



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

WLBK'S INTRO TO BEEKEEPING GOES INTERNATIONAL!

WLBK held our Introduction to Beekeeping courses in March. There were 50 delegates, with 25 attending on each weekend. On the first weekend we were delighted to welcome two delegates from Iceland, Freyr and Saeunn, who had flown over specifically to attend our course, having found that there was no course available in their country. Iceland and Bees you may ask! Yes, there are bees in a small part of Iceland, and we were really interested in finding out more from our visitors (turn to page 7). They use Langstroth hives predominately in Iceland, and their summer lasts about three months. We plan to keep in touch with them, and follow their journey as new beekeepers.

A quote from "Bee Culture": In a population of 330,000, Iceland claims approximately 100 beekeepers and 300 hives. Over the history of the country there have been several attempts to import and sustain honey bee colonies, the most recent started in 1998. When bees are imported, they come from Åland, an island in Sweden. These bees have been isolated from the mainland and must be certified healthy and disease free by a veterinarian before making the voyage to Iceland. To date, Icelandic beekeepers enjoy the luxury of not having to deal with Varroa mites.

We also had a former South African farmer, Mike Maclean, attend the course. He had this to say about the experience:

"I wish to thank everyone involved in a really fantastic experience. Firstly as a recycled teenager of 69, who used to farm in South Africa and made the decision to sell up everything, and after 45 years of marriage, my wife and I left with 4 suitcases, to start a new life.

With a passion in our hearts and excited energy, we set forth to share it with our first grand child and our UK family. We have been here for two years now, working hard and settling in. Then the itch and yearn to get involved in some sort of animal husbandry again would not leave me no matter how hard I tried. I have learnt so much from everyone involved in the course and made to feel so at home. I am now going to be doing something to satisfy my yearning of getting and giving to Nature."

Our second weekend was just as full-on as the first. Among the delegates were two young men who had a particular interest in bees.



Freyr and Saeunn with Alan Deeley



The three young beekeepers learning how to make a frame

Woody who is 13 is interested in all insects and currently also keeps 10 colonies of ants. Noah who is 10 was also an enthusiastic learner. Our own Betty who is 9 enjoyed their company and it was good to see future young beekeepers asking many questions and getting completely involved with the training course.

The final presentation of the weekend was given by Betty who told the group of her involvement with Bees Abroad and that she had raised £900 for the charity last year.

Val Dillon

CHAIR'S APRIL MESSAGE

Thank goodness we now have longer days and there's an increasing amount of spring forage for our pollinators. In our local church yard are *Anemone Blanda* with their delicate lilac daisy-like petals.

This column comes to you hot on the heels of our committee meeting where we heard of the great success of the Introduction to Beekeeping session. We welcome 12 new members as a result, including three new junior members (see page 7). It's clear that Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers has a very active programme of events which we can be proud of. I was welcomed when I offered my support as a new member and still feel privileged to do my bit for the branch. Please be assured that any help and support you offer will be accepted with open arms! On that note, the Branch at a Glance leaflet will be updated and available on our website. If you would like a printed copy, please email secretary@warleambees.org.uk.

Onto the activities which come to you courtesy of the branch... if you're out and about you will see our observation and show hives at the Warwick Museum and at Jephson Gardens. Plus there is a great programme of summer meetings coming together. You'll

hear about these in Bee Talk and on our website calendar.

WLBK have been invited to take part in some 16 events over the coming months, which is a testament to how successful we are at enthusing people about bees and their role in the environment. Just some of the places there will be WLBK stands, or WLBK members on national stands, include Hill Close Gardens in Warwick for World Bee Day; Gardeners World Live; Compton Verney and the Ragley Game Fair.

Lastly, put a date in your diary for the WLBK Honey Show on Saturday 23rd September when our best products of the hive are on show. To help you get the best from your hives, we are putting the final updated details together for the extraction unit, including a training session on 13th May on Food Hygiene. See our website for more information.

Do get in touch with me (suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk) or any of the committee if you're interested in getting involved with any of these activities, at whatever level.

Suzanne Bennett, WLBK Chair



BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

This month, Spring has to happen! After a long, cold and wet March, April has to be better. The things we need to do this April are the ones we might have expected in March! However, when the weather DOES warm up you will face rapid build-up.

