



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

SWEET SURPRISE ON THE MOORS

More in hope than expectation and armed with empty supers, we set off some three weeks after having abandoned our hives to the vicissitudes of the nectar flow and weather, to our temporary heather apiary at Rod Knoll Farm in Derbyshire, to check on how things were going. Taking bees to the heather on the Derbyshire Moors always is accompanied by a great deal of uncertainty and in the intervening weeks, the weather down here had been, shall we say, "unseasonal", so the chances were that it was even more so at 500ft above sea level.

Still, the weather smiled upon us on that day as we made our way up the M1. I don't know what I had done to deserve this, but would you believe it? Some 4 miles away from our destination we ended up behind a slow moving tractor with absolutely no opportunities to overtake which turned out to be going to the self-same farm as we were. After driving without getting out of second gear, things got better with our arrival within minutes of our mate and member David Faulkner, who had winged his way over from Kidsgrove.

Without more ado, apart from an encounter with a gang of cows and their bull blocking the

path to the apiary, necessitating a suspension-testing agricultural detour, we made it to the apiary site where we quickly booted and suited. Negotiating the boggy area with our empty supers, there was not much activity around the hives which, for midday, was a little unsettling.

The roof of the first hive put up a bit of a fight and when we eventually prised it off, we found out why. Brace comb, laden with honey, had been built above the crown board. Luxuriating in the heady aroma of heather honey, we levered off the crown board to be greeted by the picture above.

Metinks we should, perhaps, have put two supers on at the outset. Still there was a couple



of weeks, at least, before the nectar flow would be spent, so on went another super. The other hives did not live up to the quantity of honey as the first, but all had several frames of honey and supers were added where appropriate. Bringing the colonies back on our next visit will, hopefully, be more in expectation than in hope!

Bernard Brown

ENTER THE WLBK HONEY SHOW NOW — 23 SEPTEMBER

**TURN TO PAGE 6 FOR EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
THE DAY AND THE CLASSES TO ENTER.**

CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES IS 18 SEPTEMBER

WLBK CHAIR'S AUGUST MESSAGE

Warwick and Leamington branch had a mixed August. There was an excellent turn out at the annual barbecue. It's a really good way to meet members and catch up with friends and fellow beekeepers. The bring, cook and share approach makes it easy to take part. This year the (non alcoholic) bar, staffed by enthusiastic juniors was a joy to behold. We have had a very kind donation from Aston Martin Lagonda (AML) who have an apiary at their site. Given the company's emphasis on leading edge technology, the branch is giving some thought to how best to use the donation. Strong contenders are investment in hive monitoring or microscopy equipment.

On a much less positive note the branch apiary has had an infestation of European Foul Brood (EFB). This resulted in a visit by the local bee inspector and sadly the hives had to be destroyed. The hard working apiary team had to watch, and document, the necessary burning of affected hives, colonies, frames and other equipment.

This has been a devastating event. The apiary team are now working with the branch committee and others to make changes and improve biosecurity for the 2024 season. This might include new procedures like disinfecting boots when moving in and out of the apiary; washing bee suits after every visit to the apiary and other measures to limit the 'traffic' in and out of the apiary.

The branch apiary is a valued resource and the team who lead it are skilled and committed. These new approaches to help protect the apiary bees from stress and disease may also provide ideas for how we manage our own colonies.

Suzanne Bennett, WLBK Chair



WLBK SUMMER BBQ

Around 50 members, family and friends gathered at Kings Hill Nurseries Garden on the afternoon of Saturday 12th August for the WLBK Summer Barbecue. Despite the variable weather conditions that we've been experiencing this summer the rain stayed away and with the sunshine and pleasant afternoon temperatures we were all able to enjoy some serious "foraging" amongst the many tempting savoury dishes and desserts brought along by all to share.

It was a good opportunity to meet friends old and new and catch up with the latest news from our various apiaries and bee-related activities.

For those of us new to beekeeping it was good to meet other

more experienced members and their families and to put names to faces.

A number of our younger members joined us and had a great time together providing an impromptu "bar service" from the Summer House with some members managing to rack up a fairly hefty bar tab!

Thanks must go to the organiser of this event, Judith Masson – particularly for the provision of the delicious speciality breads from Kenilworth's artisan baker, Crustum.

