



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## BLOOMS ARE OUT, BEES ARE OUT

**B**eautiful, elegant Echinops, so loved of the pollinators, is a genus of the daisy family Asteracea. The name derives from the Greek words "ekhinos" (hedgehog) and "ops" (head).

It is commonly known as the Globe Thistle with its prickly foliage and striking, large spherical flower heads. The tiny blue or white flowers attract particularly bumble bees and honeybees. It is best grown at the back of the border in free-draining soil and full sun. It's a wonderful plant to fill in those gaps, which always seem to appear where other plants have failed. The easiest way to propagate is to take root cuttings in autumn or spring.

Traditional, herbal medicine use extract of the root to treat inflammation, pain and fever.

Did you know that if you cut off the heads after flowering they will reward you with a second blooming?

**Maggie Curley and Barry Meatyard**



## CHAIR'S MESSAGE: DOING OUR BIT

One of the memorable aspects of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations was the sheer number of people who took part in the celebrations, both enjoying the events and working in the background to make it a success. It's reflected at a local level too when we put on our own shows or ask members to support at an event we're showing at. The recent local Kenilworth Show and larger Compton Verney event are a tribute to all the people who helped plan, staff and set up. We can be very proud in particular of the BBKA Shows Committee, which comprises many WBKA members and does a fantastic job.

There are more stewarding opportunities coming up, which the BBKA Shows Committee are managing; at Ragley Hall near Alcester from 29-31 July. I thoroughly recommend being on the rota as a steward. Visitors are always interested to hear about beekeeping; you get a buzz from being part of the event; you get a free ticket for a friend or partner; and after your half-day stint you get to look around. To volunteer please email: [Gordon.Robbins@BBKA.org.uk](mailto:Gordon.Robbins@BBKA.org.uk)

**Suzanne Bennett**  
WLBK Chair

# MAY TASTER DAY SUCCESS

**T**here was a distinct buzz in the air the other Saturday at Kings Hill Nurseries and it wasn't coming from the training apiary but from the delegates on our WLBK Beekeeping Taster Day.

After a morning of presentations, honey tasting and, of course, the sampling of delicious honey cake (see page 3 for the recipe), the 20 "wannabees" donned bee suits and were treated to a live "bee experience" at the training apiary.

Did they enjoy it? Well, the feedback suggests so, where the quality of the presentations and the friendliness of the members, featured frequently. Would they have said that anyway? Possibly, but it was still nice to see it committed to paper.

The purpose of a Taster Day is to provide an unbiased, objective view of beekeeping – a task which given the enthusiasm of our presenters, is very difficult to achieve. So, for this particular Taster Day, and with not a little apprehension, we introduced a presentation entitled "Beekeeping; The Downside" highlighting

the cost, time commitment, challenges of factors outside beekeepers' control, disappointing honey yields, stings, neighbours etc. etc. We need not have worried as the numbers of attendees already showing interest in attending next year's introductory course swelled by 13 by the end of the day (not to mention one particularly keen lady who couldn't possibly wait a whole year for her first colony of bees - see page 5 to read how she fast tracked her way to becoming a beekeeper).

Even those who do not intend pursuing beekeeping further, left with a deeper understanding of our craft and what they can do to help our girls.

So, all-in-all, a very encouraging outcome of all the hard work and bonhomie of the members who gave so freely of their time, enthusiasm and knowledge.

Seemingly, the popularity of our craft continues undiminished ..... at least as far as Warwick and Leamington is concerned. I wonder why?

**Bernard Brown**

## BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

This June is a great contrast to last year. May saw pretty much every colony swell, swarm or split and there has been a great spring honey harvest. There have been a surprising number of swarms found on the ground, maybe because of the wind and some plants seem to be flowering early. However, flaming June is not living up to its name and it's a time for caution.