- Continue to heft or weigh regularly to check your colonies have plenty of stores until the weather improves. They may still run out of carbohydrate and starve.
- Prepare your hive records- look back at last year and decide what your goals are for this year.
- Watch (on warmer days) to see what pollen they bring in. There is plenty of blackthorn, willow, dandelion (the all-you-can-eat buffet of the bee world) about. Pollen means brood rearing.
- Time for a varroa and nosema check. Put the board in for at least seven days, divide the mite drop by the number of days and use the beebase calculator. Treat if you need to.
- When the bees are flying a good deal you can remove the mouseguards (and if you have hard floors, scrape them). Woodpecker guards can come off.
- When the weather is **very** good (for more than a few days) and do your first inspection. Is the queen laying? Is there pollen and stores? Is there too much pollen choking up the brood? Mark the queen- red this year.
- Decide which colonies need a wax change and start planning now, before the supers go on- they are bound to build up fast.
- When you have had at least three rounds of brood and it is warm you can choose to do shook swarms or Bailey frame changes.
- If one of your colonies unaccountably does not build up collect a sample of 30 bees. Barry Meatyard or Jane Medwell will do you a test. Just deliver them 30 frozen bees (and your name) and they will let you know. If there is a high level of nosema, it's time for a Bailey for a weak colony.
- Add a queen excluder and super when there are six frames of bees (or before) so that you can relieve pressure on the colony. The flow will need space!

Jane Medwell



MARCH MEMBERS' MEETING

Our March speaker, Alan Deeley, and his subject attracted an audience of 35! The most popular of this season's talks. Our bees use 10lb of honey to produce one lb of wax, so wax is a valuable commodity – essential to the bees to house brood, and to store pollen, nectar and honey. Beekeepers should make good use of it, and that means processing old wax – brace comb, honey cappings, and frame wax from the apimelter. Processing involves melting the wax with rainwater, filtering it through a sieve lined with a nappy liner and then pouring it into a ceramic mould to set. The melting temperature is important – not over 66°C – over-heated wax is dark – the best wax a primrose yellow. If you want to do no more you can exchange wax blocks for foundation at trade fairs and reduce your costs, but wax can be profitably used to make candles, furniture polish and even cosmetics. Alan makes and sells candles and explained how he does this, pointing out the importance of the correct wick size and supporting the wick so it stays in the middle of the candle. Clean wax for candles should be melted over water;

using a bain-marie can ensure the wax does not get too hot and spoil or worse, catch fire.

Wax can be a messy substance and is very hard to remove from floors, work surfaces and utensils. To ensure domestic harmony, cover the floor and surfaces and DO NOT use cooking equipment except items which have been discarded by the family cook(s). The nappy liner used earlier will make a good fire-lighter, but the sieve should be kept for wax processing only!

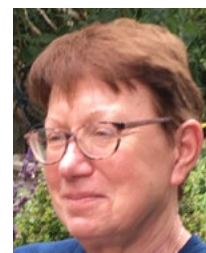
APRIL MEETING:

THURSDAY APRIL 20TH 7.30 PM AT KINGS HILL NURSERY

Kenneth Durk, who works with Bees Abroad will give a talk, Bees and Elephants. There will be cake but no buns for the elephants!

This is our last monthly meeting of the 2022-23 winter season, talks will resume on Thursday 21st September, 7.30 at Kings Hill Nursery.

Judith Masson



LOOKING AHEAD TO SWARMING



As we spring further into Spring it's natural for many of our bees to think about swarming. In our branch we would like to hear from those who would be interested in both collecting and receiving swarms:

SWARM COLLECTORS

It's now time to think about becoming a swarm collector and/or increasing the number of your stocks for the forthcoming season. So, if you are up for collecting swarms and wish to receive swarm calls from the public, register your details on the enrolment form [here 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 nest. On arrival take time to assess the risks involved and only collect swarms that are safe to do so.

SWARMS WANTED

The swarms wanted register for 2023 is now live and if you can assist in homing a swarm you can register this on our "Swarms Wanted" list at the following [link](#).

After submitting your details please be ready to receive a call from the Swarm Collector; members that answer their phones promptly will be most successful. The size and quality of swarms may be variable and collectors will give preference to members that do not have bees.

