponding falls in expenditures. Hence the branches and the “county” overall financial shape are in a sound position despite the current “social distancing” circumstances.

The AGM was brought up to date on the progress in updating the charity’s constitution to the Charity Commission standard form as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. A Special General Meeting will be called later in the year to effect this change and before this all members will be able to see what is proposed (on the warleambees.co.uk website) and have a say.

The AGM also agreed that the production of hard copy of the Warwickshire Beekeeper by the “county” would stop at the end of the year and if branch members required printed copies this would become a branch activity and cost (currently only 4 of our members). At a stroke this removes some £1,500 from the “county” cost base. At the same time the AGM agreed to giving the trustees power to change the “county” element of the membership fee by ±£2. Bernard Brown and I (the Branch “county” trustees) are looking to a possible reduction, which should offset the BBKA increase in 2022.

**Chris Cox, Branch Secretary**

## AIR POLLUTION AND BEES

Are your bees coughing or their eyes watering? Would you know if they were? Research, sponsored by BBKA, into the effects of air pollution on the health and productivity of honey bees is being undertaken by Coventry University’s Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience. These effects may take the form of direct physiological damage that impairs functions (such as vision or scent detection) or indirectly by weakening the immune system.

Having already found that pesticides produce these effects in honey bees, this “Thriving Hives” project will investigate whether air pollution components may have a similar impact. Air pollution contains many contaminants. Some are released directly from a specific source, while others are formed as a cocktail of chemical reactions in the atmosphere such as come from cars, power plants, burning, and some industrial processes.

In this project, air pollution monitors will be located in apiaries

across the Midlands and the incidence of pollution products in hives and in the bees that live in them recorded. Beekeepers willing to volunteer their bees to help in this research are being sought. So, what is involved?

Alongside the air pollution monitor attached to the hive, samples of the bees and hive products would be taken wax twice in the season which involves collecting 10 foraging bees, 3 small tubes of honey, 3 pollen cells and 3 small pieces of wax. They would also like to collect 5 nurse bees and 5 brood if the beekeeper is willing.

The understanding generated from this study will help beekeepers consider the location of hives to benefit their bees as well as alerting policy makers to the consequences of air pollution on our girls.

To participate in this worthwhile project, click on the following link:-

**[Join us at Thriving Hive \(onlinesurveys.ac.uk\)](https://onlinesurveys.ac.uk)**

**Ivan A Perry**

# ARNIA HIVE REPORT

Last month we were fortunate to take advantage of a brief spell of warm weather to briefly inspect our hives at the University Apiary, which included the Arnia hive (the blue one in the photo on the right).

We were delighted to find the queen (marked Blue) alive and well and laying once again. There were signs that the bees had been foraging with plenty of stores of fresh pollen and nectar. We have a couple of large fields of Oil Seed Rape nearby which were almost in flower before the recent cold spell, so we added a Super which accounts for the weight spike in the picture below. It is noticeable though that the colony is very much dependent upon its winter stores with consumption at around one to two pounds per week.

Once the queen gets into a regular laying cycle it is remarkable how the colony stabilises the hive temperature to a constant 35C as shown in the graph below. During the inspection we moved the temperature sensor to the middle of the brood nest so this gives us a good indication.

Following a recent exchange of emails with the new Arnia Management team we may be fortunate to receive a free upgrade to the Arnia equipment, and we are awaiting confirmation before making a decision on how to move forward with them.

Alan Deeley



## CHANGE OF DATE

Due to the updating of government guidelines announced on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, the Introductory to Beekeeping Course (ITB) 2021 will now take place over the two weekends 22/23 May and 29/30 May.

Both are currently fully booked but there is a waiting list for places which may become available due to cancellations. The contact form is available on the WLBK website.

## SUPPORT FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS

We have interest from two schools in Warwick that are looking to start beekeeping. Discussions are in progress and we would like to hear from anyone who would be willing to join a small group that could offer support and guidance - in the first instance to the staff that will be involved. Please contact me ([barry.meatyrd@gmail.com](mailto:barry.meatyrd@gmail.com)) for more details and expressions of interest.

