



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## GO ON...ENTER A HONEY SHOW



**Y**ou've extracted your honey harvest. Family and friends say it's great... but would you like an independent opinion? Then get that all important feedback at a Honey Show.

There are three levels of Honey Show - Branch, County and National.

### **THE BRANCH HONEY SHOW 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER AT KINGS HILL**

This is an informal affair providing advice and support. There are trophies to be won and Certificates for 1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> and highly commended. There are 19 classes so lots to have a go at.

For the honey classes, three colour classes are used, graded by using squares of coloured glass into light, medium and dark. The viscosity is tested with a tiny glass spoon dipped into the honey and then raised up. A torch can be moved around, shining from behind and from the bottom of the jar. Cleanliness of jar and cap are judged, as well as correct fill. The smell and flavour are tested, of course!

But it's not all about the honey! There are classes for cut comb, a frame ready for extraction, candles, mead (always a popular one with the judges!), honey cake, wax blocks and many more.

The Honey Cake class is always a popular one and if you have no honey from your bees, you can still enter using any honey you have.

There is a trophy for Novice beekeepers and for those who only keep a few hives.

So, something for everybody to enter. The full schedule is on our website.

### **THE COUNTY HONEY SHOW 15<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER AT KINGS HILL**

A bit more formal with entries from beekeepers all over Warwickshire. Qualified judges preside.

Each year there is a class for a Branch Composite Display. The exhibit must have a base not exceeding 600mm by 600mm and be of any reasonable height. The display must include FIVE different items and be submitted by at least THREE members of the Branch. At least ONE of these members must be a NOVICE. The exhibit

will be judged primarily on the quality of the items shown (as far as possible we could ask for our Branch Honey Show winners to help with these). In 2019 we did win with the theme of Suffragettes.

We are looking for volunteers to put the display together for this year. Judging by previous years it does not have to be extensive but more a minimalistic tasteful depiction of the theme.

Volunteers are also needed to help at the County Honey Show.

### **THE NATIONAL HONEY SHOW 26<sup>TH</sup> TO 28<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER AT SANDOWN RACE COURSE**

The National Honey Show has nearly 250 Competitive Classes to test your skills. The show attracts beekeepers from all over the world to compete for the much coveted trophies and prize cards.

If you feel able to help to support the Honey Shows in any way, please contact Helen Essex

[h.essex211@gmail.com](mailto:h.essex211@gmail.com)

Helen Essex

# BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

It seems to have been a short summer. Unless you are in a Himalayan Balsam area, the flows are now over and are now protecting and preparing for winter. There is a surprising amount of work this month- mostly linked to disease and food. In the last few days I have had NBU warnings about both.

I am in an EFB area and it is within 3km of me- so a recent research paper tells me there is a 30% chance my colonies will have it. The first thing I have to do is a full disease inspection- shaking off each and every brood comb and looking at each and every open brood cell. If the worst comes to the worst, I will take photos and send them to **Colleen Reichling** 07990 138898 ([colleen.reichling@apha.gov.uk](mailto:colleen.reichling@apha.gov.uk)), my bee inspector.



Himalayan balsam with carder bee. Photograph: Maria Nunzia @Varvera. The Guardian.

As I do those disease inspections, I am doing my varroa tests. This year am doing alcohol rolls using an IKEA snack container. Some of the colonies need treating- so I have ordered my choice of treatment. I can't get MAQS, so I am using Apivar. It is fantastically effective, but I have to get the supers off first. So that's the next job.

My colonies all have a super or two of honey, but nothing at all in the brood- they have not yet started to create the arc of pollen and stores by "bringing it down". I want to leave them enough space for bees whilst the brood is large, but if I leave the stores on now, they will take it down into the brood box and I will lose the honey. So I am clearing the bees into a super of empty frames which I will remove that when I feed. But take care- as soon as you remove the honey they will gather stores into the brood box, but a solid week of rain could cause starvation- it's a finely judged manoeuvre.

We will all need honey jars- ordered from Clive. So a messy evening extracting is on the cards- if you want to use the extraction room you need to book.

You also need to order your ambrosia now - it will soon be time to get around 16-20kg of stores into each brood box. This month we really notice and appreciate all the Branch members who give their time to run the shared facilities. 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. Soon I will be thinking about the boiler to clean up my combs. WLBK volunteers 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)).

## BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

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

### HONEY TASKS:

- 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.

### PROTECTION TASKS:

- 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.
- And finally, select your entries for the Honey Show- honey, combs, mead, candles, wax, photos and cake – it's on!

**Jane Medwell**





# A NEWBIE ON A BEE SAFARI

**A**ttempting the BBKA bee safari marked one

of many firsts for a bee enthusiast newbie like myself. Andrew and Sarah Health, the BBKA Apiarists rapidly took me and a few other 'newbees' through some of the basic checks to ensure solid beehive health, including finding the queen and checking for the presence of the Varroa mite.

Jumping from hive to hive, a bee-covered Andrew continued to enlighten us with more bee facts, some of which have radically

reshaped the way I see bees. One such example was learning that bees can read the electrical charges of plants to determine whether a specific flower has already been visited by another pollinator. As someone who communicates plant and fungal science at Kew Gardens (alongside a couple of bee researchers) I couldn't believe I'd never heard this before.

Peering inside hives and learning about their secret lives had me walking away from this experience with a new understanding of arguably the most important insect in Britain (for humans at least). The question is now not a matter of 'if' I will ever have a colony of my own, but 'when'.

I'd like to thank all those involved in organising this bee safari and to Judith for lending me her spare bee suit so that I could attend.

**Paul Figg**



## EFB — IT'S BACK!

**E**uropean foul brood - EFB - was confirmed in 4 colonies at our Kings Hill Training apiary on 4th July. This is very disappointing after a similar episode in 2021. The apiary is now on standstill – nothing to go in and nothing to go out - and the affected colonies have been destroyed. The frames and comb from broods and supers, including those from supers already taken off, were also incinerated. Training has thus ceased until further notice.

The seasonal bee inspector will be contacting all beekeepers registered on Bee-base within a 3 km radius to conduct disease inspections. If you are within the area and have not registered on Bee Base or know of other apiaries of non-Warwickshire Beekeepers' Association members within this radius, please contact the bee inspector, **Colleen Reichling 07990 138898**. This is a very easily transmittable disease and needs to be dealt with

promptly if we are to limit its spread.

It is always a wise precaution to inspect your colonies for the range of diseases and this is a most appropriate time of year to do so. Recognition images of EFB are available on the National Bee Unit Website. This [link](#) will take you straight to them. Even one suspected cell should be reported. It is a statutory requirement.

The importance of proper hygiene practices cannot be over emphasised, bee suits should be washed clean after each inspection. Boots should be washed in a soda solution. Hive tools, smokers, gloves and any other equipment which comes in contact with the bees – Queen catchers, crowns of thorns etc. should also be washed in soda solution between inspections of each colony. Don't swap frames between colonies.

EFB infection is not an indication of bad beekeeping, failure to report it is.

**The Apiary Team**

# ASIAN HORNET — BIGGEST THREAT SINCE VARROA



**S**o far this year, there has been around 14 confirmed Asian Hornet finds to date with 7 nests destroyed in England. All but two were in the south of the country mainly in the Dover, Folkestone, Canterbury area with one in Plymouth and another in Gravesend. Outside of these areas, an Asian hornet was discovered in Northumberland in a cabbage imported from France and, most recently, a creditable sighting has been made in the Shropshire town of Bishop's Castle. The National Bee Unit is following up several, as yet unconfirmed sightings of others.

## WHY IS IT DANGEROUS?

Asian Hornet has dramatically reduced numbers of honeybee colonies (and beekeepers) in Europe but if we can detect and destroy any Asian Hornets arriving, we can stop the spread and keep our bees.

*Vespa Velutina* (Asian Hornet), also known as the yellow-legged hornet, is a highly effective, aggressive predator of insects. It "hawks" outside hives and each Asian Hornet can eat around 300 bees a day. It also takes butterflies, native bees and other insects, to such a degree that it will alter the balance of insect populations in the UK. It will certainly wipe out honey bee hives.

If it establishes in the UK we can expect to have far fewer hives.

