



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

BEETALK IS CROWNED THIRD PLACE



We thought it was goodbut not this good! The National Honey Show is renowned for the extremely high standards expected and achieved as well as for the fiercely competitive nature of the entrants. Any placement in the top three of a class is recognised as an extremely prestigious achievement and this is just what WLBK achieved with Bee Talk in the Newsletter Class. It came third out of 10 entrants.

The many complimentary comments from members and outsiders about Bee Talk over the past couple of years prompted someone to suggest that we should enter it in the National Honey Show. We submitted copies of the last three issues which, for us, meant the July, August and September editions. Already pretty exceptional, all the contributors made a special effort into these three and all were bumper issues. Also, exceptional has been the skill and creativity of our editor, Tanya Weaver, in producing such a professional and eye-catching

publication.

The two entries ahead of us in the opinion of the Judges were both publications by County Organisations, the equivalent of our own Warwickshire Beekeeper

Of course, such achievements do not go unrewarded. Not only do we get a certificate but an eye-watering cash prize to boot. A massive £10 went to the winner and £5 to us. It's good to know that beekeepers' legendary parsimony is alive and well!

Bernard Brown

CHAIR'S NOVEMBER MESSAGE

I hope you are enjoying your PRIZE WINNING publication - Bee Talk! As Bernard said on the previous page, we entered our newsletter in the National Honey show, where it competed against other newsletters- though these were mostly county newsletters rather than branches. So coming third is a great achievement and a tribute to Tanya, our editor, and her excellent work. I like the lively and varied content and layout, and we would really like to hear your views about what sort of content you find useful and would like more of.

Have you watched Prof David Evan's talk about Rational Varroa Treatment for [Welsh Beekeepers Association](#)? David was a WLBK member before he moved to Scotland, and we all value his advice (as well as his clear presentation). Based on this talk I treated my bees when they started to produce winter bees in early August and will treat with oxalic acid when the colonies stop producing brood. The presentation gave good advice about how to monitor the end of brood production, and I realised I was leaving my oxalic acid treatment a bit too late in the year. This issue of Bee Talk has an article by Bernard (on page 10) to get you going with your own Oxalic Acid treatment - it is an activity with plenty of possibilities. Steve and Alan of the Apiary Team will be doing a practical demonstration for members in December- so that you can see what vaporisation and trickling involve, and weigh up the options.

Our October presentation about Skep Beekeeping was a great success (and the cakes were exceptional). If you want to follow this up, the County also did a lecture about this skeps by Chris Parks [The Honey Island; Baskets of Bees](#) which is available to view, if you missed it. (password Varroa). Our next meeting will be David Bonner,



Jane at the Honey Show with her son, Alex

talking to us about his experience with Bees Abroad. As an ex-bee inspector we hope he will also tell us his views on Oxalic Acid use. And don't forget to book 7th December for our Christmas meeting- the year is flying by.

If you need help with your bees, or would like to give us ideas and feedback about Bee Talk, contact me or any other member of the committee at (warleambees@warleambees.org.uk).

Jane Medwell

BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

We have pretty much completed feeding but protection is still throwing up jobs for us to do.

- Check your hives are well fed. Now is the time to start "hefting"- lifting the hive up a little by one side to establish how heavy it feels. It takes experience to gauge when a colony is too light- so heft often. If you can weigh your hives with a spring balance or luggage scale you can "calibrate" your hefting. Best of all, use a dedicated scale under the hive, linked to your computer (very few of us have these).
- Check your hives have decent ventilation. Bees set up very efficient "air con" and can manage the circulation of air to prevent frames going mouldy. These days an open mesh floor is plenty. But if you are still using solid floors, remember to check the vents and put matchsticks under the corners of cover boards.
- Now that feeding is complete, remove the feeders,
- Fit mouse guards (see page 6)
- Fit woodpecker protection. Yes, they will go for poly hives AND NUCS- remember to put the wire over the unprotected top of polynucs.
- Late November or early December is likely to be the best time to use Oxalic Acid as the colony stops producing brood (see the article on page 10).

