



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## UPDATE FROM HURST FARM

**M**uch of March was spent garnering materials. In true beekeeper fashion, before actually purchasing anything, we explored the opportunities to source donations with some success. A member, via her son, managed to secure some wood from Bellway Homes who are house-building in Whitnash, and Balfour Beatty, the HS2 contractor, who were de-commissioning their depot at Coleshill, donated a stainless steel sink with base unit, two metal cupboards, two white boards, an electric water heater producing boiling water for drinks, another electric water boiler to serve the sinks and a ceramic bucket sink. We also won the bidding on eBay for a pre-loved uPVC front door with a bid of £85. All for the cost of three jars of honey. As a result, we are well under budget.

How many beekeepers does it take to change a light bulb? .....it depends! How typical is that as a beekeepers' response to almost every question? But there is no equivocation over the number needed to construct the wasp-lock, airlock, wasp porch – call it what you will – fitted around the door into our new extraction unit cabin. On a chilly, windy Saturday it took six hours including breaks, for six of us. Only four did the actual work, one supervised and the sixth made the drinks.

The idea behind the porch is to tackle the problem of wasps being attracted to and into the existing extraction unit, which can be sufficiently bad enough to deter members from using it. Even insectocutors can't keep up. The porch will be constructed with tight joints to counter wasp entry, leaving only the door as a weak point. The door into the porch comes with a close fitting, weather-proof rubber seal as standard whilst the cabin door itself already has a similar seal. The opportunity for wasps to get into the unit will be limited to when the porch is accessed by a user. Once in the porch, the wasps will have to negotiate an insectocutor and, when sufficiently dealt with, the inner door can be opened. Another insectocutor within the cabin itself will threaten the more enterprising wasps which have successfully run



the gauntlet.

Other opportunities offered by the porch are a ramped floor which will enable trolleys laden with supers to be pushed into the cabin and a horizontal platform on which to stack supers whilst awaiting the elimination of any wasps.

Will it work? Probably not 100% but at least it should improve things. Only time will tell.

**Bernard Brown**

# BEEKEEPING TASKS THIS MONTH

**W**ith a string of sunny days, dare we say that Spring has officially sprung (although it never pays to be too optimistic when it comes to the weather forecast).

- Continue to heft or weigh regularly to check your colonies have plenty of stores. They may still run out of carbohydrate and starve.
- Prepare your hive records- look back at last year and decide what your goals are for this year.
- Watch (on warmer days) to see what pollen they bring in. There is plenty of blackthorn, willow, dandelion (the all-you-can-eat buffet of the bee world) about. Pollen means brood rearing.
- Time for a varroas and nosema check. Put the board in for at least seven days, divide the mite drop by the number of days and use the Beebase calculator. Treat if you need to.
- When the bees are flying a good deal you can remove the mouseguards (and if you have hard floors, scrape them). Woodpecker guards can come off.
- When the weather is very good (for more than a few days) and do your first inspection. Is the queen laying? Is there pollen and stores? Is there too much pollen choking up the brood? Mark the queen.
- Decide which colonies need a wax change and start planning now, before the supers go on- they are bound to build up fast.
- When you have had at least three rounds of brood and it is warm you can choose to do shook swarms or Bailey frame changes.
- Add a queen excluder and super when there are six frames of bees (or before) so that you can relieve pressure on the colony. The flow will need space!

Jane Medwell



## HOW TO DO: BAILEY COMB CHANGE



**T**he best way to get bees going in the spring is with a bailey comb change. This process should be done at least once every two years, to keep the bees on clean healthy comb. As always, this manipulation is dependent on the weather. The start of April (before drone production starts) is usual. Put a fresh brood box with fresh frames and foundation on top of the existing brood box. Help the bees by feeding with a 1:1 mix of sugar/water to encourage the wax workers. They can build comb

on wet days. Only feed until the comb is drawn. You don't want the bees storing sugar. I have had eleven frames drawn, and the queen up in the second box in a week... sometimes it takes longer (2-3 weeks). I have had one hive do nothing for 3 weeks, only to catch up and pass the hives on either side of it within a week. Like children, all hives are different.

Once the queen has started the nest in the upper box it is time to introduce the Bailey board. Shut the bottom box entrance. Put the Bailey board (queen excluder on the underside) on top of the bottom box. Put the top box back on ensuring the queen is present in the top box. The bees returning to the now closed old entrance will move up and find the new entrance above. The bottom box containing the old nest will hatch out in the next three weeks. If you have left this procedure a little later in the season, and there is drone brood present, you will have to let the drones out every few days, or you will get a lot of dead bees stuck in the excluder (as the drones will not be able to get through the queen excluder). Once all the old brood has hatched in the old nest, the bottom box and Bailey board can be removed. At this time add a clean queen excluder, and a super or two to keep the workers busy! This process is less draconian than a shook swarm but should only be done with healthy bees.

