



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

CELEBRATING WORLD BEE DAY



World Bee day was on Saturday 20th May and what a perfect day to hold the first of our shows this year. After the awful weather we'd had in recent months the sun was shining all day and it encouraged lots of folk to come along to this new event, which was held at Hill Close Gardens in Warwick.

The aim of the day was to (quote) "Bee engaged in pollinator-friendly agricultural production" and "To support pollinator-friendly agricultural production and highlight the importance of protecting bees and other pollinators, particularly through evidence-based agricultural production practices".

As you can see from the picture above, apart from an observation hive, which of course generated a lot of interest, and also honey sales and information, this year we introduced our Little Buzzers section, where we encouraged children to make bee-themed art work. This was very popular and our members spent a lot of time perched on little blue chairs as they worked with the children.

Val Dillon

In honour of World Bee Day, here is a little poem about why bees are so important:

THE LAST BEE

After the last bee
had uzzed its last uzz,

the irds and the utterflies
did what they could.

ut soon the fields lay are,
few flowers were left,

nature was roken,
and the planet ereft.

Brian Bilston

WLBK CHAIR'S JUNE MESSAGE

The long, warm evenings. The bright, light early mornings. The aroma of blossom and trees and flowers. June is an absolutely wonderful time of year for the bees, and for us. There is plenty to do and to look forward to during this 2023 beekeeping season, to keep our bees healthy and to spread the word on bees.

Just a few highlights...

The truly excellent BBKA Shows Committee, with great representation from WLBK members, will be out in force at some high profile national shows over the coming months. These include Gardeners World Live at the NEC from **15-18 June** and the Ragley Game Fair on **28-30 July**. Wearing my BBKA Trustee hat, the charitable object of the British Beekeepers' Association is 'to promote and further the craft of beekeeping and to advance the education of the public in the importance of bees in the environment'.

One of the ways we achieve these goals is through our conversations with the public on the BBKA stand at both national and local shows. The Shows Team create a great range of exhibits to encourage interaction and discussion. The BBKA stand at shows is always a positive event and I'd urge you to take part. Look out for emails asking for participants.

The ancient craft of skep making is demonstrated at our shows too. WLBK's Mike Townsend and Val Dillon are talented skep makers who are generous in helping other branch members get up to speed in this craft. If you are interested, there is a practical workshop for this craft at the annual BBKA Spring Convention in April as well as WLBK courses. See our skeps 'in action' at Kenilworth Castle and Packwood House.

Following the successful Food Safety for the Beekeeper event on 13 May, we're gearing up the refurbished WLBK Extraction Unit for you to extract your honey. In case you need any further encouragement, the WLBK Honey Show is on 23 September. It would be great to see some of our new beekeepers joining previous exhibitors in showcasing their honey and products of the hive.

Suzanne Bennett, WLBK Chair



FOOD SAFETY FOR THE BEEKEEPER

Our branch's *Food Safety for the Beekeeper* session on Saturday 13th May was well supported, with 25 participants at the wonderful Eathorpe Village Hall. It was led by Andy Pedley (pictured right), retired environmental health inspector and a presenter at the BBKA 2023 Spring Convention.

Andy gave a lively and informative presentation about honey extraction, illustrated with fascinating images of early Egyptian beekeeping alongside pics of hygiene do's and don'ts. The key point was the need for appropriate hygiene. It was a welcome reminder of the simple but important steps for ensuring your honey meets required standards of quality, which apply even when you're only selling honey to local shops or at events etc.

After refreshments, we moved on to show and tell. Clive Joyce showed us the honey melter and a radial spinner, and explained how to clean them. This was followed up by short films by Alex Wray, which will be on the club website.

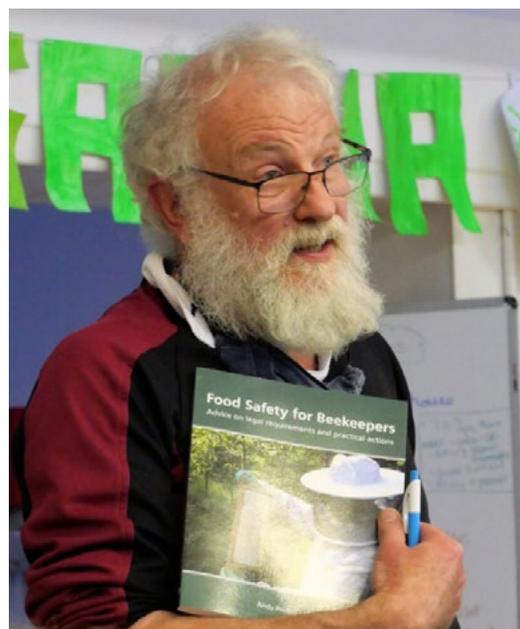
Bee chat over lunch was followed a second session from Andy on honey labelling.

