



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## A TASTE OF WHAT'S TO COME



Delegates attending the WLBK Taster Day

**S**aturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September heralded the WLBK late summer Taster Day at BBKA Headquarters in Stoneleigh. The day had the potential to be a baptism of fire for Jane and I being the first we'd organised ourselves. However, we need not have worried as, with the support of the club members, the day turned out to be a success.

It started early with one of the delegates arriving at 08:35 and offering help set up (a good sign of things to come). Some 16 delegates eventually arrived for the day, boots and gloves in hand (well, in bags actually). The morning consisted of talks introducing our craft to the eager ears of those in attendance. From the feedback, these were all well received with one being specifically picked out as engaging. "The Hive", being a difficult talk to present in an interesting way, was brought to life by Nicki Maritz and her sister Rae. These two provided an entertaining interpretation of the subject with Rae taking the roles of the principal characters in the development and use of the hive through history. Many thanks to Nicki and Rae for this.

After a morning of presentations, including the delicious honey cake, chocolate cake and honey flapjacks (there goes any thoughts of reducing my waistline – well I had to check they were all OK for the delegates didn't I?), the 16 delegates donned bee suits and were treated to a live "bee experience" in the BBKA apiary. As the Hall at Kings Hill had been booked for a wedding, it was more convenient for the delegates to use the BBKA apiary rather than our own training apiary. As a side element, using the BBKA apiary introduced them to the barrier infection control that is sometimes needed to protect the bees.

Feedback forms from the delegates showed their enjoyment of the day. Five of the six answered the question "did we achieve the course objectives?" as yes and one with "definitely". Seven of the eight delegates rated the whole day as "excellent" and one as "good".

The purpose of a Taster Day is to provide an unbiased, objective view of beekeeping – a task which, given the enthusiasm of our presenters, is very difficult to achieve. The inclusion of the presentation entitled "Beekeeping; The Downside", highlighting the cost, time commitment, challenges of factors outside

beekeeper's control, disappointing honey yields, stings, neighbours etc. etc. was an essential component of the day to give a balanced view. Despite this, a number of the attendees have already shown interest in attending next year's introductory course. We will have to wait and see if these translate into bookings with fingers crossed. Even those who do not intend pursuing beekeeping further left with a better understanding of our craft.

It was an enjoyable day and well worth the effort. Big thanks to everyone who helped, particularly to Bernard who was on hand every step of the way as we navigated our way through what had to be done in preparation for the event. To the presenters and helpers we also extend our grateful thanks and also to Steve P who always provides these events with the equipment required from the apiary stores.

If anyone is interested in helping out at future Taster Days, we always need a "floater" to help out generally if you're not keen on doing a presentation. You don't have to be an experienced beekeeper, in fact, having someone who is new to beekeeping is an advantage.

Paul Day

# CHAIR'S SEPTEMBER MESSAGE

**W**e paused during the hot, hot days of August to have our regular WLBK committee meeting. Respect to everyone who was there. We welcomed Judith Mason who has set up a great programme of winter meetings with speakers to keep us informed on a range of topics. We said goodbye to Rachel Dove who took us through the difficult days during COVID.

There was also great feedback about the number of local and national shows at which we have had a stand, with volunteers at the Ragley Game Fair, Rowington and Avon Dassett plus more to come. Thank you again for helping members of the public of all ages to understand the value of bees in the community, and encouraging them to do their bit for pollinators.

Amongst the matters discussed at our meeting was whether to invest in a solar wax melter for loan to members. Very timely. The discussion was a great example of why balanced, round-table

discussions are so valuable. We discussed the benefits of solar wax melters: a number of beekeepers use them; they are not expensive to make and can be very effective. However they can be heavy to move, and there are possible difficulties in disposing of cappings and waste material. There is a potential disease transmission risk if the melter is located in one place and used wax is brought there to be melted out. We concluded not to invest in a solar wax melter. However, there is a germ of an idea to develop a workshop where interested beekeepers could learn to make their own, to keep and use themselves.

If you disagree, or want to have your say on the decisions the branch makes on your behalf, do get in touch with me at [suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk). We'd love to welcome you onto the committee.

**Suzanne Bennett**  
WLBK chair



## BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

Now that it is Autumn, brood nests will be shrinking and stores of honey and pollen are being packed around the nest. The colony is producing those vital winter bees and this month's activity is all about protecting them and preparing for the winter months ahead.