Bernard Brown



# WHO'S WHO ON THE BRANCH COMMITTEE

## THE CHAIRMAN – BARRY MEATYARD ELECTED FEBRUARY 2026.

Barry's interest in the natural world was shaped by his early childhood in rural Berkshire where

frogs and toads, the occasional grass snake, butterflies (and the L. Hugh Newman books) formed part of everyday life. At primary school, natural history was the favourite subject.

His secondary school introduced him to beekeeping but in retrospect the timing of the school year wasn't conducive to productive hive management. He went on to Durham University to study botany and zoology, finally emerging with a Botany degree, whilst at the same time playing rugby and rowing for both College and University. This led to being offered a research PhD opportunity using the structure of a specific protein in marine algae (see below\*) to shed light on the evolutionary relationships of plants. The grant included an expectation of tutoring undergraduates – leading him towards a career in teaching once the PhD work was completed and accepted. He taught Biology at Tonbridge School from where he took a sabbatical term to spend 6 months on the Galapagos Islands working on the ecology of Marine Iguanas (\*they eat marine algae) before moving to Warwick School as Head of Department. It was this move that drew him back into beekeeping. Chemistry Teacher Gervald Frykman ran a beekeeping group and had a student (whose family lived in a flat in Leamington) who was looking to start with his own hives. Gervald spotted that the garden of the newly acquired house would make an ideal site for an apiary. Inevitably the student moved on to university – but the bees remained – and are still there!

Barry's biological career naturally included microscopy and his first task at Warwick was to bring the school's microscopes up to scratch – which naturally resulted in doing something similar for WLBK!

After a few years at Warwick School, Barry moved to the University's Department of Education to run training workshops for a National Plant Science Education programme based in Cambridge. After 'retiring' in 2007 he worked as an independent consultant on a wide range of education projects across Europe, USA, Malaysia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria before retiring 'properly'.

His love of the great outdoors led to gaining a Mountain Leadership Certificate and organising expeditions for young people in Iceland, The Yukon and Belize. He was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 1986 for this work.

Barry joined Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers (WLBK) after an encounter with our display stand at the 2014 Warwick "Show and Tell" and soon joined the committee where his experience in microscopy and education were put to good use, fulfilling the role of Education Co-ordinator (EDCO) for the branch and training, not only for our members, but those in other branches, in microscopy.

He now takes over the role of WLBK chairman from Jane Medwell drawing on his experience of chairing the Conservation Committee of the Kent Wildlife Trust, as a Trustee of the (former) Brathay Exploration Group, the Chair of Governors of Leek Wootton Primary School, and a Governor of Aylesford School.

He lives at Guy's Cliffe with his wife Anne who, along with his two daughters are, apparently, still putting up with him. These, together with his 8-year-old grandson, are and have always been the most important things in his life.

**Bernard Brown**



## BEE BOOK SALE



It has proved impossible to continue to operate the WLBK library – a case of too many books to store. There is no where to keep them at the Senior Citizen's Club and the books were too heavy to carry. Our library had grown from 2 suitcases, which could be kept under a spare bed, to 8 large boxes which were almost as heavy as a full Langstroth brood box. Rather than let them fester in storage, the Committee decided that they should be sold with members having the chance to buy what they wanted.

The book sale will take place on **Thursday 16th April from 7.30 pm** at Kenilworth Senior Citizen's Club, Abbey End – the location of our monthly meetings. Books will be priced at £5 and £10 – it will be possible to pay by cash or by credit card.

Help wanted to set out the books - from 7 pm and to staff the tills. There will be cake!

The list of books is on the [website](#), so you can browse while you are waiting for it to get warm enough to inspect your bees!

**Judith Masson**  
**Meetings Secretary**

## HEDGING OUR BETS

Members may remember that a year ago in February we planted a hedge at our Dalehouse Lane site. They were on the brow of a bank created with surplus soil from the A46 road scheme, in soil consisting largely of clay and which, in some areas, were underlain with tarmac. With the hot dry summer and no possibility of watering them, we were fearful that such young plants would not survive these conditions which had such wrought such havoc amongst even established plants and shrubs in our gardens. However, amazingly, a year on, of the 250 whips planted only 30 or so had failed and these were under the shade of a large Oak tree. These have been replaced and as it happens have been well watered in as a consequence of this winter's weather. Ain't nature wonderful!

