



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## IT'S OFFICIAL! BEE TALK IS THE TOPS

**Y**et again WLBK triumphs! 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, so you can imagine how thrilled we are that our very own Bee Talk - yes! previous editions of this self-same publication you now are reading - was judged the top entry in the Newsletter class at this year's show. But there is more. Jane Ford, our librarian, also came away with a bunch of awards.

Inspired by our performance last year, when Bee Talk came third, we again submitted the three month's editions issued immediately prior to the honey show date for judging. For us, this meant the July, August and September editions.

Convinced that our tried and tested policy of including articles in the categories "newsy", topical and of general interest was the way to go, the only steps that differed from our normal practice was to make our contributors aware that we were entering the competition and to select a few topics which were both singularly intriguing and, hopefully, memorable. Already pretty exceptional, our contributors rose to the occasion and their special effort produced high quality copy.

A large amount of our success must be down to the exceptional skill and creativity of our editor, Tanya Weaver, who, as a professional journalist, brought her expertise to bear to such good effect.

This result is a fitting and well-deserved acknowledgement of her and our contributing authors' talents and effort.

Of course, such achievements do not go unrewarded. Not only do we get a certificate but an eye-wateringly generous cash prize to boot. Now, what can we spend that £10 on? Any suggestions?

But there is more news on the National Honey Show front. Congratulations are also in order to Jane Ford who also gained a number of awards this year. Building on her success at the County Honey Show (detailed elsewhere in this issue), Jane was Highly Commended for Beeswax and Honey display of home produced products, Very Highly Commended for her Wax Wraps and..... won



Jane Medwell was again on hand to receive the winner's prize.

3rd prize for her practical invention related to bees and beekeeping. No mean achievement for a first-timer. Find details of Jane's invention on page 7 where you will also find an account of her experiences participating in the show.

**Bernard Brown**

While Bernard is too modest to take much credit himself, all credit really does go to him as Bee Talk wouldn't exist without his ability to not only source copy and images from our committee and members but to write a lot of the content himself. For my part, I just put the words and pictures supplied on the page. But, of course, this is a team effort and, like the bees, we work together. I know I certainly did a little wobble dance of my own when I found out that we came first.

**Tanya Weaver**

# CHAIR'S NOVEMBER MESSAGE

One of the main talking points at the last face-to-face WLBK committee meeting before we return to online meetings during the winter was the Extraction Unit. In a nutshell, it's not always left as pristine as it could be. What to do? We need to find a fair and not too onerous approach to give everyone the chance to benefit from using WLBK's innovative and valuable Unit to extract our honey. At the same time, we appreciate that some of us need a bit more guidance to do the right thing.

A couple of WLBK members will be meeting (online, drink in

hand) on a date to be mutually agreed after 20 November to think through how we can make this service work for everyone. Please do get in touch and join us if you have any of these attributes: a positive approach; appetite for team work; problem solving abilities; and the ability to talk to a screen after 7pm! We imagine this nut will take about 2 or 3 meetings to crack. Email me at [suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk).

**Suzanne Bennett**

WLBK chair



## OCTOBER MEMBERS' MEETING

Celia Davis (left), author of *The Honey Bee Inside Out* and *The Honey Bee Around and About* introduced us to pheromones, the different chemicals (esters) bees use to communicate, sensing these through different receptors in the antennae, mouths, bodies and feet, and passing these around the colony.

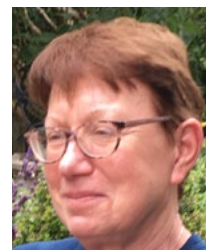
Pheromones are crucial to passing messages within the hive, and even beyond. Pheromones from the queen let the workers know that she is in the hive and well mated (or not), suppressing the production of new queen cells and egg laying by worker bees. The queen's pheromones also draw drones to mate with her by creating an irresistible attraction. The brood also emits pheromones, which let nurse bees know what they want or need. Whereas new parents have to decipher what their baby's cries, using trial and error to find out what is wrong, nurse bees get clearer much signals from the

brood. Pheromones from the brood tell the nurse bees to feed the larvae, what to feed each one and when to cap the cell. So, while beekeepers may focus on their queens and workers, it seems that it is the demands of the brood that rules the hive!