- Aim to go into the winter with strong colonies or nucs. If you have a very small queenright colony you could still feed to promote laying and add some drawn comb, but it may be better to take it through the winter in a nuc.
- Most drones have been excluded and left to die. This is not a month for queen mating, so check your colonies are queen-right and unite any that aren't. It is far better to take your winter losses in the autumn and save on the additional feeding.
- Check there is enough space for stores and bees. If you have a very large colony in a National hive, you might consider wintering with a super underneath or above- but no queen excluder. The bee cluster in winter will not even partially cross an excluder.
- If you have not already done so, do a full brood disease inspection- this means shaking the bees of every comb and inspecting each comb for signs of brood disease. Test for Nosema- though you will need to wait till spring to replace comb now.
- Check for varroa levels (board, sugar or alcohol roll) and treat if necessary. Remember, in particular, to remove the treatments at the right time- longer is NOT better and with amitraz will promote resistance.
- Take off any heather or other honey you want to keep, before you feed. You will need clearer boards or porter bee escapes. Now is a good time to book a branch extractor. Any honey coming in later will go to the bees and the ivy will flower soon, giving the bees a boost of (rather unpalatable) ivy honey.
- Extract your honey and get the bees to clean the frames by placing them over the crown board on the hive they came from. Leave for a day or so, then think about storage. Damaged super frames can be melted then boiled.
- Collect your Ambrosia (and honey buckets) from the cooperative- this is the bargain of the year. Look at the catalogue price for 12.5 kilos of ambrosia and feel smug!
- Feed fast and do not drip syrup - it is robbing season. Clive has shown us how to use large Ziploc polythene bags to do this (lay a full bag of syrup on the frames and cut a slit in the top). When filling the bags place it in a bucket and make sure it is sealed shut - the consequences of not doing so are...messy.
- Feed when you have removed the honey. A colony needs 40lb of stores (a full BS brood frame is about 4). Make sure you heft (lift one side) regularly now, to get the "feel" of what a full brood box should feel like. Then you can do this through the winter to see whether you need to emergency feed fondant.

**Jane Medwell**



# AUGUST MEMBERS' MEETING

**A**t our August meeting, Mike Townsend gave members a list of items to help ensure their honey show entries find favour with the honey judges: – a bright light, silk, clingfilm, a hairdryer and a refrigerator!

Holding frames to a bright light can help you see if they contain any dark honey. If so, this can be processed separately, and entered in the dark honey class, where there may be a bigger chance of winning. Use the silk to polish your jar before you fill it with honey, and don't forget to polish the lid too. Unlike other fabrics, silk won't leave traces on the jar, and spoil the shine on your honey. Fill the jar well and use the clingfilm to pull off any foam on the top before you screw on the lid. Warming set honey with a hairdryer can help remove granulation marks, and a refrigerator can help make your slightly too runny soft-set honey properly thick. It goes without saying that you have to start with excellent honey, but everyone tries to do that, and don't open the jar after you have prepared it because the beautiful aroma will escape – leave that to impress the judges (Turn to page 13 for Mike's tips on preparing set honey).

Mike also shared the secret recipe which earned him (and his wife) First Prize in the honey cake competition at the Royal Show – duck eggs and a little heather honey! There were also hints on how to produce a cake of wax free of debris and uncracked – it's all in the filtering and cooling really slowly. So just like baking a lovely honey cake, no opening the oven door until it is ready.

As well as these hints and tips, he also shared his international experience – selling his heather honey to the Kuwaiti Embassy, and having a car, complete with a flag come to collect this precious



Mike Townsend sharing his craft with his grandchildren

and valuable cargo. Keeping bees may not make most of us rich in money but in other ways with stories and experiences. A sociable and educational meeting for all.

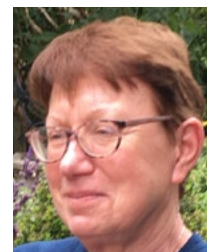
**Judith Masson**

## SEPTEMBER MEETING

**THURSDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 7.30 PM**

Margaret Murdin NDB and Master Beekeeper will give a talk

'Genetics Made Simple' at THE OCTAGON CENTRE, Vicarage Road Lillington. The OCTAGON CENTRE is in the Churchyard of St Mary's Lillington – there is no car park but street parking is available.



# BEEKEEPING SANS FRONTIERES

**I**t is not unusual for us to receive bookings for our Introductory course from outside the Warwick District area. Indeed, we get some from other Branch areas and even from outside Warwickshire including Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Worcestershire and Leicestershire. All are encouraged to, and many do, join their local associations afterwards. Nevertheless, it came something of a surprise to receive an enquiry as to whether attendance was restricted to locals from.....**Iceland**... no less! Not the supermarket where "Mum goes" but the island country in the inhospitable North Atlantic.

Intrigued, and wary of a scam, we replied rather cautiously but it appeared to be a genuine enquiry. Apparently, in Iceland, there is a

bee society but unfortunately there has not been a training course for the last two years. That course is held in Reykjavík over several weekends and Saeunn and Freyr live miles away on the opposite side of the country. They heard about us via google and are so keen to learn about beekeeping that they intend to fly over just for the weekend of the course. **Now that is beeing keen!** What could we say to such enterprise but "Yes". We are already planning a special WLBK welcome for them.

Prompted by this, we have included an article on Icelandic Beekeeping on page 11.

**Bernard Brown**





# LUCKY BEEKEEPERS, LUCKY BEES

**W**e are very lucky beekeepers to have such a well run co-op purchasing arrangement. Very few beekeepers have purchasing opportunities within their group and if they do it is usually limited to bulk buying honey jars. Thank you all the members of our purchasing sub committee who run our co-op so professionally.

I was struck by how lucky we, and our bees are, when asked by Clive Joyce to assist in receiving a consignment of Ambrosia syrup.

Clive started the purchasing of Ambrosia many years ago setting up the ability for us to buy in bulk at an amazingly low price.