Barry Meatyard

## TASTER DAYS

With the eagerly awaited relaxation of current restrictions on association, we are cautiously beginning to plan a couple of Beekeeping Taster Days in late July and early September. We will be needing some volunteers to help both with the organisation and/or to give one of the talks for which we do have power point presentations and scripts. So, if anyone fancies lending a hand (or a voice) please let me know at [bernardbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardbrown@outlook.com)

Bernard Brown

## FRAME CLEANING SESSION – SATURDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

We had a very good response to our Frame cleaning session in March and we were able to cleanse over 300 frames on the day. By boiling the frames in a soda solution it removes any propolis, wax and mould so the frames are all clean and ready for fresh foundation.

We also cleaned some heavily propolised queen excluders which came out like new. This is particularly useful for the wire excluders which can be very difficult to scrape clean.

A big thank you to Bernard for handling the booking and to Clive for keeping the process flowing smoothly.

## PUBLIC DISPLAYS

With all our major public shows cancelled, all eyes are on local village shows to provide the opportunity to strut our stuff.

Bernard Brown



# TAKE PART IN 'NO MOW MAY'



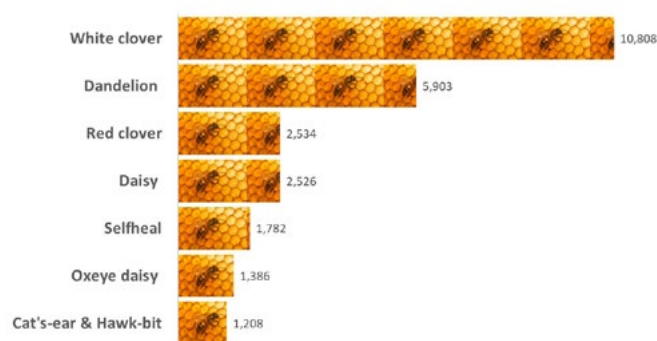
**M**ay is a busy time for beekeepers and we could all do with one less job. It is also a busy time for our girls who need all the forage they can get. Plantlife, the wild plant conservation charity, has discovered a way to provide both. They are advocating a “No Mow May” where you simply leave the mower in the shed, let your lawn bloom and, if you want to participate in their survey, report the species that appear by following the instructions at <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/everyflowercounts>. You’re even able to calculate your Personal Nectar Score showing the amount of nectar the flowers in your lawn are producing every day, in terms of how many honeybees this could support. Their 2019 survey showed that the most common lawn flowers that appeared were:-



But ranking these in order of nectar production (measuring average  $\mu\text{g}$  nectar sugar) revealed what is seen in the graph opposite.

So, let’s hear it for clover and dandelion!

The survey found that these unassuming flowers on the 5000 lawns sampled were producing a staggering 23kg of nectar each day – enough to provide lunch for 2.1 million honeybees.



Imagine the benefits for all pollinating insects if mowing regimes were relaxed across the nation.

Surprisingly, flower and nectar production were highest on lawns cut once every four weeks. This gives ‘short-grass’ plants like daisies, selfheal and white clover a chance to flower in profusion, boosting nectar production tenfold.

But areas of longer unmown grass were more diverse in their flowers, with plants like oxeye daisy, field scabious and knapweed increasing the range of nectar sources for different pollinators and extending nectar availability into late summer.

Plantlife suggest giving lawns a Mohican haircut by keeping two different lengths of grass. By short-grass, they mean setting the mower at 50mm (2”) and mowing once every month – 4 or 5 times a year. Some flowers will be cut off when you mow but they’ll come back quickly. You can even rotate patches around your garden so there are always some areas in flower.

If you can, leave some patches completely unmown to let taller flowers bloom. Cut these areas at the end of summer or early autumn.

Why not give yourself a break and a feast for our girls by giving it a go for at least “No Mow May” or, even better, for a further month or two such as “let it bloom June” or “knee-high in July”?

After all, stripes are sooooo last century!

**Jane Brown**

*Images and graphs produced by kind permission of Dr Trevor Dines from Plantlife.*

# WLBK AND SOCIAL MEDIA

**M**embers may, or may not, be aware that the branch has its own Facebook and Twitter accounts. Both little used, but we have them.

