November 2024
Issue 248

BEETALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

LATEST BUZZ ON THE ASIAN (YELLOW LEGGED) HORNET

In line with the re-naming to Yellow Legged Hornet, this term, abbreviated to YLH, will feature in this article.

Avid followers of a certain *everyday story of country folk* could not help but be aware that the YLH was spotted in Ambridge last month. Found on David Archer's farm, Brookfield, it was spotted and correctly identified by Ben and David himself and reported using the Asian Hornet Watch App. The nest was traced the following day and destroyed and removed by fledgling tree surgeons Emma and Ed but not before a newly introduced character, Zeena had been stung on the face and suffered a disfiguring reaction. They got the story line more or less in accordance with current thinking.

Jill is very worried about the effect on her bees and David on the pollination of his crops!

In terms of promoting public awareness, this was something of a coup. Our AHAT team came up with the idea of involving the Archers only to find, when we telephoned Sybil Ruscoe, the agricultural storey line editor, that BBKA/NNSS had already raised it with the programme's editors. Still, we like to think that the 30 minute telephone call with Sybil and exchange of contact details may have contributed a little.

Nationally, there has been a couple more positive sightings over that reported last month and as one would expect, but nowhere near last year's figures. A total of 21 nests have been destroyed including a couple of primary nests. All were in the southeast, namely Kent, East and West Sussex and Southampton. 4 or 5 were in the area of nests destroyed last year so it would seem that foundress queens may have avoided the destruction of the colony. The NBU continue to undertake surveillance in vulnerable areas as the leaves fall and make nest spotting much easier.

A recent update on the YLH by Andrew Durham focussed on the health implications of YLH attacks. This put the lie to current advice that the YLH sting was no worse than that of a wasp. Latest research suggests that it is much more toxic. A single sting can prove serious to those vulnerable to anaphylaxis. However, it is multiple stings (10+), where the amount of toxins released can cause a serious systemic reaction but in combination with other medical conditions, can be life threatening. These include those with cardiovascular issues – often the over 65 year-olds - and those who already suffer milder systemic reactions to bee/wasp stings – e.g. beekeepers.

Multiple stings are usually suffered by the frenzy of aggression shown by the YLH whilst defending their nests, so whilst the risk of encountering the YLH in this country is extremely low, the consequences of so doing are high so it is best to stay well away from their nests. This is the message to get across in our presentations and, in this regard, we are looking to establish a link with the Local (Warwickshire) Resilience Forum – a multi-agency team made up of local public services, including police, fire, NHS etc., responsible for risk planning in the area. We are awaiting a package of material from BBKA that could help inform LRFs from BBKA/NNSS.

We shall continue to seek opportunities to give presentations over the winter so, if you have connections with an organisation who would host one, please let your Branch AHAT co-ordinator, Liz Bates know: bates.liz@outlook.com.

Bernard Brown
Warwickshire AHAT Co-ordinator

FRAME CLEANING

Frames ready to be cleaned. Image credit: conwybee-keepers.org.uk

The "day" started on Friday with Clive filling the tank and adding a little heat to start things up. I nipped over later in the early evening to stage all my kit needing cleaning and deliver the soda crystals from emptying the shop shelf.

06:15 - arrive to turn the heaters back on to try to ensure boiling fluid by **09:00** for the start. I tried a super at about **08:30** but needed a lot of scrubbing, not quite hot enough, but by the appointed time the solution was boiling and we started on the first loads. By **11:00** we were slightly behind schedule due to some extra tough frames (Dadant with wires do not lend themselves to easy cleaning) but had a couple of helpers giving extra time to getting a successful day running. Thanks Gill and Megan. By midday we had more or less caught up again. A top up of soda crystals was required and these were efficiently delivered by the first scheduled cleaners in anticipation, clearing out another shop shelf!

In the afternoon we fell behind schedule again with trying to clean queen excluders and needing better brushes for the task, we will find some better (stiffer) brushes for next time's queen excluders. Barry and Gill worked tirelessly to try to keep us on schedule but ended up about an hour behind eventually. With the waiting around, the stores area did get tidied though and the rubbish removed by the attendees

After all the scheduled slots were finished, I set to on my own kit but called a halt as it grew dark. It was then wash down time for the tank and the gunk from the tank bottom was quite incredible, we certainly had made a lot of frames and other kit somewhat cleaner. The yard was sluiced clean, the apron and gloves hung up and the gate locked at **19:45** with a deep, deep sigh sinking into the car seat.

