



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

HONEY BEES AND CHRISTMAS

Folklore informs us of the intimate relationship between bees and their keepers. Bees were regarded as the messengers between our world and the spirit world.

Beekeepers kept up this ancient tradition of honeybees being messengers through "telling the bees" and treated them as extended members of their own family informing them of important family events. Marriages, new births and deaths are marked by decorating the hive and telling the bees what has happened. Gifts of honey were given to the bride and groom for their honeymoon.

In Christian societies hives would be visited after midnight mass when it was said bees would hum loudly on Christmas Day in celebration of the birth of the saviour. The hive would be decorated with holly, lighting of beeswax candles with gifts of sweets and cake left for the bees to join in the celebrations.

The bees were thought to have the Christian virtues of unselfishness, cleanliness, courage, sociability, wisdom, chastity, administrative skills and spirituality.

Mike Townsend



WLBK MEMBERSHIP REMINDER FOR 2022

Your membership for 2022 will run from January 1st until December 31st.

You should receive an email from Membership Services this month. If you haven't received it, please check in your junk mail or contact val.dillon@outlook.com or Liz Gurney at lizdinks@hotmail.co.uk. Please complete and return this form along with your payment.

CHAIR'S DECEMBER MESSAGE

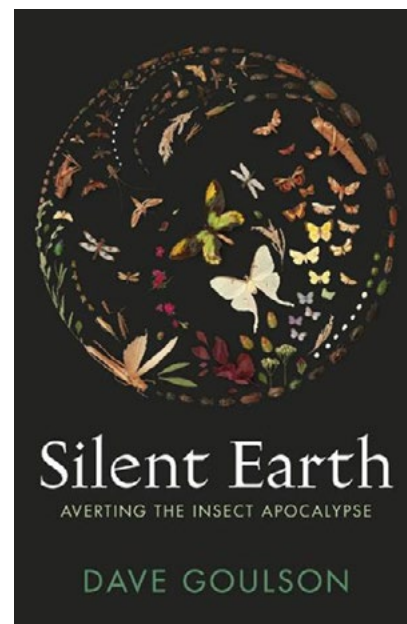
Winter is here at last! We have now had the cold snap which heralds three important beekeeping activities. First of all, a cold week and short day tells us our bees will have stopped producing brood and we can finally do oxalic acid treatments. Steve and Alan are doing a Training Apiary session on 18th December at 10.00 so you can see both trickling and vaporising.

The same signs of winter also tell us it is time to actually put on the woodpecker protection we have all been planning- as the birds get hungrier and more innovative. This leaves the third, serious December beekeeping activity - shopping! It is the time of year when all right-minded beekeepers must guide their loved ones towards sensible, beekeeping related purchases- or risk getting fripperies. My husband once made the mistake of thinking I was joking when I asked for a Burco Boiler- and got me a handbag. However, all marriages go through their tricky spots and we are over it. Last year, a very large hint (I sent him a link) ensured that I got a lovely wheelbarrow for carrying hives. The family system of reciprocal hinting (known as the Christmas list) is vital - as I cannot tell one bit of a computer from another - but I know that in matters of interest (and teenage fashion) a miss is as good as a mile.

This year there are so many beekeeping goodies we might look forward to. The year's books are very attractive: a new Dave Goulson (right); a wonderful new Microscopy book of Dorothy Hodges drawings of pollen or maybe a book which changes what we know about what bees see? There are some delightful stocking fillers like "patented entrances" and new porter bee escapes- if only the rest of the family liked these things my shopping would be so easy.....

Have a lovely December and a very Happy Christmas. 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. December is a month for a little actual beekeeping and a lot of reading about it.

- Keep checking your hives are well fed after this long, warm autumn. Heft often.
- Consider putting on blocks of fondant if your hives feel light. These can be wrapped in cling film or put into takeaway containers and added under the roof and over a cover board hole- but remember that if things get really cold the bees will not be able to cross air gaps. Be careful not to use ekes which offer more air space the bees need to heat up.
- Check your hives have decent ventilation- especially if you get snow, which can block entrances. You may also need to remove dead bees from the entrance.
- 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- it is really revealing to check the mite drop.
- Start to prepare kit for next season. It is a good time to flame broodboxes and repair woodwork when it is cold (and there are no bees about).
- Watch out for a slot on a "Wand L boiler day" . Not only can you clean all your old frames in a very short time but other, awkward bits of kit can be done. In half an hour I saw Alan dipped 30 queen excluders. It cleaned them better than I could have done- and it would have taken me all day!

