



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## SO LONG TO A SUCCESSFUL 2022

**A**s the nights are closing in and the shortest day gets closer, there is a lot to celebrate at Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers. First off is the first prize that *Bee Talk* won at October's National Honey Show for the best newsletter. Great news and a special thanks to our editor Tanya Weaver.

More highlights: we have a new librarian to look after our learning resources. A huge welcome to Jackie Ledwidge. You will be hearing more in the pages of *Bee Talk* about the plans Jackie has for our library. Many thanks to Jane Ford for her work to date in sharing our knowledge and providing a firm base for Jackie to build on.

Thinking of our wider work with the public and potential beekeepers, thank you to everyone who volunteered to get involved with the apiary at Kenilworth Castle. This is the time to make plans for the coming year and you'll be contacted soon.

We are currently working out whether to keep member meetings going through the summer. While they take time to arrange, member meetings are a great way to keep in touch. Please email your thoughts (on this and any other topic) to me at [suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.bennett@bbka.org.uk) so the committee can base its decisions on your input.

The members' co-operative continues to be a valuable and well used resource. Please check it out on the members' area of the Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers website ([warleambees.org.uk](http://warleambees.org.uk)). Let's pause here to thank our Webmeister, Roger Warham, for all his work on the website. Roger is currently working on improvements to our co-operative ordering and payment system.

Another valuable member resource, the extraction unit, is being used less at this time of year. It's a good time to take stock and



Barry Meatyard was awarded winner of the photo class at this year's WLBK Honey Show for his photo entitled, 'Hey - You, get off of my flower'.

consider how to keep it clean and serviceable at all times, and to ensure that all of us who use it know how to get the best from its kit and leave it in a good state for the next user. Watch out for new signage, instructions and training in early 2023.

Last and by no means least, the Introduction to Beekeeping (ITB) course for 2023 is already filling up for 2023. The ITB is just one reason why our member numbers in all age categories continue to rise. Another reason could be the wonderful cause we all support.

A good place to end is to thank Peter Stanworth for his work on the WLBK committee, including his time as Chairman. Keep in touch, and we hope to see as many as possible of you at the branch Christmas event on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December at 19.30 at Kingshill nursery.

**Suzanne Bennett**  
WLBK chair



# WLBK AGM IS ON THE HORIZON

**A**t the last Branch Committee Meeting the timetable for the AGM to be held on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> February was agreed. This will be the first AGM under the new constitution of The Warwickshire Beekeepers' Association (Charity Number 1197656) (the County), which took effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022. Does this mean it will be our first AGM or our 90<sup>th</sup>?

The good news is that the mechanics of the branch meetings are unchanged from the old constitution and the key dates are:-

- Members to be officially notified of the AGM by 19<sup>th</sup> January.
- The deadline for receipt of proposals from members by 2<sup>nd</sup> February.
- The Agenda to be circulated by 9<sup>th</sup> February.

So as to mirror the previous constitution with respect to our branch, the meeting will be titled our 90<sup>th</sup>. Yes, WLBK has been around that long!

You may ask why the change in constitution? This has come about as this is the preferred model of the Charity Committee for an organisation of our type. The move has involved considerable work by a subcommittee of Warwickshire Beekeepers Trustees over the last two years, including our own Bernard Brown, with professional legal input and the associated necessary restructuring banking

arrangements, led by Jane Brown, who is the County Treasurer. Neither of these areas has proved straightforward but as one of the two branch nominated trustees of Warwickshire Beekeepers' the onerous (but unlikely) personal liabilities are no longer a consideration. Both Bernard and I are slightly relieved.