Finally, we heard about the new booking system for our Extraction Unit. Users must accept the terms and conditions, check the diary and then contact Clive Joyce to confirm a booking date. Details (and an updated manual) are on the web with a laminated manual in the extraction unit - a useful reminder for using and cleaning our valuable kit.

We all left with an attendance certificate, proof that had received training. Some of us took the opportunity to buy a signed copy of Andy Pedley's book, *Food Safety for Beekeepers*.

Thanks to Judith Masson for organising the event, Clive Joyce for bringing the kit and explaining its use and everyone who gave up their time to make a really successful day.

Suzanne Bennett, WLBK Chair



BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

Entering a period of calm?

What a May it has been! There have been so many swarms that everyone I know has run out of spare kit.

Early spring too cold/windy/rainy to inspect. The colonies built up but were reluctant to swarm. I saw several colonies with capped queen cells and even hatched virgins, but the old queen was still there. Of course, on the first sunny day - they were off!

Even if you did get in and do artificial swarms, the bees on new foundation couldn't draw wax because of low temperatures. So they remained under space pressure and made swarming preparations too! On the first good day - they swarmed.

It was a case of being damned if you did do swarm control and damned if you didn't - they all swarmed. However, the honey harvest has been good and we are now getting early summer forage.

- Keep up the weekly inspections (nine days if you have clipped queens). Look closely for queen cells – they hide in the tightest corners.
- Do artificial swarms, nucs or splits for warm control if you need to- there is still time for more swarming.
- Do a full brood disease inspection- ignoring bees.
- Put in clearer boards for supers containing OSR honey and book the extraction room.
- Extract OSR honey if you haven't already- it will granulate and can "seed" your super wax.
- Make sure colonies have enough stores. There may not be much of a June Gap this year, but colonies can starve after you remove their stores.
- Do a varroa count- either using a board or an alcohol roll. I have been using this **IKEA Snack container**. It's cheap (about £1.50) Karen Burrow from Nottinghamshire BKA recommends it. I will happily send instructions to anyone who drops me an email.

Jane Medwell



PLANT OF MONTH: BROOM



Broom is flowering in profusion at this time of year and produces an abundance of pollen and nectar for both honeybees and bumble bees. A member of the pea family, which also includes lupin, gorse, and laburnum, its Latin name is *Planta Genista*. It can be found growing alongside gorse on heathland and along the coast. The bright yellow flowers are very similar to gorse but broom is not prickly and has a delicate scent of vanilla. Its long, whip like stems used to be tied together to make brushes or 'brooms'. If you are near a broom bush in late summer you might just hear the black seed pods exploding in the sun.

Fun historical fact - Broom was the emblem of Geoffrey of Anjou, the father of Henry II of England, who continued the tradition. Hence taking the name "Planta genista", Henry became the first **Plantagenet** king in 1154. The Plantagenets continued to rule until 1485 when Richard III was killed at Bosworth Field.

Maggie Curley



MAY TASTER DAY



Saturday 13th May was our first Taster Day of 2023 at Kingshill Nurseries. It had proved difficult to recruit attendees this time (maybe a sign of people being more cautious about where they spend their money). However, the nine people who did attend seem to have had a very enjoyable day if the feedback comments are anything to go by.



Fortunately for us, the day was fine so we were able to take them down to the training apiary to experience a hive being opened up. Actually, it was only nucs that were available (if you're anything like us, most of your hives have had to be split this year). There was an added bonus of witnessing a swarm emerging (possibly not what was planned but our delegates were fascinated nonetheless). Interestingly, the bees all lined up on the top 6 inches of the fence rather than clustering in a group. Many of them landed on our heads but that didn't seem to phase the delegates (for which we were profoundly thankful). Thanks to the apiary team for allowing us to invade their territory and a big thanks to Steve P who then had to get the swarm into its new home after we'd deserted him.

The honey show recipe cake was a big hit with some of the delegates and we even supplied them with the recipe to have a go at home. Have you tried baking a honey cake? It's really easy to do (if I can do it, anyone can) and the results are delicious.

