



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## WLBK BUZZES INTO LOCAL SCHOOL

**P**art of the WLBK charitable status is to spread the word about bees and beekeeping. To this end, our branch has a small outreach team of dedicated members who deal with this endeavour.

Spring/Summer 2021 has been very quiet due to lockdown. We had a few enquiries from local schools but only one from Kingsley School coming to fruition due to dates and availability of our team.

During our visit to Kingsley, the "flower to jar" presentation introduced the children to beekeeping from its historic roots to the modern day beekeeper along with the tools of the trade from bee suits to smokers. It is very much a hands on experience with the highlight of the show being the bee waggle dance, which was performed to much applause and delight from the children.

Both our team and the children enjoyed themselves very much. It was smiles all round. Kingsley have also produced a great video from our visit, which can be found on their Facebook page: <https://fb.watch/v/QrGogJ8u/>.

If you would like us to visit your school or club to talk about bees please do get in touch:

[warleambees@warleambees.org.uk](mailto:warleambees@warleambees.org.uk)

**Paresh Pankhania**



The smile says it all

## WLBK HONEY SHOW: SAT 25<sup>TH</sup> SEPT

With the date fast approaching, we are encouraging all our members to start preparing for our much anticipated WLBK Honey Show and enter at least one class. With 19 different classes to choose from, there is something for every member.

This year the Show will be held at Kings Hill Autumn Fayre on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September. This means that the exhibits will be open to the public for viewing during the course of the day with stewards on hand to answer any questions.

We are delighted to welcome John Home once again as our judge, who will provide feedback and summarise his findings during the presentations at the end of the day.

The schedule and entry forms are available on our website [www.warleambees.org.uk](http://www.warleambees.org.uk). And turn to page 12 for some valuable advice on how to best prepare for the event. Good luck!



WLBK's outreach team

# CHAIR'S AUGUST MESSAGE

**T**his is the time of year when I start telling everyone "well, you know the bees are packing up for autumn!" The summer is far from over, but my bees are generating a healthy arc of stores around the brood box and I want to take off the honey before they take it down. This year I am trying out a rhombus board for clearing supers- which is quite experimental for me.

So far this week I have extracted a modest 30kg of very light honey and even if this is all I get, I shall be happy. I would love to enter the dark, or even medium, categories at our upcoming Honey show. But no! This year, again, I shall be stuck in the light classes. If you have not entered the Honey Show before, do give it a go this year- even if it is just a cake! For aficionados, I see from Warwickshire Beekeeper, that the other Warwickshire branches are welcoming entries to their honey shows.

This year I feel very fortunate to have honey and healthy bees and a lot of my energy has gone on trying to protect them. I have had three separate NBU warnings telling me "you have EFB within three kilometres of your apiaries". I am operating the very best barrier hygiene and if EFB comes into my apiaries it will be bee-borne, not beekeeper borne. If there is national shortage of washing soda, it could be my fault.

This is the month when I most appreciate our branch and all the



Honey extraction is just one of this month's tasks

members who give their time to run the shared facilities. I have ordered varroa control chemicals through the coop and put in my order for Ambrosia. Now I am thinking about the boiler to clean up my combs. Clive, Val, Bernard, Alan, Andy and all the other members who run these facilities deserve our especial thanks at a time when they are already busy with their own colonies. They keep our costs down and take a lot of the hard labour out of this time of year. Our branch, like our bees, works together for all our benefit.

If you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at ([warleambees@warleambees.org.uk](mailto:warleambees@warleambees.org.uk)). Our bee inspector is **Colleen Reichling** and her mobile number is: 07990 138898 ([colleen.reichling@apha.gov.uk](mailto:colleen.reichling@apha.gov.uk)).

Jane Medwell

## BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

This is a honey month and the month we go into protection mode for our bees:

- Clear your supers and take off the remaining honey for extraction
- Extract and store your honey
- Clean up the supers (replacing them briefly onto the hives whence they came)
- Do a full disease inspection, if you haven't already
- Test mite drop and treat for varroa
- Do a mite drop and order varroacides, if you need them
- Re-queen or unite where swarm control has left you with small colonies
- Close down entrances as small as possible and put out wasp traps
- When the flow is over, feed in preparation for winter. (Did you know Clive and the coop shifted 8 tonnes of Ambrosia to members last autumn? That's a lot of filling 12.5kg containers)
- And finally, select your entries for the Honey Show- honey, combs, mead, candles, wax, photos and cake are all potential winners

Jane Medwell

# GIZMO OF THE MONTH



Lighting a smoker with a naked flame device such as matches, cigarette lighters, hob lighters etc. can be tricky, if not somewhat hazardous particularly on a windy day. Often, the only sheltered spot is inside the smoker itself but with the tendency of the flame to go vertically upwards, barbecued fingers can be the result. Of course, we all know to light our smokers before we don our rubber gloves and veil but nevertheless limiting the damage to fingers is of little comfort.

So, when I came across a "plasma" lighter I thought it worth a punt. Based on the principal of electricity arcing between two electrodes, sufficient heat is generated to light paper, cardboard or a gas blow lamp. At about 10" overall length, fingers are kept well away and operates in any orientation. The model I tried has a flexible end (similar to this one shown) adding to its versatility. Powered by a battery rechargeable from a USB port, there are LED lights to indicate the state of the battery. The only disadvantage encountered so far is that the battery is not replaceable.