Here is what to do in the apiary this month:

- Watch out for the June gap (in the flow) as OSR and hawthorn were over early. The danger is taking all of the spring honey off and leaving the bees with nothing. If there is no forage you may even need to feed.
- Maintain regular hive inspections.
- It is not too late for swarms. If you see queen cells: pause- don't panic. Think it through before you remove them- or call a friend.
- You might still be doing nucs or artificial swarms, but this year you are more likely to be worrying about colonies not re-queening. Be patient and remember not to mark queens till they are mated.
- If you want to maximise your honey gathering this year, instead of a Pagden, why not do a demaree?
- Do a full brood disease inspection- looking JUST for brood disease by shaking each comb (but not the queen).
- Do you need a wax change . If you didn't do it in April or May, there is still time for a Bailey- especially if you are going on holiday
- Check your BeeBase registration and have a browse in the advice leaflets.

**Jane Medwell**

# SHOW ME THE HONEY

## WLBK BRANCH HONEY SHOW SATURDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER KINGS HILL NURSERY

The WLBK Branch Honey Show has something for every beekeeper. 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.

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.

## MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Welcome to our newest Junior member:  
Bethany Woodley.

We now have six Junior members in our branch – three boys and three girls. Some of them are attending our weekly training sessions at Kings Hill Nurseries.

The total number of members has now reached 260. We have:

209 Registered members

26 Partner members

19 Local members

Plus our 6 Junior members

## FOR SALE

Simple hive stands for sale with hives fitting nicely on top.

Solid and complete £20.

Contact: Jason Butler

[jason.butler777@btinternet.com](mailto:jason.butler777@btinternet.com)





# KING'S HIGH SCHOOL: A YEAR OF BEEKEEPING

**M**ay 2021 saw a magnificent apiary being constructed in what, for the previous 143 years, had been called the headmaster's garden of Warwick School – and, indeed, where I myself had kept a few colonies in the early 1980s. The space is now referred to as a Forest School, and is used by rather more people than just the headmaster and family – and several colonies of bees have returned, kindly donated. The Apiary is named for Paul Kerr, who had been closely involved with the School's Young Enterprise programme and who was a prominent member of Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers (WLBK). It was at his suggestion, shortly before his untimely death, that the School should start a beekeeping project. The apiary is therefore his legacy. The School is now a member of WLBK and consequently a member of the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA). WLBK was involved with the initial training of staff and offered a wide range of training opportunities and resources – including a very cost effective corporate purchasing scheme for consumables.

So how is it going? Twenty-four students signed up for the project and we now have four active hives. However the weather in our first year let us down enormously, and, even by September 2021, our total yield (from just one of the four hives) was 9lb. Most of this rather fine produce was auctioned, and the money raised went to offer beekeeping training to two Evergreen School staff.

Three colonies came through the winter unscathed, and a field of Oil Seed Rape just the other side of the Banbury Road, and fine weather too, ensured that colonies built up strongly, and provided a healthy spring crop of honey. The campus quite often sees swarms pass through, and 2022 was no exception – but none chose to stay.

One purchased (replacement) nucleus hive provided much interest, in that it seemed to swarm twice in May 2022, the bees returning en masse a while later. Was this evidence of virgin queen mating flights?

Regular participation in hive-opening sessions has depended somewhat on an ultra-keen nucleus (pun intended!) of staff and students, but that is only to be expected in a school where so much else of interest has been on offer.

**Gervald Frykman**



Charlotte, Yr 7, spots the queen (with a red spot) on her first visit to the King's High apiary.

## WE HAVE BEEN HOSPITALISED!

**2**015 was not a good year. Much of it was spent ferrying a friend to and from Walsgrave hospital for treatment. On one such occasion, whilst waiting for his treatment to finish, a display in the main entrance hall about the sustainability of Tuna fishing provided a welcome distraction.

Stewarded by the hospital's Sustainability Manager, the fact that we were beekeepers somehow slipped out, as it does. That was the start of a search for an out apiary on the hospital site. The Branch's out apiary team swung into action and a suitable site found in what was planned to be a wildflower meadow. It needed a new gate and approval from the powers that be. In

the meantime, we had three beekeepers interested in occupying this site. Momentum stalled but 12 months or so later it had just started to look as though everything had been sorted out when a development proposal put things on hold. Here they remained despite the occasional enquiry as to whether there was any progress.