The sting of the Asian Hornet is much more severe than the

sting of a honeybee, so it presents a threat to humans- especially gardeners, people dealing with fruit trees, hedge cutters etc.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

This is the time of year when the Asian hornets are producing next year's Queens and we are all urged to put out our Asian Hornet Traps <https://www.bbka.org.uk/faqs/how-to-make-an-asian-hornet-trap> if you want to make one, and observe what is caught. Report any suspect Asian hornets via the mobile phone app: Asian Hornet Watch [www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts.asianhornet](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts.asianhornet) or by email: [alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk)

An aid to the identification of Asian Hornets can be found at Identify Asian Hornet Identify Asian Hornet | British Beekeepers Association ([bbka.org.uk](http://bbka.org.uk))

Our Asian Hornet coordinator is: Mrs Elizabeth Bates Mobile: 07891 370231 and the Asian Hornet team map of coordinators is [here](#). If a reported sighting is confirmed (and, of course, most turn out to be something else) the NBU will track it down and check for nests.

Please share as much Asian Hornet information as widely as possible. We must work together to try to prevent this invasive species getting a foothold in this country.

More advice will be coming our way soon, but we need to act now. By watching out for the blighters now (and reporting them) we can avoid being the beekeepers who watched it invade.



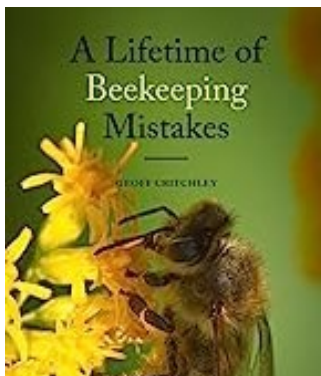
# LIBRARY NEWS

I don't know about you, but I have had an extremely busy summer. My only hive swarmed, I had to learn how to requeen this hive and before I knew it I was splitting the hive and making a nuc, which has fast grown into my second hive. I was warned this may happen last year when I was adamant one hive would be enough. I must admit though I can now see the distinct advantages of having two hives.

These manipulations would have been difficult for me if it were not for the help of my mentor and of course our much valued collection of books. I hope that the members of the WLBK have had the opportunity to read and learn from the books that were borrowed over the winter months. I have been adding to the library collection throughout the summer and look forward to seeing you all in the autumn at the branch meetings, when you will be able to return the books you currently have on loan and borrow lots more!

Our latest addition is 'A lifetime of beekeeping mistakes by Geoff Critchley'. This book covers: buying in bee stocks and equipment, record keeping, establishing and growing colonies, different types of hives, maintaining queens and drones, honey extraction and diseases. It is written from the voice of experience rather than academic research, and is entirely practical, based very much on the right and wrong ways of doing things the author has experienced throughout his beekeeping career.

Jackie Ledwidge, WLBK Librarian



## WLBK EVENTS

### AUGUST BEE SAFARI – APIARY AT WARWICK UNIVERSITY, THURSDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST @ 7PM

Bee Inspectors permitting, Alan Deeley and Steve Poynter will welcome safari-goers to their apiary and show how they manage their many hives, and the beginning of their end of season preparations. The importance of impeccable hygiene standards cannot be over-estimated – you must be suited and booted in clean kit – boots scrubbed with washing soda – and have clean marigolds or disposable gloves.

Those wanting to visit must agree the terms and conditions for safaris and book via the club website.

### AUTUMN AND WINTER TALKS

Foundation is being drawn for the programme of talks ready to start on **21<sup>st</sup> September at 7.30pm**. All talks will take place at Kings Hill Nursey Function Room (The Four Seasons). There will be winter feed (cake not fondant or pollen patties) and liquid refreshment (tea and coffee, squash – ambrosia is far too sweet). Our speakers make a big effort to educate and entertain us, often coming from afar. Do join the buzz.

Talks will be on the **3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday in September, October, November and January to April**. In December we will have our Christmas Party on **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December** – also at Kings Hill Nursery.

Judith Masson, Meetings Secretary

# WLBK SEPTEMBER TASTER DAY – WE NEED YOUR HELP

**W**e are looking forward to welcoming some new folks who will no doubt be excited to experience the bees and to learn a bit about them. To help satisfy their interest we could do with your help.

Our September Taster day is to be held at BBKA headquarters at Stoneleigh on **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September**. We currently have 17 people fully paid up for with another four possible attendees. The help we are looking for is listed below plus if you feel you would like to contribute in any way please let us know.