At a tad under £10 it may not be the cheapest way to set your smoker going but what price can you put on safety and reliability?

Ivan A Perry

# AUGUST TASTER DAY

A different arrangement for honey tasting was successfully trialled by the 18 delegates at the first Taster Day held by the Branch since 2019. Rather than dipping spatulas into open jars of honey, we had individual saucepots pre-charged with, on this occasion, three types of honey. Coupled with individually wrapped slices of honey cake, an element of normality was restored.

By the time we had finished the talks there was a distinct buzz amongst the delegates that soon elevated to swarm pitch with anticipation for the hive opening session, which was taking place at three of our members' apiaries. There were questions aplenty and, arriving just before 3pm, it was nigh on 6pm before they finally wound their way homewards.

From the interest shown to take things further in the feedback survey and subsequent emails, the day was a success, largely due, of course, to the enthusiasm, knowledge, and bonhomie of the apiaries and presenting teams.

The next Taster Day is scheduled for the **11<sup>th</sup> September 2021** and there are still places available so please spread the word. If anyone could post details on their local town's or village's Facebook page or website, please contact Bernard Brown at [bernardbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardbrown@outlook.com) for details.

Bernard Brown

# TRAINING VIDEOS

Coventry Branch's Pete Barclay has prepared a range of short training videos covering the following topics. To view, google 'Pete Barclay Videos'

- [Render wax from brood and super frames](#)
- [Making a frame from flat pack](#)
- [Boiling Brood and Super Frames](#)
- [Jarring runny honey](#)
- [Hive tools - Choice and Use](#)
- [Preparing a Nosema Slide](#)
- [Freshen stale foundation](#)
- [Filtering wax after rendering from frames](#)
- [Queen rearing in a queenright colony - using Miller method and a Cloake board](#)

# OUT APIARIES

Looking for an out-apiary? There are still some available. See the members' area of the website.

# UNWANTED SPLITS

There are still small a number of unwanted splits for sale at competitive prices. Contact [bernardbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardbrown@outlook.com)

# BDI — WARNING!!!

The recent outbreaks Of EFB and subsequent claims on the Bee Diseases Insurance (BDI) have revealed some misunderstanding over one particular aspect. For BDI to accept a claim, all hives currently at an apiary have to be covered. This means that when completing the particular section of the membership form you have to estimate how many splits and swarms might be added to your stock.

# SKEP MAKING DAY

A reminder that our Skep Making day will be on **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October** at BBKA headquarters.

10am – 4pm. The cost is £35. Places are limited.

Please complete the form on our homepage: [www.warleambees.org.uk](http://www.warleambees.org.uk)



# VARIOUS VARROA TREATMENTS

**N**ow is the time to test and treat for varroa. If you are signed on to [beebase](#) you can use the varroa calculator, enter your 7 day mite drop and it tells you when to treat. [Our co-op](#) has some of the products and others can be obtained by mail from the big suppliers. This is a quick summary of your chemical treatment options- recognising that chemicals may be just a part of a wider package using biotechnical methods like shook swarms or queen trapping.

## IF YOU WANT TO TREAT VARROA WITH THE HONEY SUPERS ON OR DURING A FLOW

If you want to treat with the supers on, you should choose MAQs (Mite Away Quick Strips). These are **Formic Acid** and do not taint honey. We have MAQs in the co-op and, this year, they come in a cardboard box- not the wasteful plastic buckets they used to occupy. If you are using these you need to use sturdy gloves and mask, and avoid inhaling anywhere near them. Place the two strips onto the top of the brood box for 8 days. When you remove them you can put the old strips into your compost heap as this organic acid decomposes. MAQS are only suitable for full colonies- not NUCs. Highly effective. (We note that Wally Shaw and others have said that a half dose is plenty on UK sized hives as the dosage is for double Langstroth hives, but we do not want to undermine the official advice.)



## IF YOU WANT TO TREAT WHEN YOU HAVE REMOVED THE HONEY SUPERS

Once the supers have gone and the flow has largely stopped you have a much greater range of possible treatments.

In the co-op we have Apistan (an **Amitraz** product). Two plastic strips are hung in the brood box for a number of weeks after the removal of the supers. Handle the chemical strips with care as they are toxic. Make sure you dispose of them as per the advice- very carefully. Or take them to a pharmacy/vet and ask them to dispose of them. Apitraz and Apivar are both Amitraz products and mite resistance (varroa in France and the US are becoming resistant) so



NBU and other sources advise you should not use this varroacide in successive years. If you used Apistan last year, choose something else this year. Amitraz products **should not be used during a honey flow or when honey supers are on the hive. Highly effective.**

Bavyrol and Apistan are available from suppliers. They are **pyrethroid** infused plastic strips which are also toxic, so handle with gloves and read the instructions for disposal. There is a well-established degree of mite resistance to these chemicals in the UK already, so again, do not use in successive years. Remember, you will be selecting for mite resistant varroa if you use these.

For a long time, the treatment most favoured by our members was Apiguard, which is a **thymol** gel in a metal tray. Two trays are placed on the top of the brood box and the bees take it down. We have this in the co-op. Similar Thymol products and alternatives include: Apilife Var (also in the coop) and Thymovar.