But then along came a new beekeeper member who, not only lived in Coventry, but also worked at the hospital and happened to know the Sustainability Manager and the Chief Exec. It took from just 27<sup>th</sup> April to the 31<sup>st</sup> May to achieve what we set out to do so seven years ago. Isn't it just great when a plan comes together.

**Bernard Brown**

# WANNABEE TO HAVABEE IN 3 WEEKS

**T**he object of our taster days is to educate attendees in what beekeeping involves and of the importance of bees in general in the environment. It is not a recruitment exercise. Consequently, we make every effort to provide a balanced view of things. We have, in the past failed, in so far as the natural enthusiasm of our presenters just cannot be controlled. So to redress the balance we introduced a talk entitled "Beekeeping - the Downside". You know the sort of stuff – badly behaved bees, being thwarted by factors outside of your control, the loss of garage space, the cost of a new shed, disappointing honey yields – need I go on? Well, at our last Taster Day held at the beginning of March, our efforts had absolutely no effect on one of the attendees. So inspired by what she had learned and being not one to let the grass grow beneath her feet, Lottie Buckland decided there and then that beekeeping was for her.

What followed is quite remarkable. Over the 21 days from 8<sup>th</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> June she:-

- Attended the Taster Day
- Became Inspired
- Was disappointed at having to wait 11 months for next branch Introduction to training course.
- Joined Branch at 6.00p.m. on Taster Day
- Ordered flat pack hive
- Assembled hive
- Assessed apiary location on friendly farmer's land
- Found and attended Introductory Training Course (cancellation at Birmingham Branch's)
- Sourced Bees
- Acquired Mentor
- Signed up for training Apiary Sessions
- Recruited Daughter as junior member
- Attended training Apiary Sessions
- Collected nuc of Bees
- Hived Bees
- Arranged invite to Branch Displays to Farm Sunday event.
- Stewarded Branch Display at Kings Hill Spring Fayre and at Compton Verney Ju-bee-lee Fun Day
- Took Breath ... as did the rest of us involved.

An amazing achievement on her part and something of a challenge for the rest of us.

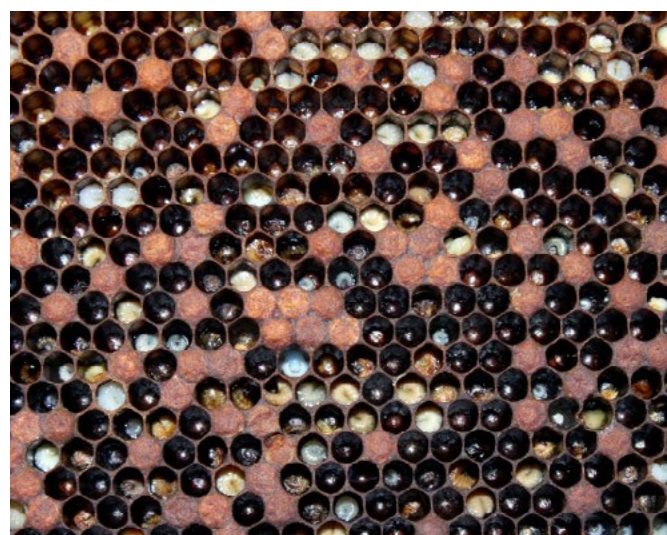
It just goes to show the passion that beekeeping invokes ..... or that we are all bonkers!!

**Bernard Brown**

# EUROPEAN FOULBROOD IS BACK!

**E**FB has returned to Warwickshire. There has been a serious outbreak in the Stratford upon Avon and Henley in Arden areas. One local beekeeper with 18 apiaries has had 4 apiaries affected, all of which have been subjected to the, regrettably, all too familiar corrective measures by the seasonal bee inspectors. If your apiaries are located in the Aston Cantlow, Wilmcote, Henley in Arden and Wootton Wawen areas, these will be worrying times. There is not much you can do other than to wait and hope but, as beekeepers are among the most common vectors of this pernicious disease, applying high hygiene standards during and before moving on to another apiary, is essential. This involves regular washing of bee suits cleaning of boots, and hive tools etc., cleaning or replacing gloves and where you grip your smoker bellows.