The tasks with which we need assistance are as follows:

- Meet and greet and general assistance during the day (full day or two people to do half a day each)
- Help with washing of the bee suits after the event and to ensure that they are returned to their rightful owners promptly. We do not

expect one person to wash all the suits but it would be useful if you could wash a couple of suits. Many hands, light work etc. We will also hope to have someone to co-ordinate this as we are a 45 minute drive from Kings Hill Nurseries so someone local to the club would be ideal.

- Needless to say, extra hands will be needed to assist with the apiary session in the afternoon when hopefully we go into the apiary. We plan to have one experienced beekeeper per 5 attendees (so we'll need four people in total). We are hoping to hold the apiary session in the club training apiary if available. Failing that, we are hoping to be able to use the BBKA apiary subject to their agreement.

If you think you might be able to help with any of the above, please do get in touch with us.

**Paul Day** [paul@paulday.co.uk](mailto:paul@paulday.co.uk)

**Jane Richmond** [jane@J-Richmond.co.uk](mailto:jane@J-Richmond.co.uk)

# UP AT THE HEATHER

It's out! That was the message from Francis Shaw, our friendly farmer on whose land we traditionally place our hives in pursuit of that most doyen of all honeys, heather honey. And so it was, that on the 1st of August I, along with "she who must be obeyed", scamp the dog and two hives of bees, could be found trundling up the M1 to Chatsworth at 6.30 a.m. It was not without some apprehension that we viewed the lowering sky but the rain held off and we arrived to be met by another member, David Faulkner and himself. Francis has the most amazing memory. He must have in excess of 30 beekeepers trying their luck with the heather each year, but he recognised us both by name and even enquired, again by name, of WLBK members who had yet to confirm their attendance.

Having handed over the statutory rent of a jar of ordinary honey per hive, his parting shot was that he had to go out so wouldn't be back until 11.00 to pull us out should we get stuck. Our apprehension multiplied as we set off down the farm track to the apiary field. We were the first beekeepers there and consequently had the choice of location so, naturally, we chose the most sheltered. After all the rain of recent days, conditions were a little damp and Francis was not joking about possibly needing a tow. The boggy area which, in previous years, we had been able to negotiate with a 4 x 4, looked particularly challenging, so we opted to use the Branch's modified hive barrow to effect a crossing. This proved to be a good move as the bog was almost a wellie height in depth. With the three hives safely across, we



painstakingly set up a base of pieces of timber on the rough, uneven ground on which to place the hives. After much trial and error, we eventually achieved something that was reasonably level and stable. It was then off with the straps, out with sponge entrance block and on with the supers, by which time the bees were pouring out of the hive seeking vengeance on those who had subjected them to incarceration and a very bumpy ride over the last mile. Not unsurprisingly, we beat a hasty retreat having "borrowed" a lump of stone from Francis' wall to weigh the hives down. So, with all done and dusted by 10.00a.m, it was time for a flask of coffee and a sausage sandwich breakfast whilst drinking in the spectacular, purple tinged view of the Derbyshire moors. It doesn't get much better than that.

**Bernard Brown**

# KENILWORTH CASTLE UPDATE

So far, so good is the news from Clive Joyce who is managing the Branch's initiative in keeping bees in skeps at Kenilworth Castle as we approach the first anniversary of their introduction. Reflecting the Elizabethan connections of the Castle and the approach from English Heritage to host some bees, we maintain two colonies in skeps and with scope for two more in WBC's. The skeps were populated last Autumn and, although perhaps a little late, the bees managed to settle in and both colonies survived the winter, although at one stage there was some doubt if one had made it. However, despite the odds, it clung on until the spring and recovered thanks to what for many of us was a quite remarkable start to the season. Both colonies have continued to make progress and bode well for the coming winter. We have not harvested any honey this year, which is a disappointment for Clive, who is keen to demonstrate the ancient skill of "drumming the bees". This is a technique to drive the bees out of the skep into another so that the honey-laden comb can be cut out and extracted.