These products work in a similar way to Apiguard, by placing impregnated pads or trays on the top of the bars of the brood box. Handle the trays or pads with gloves and dispose of them in the packaging. Thymols like Apiguard are a good choice to alternate with Amitraz products like Apistan. **Very effective.**



## IF YOU WANT TO TREAT IN THE WINTER BROODLESS PERIOD

We have Api- Bioxal (**Oxalic Acid** powder) available in the co-op. This can be mixed into a syrup and trickled or vapourised through the hive quite quickly. Now is a good time to snap it up of you are going to do this in a broodless period later in the year. Very effective on parasitic mites and highly effective when sublimated.



## FOR VARROA ADVICE

The National Bee Unit produces an excellent publication called [Managing Varroa](#), which is free to download- the chart is particularly useful as it sets out all the products.

If you use any of these products, remember to keep a record of what, when you use it and where you got it from in your Veterinary Medicines Records. There is usually a serial number of the packaging and you should keep a record of it- or take a photo.

**Jane Medwell**

# 'IT AIN'T HALF HOT MOM!!!'

**S**ome of our older members might remember this expression from a BBC Television sitcom about a Royal Artillery concert party based in India during the last months of the Second World War.

Well, it felt like history was repeating itself on 17<sup>th</sup> July, the hottest day of this year, when Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers were invited to the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum in Warwick to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> year of VE Day.

"Buzzing for Victory" was about the role of bees and the products of the hive in wartime generally and in WWII in particular.

For example, the use of hives as safes to secrete things, the deployment of caches of mead to reduce the combat efficiency of pursuing armies, the use of honey and propolis to treat wounds, the

measures taken to stop the black market in beekeepers' additional petrol ration and in the sugar ration provided to feed the bees over winter. This last involved having to dye the sugar which resulted in dyed honey.

Luckily, we could spend the day shaded under the marquee and out of the fierce heat as we spoke to visitors about our bees. Unlike others who were actually wearing various armed forces' uniforms appropriate to those years whilst describing to visitors their involvement during wartime. They must have been sweltering!

It was good for us to get together once again and to do what we are so good at doing – promoting beekeeping and informing the public of the importance of bees throughout the centuries.

**Val Dillon**



## REPORT OF BBKA EXEC MEETING

**T**he BBKA Executive held their quarterly trustee meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> July. These follow the subject-specific committee meetings on the topics covering the range of areas included in the BBKA's remit: Education and Husbandry, Research, the Spring Convention, Governance, Communications, Finance.

The Spring Convention committee in particular has non-trustee members. It's a great way to get involved in planning this prestigious and wide-ranging annual event.

It's an opportunity in July to consider budgets for the year ahead in line with our priorities and the charitable objects of the BBKA: To further and promote the craft of beekeeping and to advance the education of the public in the importance of bees in the environment.

The Exec meeting covered topics including the BBKA's financial position; our insurance arrangements; current government policy development and its impact on beekeeping; and maximising the value of BBKA News while considering its carbon footprint. Education and husbandry is always a key priority for the BBKA. The activities by branches and associations to lead taster days, introduction to beekeeping, training for exams such as the Basic Assessment and others plus queen rearing courses

are very much appreciated.

A further highlight was that the Zoom meeting started at 9 am on Saturday, there was a leisurely comfort break mid-way through and the meeting ended before 1pm! The virtual world really does have its benefits.

One last thing: a number of trustees' terms are ending in January 2022...you may want to consider volunteering to become a part of the next generation of trustees. Your skills and knowledge from your working life and your experience are particularly valuable (accountancy ability are a skill set we're also looking for). Trustee work is a great way to learn more about and contribute to the national wider interests and concerns of the craft. A regular part of meetings includes discussions on how the BBKA can influence government, how it communicates with members and the public, and what publications to produce.

If you would like to know more about becoming a Trustee, volunteering for the Spring Convention or are interested in learning more about how you can get more involved in a national organisation, do get in touch with me:

[suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk)

**Suzanne Bennett**

# TIME OF YEAR: AUTUMN FEEDING

**F**or those new to beekeeping, Autumn feeding can be a bit of a mystery – Why feed?, When to feed?, What to feed? How to feed? and How much? So here is some guidance.

## WHY FEED

The aim of autumn feeding is to ensure that at the end of the foraging season your girls have at least 20kg of stores in each standard National hive to last them through the winter.

## WHEN TO FEED

The timing of Autumn feeding of bees is one of the “judgement skills” of beekeeping. However, each colony and apiary is different and, once the honey we are stealing has been taken off, you need to inspect the hive to establish the remaining stores situation. This year, most colonies should contain some summer stores, so we would not expect to feed until September/early October. If, however, your girls are light on summer stores then early emergency feeding may be necessary. The danger of early feeding is that the colonies can conclude there is a strong nectar flow and turn too much of what you supply into producing brood, rather than storing it but this is better than starved bees. This the very situation I am in, having to feed two of my colonies who seem to have forgotten how to go shopping.

## WHAT TO FEED

There are numerous products available. Some proprietary and some home manufactured.