Ambrosia syrup is an especially formulated partially inverted feed for bees. The advantage is that it is readily taken by the bees who are able to store it with little further preparation before storing.

It is a far superior to the white sugar feed we used to mix, itself a messy job now avoided, is highly welcomed by the bees, with no

aroma, which helps minimise the problem we used to have with wasps.

It is also superior to fondant for autumn feeding; something we never used to entertain as the bees have to do so much work to convert it into winter feed.

The scale of the Ambrosia operation became apparent when the immaculately presented tanker arrived with driver Mario from Germany. Mario and Mick Smith quickly dispensed 8 tonnes (!) of Ambrosia into our line up of containers. Mick's perfect German speaking assisted in the smooth dispensing of the syrup.

Thank you Clive for once again arranging such a beneficial opportunity for us and our bees.

**Mike Townsend**



## AUGUST'S COMMITTEE MEETING

**A**s we move from the busy summer beekeeping months into winter, the agenda for our meeting looked at actively involving, informing, and supporting members over this period (A date for your diary - 15<sup>th</sup> December Christmas Party). Judith Masson was co-opted onto the committee as she has taken over the mantle of Rachel Dove in managing our members' meetings and arranging speakers. The committee recorded their thanks to Rachel especially for taking us through the Covid remote working times so seamlessly.

The first matter on the agenda was that of the WLBK Safeguarding Policy (covered on page 7). The request by BBKA to have the branch identified on an interactive map was unanimously agreed with the secretary being the nominated point of contact for enquiries.

A discussion on varroa management resulted in the concept of a "Varroa Day" being aired so the membership co-ordinated their treatment activity. This will be discussed and actioned in 2023.

The branch financial picture was again very healthy with predictions for the year end being closely aligned with the agreed budget. In

addition, the ever-increasing membership, now 270 with 7 new junior members was noted. The meeting agreed that a new laptop be purchased to support our talks in light of recent difficulties with the existing aged kit.

Following positive feedback of Talks, Displays, The Kenilworth Castle apiary and Kings High/Evergreen Schools initiatives, the meeting then noted the impact of the starvation warning issued via MessengerBee. In the event Alan Deeley, standing in for Clive Joyce, issued some 150 units of ambrosia (2 tonne) to members. A weight training exercise which no one anticipated, least of all Alan. The meeting expressed their considerable thanks to Alan for taking on this task.

To wind up the meeting, Val Dillon reported that costs of room hire at both BBKA and Kings Hill were to increase substantially. In both cases, as expected, the driver was rising energy charges.

**Chris Cox**  
**WLBK Secretary**



# ECOFEST 2022

**E**cofest is all about minimising our carbon footprint and encouraging sustainability in the decisions we make affecting the environment. In harmony with this theme, we certainly sustained the popularity of our display with the public. With a 20m frontage and open at both the front and the back, we pulled out all the stops and mounted the full range of our activities .....and more.

As intended, the new blood invited onto the displays sub-committee generated fresh ideas. Most notable was the trialling of a "kiddies' corner" where we provided the opportunity for the kids to colour in outlines of bees and to make bees out of pine cones, orange and yellow wool and paper wings. If kids get bored, then the parents move on but if the kids become engaged then the parents hang around and have the opportunity to find out more about our craft.

Things were manic at the candle rolling table with over £120 being taken in donations but this was nothing compared to the frenzy at the honey tasting and honey sales tables. Starting the day with a stock of 300 jars, by 4.30 there were just 8 saleable ones left accounting for over £1300 of sales for member supplied honey.

The live beekeeping demonstrations attracted huge crowds as usual and featured a starring role by our youngest beekeeper, Betty Buckland, 8 years old, who, dressed in her beesuit, assisted inside the demo tent by parading the frames of brood and stores around the perimeter for the public to see with all the confidence of a master beekeeper.

If this all sounds exhausting, it most certainly was, but we had a great response from members to steward the stand who rose magnificently to the challenges of the day. Without their dedication enthusiasm and hard work none of this would have happened, the public would have been denied the opportunity to learn more about bees and we would not have experienced one of the most rewarding days of the summer.

We have two more shows coming up in September – Kenilworth Castle on 17<sup>th</sup> and Kingshill Autumn Fayre on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Keep an eye on your inbox for details and get that honey jarred and labelled.

**Bernard Brown**



## OUT-APIARY OPPORTUNITIES

The general consensus is that this has been a good season for beekeeping and it has been an equally good season for our soliciting of offers to host. We currently have opportunities in:- Broadwell, Charwelton, Chesterton, Claverdon, Fenny Compton, Moreton Morrell, Priors Hardwick, Hatton, Warwick, Deppers Bridge, Mallory Court, Heronfield, Knowle.

So, if you be inspired to expand your activities or need to move your apiary for other reasons, take a look at the "available apiaries" page in the members' area of our website.

## MARATHON UPDATE

WLBK member Colleen Abell is running the Virtual London Marathon in support of Bees Abroad on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October. For this virtual race competitors have 24 hours to complete the distance (run, walk, crawl... whatever it takes!!).

Colleen has set up a [fundraising page](#) and hopes she will achieve her target of raising £500 for Bees Abroad.