As a family new to the group, we particularly appreciated how friendly and welcoming everyone is to members of all ages. It is bee-rillicant!

The Corkish Family (Gary, Dawn, Breesha & Ramsey)



BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

This is the month to look ahead to winter activities. After the upcoming Honey Shows (you are entering, right?), Judith has already planned an exciting programme of talks.

In the apiary, the honey is mostly off, the drones have been excluded and protecting those long-lived winter bees is the name of the game. Unless you are having a Himalayan Balsam flow at the moment (lucky you), you are probably feeding Ambrosia. In one of my apiaries, I am using Clive Joyce's poly bag method of feeding - it saves me storage space and avoids the need to clean feeders. Basically, Clive puts big, sealed bags of Ambrosia directly onto the brood box (with a super around) and makes a 7cm slit in top side of the bag- that's it. But make sure you put the poly bag in a bucket to fill it up- I learnt the hard way that the bag needs support whilst being filled.

- Take off any remaining honey and extract it- you might need the apimelter and boiler- details on the website.
- Get the bees to clean any spun supers and do not store them wet- it invites wax moth.
- Do a disease inspection if you have not recently done one- only unite healthy colonies.
- Decide how many colonies you want to overwinter and unite any small colonies. This saves money on varroa treatments and feed. (If you freeze the unwanted queens, the new county microscopy group would love to have them).
- Do any remaining Varroa treatment to protect those winter bees and fill in your Veterinary Medicine Record.
- Feed so that your colonies have around 20kg of stores. Plenty of stores in the brood box is ten times as good as fondant later in the year. It prevents isolation starvation.
- Think about beginning the "big clean".
- Plan your winter reading and beekeeping study. There are module exams in November or March you might enter for or Why not think about doing the Basic Assessment, Honey Bee Health Certificate or General Husbandry Certificate next year.
- Lastly, the Branch Honey Show is on Saturday 23rd September 2023. Now is your chance to enter- simply go to this [link](#). This is not just a show for a few experts- there are classes for everyone and we want to make it easy to take part. To enter the honey classes you need 1lb jars and to enter the frame class you need a frame box- but Chris Price (price_chris@btinternet.com) has spare jars and a few frame boxes you can use to enter. But it isn't just honey- there is the photograph class or Honey Cake class. There are additional classes for novices and even a skep class (turn to page 6 for more information).
- Then there is the County Honey show on 30th September (where you can re-enter all those winning entries- or non winning ones for another go. Find out more [here](#). (password: Sup3R#)

Jane Medwell



LOOKING AHEAD TO WINTER TALKS

A varied programme of in-person talks has been arranged for the winter months providing opportunities for learning and entertainment, as well as a chance to catch up on bee chat and eat cake. Mark the third Thursday of each month (not December) so you are sure not to miss these events.

Our first speaker on Thursday **21st September** is Len Dixon, who has years of experience as a beekeeper, the Chair and President of various local associations, and as a Regional Bee Inspector. Len's talk *Messengers of the gods* will give us a glimpse of bee keeping in the past.

On **19th October** Michael Badger MBE, former President of the

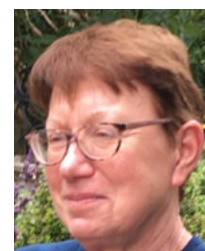
BBKA will talk about *Sustainable Bee Keeping*.

And on **16th November**, Richard Rickitt, co editor of Bee Craft will take us on an illustrated journey to meet bees and beekeepers across the country from *Buckfast Abbey* to *Buckingham Palace*.

All talks will take place in the Function room at Kings Hill Nursery at 7.30 pm. The room will be open so you can use the library from 7.15pm.

We will be welcoming members from other Warwickshire Branches, so join and make new bee friends.

Judith Masson, Meetings secretary





ASIAN HORNET WEEK

Timely is the word to describe the launch of BBKA's 2023 Asian Hornet Week commencing on the 4th and running until 11th September - the more so given the recent dramatic increase in credible sightings of this invasive predator of pollinators, in general and of bees in particular.