Members requesting swarms 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 on either of the following emails to remove your details from the list: swarms@warleambees.org.uk or price_chris@btinternet.com
Chris Price, Swarm Co-ordinator

NEW LOOK FOR TRAINING APIARY



Team photo left to right – Maggie, Steve, Richard, Nicki, Barry, Chris

Throughout the autumn and winter, while the girls have been all tucked up warm, the training team has been busy on the ground work. There has been weeding, pruning, rubbish clearing, mending hive stands as well as strimming the outside areas. Andy's idea of taking down most of the old lean-to shed and moving the small shed has proved genius. It has opened up a whole new area where we have been able to move several of the hives, giving us more room around each to work with the trainees. Twelve strong colonies ready for the new season and all we need now is some fine, sunny weather.

The Training Team

BEE SAFARI

During the summer months (May to August) there will be Bee Safaris, visits to members' apiaries on the third Thursday of each month, followed by refreshments at a local pub. Details will be in the next issue of Bee Talk, and on the web. Numbers are limited for the visits so you will need to book, but anyone can join us for bee talk at the pub. The chosen pubs will be listed with details of each safari. Please check the web for visit timings, these are agreed with our apiary hosts.

DAY COURSE

Andy Pedley, author of Food safety for beekeepers is running a course for us on **Saturday 13th May 2023**, Food hygiene and honey labelling for Beekeepers, **9.30 – 3 pm**. There is no charge for attending but numbers are limited so please book through the website. This event will also mark the revised arrangements for the Extraction Unit to ensure that it is always up to scratch for users.

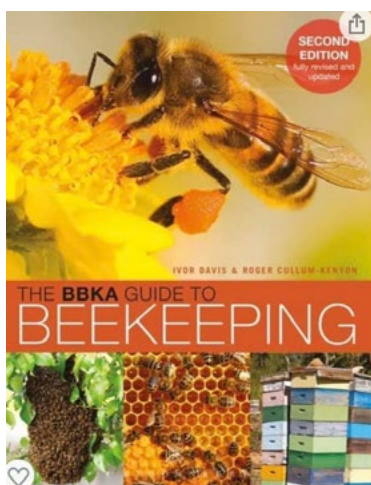
SHOWS CALENDAR 2023

WLBK will be coming to a show near you. We will be inviting members to volunteer to steward these shows in the coming weeks. This involves sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with the public, the sales of honey and wax products, demonstrating various pieces of beekeeping equipment and the 'little buzzers' stand.

20 th May	Hill Close Gardens
27 th May	Kings Hill Nursery
3 rd June	Kenilworth Show
11 th June	Open Farm Day
17 th -18 th June	Kineton Music Festival
1 st July	Napton Eco Fair
1 st July	Shotteswell Fete
5 th August	Rowington & Lowsonford Flower Show
5 th August	Dassett Country Show

Chris Price, Exhibitions & Public Displays

LIBRARY NEWS



I remember starting out on my beekeeping journey and asking for recommendations for a book for novices. I was guided to this very useful book:

The BBKA Guide to beekeeping by Ivor Davis & Roger Cullum Kenyon, introduces the reader to beekeeping, including such areas as the workings of the colony, the structure of a hive, how to acquire bees and keep them healthy and what happens in each month in a beekeeping year. Each chapter is accompanied by anecdotes, answers to frequently asked

questions and fascinating facts about bees and honey.

The library has two copies available for loan at the next members meeting on 20th April 2023 at Kings Hill Nursery, 7.30pm.

Jackie Ledwidge, WLBK Librarian



HAVE YOU TRIED TANGING?

Will tanging bring your bees to ground? Image source: Bee Culture



When playing charades a couple of Christmases ago, a friend of mine and I were challenged to mime the title of the notorious film 'Last Tango in Paris'. After a number of ineffective dumb shows, he finally broke the rules by saying 'Pardon Monsieur, we 'ave only ze one fizzy orange left'.

All of which has nothing to do with the ancient – very ancient – art of tanging. Forget the fruit products; to tang is to twang or clang metal. And its origins lie, apparently, in the legend of Chronos and Melissa and their son Zeus. According to the story, Chronos the King of Crete was in the habit of eating their offspring. So Melissa hid her child Zeus in a cave; but he could not be stopped from crying. To disguise his wails, Melissa's servants would bang pots and pans. One day, while they were doing this, a swarm of bees fell from a tree.

Chronos was King of Crete around the Bronze Age. Tanging can only have followed the invention of bronze, since only then were sheets of metal available to tap or hammer. According to Betsy Powner, writing in the Daily Mail in 1911, it is essential to tap metal on metal – in her case, a key on a warming pan. Tanging is most effective as soon as possible after the swarming bees leave

the hive. A later writer, L R Croft, claims 50% success in 'Curiosities of Beekeeping' from Northern Bee Books.