Jane Medwell

MEMBERSHIP FEES FOR 2022

We will be contacting you after December 1st to ask for your membership renewal. The subscription for 2022 has now been determined and for Registered (Full) Members remains at £43. The portion of the subscription retained by Warwick and Leamington Branch (WLBK) remains at £14.50 (it has remained at this level for 10 years) whereas the amount retained by the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association (WBA) has reduced by £2.00 to £5.50. The WBA pays an affiliation fee of £21.00 to the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) for each full member and this has risen by £2.00 from the 2021 figure. In addition, £2.00 is paid to Bee Disease Insurance (BDI) for disease cover for up to 3 hives.

The corresponding figures for other membership classes are:

PARTNER MEMBERSHIP	£21.30
This figure is broken down as	WLBK £4.80, WBA £3, BBKA affiliation £13.50,
JUNIOR MEMBERSHIP	£16
This figure is broken down as	WLBK £4, WBA £2.50, BBKA affiliation £9.50,
LOCAL (ASSOCIATE) MEMBERSHIP	£5 (WLBK only).

Val Dillon
Treasurer

HILL CLOSE APPLE DAY



October can be a treacherous month weather-wise for events outside. This is always in the forefront of our minds in attending the Hill Close Gardens, Warwick Apple Day in early October and with good reason. A couple of years ago it rained. Not gentle showers but stair rods. So much so that we had to send for a complete change of clothes for one of the team who had braved the elements to secure the marquee from ending up in Kenilworth.

This year couldn't have been more different as the photo shows. We were treated to a warm, sunny day with a gentle breeze more akin to late August than the second week of October. Apple day celebrates the range of heritage apple varieties with exotic names such as

"peasgood nonesuch" and promotes their continued planting to conserve this valuable genetic resource. They are often tasty and, although, heavy cropping in some cases, cannot compete with the more commercial varieties found in supermarkets for shelf life and consistency. The event is supported with a range of craft stalls such as wood carvers, spinners and blacksmiths so we are in good company.

The sun brought out the public in a steady stream throughout the day and our stand was as popular as ever with much interest in the honey, offers to host bee hives and in taking up the craft. This was the last gig for the observation hive bees who are now relaxing back in the Kings Hill Apiary after a busy season.

Ivan A Perry

TIME TO MOVE ON?

So, the season's over and thoughts are beginning to turn to the next. Want to expand your operation? Want more space to house them? Need to relocate? Now is a good time. The Branch has sourced out apiaries throughout the district from people who are keen to do their bit for the bees but don't want to take up beekeeping themselves that is, not yet!

28 of these are occupied but we have a number of offers unfulfilled. Opportunities are available at Alkerton, Broadwell, Barford, Charwelton, Chesterton, Claverdon, Fenny Compton, Hatton 1, Hatton 2, Leamington, Warwick, Moreton Morrell, Pinley Green, Priors Hardwick (x2)

To find out more, visit our postings on the Branch Website's, "Available Apiaries" page:

Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers Available Apiaries (warleambees.org.uk)

Ivan A Perry

EXTRACTION UNIT MAKEOVER

Following the transformation of our portacabin at Dalehouse Lane, the committee's attention has moved on to the extraction unit at Hurst Farm. We have been using this valuable facility for about 12 years when it was last fitted out. The unit had a full and active life before that. Since then, time and use have taken their toll and attention is needed both to enable its use to continue and also to smarten up the image it creates of the Branch.

So, now that the extraction season has quietened down, we shall be looking for volunteers to tackle what are mainly DIY tasks. If any member has these skills or knows of someone would they please contact Clive Joyce on 0779222251.

The DIY tasks include:

- Provide new ceiling with wipe down material
- Install new insect curtain
- Replace hardwood threshold
- Clad warming cabinet inside and out with wipe down material
- Replace 3 no. corner trims
- De-rust external frame and repaint external walls
- Overhaul entrance door locking mechanism
- Provide 2 tier shelving in store
- Clad frame cleaning tank in wash down material

We are planning to make a start in November so, if any member has these skills and is willing to deploy them on behalf of the branch, please contact Clive Joyce on 0779222251 or Bernard Brown at bernardbrown@outlook.com.

