



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

INTRODUCING THE NEW WLBK CHAIR

There has been a recent changing of the guard at WLBK. Following her two-year tenure, Jane Medwell has now stepped down as WLBK Chair. Jane saw us successfully through two pandemic years with her enthusiasm, drive, beekeeping knowledge and organisational skills. For this we are all very thankful. It also hasn't gone unnoticed that despite the circumstances our membership numbers have increased.

Now it's Suzanne Bennett's turn at the helm. She, like many of us, started her beekeeping by signing up to do an introductory course.

She was prompted to do so following a dinner party conversation with her current beekeeping buddy, Rachel Dove. Suzanne, Rachel and Bernard Brown all did the same Introduction to Beekeeping Course in 2010. Since then she has either kept bees jointly with Rachel or on her own when garden space has allowed. Suzanne has also experienced the trials and tribulations of "taking the bees to the heather".

Suzanne is now in her second term as a Trustee of the British Beekeepers Association where her considerable experience in Public Relations with the Environmental Agency will be of considerable benefit if the national body

is to realise its charitable objectives. Suzanne originates from "Last of the Summer Wine" country, Holmfirth, and she brings to the role of Chair the steady and determined outlook of those from that part of the world. As a trustee of BBKA and as the chair of WLBK Suzanne is taking on two integrated roles that I believe will benefit both organisations. We will not only have a feedback loop on what is current at BBKA, something that has been missing in the past, but Suzanne will have some understanding of the grassroots memberships' thinking. Our committee is nothing if not forthright.

Chris Cox, WLBK Secretary

Isn't spring such a welcome season? Practical beekeeping will be keeping us all more busy. My beekeeping buddy Rachel Dove and I keep encouraging each other, and thanks to Rachel's nurturing oversight the bees have overwintered well again.

Other beekeeping matters are my involvement in the BBKA Spring Convention, from 8-11 April at Harper Adams University in Newport, Shropshire. The Speakers Corner event has been brought together under my watch: informal sessions aligned with the trade show, and a great forum for learning more in a relaxed setting at the Welly Bar. As the new chair of the BBKA's governance committee I am working on the risk register and helping to plan the next Annual Delegates Meeting. Please think about propositions to put forward for consideration.

Then, of course, there is my new role as the WLBK chair. It is a great committee of exceptionally committed people, as always, much more than the sum of its parts. All skills and expertise are valued and have a place on a committee. That counts for beekeeping skills as well as what we have learned through life and work. I'd urge you to consider a role on the committee.

One of my first tests as WLBK committee chair was whether to print and distribute a guide to the branch, delivered to all members. After a spirited debate, the majority view was to physically reach out to all members after the exceptional couple of years we have all experienced. You will be receiving this useful document as a way of demonstrating that you matter; you make the branch; and even if you can't make a meeting in person, you have a contact. We felt the cost was worth the benefit of ensuring everyone receives a copy without having to print their own, which is not easy or desirable for everyone. We accept that all modes of communication have their limitations, but the committee hopes you appreciate the intention.

With that, best wishes for your April beekeeping and I hope to see you at an event soon.

Suzanne Bennett, WLBK Chair



BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

Just when I thought it was safe to come out....
In the mid March heat I did my first inspections. Most colonies had between three and nine frames of brood in all stages- except one drone layer. The rest of the colonies were crammed with stores and I cursed myself for over-feeding in the autumn. I hate to remove combs of stores or pollen this early in the year, just to make space. No need- the cold snap last week will have taken care of that- so maybe it all works for the best!

As soon as it warms up I shall be changing brood boxes and floors and adding supers but, first- the Spring Convention! My seconds frames are ordered and awaiting collection. Spring has certainly sprung.

- Do the first inspections if you haven't already. Choose a warm day and assess the BIAS, stores and space. Mark the queens while it is easy. Plan for a disease inspection soon.
- Review last year's hive records and make sure you have the kit for your plans for this year. Establish your goals for this season and print out new record sheets.
- Heft those hives- it's not too late for colonies to starve.
- Prepare to change your brood boxes and floors. A change of woodwork allows the bees to start afresh- but only do it on a warm day.
- Checks varroa levels if you haven't already- put in the boards for at least seven days and calculate the daily drop. Treat if you need to.
- Think about your training needs this year. Why not enrol for the Basic Assessment if you haven't done it already?