Once home, the car was left unpacked and I trudged upstairs into the shower, dropping the very dirty clothes into the wash bin on the way, then ate some supper before crawling into bed early.

With 74KWh of electric used, a few hundred litres of water, 3.5kg of soda crystals and a lot of elbow grease and a few achy muscles for nearly 1,000 frames, multiple queen excluders and a few boxes cleaned, the equation was balanced.

Next day, only mildly stiff and satisfied that the cleaning was done. I think there were a few who could not make it this time and another winter session might be planned. Make yourself known if you have scraped frames to boil.

Neil Shuttleworth

CHRISTMAS COMES EARLY

The following items are being offered free of charge:

- 2 pre-loved poly hives; Requires cleaning. Contact Steve Cox steviec52@hotmail.com
- Chest Freezer 32"X 22"X 18"; not working; would make a good warming cabinet. Contact Mick Smith michael.smith670@ntlworld.com

NEWS FROM THE CO-OP

You all know that the Co-op purchasing Team, led by Clive, works hard to secure beekeeping essentials at excellent prices. We are now looking to improve the way you purchase goods. The existing Google Forms will be replaced by an 'online store' to allow us to streamline the whole process. Please watch your inboxes for details of the new system – they'll be along shortly.

The Co-op Team

OUT APIARIES

There are two new opportunities for out apiaries in Hatton and Long Itchington. Both sites have good security and access with excellent forage potential and can accommodate one beekeeper and up to 4 colonies. There is also a third opportunity for an out apiary in Thurlaston near Rugby on farmland.

For further details contact Alistair Walker alistair.walker@btinternet.com.

A schedule of all available out apiaries is on the WLBK website.

OCTOBER'S MEMBERS' MEETING

Peter Lewis (right) introduced members to the sensory analysis of honey - what it is, why it developed, how he learned to do it and how it has begun to take him from his hives in the Yorkshire Pennines, beyond judging at the Great Yorkshire Show to Slovenia and Paris.

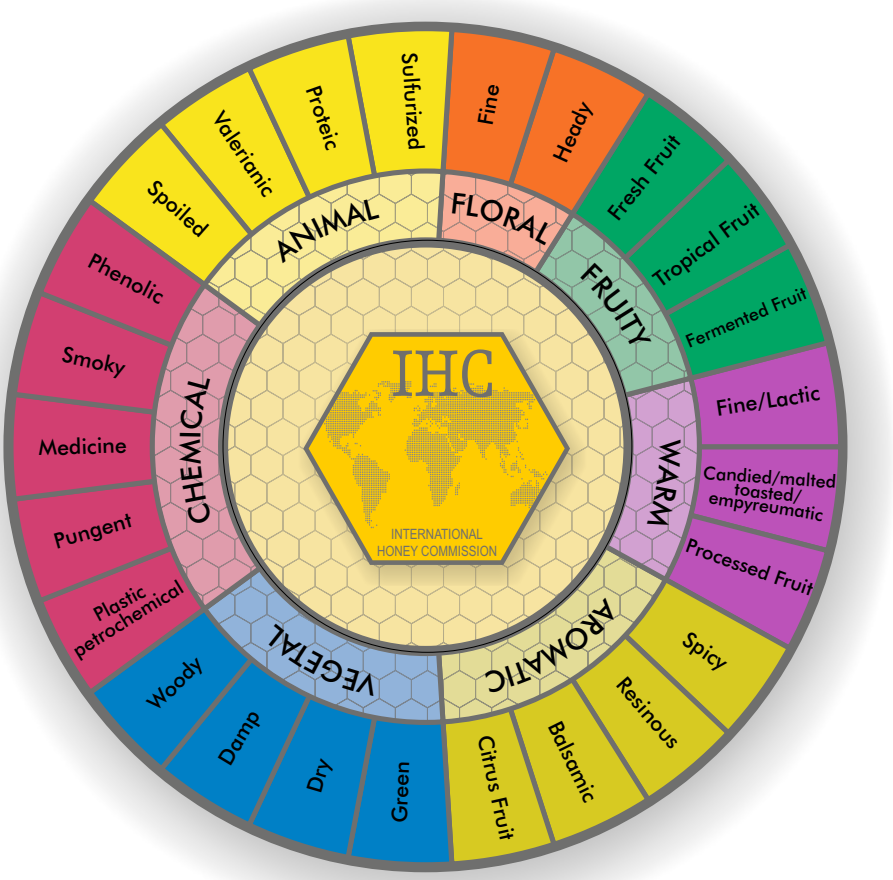
Sensory analysis involves assessing honey by its aroma, taste, colour and feel (in the mouth). It was developed as part of the fine food culture in Italy and elsewhere to promote the value of artisan honey.