According to Colleen, preparations for the marathon continue, following completion of the Leamington Half Marathon (photo below). She is currently looking into the route she'll take around Warwickshire to complete the distance on the day. Bees Abroad have been arranging for those running to have Bees Abroad T-shirts and plan to promote the event via their social media channels. Bees Abroad are keen to hear from anyone else who would like to carry out a challenge event for the charity.

Good luck Colleen!





# WLBK HONEY SHOW 2022

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

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.

This year's Warwick and Leamington Honey Show is to be held at Kings Hill Autumn Fayre on **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September**. The exhibits will be open, to the public, for viewing during the course of the day, with stewards on hand to answer questions.

We are delighted to welcome Douglas Nethercleft as our judge supported by stewards from the branch. It will be a closed format but Douglas will provide feedback and summarise his findings during the presentations at the end of the day.

**With 19 different Classes to choose from there is something for everyone and we hope members will enter at least one class!**

The schedule and entry form is on our web site [www.warleambees.com](http://www.warleambees.com) or contact 078 0466 6912 .

**Helen Essex , Honey Show Secretary**



## TIMINGS ON THE DAY

Staging of entries : 10am - 10.45am

Judging : 11am - 1pm

Show open to public: 1pm onwards

Presentations: 3pm

Removal of exhibits: 3.30pm

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. 1lb (454g) jar of light honey   | 14. Cottager Class for those with fewer than 5 hives   |
| 2. 1lb (454g) jar of medium honey  | – Jack Taylor Plaque   |
| 3. 1lb (454g) jar of dark honey  | 1lb (454g) jar of honey- liquid, granulated or soft set  |
| 4. 1lb (454g) jar of naturally granulated honey  | 15. One honey cake (recipe below) - Nancy Wilshire Rosebowl  |
| 5. 1lb (454g) jar of soft set honey  | 16. 1lb (454g) jar of honey to be judged on flavour only.  |
| 6. 1lb (454g) jar of heather or heather blend honey  | 17. One decorated screw top 1lb jar lid .  |
| 7. A beeswax candle of any type or size mounted in a non- combustible holder. The candle may be lit during judging | 18. One photographic print (colour or mono chrome) mounted on card no larger than A4 of a subject related to bees or beekeeping. |
| 8. One container of cut comb honey - 200g min  | 19. Gift Class- an item made from product or products of the hive suitable for a gift for a special occasion                     |
| 9. One frame for extraction  | 20. Best in show-The Bernard Collins Troph. Awarded to the member judged to have the best exhibit in the show from Classes 1-16  |
| 10. One cake of beeswax- 150g min  |  |
| 11. Bottle of dry mead   |  |
| 12. Bottle of sweet mead   |  |
| 13. Novice Class for those who have never won a first prize for their honey in any honey show- Novice Mazer        |  |
| 1lb (454g) jar of honey- liquid, granulated or soft set  |  |

### NOTES:

Extracted honey must be exhibited in clear glass 454g standard squat plain jars with gold metal lids.

Mead (minimum one pint) must be exhibited in clear glass bottles of round section without fluting or decoration of any kind and closed with a cork stopper with a white plastic flange. A base and cover will be provided for staging honey cake (class 15). Black display boards are available for staging classes 8 & 10. Frames holders are available for class 9

Jars and bottles should be labelled with approx 20mm from the bottom of the jar to the bottom edge of the label.

No more than 2 entries are permitted per class per entrant. Entries to be the product of the entrant.

**The Thorpe Cup** will be presented to the exhibitor with the most points in the show excluding Class 20. Points are awarded as follows;

1st =4pts, 2nd =3pts, 3rd =2pts, 4th =1pt.

## HONEY CAKE RECIPE

150g (5oz) butter

175g (6oz) clear honey

1 tablespoon water

110g (4oz) soft brown sugar

2 eggs

200g (7oz) self raising flour

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

# PLANT OF THE MONTH: CROCOSMIA

It had been a particularly dry end to this long hot summer and the poor gardens were looking all a bit brown and crispy. Certainly, mine was looking pretty drab, except that is for the last few fronds of bright scarlet crocosmia peeping out through the tangle of grasses and wilting perennials. The bees made the most of their late feast.

This lovely, elegant plant, also known as montbretia, comes from the iris family, Iridaceae and is grown worldwide. It will tolerate both shade and drought and is winter-hardy. The corms are readily separated for propagation, but this property can also lead to some species becoming invasive. You will see banks of them along coastal paths where they have escaped from nearby gardens.

Apparently, when the dried leaves are immersed in hot water, they emit a strong smell

of saffron. The name *Crococsmia* therefore comes from the Greek words – “*Krokos*” meaning saffron (a spice harvested from *Crocus*) and “*Osme*” meaning odour.

**Maggie Curley**



Image courtesy of Barry Meatyard

## WLBK AT ROWINGTON VILLAGE SHOW

This summer has been extremely dry and hot and often this can be a problem, but when it comes to Village Shows it is just perfect.

The village show at Rowington took me back to when I was a child (it never seemed to rain then) and all the village shows I attended then were just the same as this one, being bathed in beautiful sunshine. Although I don't seem to remember that Splat the Rat or Ball in a Bog would have been acceptable stalls at our Church Fete – what would the vicar have thought?