Jane Medwell



First inspections during mid-March's warm spell



A 'warm way' hive featuring combs at the front with brood and the combs at the back with stores



A 'cold way' hive featuring brood at the front of the comb near the entrance and the stores behind

WLBK 2022 SURVEY

Do you remember the survey of members views on the support provided by the branch a couple of years ago? Actually, it was in 2019/20 and our intention to follow up on the issues thrown up by it was de-railed by the pandemic. However, things are different now so, we thought it appropriate to conduct another survey to update our understanding whether Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers is meeting members' general expectations and wishes. We are also looking to establish those members who will be willing to undertake tasks supporting the running of the branch, e.g. school talks, show/event supervision etc, so we can follow up with the individuals.

You should, by now, have received an email from Messengerbee containing a link to the survey form. This is very straight forward and the overall time to put aside to complete it is about 5 minutes. Only those individual questions that members think relevant need to be completed.

There have been some instances of the email ending up in junk folders so here is the [link](#).

We are also looking to establish what the membership views the value-for-money status of each of the three elements that make up the current annual fee of £43; BBKA, WBA and ourselves.

Finally, there are a number of issues currently circulating relating to beekeeping and beekeeping issues (e.g. Honey Adulteration, Neonicotinoids Licencing, Queen Importation etc) and this raises the question of whether British Beekeeping Association should be a campaigning organisation or not. Just asking?

Please do find the time to complete the survey. It will help enormously in keeping the Branch's performance relevant. It closes on Wednesday 20th April 2022 with the first feedback of results in the May issue of BeeTalk.

Chris Cox, WLBK Secretary

SWARMS 2022

SWARMS COLLECTORS

If you are up for collecting swarms and wish to receive swarm calls from the public, register your details on the enrolment form at this [link](#). 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 you receive a call try and obtain as much information from the caller, a photo might help as you do not want a wasted journey for a wasp's nest. On arrival take time to assess the risks involved and only collect swarms that are safe to do so. As reported in last month's Bee Talk, the branch has purchased a bee vac that can be used for the more difficult collections. If you have any interesting collections throughout the season and would like to include them in Bee Talk please contact me on the email addresses below.

SWARMS WANTED

The swarms wanted register for 2022 is now live and it can be accessed on this [link](#).

After submitting your details please be ready to receive a call from a Swarm Collector. The size and quality of swarms may be variable and collectors will give preference to members that do not have bees. You may be asked to contribute up to a maximum of £20.00 towards the collector's expenses. When you have received your swarm, please contact me - swarms@warleambees.org.uk or price_chris@btinternet.com - so I can remove you from the list.

Chris Price, Swarm Co-ordinator

COUNTY AGM

Over 80 beekeepers attended the recent County AGM to hear reports on activities for the year from 1st December 2020 to 30th November 2021.

As for finances, they learnt that the reduction in income due to Covid-19 was substantially offset by a reduction in costs. As a result, there will be no increase to the County's element of our subscriptions for 2023. Membership County-wide had increased and now stands at 853 beekeeping members and 129 Associates. Of these WLBK made up 27%. The next largest Branch being Birmingham accounting for 13 %. The County now has a completely re-worked [website](#) which is well worth a browse. The password for the members' area is varroa. The most important part of the event was the almost 100% support for changing the Association's charitable status. This decision will set the organisation up to meet the demands of the future.

REFURB NEWS

Work is underway to give our extraction unit at Hurst Farm its makeover. We can already see a difference and expect it to be complete in the next couple of weeks. The work is being carried out by Chris Fisher Maintenance. Chris happens to be one of our active members so we are expecting great things. So, ... no pressure Chris!

APIARY UPDATE

June should see the completion of the works to re-align that part of Dalehouse Lane outside our former apiary and September, the completion of the whole reconfiguration of the Stoneleigh roundabout/A46 roadworks project. Consequently, we are currently in discussions with Warwickshire County Council (the landowner) about the extent of area which will be available to us so that hopefully we can re-occupy the apiary in time for the start of the 2023 beekeeping season.