Traditionally, **sugar syrup** was the staple feed for bees. This is made by dissolving white granulated sugar – NOT demerara nor brown sugar – in water and, at this time of year, in the proportions of 2lbs of sugar to 1 pint of water (1kg to 630ml). Using warm water speeds up the process but allow it to cool before giving to the bees. Sugar syrup can ferment and thus has a limited shelf life.

**Ambrosia syrup** is a specially formulated product made from a base of beet sugar with added fructose and glucose which has been found to be an entirely satisfactory alternative to making ones' own sugar syrup. It has the advantages that it is ready mixed, has good keeping qualities, requires less work for the bees to store and has a lower odour than sugar syrup making one's hives less attractive to robbers. Beekeeping suppliers charge £51 for a 12.5kg jerry can but, through bulk buying, the branch co-op can sell this at £10.00 for 12.5kg. 12.5kg of ambrosia will fit easily into a standard 30lb honey bucket. We now have it in stock and orders can be placed via the members' section of the website [www.warleambees.org.uk](http://www.warleambees.org.uk)



**Fondant** (the stuff cakes are iced with) can be used as an Autumn feed. It can be made in the kitchen but is conveniently available as Baker's Fondant in 12.5kg blocks. Fondant as a feed, has several advantages. It is simply added under the crown board. You don't

need specialist feeders.

There is no risk of spillages when putting on the hive which reduces the risk of robbing by other bees. The bees take fondant down more slowly which seems to avoid the brood box getting packed out with stores which can leave the queen with nowhere to lay. Usually a once only application, fondant is a good option for an out apiary which cannot be visited frequently to top up syrup feed.

Fondant is also available through the branch co-op. This year's price has yet to be agreed but last year was £8.75 per 12.5kg block. As soon as negotiations have been finalised, we will let you know the ordering procedure.

You can, of course, leave a **super of stores** over winter for your bees. Simply adjust the quantity of syrup feed to be given accordingly and make sure the bees have access to the stores in the super i.e. remove the queen excluder or, better still, put the super under the brood-box without a queen excluder.



## HOW MUCH TO FEED

How much to feed depends on how much honey is already available to the bees within the hive. Once this has been assessed it can be deducted from the 20kg target quantity to give the amount of feed to be given.

To avoid such calculations, beekeepers commonly continue to feed their bees until they will “take down” no more. They approximate how much to purchase but as a general guide, 1.5 units of 12.5kg of Ambrosia per hive should be sufficient if this approach is adopted. Any Ambrosia remaining can be stored and used as a stimulative feed in the Spring but be careful, as this can encourage early swarming in prolific colonies.

Others assess existing stores levels by estimating the weight of stores in each brood frame before feeding, totting it up and making up the difference between the total and the target of 20kg with syrup. For this exercise assume a full national brood frame holds approx. 2.5kg of stores, hence the bees need the equivalent of 8 full frames. A full 14 x 12 National brood frame holds 3.75kg of stores.

A further method is to weigh each hive using a luggage scale (it is accurate enough to weigh one side and double it) making an allowance for the weight of the hive and bees.

With years of practice, many beekeepers “heft” their hives in order to assess their weight of stores.

In your calculations you need to take account of the fact that sugar syrup and ambrosia contain 30% and 40% water respectively which needs to be evaporated off by the bees to 18%. Consequently 12.5kg of syrup does not lead to 12.5kg but 9.75kg and 12.5kg of ambrosia 11kg of additional stores.

## TIMING OF FEEDING

It is best to feed bees in the evening. This is partly because, when feeding, bees will do the “round dance” in the hive indicating that



food is available somewhere in the general vicinity of the hive and will tear about outside looking for it which they are less inclined to do at this time of day. They appear to have no means of telling each other that the food source is actually in the hive.

All colonies in an apiary should be fed at the same time to discourage robbing which is also deterred by late evening feeding.

### HOW TO FEED

There are proprietary feeders such as Rapid (right) and Contact feeders of various capacities for feeding syrup but equally successful and cheaper



are washing up tubs or ice cream tubs, placed on top of the brood frames, with chopped straw spread on the syrup's surface to provide a platform from which the bees can feed without drowning. Another method is to use "Click and Close" polythene freezer bags filled with the feed which are then laid on top of the brood frames and the upper surface slit with a sharp (Stanley type) knife. It sounds counter intuitive but the syrup does not flow out.

With fondant, cut the block of fondant in half lengthways. At the hive, place the fondant, cut face down, on the queen excluder. That's it. Job done.

Nearly all methods of feeding require either an eke or an empty super to accommodate the feeder under the roof.

### REMEMBER

Do not neglect Autumn feeding. The sight of bees with their heads in the cells trying to get at the last drop of honey and starving to death is a pitiful one. It can be avoided.

Originally penned by Tim Foden in 2016.

Updated by Bernard Brown.

## FORAGE OF MONTH: BERGAMOT

**B**ergamot, Monarda, Beebalm, Horsemint – what a variety of names for the same plant!

A genus of the mint family, these lovely flowers, which are in full bloom at this time of the year, grow on erect stems up to three feet tall and look wonderful in clumps mixed with other summer perennials. The yellow lysimachia that tangle around the base are particularly attractive to pollinating insects, hence the name 'Beebalm'.