Learning sensory analysis – Peter attended a week-long course in Bologna – starts with educating your palate and developing a vocabulary to describe the honey you see, smell and taste. Working with a partner, you learn to compare and exchange, all the time refining your ability to distinguish and describe different honeys.

The honey wheel below provides a guide to the consistent description of the aromas and flavours of honeys. Curiously, perhaps, honey shows in England have largely focused on the jar and its presentation although cake and biscuit classes do involve colour, taste and crumb – a start at valuing cake as food for pleasure!

Sensory analysis of honey focuses on the more important aspect of what's inside the jar – what our bees have produced and not simply our work in extracting and bottling it.

If you want to know more see Peter Lewis's article in *Bee Craft* in October 2018.



NOVEMBER MEMBERS' MEETING

Thursday 21st November
7.30 pm
Kenilworth Senior Citizen's Club
Abbey End CV8 1QJ

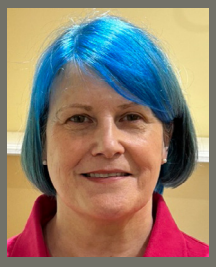
Michael Badger MBE, past President of BBKA will give a talk: **Sustainable Beekeeping**.
There will be cake, with a fine crumb and lovely taste!. Join us to meet you friends, make new ones, talk about bees and learn something more about beekeeping. THERE WILL BE CAKE.

Judith Masson
WLBK Meetings Secretary

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

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulation are in order to Jane Medwell and David Blower upon being made Honorary members of WBKA (the 'County') for their outstanding contributions facilitating the education of the County's beekeepers.

BEE TALK AT THE NHS

In this case, NHS stands for the National Honey Show, in which we entered Bee Talk in the newsletter class.

We had to submit the last three issues which the judges considered merited the award of being "very highly commended" which means it came 4th out of 9 entries.

Well done to our editor Tanya Weaver and to all the contributors.

[From Tanya - a huge thank you to Bernard who without there would be no newsletter. While I put the words onto paper and make them look nice he makes sure that there are actually words from our contributors to put in the newsletter!]

BIG GIVE CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE

Bees Abroad

SAVE THE DATE: 3RD TO 10TH DECEMBER

Bees Abroad are taking part in the Christmas' "Big Give" challenge, where, for one week any donations made via the Big Give will be matched thereby doubling the value of the donation and, of course its impact on the ground.

Can you help turn community spirit in to community action? One donation, DOUBLE the impact.

Go to this **link** to set yourself a reminder to take part .

Visit **beesabroad.org.uk** for more information.

A TASTE OF HONEY

Throughout the beekeeping year a small band of volunteers from the branch endeavour to interest, educate and inform the public about our lovely ladies and how necessary they are to human wellbeing. This covers everything from honey tasting and sales, observation hive and flying bees, candle rolling and skep making and general information for potential new members. We also focus on the younger generation involving them in play and drawing as they are the future and the ones we most want to educate. We haul the marquees to an ever-changing range of shows across Warwickshire having a lot of fun and doing a lot of good in the meantime – so feel free to join us even if you can only offer an afternoon of help.

We're often asked why we do honey tasting and whether the honey for sale is local.