But there were coconuts to be won then and now, cake stalls, jams and chutneys for sale and endless cups of tea.

We also had music in those days, but not as good as at Rowington, and, of course there was no beer then, but I seem to remember we did have ice creams, although how they kept it frozen I'll never know.

Rowington must produce some wonderful gardeners as there were displays of flowers, fruit and vegetables to be judged and lots of prizes to be won. I also remember this when I was a child.

But what was never there when I was a child were bees – unless

they were attacking the cream cakes and fruits along with those pesky wasps. These days things are so different and any opportunity for us to promote the value of bees in the world is seen as a good thing.

Although the show was only 2½ hours long we had a steady stream of visitors wanting to see our girls, children rolling candles, folks asking questions and some offering the use of their land for our members to keep their bees on.

Honey sales went well and we weren't affected by the power cut which shortened the time the band could play and meant the bouncy castle collapsed half an hour early.

All in all, a wonderful afternoon with lots of laughter, good spirits and new acquaintances made.

If you've never been involved with our shows, you are missing a great opportunity to promote our craft and have lots of fun.

**Val Dillon**





# BACK TO THE HEATHER

Continuing our chronicle of this year's experience of four of our members' foray up to the Derbyshire heather moors, readers will have noted that this can be a risky activity. Not only is the nectar flow weather-dependent and, consequently highly variable year on year, but with hives from all over the country vying for the same resource, disease transmission is always a concern. The flowering of the heather was reported to be a spectacular sight by later arrivals, but would the exceptionally dry weather affect the nectar flow? This threw success into serious doubt. So, with such uncertainty, it was prudent to pay a visit to the heather during the anticipated flow to see what was going on and to take corrective action where necessary.

And so it was on one showery Thursday, I packed the dog, a lunch, beekeeping equipment and waterproofs into the car and together with Jane and spare supers from each of our gang we set off up the M1, more in hope than expectation. No early start this time. Indeed, it was intended to make a nice relaxing day of it with exploration of the glorious treasures of the Peak District thrown in. The journey was rather wet and it was still showering when we arrived. The heather was still in bloom and the surrounding moors shrouded in mist. Things did not look encouraging. The dog needed a comfort break and with sheep grazing as far as the eye could see, there was nothing else for it but to sally forth with dog on lead and muzzle to keep him from sampling that delicacy of all delicacies, sheep poo.

The weather began to clear, and it was then we realised that we were not alone. We had moved our bees onto the heather quite early on and had the choice of literally miles of dry stone wall field boundaries in the lee of which to site our four colonies. Now, there were banks of hives against most of the walls. Some on pallets with 6 colonies. We stopped counting them at 200. The portents for our crop took an even greater downwards turn.

After a much-needed lunch and coffee break, the weather calmed down so it was on with the bee suits and off we went to discover what awaited us. All our hives had been left with two supers bar one which had three. The first hive inspected had one full super with the bees working the second. The other three colonies each had two very full supers and on the three supered colony, the third was being worked on. Clearly more space was required so two of the empty supers brought up with us were deployed. The other colonies were deemed to have sufficient space given that the heather was past its best and the bees' job nearing completion.



Our bees didn't do too badly on the heather moors

As is so often the case, it is the feistiest of colonies which are the best foragers and so it was here with the bees demonstrating their irritability by taking a shine to my left calf and burrowing down inside my wellie to exact their revenge. Who said bees always travel upwards?

So, it has been a good year. The trick now is to judge when to repatriate the colonies. Make it too soon and you will miss out on any late flow. Take them too late and the bees will start eating the stores as there is precious little other forage around. As with much in beekeeping, time will tell.

With clearing weather, we found a five mile walk along the lanes of the Peak District, visiting several hamlets all with spectacular views and, after a traffic free journey arrived home tired but very happy.

Next month, we will report on bringing the bees back home, what effects their sojourn up north has had on them and on extracting the honey.

**Bernard Brown**





# REMOVING UNWANTED BEES

**D**ue to a lack of natural sites for swarms to settle these days, we are increasingly being contacted to remove honeybee colonies from buildings and outbuildings. Steve Poynter and myself recently undertook a couple of interesting 'Cut-Outs' of honey bee colonies in nearby rural villages of Claverdon and Preston Bagot.

The first was from a Stable in a 16<sup>th</sup> century property near Claverdon. The new owners of the property wanted to use the Stables for horses, so it was necessary to remove the bees. The Stable actually housed four separate honeybee colonies in the wall cavity where bees entered through knot holes in the exterior wood cladding.

We cut off the internal plywood cover to expose the colonies, and carefully cut out each colony. We then used our BeeVac apparatus to remove the bees. Judging by the size and colour of the comb, the colonies had been in place for some time!



We received a call the following week to say that we had missed a colony, however when we went back to check, a swarm had recently moved in to one of the other cavities! This was evident by the light colour of the comb which had been made by the bees very quickly.

Clearly news travels fast in rural Warwickshire, and we were contacted shortly afterwards by an elderly couple in a nearby village to say they had a Honeybee colony in a narrow roof space in their garage. The colony had apparently been there happily for a

few years, but had turned nasty and were stinging the residents.