### NOVEMBER MEETING

**Dr Barbara Smith** will present findings from the Healthy Hive Study, which some members contributed to on **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30 at the Kenilworth Senior Citizens Club (KSCC), Abbey End CV8 1QJ**. For those who have not been to KSCC it is on the ground floor of the Retirement Flats Complex which faces directly on to the Abbey End Car Park.

**Judith Masson**



## WLBK NEEDS A NEW LIBRARIAN

We are very fortunate in our Branch Library to have an amazing collection of books. There are books with up-to-the-minute, latest ideas and research. There are also historic books, some of which have been out of print for a very long time. Of course, you will also find every kind of 'how to' guide for all aspects of beekeeping.

When I took over the library from Jane Rigby, it was already well-stocked and I needed to plan quite carefully, where to invest the budget available. As a life-long learner and member of a branch, where education is both a core value and a real strength, I focused firstly on ensuring our collection of bee education books was up to date. I also filled some gaps on the BBKA recommended reading lists for the modules.

Next, I tried to ensure that some of our interest groups had texts appropriate to their meetings and courses, e.g. the Microscopy group and the Wax group.

I ran a Zoom Beekeeping Book Group during the winter months of 2020-21, when COVID hindered our activities somewhat. We read some interesting books – and some less interesting ones too!

When I became Librarian I said that once I had achieved what I wanted for the Library, then it would be someone else's turn to develop this resource further. That time has come!

So if you like books, beekeeping and spending money on lovely beekeeping books – this could be the job for you! I would be pleased to talk to you about it, if you have questions and am happy to support someone as they embark on an exciting path!

**Jane Ford**

# 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.
- 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.

Jane Medwell



## COUNTY HONEY SHOW SUCCESSES

A very successful County Honey Show was held on 15<sup>th</sup> October at Kings Hill Nurseries and WLBK members featured among the prize winners. Jane Ford was 'Commended' for her Beeswax Candles and 'Highly Commended' for her Crystallised Honey, and her "Item of Beekeeping Equipment" but it was her photograph that stole the show and was judged to be the best, winning first Prize. Jane also went on to exhibit at the National Honey show as covered elsewhere in this issue. Also amongst the prize winners was Chris Price who was placed first in the Novices' Medium or Dark honey class and third place was awarded to Lottie Buckland, aided and abetted by Chris Price and Mike Townsend, for their display in the Branch Composite Display Class on the theme of "100 years since the discovery of Tutankhamun". No mean achievement this, given that she only had 10 days in which to design and stage a display whilst the competition had been working on theirs for months. All in all, a very creditable and encouraging result. Well done everyone!

Ivan A Perry



Jane Ford's stunning photograph earned her first prize.



# HEATHER HONEY EXTRACTION



**H**aving collected our Heather honey from Derbyshire in early September, we now had the task of extraction. This year has been an excellent year for Heather Honey, and our two hives were working on their third super when we collected them. Clearly we will need to take a stronger stand next year!

Heather honey is quite viscous and jelly-like, which makes it impossible to spin out of the super frames using a normal radial extractor. Fortunately, the association has a heavy duty fruit press, which is ideal for squeezing out the honey. The comb is cut out of the frames and is wrapped in cloths in layers between wooden stays.



Once the layers are loaded, a heavy wooden block is placed on top and the press is applied to squeeze out the honey.

In total we were able to extract 92 pounds of Heather honey which is an excellent yield from just two hives in six weeks.



Heather honey does command a price premium. It is particularly fragrant and has a strong sweet and caramel taste. It has high antioxidant and antibacterial properties which have been used for medicinal purposes for many years.

Overall, we had a great experience taking our bees up to the heather and we will hopefully give it another go next year.