OUT APIARY

There is an opportunity for an out-apiary in a wild part of a large garden in the village of Lowsonford. Security and access are excellent as is the forage potential. The site will accommodate a single beekeeper and up to 4 colonies. For further details contact bernardnbrown@outlook.com

MARCH MEMBERS' MEETING

For our penultimate Members' meeting this season we showed the film: 'The Pollinators'. It follows bee farmers as they transport their bees across America from apples to the blueberries and onto the almond crop and so on. They share their struggles with the American farming system honestly and it is at times hard to watch.

Next month our last meeting this season, I am hoping we will have Barbara Smith from the Thriving Hive Project come and give us some early findings of her research project which many of us took part in last year.

Rachel Dove, Members' meeting co-ordinator



CAN YOU TALK?

We are being invited increasingly to give presentations of our craft to local organisations and schools and are seeking to extend our list of members willing to help out. A reflection of the current concern for nature and the environment, talks such as these sit full square with our charitable objectives and is seen as an important activity for the Branch. Should you be interested please contact either pares.h.n.pankhania@gmail.com or bernardnbrown@outlook.com.

'REAL' HONEY

Adulteration of honey is very topical at the moment with campaigns afoot to draw the attention of both the government and the public to the issue. Petitions have been initiated on the government website to spur the government into action. For our part, we have designed a banner and leaflet with the same message promoting our real honey for display at our public shows.

SUMMER SHOWS

Excitement is mounting about the imminent delivery of our new beekeeping demonstrating tent. Almost twice the size of our existing one we hope to avoid the risks of tripping over the discarded lifts of the WBC and falling against the mesh walls with a hot smoker in hand, which as you can imagine would have most unfortunate consequences. We are planning its debut at the Kenilworth Show on the 4th June so do swing by and check it out.

Invitations to strut our stuff at local shows are coming in steadily. The most recent is the Ecofest event being held in the Leamington Pump Room gardens on 3rd September and the Canals and Rivers Trust family day which is a first for us. This being held in Coventry to coincide with World Bee Day on 21st May. These two will more than compensate for the regrettable cancellation of the Leamington Peace Festival this year, which has been the highlight of our programme for many years.

There are also two other events being held locally which the BBKA a display team are supporting and to which we will also be contributing stewards. These are the Queen's Platinum Ju-bee-lee Family Fun Days at Compton Verney on 31st May - 1st June and The Ragley Game Fair on the 29th-31st July at Ragley Hall.

In stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of these events, the opportunity to embrace the rural idyl of Charlecote Mill on their open days is a welcome way to chill out whilst promoting our craft.

We will be inviting members to volunteer to steward these events in the coming weeks, so keep an eye on your inboxes. Helping on a 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. It also provides a unique training opportunity by rubbing shoulders with the more experienced members on the team.

Bernard Brown

TASTER DAY

There are still places available on our Taster-Day on May 8th at Kings Hill Nurseries so do please spread the word. With Easter in the middle of April how about suggesting that this would make an unusual Easter gift for a special person. We can provide gift certificates. Bookings can be made by going to our [website](http://www.beeconnected.org.uk) and following the links at the right hand side of the home page.

BEE CONNECTED

The website beeconnected.org.uk is a way of connecting bee keepers to farmers. If a farmer is going to spray in the vicinity of your hives you will receive an email alert so you can decide to take action. It is certainly worth a look. Since watching The Pollinators at our Members' Meeting in March I must say I feel a sense of urgency now about the use of pesticides, fungicides, in fact all the 'cides'!

Rachel Dove

PLANT OF THE MONTH: OS RAPE



Image courtesy, Barry Meatyard

Yes, it's that time again when a few fields are turning yellow with Oilseed Rape flowers, welcoming our girls to their first great feast of the year!

