May 2021
Issue 206

BEETALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

Ever wondered why the behaviour of bee colonies differ? The cause, although they didn't know it at the time, was identified as early as the 16th century in the observation:-

"The queen be no better than a base, notorious, impudent strumpet, with gallants by the hundreds".

The promiscuity of queens and the genetic diversity of drones is the root of behavioural and character differences and this was exacerbated in the UK by the virtual annihilation of the British Black Bee by the Isle of Wight disease in the early years of the 20th century and the subsequent restocking with imported bees, mainly from Holland and with Italian and Slovenian queens. Interbreeding between all three of these subspecies has resulted in the hybrid bees we have today. Yet it is still possible to detect characteristics of the pure subspecies in the behaviour of our mongrels. Here are the main characteristics of pure bred British Black, Italian and Carniolan bees.

BRITISH BLACKS – APIS MELLIFERA MELLIFERA

- Native Bees of Northern Europe but with a whole variety of sub strains
- Virtually wiped out by the Isle of Wight disease (see page 5)
- No yellow banding
- Blacks are hardy, acclimatised and over-winter well
- Industrious with moderate swarming.
- Use little propolis and comparatively resistant to disease
- Reluctant to sting, hold well to their combs and do not run around excitedly during manipulation
- Slow development in Spring and do not develop excessively large brood nests.
- They settle down for winter early with less occupied cells leaving more room for stores.
- Frugal in their use of winter stores
- Good Honey producers

ITALIAN BEES – APIS MELLIFERA LIGUSTICA

- From the Ligurian area of Italy
- Have yellow /orange banding
- Gentle, easily subdued and adhere to their combs during manipulations
- Active – working early and late.
- Store large crops of honey
- Breed early in Spring, queens are prolific and breed continuously until late in the year.
- Inclined to swarm and raise more queens.
- In a poor season they will consume much of what they produce in excessive brood rearing
- Can turn much autumn feed into brood.
- Need more feeding than thrifty bees and hence greater risk of starvation
- Don't fly at low temperatures
- Notorious robbers
- Intolerant of wax moths
- When crossed with dark bees, are good in the first generation but in later generations can become vicious

CARNIOLAN BEES – APIS MELLIFERA CARNIOLA

- From Slovenia.
- Very hairy dark grey in colour and larger than the common European bee.
- Energetic workers making white capped combs.
- Adept at handling dearths.
- Produce little propolis and over-winter successfully using little stores.
- Build up rapidly toward the swarming season.
- Are very gentle.
- Have a longer tongue increasing range of forage and pollination potential.
- Main disadvantage is that they are very swarmy.

Do any of these seem familiar?

Bernard Brown

CHAIR'S MAY MESSAGE

Well, the bees have survived the frostiest April on record (and, according to BBC Countryfile, one of the sunniest and driest) and are living up to May. My mother always said a swarm in May is worth a field of hay! This may be something to bear in mind if you see your bees twirling around you at midday on a day when you aren't sure you have any brood frames left. The bees are going into May just as we'd expect!

Normal is coming to us as well. Throughout the last year we have been able to maintain our bees as part of essential husbandry. But now we are able to meet outside with up to six other people and this means beekeeping with others (at a distance) is possible and responsible - for the first time in ages. We have done training in performing shook swarms (in a Covid-friendly field) and the ever-oversubscribed Introduction to Beekeeping courses start again at the end of the month. BBKA have re-started practical assessments: Basic Assessments, General Husbandry Assessments and Bee Health Assessments can all safely take place in apiaries. After a year of no assessments these are re-starting all over the country. If this is the year for you to do your basic assessment just email **examsec@wbka.org.uk** and you will get a link to sign up. Doing the basic assessment is a very enjoyable way to talk about your bees with someone who is genuinely interested.

Right now I am scrabbling to have enough supers to keep the bees happy. The farms around me are not growing OSR this year, but the bees seem to be finding alternatives. I've seen more than a few queen cells (maybe not fast enough with those supers?) and I have two more colonies than I had at the start of April. In other words – all is normal for May.

The last year seems to have given us enhanced use of mobile phones and I have enjoyed some brilliant swarm videos from fellow members in the last couple of weeks- it's good to share.

If you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at (**warleambees@warleambees.org.uk**). Stay safe, don't panic and let's look forward to beekeeping to come!

BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH- REALLY GETTING GOING

- Maintain regular hive inspections (weather permitting, of course).
- Prepare spare brood frames for making up nucs or artificial swarms.
- If you see queen cells- don't panic. Think it through before you remove them - or call a friend.
- If you want to increase your colonies do Pagdens. If not, why not do a demaree?
- Kick yourself if you didn't mark your queens whilst the population was low
- Do a full brood disease inspection- looking JUST for brood disease by shaking each comb (but not the queen).
- Do a varroa drop test (though your treatment options are now getting limited by your supers).
- If you replace your combs gradually, replace the four mankiest now.
- Now is the time for Bailey comb changes or, even shook swarms. If you do a shook swarm, use a sacrifice comb to break the varroa lifecycle.
- Add supers as needed- or just before.
- If you have OSR make sure you are vigilant as a strong flow can need to be removed very quickly.
- If you get time, watch some of the many excellent beekeeping zoom presentation. The BBKA Spring Convention is still available online- just go to the BBKA Website.

Jane Medwell

INTRODUCING JANE NIMMO

At the last County AGM, Mike Blanco stood down after many years as Hon Secretary having steered the County through a period of much change and improvement in its governance. We wish him well in his new found freedom. Taking over from Mike is Jane Nimmo, who was elected to the post at the same AGM. She becomes the latest incumbent of the post which has existed since the County's foundation in 1879 and has been occupied by some quite notable characters. But who is she? We thought we ought to find out, so, in her own words, this is her profile:-

"I've been a beekeeper and member of Birmingham and District BKA for the last 10 years. I naively went on a one-day introduction to beekeeping course and thought it would be easy! Luckily, our beekeeping community is hugely supportive and I had lots of help and encouragement along the way. I really enjoy supporting new beekeepers and improvers so get involved in our branch training - both the serious stuff around diseases but also how to make honey gin! I've been our branch's Education Coordinator for the last year so am really looking forward to getting back to proper apiary sessions soon.

Like you all, I find honey bees fascinating and each year do some exams or assessments. I've passed my Honey Bee Health and General Husbandry and am working my way through the BBKA modules at the moment. I've given up my day job to run my own business "Let It Bee" so I happily spend my days making natural skincare products and beeswax wraps.

I'm really looking forward to taking on the role of Honorary Secretary. I'd like to find out more about running our charity and to delve deeper into the world of bees and beekeepers. I look forward to meeting you all!"

Chris Cox

FORAGE: FLOWERING CURRANT

We have probably all heard it said that when the flowering currant comes into bloom, it's time to do the first hive inspection of the year. Like everything in beekeeping, this is very weather dependant, and this April has been particularly cold so we may have got going a bit later than the currants.

Loved by the bees, Ribes sanguineum (Latin sanguis = blood) is a deciduous shrub native to the US and Canada and now found throughout temperate Europe and Australasia. The beautiful red, pendant flowers appear in early Spring to give a wonderful splash of colour just as the first bulbs are going over. On the downside it does have a particularly strong scent reminiscent of cat urine. The chemical explanation for this is the presence of several Thiol containing compounds in currants which are also found in cat urine and known as "cat ketones" Apparently, many people are unable to detect the odour – lucky them!

Although Ribes sanguineum does produce an edible fruit in the form of small dark purple oval berries, they have an insipid taste which in no way can compete with their cousin Ribes nigrum, the blackcurrant. The well known glossy black fruits are particularly rich in vitamin C. During World War II, when oranges were difficult to obtain, the government encouraged blackcurrant cultivation and from 1942, the juice was given free of charge to all children under the age of two. Today most commercial growing in this country is for the juice market. Did you know that the household name of Ribena derives from "Ribes"? The French for blackcurrant is cassis hence the aperitif Crème de Cassis. Added to white wine you have Kir, added to sparkling wine and you have Kir Royale. Cheers for the Ribes!

Maggie Curley

HOW DID THEY GET IN THERE?

Mick Smith and Mike Townsend received a phone call from a lady in distress claiming that her car was full of bees. On arrival they found her car, locked and windows shut, filled with clusters of bees.