The honey tasting is part of the educate and inform activities. We do it to raise the awareness of the public to how the taste of honey varies with the seasons as well as where the bees forage. Remember, the average non beekeeper has only experienced supermarket honey that tastes the same whatever the season and wherever you buy it from. The unexpected discovery is that people who do source local honey and even beekeepers are surprised by the variety of taste that we can show them.

The honey sales are driven by the tasting experience. The mantra is "Try before you buy" and the public take this to heart. There is always a buzz around the tasting table as we interact with the visitors in groups of up to 6 or 8 people at any one time. Lots of chat, laughs and sticky hands are the result.

After tasting they will admire and explore the display to buy a jar or 2 of their favourite tasting experience. Finding the honey that is most local to them is a favourite quest. There is always lively interaction as we try to match them up with their ideal honey from those on display.

In general, we taste and display honey in a variety of sizes and types (cut comb, runny, soft set, speciality single nectar e.g. borage, heather etc) from between 10 and 15 of our members. Depending on the past history and expected footfall of a specific event we take between 200 and 400 jars to a show and will typically sell around half of this on an average sort of day.

How do we work this? At the beginning of the season we will issue a call to members for the initial honey show consignment stock. We are looking to obtain as wide a selection of types and sizes as are available from the membership. Our aim is to have between 10 and 15 members supplying the show stock. Between 12 and 24 jars would be a typical quantity that a member would supply initially. The prices are set by the Displays Team and the Honey is sold on behalf of the supplier with the proceeds returned to the member less a levy of 10% retained by the branch unless they help out with the show when this levy is not applied. As the show season progresses, we request top up supplies to manage the stock levels for type and quantity. This year we have done 13 show days where we sold a total of 1,220 jars with a value of £7,000.

A few observations to keep in mind if you are considering offering to supply for the shows.

- The beekeeper's favourite 1lb jar of runny is not the biggest seller as it's the most expensive size.
- 12oz and 8oz are the other sizes you should consider.
- Hexagonal jars catch the eye of the customers.
- Buying choice often comes down to label style and honey type description.

Di Hetherington and Pete Benson

SCOUTING FOR GIRLS

Continuing our series on polyethism in bees we turn our attention this month to scout bees.

No matter what a scout bee is looking for, she shows particular behaviours that set her apart from the rest of the foragers.

Two groups make up the foraging workforce of a honey bee colony: the scouts and the recruits. Scout bees are the individuals that go out into the world and search for things the colony needs. Once they discover what they're searching for, they go back to the colony and report the location and quality of what they found.

Most often scouts look for rich sources of nectar and pollen, but they may also search for water, plant resins, or even alternative places to live. During nectar dearths, scouts may even report the location of hives to pilfer.

Scouts use honey bee dance language to describe the direction, distance, and quality of their finds to the recruits. The better the find, the more exuberant the dance. The recruits watch intently, interpret the dance, then go off to collect the most highly recommended supplies.

How do scouts and their recruits differ? Exceptional fliers that are especially familiar with the local area make the best scouts. These are usually older, highly experienced foragers that can efficiently scour the landscape. Current research suggests that anywhere from five to twenty-five percent of the foragers can be scouts at any one time depending on the time of year. The scouts search for new resources every day while the recruits keep returning to the supply source as long as that source is still productive. When the source is nearly spent, the recruits may circle it, looking for more resources in the same general area. At other times, they may go back to the hive for new instructions.

Most recruits do not have to re-orient to new foraging grounds very often because they don't live long. Since foraging is dangerous work and most foragers are already nearing the end of life, many bees forage in only one area before they die.

In the days before a swarm leaves the parent colony, scouts go out looking for a new place to live. These sites may be a mile or more from the parent colony, although they may be closer if they find an especially attractive site. The scouts search tree hollows, buildings, vacant hives, or any type of real estate that meets honey bee requirements for interior volume, opening size, and safety.

The various scouts go back to the colony and report their findings. By the strength of their dance, they try to get other scouts to look at their find. If a scout likes the new site better than the one she found, she may switch allegiance and dance for the new site. This looking and switching behavior continues until the bees come to a consensus on their new home.

As swarming time gets closer, the dancing and negotiating increase in intensity. Once the bees swarm and find a temporary resting place, the scouts dance on the outside of the cluster instead of in the hive.