What happens? Bees have ears – they have a sense of hearing. Why else would young queens, for example, pipe? So they will hear the 'rough music', and may respond.

Why should it work? There are various theories, as so often when it comes to bee behaviour. One is that tanging mimics the sound of thunder. Bees naturally head for home in thunderstorms. But the pitch is quite different from that of struck metal. More likely, the clanging of metal matches the frequency of the young queen's piping and interrupts or masks it. The swarm fails to form correctly and can fall from its perch. It's then possible, with a skep and a smoker, to guide the bees into a hive.

How did the practice start? Suggestions are that metal was tanged to keep people away from a swarm; but as we all know, bees are more docile in a swarm with no honey to protect, than at other times. Perhaps the clanging was used to claim the swarm. Or perhaps it was just a coincidence. But the attached photograph of Ms Croft, coated in bees while tanging, suggests there is some truth in the practice.

John Stringer

TASTER DAYS — WE NEED YOUR HELP

We currently have two people fully paid up for the May Taster Day so, if you know of anyone who might be interested in learning more about what beekeeping involves, please do encourage them to sign up. The link to the club page for the Taster Days is [here](#). We also need assistance with the following tasks (for both May and September):

- Meet and greet and general assistance during the day (full day or two people to do half a day each)
 - Someone to organise the washing of the bee suits after the event and to ensure that they are returned to their rightful owners promptly.
 - We may also need extra hands to assist with the apiary session in the afternoon (this will depend on how many we have who want to attend).
- Many thanks.

Paul Day (paul@paulday.co.uk)

Jane Richmond (jane@j-richmond.co.uk)

COUNTY AGM

Forty four county members attended its AGM on Wednesday 29th March. The good news was that subscriptions will remain unaltered for the forthcoming year (2024) but the County is struggling to fill a number of officer posts. We are looking for a chair elect to take over in 2024 for two years, an Asian Hornet Co-ordinator, BDI representative and National Honey Show delegate. If anyone is interested you can find out more about these roles by contacting the County Secretary, Jane Nimmo on secretary@wbka.org.uk.

KENILWORTH CASTLE APIARY

Our girls in the two skeps have been flying and hopefully will survive and prosper once the weather improves.

INTRODUCTORY COURSE STATS

A brief analysis of the 50 delegates signed up for the ITB revealed that 30 came from outside our patch, the Warwick District Council area. This was made up as follows:-

Coventry – 18

Stratford 3

Rugby 3

Nuneaton 2

Banbury 2

Iceland 2

Our reputation clearly spreads far and wide.

Of the 50 delegates, 22 were workers and 28 drones. Still some way to go for gender equality but we are going in the right direction, don't you think?

HOW THEY DO IT IN NEW ZEALAND



On a recent trip to New Zealand, Val Dillon took this photo. A beekeeper's dream or nightmare depending on whether it has already been prepared for the jar or is waiting to be processed?

"DO YOU ACCEPT FOREIGNERS?"

For several years, in the municipal office in Egilsstaðir, Iceland, a colleague and I have talked about our common interest in beekeeping. I, Sæunn, work in social service as a consultant in the field of disabled children. My colleague, Freyr, works as an environmental manager but has recently transferred to The Environment Agency of Iceland.

Our interest in bees differs quite a bit. I am very fond of honey and while abroad I focus on hunting down farmers' markets to get natural honey while others might go hiking or shopping. On the other hand, Freyr is not a big fan of honey, but he is interested in the lives of bees and their importance in nature. During our breaks we'd often talk about bees and our interest in becoming beekeepers.

In Iceland there is a working Bee Society and where we live, only one beekeeper. But he's still quite a distance away. Egilsstaðir is about four hours away from Reykjavík by car and one hour by plane.

The Bee Society in Iceland usually holds a course in beekeeping but that course has been closed for some time and it was unclear whether it would be held again in the Spring of 2023.

August 2022, I got confirmation from the Bee Society in Iceland that their course in beekeeping would most likely not be held next Spring. So, I got the idea to google "Best beekeeping course for beginners in England". Google recommended Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers Course as the best for beginners.

So there was nothing else to do but to send them a mail which promptly ended with us booking a course in March 2023.

