



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

CONSTANT VIGILANCE....!

The bees went into May just as we'd expect - with swarms everywhere. But May 2021 was cold, wet and miserable. So I am not taking off the harvest I expected, but I am very thankful my bees are all well provisioned. Starvation warnings from the NBU in May felt like the end of days.

A terrible May has knock on effects - one is the near-euphoric satisfaction of getting a good flow this week. The smell of hawthorn nectar is overpowering when I open my hives and it feels like magic. Another less positive effect is increased incidence of bee disease. This May our bees have been confined to their hives more than usual and stressed by unexpected patterns of forage - a recipe for some types of disease. Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus (CBPV) has been increasing in recent years and it is a disease of confinement. Right now, we need to be on the lookout for those shiny shakers. Even worse has been a spike in European Foulbrood (EFB) cases in May, reported across the bee media. When colonies are stressed and confined, they may be less able to deal with mild cases of EFB, so maybe it is just more evident, but it demands constant vigilance. The UK has an excellent record of control of EFB- far better than other countries. This is entirely because beekeepers like you and me spot and report cases to their Bee Inspector (ours recently gave the Branch Apiary a clean bill of health). If you suspect you may have EFB, you are legally required to report it to the NBU (Send your bee inspector some photos). EFB is not something any of us want to find, but we should owe a debt of gratitude to every fellow beekeeper who acts responsibly.

So this month, while you are busy with beekeeping at its best, be vigilant for the worst that can happen. Check your BeeBase entry, so that if there is disease in your area, you will

be notified automatically. BeeBase is free and contains wonderful advice about disease and husbandry - everything you need to know about CBPV and EFB is here. Now is the time to do a brood disease inspection, shaking off the bees and really scrutinising those cells.

Of course, not all disease is as serious as EFB. This month one of our members and his Bee Inspector found..... Stonebrood! This very rare fungal disease is the only one that could theoretically infect humans (but hasn't). It's so unusual it is a sort of celebrity fungal find and definitely worth a mention.

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 (NO, REALLY)

- Remember your bees may be tetchy if they have just lost a flow of ORS- go calmly.
- Watch out for the June gap (in the flow) after the hawthorn goes over. If there is no forage you may even need to feed.
- Maintain regular hive inspections.
- Make up nucs or artificial swarms and re-queen as planned.
- If you see queen cells- don't panic. Think it through before you remove them- or call a friend.



Swarm season is upon us.

- If you want to increase your colonies do Pagdens. If not, why not do a demaree?
- Do a full brood disease inspection- looking JUST for brood disease by shaking each comb (but not the queen).
- I really hope you didn't take my advice and try to do Bailey comb changes or, even shook swarms in May- the temperature was too low for wax making. But now.....
- Check your BeeBase registration and have a browse in the advice leaflets or the e-learning section.

Jane Medwell, Branch chair

INTRO TO BEEKEEPING 2021

The weekend of 22nd/23rd May finally saw the start of our Beekeeping training course, which had to be cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic after only 2 of the 6 evening sessions had been completed.

It was rearranged for March this year, then was cancelled when it became obvious that we would not be able to meet safely indoors. An April course was arranged and this too had to be cancelled, so we took the opportunity to run it as soon as restrictions were eased on 17th May.

This was the first of two weekend courses with the second one happening a week later as numbers had to be limited to 30 people

in the room.

Twenty trainees and five trainers spent two very full days listening to a number of our experienced members taking them through the basics of beekeeping, culminating in the trainees being able to visit our training apiary where they were able to get up close to our girls (and boys!).

The atmosphere during the weekend was amazing and the enthusiasm for learning about bees was infectious. New friendships were made and already a number of trainees have become members of our branch.

Val Dillon



SHOW ME THE HONEY

WLBK BRANCH HONEY SHOW

SATURDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER 2021

KINGS HILL NURSERY

There are 20 classes which include honey, candles, cut comb, beeswax, mead, frames for extraction, photography, hive crafts. There is something to challenge all levels of beekeeping skill.

With our very own John Home judging.

The Honey Cake class is always popular - especially with the judge! Here's the recipe for you to try with plenty of time to perfect it!

HONEY CAKE RECIPE

- 150g (5oz) butter
- 175g (6oz) clear honey
- 1 tablespoon water,
- 110g (4oz) soft brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 200g (7oz) self raising flour

METHOD

- Put butter, honey, water and sugar into a saucepan and heat until fat melts, stirring all the time.
- Leave to cool to blood temperature
- Gradually beat in the eggs.
- Add sieved flour and mix until smooth.
- Pour into a greased and lined 180mm (7inch) tin.
- Bake for approximately 1 hour until risen and firm to touch. 180°C, 350°F, gas 4. Timing is only a guide as appliances may vary.