The feedback forms received back from the delegates showed their enjoyment of the day. All of them answered the question "did we achieve the course objectives?" by saying "Yes", "Yes and more", "Very much yes" or "Absolutely". All of them have expressed an interest in hearing about the ITB next year and one has already joined the club.

It was an enjoyable day but we couldn't have done it without the help of the wider team. As usual, a huge thanks to everyone who helped, particularly to Bernard and Jane, Nicky, Steve and Kirsty Bax.

If anyone is interested in helping out at the September Taster Day (we always need someone as a "floater" to help out generally if you're not keen on doing a presentation), please do let us know. You don't have to be an experienced beekeeper to help out. In fact, having someone who is new to beekeeping is an advantage as it gives the attendees the chance to speak to someone who was in their shoes the previous year.

Jane Richmond and Paul Day

TOP BAR HIVES

I am rather urgently seeking information about top bar hives. I don't have any experience of them and need to talk to someone who does.

Do you have any experience of top bar hives? Have you used them or encountered users in the UK or abroad, now or in the past?

I would like to know about what it is like to use them- good, bad and just different. If you have any experience at all of top bar hives, please could you drop me an email at jane.medwell@gmail.com. I can learn basic facts on the internet, but that's not at all the same as talking to someone who has experience!

I would love to hear from you.

Jane Medwell, WLBK Committee Member

JUNE BEE SAFARI

June Bee Safari – **15th June at 7pm**

David Stott's Bee Farm, Napton

David will show us his queen rearing operation.

Booking via club website [here](#).

Afterwards (from 8 pm) at Kings Head Napton on the Hill, CV47 8NG (no need to book unless you want a meal at the pub). Everyone welcome to join us for a drink.

Judith Masson

OUT APIARIES

There are two new opportunities for out apiaries, one in Hampton on the Hill which is in a private garden overlooking farmland and the other is in Norton Lindsey which is in a horse paddock overlooking farmland. Both sites have good security and access, and each site will accommodate a single beekeeper and up to 4 colonies. For further details contact me at

alistair.walker@btinternet.com. A schedule of all available out apiaries is on the WLBK website.

Alistair Walker

BEES ABROAD AT THE WAX CHANDLER'S LIVERY COMPANY



This year the Wax Chandler's Livery Company sponsored a lunch for Bees Abroad at their headquarters in the City of London and I was lucky enough to be invited. I was impressed by the history of the company (600 years in the City), the sumptuous premises and delicious vegetarian menu. But most of all by the wonderful work they do using beekeeping to change lives in Africa.

The speakers were a real treat. Prof Dave Goulson was uncharacteristically diplomatic about honeybees as part of the pollinator economy. I have so loved all his books, but I particularly love *A Sting in the Tail*. If you haven't read it.... Anne Rowberry (BBKA President) spoke about visiting projects in Kenya and Bees Abroad own Project Leaders about the massive difference Bees Abroad makes to the lives it touches.

One of the nicest parts of the lunch was hearing, from the chairman, about WLBK member Betty Buckland and her amazing fundraising for Bees Abroad this year. At the lunch we all heard her song, recorded from the radio!

I'm selling honey for Bees Abroad and I can't recommend it enough as a charity that makes every penny really work!

Jane Medwell



TAKE YOUR BEES TO WATER



Honey bees and a few wasps are drinking water on a tree stump.

cooling and fanning requires lots of water, perhaps several quarts a day. Besides all those “house-keeping uses,” bees also use water as we do. A good swig of water helps them digest their food and it allows them to secrete the royal jelly they need for rearing young’uns. A bee without water wouldn’t last long.

It should come as no surprise that bees carry water in their honey stomach. This is a stretchy organ that expands as it is filled and shrinks when it is emptied. Because bees have only one honey stomach, they can only carry water or nectar on a foraging trip—not both.

A water forager brings home multiple loads of water until the house bees signal that they have enough. Only then can she switch to collecting something else, such as nectar, resins, or pollen.

Just like us, honey bees need a constant supply of water all year round, so make sure to provide one, especially when the weather is dry.

Did you know honey bees are a thirsty lot? That’s right, they need water all day long. But during the scorching summer months of nectar dearth, a reliable watering hole is an absolute necessity. Without it, the entire colony could go belly up. Because it’s so important, some foragers spend their lives finding and fetching water so their sisters can drink.

So, what kind of water do bees seek? Well, they’re pretty picky. They need a supply that won’t dry up, and they like water with a nice odour—mossy, mouldy or stinky does the trick. In fact, nothing makes a bee happier than a little musty-scented mud puddle.