Bernard Brown.



COUNTY LINES

Many of you will have noted that WB has not been published for the last three months. This is because of the indisposition of the editor, Katerina Prokopiou a former member of our Branch, who has been editing WB from Singapore where life had taken her but now will be doing so from Cyprus, her home country. As you will have seen, WB is back and whilst this is good news for us, we send our best wishes to Katerina.

TESTED AND NOT FOUND WANTING

Belated, but nonetheless heartily meant congratulations to Dawn Cowgill, Jane Richmond, Habib Kashi and Paul Day on their successes in passing BBKA written examination modules this year.

FRAME CLEANING

We are planning a frame cleaning session on **Saturday 13th November** so, start removing comb, scraping your frames and keep an eye on your inboxes for booking details.

WINTER VARROA TREATMENT

If you are needing a break from the festivities between Christmas and New Year, how about coming to watch a demonstration of oxalic acid vaporisation at the training apiary?

Weather permitting, Steve Poynter and Alan Deely will be treating the colonies at Kings Hill Nurseries CV3 6PS, on **Wednesday 29th December at 10.00 am.**

MEMBERS' MEETING NEWS

On Thursday 14th October we had our first face-to-face members meeting since 2019. To celebrate I asked Paul Hand to return to the branch and talk about beekeeping in skeps. Paul is a very entertaining speaker who first got interested in bees by keeping Bumble bees. He regaled us with stories of his first attempts of skep making. We got into a bit of an argument about the proper names; are they Fids (skep making needles) or are they awls?

Paul always brings a plethora of interesting items and equipment to illustrate his subject and this meeting was no exception. We saw skeps with revolutionary holes that would enable you to provide space and supers. A selection of skep irons that would be essential for inspecting or collecting honey. There was an offer of a trip to Ludlow to see Paul demonstrate bee driving - the rhythmic banging of one skep to drive the bees into an empty skep so that the beekeeper can collect honey.

We are also trying a hybrid version of meetings for those of you who are still shielding or unable to attend in person. So meetings will also be available on zoom. It seemed to be fairly successful last Thursday.

For our next meeting on **Thursday 25th November** Dave Bonner will be talking to us about Bees Abroad, the charity supporting beekeepers in Africa and other developing countries. There will also be an opportunity to buy Christmas cards and other items in support of Bees Abroad. Again the talk will also be available on zoom.

Rachel Dove, Members' meetings co-ordinator



THE BERNARD COLLINS TROPHY

Bernard Collins set a benchmark for how we engage with new beekeepers with his warm-hearted greeting. He had been apiary manager from the year zero when we had a teaching apiary sited on the edge of a school playing field. There wasn't the professional approach we take now to introducing new beekeepers, but he did demonstrate very well the essentials in managing hives and was very good at producing a good crop of honey, which was the Branch's main source of income at that time.

Bernard was able to take us back to a time when Whitnash was the founding place for Warwick and Leamington Branch (1932).

He was what were originally known as GPO telephone engineers. Have you ever wondered what goes on under one of the familiar red and white striped tents erected over telephone manhole? On a warm summer's day Bernard found his tent to be just right for a bit of queen grafting.

He was a very competitive and successful honey showman at every level including the National Honey Show and I was especially keen to know why he was always the most successful honey cake baker. He eventually gave me his secret recipe - a little bit of heather honey especially in any fruit cakes.

Bernard appreciated the enthusiasm I tried to show in encouraging people to be beekeepers but politely explained my approach was all wrong. "All you need to tell 'em is, if you keep bees, you'll live until you're ninety". Something that's starting to be

important to me.