The well-known bergamot oil is derived from the crushed leaves and has long been used in traditional medicine. Native American Indians recognised its antiseptic properties and made it into poultices for the treatment of skin infections. When made into an infusion it was found to alleviate painful conditions of the mouth and throat.

Today, apart from in diffusers or "Yankee Candles" in our homes, probably the most widely known use of bergamot oil is in Earl Grey tea. This is what gives it the distinctive flavour so loved and detested in equal measure! Charles Grey, 2nd Earl Grey, Viscount Howick, and British Prime Minister 1830-1834, apparently had his



tea blended with bergamot, to suit the water at Howick Hall, his family seat in Northumberland. It is also thought that it may have been added to enhance the taste of lower quality teas at that time.

Howick Hall Gardens and Arboretum, near Alnwick, is open to the public and well worth a visit. Treat yourself to the most English of cream teas in the Earl Grey tearoom, wander through the acres of grounds leading down to the sea, then back in the gardens, enjoy the magnificent herbaceous borders splashed with Bergamot, Monarda, Beebalm, Horsemint.....

Maggie Curley

# THE THRIVING HIVE PROJECT

**P**articulates in the air have grabbed headlines recently, because of their impact on human health. Now, Coventry University's Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience is being supported by BBKA to work with beekeepers across the Midlands to explore the possible impacts of air pollution on honey bee health.

Bees face many environmental threats to their health and numbers; including habitat loss, alien species invasions e.g. varroa mites, disease, pesticides, and climate change pressures. Of these issues, the least understood is air pollution. Whilst air pollution effects on human health are well documented, research around how



many hives and bees are exposed to, or affected by, the threat is not.

As part of the project April Webb, Research Officer, has been installing Air Quality Monitors in apiaries in places as diverse as the Custard Factory in Birmingham and a field in Eathorpe. Sixty beekeepers across the midlands have been issued with sensors to be placed in their apiaries. In fact, April arrives with a sledge hammer (as shown in the image below left) and gets the job done very quickly.

Over the next weeks and months, the sensors measure the particulate matter, focusing on particles less than or equal to 10 microns (PM10s) and 2.5 microns or smaller (PM2.5s), temperature and humidity in real-time, shown as a live feed on the project website. Beekeepers will collect various samples and keep records.

Dr Barbara Smith, Associate Professor at CAWR and Principle Investigator, said: "The little research that has been done suggests that particulates in air pollution could impact bee immune and circulatory systems but not much is known about the physiological effects. In our first project, we will determine the scale of the potential problem. We will then move on to look at the health outcomes for bees. Key to this project is working in partnership with beekeepers, who know their bees better than anyone else."

We can't wait for some of the results of this study, which is new and different. This is something we simply do not know about at all! Thriving hive are going to keep us updated and we look forward to their results and we will all be able to enjoy the Warwickshire County lecture Barbara is giving in February (more details to come).

Jane Medwell

## BEE BLUNDERS — CONTINUED

**C**ontinuing with our Bee Blunders series, Val Dillon is next to stick her head above the parapet...

My biggest blunder took place a number of years ago when I attended a queen rearing course run by Professor David Evans, who was a member of our branch in those days. We had a wonderful day learning how to transfer eggs into ready-prepared cells using the tiniest of paint brushes, before they were placed in small queen rearing boxes in the hope the girls would turn them into queens

Needless to say our efforts were not the best and all attempts to create new queens were unsuccessful as the bees weren't interested in following up with these poorly produced eggs. However, a few days after the training day, every trainee was presented with a beautiful queen cell which had been created by David and reared by his bees, to place in one of our hives.

My girls looked after their new charge and very soon this queen had hatched, had mated and was laying copiously, producing really gentle bees and who, in turn, produced lots of honey. I hoped this was to be the start of an apiary full of her offspring in years to come. The colony was everything a beekeeper would want.....almost....

I waited in patient anticipation for queen cells to appear in the hope of beginning some nucs. But there weren't any. The bees were

really happy, the colony was huge, but there were no indications that they were planning to swarm.

I decided to take some eggs from the hive, pop them in a nuc with food etc and wait for them to make queen cells. Nothing! The nuc eventually died out.

Over the next couple of years the colony thrived, but still didn't show any signs of swarming. I tried again to get them to produce queen cells in nucs, but it never happened. With hindsight I should have taken some of these eggs and tried queen rearing, but I didn't have the kit, David had left the branch and I was sure eventually the bees would do what comes naturally. Or I could have dropped a frame of eggs into another colony and let them do the work. But I only had one other colony (those were the days.....) and this other colony was queenright and working well.

By year 4 the queen was still laying really well but the white spot on her thorax had faded, so I decided to mark her again. I found her, put the crown of thorns over her.....she moved.....and I cut her in half with the crown of thorns!

That was the end of the colony. No attempt to introduce a frame of eggs into the hive was successful and by the end of the summer the colony had died out.

Val Dillon



# 'THE FATHER OF BEEKEEPING': JAN DZIERZON

**S**ent back in time, and given the choice of profession, I'd probably ask to be a country vicar in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. It appears that they had the time to follow other pursuits – often natural history – and could avoid parish responsibilities completely. (My own church, All Saints Harbury, even has a small door opening onto the chancel, so the minister could pop in, conduct the service, and escape without even meeting the grubby parishioners.) It's no surprise that Langstroth – he of the moveable bee frames – was a churchman. But was he the originator of the idea, and indeed of 'bee space'?