Jane Medwell

WLBK BRANCH AGM 2022

Another year, another AGM and still a degree of uncertainty as to how we hold it considering the recent Greek Alphabet announcements in respect of Covid-19 by the powers that be. We do have plans, however.

Let's deal with the timetable of events for the AGM which will be our 89th and is diarised for **Thursday 17th February** at 7.30pm. The business of an AGM is quite prescriptive, and nothing can be taken on the day as all members must receive notice (see point e. below) of the business.

What we must do is:

- Receive and consider reports and receive the Branch accounts for the previous year.
- Elect the Officers and Committee Members.
- Appointment of the Independent Examiner.
- Set out the Branch capitation fee payable by all the grades of Member for the next financial year.
- Consider any proposal from members of other matter(s) of which due notice has been given.

The Warwickshire Beekeepers Association constitution, of which we are a branch, set down dates for notification are:-

Notify Members of AGM	by 20 th January 2022
Deadline for receipt of proposals	by 3 rd February 2022
Circulation of Agenda for AGM	by 10 th February 2022

Clearly the committee will need to be mindful of what happens to possible Covid-19 meeting restrictions over the coming weeks, but a fallback position will be a repeat of last year's AGM courtesy of ZOOM.

As with all volunteer committees their strength comes from an active input by members, and we are no different. If you would like to stand to be a committee member, please contact me: secretary@warleambees.org.uk.

Note: The branch will be conducting a satisfaction survey of the membership early in the New Year to pick up member's wishes and inform the committee.

Chris Cox
Branch Secretary

TOWARDS THE BASIC 2022

Following your first year of beekeeping you will be eligible to take the BBKA Basic Certificate. This assessment is a practical "conversation over the hive" which assesses your developing knowledge and your experience so far. We offer training to prepare for doing the Basic Assessment at a cost of £25. This training includes three discussion-based sessions and a practical day.

The aim of these sessions is to give you the confidence and knowledge to enjoy the basic assessment and for you to meet beekeepers who did it last year, and those who will do it this year. The assessment will be arranged at your convenience later in the beekeeping year and we will make sure you have a "practice practical" before the event. We will focus the sessions particularly on swarming, handing colonies well and basic disease and pest control, as these are the content of the Basic Assessment.

In 2022, the sessions will be at Eathorpe Village Hall (CV33 9DE) on **22nd March, 29th March and 4th April 2022**.

To sign up please go to:

[Basic Assessment Training Course - Booking Form \(google.com\)](#)

Jane Medwell



The course includes a "practice practical" to prepare for the Basic

XMAS PARTY 2021

Our Christmas Party will be on **Tuesday 7th December** at King's Hill Nurseries at 7.30pm. This is what you have to look forward to:

- We will enjoy a performance of Christmas tunes by the Kenilworth branch of Solihull Pop Voices.
- There will be mulled wine and Christmas fare.
- A quiz by our very own quiz master, Barry Meatyard.
- There will be prizes for the best Christmas Jumper and for the most correct quiz answers.

Come and celebrate with us. Eat, drink and be merry on Tuesday 7th December. King's Hill Nurseries, King's Hill, Coventry, CV3 6PS.

Rachel Dove



Spring 2022 Convention

WANTED

Stewards for the BBKA Spring Convention

Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB

Friday 8th, Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th April 2022

As the success of the Spring Convention depends very much on the many volunteers involved, I am looking for a number of stewards to cover the three days of the event.

For further information, or offers to steward, please contact:

Chief Steward, Ray Green

e-mail: conventionstewards@gmail.com

A reply by 11th February 2022, would be appreciated.

FOR SALE

An almost new 4 frame extractor for sale.

£40.

Contact Jason Butler:

jason.butler777@btinternet.com

CHANGE OF DATE

Oxalic Acid Vaporisation Demonstration Change of Date

Alan Deely and Steve Poynter will now be demonstrating oxalic acid vaporisation on **Saturday 18th December** 10.00 am at the Training Apiary, Kings Hill Nurseries CV3 6PS. Not on 29th December as previously advertised.

WHAT DO WE GET FROM COUNTY?

Quite a lot, actually.

We get membership of the BBKA and the services that flow from this. County organise training courses a lecture programme, module examinations and assessments and a honey show. They provide guidance on matters such as health and safety, risk assessments and safeguarding. They do all the admin associated with being a charity including claiming Gift Aid on our behalf which, for the current year, amounted to £1,935. With subscriptions to County totalling £1,100 – well you can do the maths. The latest thing received from County is a refund of £100 on the insurance premium for our kit through their initiative to negotiate a single policy for all eight branches.