Unfortunately, in his later years Bernard was plagued with health problems and recognised the need for succession planning in the care of our hive in the Market Hall Museum Warwick, which passed over to me. His history in looking after this hive for decades was an example to us all in contributing to the success of our Branch through volunteering; something which has remained in my thoughts looking after them for about twenty years and not wanting to let him down.

The Bernard Collins Trophy, commissioned by the Branch in 2011 and, first awarded for the "Best in Show" at our honey show in 2012, takes the form of a unique bronze statuette of a beekeeper holding and inspecting a frame as Bernard had done during his 50 years of beekeeping.

Mike Townsend



OCTOBER SWARM



Just when I thought Swarm season was over for another year, I recently had an interesting and unusual challenge to retrieve a colony of bees, which had set up home on a Hawthorn tree in a domestic garden near Leamington Spa. This was probably a prime swarm which was unable to find a suitable space in a tree hollow or a building cavity. In desperation, the colony would have begun drawing comb using their honey stores to make the wax, and at the time of removal, there were six well drawn sheets of beautiful comb.

The colony were quite docile but the home owner was concerned about being stung and had asked Jan Hyatt for help in removing them. We carefully cut away the comb and attached it to empty brood frames using rubber bands. The frames were then placed into an empty brood box. There was lots of healthy looking brood and stores which was encouraging. Once all the comb was removed, we placed the brood box above the "BeeVac" and proceeded to vacuum all the remaining bees into the unit.

The BeeVac has a long smooth plastic pipe that prevents damage to the bees as they are sucked into the unit. Once inside they safely climb up into the brood box above and quickly settle into their new secure home.

We were pretty sure that we had captured the queen, as the bees quickly settled down. When complete, we sealed the brood box and took the colony away. We placed them in quarantine for a week or so and then treated for varroa. The colony was fed with Ambrosia and then prepared for the Winter.

If you'd like more information on how to remove a bee colony or how to construct a BeeVac, please get in touch with Alan Deeley on aldeeley@btinternet.com

Alan Deeley



MOUSE GUARDS

Mice can do massive damage to a colony so it is a good idea to fit a mouse guard over the entrance in winter, when mice are looking for a source of food and shelter.

Do I need a mouse guard?

If your entrance is less than 8mm wide the mice cannot usually get in- though a very few supermice seem to manage it. If your entrance is bigger than 8mm, you should use a mouseguard.

Do I have to fit a mouseguard right across the whole width of the hive?

Not unless you are using solid floors. A full width mouseguard increases ventilation but you do not need this if you have an open mesh floor, though it will not do any harm. If you like to fit your mouseguard over an entrance block, you can buy a short length of mouseguard or cut a full length guard in half.

Do I have to use drawing pins?

If you use a traditional mouseguard (a strip of metal with two rows of holes in) then you need to hold it on with two or three drawing pins. This is a surprisingly tricky manoeuvre.

Naturally, Thornes has a gadget for this- a magnetic pin pusher. I don't know anyone who has one but it could be a Christmas stocking idea.



Can I convert an ordinary entrance block?

Barry uses the mesh "corners" plasterers use. He pulls out a piece of mesh and nails it to an entrance block, covering the entrance (see above).

Can I use a wooden mouseguard?