Jan Dzierzon was born in 1811 in a village in Prussia – now part of Poland. In 1936, the Germans renamed the village Lowkowitz – Bee Village – in honour of him. Indeed, the Nazis destroyed many of his books and memorabilia in an effort to prove that the 'Father of Beekeeping' was not Polish, but German. For 49 years, he was the Roman Catholic priest of the parish of Karlowice; like many beekeepers he had a long and active life, dying at the age of 96.

His most original discovery was the parthenogenesis of drones – that they develop from unfertilised eggs. This was disputed throughout his life, and only confirmed in 1906 – the year of his death. His discovery may have influenced Gregor Mendel (yes, another churchman) in his work on genetics. Dzierzon also proposed that it was feeding with royal jelly that resulted in a female larva developing into a queen.

But it was his development of experimental hives, in parallel with Langstroth, that revolutionised beekeeping. He improved the hives, probably first devised by Ukrainian apiarist and inventor Petro Prokopovich, by introducing grooves in the hives' side walls, and setting them at the perfect 'bee space' – one and a half inches between the centres of each top bar. This was further improved by Langstroth, who made the moveable bee frames practical, and relatively cheap.

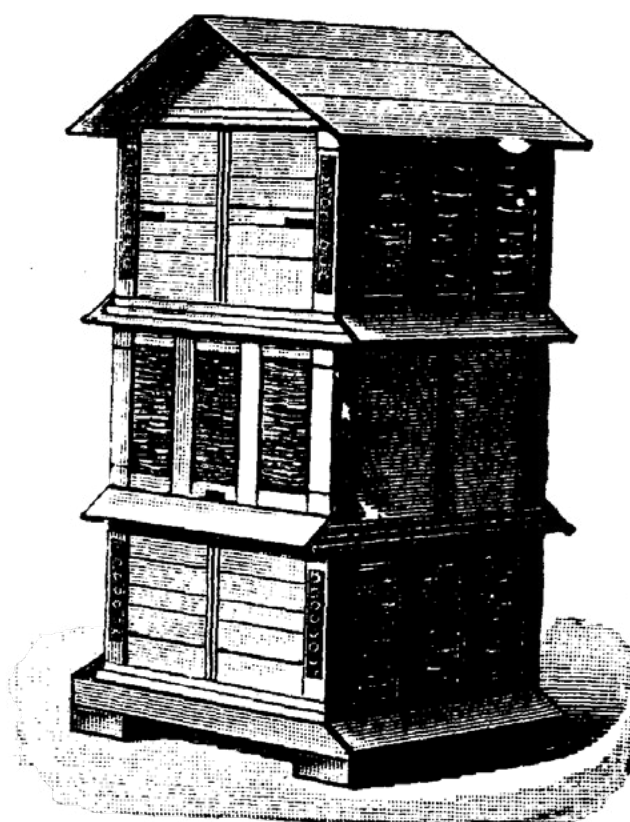
Questioning the infallibility of the Pope had Dzierzon excommunicated, but no doubt his beekeeping kept him busy in his later life. A museum at Kluczbork contains over five thousand works on apiary, many of them related to Dzierzon and his work.

Read more at: [badbeekeepingblog.com/2021/01/16/better-hives-dzierzons-boxes/](https://badbeekeepingblog.com/2021/01/16/better-hives-dzierzons-boxes/)  
John Stringer



**ABOVE:** Johann Dzierzon is considered the father of modern apiology and apiculture. Most modern beehives derive from his design.

**BELOW:** Stack of Dzierzon hives.



# PREPARING FOR THE HEATHER

**F**or some years' members have had the opportunity

to take their bees to the heather moors of the Derbyshire Peak District in the hope of getting some heather honey. This pilgrimage usually takes place during the first or second week of August with the hives being brought back about a month later. It is quite any easy journey, up the M1 and through Chesterfield to a farm overlooking the heather moorland at the back of Chatsworth House.

A great deal has been written about preparing bees for the heather but essentially you need to consider the strength of your colony; it must have bees over every frame, and I do mean a good covering of bees over each one, be queen right of course, and have at least two full brood frames of stores and I suggest feeding them. A high proportion of young bees with near wall-to-wall brood is ideal. Rearranging frames with unsealed brood to the outside and sealed in the centre allows the queen to lay in the centre as workers emerge forcing honey to be taken up into the super.

You need just one super, ideally drawn comb, but foundation will do. Thin unwired foundation is best as it allows you to make cut comb. The usual way hobby beekeepers extract heather is by cold pressing so thin unwired foundation is also more economical and we are very fortunate in having a heather press in our extraction room.

In fairness to other beekeepers you need to be satisfied your bees are disease free and understand they will be placed on the moor amongst bees from other places with the risks associated in doing this. The farm we go to is about 1000ft up so the lighter coloured Italian bees and variations of them may not be suitable because when we are enjoying refreshing warm light rain at home up on the moor it is cold horizontal stair rods.