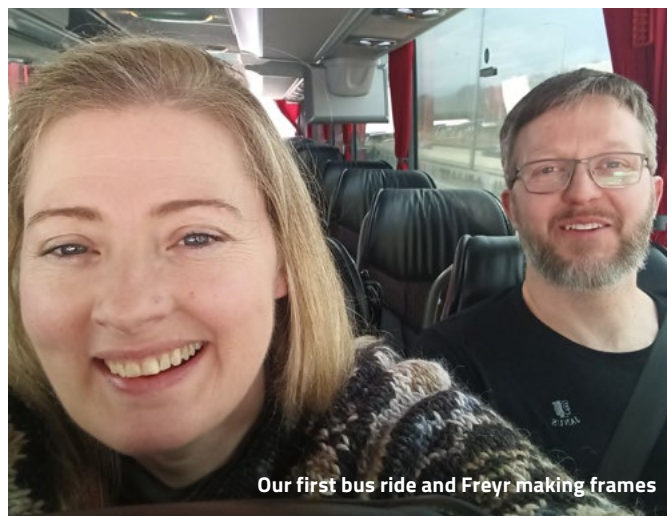
We had planned to go together with our spouses as a party of four. Though our spouses aren't interested in beekeeping they would have undoubtedly still enjoyed the trip for something else. We waited to book flights and accommodation in Birmingham but as it turned out, neither of our spouses could make it.

Funnily enough, a message came from the Icelandic Bee Society that a course will be launched in February 2023 until June and new members of the society will get priority for bee packages, so we decided to go to that too. You can only get bee packs through the Icelandic beekeeping association, but bees are imported from the Åland Islands, which is a small island between Finland and Sweden. The bees from the Åland Islands are free from diseases and Varroa. And as such there have been no diseases or varroa found in bees in Iceland.

Due to Railway strikes our trip to Kenilworth started with a bus trip. Geoff greeted us royally with the Icelandic flag and took us to our accommodation. In the evening we met a few WLBK members over a meal. We were the very first international students there. During our meal, there was a lot of talk about beekeeping and a lot of laughter.

The course itself started well and we were very impressed to see how many people gave a lecture. It was nice to see the different methods and approaches to beekeeping. But as the saying goes, if you ask five beekeepers the same question, you'll get six different answers.

We liked the set-up of the course, listening to a lecture and then getting up and "learning by hand". Also, practical things were covered, not just what to do, but most importantly - how to do



Our first bus ride and Freyr making frames



it. And it didn't hurt to have a cup of coffee and slice of cake in between. We do love some cake. I'm also amused to say that we have never said the following phrase as often as we did during our time there: "Sure we're married, just not to each other".

The rest of the training went well. It was organised, theoretical and extremely professional. We were impressed by the amount of patience and tolerance the bee instructors showed us newcomers. Dividing the group into small units and having a chat with the instructors was also encouraging because we could discuss detailed ideas and there were often fun discussions about different approaches that people were thinking about. It was good to hear the instructors' experience and recommendations so that we could start our ideas off right.

After the trip in Kenilworth, we managed to spread the interest in bees to our local community in Egilsstaðir and now the people here have joined the beekeeping course in Iceland.

But of course, we recommend the course at Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers. There is every chance you will see us there again, and maybe someday we'll be able to bring our spouses along too.

Sæunn Sigvaldadóttir

EXOTIC HIVES SERIES –

WARRÉ TOP BAR HIVE

Top Bar hives take many forms and their origins date back hundreds of years. The Warré hive is a top bar hive, usually referred to as 'The People's Hive' in France where it was designed by Abbé Émile Warré (1867 – 1951) and described in his book *Beekeeping for All*.

As the hive does not use conventional frames like the other hives described so far the calculation of the number of cells available for brood in each hive box is approximate. The National hive figures are given for comparison.

As can be seen from the illustration the Warré hive consists of a tower of identical hive boxes plus floor, top bar cover cloth, quilt and roof.