**Alan Deeley and Steve Poynter**

# PUBLIC SHOWS RETROSPECTIVE

**O**ur observation hive bees issued a sigh of relief as our programme of summer shows

concluded on 9<sup>th</sup> October with the Hill Close Garden's (Warwick) Apple Day event. The autumn weather has over the years introduced certain uncertainty surrounding this event, but this year's exceptional autumn meant that we had a successful day and ended the season on a high with dry marquees. Talking of marquees, we acquired a further three during the year. Two were funded by grants and the third by our insurance company following the wind damage which reduced to a mass of crumpled metal our trusted large marquee that had given us such good service since 2013. So now we have two eye-catchingly bright yellow tents and one purpose-made beekeeping demonstration one.



These have all been put to good use despite the cancellation of two significant events. These were the two-day Leamington Peace Festival and our debut at Kenilworth Castle, the latter because of the death of the Queen. This was the second time this year that her Majesty featured in our displays programme, the other being her Platinum Jubilee which we celebrated in the theme of our stand at the Kenilworth Show – an event, by the way, where we won the "Best in Show" small stand award. The citation for this emphasised the inter-active nature of our activities. A new example of this was our "Little Buzzers" corner where tiny tots could make bees from pine cones, colour cardboard cut outs of bees with many more such activities in the pipeline. This not only provided entertainment for the kids, for whom these shows can be a little overwhelming, but also provided a welcome respite for parents struggling to keep their offspring amused with the added opportunity to get them interested in our craft.

All in all, we attended 12 shows at which we sold 1024 jars of members' honey resulting in £5350 of sales. Only 13 members offered their honey for sale, a number which, given the success of this year's season, we hope will increase significantly next year. We recruited 47 individual members to help steward our stand, including several new members, thereby providing a pool of experience upon which we can draw in the future. Finally, and most importantly, we received 57 expressions of interest from the public in a variety of our activities, such as taster days, introductory training courses, offers of out-apiaries, skep making workshops and talks to organisations.

So, 2022 saw the first full season of public displays for a couple of years and it was good to know that we had not lost our touch to provide both an entertaining and enjoyable time. Of course, none of this would happen without the effort and talent of our brilliant displays sub-committee.

Although the summer show season is over, there are still Christmas Fayres at which we can promote our craft and sell our products. If any member is involved in such, we do have some bits and pieces of kit (bunting, cash boxes, cuddly toys, mini hive etc.) with which to "dress" a table available to lend. Contact Bernard Brown on [bernardnbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardnbrown@outlook.com).

Who'd have thought that fulfilling our charitable objectives could be such fun!!

Ivan A Perry

## BOOK FOR YOUR TO-READ LIST

Hopefully some of you had the chance to tune into Andy Pedley's recent talk, Food Safety for Beekeepers. I was lucky enough to hear him speak the weekend before as part of the National Honey Show's programme of lectures and workshops. His experience and down to earth approach are reassuring and I bought his book for the branch library. I hope you will find it useful.

The book's blurb:

*"In this book, Andy (an Environmental Health Officer for 46 years and a beekeeper for 30) explores the Consumer Protection law that applies to beekeepers and bee farmers. The book principally deals with Food and Food Safety, and includes a full HACCP that covers both extracted and comb honey. The book includes other products – Candles, Melts, Wraps and Polishes. The intention is to give as comprehensive picture as possible of both the legal requirements, and at the same time, practical advice to achieve the highest quality product and achieve a high Food Hygiene Safety Rating."*

Jane Ford



## OUT APIARY

Stop Press !! We have the offer of a rural out apiary in a 2 acre field which is being re-wilded and is attached to a house between Bishop's Tachbrook and Oakley Woods.

Interested? Contact Bernard Brown at [bernardnbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardnbrown@outlook.com) for details



# A LOT OF STRAW, A LOT OF BINDER AND A LOT OF FUN

Once again WLBK held a skep making day at BBKA headquarters in October. The pictures below tell their own story about what was achieved during the day and I'm pleased to hear that already a number of skeps have been completed, including a wonderful hexagonal one from our youngest skep-maker Jamie, who then went on to make a smaller version which you can see in his left hand. (He did have a head start as he'd begun his larger skep earlier).

However, some of the ladies didn't spend as much time in the room as they should have, after they heard that there was a clothing sale just up the road in Hall 2 and disappeared for a rather long lunch break!