This year Asian Hornet week takes on a new urgency. There have already been 42 nests destroyed in England, more than all eradicated since 2016 - most notably in August and continuing into September. This is a fast-moving situation, so the above statistics will almost certainly be out of date by the time Bee Talk comes out. The incursion is mainly, but not exclusively in Kent, but also in Hampshire, Thamesmead and Devon. In Jersey, where the AH has been around for several years, this year's count of nests so far amounts to 455 compared with 55 in 2022 - a trend repeated in reports from Europe. Whilst figures in the UK are nowhere near this level yet, with each nest producing, on average, 350 new queens at this time of year which, if mated, could each found a new colony next spring, numbers will mushroom.

The closest credible sighting to Warwickshire, yet to be confirmed, has been near Oxford. If it is, it is dangerously close to Warwickshire. This is worrying because considering how many queens each nest produces, AHs can spread at the rate of up to 100 km per year. So we need to be on our guard and plans are afoot in WBKA to help the National Bee Unit in combatting this potentially devastating threat to our bees and other pollinators.

Asian Hornet Week will increase public awareness of this threat covering "How to identify an AH", "What to do if you suspect you have seen one" and "How to report it" - information which all beekeepers, being the most likely to encounter AH, should acquire. The BBKA organised a two-part lecture, aimed at doing just this on 6th and 7th September. It was live streamed on YouTube and is still available to view. Follow this [link](#).

The BBKA has also produced an [Asian Hornet Team training exercise](#) for members which is an online question and answer session, used as a training tool rather than a quiz and well worth the 10 minutes or so it takes to complete it.

Beyond AH week, we need members to use their networks with the public to inform and reinforce the message. BBKA has the artwork for various posters, banners and leaflets for local printing - [Asian Hornet Resources | British Beekeepers Association \(bbka.org.uk\)](#). The NBU also has leaflets and posters to distribute. Powerpoint Presentations are also in development.

Do take every opportunity to spread the word. You can take part in this important work in five important ways:

1. Download the Asian Hornet Watch app to your phone. Using this you can take a photo, note the location and report a sighting.
2. Know what *Vespa Velutina Nigithorax* (the Asian hornet) looks like; it's not called the Yellow Legged Hornet for nothing. It has an orange face and single band of yellow on its dark abdomen.
3. Set up a monitored bait station. Using sweetened fruit juice, Trappit or rotting fruit on a piece of kitchen maper, weighted down with a stone. Put the bait out then observe for 10-30 minutes to see what species are attracted. If you see an Asian Hornet, note the direction it leaves in and report it immediately, using the app.
4. Keep your eyes on the "Bee Press" to know when is a good time to put out Asian Hornet traps- it is important not to use them when they are likely to kill the wrong insects.
5. Watch the above BBKA Asian Hornet sessions.

Follow this [link](#) to keep abreast of new sightings.

Bernard Brown
County AHAT Co-ordinator



BEES AND TREES

When we think of pollinator plantings, it's easy to forget about trees. Yet, one tree can equal an entire field of flowers, all growing out of that square foot of real estate. And many trees make tasty honey, as well as providing fruit, nuts, animal forage, nesting sites, windbreaks and shade.

If you want to plant flowering trees for honey bees, just about any fruit tree will do. Apples, crab apples, peaches, plums, and cherries are all great for bees. Some varieties get more flowers than others, so for maximum pollinator benefit, find out which local varieties are best.

One of the quirky features of such tree honey is its high fructose content. This one component makes it much more resistant to crystallisation than most other honey. Maple and chestnut honey are among those whose resistance is more persistent.

If growing fruit is not your thing, there are plenty of flowering trees to choose from. You might choose Willows, Maples, Lime, Hazel Hawthorn, Horse Chestnut, tree forms of Sorrel, Robinia, and Juneberry but, although some of these are relatively small, be aware that you do need greater space for others. So, with the current climate change induced enthusiasm for more widespread tree planting schemes, do try to encourage the inclusion of pollinator beneficial varieties.

Bernard Brown

HANDLING FONDANT

Fondant, being a gooey substance, has a tendency to spread outwards. So if you intend keeping your fondant for any length of time, the judicious application of a strip of duck tape on the box's vertical side joint – there is only one and it is about 3 inches long – and along the join in the bottom flaps will bring a little peace of mind and hopefully save a sticky fondant slide. Store the fondant so that the box is fully supported on a solid surface ensuring that it is well wrapped to avoid premature drying out and in a cool, dry, vermin-free place.