In the past, drumming the bees featured as a popular, public attraction at beekeeping displays and even competitions between beekeepers for the quickest who managed to transfer the Queen were held. Armed with two wire short staples and two wire long staples called driving irons, the technique we propose to adopt involves the beekeeper being seated with the upturned, full skep of bees on his lap and gripped between his thighs. An empty skep is placed on top of the full skep and the two short staples inserted in the side facing away from the beekeeper to join the skeps together and make a hinge. The skeps are then parted with the long staples inserted to hold the skeps apart. The beekeeper then covers the whole arrangement with a cloth and begins drumming the sides of the lower skep vigorously and with a regular beat. The theory is that the noise and vibration drives the bees from the lower into the upper skep leaving the cleared combs of honey behind. The comb is then cut out using a specially shaped tool. If it is decided to take only some of the honey, the bees can be driven back using the same technique.

Although the numbers in a skep colony may not be as large as a modern hive, given the position of the operation, this, as can be imagined, presents a high-risk to a certain part of the beekeeper's anatomy. Surely "No man can have a greater love for his craft"!

**Bernard Brown**



# AUTUMN FEEDING: WHAT & WHEN

**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 20 Kg 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 is 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 one's 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 £36+ for a 12.5kg jerry can but, through bulk buying, the branch co-op can sell this at £9.00 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** 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 may be available through the branch co-op. Keep an eye on your in boxes for availability and 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 12.5 Kg 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. 2.5 Kg of stores, hence the bees need the equivalent of 8 full frames. (A full 14 x 12 National brood frame hold 3.75Kg of stores).

A full Super frame holds approx. 1.9kg 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 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 counterintuitive 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

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.

**Bernard Brown**





# BEEES ARE HOME IN ICELAND

**S**æunn and Freyr (*right*) attended WLBK's Introduction to Beekeeping course earlier this year all the way from Iceland (as reported in April 2023's issue of Bee Talk). Here Sæunn recounts the arrival of their first bees and looks forward to putting what she learned on the course into practice.

Finally, the bees have arrived. Bees only come to Iceland from the Åland Islands, but that area is one of the few places in the world that is Varroa and disease free, so I'm told. We are lucky to still be free of Varroa and other pests that attack bees here in Iceland. But it was unusually cold on the Åland Islands this spring, breeding started later than usual and because of those bees came to us late. Meanwhile we waited a little impatiently and prepared for the arrival of the bees. I have material for two hives, but in Iceland it has been customary to use Langstroth, the styrofoam version. To be honest, I've seen more beautiful beehives and decided to spruce up mine a bit. I had an artist paint the boxes for me and she did a "living" piece of art on one hive. Flowers that connect - no matter the order in which the boxes are put together, it turned out nice. The green boxes are old used boxes that also got a new look, single flowers all around.

Then came the 6th of July. Four newly graduated beekeepers from the east of Iceland drove to Reykjavík and were given one package of bees each. Originally, I was going to get two packs of bees, but unfortunately 17 packs of bees were destroyed on the ferry from Åland to Sweden, the driver forgot to open the window and they simply suffocated from the heat, so I will get another pack of bees at the end of July. We headed home each with a 5-frame box and drove the next 8 hours until we got home. We all met the next day and helped to set everything up, talk and mirror about feeding and weather, you know this. At first two hives started slowly, there were few eggs and larvae and the queen wandered around the frames. The other two hives were more vigorous, eggs and larvae at all stages. But time heals everything and 14 days later everything is well underway, these queens probably just needed to recover from the journey and get to know the new place. Bees are very interesting. Everything is good.

**Sæunn Vigdís Sigvaldadóttir**





# THE GENTLE PASTIME OF BEEKEEPING (WINK!) PART 2

**E**lizabeth Holding contacted Bernard Brown recently and it sparked his memory of a hilarious article she wrote as a new beekeeper for BeeTalk back in 2012. Bernard managed to retrieve a copy and found it has lost none of its impact nor relevance to the experiences of many of us (especially in this very 'swarmy' season we've just had), so here is Part 2. Enjoy and feel the relief that it's not just you!

So, a week has passed since the last inspection and all that went with it. In the meantime I have a lovely new hive (ordered Thursday afternoon, delivered Friday - thanks Maisemore), much hammering has gone on and the hive has been painted on the outside with green fence paint and filled with lovely new frames.

Wednesday morning was spent finishing off the frames, and inserting some very warm and rather soft wax sheets, closely observed by several bees. So closely that in the end I gave up and went indoors - they were very persistent. Am guessing they are attracted to the smell of the wax, but that dint justify buzzing me quite so aggressively. Despite temperatures of 26 degrees, on went the bee suit, rubber gloves and wellingtons and off I went, smoker in hand.