FORAGE OF THE MONTH: THE HORSE CHESTNUT



**Underneath the spreading chestnut tree
There we sit both you and me,
Oh, how happy we can be,
Neath the spreading chestnut tree"**

I think this little song was written by the bees! After the dreadful weather this spring, they are at long last able to get out and feast on the glorious horse chestnut. If you stand near when the sun is out it is as if the whole tree is full of our singing, happy girls.

The Horse Chestnut, (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) is a species from the lychee family, its fruit, being not lychees of course, but conkers. The name derives from the fact that the leaves and fruit are similar to those of the sweet chestnut, and it was thought that the seeds could help to treat coughing horses. Also, as you can see in the picture above, the scar, which is left on the twig after the leaf has fallen, has a distinct horseshoe shape complete with the marks of seven nails. Amazing!

As far as the bees are concerned, the horse chestnut provides for their every need. The magnificent white, (or less commonly pink) flowers, have copious very beautiful deep burgundy coloured pollen and right in the centre, the light green structure is the nectary. In addition, as can be seen on the twig in the picture, the "sticky buds" containing the next season's leaves, are an



abundant source of propolis.

In the autumn, conkers have delighted children over the years with the game of hanging them from lengths of string and attacking opponents to try to smash their conker. I never liked it because the boys always won, and I just ended up with sore knuckles!

The sun is shining, the temperature has risen to the dizzy height of 18 and I'm off to sit under the spreading chestnut tree and listen to those happy bees.

Maggie Curley

SKEP MAKING COURSE



Did your bees swarm this year? How did you collect them? In a cardboard box or a plastic tub? Whatever you used, the best item is always a skep because it can be left outside while the bees gather. If it's hot, the bees will be kept cool. If it rains they will be protected, as it is made from thatching straw, so will do the same job as a thatched roof.

It's been a few years since we last offered a skep making day, so now is your chance to make one. It won't matter if it is a bit wonky, the bees won't mind. But you will be the proud owner of a unique piece of beekeeping equipment.

You won't complete your skep on the day but you will go home with sufficient materials to enable you to do so.

If you are interested, please go to our website, complete the form and make your payment. Places will be limited to 15, so it will be first come, first served.

Date: Saturday 2nd October 2021

Venue: BBKA Headquarters, Stoneleigh Park

Cost: £35.

Val Dillon

EQUIPMENT SALE UPDATE

The 130 plus items of members' surplus equipment offered for sale last month are now considerably reduced through purchases by canny members with an eye for a bargain. Boosted by extending the opportunity to other branches within the County, we have grossed over £1500 of which over £400 will soon be winging its way to our favourite Charity – Bees Abroad. And it's not over yet! The recent ITB course has inspired many of the delegates to take up beekeeping and they too will be offered the opportunity to pick up a bargain.

Thank you to all who participated, and we hope you are well satisfied with your purchases.

Yet another successful member-focussed event.

ALL IN THE BEST OF TASTE

Places at the two Taster Days planned for the summer are beginning to be taken up by hopeful wannabees and we, too, are hoping for a surge in applicants now that the show season has, albeit falteringly, started. We do still need to promote these events more, so, please, can you continue to take every opportunity to mention them to friends, family, neighbours, work colleagues, clubs, Parish Councils etc..

Places for the August Taster Day can be booked [here](#) and the September one [here](#). The cost is 35 with the proceeds going to Charity.

Bernard Brown

SUMMER SHOWS

With confidence returning we now have 6 bookings of our displays at local shows during the summer. We start off at Kings Hill Nursery on 29th May, followed by Shotteswell Village Fete on the 3rd July. Then we're off to the Rowington Flower Show and the Avon Dassett Country Fayre, both on the same day – 7th August. The Ecofest show, one of the major events in our programme, is being held in the Pump Room gardens in Leamington on the 4th September and the season finishes on the 10th October with the Hill Close Gardens, Warwick, Apple Day.

The kit has come through the pandemic relatively unscathed, thanks to Mick Smith and his mouse traps. The biggest problem facing the display team is that we are out of practice and remembering what to take and how things go together is something of a challenge. Hopefully it will be like riding bike!!???..... well you know what I mean.

Although the report on the Kings Hill Fayre will miss this issue of Bee Talk, one surprising feature is the lack of response to the invitation to members for supplies of honey to sell on their behalf. Hopefully this reflects the popularity of our product and we are grateful to David Stott of Tomlow Bees for stepping into the breach.

