



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

WELCOME TO THE CLASS OF 2023



The new training season started with a flourish on Tuesday 18th April when 19 new members got suited and booted for their first look into the hives!

After our Introduction to Beekeeping courses in March 22 people signed up for the practical training session,s which take place at Kings Hill Nurseries every Tuesday evening through to September. To our great delight, this

includes five new junior members.

As in previous years, we work in four teams (one trainer to five trainees) each looking after three colonies. The weather was not quite as we would have liked, and inspections had to be done fairly briskly to avoid chilling the brood. Even so, one group was lucky enough to find queen cells and carry out the first split of the year.

Let's hope the weather warms up for the rest of the season.

Maggie Curley

WLBK CHAIR'S MAY MESSAGE

It was great to see WLBK members at the annual beekeeping Spring Convention, held here in the midlands at Harper Adams University in Newport, Shropshire from 21-23 April. Some members were speaking: Jane Medwell and Alex Wray. Some members were on the BBKA Shows Committee stand – Clive and Elaine Joyce. And one WLBK member was a Guest of Honour at the Saturday Evening Dinner: one Bethany Woodley, aka Betty Buckley, winner of the WLBK 2023 Foden Award to recognise young beekeepers.

My apologies to anyone at the Spring Convention who I have missed out. Do consider going along next year – everyone you meet is so enthusiastic about sharing ideas, stories, news and experiences of beekeeping.

Sharing our joy for bees and their place in the environment is the purpose of the many public events that WLBK and the national BBKA will be a part of in the coming months. To make more of our presence at shows and fairs, the branch has produced some display panels. The panels feature some highlights of being a WLBK branch member. As a member of WLBK you also tap into the benefits of the BBKA too.

The panels also have some facts about the wonderfulness of honey bees. Here's a sneak peek:

- We offer training, advanced learning, outreach, support and networking opportunities. That means taster days, workshops, qualifications, swarm collection, a purchasing co-operative and a range of meetings and events.

Just a couple of facts:

- A worker bee can carry up to 80% of its body weight of pollen and nectar.
- A single honey bee collects the equivalent of half a teaspoon of honey in her entire life.

Do look out for our new promotional material over the coming months, and if you would like to volunteer at any of our shows, do get in touch with me (suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk) and I'll pass your details on.

Suzanne Bennett, WLBK Chair



We are sad to say goodbye to Sophie Di Gesso, who has been the manager at Kings Hill Nurseries for the last four years. She has been wonderfully accommodating to us, both at the training apiary and the Four Seasons conference centre. Nothing was ever too much trouble for her.

Thank you for everything Sophie, and good luck in whatever the future holds.

Fondest wishes from WLBK.

TRAINING IN FOOD SAFETY

Andy Pedley, author of *Food Safety for Beekeepers*, hot foot back from talking at the BBKA Convention, is leading a course especially for WLBK members on food safety and honey labelling on **13th May** at Eathorpe Village Hall 9.30 a.m. – 3.00 p.m. This course will explain what beekeepers need to do to meet their legal obligations. This is also relevant to all members using our extraction facility, as the committee plans to register it as a Food Business. Clive Joyce will be on hand to explain the working and cleaning procedures to be followed to meet these requirements.

To encourage all members to meet these standards in honey production and labelling. There is no charge for attendance. Further details and booking through the [website](https://www.bbkasociety.org.uk). Please join us.

Suzanne Bennett, Clive Joyce and Judith Masson

BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

The horrid, terrible, awful very-bad day!

Last month I urged you not to go into the bees till it warmed up, but noted that "when the weather DOES warm up you will face rapid build-up". And I still got caught out! In the unseasonable cold, I put on a couple of supers per colony and trotted off to the BBKA Spring Convention.

Opening the colonies on a chilly 25th April, I found them allbursting with bees. My colonies ALL had queen cells, despite the supers. Luckily, Jane Ford came along and, together, we found all the queens and split all the colonies- using up every piece of available kit and every last brood frame. I'm happy to report all the queens are fine and the splits are developing well - we were lucky. So, the advice from the apiary this month is: be prepared- for anything! Your colonies may be well on and need splitting or be practically starving, so you need to be vigilant.