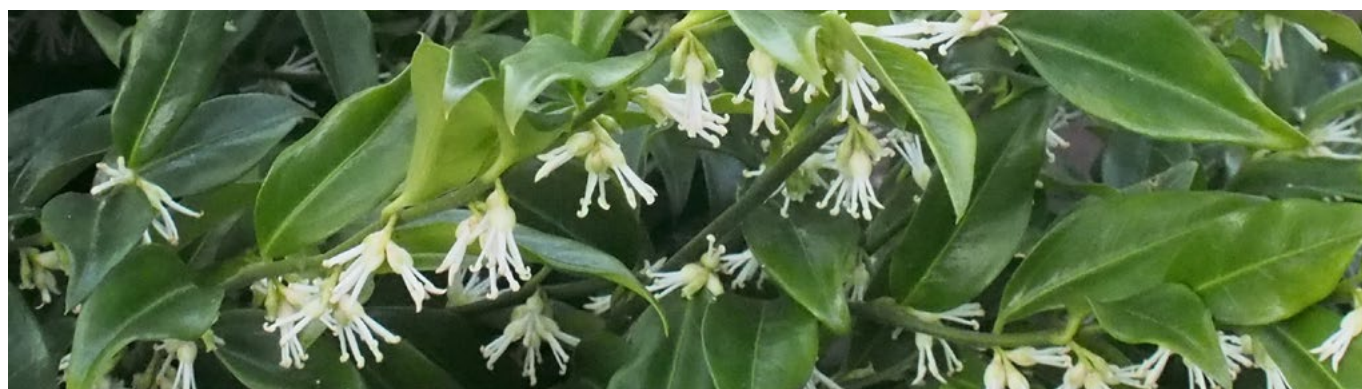
With the new constitution coming into place a workshop of the 20 County trustees was held to review the implications of the change in both powers and responsibilities. Key is that all 20 trustees have an overall responsibility for the running of the new registered charity, including its 8 Branches. The consequences of this will be worked through over the next few months but will most probably be limited to reporting key financial Branch information to the County treasurer (yet more charity bureaucracy).

Finally the workshop also reviewed our Safeguarding responsibilities with the key message that young people (aged under 18) as members will need to be accompanied by a parent or notified guardian at branch beekeeping activities, no exceptions (turn to page 4).

**Chris Cox**  
WLBK Secretary



## PLANT OF MONTH: CHRISTMAS BOX



**W**hat an incredibly mild autumn it has been with the bees out foraging through into mid-November! If temperatures keep up like this, they will be looking for winter snacks- and what better than the sweet, vanilla scented nectar of *Sarcococcus confusa*, the Christmas Box – also known as the Sweet Box.

This compact, glossy leaved, evergreen shrub of the Box (Buxaceae) family can grow to 2m high and 1m broad. Bees that may venture out on sunny winter days visit its delicate white

fragrant flowers. The flowers are followed by glossy red, later turning black, berries which contrast beautifully with the dark green foliage. Birds eat the berries and hence disperse the seeds. Originating in the Himalayas; it is a particularly easy shrub to grow and will adapt to most conditions. It is dense shade tolerant and can thrive in very dry soil. An amazingly versatile plant!

**Maggie Curley**



# BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

You would have expected the bees to be all clustered and ready for Oxalic Acid. A week ago this would have been the case but now that temperatures have plummeted, the bees may have stopped producing brood. December should be a month for a little actual beekeeping – but there is always something to do.

- 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 try to avoid ekes which offer more air space the bees need to heat up.
- Do not give more syrup this late- it will give the bees dysentery.
- Fit woodpecker protection. Yes, they will go for poly hives AND NUCS- remember to put the wire over the unprotected top of polynucs. You have until it gets frosty and the ants nests are gone.
- Early December is usually the best time to use Oxalic Acid as the colony stops producing brood- it is really revealing to check the mite drop. This year, check the colony is broodless before you trickle- brood can survive vaping.
- Start to prepare kit for next season. It is a good time to flame brood boxes and repair woodwork when it is cold (and there are no bees about).

Jane Medwell



## NOVEMBER MEMBERS' MEETING

Our November meeting was held in a new venue. The Kenilworth Senior Citizens' Club was ideal – although the car parking machine outside was surely the slowest in the nation. Best use the RingGo App to pay for parking at future meetings here!

Dr Barbara Smith (right) is an agricultural ecologist, with a special research interest in insects, working at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University. Barbara is leading the Thriving Hive Project that was funded by the BBKA and used data collected from 45 apiaries in the Midlands in 2021 – some of them belonging to our own members! Data was collected on airborne particulate matter and on particulates adhering to bees. Initial results show that the bees sampled were carrying microplastics, particles of nylon and even fragments of car tyres. Interestingly, air quality was not related to levels of urbanisation, so rural Warwickshire may not be as idyllic for our girls as we thought! As expected, foragers carried more pollution than nurse bees. One particularly memorable slide showed in shocking detail the debris adhering to the hairs that sprout from a bee's eye.

It was fascinating to hear Barbara's account of the painstaking work her team had done – laboriously washing individual bees in purified water and subsequently filtering and analysing the particulates.

The team is still working on their report which they hope to finalise next March, and which promises to form the basis of an important scientific paper. At that stage, I'm sure the members who took part in the project will indulge in basking in a little reflected glory.

The evening was rounded off by tea, coffee and cake. Lottie's lemon curd cupcakes complete with cute fondant bees were a real treat.