On close inspection we removed an area of wooden cladding to expose a colony that extended several feet into the void behind!



The bees were indeed quite defensive and we received several stings for our troubles.

However, we removed the comb with brood and put it into frames held in place by rubber bands. We then assembled the BeeVac and took away the flying bees, which made the rest of the removal much easier. The nest extended so far into the cavity that we needed to use a garden hoe to access the outer reaches of the nest.



The elderly residents were extremely grateful that the problem was resolved, and that we were able to save the bees.

Once we had quarantined the colonies and treated them for varroa as well as re-queened them, each colony was re-homed and quite quickly settled into productive colonies.

**Alan Deeley and Steven Poynter**



# WLBK AND SAFEGUARDING

**F**or some time, the matter of working with children when beekeeping has been covered by our branch policy of requiring parents, or registered guardians, to be present whenever their family members are attending training and members meetings. This covers any issues for our junior members and has been found to be both workable and not overly constraining.

However, the issue of Safeguarding goes much wider than working with children and some years ago a template for a policy was circulated by the British Beekeepers Association to help County Associations in establishing their own. A Safeguarding policy and its accompanying arrangements are a requirement as a registered charity and as such we, Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers, are required to implement the measures established at the last meeting of the County Trustees.

**"Safeguarding" involves measures to protect the health, well-being and human rights of individuals, which allow people — especially children, young people and vulnerable adults — to live free from abuse, harm and neglect.**

The County Trustees were fortunate that there were a number of members who had some experience in this area and, facilitated by a professional consultant, they arrived at a set of documents that were approved at the last trustees meeting. The consultant having been recommended to the County by a local youth charity (Young People First in Leamington) with working experience in this area. We are also fortunate that Douglas Netherclef from Shipston has stepped

forward to act as the Designated Safeguarding Officer for the charity. Well, we have the documents but what are the next steps for their implementation.

**Step 1** – To inform the membership (this article and MessengerBee)

**Step 2** – To make the policy and the accompanying Code of Conduct and Children Policy readily available (posted on our website in the members area)

**Step 3** – To have the Children Policy and the Code of Practice displayed at our members meetings, at our Training Apiaries and at the Hurst Farm Extraction Unit.

**Step 4** – To appoint our Safeguarding Officer (The Branch Secretary)

The good news is that the set-out policy and its accompanying documents are not requiring any change in what we have arranged or the way we currently behave to one another. They effectively state the obvious. What they do establish are actions to be taken in the event of an issue being raised.

The current branch arrangements for junior members is unchanged as it falls well within the agreed Children Policy.

**Chris Cox**  
Branch Secretary & County Trustee



# ICELANDIC BEEKEEPING...BRRRRRR

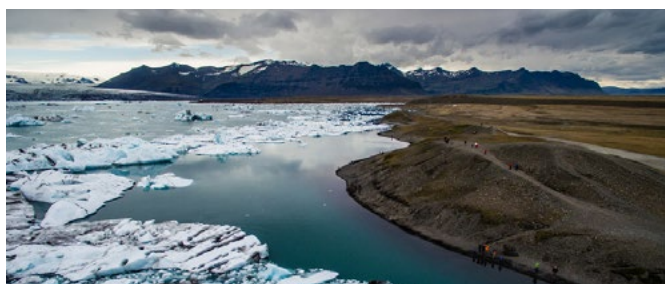
**F**or many, Iceland conjures up images of cold weather, rugged volcanic landscape, geysers, hot springs and Vikings. The last thing most individuals would associate with Iceland is beekeeping, and quite rightly so. In a population of a little over 350,000 – equivalent to that of Bristol

- there are approximately 120 Beekeepers and 350 hives.

Most things in Iceland are expensive compared with the UK. Colonies cost well over £500 and a Queen £90. So far, stocks are reported as Varroa free due to strict importation restrictions which limit imports to those from Åland, a village in Norway.

Although much of the country is mountainous with the population distributed in small concentrations around the coast, the winters are not that cold teetering around the zero degrees centigrade mark. It is not the cold which presents the challenge to beekeeping but the prolonged winter – over 6 months duration - and the consequential limited opportunity to build up numbers and to forage for stores for the forthcoming winter.

What forage there is available, is far from abundant. Vegetation is generally stunted but there are several shrubs and low growing plants that provide a source of nectar and pollen mainly, Crowberry,



Coltsfoot, Arctic Thyme, Angelica and Heather as major food sources. The name of the game is survival with honey production and pollination secondary and it is the complex relationship between the wild vegetation, genetic strain of bee, and devoted tending by beekeepers which makes colony survival possible.

So why keep bees in Iceland? The fascination with these creatures in their own right is something most UK beekeepers can recognise but the challenge beekeeping presents no doubt plays a part. Then, perhaps, the limited supply of domestic honey attracting a price to retail outlets of £65 per lb, might just have something to do with it.

**Bernard Brown**



# MY NAME IS JOHN, AND I'M A BAD BEEKEEPER...



Our first swarm collection was like a scene out of Ghostbusters

**T**his is the sort of admission you give at your first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. And in fact, I've been an addicted beekeeper (of a sort) for twelve years.