- The mouse guards and woodpecker protection should be off now- it is build-up time.
- Watch out for lupins in flower - a sure sign of swarming.
- 'Tis the season for weekly inspections (nine days if you have clipped queens). Look closely for queen cells and make sure colonies have enough stores.
- 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 bees will need space as the population increases and, we hope, when the nectar flow really gets going.
- Make spare brood frames - for swarm control. You will need a spare hive and box of frames for an artificial swarm or a nuc box full of frames to make a nuc- both are good methods of swarm control.
- Do 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.
- 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, its time for a Bailey for a weak colony.
- Remove and extract rape honey as soon as ripe. Yes- it's that time again!!!

Jane Medwell



PLANT OF MONTH: COW PARSLEY



A wildflower for a change this month! We will soon be seeing the ubiquitous cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) adorning the hedgerows and meadows, flowering well into June. It is loved by the pollinators but not always by gardeners who find its invasive nature and deep roots very difficult to control. This perennial plant of the Apiaceae (carrot) family is adorned with lace-like multi-flowered umbels, the delicate flower shape lending itself to the alternative name of "Queen Anne's Lace". Although the above ground parts of the plant are edible, the similarity to its poisonous relative Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) means that it is best avoided at all costs. Just remember what happened to Socrates when he drank that hemlock potion!

Maggie Curley



WAXING LYRICAL ABOUT BEEKEEPING



Spring is here. It's been a long time a-coming thanks to this crazy weather of ours but, for my part, the bees seem to have ridden the swings in temperature very well. No doubt you too have opened your hive(s) for the first inspection of the year. Wasn't it just a wonderful experience? To inhale, and be overwhelmed by that smell. You know the one. The damp, oozy, warm odour of brood, pollen, wax, and nectar. And then there was the unceasing sound of a busy hive, like a finely tuned engine, so reassuring. And yet again, what about the sight of wall-to-wall brood. Life affirming.

Initially, the motivation to take up beekeeping was a sort of half thought through, mish mash of the attraction of our own honey, a vague desire to encourage pollination and to mitigate the guilt of man's crass actions in threatening the very existence of our natural world.

These maybe what got me started, but it's not just these that continue to sustain my beekeeping. I stay with it because of the bond I have developed with the bees. I feel a physical need to see, hear, and touch them. Like anything addictive, the craving doesn't go away. It only grows and matures.

But In addition to this physical need there is an emotional one. Bees don't give a fig about you, your plans, or your investment portfolio. Regardless of what you do, they stay focused on their mission. There is something rather special about being among single-minded creatures who go about their lives not judging, not asking, not expecting.

Bees will let you be anything you want. In front of your bees, you can be yourself. You don't need to live up to their standards, speak their language, or imitate their style. You are free to watch, to learn, and to help them along.

What could be better for your well-being? Gone are the memories of disappointments, un-met challenges and crass stupidity of last season and, replaced by an optimism and anticipation that this might be the best year yet, will hopefully carry me through another year of this amazing hobby.

Bernard Brown



FOR SALE

Full over winter colonies of bees available

On 14 x 12 or national frames. £200

Getting close to swarming.

Also over wintered nuc's national and 14 x 12
£150

Chris Fisher

chris@coldharbour.farm

07802482515

BEE SAFARIS

In place of our monthly meetings we have arranged Bee Safaris, a visit to a member's apiary followed by a pub social. These will be held on **Wednesday 17th May** in Eathorpe followed by a drink at the Red Lion in Hunningham, and **Thursdays 15th June**, Napton followed by a drink at the King's Head; **20th July**, Stoneleigh and the Malt Shovel in Bubbenhall and **17th August** at Warwick University and the Varsity.

These Bee Safaris have to be booked on the Member's area of the website. No need to book to meet us at the pub.

Please remember, apiary hygiene is very important, wear a clean bee suit, boots and gloves when visiting any apiary. Wash your bee suit before wearing it for your own bees.

Many thanks to the members who have agreed to host these visits.