Jane Brown





# WARWICKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS'

## CODE OF CONDUCT

## & PRACTICE FOR MEMBERS

Below is information regarding safeguarding from Warwickshire Beekeepers' Association:

# B

### Do:

- Be aware of the WBKA Safeguarding Policy and adhere to it.
- Be aware of the WBKA Policy on children attending Association activities.
- Report all allegations, suspicions, and concerns regarding the well-being of children and vulnerable adults immediately.
- Be part of an open and transparent culture, where people can challenge inappropriate attitudes or behaviours.
- Remember that you are an ambassador for beekeeping and a role model for good practice.
- Value and treat all individuals equally with respect and dignity.
- Take care not to discriminate by virtue of gender, age, or ethnicity.
- Listen to and involve individuals in decision making.
- Provide positive praise and encouragement to all individuals.
- Act within appropriate boundaries and remember that someone may misinterpret your actions.
- Ensure that a child and parents/guardians are aware of any activity that requires physical contact and its nature before the activity takes place.
- Maintain clear boundaries regarding social media usage associated with your private life and your use of social media for Association beekeeping matters.
- Use clear and unambiguous language in all communications and avoid abbreviations or emoticons that could be misinterpreted.
- Be aware of GDPR constraints when communicating / sharing information with others. Use BCC rather than CC in e-mails where appropriate.
- Inform the Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) or Deputy (DDSO) if you are concerned there has been a potential data breach or concerning online activity.

### Do not:

- Trivialise abuse by others or let it go unreported – be particularly alert to peer-to-peer abuse.
- Permit abusive peer activities such as ridiculing or bullying.
- Show favouritism to any one individual or group.
- Allow an individual to involve you in excessive attention seeking.
- Be alone with a vulnerable adult or child/young person at any time for whatever reason. If, however, this unexpectedly arises, ensure the DSO/ DDSO is informed immediately.
- Befriend children/young people and vulnerable adults on social media.
- Use inappropriate, suggestive, or threatening language, whether verbal, written or online.
- Say anything on social media that you would not be happy saying in a public meeting or to someone in person.
- Use visual media (e.g., Skype, FaceTime or Zoom) for one-to-one conversations with young people – use only in group settings.

### WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP US?

I've been Treasurer of Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers since 2010, and I'm now looking to hand over the position to the next Treasurer. This is an opportunity for a member to make a real difference to our branch and to influence future plans. Please don't worry as I'm not planning to leave the committee until a new Treasurer is in post.

If you would like to speak to me about what is involved, please contact me by email [val.dillon@outlook.com](mailto:val.dillon@outlook.com) or on 02476 417374 or 07903 198272.

Val Dillon

# WLBK TO BUY SUPERMARKET HONEY

**S**hock! Horror!  
Next year, we  
will be buying  
supermarket  
honey.  
What?????

Yeah we will, but by doing so we hope to educate the public taste in the distinctiveness of our authentic honey. Prompted by the recent County lecture

by Lynne Ingram, a BBKA trustee and passionate driver of the BBKA's campaign against honey adulteration, a pot of supermarket honey, retailing at between 80p and £1.75, will feature on the honey tasting table at our public shows. Our principal beef is that labelling regulations allow what is effectively a syrup to be called "honey" when it has barely been anywhere near a bee.

There are many ways in which honey is adulterated, all for the purpose of boosting the volume of supply and profit.

- Immature, unripened "honey" is harvested - in effect nectar - which has a high water content which has to be evaporated in a factory process.
- Dark, unpalatable honey, often gathered from polluted environments, is subjected to a resin-based filtration process to remove pesticides, fungicides and pollen etc. in fact almost everything, producing a clear, light amber, bland tasting liquid with a long shelf life before crystallising. To this, pollen is added back from whatever plant the customer demands e.g. Acacia, Chestnut, Lavender etc.
- Vegetable based syrups are fed to the bees during a honey flow which although it does pass through a bee, does not have the same qualities as our honey.
- These same vegetable-based syrups, from maize, corn. Rice, sugar beet, wheat, cassava and even potatoes, are used to dilute real honey so the resulting concoction comprises only 15% honey.

This matters as this so-called honey is undercutting genuine honey producers causing increasing numbers to go out of business but most importantly, it is misleading the public on a scale tantamount to fraud. In addition, studies have shown that the over sweetness of adulterated honey can lead to insulin resistance and greater obesity in humans.

Of course, there is a demand for this adulterated honey and, in these straitened times, who can deny people the opportunity to buy it if they want to, but it is not honey and should not be labelled as such.