Your hive will need to have a travelling screen and be secured with two proper hive straps or ratchet straps. The floor, particularly the Thornes budget varroa floor, needs to be checked for leaks (of bees) with the entrance blocked with a strip of foam; not tape or wood etc. Pay particular attention to the back part of the floor for which Thornes give you a few drawing pins to fix the mesh in place. This is not good enough as when hive straps are tightened the mesh floor lifts and bees come flying out at the back. Staples or large headed nails are required to fasten it securely

In the past we have taken members bees for them. This is no longer practical but, as always in the past, members are able to take



Peak District Heather  
(Image Credit: James Grant Photography)

their own hives. The site is secure with reasonable access along a track to a field at the edge of the moor. However, the last part of the track is steep and rough leading to the field where we keep the bees which can sometimes be rather soft. Taking this into account the arrangements will be as follows.

- Inform Mike Townsend [michaelatownsend@hotmail.com](mailto:michaelatownsend@hotmail.com) that you want to take bees. I would appreciate an expression of interest in the first instance by email only please.
- I will liaise with other heather goers to see if vehicle sharing is practical subject of course to Covid restrictions. This will take into account the type of vehicle beekeepers have with the opportunity to team up with others. Those with four-wheel drive/high clearance vehicles may help others get across the short last stretch of the field leading to the edge of the moor.
- We now have a hive barrow which can be borrowed to make it easier for members who do not have four-wheel drive/high ground clearance vehicles to carry their hives the short distance where ground conditions may be difficult. It is a modified Thornes barrow adapted to deal with the terrain and you will be shown how to use it when collected from my house in Kenilworth. It is easily taken apart for putting in a car.
- Hive stands are not required and are unsuitable for the terrain. However, hives do need to be off the ground and what works very well are short pieces of timber about 75mmx 75mm so offcuts of old fence posts are ideal and if they are cut to a length to fit inside a roof makes packing in the car easier. Four of these together with a few short pieces of small timber offcuts facilitates levelling of hives.
- You will be given contact details and map. The 'rent' paid directly to the farmer is one 1lb jar of honey per hive taken.

I hope you will want to try heather going; at the very least you will be able to use the trip as an opportunity to explore this part of the Peak District which includes Chatsworth House just a few miles down the road.

**Mike Townsend**

# HINTS & TIPS: HONEY SHOW PREP

**It is very much a traditional feature of beekeeping to hold honey shows"..... at WLBK let's keep that tradition alive!**

*Our upcoming annual WLBK Honey Show, which takes place on 25<sup>th</sup> September, consists of a range of different categories, or classes, with something to challenge all levels of beekeeping. The aims of the show are to highlight good practice, to inform on what makes a honey suitable for sale and to showcase bee related products and produce. Superficially, the objective of entering one or more show classes is to have your product judged to be the best in class. At branch level though, especially with such a high proportion of our members being relatively new to the craft, our show presents the ideal opportunity to get feedback from an expert on the quality and presentation of your entries.*

*One of our members, Nigel Coad, who has successfully exhibited for many years, kindly shares his advice on preparing for the show below.*

## PREPARATION FOR THE HONEY SHOW: A GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

Our annual honey show is a great opportunity for beginners to try their hand at exhibiting, so I am writing this brief article to encourage you all to put in some entries.

In this article I would hope to provide sufficient information to beginners to give them confidence to enter a honey show and feel their entry will be competitive. It is not a definitive guide but I will highlight some of the common faults in preparation and presentation and try and give some tips on how to avoid them. Our bees all make wonderful honey but it is up to us to show it at its best. Much of the skill in exhibiting is not about the honey itself but how it is prepared.

The judge will be a highly experienced beekeeper and exhibitor whose first task when confronted with rows of gleaming pots will be to get the exhibits down to a shortlist which he will do by eliminating any exhibits which are not in the correct class or conforming to show rules. Only then will he exclude further exhibits for faults and finally if you have made it that far he will open your jar. Your aim should be to get to the stage where the judge will open your jar. By not complying with the rules you will make the judge's task a lot easier by instant disqualification! So your first step is to read the show schedule well in advance and check which classes you will enter.

## HONEY CLASSES

I personally take all my exhibits from my normal honey stock but do try and keep back a few jars of a particularly good honey if I am lucky enough to come across it during the course of the year. So if you can try and prepare all your honey as if you are going to show it then your honey will shine on the shelf, your customers will be happy and you will also sell more! Do however keep your show honey somewhere safe or else someone in the house is bound to give it to one of the children for the car boot sale or it will end up on toast whilst you are not looking!

## JARS AND LIDS

Should be of the standard 1lb jars with screw lids. Jars should be clean without honey on the threads. The lids should be clean, undamaged and without honey on the inside.

It's best to check jars and lids a few days before the show as the judge will want to smell your honey and the subtle aromas can be lost by a hurried change of lid just before entry.

## FILLING AND LABELLING

Take care not to allow foreign matter, wax, bee legs or dog hairs to gain entry. This causes great interest and the appearance of a spider in one entry is fondly remembered! The jars should be well, but not overfilled and the experienced exhibitor will allow a little extra for skimming the top of air bubbles or wax particles, perhaps for more than one show. Under filling of a jar is a major fault and as a rough guide no daylight should be visible below the lid.