I set out all the new equipment first, so I knew what was going where. This time I will be organised.

Firstly the 'parent' hive containing queen cells and most of the frames from my first hive. Put up its new stand (put together by husband at 11.30pm last night, and then painted this morning). Big crisis of conscience about the paint - should it have gone on the top, will the smell affect the bees? In the end I couldn't face telling husband that all his late night work had been in vain, so hope they are not all gassed in the morning.

Moved the hive to the other side of the 'artificial swarm' hive, so that all the flying bees will go back to the artificial swarm and the queen (ha ha - see later). Took off the second queen cell, now capped, plus two more I found! How did I miss them last time? Hopefully there is now just one there. Quite a few bees, busy, seemed settled, lots of stores. All going well.

My other hive with the swarm from Leamington was busy with stores but no sign of the queen and no sign of any eggs! Surely she should be laying? Quite a shock when I spotted a few cells that looked like they were filled with blood! Pollen, according to my chart, probably from the lovely rockrose in next door's garden, or plum/wild cherry? (Advice received later from Mike T - this means it was probably a cast. Leave it for 3 weeks from time of collection. Virgin queen could have got lost or killed. At worse could combine with another queenright lot).

On to the main one - opened the 'artificial swarm' hive - arrgh - full of new uncapped queen cells and two capped ones !!!! How can this be? Have only left it a week. I can't find the queen, is she hiding as usual.? Bit difficult to tell as this is the 'botch' hive and frames keep falling off the edges and I get stuck on the gaffer tape,

plus I have to transfer the frames into my new brood box. Searched the whole thing twice, fearing that she has fallen out onto the floor, but then think maybe she has gone ..... and actually there don't seem to be many bees, although there are some eggs which seem to be standing up. Has she gone today? How ungrateful is she? What about her nice new hive?

Oh well, started getting rid of the uncapped cells, then thought maybe I should leave something, so left the two capped cells, they are right next to each other. Should I get rid of one? Or will they both hatch out and fight to the death - survival of the fittest and all that. At least I remembered to replace new brood box exactly where hive was.

Two supers - quite full. Nice of them to leave a bit for the others.

Beginning to think this is all too difficult! I only wanted one hive, and then maybe just one more, and well, if I have three ... but now not even sure if I have one that is going to work. Depressed and very hot and sweaty - marigolds and wellies should not be out in the midday sun. Home for a shower, cold drink and then email lots of questions to Mike and Mike, my cheerful and very helpful 'bee friends'.

All is calm for at least an hour, until the phone call from the churchwarden - could I go up to the church, seems to be a swarm. So back in the sweaty bee suit, wellies and marigolds and off I go, feeling a bit like a proper bee person. Looks like a swarm has gone into the stonework of the church, but hundreds of them have got stuck in the church, and are desperately trying to get out through the stained glass windows. The noise is incredible, the whole church seems to be buzzing. What to do? Found a dustpan and brush and attempted to collect up as many bees as I could reach, and throw them back out into the churchyard, but most of them are too high to catch. Nothing to do but leave them until tomorrow. Sad realisation dawns - they could well be my bees! Oh no, not content with leaving me, they are now going to cause a nuisance at the church - for which I am PCC secretary. Oh dear. Cringe.

Back home to discover that next door neighbour has been stung.

Not a good day. Look on the bright side - at least I didn't have to rush off to a tennis match tonight!

Next...

30th May - don't even look at them, none appear to have laying queens, so all they need to do is quietly get on with the process of hatching out their queen and/or getting her flown and mated. A bit of peace and quiet will do them (and me) good.

5th June - Yeah right!!! It is raining and dull and cold. So why is there a swarm of bees in the nettles outside the hive then? But I haven't got anywhere for them to go. And where have they come from? And what do I do with a swarm anyway?

I know, get a box (only got a cardboard one, and it's raining), and pop it over the top of them. Pull the relevant nettles in under the box and have a quick look in the hives to see what is happening. Original hive very stroppy, gave up on them. Swarm hive ok (oh wow, seem to be some brood! She must now be laying, better

leave them alone). Back to the house to ring poor Mike R and Mike T again.