Why, you may ask? Well, at the time we thought we should embrace the modern world. But recently the support of these applications in the branch is now proving to be somewhat problematic. Not to mention there is Instagram and TikTok and many others out there where we are consciously "looking the other way".

At the last branch committee meeting a quick review focused on the fundamental questions; Do we need Social Media? If we do, what do we want from Social Media? These questions inevitably led to the next one of how do we support and promulgate the use within the branch of these two social media platforms?

Clearly, we are not utilising social media with a view to publicising our activities to the World to "grow the business" – the objectives of many and the consequences of which could submerge us in unwanted attention and a considerable unmanageable and unprojectable workloads. One of the

committee already had some experience of this.

In fact, we have a very limited objective of interacting with our members to alert them to a) what is happening locally, b) articles and posts of beekeeping interest from others using the applications (e.g. BBKA recent post highlighting their petition to Stop the Importation of Honey Bees into GB from the EU via Northern Ireland <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/577603>), and c) to facilitate member interaction (using Twitter) if they wished.

The committee took the view that we should continue with both Twitter and Facebook with the objective of a very low level of posting (may be once a week). To do this we are now looking for a member, or members, to take on this task.

If interested, please contact the secretary - [secretary@warleambees.org.uk](mailto:secretary@warleambees.org.uk).

In the meantime, members who use Twitter are encouraged to tag **#warleambees** if posting, retweeting or quoting bee related tweets.

Finally, don't forget the BBKA petition.

**Chris Cox, Branch Secretary**

# FORAGE OF THE MONTH: HAZEL



**A**s I write this at the end of March, the rain is hammering down and the temperature is a mighty 9 C, so not much pollen collecting going on today! However, when the sun does eventually come out, the girls will be out foraging on all that is available and in particular the hazel.

The ubiquitous hazel (Latin name *Corylus*) is a genus of deciduous trees and large shrubs native to our temperate northern hemisphere. They are most noticeable at this time of the year for their long, pale yellow, pollen laden male catkins (Lambs Tails we

used to call them as children) The female catkins are very small and largely concealed in the flower buds. Being wind pollinated, there is no nectar to be had for the bees, simply clouds of pollen for them to take back to feed the developing brood. You will know that brushing against hazel catkins leaves a great yellow trail on your clothes and some people can be particularly allergic to this fine dust.