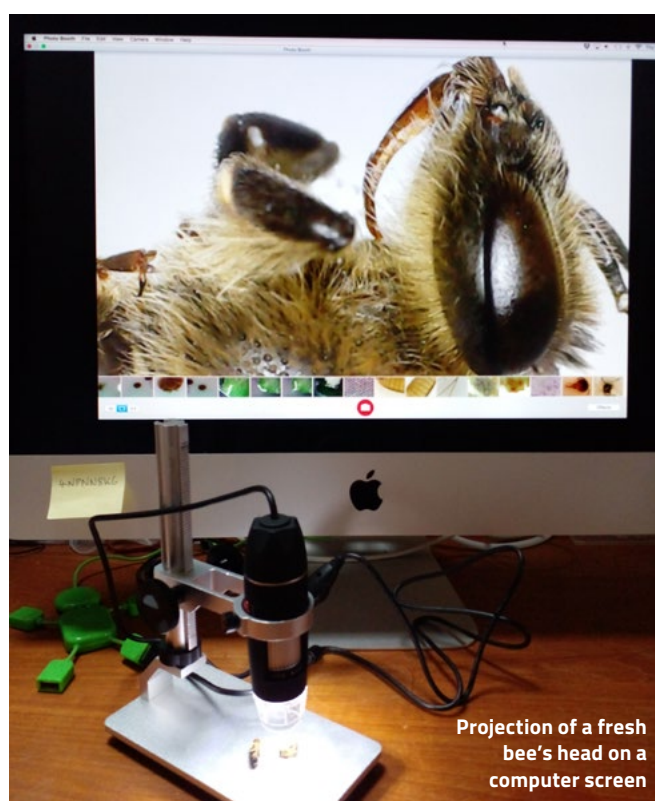
Yes- an entrance block drilled with 8mm holes works well, but do remember to check the holes remain clear as, like any mouseguard, dead bees build up behind it in the winter.

What do you think of proprietary mouse guards?

If you want a mouseguard which involves fitting two little brackets to each hive, then the suppliers sell one and have a video of how to fit it. Or there is the "Robo Guard" a spring loaded super-entrance which offers an entrance of any size, a mouseguard and an anti-robbing entrance. This is definitely one for Santa.

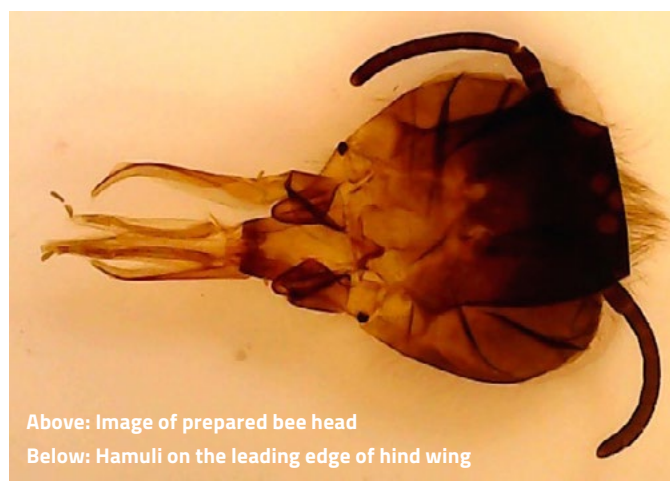
NOVEL APPROACH TO MICROSCOPY

Several years ago I was given a 'Smartscope' USB camera microscope to play with by DataHarvest – a company specialising in data logging equipment. At the time such instruments were beyond the reach of many schools (and beekeeping groups), with some models running to several hundred pounds. Fast forward to the on-line auction site years and lo and behold there are many vendors offering USB microscopes with spectacular sounding specifications at bargain prices. But what is a 'USB microscope' and how good are they?



In essence, the 'microscope' comprises a webcam with a lens system that allows ultra close up images to be captured at 'macro' (up to life size) and 'micro' (magnified) scales. A typical magnification range is claimed to be between x40 to x1000. The unit is a sausage-shaped cylinder around 12cm long and 3.5cm in diameter that can be connected to a computer. Images and, usefully, videos can be captured using software supplied on a disk or with the onboard image capture software on most computers – for example 'Photo Booth' on a Mac or the Windows 'Camera' app. In doing some recent (bee-related!) work for the Orkney International Science Festival I came across a model being used by the Aberdeen University Science Centre. I assumed that anything good enough for a university would be good enough for beekeepers so I sourced one on the web. It did not disappoint!

The model is a 'Bysameyee' USB microscope (around £18) and having tested one I was able to negotiate a bulk buy at £12 each. The instrument is supplied with its software on a minidisk,



Above: Image of prepared bee head

Below: Hamuli on the leading edge of hind wing

handbook, a very basic stand and a useful micrometer size scale. I have augmented mine with a more robust stand that allows finer control of focusing (around £13), but otherwise it works straight out of the



box and is simply 'plug and play' although getting the computer to recognise it as a camera may involve experimenting with whether it is plugged in before or after the software is launched – so no different to many other P&P devices. The clarity of the on screen image is very impressive. So to answer the above question 'How good are they?' I would say 'pretty good'.