You can recognise a scout not by her looks but by her behaviour.

1. Scouts often act like they're lost. Those looking for patches of flowers may fly back and forth over the ground without ever landing. Those who do land stay only briefly, perhaps taking a short sip of nectar. Scouts don't load their honey crops or their corbiculae, but simply sample the goods and take a taste back home.
2. Scouts looking for new homes poke around cracks, knotholes, mailboxes, owl boxes, birdhouses, or anything else that looks interesting. They often spend long periods on the inside of a cavity, such as a bait hive, where they analyse the volume of the cavity and the size of the opening. These bees are never in a hurry, but examine every detail of the cavity. If they like it, they will go back home, report, and return with some nest mates for a second opinion.
3. Bees that find a hive to rob were probably out looking for flowers when they stumbled upon a yummy-smelling structure. They act like most robbers, sniffing the junctions between boxes, the space around the lid, the area beneath an elevated hive, cracks in the wood, or any other place where the hive smell may leak out. Like bees searching for a new home, they take their time. Before they leave, they may circle the target hive, orienting to its exact location.

It's easy to spot scouts, mostly because they are not in a hurry to collect anything. They dawdle, examine, and think. Some look lost or confused. Others appear almost lazy. When you see bees behaving like they have all day, watch carefully and try to figure out what they're doing. It should be encouraging to see a bee at your bait hive, then two or three, and later fifty or sixty. It can still go either way, but the excitement of knowing a swarm may be on the way is one of the better aspects of beekeeping.

Next month we'll tackle guard bees.

Bernard Brown

Based on and with the permission of the Honey Bee Suite

BEES KEEP ELEPHANTS AWAY

A groundbreaking, nine-year study has revealed that elephants approaching small-scale farms in Kenya avoid beehive fences up to 86% of the time during peak crop seasons, helping to reduce human-elephant conflict for local farmers and boost income.

The study was conducted by the research charity Save the Elephants (STE) in collaboration with the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the University of Oxford.

Kenya is facing rapid human population growth, with a 59.4% increase between 2000 and 2020, which has led to the shrinking of elephant habitats as human settlements and infrastructure expand.

Finding sustainable ways for people and elephants to coexist is becoming an urgent challenge in Kenya with elephants roaming free however drawn to agricultural crops in farmers' fields.

With previous knowledge that elephants tend to steer clear of beehives for fear of getting stung, in 2007 the study partners introduced beehive fences to 26 small-scale farms near Tsavo East National Park. They consisted of a series of beehives strung together between posts to create a physical, auditory and olfactory deterrent to elephants.

Another advantage of these "living fences" is that farmers benefit from pollination services from the bees as well as additional income generated through honey and wax production.

Through monitoring the beehive fences, the researchers found that during six peak crop-growing seasons (November to January 2014-2020), 3,027 elephants approached the farms and the beehive fences successfully deterred an annual average of 86.3% of elephants from raiding crops.

Across all seasons and the entire study period, including a drought, the fences deterred an annual average of 76% of elephants.

However, challenges such as the drought — which reduced hive occupation by 75% during 2017 — negatively impacted honey production and profits both during the drought and for three years after. Despite this climatic shock, the 365 beehives used in the study produced one ton of honey, sold for $2,250.

Dr. Lucy King from Save the Elephants and the University of Oxford, who led the study, highlighted the effectiveness of beehive fences but warned of future risks: "Increased habitat disturbance or more frequent droughts could reduce the effectiveness of this nature-based coexistence method."

Read the full study – 'Impact of Drought and Development on the Effectiveness of Beehive Fences as Elephant Deterrents Over Nine Years in Kenya' – in **Conservation Science and Practice**.

Tanya Weaver

HINTS AND TIPS: AUTUMN RECIPES

What we need this time of year is something delicious and comforting, so enjoy these two recipes below.

SULTANA APRICOT & HONEY CAKE

- 225g (8oz) self-raising flour
- 115g (4oz) Sultanas
- 115g (4oz) Butter
- 60g (2oz) Chopped Apricots
- 225g (8oz) Honey

oven

- 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

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.

Now it is your chance! If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to h.essex211@gmail.com

Helen Essex

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.
Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

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