When I say, 'of a sort', I have to ask whether you have ever put on your bee suit, checked all the fastenings, and forgotten to secure the little strip of Velcro just below your chin? I hope you have. Not because I mean you any ill-will, but it's just one of the many blunders that have made me wonder over the years whether I'm really cut out for beekeeping. The result was more bees inside than out, and my neighbours entertained by the sight of a man dressed all in white attempting to commit suicide by beating himself about the head.

I've known some highs – my beekeeping friend leading us to an award for best honey from a small apiary – and some lows – hiving a local swarm that we named 'The Kenilworth B\*\*\*\*\*s' because they stung with enthusiasm, swarmed with alacrity, and never produced any honey.

I've acquired bees as gifts from generous colleagues, bought nucs and casts, and once bought an expensive nucleus of Brother Adam's Buckfast bees. They were lovely; benign, productive and contented. I treated them like babies – they got every care almost to my bringing them indoors with me. And of course, the first sharp winter finished them.

Our first swarm collection was exciting. A young family cowered

behind their patio doors as we arrived like Ghostbusters, sweeping the bees into a large cardboard box, and returning later for the full swarm, and to present them with a jar of honey. Not so much fun was the swarm on the eaves of an old cottage. The houseowner questioned me closely about the economics of beekeeping, only to ask, when we were half-way up the ladder, how much we were giving him for his fine collection. The temptation to open the bedroom windows and give the swarm a good thump was almost irresistible.

My family have been hugely supportive. My patient wife clears and bottles our produce. Helping us spin out buckets of honey at the end of one season, our eldest son laughed uncontrollably: 'What are you going to do with it all?' Our youngest son took a jar to work with him, left it in the staff canteen with a loaf of bread, and collected enough orders from those who tasted it to pay our expenses one year. Appropriately, my sons bought me an American book called 'Beekeeping for Dummies'. It advises that each summer I take the bees to South Dakota. It's advice I've not been able to follow so far.

Ah, books. They are full of such good advice. The first advice I received was that if you ask two beekeepers for advice, you get three different answers. And the bees haven't read the books, of course. But I spun out a good few pounds of honey today, so I'll go on reading, asking, and learning.

**John Stringer**

# BEEES AT THE PROMS

**F**ascination with honey bees is, I think, something with which we all can identify and so it was when a co-commission by the BBC and the World Harp Congress was awarded to English classical music composer, Sally Beamish, the outcome was a composition evocative of the sounds of bees. Entitled "The Hive". This work received its world premiere at the BBC Proms on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July at the Royal Albert Hall to much acclaim. Its 4 movements are based on the seasonal differences in sounds emanating from the Hive.

Sally Beamish uses a sound palette more tonal than has recently been popular. Written as a concerto for the harp, for which the soloist was Catrin Finch, one time harp player to HRH Prince Charles, it uses the sounds of the harp in wide ranging and innovative ways. The harp has a natural tendency to "buzz", a feature which, when learning to play is frowned upon and taught to eliminate, but here she was allowed to "buzz" to her heart's content. Catrin was wonderfully accompanied by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Ariane Matiakh.

The piece is very atmospheric, particularly the beginning and end which worked very well. The first section depicts the winter with the cluster huddled together for warmth, a still and enigmatic atmosphere. Then there are stirrings of spring, lots of joyous birdsong, and busy foraging for nectar. The summer is a crescendo of activity, swarms leaving and new queens taking up residence to be followed by the gentle acceptance of autumn and a return to the stillness of the beginning. The middle more chaotic sections used percussive ideas with Catrin hitting the body of the harp and stopping the plucked strings to give a really twangy sound. Towards the end of the piece the double basses are required to play in their upper register, in dissonant chords, sounding like bees.

I enjoyed it and it benefits from repeat hearings.

A bonus from this performance was the interval talk. Sally Beamish and the presenter, Nicola Heywood-Thomas, were joined by Lars Chittka, Professor of Sensory and Behavioural Ecology, Queen Mary University of London. He has recently published a book "The Mind of a Bee" which I hope will soon be on my shelves. Sally Beamish had consulted him when the commission for her work came in and he is beguiling to hear. He pointed out that bees see things that we do not, such as ultraviolet and polarised light. They can learn to navigate, count, recognise human faces, manipulate objects almost as if they were using them as tools and they also copy from other bees. The workers have the ability to make the honeycomb and its perfect hexagons, and also recognise that some cells need to be big enough for drones or queens so are they to be described as intelligent? Lars Chittka considers that we should be preserving bees not just because they are vital to our crops, but because they are sentient beings and worthy of our support for their own sakes. It cannot be coincidence that Lars Chittka plays in a post-punk band called Killer Bee Queens!

Bearing in mind the huge audience figures for the Proms, I hope the ecological importance of all sorts of bees is better understood. Climate change has recently been very obvious but the message cannot be over emphasised. We must help all bees and Catrin Finch hopes to do her bit by having a hive in her garden one day. I have always thought bees have their own music but I only sang occasionally to my bees, too busy manipulating frames etc. However, they sang to me, a lovely song. I hope yours do too.

"The Hive" is available to hear again on BBC Sounds (Prom 9) and if you look for Lars Chittka "The Mind of a Bee" on You-Tube you should be able to hear him talking about his work via the Linnean Society.