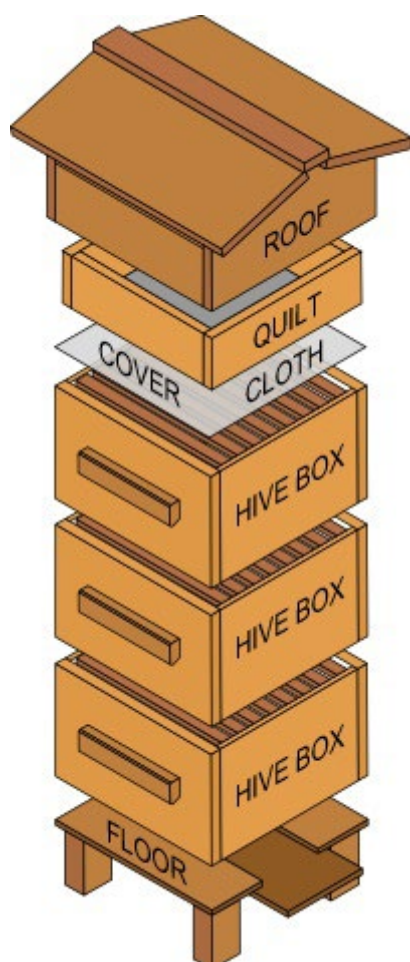
The usual procedure is to introduce bees into a single box. When more space is required a second box is added below the first, called **nadiring**. This process can be repeated as often as required.

In each hive box there are eight top bars which are usually supplied with wax comb guides. The 24mm wide bars rest in a rebate cut into the thickness of the hive wall and are spaced 12mm apart.

The cover cloth rests on the bars in the top box and can be of hessian or other breathable cloth. Above the cloth is placed the quilt which is essentially a shallow box with a cloth base and filled with wood shavings, dried leaves etc to act as insulation.

The roof is placed over the quilt but there is no direct passage of air from the hive to the vents in the roof.

HIVE DATA	NATIONAL 14×12	HIVE DATA	WARRÉ
Brood frame	14" x 8½"	Brood box cross section	300 x 210mm
Super frame	14" x 5½"	Honey box cross section	300 x 210mm
Frames / brood box	11	Top bars / box	8
Cells / brood box	54,000	Cells / brood box	39,000
Lug length	1½"	Lug length	Approx 1cm



The essential feature of Warré beekeeping is to reduce disturbance and intervention to a minimum. If a hive box needs to be inspected it can be removed and tilted over with the combs in the vertical plane.

To remove a comb for inspection or honey extraction may require some cutting between walls and comb. Once free, the comb should be lifted gently and placed in a comb holder.

Warré developed his system before Varroa mites arrived in France. The consensus is that long term the bees will adapt to the mite. Mite population can be considerably reduced by artificial swarming techniques and could be further reduced by treatment while the colony is brood-less.

Honey can be collected from brood free combs by using a honey press or other suitable device. The remaining wax is a potentially valuable by product.

This hive is not recommended for novices unless an experienced mentor is on hand.

For more information a good starting point would be the Biobees website www.warre.biobees.com/

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BEEKEEPER WANTED

East Lodge is the building at the Willes Road entrance to the Jephson Gardens, Leamington Spa with the building acting as the centre for Leamington Studio Artists (always worth a visit). The District Council planted up and maintain the garden with bee friendly plants and they are very supportive of our having a working hive in this garden.

For a number of years, a WBC hive has stood in the Bee Garden to the rear of East Lodge, with visitors seeing working bees. Initially there was two WBC but following a visit from vandals we reduced the presence to one with anti-vandal measures that makes manipulations slightly more awkward.

Unfortunately, your secretary, who has acted as the on-site beekeeper at East Lodge is no longer able to actively manage these bees.

Due to the proximity of visitors to the garden, and particularly to the beehive itself, it must be carefully managed. The imperative is that the WBC has a maximum 5 frame Nuc size limit, so reducing markedly the number of flying bees. This is unfortunate as its proximity to the gardens itself, and those in the surrounding area, has shown that there is considerable forage and rapid expansion is experienced during the season. The ability to remove active frames to another site is a must. (Also, an opportunity for splits etc.). The branch covers all the costs associated with the maintenance of this hive (treatments, feed, frames etc).

Are you interested in taking on this role? If so, please email secretary@warleambees.org.uk or phone 07836 668439 for more information.

Chris Cox



HINTS AND TIPS

- Being able to pick up a queen is a very useful thing to do. Practice by picking up drones in the hive or better still, practice by picking up workers from inside a window when they become trapped in the house. When you pick them up by their wings, their abdomens curve away from you so that worker stings are out of harm's way!
- 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 beekeeping 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.
- On fine days the bees will be collecting early spring pollen. Without it the colony cannot expand and will not be able to take advantage of the approaching spring blossom. Remove the mouse guards to assist the pollen delivery!
- 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.

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to h.essex211@gmail.com

Helen Essex



The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.
Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
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