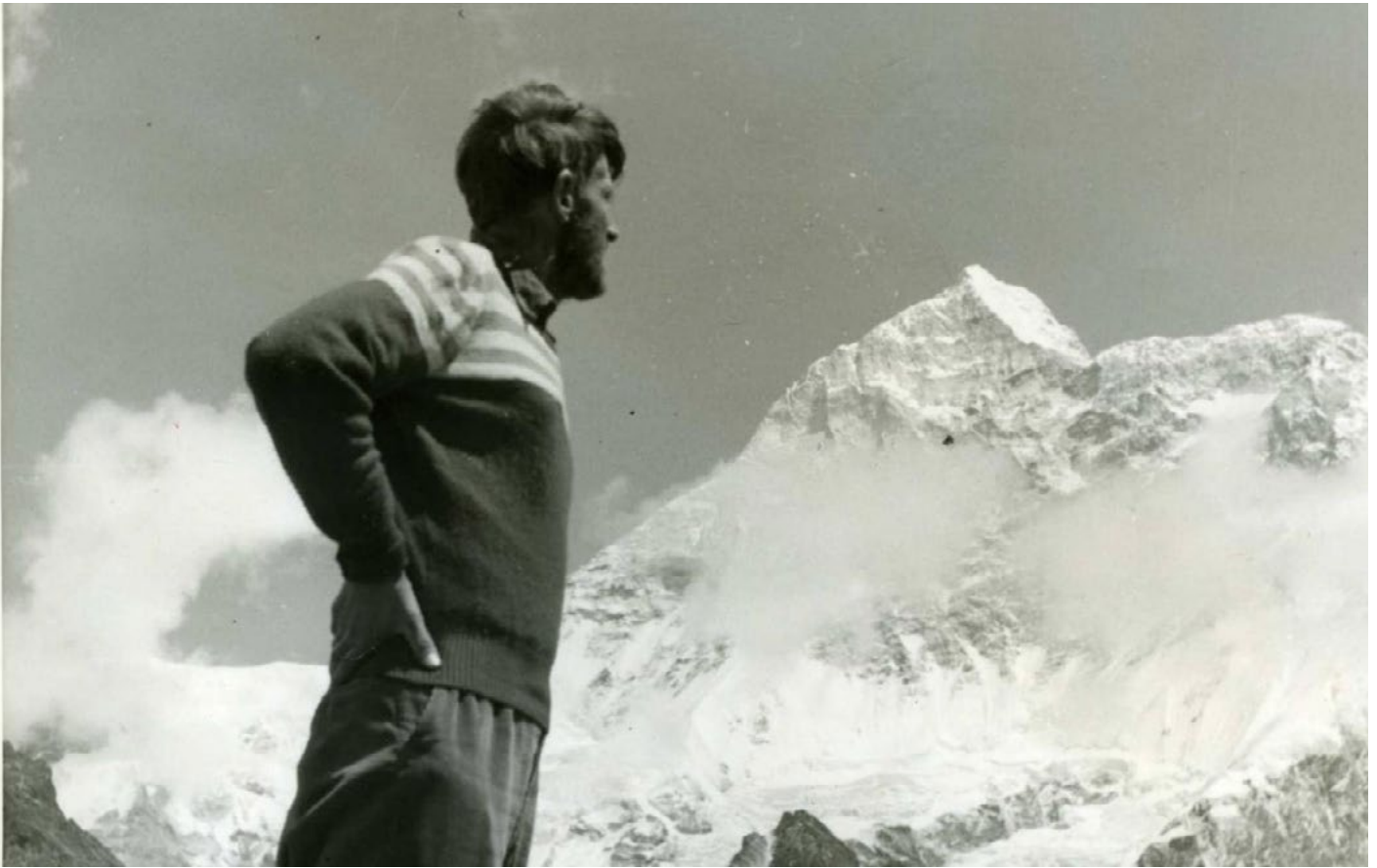
Woodland management throughout the country and particularly here in Warwickshire has been carried out for centuries by means of coppicing certain trees, in particular hazel. These traditional methods of periodically cutting back, allow numerous new branches to regrow from the stumps thus producing shoots or poles. The cutting back prolongs the life of the trees as well as opening up habitats to a wide range of flora and fauna. The poles are used to make such things as hurdles, thatching spars, pea sticks, shepherds' crooks, and wattle fencing. Woodlands are divided up into compartments called coupes, each area ideally being managed on a twelve-year rotation and the work being carried out in the autumn and winter when the birds have finished nesting. If you go for a walk in Crackley Woods on the edge of Kenilworth on a Sunday morning, you will come across groups of volunteers happily coppicing away and laying hedges with the hazel sticks.

The Celts believed that hazelnuts gave one wisdom and inspiration, so I'm going to eat a few the next time I'm inspecting a hive and wondering what on earth to do!

**Maggie Curley**



# THE BEEKEEPING MOUNTAINEER



**S**ir Edmund Percival Hillary once helped my team to win a quiz. It was tie-break time, and we would be asked five questions to identify a famous person. The first was 'He was a famous beekeeper' and we didn't need the others; the 'Beekeeping Mountaineer' sprang to mind immediately.

Edmund Hillary was born in Auckland on July 20, 1919. His father was allocated three hectares of land near Tuakau, then a village, now a small town in North Island, as a returning soldier from the First World War. He took up commercial beekeeping. Edmund attended Tuakau primary school, which involved an hour and forty minute journey each way, so that he was away from home from seven in the morning to six in the evening each day. As a child, he was small and shy and by his own admission 'somewhat lonely'; but he grew to be a fit, strong six foot two (some sources say six foot five).

Edmund's mother was keen for him to get a good education, and sent him to grammar school in Auckland; from where he studied unsuccessfully at Auckland University College. In the summer, he helped his father and brother Rex with the hives; in the winter, he climbed.