This is the essence of the BBKA's campaign to arouse awareness of this misrepresentation and to lobby for revision of the labelling regulations. Most of this adulterated honey comes from far eastern countries, such as China, Vietnam, Singapore. The BBKA has raised a petition to force a debate in Parliament to require labelling to show the country of origin to enable consumers to choose honey from sources where adulteration is less likely. For this it needs 100,000 signatures so if you haven't already, please do sign up to this and encourage your families, friends, work colleagues, etc. to sign it as well. The link to the petition is:-

**[Require honey labels to reflect all countries of origin of the honey - Petitions](#)**

**Bernard Brown**



# WLBK CHRISTMAS PARTY

**WLBK CHRISTMAS PARTY**

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December**

**7.30 -9.30 pm**

**Kings Hill Nursery**

**Join us for food, drink and fun!**

## BORROWING EQUIPMENT

Do you ever give illustrated lectures about bees and beekeeping?

If so, read on...

WLBK owns equipment which members can borrow. The Association has a laptop, data projector, screen and tripod – in fact everything needed to give an illustrated talk – except the speaker! Contact the meetings secretary if you want to use any of this equipment, which can be collected from Kenilworth: email

**[judith.masson@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:judith.masson@bristol.ac.uk)**

**Judith Masson**

## WLBK RENEWAL

To our members that have not done so already, this is a reminder that your membership payments are due by 31<sup>st</sup> December.

You should have received an email from Membership Services at the beginning of December asking you to complete the attached link to confirm your personal details and then requesting you make your payment.

A number of members have already completed this link, but have yet to pay, so this is a nudge for them to complete the process please. If you can't find the link in your email, please try your Junk Mail and if it's not there you can contact me and I will resend the link:

**[lizdinks@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lizdinks@hotmail.co.uk)**

**Liz Gurney**

# A SEASON IN A LINSEED FIELD



**W**hile the M45 is one of our least used motorways any frequent users travelling along it this past Spring might have wondered what the 160 acres of blue crop was. Within a fortnight the bright yellow vistas of oilseed rape gave way to beautiful blue hues that is linseed.

Linseed (flax) is grown commercially as a seed crop similarly to oilseed rape (OSR). It yields a hoped for ton per acre and sells for roughly £550. In comparison, OSR is 2 tons at £650. Now you know why Warwickshire fields are yellow not blue!

Yellow does come with bigger risks but bigger rewards, it is winter veg for sea gulls as well as susceptible to beetle blight that can deliver zero crop and a total financial loss. On the other hand, a good crop can rise to 3 tons with prices reaching £1,000 if yield and price coincide. It is a holiday in the Bahamas rather than Bognor. The weather can also be the cause of the Bognor destination where the grower can feel twice aggrieved by our climate.

Linseed is a little less risky to grow but does not deliver the same rewards although it is a useful rotating crop.

Both of these field crops self pollinate on the breeze and whilst reasonably extensive studies have shown 20% yield increases where pollinators are allowed to pass freely through OSR against controlled no pollinator areas, there are very limited studies for linseed. Incidentally, it is the 20% gain with pollinators versus the total loss to beetle blight that fuels the neonic debate with OSR and possibly the reason there are significant studies. The few linseed studies I came across were pointing to yield improvements below 10% and some with no discernible benefit at all. "Yes we know," I can hear ringing out from a chorus of beekeepers, "the pollen is not plentiful and the nectar is neither particularly sweet or accessible to bees of any kind!" OSR wins again for the beekeeper with honey production volume in mind.

So knowing all this why did I go to the bother of setting up leveled brick bases in fields away from home and lumbering myself with weekly visits to the hives I set up? Firstly, I was asked to. My daughter's partner was looking for any advantage to promote the yield of 160 acres of linseed and he wondered if a sudden influx of bees at flowering time might help. I did a bit of checking and was somewhat skeptical about it but also became a little curious, not least because I asked myself "what is linseed honey?"

and did not find much in the way of an answer. The fact that it is away from home was no real issue as "access", "the farmer" and "commercials" were all non-issues. Also, whilst familiar with the nectar sweetness hierarchy that does govern some forage behaviour in bees I am a great believer in the sweetness/distance ratio governor where a grove of high ranking sweet chestnut a mile or so away are always going to miss out on visits from bees sited in a field of lower sweetness OSR when flowering at the same time. Surely sitting in the middle of 160 acres of linseed is going to entice the bees into linseed visitation despite the collection limitations. Another tempter this year with this particular crop was that flowering was just following the decline of OSR and effectively closing the "gap" to the usual mid summer nectar flows after OSR.

I prepared two bases but when hive transfer time arrived I was experiencing swarm preparation in one hive. I chose to take a single, very slow developing hive with no super filling to see how it fared. I was not too concerned if it did not thrive.