Oilseed rape, also known as rapeseed or rape, or more often OSR, is a cabbage – a member of the Brassicaceae family. It is widely cultivated for its seed which is rich in erucic acid. In high concentrations, this acid can be toxic to man, so a food grade rapeseed oil has been developed called canola oil or low erucic acid rapeseed oil (LEAR for short). In addition to the edible form, rapeseed oil is also used to produce animal feed and biodiesel.

But the bees aren't too interested in the oil, it's the wonderful bright yellow flowers that they are attracted to with their abundance of glucose-rich nectar. The plants grow to around 40cm tall with flowers consisting of four open petals allowing easy access for foraging. True monofloral rapeseed honey is very pale yellow in colour and can have quite a spicy, peppery after-taste (from its cabbage origins!) In a good season there can be a huge honey crop, but it comes with a down-side. The low fructose to glucose ratio results in rapid granulation within the comb making extraction very difficult. Once bottled, it will crystallise in a few weeks.

Maggie Curley

WANTED: MEETING CO-ORDINATOR

Members will be aware that our Autumn to Spring series of members meeting is shortly coming to an end. These normally take place on the 3rd Thursday off each Month and have a very varied content ranging from talks on beekeeping and related flora and fauna; to films and question-and-answer sessions to help our members with their beekeeping. The aim is to bring members together to share their experiences in a semi social and friendly environment. All beekeepers together as it were.

At the last committee meeting Rachel Dove, who has held this role for several years including over the Covid-19 restrictions period, announced her wish to step down, primarily as the current timings of meeting clashed with her new job commitments. As a result we are looking for a member of Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers to step in and take on this role.

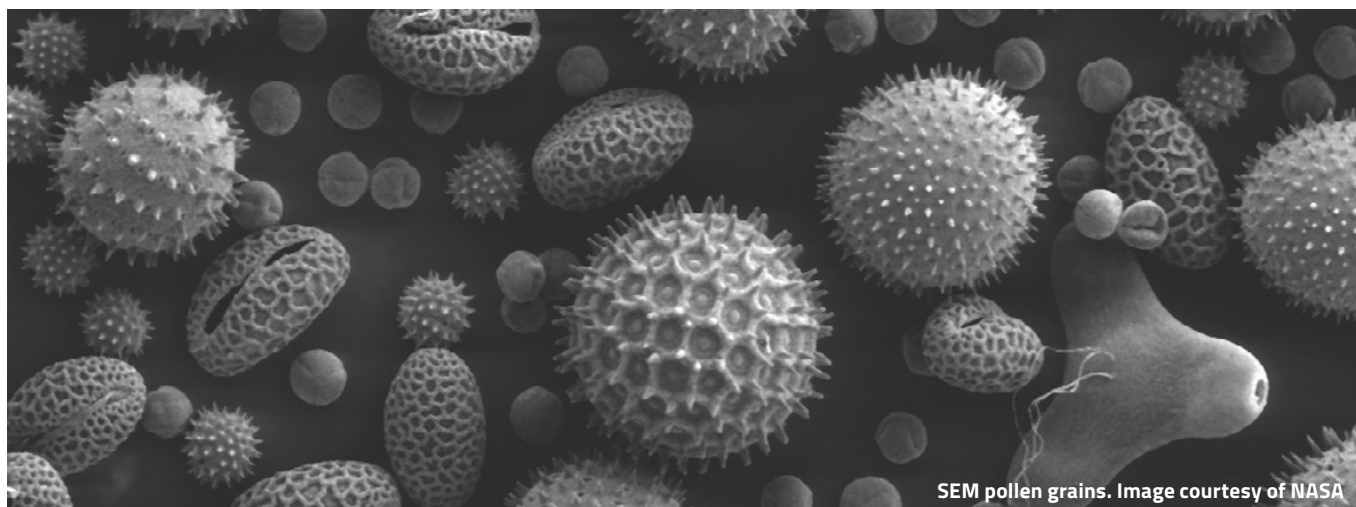
Yes, we have a job description. The key is co-ordination. Identifying topics and approaches, sourcing speakers (other beekeeping associations are very helpful with this), booking venues (Kings Hill Nurseries comes to mind), promoting (via MessengerBee and BeeTalk) etc. We would ideally wish the person taking on this role to join the branch committee (which meets 6 times per year) where ideas may be shared, and assistance given.