A TIP TO HELP CARVING SLICES OF FONDANT FROM THE MAIN BLOCK

Before you start, place a bowl of hot water and one of hand-hot water within reach. Place a length of cling film on a convenient table or worktop. Place your block of fondant on the draining board of the sink partly overhanging the clean and dampened bowl. Take your knife, – we use a stiff, serrated, bread knife – and dip it in the bowl of hot water. Peel back the blue plastic wrapping on the overhanging bit of fondant and saw away at the fondant with the hot knife returning it to the bowl of hot water to reheat it when the sawing gets tough. Allowing the fondant to overhang the bowl causes the cut section to fall away preventing it from re-sealing with the parent block. Place the severed piece of fondant on the cling film. You can pummel it into the desired shape to suit the depth of your eke and wrap it up ready to be transported.

It is helpful to have the bowl of hand-hot water handy throughout the process to wash sticky fingers in as you go along.

At the hive, score one side of the cling film a couple of times with your hive tool, lift the crown board, add a shallow eke, move the bees away from the top bars and place the fondant scored face down, directly on the top bars over the cluster.

As an alternative to cling film you can squeeze the fondant into a used, but washed, take-away food container and simply invert it over the cluster. Job Done.

Bernard Brown.

ASTON MARTIN

Our newly established relationship with Aston Martin has taken a couple of steps forward. Aston Martin's support of WLBK in creating an out-apiary has been aired in earlier issues of Bee Talk, but this has now gone further with the grant of a four-figure sum to the Branch and an invitation for our display team to feature at their staff family day in October. Although this is at the end of the displays' season, we will be there promoting our craft and wowing the public.

Our committee are still discussing the uses that these funds can best be put. Suggestions include upgrading our microscopes and extending our hive monitoring equipment. Any other suggestions will be welcome.

TRAINING APIARY UPDATE

We are delighted to report that after all the trauma of the EFB outbreak at the training apiary in July, we were visited by the bee inspectors on 22nd August and given a clean bill of health. There are now eight, healthy, queen-right colonies to take through the winter. As there was a small varroa drop overall, we were advised to treat with Apiguard in September and trickle, (rather than vaporise) with oxalic acid in December. We have learned a great deal from the inspectors and hope that with the tightening of our hygiene and biosecurity methods, we can avoid future recurrences.

PRODUCT RECALL

Stainless steel smokers of this design with grey bellows purchased between April 2021 and May 2023 are being recalled under notice from the Office for Product Safety and Standards [PSD case number: 2308-0055] due to the possibility of small traces of asbestos being present in the bellows. These smokers have been sold through several outlets including Thornes. If you have purchased one of these from Thornes contact sales@thorne.co.uk with proof of purchase for replacement bellows.



WLBK HONEY SHOW 2023

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 23rd September**. The exhibits will be open, to the public, for viewing during the course of the day, with stewards on hand to answer questions.

The show is open to all PAID UP members of the branch and staging will take place between 10am-10.45am with judging starting at 11am prompt. Whilst all possible care is taken with the exhibits the Branch Committee cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage. There is an entry fee of one jar of honey or cash equivalent of £5 Honey will be donated to Myton Hospice.

Entry forms are available at www.warleambees.org.uk or if you cannot use this method please contact Helen Essex on 07804666912.

Closing date for entries Monday 18th September 2023 .



INFORMATION FOR THE DAY

Kingshill Craft Fayre, 10am start on Saturday 23rd September 2023

Show Judge: John Home

Show Manager: Chris Cox

Secretary: Lottie Buckland Judith Masson

Steward: Peter Ellis

Photographer: Chris Price

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1lb (454g) jar of light honey 2. 1lb (454g) jar of medium honey 3. 1lb (454g) jar of dark honey 4. 1lb (454g) jar of naturally granulated honey 5. 1lb (454g) jar of soft set honey 6. 1lb (454g) jar of heather or heather blend honey 7. A beeswax candle of any type or size mounted in a non- combustible holder. The candle may be lit during judging 8. One container of cut comb honey - 200g min 9. One frame for extraction 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 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Cottager Class for those with fewer than 5 hives
– Jack Taylor Plaque
1lb (454g)jar of honey- liquid, granulated or soft set 15. One honey cake (recipe below) - Nancy Wilshire Rosebowl 16. 1lb (454g) jar of honey to be judged on flavour only. 17. One decorated screw top 1lb jar lid . 18. One photographic print (colour or mono chrome) mounted on card no larger than A4 of a subject related to bees or beekeeping. 19. Gift Class- an item made from product or products of the hive suitable for a gift for a special occasion 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 |
|---|--|
- 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: GOLDENROD

Growing up to a metre in height, the lovely clouds of yellow flowers of goldenrod, adorn perennial borders in the late summer, attracting a variety of insects to its abundant nectar and to its sticky, heavy pollen. From the Asteraceae family, they are native to North America and Mexico, from where they have been introduced to Europe. In the US, it is the state flower of both Kentucky and Nebraska.