## THE FINAL SELECTION

Should be made about 3 or 4 days before the show. Check jars and lids. Look at honey for clarity. Ideally you should have a bright crystal clear honey. Cloudiness in honey may be due to excess pollen at extraction, or minute air bubbles in a honey which has not been adequately ripened (allowed to settle after extraction), or heated after bottling (60-65C for 1 hour). Finally check for clarity and foreign material with a strong light such as a torch under and through the jar. Multiple fine bubbles can sometimes be cleared by careful heating, but beware of overheating. Minute particles of debris can be extracted with a fine straw. Skim from the surface any excess of bubbles or froth. Clean the threads carefully with a clean cloth and finish with a fresh lid.

## LIQUID HONEY

Usually classified as either light, medium, or dark in colour. To ensure the honey is in the correct class the judge will check colour against grading glasses. These are available on the day so if you are not sure which class to put your honey into ask someone to help then your jar can be checked against these standards.

## GRANULATED OR CREAMED HONEY

Should be sufficiently well set so that it does not fall out if the jar is inverted! Debris in set honey usually falls to the bottom and is easily seen at the base of the jar. The surface should be clean of froth, excessive bubbles and debris. Frosting, although a natural phenomenon, is unsightly and may well detract from an otherwise good honey. It occurs as the honey contracts during setting and is usually seen around the neck of the jar, particularly in naturally granulated honeys. Some judges do not regard it as a fault. It can be avoided to some extent by using jars that have been slightly warmed. When tasting granulated honeys a judge will also assess the texture of the granulation so if possible always seed your set honey with a fine-grained honey such as oilseed rape.

## ON THE DAY

Arrive early and the secretary will give you numbered labels for your jars and other exhibits. The jars unless specified carry no other labels apart from the entry sticker. This is usually fixed to the lower jar about 1/2-1 inch from the bottom. It helps to keep the label straight if you bring a strip of paper glued into a circle that will fit over the jar and act as a guide. Polish the jars and lids with some paper or a clean towel and place on the stand.

## COTTAGER AND NOVICE CLASSES

The Cottager class is for those who have less than five hives and the Novice for those who have never won a first prize in a show. They are



both well worth entering for all beginners as there are often few entries so you can be almost guaranteed a prize and you may even go home with a coveted cup.

### SECTION OF CUT COMB HONEY

May be of stated weight but more usually unspecified. Best presented in an 8oz cut comb container with clear lid (available through our branch co op). Comb should be evenly filled and capped with clean cappings. Avoid 'travel-stained' brown cappings, wax moth trails and bee debris!.

### FRAME FOR EXTRACTION

Usually exhibited in a special box with glass sides and these are available to borrow for the show. Pick your best frame as you extract and put it carefully to one side. The frame itself should be cleaned of wax and debris. Members have been known to use a hand held vacuum on this one! It should be capable of being uncapped and extracted, so a winning frame in this category will be evenly drawn out beyond the frame with cappings to the edge of the comb on both sides. The honey itself should be liquid. Once again wax moth should be avoided!

### MEAD

Mead should be the subject of an article by itself. Takes at least a year to make and longer to mature so start brewing now for next year! Usually classed as dry or sweet mead. Must look bright, and be clean tasting, with no debris or sediment.

### CAKE OF BEESWAX

Preparing a perfect 8oz block of beeswax is perhaps the greatest, and most frustrating challenge of the show. Once again whole books

have been written on the subject. The real experts use only hand-graded cappings carefully washed in soft water but for the rest of us, starting off with your best wax that isn't too dark.

It will need to be filtered through lint several times. Do not overheat the wax more than about 90 OC as this will darken the colour. Most people use a Pyrex bowl as a mould which should be polished with a small amount of washing liquid. Pour the measured amount into the container through a sieve and lint. Cover and allow to cool slowly overnight in a previously warmed oven. Tap or float the cake out in the morning to find a small fleck of dirt or imperfection so start again! Wrap perfect cake in polythene bag until show. Treat with exceptional care as damage could result in terminal depression.

### THE HONEY CAKE

This often a keenly competitive class, as the skill is all in the making of the cake. There will be a standard recipe which should be adhered to by the letter and in spirit so there should be no additions or variations in the method although you are welcome to experiment with the quality and make of ingredients, the temperature of the oven and cooking time. The cake should be made as per specification. The winning entry will be well and evenly risen with a well-cooked but not burnt surface. The mixture should be well cooked throughout with an even distribution of fruit if( in recipe). The cake should have a pleasant taste of honey and spices (if in recipe). It is said to be better to make the cake a few days before and store it in a cake tin to allow the flavours to mature.

Additional information can be found in a series of articles prepared by leading experts for the National Honey show at <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/support.shtml>

Good luck to you all.

**Nigel Coad**



- A Nottinghamshire BKA member, Karen Burrow, showed me this- it's IKEA's contribution to beekeeping- a zip up cover called Parkla (£1.75) which neatly contains a national super. It is bee, water and wax moth proof and Karen was using this one in her extraction.



- Have you ever lost the "grid" at the bottom of your smoker when emptying it? If so, you can make a robust new one using a tuna tin punched with holes. Thank you Richard Matthews of Dean Forest Beekeepers. (Many thanks to Jane Medwell for these gems).

### 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)

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