Jane Rigby

## HINTS & TIPS: HONEY PREP

**W**e have a few hints and tips for you this month. The first one is thanks to Mike Townsend.

### SOFT SET OR CREAMED HONEY

#### Why bother?

- Much of our honey crystallises quickly, which means heating it again and maybe again to keep it liquid. Heating it for one hour at just above 60°C may work for a few months.
- Opportunity to blend honeys, which if kept liquid may appear cloudy. Also, to include honeys with lots of pollen or propolis, which can be unattractive on their own.
- Creamed honey can be spread thickly and used in cooking.
- A way of dealing with OSR, but blend with later honey to enhance the flavour.

#### Processing honey, even for liquid honey will mean heating it

- Temperature range 40-60°C – use an oven, a warming cabinet.

#### What causes honey to crystallise?

- The amount of glucose compared with fructose. The ratio of each depends on the source of honey. Glucose causes granulation.
- Viscosity or thickness. Thick dark honey slows down spread of crystals and crystallisation but is likely to end up with large coarse crystals.
- Temperature. Crystallisation increases at lower temperature, but honey gets thicker which slows crystallisation down.

Best temperature for rapid crystallisation is 13 – 15°C – (think garage floor)

Below this temperature crystallisation is slower, which is why you can freeze honey and when thawed it is still liquid.

Warming liquid honey to 60 degrees for an hour will give a shelf life of a few months but is tricky to achieve without overheating.

### Naturally set honey

No control over crystallisation, may be very hard, coarse, large gritty crystals, also frosting where it shrinks with and in contact with air.

### Soft set or creamed honey

Seed the honey with crystals we like, to give a soft buttery consistency. Also the process minimises frosting.

- Find soft set honey you like and use it as seed. Get from another beekeeper or cream your own using a pestle and mortar or back of a large spoon and mixing bowl.
- Use honey that has oil seed rape in it.
- Need about 5% so two/three jars for a 30 lb bucket is usually plenty. Some members use a little more 4/5 lbs per 30lb and believe it gives finer crystallisation.

### The process

- Warm your honey and filter in the usual way. A coarse filter is good enough and pollen etc gives crystals something to grown on.
- Warm at low temperature for long time. 40/45°C is fine.
- If you rush by heating at 60°C will slow the process down and may damage the honey.
- Let it cool to room temperature and then stir in your seed honey. Use a creamer tool, potato masher or even a large spoon.
- Run the mixture into your honey bucket and stand in a cool place. I stand on the garage floor having covered the container with pallet wrap but you could use cling film. Try to cool rapidly and hold at 13 – 15°C. This is the first creaming and may all that is required if the honey is eaten fairly quickly
- Could stand in a cool pantry in winter because if it is too cold it will slow seeding down.
- Creaming it again seems to help to help minimise shrinking, which gives an unsightly appearance where the honey comes in contact with the air. So for a second cream after the honey has set return the container to a warming cupboard and warm slowly until about 1/3rd or ½ from outside in is 'liquidish' and the rest is soft
- Carefully and slowly tip the container contents into a settling tank. Watch out hard lumps and either fish them out or mash as they go into the tank.
- Gently mash the honey until you have a nice even consistency and colour. Try not to introduce too much air.
- Leave to stand for 24 hours in a warm place to settle and get the bubbles to rise to the top.
- Warm jars in the oven and fill. When bottling creamed honey I put a small desk light behind the honey flowing from the tap so that I can watch for lumps and debris I might have missed in the filtering process. This is what the commercial packers do.

Will/may have lines. These will go when left to stand but sometimes have a faint stripe. Better with practice.

Second creaming seems to minimise frosting due to shrinkage but store at ambient temperature as if too cool frosting will almost certainly appear.

As a general point never store honey in the fridge. It needs to be a room temperature for the aromas to be released.

### IMPROVISED TRAVELLING SCREEN

Transporting bees over any distance runs the risk of them overheating, not only from being confined but also from the stress created by being tossed about en route. One of the ways to mitigate this is to remove the roof

and add a travel screen – a wooden framed mesh placed on top of the boxes. Being a tad on the frugal side, I balked at having to acquire and store such a piece of kit which would only get used once a year so it was time for some improvisation. I took a mesh floor, inserted an entrance block – I actually screwed it in place – inverted the floor and hey presto! – a perfectly adequate travel screen.

Many thanks to Bernard Brown for this money saving gem!

### IN THE HIVE

Now is the time to think about uniting colonies. Bad tempered colonies and weak ones can be managed by killing the queen of the unwanted colony and putting it on top of the recipient colony. Unite through newspaper which has some small slits in, hold down with a queen excluder. Do this in the evening and look for chewed paper at the entrance in the morning. Unwanted queens can be euthanised by putting them in the freezer.

A strong colony needs 20kg or more of stores to see it through the winter. It is not easy to judge the amount extra needed so just keep feeding until the bees stop taking the feed. Try to get feeding finished by the end of September so the stores can be ripened and capped before the weather gets too cold.

If you find that the bees are not cleaning the wet supers then put an empty super between the brood box and wet super .

**Helen Essex**

*If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to Helen Essex:*

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