Judith Masson



APRIL MEMBERS' MEETING: BEES AND ELEPHANTS



A row of top bar hives suspended on wires creates an elephant fence

We all know that elephants never forget, but who knew they were scared of bees – well elephants do tend to meet the super-defensive African Bees, so perhaps it is to be expected. Brian Durk from Bees Abroad shared his experience of working in Ghana and using elephants' fear of bees to protect subsistence farmers' land and crops, and to improve their income.

A row of top bar hives suspended on wires creates an elephant fence. Elephants who try to move through the wires shake the hives – out come the bees and off go the elephants. In time, elephants learn to recognise the hives and stay well clear. A system, which needs hives every 20 metres or so, cannot be used to protect land areas of land but can keep elephants out of a banana grove, with the added benefits of improved pollination, and honey to sell at the local market.

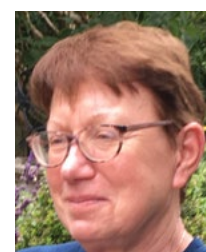
Brian was a very engaging speaker. As well as slides and stories

he brought a small collection of African hives, to illustrate how local materials such as sorghum stalks could be simply crafted into hives but without moveable frames. With African bees who would want to undertake weekly inspections, especially without a top notch bee suit? Brian's enthusiasm and the obvious benefits of the work he and others do in Ghana really caught members' imaginations. My only worry is that there will be fewer members to attend our meetings as they will be out in Africa!

NEXT MEETING:

The next members' meeting is on **21st September** at Kings Hill Nursery at 7.30. Details will appear in the July and August editions of Bee Talk. In the meantime, attend one of our Bee Safaris (see page 4).

Judith Masson



FINDING AN OUT APIARY

As a branch we encourage the public to agree to host members apiaries at every opportunity, mainly when we interact with the public such as at public displays, talks to organisations etc. We also receive unsolicited offers but these, and those from public interaction, do not always coincide geographically with members seeking out apiaries. So, if you're looking for an out apiary how do you go about it?

TO START WITH LET'S LOOK AT WHAT CONSTITUTES A SUITABLE SITE

- 1) In a rarely frequented area away from close public access
- 2) With vehicular access reasonably close by. A full box of honey can weigh 30-40lbs and we don't want to be carrying those too far!
- 3) Access for the beekeeper at evenings and weekends as well as during the day.
- 4) Avoiding frost hollows
- 5) Not susceptible to flooding in excess of 1 ft deep
- 6) Relatively flat or gently sloping
- 7) 1m access all round a hive
- 8) Shade at some part of the day
- 9) It has been known for colonies and equipment to be stolen so we would want a site in a reasonably secure area preferably relatively secluded i.e. away from curious eyes
- 10) Not prone to inquisitive animals although an apiary can be fenced if necessary.

The above represents the ideal and few sites match all these but there are usually compromises which both bees and we beekeepers can accommodate.



NOW LET'S CONSIDER HOSTING FROM THE PROPERTY OWNER'S POINT OF VIEW. THEIR CONCERNS AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES INCLUDE:

- Will I have to do anything? *No. The beekeeper will look after the hives, fence and mow the apiary.*
- Will having hives compromise other activities I use my land for? *The bees can be sited and entrances orientated to minimise this but it depends on the activities.*
- How frequent will access be required? *Weekly March - July, every three weeks July – October and a few times between November and March.*
- Can I accompany you on an inspection? *Try to accommodate such a request. The Branch has bee suits it can lend for this purpose.*
- At what times will visits be made? *Ideally 24/7 but bespoke times can be agreed.*
- Can I be advised of any visits just in case I have other things going on? *Yes.*
- What about neighbours? *Best to sound them out first. Talk to them.*
- What if there is an issue and I can't contact you? *Arrange for a bee buddy to cover for you and share contact details.*
- Are you experienced? *Either yes, I have been keeping bees for ???years or I have been trained by WLBK training and have an experienced mentor to assist me, (mentor essential).*
- What about Insurance? *Members of WLBK have £10m public liability insurance.*

BUT WHERE TO START LOOKING?