NOT DEAD — JUST SLEEPING



(c) Paresh Pankhania

Arriving home one day, member, Paresh Pankhania, was met with a sight that would arouse fear and despondency in most beekeepers. There, before him, on the ground in front of his hives was a carpet – well perhaps a threadbare one – of bees, some twitching but others comatose. Many were still had their pollen baskets laden. The bees had obviously crash landed before entering the hive so what could have been the cause? Pesticide spray was an immediate suspect, but the apiary was in quite a built-up area and, in any case, the time of year and the weather, were not conducive to spraying. There was nowt in the books about such an occurrence so there was nothing else for it but to seek advice from the experienced members within the branch.

As luck would have it, he struck gold. A couple of the “wise ones” had experienced this before and, on those occasions, it had happened at times where the days were warm, but temperatures plummeted as the afternoon faded and evening drew on. The bees, lulled into a false sense of security, had sallied forth only to find that they had to struggle to make it back home in the falling temperatures. These were the exact same conditions which prevailed in this case. Clearly the bees would die if they could

not recover sufficiently to summons the strength to clamber up into the hive but, again, the experience of the “wise ones” brought hope. If the bees could be fed a little syrup and moved to where they could warm up, they just might recover. Much to Paresh’s relief and delight it worked. Yes, there were fatalities, but a surprising number made it back to buzz for another day. It was amazing just how resilient our girls can be when the chips are down.

So, what was feared to be a deadly disease turned out to be a bad call by the bees. Weren’t they lucky that there was a beekeeper looking out for them and one who knew when and how to seek advice. We don’t profess to have all the answers but those who have been around the block a few times are always willing to help. Contact them direct if you know who they are or our own Master Beekeeper, Jane Medwell at jane.medwell@gmail.com. Then there is always the contacts page of the website.

Ivan A Perry

With thanks to Paresh Pankhania for sharing this learning experience and granting permission to use his photo.

Copyright Paresh Pankhania

TRAP OUTS AND CUT OUTS

Our third installment on how to catch a swarm has kindly been sent to me by Alan Deeley. He is currently in the process of retrieving a colony using the 'Trap Out' method in large oak tree. With this unusual start to the season there have been plenty of swarms to keep him busy, so much so he is rapidly running out of kit.

How do you collect a swarm that has established itself into a new home and is in an inconvenient place? When a swarm installs itself in a building or a tree, it is much harder to remove than a regular hanging swarm, plus the bees are more defensive as they now have a new home to protect. There are a few options that can be tried as described by Alan Deeley below.

1. Leave alone

The best and easiest option is to leave them be. Unless the bees are causing a nuisance to people or to the property then just let them settle and get on with things. This applies especially to chimneys where our beekeeping insurance does not cover us for any injury.



2. A Trap Out

If the bees are in a location where there is only one possible entrance then I have used a Trap Out method. This involves placing a nuc box with a Porter Bee escape on one side and then sealing around the hole to ensure the bees can only go through the escape. Some good advice from Clive Joyce is to put some drawn comb in the nuc box and a frame containing brood and eggs. This encourages the foraging bees to remain in the nuc box. The box is left in place for the full brood cycle of 21 days when it can be removed. The problem with this method is that the Queen is highly unlikely to leave the brood nest, so she needs to be coaxed out either by smoking the nest or inserting a cloth which has been wiped with Carbolic soap. I have done two of these removals recently; one in a tree on a golf course (above), which was next to a tee. Another was in a wall cavity inside a factory where an

outlet pipe had not been sealed and the bees were bothering the employees.

Once the bees are removed, then it is important to seal up the hole to avoid another colony moving in.



3. A Cut Out

This method is useful when there are multiple potential entrances to the nest, so blocking one entrance will just mean the bees will find another. The method I use was patiently explained to me by the late Tim Foden, for which I have always been grateful. The Cut Out requires a lot of planning to ensure you have all the equipment needed, and it involves using a 'Bee Vac' to gently suck the bees out from the nest and directly into a brood box (see over the page).



As the name suggests, this method involves locating the nest and then cutting an access hole to enable the comb to be safely removed. Any comb with brood can be cut to the size of an empty brood frame and then held in place with a large rubber band. Any comb with stores can be removed.

The bee vac is basically an adapted box with one hole to connect a vacuum cleaner and another hole to connect a smooth flexible hose. Crucially, the box has a mesh barrier to avoid the bees going into the vacuum cleaner! Sitting above the Bee Vac is a brood box with drawn comb so the bees can climb up safely. If you see the queen whilst you are vacuuming the bees, then catch her in a queen clip and keep her safe (don't forget to keep one handy!).