We felt the standard was excellent as usual and we hope all the skeps will be completed in time for next season.

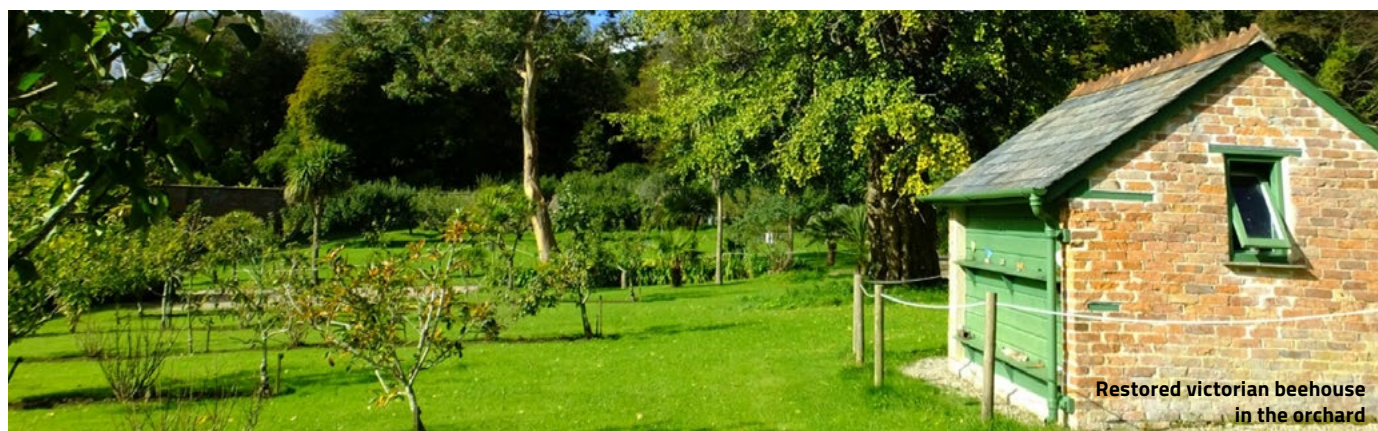
We already have a waiting list of 11 people for the next course which we hope to hold next year. This is really good, as we need to keep this historic craft going.

**Val Dillon**





# HOME'S UNDER THE BLUE TRIANGLE



Restored victorian beehouse  
in the orchard

In Victorian times, bee houses, containing a number of hives, were common across northern Europe. Now, very few survive in the UK. But the National Trust, at their garden in **Trengwainton** near Penzance in Cornwall, are preserving and maintaining a Victorian bee house. My friend Terry Hunt came across it while visiting Cornwall, and sent me pictures.

It's a simple brick building, and it currently houses two hives, installed and maintained by a local BBKA member, who also has two hives in the grounds. It has a wooden façade to the south, with landing stages and entrances for the bees. It can contain more, and to ensure that foraging bees return to the correct hive, the entrances are marked with brightly coloured geometric shapes.

The bees are fed in the winter, and in the Walled Kitchen Garden the Trust deliberately plants flowers and vegetables side by side in order to encourage the bees. Favourites for them include Phacelia - listed as one of the top 20 honey-producing flowers for honeybees - and the poached egg plant, *Limnanthes douglasii*. You might add a visit to Trengwainton to your next West Country holiday!

**John Stringer**

## NATIONAL HONEY SHOW REPORT

Throughout my nine years as a beekeeper I always wanted to go to the National Honey Show at Sandown Racecourse but it always clashed with other things! Then when I could finally go, in 2020, there was no show due to COVID.

Eventually, in 2021, I made it – but only for the Saturday. I resolved to do better and in 2022, I got properly organised, with a membership for £24, which not only covers all three days, but also gives you free entry into the many and diverse classes.

I entered all kinds of things – on paper. When it came to loading up the car, however, some things either were just not ready in time – soft set honey – or were literally still warm from last minute preparations – soap and beeswax wraps. Still, I did have entries for some honey classes and some others too.