However, within a week there was a noticeable upturn in activity with comb being drawn. A further week showed some super stores laid in and the brood box filled with brood and stores. A week later a very full hive and increasingly feisty bees were evident. After a month there was an extremely full hive with an entrance cluster sleeping outside. Feisty too but just on the acceptable limit. One super had become two before the flowers faded away. As one super was fresh drawn comb whilst being sat in the linseed field and fully capped I isolated it for later extraction, hoping it to be linseed honey or at least as close to it as I was going to get. The second super was nearly full but uncapped so I left that to be completed with whatever the bees subsequently found to forage upon.

The outcome? A very strong colony going into winter from a "lazy" spring colony with plenty of retained stores. On the question of increase crop yield, the harvesting data for areas of the fields is incomplete and the spring/summer drought will have skewed the results anyway. The harvest resulted in ten litres (I broke the scales trying to weigh the bucket) of very light straw coloured runny honey from the isolated super with a delicate honey flavour (not strong) that seems slightly less sweet than other honey. I might bring a jar along to an evening tasting at the branch, if such a thing is arranged, to see what you think of it.

**Neil Shuttleworth**



# 'TIS THE SEASON TO BE...TRAINING

**W**arwickshire BKA is one of the most successful associations in the country at practical beekeeping qualifications. Now is the time to be thinking about what you might do next season and how courses from the branch or county can be useful- and fun.

If you have completed your first season of beekeeping (even if you did it 20 years ago), then the **Basic Certificate** is for you! A practical assessment, done over the hive, you can do it at your convenience in the summer. And we have a WLBK course for that. On four Thursday evenings in March and a practical day, we will prepare anyone who wants to do the basic in 2023, so that they feel confident and capable. Just go to this [link](#). All the details are on the WLBK website.

If you already have your Basic, what about the **Honey Bee Health Certificate**? It is practical certificate which improves your ability to recognise and prevent disease. We have a course for that, too. Over two days (1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> April) we will practice all the tasks so that you feel confident. To enrol in that course, please go to this [link](#). Again, all the details are on the website.

If you're thinking further ahead, perhaps the **General Husbandry** or general training, Warwickshire runs a "Beyond the Basic" course at Solihull school on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023. To book WBKA Beyond Basic Beekeeping go to this [link](#).

Maybe you are interested in **Microscopy**. In which case, Warwickshire has a course for that, too- run by WLBK members. The beginner's bee microscopy day is Saturday, 28 January 2023 ([book here](#)) and the intermediate bee microscopy day WBKA Microscopy is [here](#).

And don't forget all the resources on the **Warwickshire Beekeepers site**- you are members of that too. The password is Sup3R# If you want to do the Honey Bee Health Certificate or General Husbandry Certificate in 2023 you must enrol by 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023. Just contact

[examsec@wbka.org.uk](mailto:examsec@wbka.org.uk)

Jane Medwell

## HELLO FROM THE WARWICK-SHIRE LAVENDER FARM



**A** WLBK member has started a new, bee-related venture- a lavender farm!! A field on Watery Lane opposite Broom Hill Farm (Bubbenhall) has been transformed as a retirement project. It has gone from a cattle field and a rundown stable, to a working Lavender Farm and a charity café.

Ian has planted more than 20,000 plants. There are three varieties of Lavender, chosen for their essential oil qualities. They flower

at slightly different times and are different shades of lavender blue. There are also two varieties of Rosemary and a row of Black Mitchum Menthe Piperata (Peppermint). During the Lavender season, the noise of the bees is deafening, and well worth a visit.

The stable is now a beautiful café with all profits going to charity. So do visit for a delicious coffee/ tea and cake. And dream of the fragrant summer to come.

Jane Medwell

# HINTS AND TIPS: HONEY FUDGE

Thoughts may be turning to Christmas gifts, so why not try this recipe. It is very easy, very yummy and would make a lovely gift:

## HONEY FUDGE

115g butter  
450g granulated sugar  
1 (397g) tin condensed milk  
2 tablespoons honey  
140ml full cream milk  
A pinch cream of tartar

- Line or grease a 18cm (7inch) square tin.
- Heat all the ingredients together slowly until completely dissolved.
- Bring to the boil, stirring all the time, until it reaches 114C or 240F on a sugar thermometer.
- Remove from heat and continue to beat until it thickens. Pour into tin.
- When it has cooled slightly, mark into squares. Set it aside to cool completely
- Should make about 16 pieces. Enjoy!



Some of us will start feeding our bees fondant this month. If you have any fondant left 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](#).

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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