Their first thought was to try use a bait hive placed inside the car. This was unsuccessful; the bees were not interested. Mick and Mike then decided maybe a little smoke would do the job, however, with the car being relatively new they did not want to apply too much as this might cause smoke damage to the vehicle. This did not work either and by now the bees were starting to get agitated thus getting caught in the interior's fabric. It was decided that they would try using a skep with the hope that the smell of old wax would coax the bees in. This would require a longer wait, so as the car was situated in the middle of a carpark it was decided to push the car to the perimeter.

Fortunately, whilst moving the car another cluster of bees was spotted on the ground and eagle-eyed Mike spotted the queen amongst them. The bees including the queen were picked up and placed in a box outside the car. During the evening, with the queen bee's help, the remaining bees made their way to the box. The swarm was successfully collected, unfortunately with a few casualties.

So, how did they get in there? How did the bees gain access to a vehicle with locked doors and closed windows? Mike's theory is that they must have entered the vehicle via the car vents.

If you have any interesting examples of collecting swarms and would like to share them WLBK members, please email me on **price_chris@btinternet.com**

Please 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 abided by the current government advice on 'social distancing'

Chris Price, Swarm co-ordinator

THE PAUL KERR APIARY

As you will already know Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers are supporting Kings High School to set up a school apiary – a project planned originally by Paul Kerr and now led by Barry Meatyard and some willing helpers.

MOVING DAY

The bees needed to be moved from Paul and Rosie's garden before they could be sited at the school. Their original apiary was too close to the school and so back in that cold and frosty weather, the bees were shut in one evening and moved early the next morning to their temporary residence in Earthorpe.

BEE HEALTH DAY

It is obviously important to get the project off to a good start, with the bees in the best possible condition. We decided that moving them onto nice fresh foundation would be a good plan and as the Honey Bee Health Group needed to practice their Shook Swarm and Bailey Comb Change technique, this was too good an opportunity to miss. On Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th April the team carried out shook swarms – a great way to reduce viral load and varroa or in the case of one weaker colony a Bailey Comb Change which is a good way to help clear up Nosema and any other nasties holding the colony back.

SO WHAT'S NEXT?

The bees are due to move to their new home in the apiary at Kings High School on 19th May and the team will deliver a bespoke training session to the staff – some of whom are already beekeepers. This is scheduled for Saturday 22nd May. Thank you to everyone involved so far!
If you would like to help with this project do please let us know!

Jane Ford

MADE OF THE "WIGHT" STUFF

1911 was a brilliantly successful season as far as Warwickshire beekeepers were concerned, following, as it did, a long succession of frustratingly dismal years. But any euphoria was short-lived as what followed over the next 8 years, was far, far worse and reduced the Warwickshire BKA from its peak of membership to the brink of its very existence.

The cause was not the weather nor the exigencies of the first World War, but the highly contagious and devastating "Isle of Wight" disease. First found in the County in the Spring of 1911 in five apiaries in Birmingham and Sutton Coldfield, it spread down the central and western part of the County and then to the east. By Spring of 1913, 280 colonies had been lost since the previous autumn, and the total number of colonies which, in 1910, was above 2000 had dropped to 1270.

The members tried to make good these losses by making as many new colonies as possible each summer, but these efforts were in vain. The losses continued both winter and summer alike with chilling consistency. Between 130 and 180 colonies were being reported dead every six months. By the Spring of 1919, only 80 members with any bees and they owned only 130 colonies between them. 144 colonies had died since the previous Autumn, so the trend was ominous.

Had the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association come to the end of the line? All hopes were pinned on the chance that the disease would destroy itself by killing all the colonies and that new stock from abroad could be introduced without the fear of the disease recurring? As 1919 progressed there was an inkling of some respite. By the Autumn, over 100 members had bees and there was very little disease to be found. This improvement continued and over the next 12 years no more than 10 colonies were reported lost through the disease in any six-month period.

We have to remember that the cause of the Isle of Wight disease was unknown at this time. Not until December 1919 did Dr Rennie's research team at Aberdeen University discover the acarine mite and the first effective treatment followed seven years later. As an aside, in 1964, acarine as the cause of the disease has been called into question by the work done at Rothampstead Experimental Station by Dr Bailey (of comb change fame).