When I arrived at the racecourse, I carried everything inside where there were many tables set up, ready for last minute polishing and prep. I could have as much time as I needed for this – I didn't need long compared to some, who literally had hundreds of items to stage. The white-gloved steward collected my honey and candles from me and staged these. Then for my Home-Produced Products class, Wax Wraps and Beekeeping Invention, I had a 'Staging Pass'

which allowed me to do just that, whilst accompanied by a different steward. Every entry has a specific labelled spot to sit on – all very civilised! Then I walked away and left it up to the judges.

While they were busy, I attended a workshop by Dr Sara Robb, where we made soap, lip gloss and heel salve. Sara's sessions are always booked up very quickly, but are excellent and lots of fun. I also attended Andy Pedley's 'Food Safety for Beekeepers' talk, Candle-making with Richard and Shirley Bond and Honey Ferments with Angie Kirk. All sessions were excellent. If I could have fitted more in, I would still have been spoilt for choice. There are also free lectures at all levels, from Beginner to Bee Scientist. However, I also wanted time to visit the Trade Show, with all your favourite companies.

I was delighted to get prizes for my Products, Wax wraps and Invention. I didn't win anything for my honey – someone told me there were 2,500 entries though. And of course, there is always 2023!

If you have entered the Branch Honey Show or the County Honey Show, then I would encourage you to have a go – you will have fun at the very least and you might even walk away with a shiny cup and some prize money – £5 in my case.

**Jane Ford**

# HINTS AND TIPS: AUTUMN RECIPES

What we need this time of year is something delicious and comforting, so enjoy these two recipes below. Thanks to the North Staffordshire Branch for the first one, which has no added sugar with all the sweetness coming from the honey and fruit.... the way it should be!

## SULTANA APRICOT & HONEY CAKE

- 225g (8oz) self-raising flour
- 115g (4oz) Sultanas
- 115g (4oz) Butter
- 60g (2oz) Chopped Apricots
- 225g (8oz) Honey
- 1 teaspoon Lemon zest
- 2 eggs (size 3)
- 3 tablespoons Milk
- Cream the butter and honey together.
- Beat eggs and add alternately with flour.
- Add sultanas, apricots, lemon zest and milk.
- Beat well and lightly.
- Bake in buttered 180mm round tin for 2 hours in a moderate oven

## METHEGLIN

Metheglin is a honey based liquor, in other words a mead, in which spices or herbs are used. It's slightly more complicated to make than mead but not difficult as this recipe shows. As with all recipes, you can vary it to suit your tastes, what you have growing in your herb bed or balancing the individual flavour of the honey used. Most meads in the past when it was the celebration drink for weddings etc. were technically metheglins. The makers were more interested in the final flavour rather than the name!

- 4lbs Honey
- 1 Lemon
- Sprig of rosemary
- Sprig of balm
- ½oz of root ginger, chopped and bruised or grated
- Water
- Wine or Mead Yeast
- Yeast Nutrient

1. Start the yeast 2 days ahead. Take a sterilised jar and add a tablespoon of honey. Pour on ½ pint of boiling water and stir to mix. When cooled to 20°C or below, add the yeast and yeast nutrient. Keep covered but not airtight, a muslin cover affixed with a rubber band or string is ideal.
2. Put the rosemary and balm into a large pan along with the ginger and zest of the lemon. Add about 4 pints of water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 20 minutes.
3. Put the honey into a fermenting bin or lidded wine bucket and strain the herb liquid through a jelly bag or muslin cloth onto it whilst still hot. Stir the honey until dissolved.
4. Add the juice of the lemon
5. Allow to cool to 20°C and then add the prepared yeast starter.
6. A fierce fermentation should begin quickly. After a few days to a week the rate will have slowed and the must can be poured into demijohn and topped up to the gallon with cooled boiled water prior to fitting the air-lock.
7. Keep in a warm place until fermentation stops
8. Move the demijohn into a cool place and when ready to drink, rack off into bottles.

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to [h.essex211@gmail.com](mailto:h.essex211@gmail.com)  
**Helen Essex**



The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.  
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