We have had apiaries on a wide range of sites from private gardens, allotments, cemeteries, hotels, pubs, universities, hospitals, farmland, nature reserves, corporate headquarters, public parks, smallholdings the list is endless almost.

To find one in your locality does require you to do the groundwork.

- If you work why not try your employer. Workplace apiaries can be very convenient for the **beekeeper** and very often the company will help with set up work and costs. Some encourage other employees to take up the craft. In return they may use this for "green washing" i.e. ISO 14001 - the internationally recognised standard for the environmental management of businesses.
- If you spot a likely site, try to find out who the owner is. The land registry maintains records of ownership of registered land and you can search on -line at HM Land Registry - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). A search fee of £3 is charged. Alternatively write or knock on the door.
- Use your network and your network's networks.
- Social media has proved a good source of leads for apiaries
- Your local parish council.

Should you find a potential apiary site and would like an experienced beekeeper to assess its suitability, contact Alistair Walker, our Hive Hosting

Co-ordinator at alistair.walker@btinternet.com

Good hunting.

Bernard Brown



THE WILD ESCAPE



Over the past centuries, Kenilworth Castle has seen many extravagant entertainments but, I warrant nothing quite like that staged by WLBK over four wet, windy and cold days at the end of March. Famed for the unsuccessful attempt by Robert, Earl of Leicester, to woo Queen Elizabeth 1st by doing what today we would call a makeover of the Castle and by creating a spectacular garden, the Castle, currently owned by Warwick District Council and managed by English Heritage, focuses on its Elizabethan historical period.

So, when WLBK were approached to keep bees in the Castle grounds, our offer to keep bees in the fashion of the time i.e. in skeps, was met with enthusiasm. Our Kenilworth Castle apiary was established in 2022 under the leadership of Clive Joyce with members interested in learning about skep beekeeping. Two colonies were introduced into the orchard behind the now restored Elizabethan Garden. This is on a main visitor route and thus provides a splendid opportunity to promote our craft.

It was on the back of this that we received an invitation from English Heritage to participate in their contribution to the "Wild Escape". Led by the Arts Council England, with museums, heritage sites and schools taking part, the "Wild Escape" is an opportunity for the next generation to explore the big subjects of biodiversity and the environment. The project provides a fun and educational way to engage with local school children through a focus on wildlife and the nature around us. The team at Kenilworth Castle elected to invite local primary school children (ages 7-11, Key Stage 2) and to have bees and pollination as their theme for the event. In addition to our display, the kids were to create a giant wicker bee sculpture under the direction of a local artist weaving yellow and brown willow fronds on to a 2m x 1.2m wicker framework. Upon completion, this is to be on permanent display in our apiary. Planting native wildflower plugs to create a wildflower area close to the apiary was the third activity.

Faced with 7 classes of 30 children over the four days of the event in the outside air before the beekeeping season had really kicked off, was something of a challenge even if climate change had worked in our favour – which it didn't. In the end, we opted for honey tasting, an observation hive and, in support of the pollination theme requested, we invented a new interactive "nectar and pollen" game.

This consisted of a "Flower" – a flower pot with petals stuck round the rim, – a tray inside containing "nectar" and powder puffs laced

with talc, "pollen" as anthers on wire stamens

The kids were each given a syringe (as used for oxalic acid dribbling). The idea was for kids to "fly" to the flower, push past the anthers to get to the "nectar" and suck up the nectar, hopefully getting the "pollen" on their sleeves. They were then to fly to a similar "flower" but this time with a stigma fashioned from one of those pet-hair-removal, sticky rollers and to rub the powder off their sleeves onto the Stigma. It was then onwards to a WBC to squirt their "nectar" load into a honey bucket inside. Having done this, they were shown how to do a waggle dance. After an initial demonstration, it took the kids no time at all to learn this behaviour and, having explained that bees do this all day, the demonstrators withdrew to the shelter of the marquees whilst the kids ran back and forth with boundless energy despite the wind and rain. They seemed to enjoy this hugely. Was it the exercise, the squirting and the wagging? or was it a sugar rush from the honey tasting? Or was it, perhaps, just a way to keep warm!