Whatever the cause was, it can be deduced from the record that about 94% of the Warwickshire bees died as a result of the Isle of Wight Disease and this naturally had a serious effect on the activities of the Association. Many erstwhile members, once they had lost their bees did not restock and the whole episode had the effect of removing half-hearted beekeepers from the craft.

How do we know all this? Well, back then it was the practice of County Associations to employ an "Expert" who was a beekeeper, qualified under the BBKA training system, and whose role it was to conduct spring and autumn tours of members' apiaries inspecting their colonies and spreading good practice. Given subsequent understanding of how disease is transmitted, one wonders whether advice was all he spread! The "Expert" during this period was one George Franklin, from Burton Green, who, in his report on the outcome of his tours recorded the progress of the disease and the statistics used in this article. Franklin's reports shed fascinating light on the exigencies of his role, but that is a story for another day.

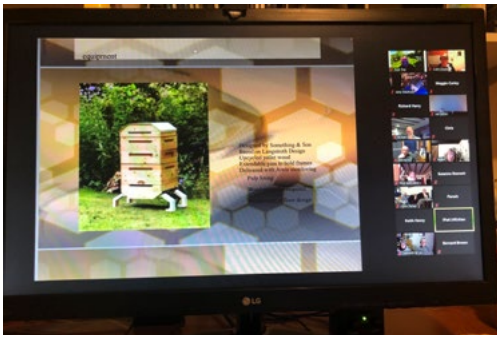
Bernard Brown

MEMBERS' MEETING UPDATE

The last meeting of our winter programme was on hive monitoring. At the first Spring Convention I attended as a new beekeeper I met an old beekeeper who told me that I would never really know what my bees were doing until I put a microphone inside the hive and listened to them. I have kicked myself many times since for not asking how he had managed this.

April's talk featured two of our own members; Alan Deeley, who manages the Arnia hive for the branch, and Paul Day, who uses a different system from Slovakia called Bee Hive Monitoring. Both Alan and Paul gave presentations on the systems they used. Both systems measure the weight, noise levels and the buzz the bees made, temperature and humidity in order to enable the beekeeper to reduce inspections, keep a check on swarming and give the beekeeper a heads up about lack of stores.

I was hoping we would be able hear the bees buzzing but apparently even though both hive systems monitor the buzz and the volume, the beekeeper isn't yet able to listen in even though Paul tried very hard to get me a recording so the meeting could hear the buzz.



High praise for Alan's tech savvy-ness and dedication that he gave his presentation while on holiday on the Pembrokeshire Coast (I have a mental picture of him huddling over an iPhone in a tent on a cliff)!

At least our reliance on tech and platforms like zoom have enabled us all to stay connected this winter. Thank you all for your patience and persistence in getting on line.

Rachel Dove, Members' meetings co-ordinator

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF 58 YEARS OF BEEKEEPING

Malcolm Taylor, member of the Solihull branch, has helped our branch considerably over the past few years as we embarked on our Branch co-op venture. As an agent for Ambrosia bee food for the surrounding area, which was in addition to his farming and beekeeping business, he has supported our Branch with more than generous discounts. To my disappointment at our last meeting together, Malcolm advised me of his decision to retire . Initially he was going to give up his beekeeping but I am pleased to report he has had a change of mind and now is carrying it on as hobby. Below is a short piece from Malcolm of his beekeeping life.

Clive Joyce

Some of my earliest memories involve insects. As a young boy, I remember being fascinated by insects, and discovering a special interest in bees. From this, I quickly learnt to identify all the different species. On my route to school, I remember cycling past a garden with a number of WBC hives in a prominent position. Intrigued, I soon invited myself round for a closer look. The beekeeper, a proper countryman type of character, was more than happy to open up the hives and let me have a hands-on experience. The two of us remained good friends for many years following.

At the age of 15, I joined the Solihull BeeKeepers Association. They were very welcoming, and I was soon helping out in the branch apiary. I remained the youngest member there for many years, (though this never bothered anyone). The following spring, they set me up with a second-hand hive and some equipment. Another one of the members soon called round with a swarm, and later that summer, I extracted my first few pounds of honey. I think that was the best honey I ever made; I believe your first batch will always be the best.