Lifting the hives helped his upper body strength, and whatever his height, he would have had a good span for climbing. His family had 1600 hives, and despite precautions, he reckoned on getting stung up to a hundred times a day. His father Percy edited the New Zealand Beekeepers' Journal; and his mother Gertrude was famous for breeding queen bees. Edmund married twice; his first wife and daughter were killed in a tragic plane crash near Kathmandu.

Hillary's greatest achievement was on May 29, 1953, when he and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers confirmed to have reached the summit of Mount Everest. He returned home to the manual labour of caring for his family's thirty-five apiaries. Edmund was knighted and went on to lead many more expeditions, and to found a charity, The Himalayan Trust, for the Sherpa people, building schools and hospitals. He died on January 11, 2008.

John Stringer





# AUTUMN BEE RESCUE UPDATE

**Y**ou may recall from my article in the January 2021 issue of Bee Talk that on November 29th I participated in the rescue of a bee colony which had built its home in the branches of a tree on the canal side in Leamington Spa. The bees would have been quite sheltered there until autumn arrived and the foliage departed leaving the colony exposed to the elements. Well, the bees survived the winter in the polynuc and have been very active on mild days. In February, even though there was very little forage about, they were coming back with pollen, mostly from crocus I think judging by the dark golden colour. I took this as a sign that the queen may be starting to lay and, after consulting "branch guru" Mike Townsend, decided that in March, if the weather was mild, I would move the colony into a new poly hive I had ready for them.

In recent years the effects of climate change have led to some very mild weather in February and March and I have been aware of swarming in March previously so I was keen not to be caught out. As it turned out, the last weekend of February was very dry, warm and sunny so that weekend I moved the bees into their new hive which now stands on the spot their polynuc occupied. The move into the hive was accomplished very quickly and without incident (which is very rare for me) and although I didn't carry out an inspection, I glanced at the frames as I moved them and saw at least two frames had small amounts of capped brood so hopefully the colony is queenright. Oddly enough I had bought the polyhive in a Black Friday sale just before the

colony was found and rescued, so it became a very useful purchase, rather than the impulse buy it actually was. I have not used a polyhive before but my BBB (Best Beekeeping Buddy) has been using polyhives successfully for the past 2 years. Having had to insulate my wooden hive both inside and out I can certainly see the benefit of a polyhive in keeping the bees warm in winter and cool in the summer.

I had not treated the bees for varroa with oxalic acid in December as the colony was small and would have been already very stressed by the rescue process. So, at the same time as I moved the colony into the hive I added one strip of Apistan varroa treatment as this is the manufacturer's advised dosage for a small overwintering colony and was also the advice of Mike. I have been checking the varroa board weekly and have noted two good drops of varroa so far.

The bees are very active and being fed Candipolene Gold currently. I am hopeful that the canal colony will do well and I am very pleased that they survived the winter enabling me to give a positive update.

Janet Hyatt



## HINTS & TIPS

- Colony development is really increasing this month. Supers need to be added to prevent the hive becoming overcrowded. This is best done when the brood box is about three-quarters full of bees. As with many aspects of bee keeping there are divided opinions on how to add successive supers. However if they are added just above the queen excluder then the young bees will be able to occupy this space more readily and thus relieve the pressure in the brood box.
- Watch out for drones as their presence is a sure sign that the colony is ready to prepare for swarming. Look out for those queen cups!
- It is a good time to replace old brood frames once there is a flow on. Don't put them between frames of brood as this will split the brood nest and could lead to brood loss.
- Make hygiene a priority this year! Always take a bag or box with you during an inspection to put those odd bits of comb, lumps of wax and propolis in. The added benefit is that then you have a ready store of wax for that candle you are going to make for the Honey Show on September 25<sup>th</sup> 2021 hopefully!
- If you are purchasing bees it is worth checking BeeBase to find out about the prevalence of disease in the area you are buying them from. The disease incidence and report page gives detailed and up to date information. If you are not registered with Beebase then make it your Spring mission.

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](mailto:h.essex@virgin.net)*

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver. Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28<sup>th</sup> of each month:  
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