What do we get from County? Well, now you know.

A YEAR IN THE TRAINING APIARY

Well, what a year 2021 has been. We didn't think it could get any worse than 2020, but it did!

JANUARY

Six strong colonies were returned from their enforced Covid quarantine of 2020.

We treated them with oxalic acid, gave them plenty of fondant and waited for them to fly.....



FEBRUARY/MARCH

Fondant was kept topped up, hives hefted regularly, the team started to meet every Tuesday evening from March. We were quietly optimistic.

APRIL/MAY

Being big colonies, it wasn't long before swarm preparations were under way in all the hives. Try as we could to prevent them taking off, the bees were always several steps ahead of us. We knew that phone calls from Shirley at the Nurseries meant just one thing "The bees are swarming." We did splits, made up nucs, by early May there were 12 colonies – and then the weather set in. One of the coldest and wettest on record, the virgin queens were unable to get out to be mated and several colonies went queenless. However, we had good news from the Seasonal Bee Inspector on the 15th May, the apiary was clear of European Foul Brood (EFB) and we were able to start training the new beekeepers who had recently completed the Introduction to Beekeeping course.

JUNE

Oh dear, our optimism was short lived! EFB had found it's way into two of the colonies. They had to be destroyed and the apiary put on standstill.

JULY

What a start to the month, the big burn! Two bee inspectors plus five of us from the training team spent Thursday 1st July doing shook swarms, burning 320 old frames, scouring, and scorching all the brood boxes and supers then putting it all back together. We learned a lot; we had a lot of fun and went home exhausted.



Inspector Colleen instructing us on shook swarms

The rest of the month was spent caring for the colonies, keeping them fed, checking for queen cells and staying as squeaky clean as possible.

AUGUST

The bees thrived on their new comb; a few new beekeepers came to join us at the Tuesday sessions.

SEPTEMBER

Time for the varroa treatment – Apivar this year – and topping up the stores with Ambrosia.

OCTOBER

Apivar was removed after 8 weeks and a couple of colonies were united, leaving us with 8 strong ones to take through the winter, all with this year's queens. Mouse and woodpecker guards were put on.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

Time for the fondant, which they are taking down well.

The shed is immaculate, the weeding is done and now we can hopefully all look forward to a more productive and less dramatic 2022.

And so back where we came in – Oxalic acid vaporisation being done on Saturday 18th December 10.00 am. All are welcome to watch the demonstration.

Happy New Year from the team – Steve Poynter, Andy Threlfall, Nicky Maritz, Chris Price, Maggie Curley, Barry Meatyard and Richard Mountney.

Special thanks to Alistair Walker, Stuart Hole and Jane Medwell for their invaluable help at the "Big Burn" and to Val and Terry Dillon for making up hundreds of frames in super-fast time!

Maggie Curley

NEWS FROM OUR BBKA TRUSTEE

1

BBKA TRUSTEE ACTIVITY

Trustees met on 13 November for their meeting. The Healthy Bee Plan is guiding a lot of what the BBKA locally and nationally is working on, such as the importance of improving husbandry, managing disease, and continuing to work with the public to explain the value of beekeeping. Much of the meeting involved considering the propositions for the next Annual Delegate Meeting on Saturday 15 January 2022. Propositions are generated by local associations and are the main route for guiding the direction of the BBKA. There was also discussion of BBKA-funded research, including work on Deformed Wing Virus and the importance of tree floral resources for pollinators in urban areas. Finances are in a good position, and there is an ongoing programme of producing topic-based Special Editions which are available through the BBKA website.

2. SPRING CONVENTION 8-10 APRIL 2022

The enthusiastic team of volunteers are working on the next Spring Convention which is intended to be a face-to-face event once more at Harper Adams University near Telford, in Shropshire. Tickets will be available for the full event, individual days or the Trade Show only. There will be an extensive varied programme of lectures and workshops as well as the Trade Show on Saturday 9 April. This is a great time to browse, trade-in wax and buy kit for the year ahead. The programme will be available from mid-January and tickets, workshops and the limited on-site accommodation (plus camper van parking) will be open for booking from the end of January. If you miss a room on campus, there is a range of accommodation in the local area – book early if you can. Lastly, if you use social media such as Facebook to find out about events, I'd love to hear from you as we want to use social media more to promote the Spring Convention. Contact me at suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk

3. WLBKA SPEAKERS PROGRAMME – DAVE BONNER, BEES ABROAD 25 NOVEMBER 2021

Rachel Dove continues to bring together a great programme of speakers for WLBK. Dave Bonner from Bees Abroad gave an insightful lecture on 25 November. Three thought-provoking elements for me were: training communities to keep bees in Uganda is life-changing for the people affected. The community approach improves life chances for everyone: income from honey and honey products that Dave and his wife Cathy help the community beekeeper to produce stays in the community. This enables them to improve their health and housing, for example. The third point is the importance of education which helps sustain beekeeping; just having the equipment is not enough. Do please consider a donation to Bees Abroad: find out more here: beesabroad.org.uk

Suzanne Bennett

Trustee British Beekeepers' Association

THE NANCY WILSHIRE ROSE BOWL

As part of our series on people who donated trophies for our honey show we turn our attention now to Nancy Wilshire. Nancy presented the rose bowl to the branch as a trophy for first place in the honey cake category but who was Nancy Wilshire? The following memories of Nancy provide something of a clue as to why she selected this category.

"I remember the warm-hearted greeting when I first met Nancy who made a point of seeking out new beekeepers and making them feel welcome; something we have all tried to follow in the branch. Nancy rather broke the mould too. In those early days it seemed that the few female members and wives of beekeepers were rather kitchen and catering orientated and, whilst Nancy fulfilled this role very well, she was also an assertive, capable beekeeper too with a particular interest in doing well at the shows. Whilst in her later years she only made the occasional appearance at meetings, she always brought that warm-hearted smile with her."

Mike Townsend

"Fond memories of Nancy and her husband in far off days. She hosted, for many years, our first outdoor member's meeting, requesting that one of the members would demonstrate and, in her words, 'put her bees in order for the coming year.' The real attraction which guaranteed full attendance was the wonderful spread of food she provided on those occasions."

John Home

"As a young teenager, I remember her well for several reasons including the beautiful cakes she always used to bake for the WLBK meetings. A motherly Beekeeper who was always supportive of new beekeepers from a time when equipment was limited but the craft knowledge was excellent."

Brian Donley

Nancy died last year aged 102. It would appear that she donated a partiality to cake as well as her Rose Bowl.

Bernard Brown

MEMORIES OF BEEKEEPING IN A TUNNEL

Recently a beekeeper with a very long memory asked me about the time I was beekeeper for David Evans at Warwick University, beekeeping in 'The Tunnels', and what had been learned from this.

I was asked to manage bees in an unusual environment with the hives located within netted tunnels. My involvement was in caring for colonies contained within three 'tunnels' with feeding and watering stations providing pure pollen, syrup and water.

The purpose of containment was to exclude contact with drifting local, varroa infested, bees with varroa free colonies in the tunnels sourced from Andrew Abrahams' bees on the Scottish island of Colonsay.

Although the first stock to be handled targeted my nose (!) Andrews' bees are known for their quality and once settled in, at the hive were calm and easy to handle. The bees used the feeding stations readily, however many of the bees were disoriented by the cages which was uncomfortable to observe.

I was required to introduce varroa infested brood donated by Branch members and later remove workers so that the diversity and levels of the DWV related virus population could be analysed. Further extensive experiments with drones is now being undertaken.

David and his team were able to show that bees appeared to start with a low level of highly divergent viruses, but to end up with just one, near clonal, virus that was present at very high levels. David and his team originally thought that there was just one highly virulent virus type. Subsequent studies suggested that many/any/most (we still don't know) DWV strains can be virulent and dominate the population. David's current PhD student has done some



Fig. 4. Flight cages at the Warwick apiary and inspection of a varroa-free colony in one of the flight cages (inset).
E. Ryabov

Captured inside the tunnel.

Image courtesy: Image copyright MicroBiology & Society for General Microbiology

computer modelling of how the virus population evolves, building on the original work done in those cages.

An early summary of David and his teams findings were published in 'Micro Biology' and further peer reviewed scientific papers; the biggest and most cited is at:

<https://journals.plos.org/plopathogens/article?id=10.1371/journal.ppat.1004230>

The project continues to make an important contribution to the understanding of the evolution of viruses in the bee population.

Mike Townsend & David Evans

David was a member of Warwick & Leamington Branch until moving to St Andrews University where he is Professor of Virology. He writes a regular feature for BBKA News and kindly helped me with this article.