The observation hive held its usual fascination for the kids as did the super powers of the bees explained by Clive Joyce in his own inimitable way. Over at the honey tasting, there was much delight as they licked their way through 6 different honeys receiving a gift of a packet of wildflower seeds and a bee badge to take away.

Judging from the letters of appreciation, our efforts went down well. As always with these events, it isn't just the kids who had all the fun. Even after 210 children and enduring rain, blustery winds and temperatures below 10°C, plummeting much nearer to freezing at night for 3 of the four days of the event, we stewards had fun too.

The "flowers" suffered a bit from the weather and the kids but, now we know that the "Pollen and Nectar" game works, it's back to the drawing board to, refine the design and robustness of the props.

..... ASIDE

Cast your mind back to the end of March. For three of the four days of the event, we encountered rain, blustery winds and temperatures below 10°C, plummeting much nearer to freezing at night. This was not good for the observation hive bees. We would not normally countenance attempting to provide an observation hive under these conditions but as luck would have it, we were able to take advantage of a brief spell of a 14°C day to populate the hive. We wrapped them in 150mm of loft insulation at night and they survived the ordeal well.

If the weather was problematic for the bees it was much more so for the marquees when the wind tried to launch them into space. One had to be taken down completely and the others were saved only by using the stewards as additional leg weights. The conditions were particularly uncomfortable for the stewards who, being tethered to the various stations had little opportunity to keep dry or to exercise to keep warm. Nevertheless, they stuck to the task proving, if further proof were necessary, that Beekeepers are very resilient. Special commendation is due to two, Judith Masson who did 4 sessions back-to-back and Terry Dillon who volunteered at very short notice to help out. Wet we might have been, cold we certainly were. But miserable? Not a bit of it. Was this fortitude, or simply plain bonkers.

Ivan A Perry



EXOTIC HIVES SERIES –

LEYENS LONG HIVE

George de Leyens developed the hive that bears his name over several decades, based on his observations of the natural behaviour of bees and the principle of minimal intervention, typically 2-3 visits a year. The hive uses moveable frames 340mm wide x 440mm tall (approx 13" x 17"). The top bars are butted together to help retain heat inside the brood nest. This height of frame allows the bees to move upwards without hindrance during the winter cluster, as they would naturally in a wild colony, and also allows the colony ample room for expansion. Frame spacing is conventional with 14 or 20 frames arranged horizontally, hence the description of 'long hive'. There are many variations on the basic hive design due to its simplicity.

The hive is made from timber up to 32mm (1¼") thick reputed to give the hive better over-wintering qualities. Legs are usually provided to bring the hive to a comfortable working height for the beekeeper. There are also two entrances provided at opposite sides of the hive to enable different management strategies.

De Leyens advocated a visit during the early part of the year to stock the hive with frames and a further visit in the autumn to remove honey. This was before the arrival of Varroa mites. However, devotees of the hive claim that the lack of disturbance enables the bees to cope with the parasite adequately.

The table below gives figures for the 14 and 20 frame Leyens hives for comparison with a Dartington hive using National 14 x 12 frames.

HIVE DATA	DARTINGTO	LEYENS 14	LEYENS 20
Brood frame	14" x 12"	13" x 17"	13" x 17"
Frames / brood box	21	14	20
Cells / frame	7,250	9,500	9,500
Cells / box	152,000	130,000	190,000
Lug length	1½"	approx ⅝"	approx ⅝"



All brood figures are approximate.

George de Leyens' book, *Keeping Bees in Horizontal Hives – A Complete Guide to Apiculture*, was written in 1897 and has been translated and re-printed in 2017 with many of the original drawings. There is a copy in the East Devon Beekeepers library for those who may wish to acquaint themselves with the principles of his hive management.

The two major principles are : **using local bees** and keeping them in **appropriate hives** that are gentle on the bees and the beekeeper alike, and require minimal management.

The USA and Spain both have large numbers of Leyens hives today.

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HINTS & TIPS

This winter has been a mild one and swarming preparation is likely to be early... 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 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.essex211@gmail.com



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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