But bees also need a place to stand where they can drink at leisure and not drown. Who can blame them? We all like to enjoy a drink without an unexpected swimming lesson.

Since nectar is about 80 per cent water, much of the water in a nectar-collecting hive comes from flowers. But even that’s not enough, which means some worker bees search for water they can bring back to the hive. But finding water is not as easy as it sounds. Because a bee’s vision is different from ours, bees may have trouble seeing water from the air. Many people think bees are more likely to find water by scent than by sight, which explains why water with an odour attracts honey bees so well. Once bees learn a scent, they will go back to the source over and over again. If the source is your neighbour’s pool, dog bowl, horse trough, hose pipe, or fish pond you risk big-time neighbour problems.

Honey bees use water for things besides drinking. On the hottest days, they smear water in thin sheets along the edges of brood comb. Next, the bees fan the water with their wings, causing it to evaporate. Because evaporation is a cooling process, the air and the brood nest can be maintained at a proper temperature. This busy bee process, called evaporative cooling, works just like an air conditioner but much quieter.

On super hot days, the bees have to work extra hard to prevent their wax combs from deforming or melting into a puddle. All that

So, next time you see a thirsty bee buzzing around, remember that she’s not just looking for a quick sip. She’s got important work to do, and a reliable water source can make all the difference.

When we examine popular honey bee watering holes, we usually discover something that imparts an odour. That may be decomposing leaves, mucky moss-filled sludge, creepy crawlies such as worms, slithery larvae, or partially submerged plants. Even the essences of chlorinated or saltwater pools such as hot tubs tend to attract honey bees.

This business with swimming pools can be a problem because most people don’t like to share their expensive-to-own, exorbitant-to-maintain swimming pools with wee stinging insects.

If starting a new apiary, set up a reliable water source before you get bees. If you provide no water, the bees will find a source on their own, and that might be a swimming pool or koi pond. Once honey bees establish a bad habit, it will be very difficult (or impossible) to break.

When it comes to providing water for bees, safety should be your top priority (theirs, not yours). Bees tend to be lousy swimmers, so a poorly designed watering hole could spell disaster for your hardworking colony. Don’t be the unwitting cause of apicide!

To lure your honey bees to the new watering station, there are a few tricks you can try. Some beekeepers like to entice their buzzy friends with sugar water, a tablespoon of chlorine bleach, or a drop of aniseed oil. Others prefer to add ground oyster shells or a small amount of salt to impart that irresistible seaside aroma. Once the bees start frequenting your watering station, you can stop adding the optional extras. But don’t forget to keep the water filled or go drippy with irrigation heads.

With a little creativity and some attention to bee safety, you’ll have a happy, hydrated colony in no time. With any luck, your neighbours will be happy too.

Bernard Brown



SHAKEN AND STIRRED

When branch member Alan Rodricks contacted us wanting an out apiary, we thought we may have the answer in his email address. This contained the name of his employer. Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, he bounced the idea off his sustainability manager who, currently engaged with seeking accreditation under ISO 14001 - the internationally recognised standard for the environmental management of businesses - showed a flicker of interest. With Alan's encouragement, this developed into taking soundings from his site management and public relations teams who decided that they needed to know more. So, Alan arranged for us to give a presentation on hosting beehives which seemed to go down well judging from their insistence, immediately afterwards, that we tour the grounds looking for a suitable site. To be honest, whilst there were several potential ones, all had some drawback until one of the company's staff suggested an area in the corner of a far-flung car park. Absolutely ideal. Smooth, weed free surface, good access, admittedly very exposed visually but nothing that some fencing and screening couldn't sort out.

Now, when I reveal that the company involved was none other than Aston Martin Lagonda - the luxury car maker at Gaydon, - you will understand that our usually unkempt patch of land, often unusable for anything else, with a motley collection of shabby, weathered hives, hardly fitted in with the image that the company wished to project. Having learned that Bentley and Porsche already had apiaries, the Aston Martin one had to be something special. So AML set up a fenced and screened apiary for the Aston Martin Bees.

Alan, in the meantime set about painting all his hives in matching colours. The commitment of the company extended further. Alan gave the company a specification for tramway hive stands. But, not for AML the usual reclaimed timber rails on concrete blocks, - powder-coated steel ones seen above.

Alan must have made a favourable impression on his bosses as we received another invitation - this time to bring a display of bee keeping to the company for the benefit of their employees. We felt that their commitment to our girls thus far merited recognition.