Discuss the options and decide that they probably came from the 'parent' hive. Have a look - yes, queen cells. I had left one, and marked the frame with a pin, and got rid of all the others, or so I thought. But the one I left was still there, and rather black, and just had a nasty blob inside. so I guess they had raised some more - LOTS more. At least 2 were nicely hinged open, another big one was still closed, so I pulled it off, and guess what - out walked a nice new queen! I was so stunned I just watched her walk off - not sure what I was supposed to do with her anyway. Lots of bees really noisy outside, buzzing away - could another queen be off on her mating flight and they are waiting for her to return?? (No, I didn't think that one up - it was advice from someone who knows much more than me, but I liked the idea). Well if she does, there will be more waiting for her than she bargained for. Anyway, too dodgy to put the bees back into this hive, so a trip to Kenilworth beckons to get a nuc box.

Meanwhile it is tennis club day with no. 1 son, so will drop him there and go and get box. Except they just need one more to make up the numbers for the first match - and then no-one else turns up, so play all afternoon, and it pours with rain. Get soaked but assume that the swarm won't be going anywhere for the moment, so long as the soggy cardboard holds out.

Get back much later with box. Pick up soggy box to find it is full of cosied up bees - they are really very cute, I had better try and save them rather than let them fly away into the distance, which was my first thought on seeing them in the swarm this morning. Still, no time for messing around, open nuc, move out frames, up-end the box and give it a good thump. Out they all fall, shove in frames and put on lid quick. Shock or a good shower of rain? Either way all were inside except about 6 - job done.

So, nothing to do for the moment except enjoy the lovely sunshine (not) and the Jubilee! Rain and wind, more rain, more wind. No bee would go off in this now would they?

9th June - OK so its not raining, but it is windy and it is cold. SO WHY ARE THERE TWO SWARMS BY MY HIVES?

Too embarrassed to ring up everyone again and ask them, so just send a text to Mike T (and then discover that he is getting 5 calls a day from rubbish amateur beekeepers like me - sorry Mike. Thanks so much for keeping your sense of humour).

Put the trusty cardboard box over the one lot in the nettles and bonfire pile, but the other lot are at the top of the hawthorn hedge, so climb up the step ladder and attached to a large-ish trunk.

Balance another box over the top of them, smoke them from the bottom and hope. Have asked husband to warn next door neighbours. He assures me he has. So why do they then start mowing the lawn!! Oh dear.

Attempt to go through hives and see what is up. Original hive, the one that was so stroppy last time - I should have guessed - lots of lovely queen cells. I know it is the Jubilee but this is ridiculous. Some empty, some full. Take them off and put them on top of hive - remember story about them hatching out and fighting, so think this could be fun to watch. This hive has two full supers - oh well might as well have a bit of honey for my pains. Take top one off, can hardly carry it! Move it a distance away, brush off the few bees and cover it quick. Get back to discover both queen cells have hatched out and no queens to be seen. Spoilsports!

Swarm hive - looking OK so leave alone - at least maybe I have one queen amongst this lot?

Parent hive - more old (?) queen cells, so probably that little one that I let out has flown off with half the hive bees. So what about them fighting it out for supremacy - looks more like they all grab a retinue of followers and bu\*\*er off into the distance. Decide to destroy all evidence of queen cells, and just dump swarm back into the hive.

Nuc box still has bees. Leave them alone.

So, getting late and time for bees to go to bed - but no. Neither lot has decided to go into their box. Now what do I do? Feeling pretty p'd off by now, so attempt to drop nettles and swarm into box. Get half of them. Dump them without ceremony into the parent hive. Put crown board, super and top on and leave them to it. Rest of swarm still gathered right down in nettles, so assume I've missed the queen.

Attempt to do same with swarm up in the hedge. Same rubbish result. No idea if dumped bees will stay in hive, or whether they will fly back to the queen, but it is nearly dark by now, so the rest of them are on their own.

Have a lot of pretty cross bees all around me now, but fairly cool about it - until I realise that one is actually INSIDE my hood. How? Remember watching Mick when it happened to someone at my first apiary day, and squish it quick! Still a lot buzzing about now, and worried that more are inside, so go up to house to ask husband to check. He checks, one flies out, stings him! Sorry ....

Ah well, honey cuts beautifully off non-wired frame, and honeycomb for supper.

**Elizabeth Holding**

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