My 'Smartscope' is claimed to have a resolution of 5MP and the Bysameyee can't be far behind that – unless I keep a record I can't tell by looking at an image which camera it has been taken with.

Some cheaper versions do not have the ability to adjust or switch off the built in LED lighting. This is a disadvantage since it makes using transmitted light much more difficult. More on that later!

Importantly the image can be projected as 'live view' on a computer screen (see left). One useful application of this is the potential to use it to demonstrate techniques such as bee dissection microscope for bees – for example to do a general abdominal dissection or to test for Acarine. The key trick of the trade is to rotate the camera on its stand so that 'up is up' on screen. A little bit of practice in watching the computer screen to follow your dissection rather than looking directly at it is needed. In essence this is similar to many surgical procedures in hospital operating theatres where delicate operations are now routinely visualised on a screen. The advantage to beekeepers is that this negates the use of a much more expensive and bulky dissection microscope for those interested in doing the microscopy certificate and bee health. It also means that dissecting techniques can be easily demonstrated to small groups viewing the screen and so has potential as an aid in training workshops.

Barry Meatyard

SKEP MAKING DAY 2021

What were you doing on a very rainy Saturday in early October? Those who joined our Skep Making class on the first Saturday in October will remember, because they didn't have time to look out of the window at the soaking wet roads, they were too busy constructing their skeps and sharing a lot of banter with other attendees and the instructors.

We met at the newly refurbished BBKA headquarters, which is now a beautiful room to hold a class in, with excellent facilities.

This year, like many others, the group consisted of beekeepers from Rugby, Coventry, Shipston and Warwick and Leamington branches as well as a number of non-beekeepers who we have met during the shows we have run this year.

Everyone got off to a good start with their skeps and took sufficient materials home to complete their work. We hope the beekeepers will be able to put their skeps to good use next year and the non-beekeepers will have a lovely basket to show for their efforts.

Mike Townsend, Mary Pemberton and Val Dillon



PLANT OF THE MONTH: NIGER

Well, I thought I had finished with "Plant of the Month" for this year then Barry Meatyard sent through some lovely photos from his garden, including this one on the right. Barry is our expert botanist and knew that they were *Guizotia Abyssinica* – aka Niger – growing at the base of his bird feeder. Apparently on sunny days, his bees were having as good a feast from the flower pollen as the finches were from the Niger seeds.

As the name suggests, it originates from Abyssinia, the countries now known as Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is cultivated for its seed and oil and is also grown in India and Malawi. Those of us who feed the birds will know the seeds very well. Smaller but similar in shape to sunflower seeds, they have a thick black coat which the birds attack with vigour to reach the nutritious oils and proteins inside. This of course makes a tremendous mess around the feeders but as in Barry's Garden, if the seeds germinate, there is a potential source of late season pollen for our girls.

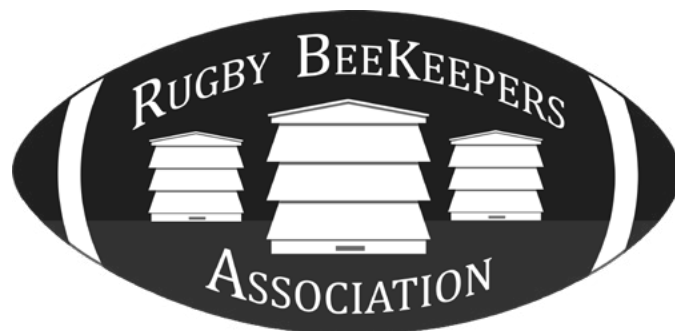
Niger seed is grown commercially in Africa, India and areas of Southeast Asia and exported globally as bird seed. Human consumption seems to be limited to southern parts of India where



they are made into a dry chutney. In Ethiopia, the roasted and ground seeds are added to sugar and water to make an infusion to treat common colds. Perhaps we should try it sometime when the lemon and honey fail?!