WE ARE NOT AN ISLAND: SUTTON COLDFIELD AND NORTH BIRMINGHAM BRANCH

Our trip around Warwickshire Beekeeping Association's branches continues this month with Sutton Coldfield and North Birmingham Branch.

Sutton Coldfield and North Birmingham Beekeepers Association was formed towards the end of the 19th century and affiliated to the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association on 9th May 1931. Unfortunately, the records of our earlier years are buried somewhere in the archives but when changing secretaries over the years some boxes have been left in lofts, cellars or similar and may be found someday and fully documented but nobody has come forward to offer help with this and currently the recent history is in the minds of current members and only goes back to the second world war.

The Association has always been active with a membership between 70 and 100 active beekeepers and still forms part of Warwickshire BKA despite moving into the West Midlands in 1974. There was no interest in forming a new County organisation at the time. We do form the northern end of Warwickshire BKA and do get members from Staffordshire and Walsall so our catchment area is larger than our name suggests.

We have had, in living memory, a Branch Apiary initially in a member's garden but when she passed away with no descendants, she willed her house and garden to Sutton Town Council (this was well before Birmingham included Sutton Coldfield) but left the apiary to Sutton Coldfield Beekeepers in perpetuity putting the Town Council in an awkward position as this did not fit their plans. Agreement was reached in 1971 that the apiary would be given up and replaced by a site in Sutton Park for which a formal lease was drawn up. This did include a peppercorn rent (of £5) which annoyed some of the older members as it was previously free but did give certain rights. This lease is still in force, as is the rent, but Birmingham Council have realised recently that this is possibly the only remaining lease in the name of Sutton Town Council which they took over in 1974.

The apiary has had many changes since 1971 including several increases in size which have been possible as the original agreement gave a much larger area than was used at the time

and the Park authorities are more than happy that we are part of the park. It is probable that we are included in the SSSI section of the park and certain that it is part of the National Nature Reserve. A previous Park Manager believed that we were continuing a tradition in Sutton Coldfield that went back to the Domesday book as apiaries are mentioned in the entry for the area.

The apiary now has around 15 hives, 4 of which are in a separated area used solely for beginners training as it was found beneficial to allow beginners on our summer course to see 'their own' hives and the progress through the year without other members opening them. Our summer beginners course runs all through the season from May to September with meetings every week. We have limited numbers to 16 and we usually have at least 4 mentors/demonstrators at each meeting. This gives the beginners almost individual contact with the mentors. We also run a winter beginners/introduction course over 6 weeks in February/March which is normally classroom based but this year was held over Zoom for obvious reasons. This winter course has run for many years and was how I started in the 1970s.

The apiary is also used for members meetings every week in the late afternoon.

Some previous members of note on a wider basis. Walter Diaper lectured widely after the second world war and was part of a beekeeping dynasty. Jim Watson was one of the best competitors in Honey Shows and won some of the classes at the National Honey Show so many times that Warwickshire have endowed the Crystal Palace Cup in his memory.

Several of our current members are active on the national scene. Bernard Diaper is a Honey Show Judge and Claims Manager for Bee Diseases Insurance. Bob Gilbert is a Master Beekeeper, has stood on the BBKA Exam Board, ran the BBKA Correspondence course for many years and is an assessor at all levels of the BBKA Practical assessments. Julian Routh is a Master Beekeeper, was a BBKA Trustee for 6 years, spent 8 years as a Seasonal Bee Inspector for the National Bee Unit, is on the BBKA Spring Convention committee and is an assessor at all levels of the BBKA Practical assessments.

JULIAN ROUTH

HINTS & TIPS

Thanks to Bernard for these tips on handling fondant:

▪ **Storing fondant** - Fondant, being a gooey substance, has a tendency to spread outwards in a bid for freedom unless restrained. It relies on the enclosing cardboard box to halt this southwards march and in particular on the strengths of the joins in the said box - some of which have been found wanting in the recent consignment. 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.

▪ **Carving fondant** - Before you start, place a bowl of hot water and one of hand-hot water within reach and 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 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. Steve Sidaway's tip of 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 and wrap it up ready to be transported to the hive. It is helpful to have the bowl of hand-hot water handy 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 an eke, move the bees away from the top bars and place the fondant scored face down, directly on the top bars over the cluster. Job Done.



And if you have any fondant left over you could always try your hand at making actual fondant honey bees to decorate your Christmas bakes! Wilton has a step-by-step video of how to do it [here](#). Bee-utiful.

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:
tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
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