If you are interested in taking on this role and would like further information please contact me by email: secretary@warleambees.org.uk.

Chris Cox

WLBK Secretary

A PASSION FOR POLLEN



SEM pollen grains. Image courtesy of NASA

One of the most reassuring signs for beekeepers in early Spring is the sight of pollen loaded bees flying back to the hives. Tradition states that this is a good thing since the pollen is being used to feed developing larvae in the brood box, and that the colony has successfully come through the winter. Pollen is the ultimate balanced packaged food and comprises on average 23% protein, 30% digestible carbohydrates, 25% sugars and 5% fats with little room left for water and a protective coat. It's therefore cost effective in energy terms to fly a distance to collect it.

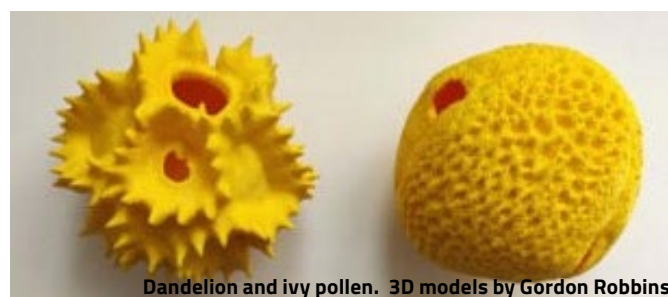
But how it is that bees are 'stealing' pollen from the flowers that they visit? The answer to that goes back at least 145 million years to the beginning of the Cretaceous period, and before the proliferation of the dinosaurs, to the origins and diversification of the flowering plants. At that time insects were already abundant and looking for an easy meal. Pollen provided for that at an increasing array of 'take away' outlets. What followed was the development of mutual arrangements between bees (and other insects) and the newly evolved flowers – involving some intriguing mechanisms for the benefit of each including colour, scent and nectaries to attract and reward the bees, modified floral parts and rucksacks in the form of hairy legs to carry pollen.

The essential purpose of a flower is to function as an organ of sexual reproduction – a set of structures that facilitate the fusing of a female cell (the egg) with a male cell (pollen), the ideal outcome being pollen from one flower reaching the eggs of another – the 'cross pollination' that many gardeners will be familiar with. In order for this to happen pollen must be released from the anthers and transferred to the stigma of another flower. This can happen either by wind, as in grasses and trees such as hazel or by animals including bees.

Once on the stigma the pollen grain develops a root-like 'pollen tube' that grows down the style towards and into the ovary. There it penetrates an ovule where a pollen nucleus fuses with a female nucleus, resulting in the development of a seed. Pollen tubes can easily be grown under the microscope (see image of birch pollen tubes). Pollen grains are some of the most spectacular structures in nature and have a wide

range of surface features that enable them to be identified (see hazel pollen image). These are best seen in a 'scanning electron microscope' (see SEM image above), but with modern 3-D printing technology can also be accurately modelled. Fellow member Gordon Robbins has been experimenting with this (see image below) and we hope to build on his work to produce teaching aids for education purposes, and because pollen is such fascinating material.

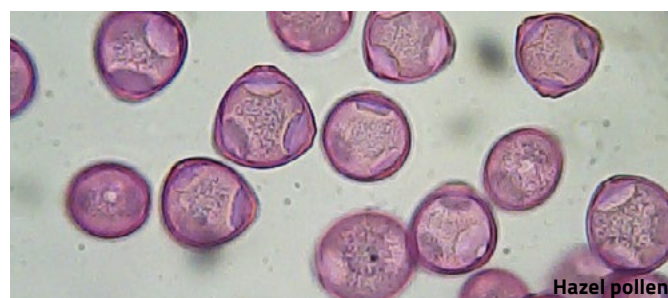
Barry Meatyard



Dandelion and ivy pollen. 3D models by Gordon Robbins



Birch Pollen tubes



Hazel pollen

THE FUTURE OF 'BEEKEEPING'



I guess it was inevitable that the inexorable march towards the industrialisation of our food production would turn in the direction of honey.