Maggie Curley and Barry Meatyard

WE ARE NOT AN ISLAND: RUGBY BRANCH



Continuing with our series of profiles on our sister Branches within Warwickshire Beekeepers, this month we profile Rugby Branch. Don't you just love their logo!

There was a branch of the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association in Rugby at the turn of the 19th - 20th century. According to archive material at Rugby Town Hall it must have been quite a thriving Association with an excess of over 100 members. This was the situation until there was a falling out between the Rugby Branch and the Warwickshire County Association. I have no idea what the problems were about as it was before my time, but there was still correspondence between the two groups; this was organised by a Mr Mullin, a county man, who acted as a link between the county and Rugby.

This was the situation until the late 1950's when Tony Malin resurrected the Rugby Branch. (Tony Malin is still an honorary member of the Branch and is our oldest member at 96 years old).

A Rugby directory of 1962 gives The Rugby and District Beekeepers Association among the list of societies in Rugby at that time; and gives the Chairman as Mr S A Couling, the Hon Secretary as Mr R Avery and the Hon Treasurer as Mr E H Porter. It then gives all the names of the committee, referring to each one by title as Mr, Mrs. or Miss. How formal we were in those days. A number of the names would mean something to long standing members of Warwickshire, such as people like Peter Spencer. It then states the advantages of being a member of the association, with insurance, foul brood diseases and facilities for taking exams. It is interesting to note the number of associations in Rugby at the time, with most of them now no longer in existence. Rugby Beekeepers' come between the Dr Barnardo's Helpers League and The Rugby Leprosy Relief Association.

From the time of Tony Malin's resurrection of the Branch it is now still flourishing. At one point during the late 1980's and early 1990's the membership was very small, but it managed to keep afloat, and is now (2021) a very go-ahead branch, running beginners' courses; and attending various fêtes, fairs and garden parties in the district, to educate and inform the public about beekeeping; one of our primary aims. Our current membership, including associates is healthy and thriving, like our bees!

Over the years Rugby has been active with County events and has provided the county with many Chairmen over the years, including Bruce Roberts and Maurice West, and no doubt many others in the early years.

Presently, Sam Peckett holds the post of County Chair. In addition, Rugby has always taken an active part in the

Warwickshire Honey Show, providing stewards and volunteers as well as entries into the show.

Rugby has an annual honey show of its own which is well supported, and usually has a guest speaker to listen to whilst the judging is taking place, this is followed by refreshments before the prize giving and awards are handed out, usually by the judge, who gives comments on the standard of the exhibits. The judge's comments are usually good and very often the comments like 'this is good enough for the National Show' are very encouraging.

The honey show has a number of awards for various classes which are as follows:

LIGHT HONEY CUP

This is awarded for the best exhibit in the light honey class. This cup is of solid silver and is a valuable cup owned by Rugby.

TOWNSEND MEMORIAL CUP

This is awarded for the exhibitor who gains most points overall in the show. The cup was presented to the branch by Mr A. E. Townsend who owned and ran a florist shop in Regent Street in Rugby. The shop also stocked beekeeping supplies from the manufacturers of the day.

RUNNER UP CUP

This is given to the exhibitor who has the second highest number of points.

JEAN MALIN PLATE

This is given to the exhibitor who takes first place in the honey cake class. The plate was presented to the branch by Tony Malin in memory of his wife in 1979. She was a great supporter of Tony in the branch and was a great cook.

JOHN THREADER AWARD

This striking glass 'shield' award is given to the novice (a person who has never won a first prize in the show) at Rugby. This award can only be gained once by any member, and thereafter they have to enter with the more experienced exhibitors. It is an award to encourage beginners to enter the show. It was given to the branch by Margaret Holdsworth, as the first winner of the award, as a tribute to John Threader in 2010. For over 20 years, both John and his wife, Peggy had organised the Rugby branch honey show. John was also an excellent producer of beeswax figures which won many awards.