**Image:** EFB after several weeks in the hive (Source: beeinformed.org)





# PUTTING UP WITH FOLLOWERS



While most guard bees protect the colony from the vantage point of the hive entrance, some may decide to go looking for trouble before it arrives anywhere near the hive. This is guard bee turned follower bee.

**B**eing harassed by a follower bee who has singled you out for sacrifice is quite an ordeal. A solo worker, who behaves like a thing possessed, a heat-seeking missile, a smart bomb that's got your number can be frightening. While most beekeepers are comfortable dealing with a swarm of thousands, a persistent lone bee on a mission is an entirely different matter.

The swarm is docile because it's homeless. Since it hasn't yet selected new lodgings, it has nothing to defend, no address, no possessions, no kids. It doesn't even have honey stores. Since there's nothing to steal, you don't seem like much of a threat. You can cut the swarm out of a tree, carry it around on a branch, or drop it in a cardboard box without so much as a ping.

But the single worker who tags you is likely a guard bee. She's on a mission to protect her home, her queen, her food stores, and the all-important brood nest. While most guards work in proximity to the hive, one or more may decide to go looking for trouble before

it comes knocking.

These single-minded bees are unusual because something that's not bothering the rest of the colony sets them off. I mow within three feet of my apiary with tens of thousands of bees without an issue but for the one individual who takes exception to my efforts to work with nature. There is almost nothing you can do once these loners decide to go after you. They head-butt, circle, and dive-bomb. If they get the chance, they will sting.

Leaf blowers, pressure washers, dogs, a garden barbecue, a game of footie or kids splashing in a pool can set them off.

It is difficult to resist defending yourself and walk calmly away as recommended but another solution worth trying, if they are persistent in their pursuit, is to whisk them out of the air with an insect net. Once caught, flip the net over so that she can't get out and lay it in a nice shady spot where she can cool her heels. Once the threat is gone, let her go. Although she looks embarrassed, she's unharmed by her incarceration.

**Ivan A Perry**

# HINTS & TIPS



- On average, honey from oil seed rape (above) will granulate within 10 days of being sealed in the comb. So watch out for when the yellow flowers fade and harvest it as soon as possible. As you extract your honey don't forget to think about the Honey Shows and save some of the good looking jars for entering. It's really useful to get expert opinion on your produce. This year the Branch Honey Show has a class for wax candles so keep the wax cappings separate, as they are the best for the candles and wax blocks.
- Did you know that bees exhibit 'flower consistency'? This means that they don't fly randomly from one flower to another but collect mainly from the same type of flower or plant at a given time. This has consequences for planting. If you plant in 'drifts' of one particular plant rather than scattering them around the garden, this will help the bees to find the flowers and have a good forage.
- Beware the 'June gap'! In some parts of the countryside there is a lull between the dandelion and blossom crops of spring and the big tree flowers such as horse chestnut in July, and bees may even need feeding. However this should not be of concern to you if your bees are visiting domestic gardens, as there is a wealth of forage to be had.
- Signing up to Beebase as a beekeeper will enable you to take advantage of the free service they offer. No charge is made for an apirary visit by a fully qualified Bee Inspector. The inspector will check for signs of disease or pest, and will provide you with help and advice on good husbandry, and how to tackle any potential problems they may find. All have extensive experience of managing colonies of bees and are keen apiarists themselves. They will try and keep any disruption during a visit to an absolute minimum and provide you with up to date information and advice. You will also have access to all the latest information concerning disease and pest outbreaks and the results of various research projects and latest advisory information. Just Google Beebase and follow the instructions on how to sign up. I was really glad I had as the inspector came around to check my colonies following an outbreak of EFB close by.

## 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](mailto:h.essex@virgin.net)*

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.  
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