The plant's Latin name is *Solidago*, which means "to make whole or heal" and reflects its use in traditional herbal medicine. It contains many valuable plant compounds, including saponins, which have antifungal effects, and flavonoids, which have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory functions. Native Americans chew the leaves to relieve sore throats.

In folklore, goldenrod is considered to be a sign of good luck and fortune and it has been said that "Where goldenrod grows, gold is buried" – so get digging everyone!

Maggie Curley



AUGUST BEE SAFARI

Alan Deeley and Steve Poynter welcomed 12 members on safari to their apiary at the University of Warwick. They established their apiary in its present position in 2016, the year after they both started beekeeping. There has been a long association between the University of Warwick – Professor David Evans conducted much of his research at Warwick before moving to Scotland and retiring to a varroa free area and continuing his own beekeeping, giving on-line talks to associations and blogging as theapiarist.org.

In keeping with this history, Alan and Steve gave a very interesting and educational tour of their set up, including their recently acquired essential – a bee shed, records and their solar wax melter. The melter, which performs the miracle of turning old dirty comb to clean golden wax, ensures the apiary is well supplied with foundation through Thorne's wax exchange system, leaving Alan to make candles from cappings.

The questions and answers kept flowing until well after the bees had gone to bed. With headlights blazing, Safari-goers went home after a thoroughly successful trip thanks to their generous hosts.

Judith Masson with photos from Kathy Hewitt



The club plans to run more safaris from May to August 2024. If you have suggestions for apiaries, including your own, contact Judith Masson.

EXOTIC HIVES SERIES: TOP BAR HIVES — KENYAN DESIGN

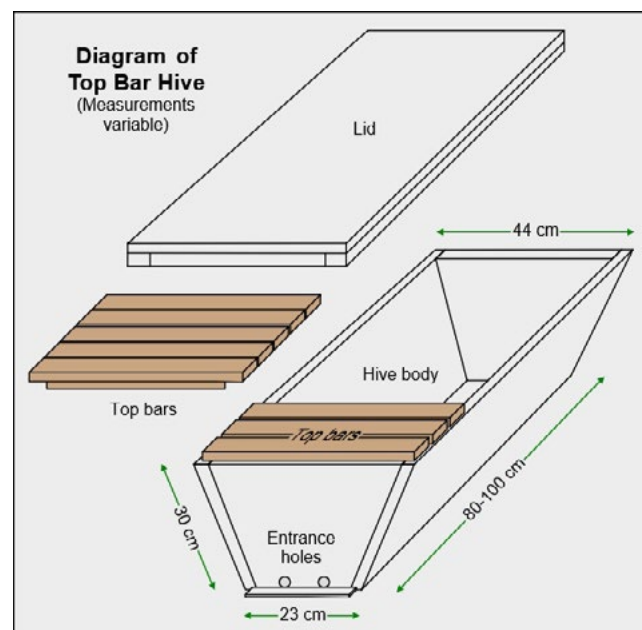
The drawing shows the main features of the original Kenyan top bar hive introduced by the 'Bees for Development' programme and designed to be easily constructed with cheap local materials by beekeepers in Kenya and other African countries. The sloping sides mimic the catenary shape of natural comb.

Bees are encouraged to start building their comb in straight lines by providing ridges on the underside of the top bars or sometimes by providing a beeswax strip on the lower edge of the bars. As the comb extends downwards some will be attached to the sides and/or base of the hive and may even curve to cover other top bars. This makes inspecting the hive problematic.

VARIATIONS

Top bar hives can be made in all sizes to suit your beekeeping requirements and the materials available in your locality. You could even make the top bars into frames if you wish.