TIME FOR ACID

It's getting towards that time of year for the strongly recommended winter treatment of varroa. The treatment of choice is oxalic acid, available under the brand names of api-bioxal and oxybee.

Oxalic acid treatment should only be applied when colonies are broodless. Given too early, the varroa snuggling in the capped brood escape the treatment. Given too late, it will kill the unsealed brood which are desperately needed to take over from the winter bees and kick start the development of the colony.

So how to tell if a colony is broodless?

It was originally thought that oxalic acid treatment should be a task carried out between Christmas and New Year. But research now shows that the timing of broodlessness depends on factors such as the temperature, the weather, day length, latitude and the individual characteristics of each colony... and probably many other factors of which we are unaware. In other words, it is impossible to predict a general onset of broodlessness with any confidence and climate change adds further to the uncertainty.

In general terms, it is now considered that queens stop laying towards the end of October and can restart around the winter solstice. Allowing for 21 days for the last egg laid to emerge as a bee, the colony could be broodless by the beginning of the fourth week of November.

Could be! I guess, like my bees, yours were out gathering pollen on days in the relatively mild October/November. So, is the pollen supply an indicator of the presence of brood? We really need to find out just what the situation is.

There are several tricks up the beekeepers' sleeve to attempt this:-

- Carry out an inspection. I am reluctant to go into my bees at this time of year, breaking the propolis seals and exposing them to the

cold weather but some do, choosing a warmer day and inspecting the frame at the centre of the cluster for brood.

- Get a neighbouring beekeeper to carry out an inspection of their bees and extrapolate the outcome to your girls. Let them take the risk.
- Monitor the wax dropped from the brood box by inserting the varroa board and regularly inspecting the drop. When the biscuit-coloured brood cappings stop accumulating and only the white honey cappings are evident, the chances are that the colony is broodless.
- Monitor the temperature of the hive. Once all the brood has emerged the temperature of the hive drops as the bees conserve energy for the uncertain future.

With Climate change, warmer winters may well prompt queen laying to re-start earlier thereby narrowing the broodlessness window and the opportunity to treat. For my girls, the varroa board will be in and oxalic acid treatment to hand during the last week of November.

To apply oxalic acid always mix up the solution in accordance with the instructions on the packet. There are basically two methods with which to apply it. The first is by dribbling a measured quantity onto each occupied seam between the brood frames. This can be done by syringe or by trickle bottle (£1.20 from Thornes) which automatically measures out the correct amount. I personally prefer the latter as I find it quicker. The other method is by vaporisation. For this a special piece of kit – a vaporiser and a battery – is required. This method has the advantages of being more effective than dribbling and not requiring the hive to be opened up.

The disadvantage is that oxalic acid vapour is toxic to humans and protective equipment **must** be worn. It has also been known for the hot vaporiser to melt or even set fire to the comb.

Bernard Brown

HINTS & TIPS

- The average colony can consume about 20kg of food during the winter, depending on the temperature. One method that can be used, is to place a full super below the brood box and as room becomes available the bees will move the food up to the brood box. An alternative is to place the full super above, where it will be kept warmer and so easier for the bees to reach. Below or above it is important to remove the barrier created by the queen excluder.
- Torrential rain storms are becoming more frequent. These can cause soil to subside and twigs and leaves to build up. After such a weather event it is a good idea to check your hives to ensure all's well and hives are securely strapped down and entrances are clear. It is possible that following bad weather the entrance may become blocked by dead bees which the surviving bees have not managed to eject. These need to be removed so good ventilation in the hive is maintained and enable bees to get out on cleansing flights.
- Beekeeping suits are machine washable. To remove sticky propolis add a handful of soda crystals to about half the quantity of your usual detergent. Soda will help to reduce the build up of lime-scale in the pipes too!

HELEN ESSEX

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to Helen on h.essex@virgin.net

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.
Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
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WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
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