Once all the bees and comb are removed, any entrances should be sealed up and the hive placed as close to the original entrance as possible. Open up the brood box with an entrance/floor and if the queen has been caged then release her into the hive. Leave the brood box in place overnight and hopefully the bees will have adjusted to their new home, and they can then be safely removed.

We used this method recently when a colony of bees had set up home in the cavity of a residential garage (as the photos on page 5 and opposite show) and the bees were entering along a window frame which had not been sealed when it was installed.

4. Last resort

The very last resort is to kill the bees, but I am fortunate that I have never had to do this.

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

Chris Price

Swarm Co-ordinator



COUNTY LINES: MAURICE WEST

At the last County AGM our Peter Spencer stepped down as President of the Association after five years' service. Maurice West, of Rugby Branch, was elected to succeed him. Although active in County affairs several years ago, he has been enjoying being out of the limelight recently but with this appointment, all that is to change. So, who is he and what is his beekeeping pedigree? Well, here it is..... in his own words.

"I have always been interested in natural history, gardening and wildlife, and started beekeeping 45 years ago. Things were a great deal different in those days. I had read about varroa, but it was not something that was in the country. There was a little mite called braula which used to bore tunnels under the wax capping of honeycomb, but it was never a big problem. Small hive beetle and Asian hornets were also unheard of in this country. There was of course AFB and EFB which we insured against through the BDI scheme, and the odd cases of nosema, but on the whole we had a much easier time than today.

I bought my first colony of bees for the grand price of £10 from Mr R. Higgs, a beekeeper of many years standing in Rugby. For

good measure he also gave me a broken smoker, an extractor and ripening tank, both tin plated and painted on the outside with some sort of galvanized paint. (What would health and safety think of that today?) The colony I purchased was in a WBC hive, which of course meant nothing to me in those days. I contacted the Rugby Beekeeping Association and became a member. The secretary was Mr John Thompson who was extremely helpful to me and suggested what I required to be a beekeeper.

I acquired a boiler suit (It had property of Coventry City Council emblazoned on the back), the buttons were removed, and a Velcro strip stitched in place. I bought a square veil from the Rugby branch which I fitted over a straw hat, (my wife was a pupil at the



Dunsmore School for Girls and their summer uniform included a straw boater with a ribbon round it in the school colours, with the removal of the ribbon it made an excellent beekeeping hat). My final piece of clothing was my pair of motorcycle gloves. My first hive tool was an old wood chisel.

From those early beginnings I was hooked and gradually built up experience and equipment but now run just six colonies in Langstroth hives.

With regard to beekeeping activities with the County, I have been chairman of the Rugby Branch on several occasions and been a member of their committee for many years before the branch swelled in numbers and younger new beekeepers took up the reins. I have enjoyed helping out on the displays at local fêtes and open days. I have also been chairman of the County and given help at

the County Honey Show helping to set up in the various locations. (This is probably punishment for owning a large trailer and able to transport stands, tables etc.)

I have been on the Royal Show Committee in the days when there was a Royal show and their treasurer for many years. We became the BBKA shows committee after the cessation of the Royal Show.

I hope this gives an insight to my beekeeping career and that I can fulfil the position of president for the next five years."

I think you will agree that Maurice's background in beekeeping makes him a very worthy candidate for the role of our County President. Congratulations to him on his election and our best wishes for his presidential term.

Ivan A Perry

HINTS & TIPS

- Whilst most beekeepers will want to use wired foundation to give super frames more strength during extraction, unwired frames make it easy to remove newly drawn and filled combs for sale as cut comb. It is best to remove them as soon as they are capped to avoid staining as bees walk over them. Put the cut comb in the freezer to kill any wax moth before it has chance to ruin it. Then you have the perfect entry for the coming HONEY SHOW!
- To help to minimise transference of infections remember to have of bucket of washing soda available during inspections. A solution of 1kg washing soda to 5 litres of water with a use by date of a month is ideal to clean hive tools between each colony.
- It is best not to open a colony to look for a virgin queen. Be patient and leave for at least a couple of weeks to give her chance to mate and begin to lay. Virgin queens may panic and fly off if the brood chamber is disturbed.
- New supers can be added to the top of the stack (over-supering) or next to the brood box (under-supering) Over- supering means that ▪ heavy lifting is avoided but under- supering is better if you want wax drawn quickly, as the heat from the brood nest, immediately below, helps the wax builders to construct comb. Research indicates that the



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.
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