An Israeli food-tech firm, **Bee-io Honey**, aims to eliminate human nutrition dependency on bees, and make premium honey accessible anywhere, anytime by developing an industrial process for the production of “cultured” honey. Under laboratory conditions, and using “natural nectar”, this company has focussed on the development of an “artificial bee stomach,” which mimics the enzymatic activity and the specific conditions and processes that occur in the bee’s stomach. They are also working on technologies to replicate “natural” nectar to increase the capacity of honey production in a more efficient, fast process.

Is “cultured” honey, produced from chemically created nectar, the way of things to come? According to Bee-io, it has many benefits such as: not containing antibiotics, pesticides and toxins; helps the ecological fabric by removing the need to use bees for its production (not sure about this); it allows for on-demand production, regardless of the seasons, the weather, flowering and climate change; and it addresses a major shortage: the rate of honey consumption and the demand for honey, globally, exceeding the rate of production.

Although the advent of cheap plentiful supplies of consistent

taste and quality honey will remove one of the motivations to keep bees, I can’t see it stopping us beekeepers from pursuing our craft.

Yesterday I opened a hive only to be overwhelmed by a smell: the damp, oozy, warm odour of brood, pollen, wax, and nectar. I stopped to inhale, aaaaahhhh.

..... and how about the taste of honey straight from the hive? Warm. Viscous. Individual. Still tended by bees. Honey like this bears no resemblance to honey in a jar. Unextracted. Unfiltered. Unmixed.or the sound of a busy hive? Like a finely tuned engine. A contented kitty. The soft susurrant of a sleeping baby. Reliable. Unceasing. Life affirming.

I know of no other hobby that is so tactile. The stickiness of honey. The tackiness of propolis. The silken texture of beeswax. The slippery, mucilaginous feel of royal jelly. The muscle-tearing weight of a full brood box. The burning heat of a sting.

And let’s not forget the sights. To me, nothing comes close to a swarm for pure visual enchantment. Nature choreographed in a way no man could replicate, a visual reminder of the life force. Or how about a lacy festoon of bees, complicit, wilful, turning labour into artwork not forgetting that of a swarm marching into a hive.

As fellow beekeepers, I’m sure you know exactly what I mean. Beekeeping is so much more than the mere pursuit of honey.

Bernard Brown

HONEY SHOW UKRAINE APPEAL

The National Honey Show has set up a Just Giving site to show Ukrainian beekeepers we are thinking of them. Beekeeping is a major economic activity. Approximately 700,000 people, 1.5% of the Ukrainian population, are engaged in the production of honey. Ukraine is ranked as the number one country in Europe and among the top five countries in the world for honey production, producing 75 thousand metric tons annually.

Petro Prokopovych, a famous Ukrainian beekeeper, who developed commercial beekeeping in the country, started using a form of moveable frame hive 75 years before Langstroth refined the design we use today.

Donations, for now, will go to the Disasters and Emergency Committee for the benefit of all Ukrainians. When the time is right, we will look at how we can directly assist Ukrainian beekeepers.

The stated aim is to show solidarity with our Ukrainian friends but so far, less than 100 have responded to our appeal. If each UK beekeeper would donate £5 it would raise well over £150,000.

Could you add your support with a £5 donation? It can be anonymous if you wish. Gift Aid will add a further 25%. This isn’t just about the money. It’s about the number of beekeepers stepping forward to show support.

To donate, go to www.honeyshow.co.uk and click on the link under the heading for the 91st National Honey Show.

HINTS & TIPS

Many thanks to Mike Townsend who put together these tips some time ago. Very apt as the weather gets warmer and we remember we have a garden out there somewhere!

If a few simple steps are followed honey bees are quite tolerant of gardening near a beehive.

- 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 a single bee to come and 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.



Image courtesy of Bee Talk editor, Tanya Weaver, who soon learnt her lesson after mowing near her hives and so the next time took extra precaution inside her bee suit .

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.
Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
OF WARWICKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
REG CHARITY NO. 500276
WWW.WARLEAMBEES.ORG.UK