In the early 1990s, just when Varroa was making an appearance, I started to become more commercial: increasing the number of hives and converting an old building into an extracting and bottling room. I found a few local retail outlets who were happy to stock my honey, and I began trading as Solihull Apiaries. I also became an agent for Ambrosia Bee Feed about this time. However, those were turbulent times for beekeepers, as many lost interest or gave up due to the effect of Varroa. This also created an abundance of second-hand resources, allowing me to slowly build up my business to about 200 hives.

Over the years, I have tried a majority of the many different hive management systems. Nowadays, I tend to let my bees manage themselves, which they do very well!

I have some very good local sites, and have had some very good honey crops in recent years.

All of my honey is sold in the jar to very local and loyal retail outlets and it is great to see my honey bringing the community together.

Malcolm Taylor

A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME

As 2020 was a year when the pandemic put paid to any new beekeeper training together with the restricted numbers on this year's Introductory Course are less than usual, we reckon that there is a pent up demand out there for our craft so we are organising two Taster Days, one on Saturday 1st August and the other on Sunday 11th September. The cost will be £35 and they will be held at Kings Hill Nurseries.

The problem we have is, that without our presence at public displays, in getting the word out into the public arena. So, can we ask you to promote these events amongst friends, family, neighbours, work colleagues, clubs, Parish Councils etc. If you would like a poster to put up on a noticeboard please contact Bernard Brown on **bernardnbrown@outlook.com**.

Places for the August Taster Day can be booked at:-

Beekeeping Taster Day August 2021 (google.com)

And the September one at:-
Beekeeping Taster Day September 2021 (google.com)

Bernard Brown

REPORTING VARROA

For several weeks now, amendments to the **Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006**, the **Bees Diseases and Pest Control (Scotland) Order 2007** and the **Bee Diseases and Pests Control (Wales) Order 2006** have been discussed on Beekeeping Forums and is now in force on since the 21st of April 2021 This amendment will allow Great Britain to comply with the Animal Health Law which is necessary for future working (trading) relationships with the European Union. It requires **all beekeepers and/ or officials in GB to report the presence of Varroa in any of the hives that they manage.**

To make this simple, a tick box will be introduced to BeeBase, the voluntary register for beekeepers managed by the National Bee Unit. This will be the easiest way to report Varroa but an alternative mechanism is planned for those who have not registerred on the BeeBase system. (Shame on them). Details of this alternative system due to be provided after 21st April, is still awaited.

Although Varroa is known to be widespread, it continues to be one of the most serious pests faced by beekeepers. Reporting Varroa will, with our support, contribute to the overall pest and disease surveillance work of the National Bee Unit.

Bernard Brown

HINTS & TIPS

I overwintered a colony in a nuc and they were doing so well i put them into a hive on 31st March, during that few warm days we enjoyed. When I inspected these bees on Saturday 24th April they were thriving AND there were eggs in 5 queen cells! ... . So be prepared and here are some tips to help with thanks to Clive Joyce.

- When carrying out your weekly inspections in May, June and July (or even April!) keep a close eye out for the signs that may indicate swarming preparations are taking place. Look out for these signs and you will be better prepared:-

1. An increase in the number of drones or drone cells.
2. Play cups (vertical, empty hemispherical wax cups) suggest the colony is practicing the art of making queen cells.
3. During swarm preparation the young bees stay in the centre of the frame and the older bees collect around the outer parts.
4. The number of bees around the queen increases as she is fed more. This leads to increased egg laying and eventually the space is not available so possibility of swarming increases.
5. Scout bees will be out about 14 days before a swarm. They will be looking for a favourable site for the swarm to go to. Look out for bees with no pollen doing a waggle dance on the comb, these will be the scout bees communicating their findings.
6. Set up a bait hive and look for interest being taken.
7. Look out for bees zig- zagging across the comb. This recruits bees and stirs up the colony to prepare for swarming.

..... BUT after all this, if they still swarm then collect them up and rub carbolic soap on the area they chose to swarm to. Then they will not all abscond back to that place as soon as your back is turned!

- Mike Townsend has a brilliant tip about finding the queen- he sent it in an email about the branch bees he's looking after:

There had been difficulty in finding the queen and I was having the problem too as it was rammed full of bees. I decided to add a second brood box and moved almost all the brood into the top one after shaking the bees off. Then put excluder below, above the remaining couple of frames with brood in the lower box. On the next inspection most of the bees had moved up so the queen was easy to find in the bottom box.

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:
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WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
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