There is also a straight sided version of the top bar hive, called the Tanzanian hive, which retains the simplicity of the design.



ADVANTAGES

Advantages claimed for the top bar hive, in addition to simplicity, are:

- Reduced weight to lift – only one frame lifted at a time, no heavy boxes to move.
- Easy access – one horizontal box at a height convenient for you.
- The use of naturally built comb – no contamination from foundation wax plus cell size is as the bees want it.

DISADVANTAGES

- The obvious disadvantage is that top bar hives are not designed to be moved. However, inspecting individual combs can be achieved but may entail cutting through sides and base before lifting out. Having a good mentor at the start of your beekeeping career should make things easier as they will be able to demonstrate best practice, for example, how to use a comb holder for lifting comb gently.
- No provision is made for adding extra space should it be required for honey storage. For comparison, the dimensions shown would approximate to 70 litres of comb space, adequate for most colonies and similar to two National brood boxes. Alternative management techniques such as splitting or early harvesting can be employed to overcome space problems.

HARVESTING HONEY

Harvesting honey usually means cutting out comb and either taking the crop as cut comb or crushing and straining. This produces more wax but bees have to build new comb before storing more honey. Honey crops are usually smaller compared to a vertical supered hive as honey is spread across a number of combs still with brood, and more honey is converted to make the additional wax. This is not a disadvantage if the honey is not wanted for human consumption or the beekeeper does not wish to feed for winter stores.

DEVELOPMENTS

The basic top bar hive design has been hijacked by amateur beekeepers in many countries who wish to keep bees in ways that are seen as more natural or sustainable. All manner of modifications have been proposed such as legs to maintain the hive at a comfortable working height, observation windows, extra thick wood for better insulation, hinged roof with gas struts, varroa mesh floors, biological sumps, moveable division boards for splitting colonies, ... The list goes on!

These hives should be compared to the **Warré hive**, a top bar hive built vertically. This is a more "natural" hollow tree shape, being relatively tall and thin. It is argued that the Warré configuration is more suited to cooler climates, compared with a design for warmer climates where heat loss may be more desirable than heat retention.

HINTS & TIPS: HONEY SHOW PREP

For many beekeepers the highpoint of the season is exhibiting at honey shows. Locally we have the Branch Honey Show on 23rd September at Kingshill Craft Fayre.

The honey shows consists of a range of different categories, or classes, with something to challenge all levels of beekeeping skill.

There are classes for beekeepers to show their skills at honey presentation in all its forms, in wax presentation, in honey cookery, crafts, gadgets and in photography. In fact there are classes for almost any activity related to bees and the hive products.

We encourage every beekeeper to enter a show.

The discipline involved in preparing the exhibit teaches a lot about the proper way to present our honey and other hive products which are essential especially if you are selling your products. One of our members who exhibited for many years with great success kindly shares his advice here.

PREPARATION FOR THE HONEY SHOW: A GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

Our annual honey show is held this year on September 23rd and will be a good venue for beginners to try their hand at exhibiting so I am writing this brief article to encourage you all to put in some entries. Our local show is very informal and the judge will give feedback at the end of the show but will be around after the judging to chat to.

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

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

HONEY CLASSES

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

JARS AND LIDS

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



and without honey on the inside.

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

FILLING AND LABELLING

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

THE FINAL SELECTION

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

LIQUID HONEY

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

GRANULATED OR CREAMED HONEY

Should be sufficiently well set so that it does not fall out if the jar is inverted! Debris in set honey usually falls to the bottom and is easily seen at the base of the jar. The surface should be clean of froth,

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

ON THE DAY

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

COTTAGER AND NOVICE CLASSES

The Cottager class is for those who have less than five hives and the Novice for those who have never won a first prize in a show. They are both well worth entering for all beginners as there are often few entries so you can be almost guaranteed a prize and you may even go home with a coveted cup.

SECTION OF CUT COMB HONEY

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

FRAME FOR EXTRACTION

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

MEAD

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

CAKE OF BEESWAX

Preparing a perfect 8oz block of beeswax is perhaps the greatest, and most frustrating challenge of the show. Once again whole books have been written on the subject. The real experts use only hand-graded cappings carefully washed in soft water but for most of us you it means starting off with your best wax that should not be too dark.

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

THE HONEY CAKE

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

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

Good luck to you all!

Nigel Coad

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