So it was that Clive Joyce, Mick Smith and Bernard Brown rolled up one day to set up our display of honey tasting and honey sales, an observation hive and information about beekeeping and our branch activities, in the foyer of their newly refurbished canteen. This turned out to be a superb location and, during the three hours the canteen was open for lunch, we were inundated with interest. This far exceeded our expectations and we were frenetically busy barely having time to replenish the honey on the sales table let alone eat the sandwich kindly provided. Perhaps the best way to give readers an inkling of what it was like is by way of honey sales which totalled 90 jars grossing £450 in just 3 hours! We were, at the end, pretty exhausted but perked up somewhat when we were offered a tour of the factory. What an experience and what a conclusion to an exceptional day. A day in which we were **shaken** by the popularity of our display AND **stirred** by the sight of the road going version their formula 1 racing car, the Valkyrie.

BREAKING NEWS - subsequent to our visit four employees have attended our taster day, one of whom has already joined the branch. What's more, "could we come back for their Autumn families' day?"...You bet!

Ivan A Perry



THE MUSEUM BEES ARE BACK



WLBK have managed a viewing hive in Warwick's Market Hall museum for around 80 years with bees flying freely from one of the upper gallery windows. The colony is replaced occasionally and recently I was assisted by Steve Poynter in furnishing the hive with bees from the Branch apiary. Being a 2022 queen she has been well marked yellow by Steve and her laying behaviour is clearly on display. The bee dances near the entrance 'dance floor', food sharing and caring for the queen, incidentally named Jaia, can be clearly observed.

Please do visit and feedback your observations to me. Also note in the display cabinet opposite the lost wax technique used to create intricate ornamental and weapon accretions is shown. Although we chase the honey, since earliest times recovery of beeswax was at least as important.

Mike Townsend

BEE BREAD



Let's take a quick look at how honey bees make bee bread and how bee bread affects the health and longevity of a bee colony.

We all know that bees collect pollen. In fact, except for the kleptoparasites (bees that rob other bees' stores), all species of bees collect pollen for raising their young. But pollen doesn't keep well. It rapidly loses its nutritive value unless it's frozen or processed within a day or two of collection. We humans can stick it in the freezer, but the bees must process it without delay.

The process has several steps. First, the foragers collect pollen in the field, scraping it from their bodies and stuffing it into their pollen baskets. During this stage, the bees add a bit of nectar and saliva to the pollen to help it stick together, a step that makes pollen pellets shiny.

Whoever thinks processed food is a bad idea hasn't talked to a bee. Pollen by itself is extremely difficult to digest and has a short shelf life, but once processed into bee bread it becomes a stable, baby bee superfood.

Next, they fly home with their full baskets. Each pollen-carrying bee goes to a pollen-storage area near the brood nest. She searches for a cell that can receive her load and then backs up to it. She uses one leg to knock the pollen pellet off the other leg until both pellets drop into the cell. Then she's off to find another load.

House bees come along later and tamp down the pellets, butting them with their heads to fill the air pockets and make a solid "loaf." They also add, honey, more salivary secretions, and lactic acid. The added ingredients encourage fermentation, a process that helps break down the tough outer coating of pollen and make the inner contents more digestible.

After the cell is full, the bees add a layer of honey over the top of the pollen cell to block out air and microbes, which further enhances the shelf life. The fermenting stored pollen with added ingredients is now called "bee bread."

Going into the winter months, a good supply of bee bread is a valuable asset. Just like a pantry full of human food. It can get the occupants by for many weeks or even months. Bee bread becomes particularly valuable in late winter and early spring before the first flowers appear—a season of heavy brood rearing requiring lots of protein.

The staying power of bee bread may be why the ancient Greeks called it ambrosia. The word means "food of the gods" because it could provide immortality. In a sense, it does. A good stash of bee bread can lead the colony into another year.

However, old frames of bee bread eventually become dry and brittle, losing their nutritive value. Some say a well-preserved frame of bee bread can last two years, although one year seems to be more likely. Since different types of pollen have different characteristics, shelf life will vary.

Once a frame of pollen gets dry and the pellets shrink, a beekeeper can turn the frame upside down and bang it against a hard object. With any luck, most of the pellets will fly out and you can re-use the frame.

Reproduced with permission of the Honey Bee Suite

HINTS & TIPS



- On average oil seed rape honey 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 forage more successfully.
- 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 apiary 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 it really is worth the effort!

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.
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