# NOT QUITE READY FOR A SWARM!

I went to the talk given by Dave Bonner in Kenilworth on Thursday 19th March. The talk was entitled Swarm Prevention. Dave started the evening telling us of his work with Bees Abroad. He said that beekeeping in Africa is life changing because bees are kept mainly for improving pollination



in crops. An earlier, bigger or better crop brings a quicker or bigger income and means farmers can support their family better. Dave went on to talk about Swarm Prevention. It is the honeybee's nature to swarm (to reproduce their colony) so why prevent it? One reason is because if you lose a swarm it takes the remaining colony a long time to recover and you basically lose a season of honey production. The impact on the colony can be broken down like this:

- The swarm leaves when the queen cell is capped.
- 7 days for the new Queen to hatch.
- 7 days or more for the Queen to mate.
- 7-14 days for the queen to start laying.
- 21 days for worker bees to hatch.

Several things can be done to prevent swarming including using young and vigorous Queens and using strains of bees that are less "swarmy." Supers should be added as the bees need space for nectar and honey. If there is no room in the supers the brood box will be filled limiting space for brood. Old frames should be changed for drawn frames if possible. In summary if you have a vigorous queen, space and good conditions in the hive the bees are less likely to swarm.

When Dave said that the first inspection should take place in mid to late April there was a stunned silence,..... then mutterings of "I've already been in my hives!" Dave's message was be patient, be quick, check one frame, put in a couple of clean frames and close up.

After the talk over tea and cake I heard many conversations about how long to leave it before the first inspection, when to change your queen and whether to feed syrup or fondant. One thing that came across was that Dave changes his queens in August of the second year, as young bees are less likely to swarm.

Yet again you ask a beekeeper one question and you get many answers!

**Sue Cooper**



## WINTER LOSSES

45 members have responded thus far to our survey of winter losses and the results make gloomy reading. 13 suffered no losses, the remaining 32 suffered an average of 52% and 8 of these were totally wiped out. In total 68 colonies have been lost. Amongst these the following causes were suggested:-

20- not known

10 - wet weather.

Other reported causes were:- laying workers, upturning by tractor spraying, entrance becoming blocked, starvation and being weakened by Autumn wasp/hornet attack.

Neither National nor regional figures are available yet.!

## SPRING SALE

We are in the throes of organising this spring's beekeeping equipment sale. This is the planned timescale.

18<sup>th</sup> April – Issue of Browsing Catalogue

26<sup>th</sup> April – Issue of Purchasing Catalogue

Keep an eye on your Inbox for updates.

## FIRST SWARM OF THE YEAR?

Found and collected on 7th April!



# YLH – THE LATEST BUZZ

It's that time of year when we shall start to learn how successful last year's YLH foundress Queens have been in surviving the privations of winter. It may not have been the coldest, but it certainly has been a wet one. 2024/25 winter was relatively mild and is widely believed to have contributed to the heightened number of YLH nests spotted and eradicated in 2025 (163) being almost double those dealt with in 2023 (72). The survival rate of the foundress queens will impact directly on YLH numbers in 2026.

Here in Warwickshire, the probability of encountering YLH's in 2026 is still considered to be low but there is a heightened risk of "inadvertent, anthropogenic, transportational" arrivals - in other words, hitch hikers. Already this year, the first sighting of 2026 has been recorded in Doncaster on the 26<sup>th</sup> February – most likely a hitch hiker. Warwickshire's response, as a County, is to encourage our members with apiaries close to transportational hubs – motorway service stations, railway marshalling yards, transport hubs and depot's etc - to set up selective traps from now until the end of April. For WLBK, traps and bait are available for loan from Liz Bates at [bates.liz@outlook.com](mailto:bates.liz@outlook.com).

When there is a confirmed sighting of YLH within the Branch area, we will have no idea of the number of unreported colonies and thus we may well be facing a significant incursion. We need to be prepared to react quickly to such an eventuality. Contingency planning for this requires the establishment of a network of bods who will undertake identification and monitoring/trapping activities as and when required. Volunteers can fulfil one of two roles identified as part of the YLH Action Team. They can become either a "Verifier" or a "Monitor".

These roles have much in common and involve confirming, or otherwise, reports of a YLH being sighted by deploying and observing monitoring stations baited to attract YLH.

With both, when a suspected sighting has been reported, the "Verifiers"/"Monitors" in the vicinity will be contacted by the branch YLHAT Co-ordinator and asked to carry out their role for 2 or 3 weeks with observations up to 3 or 4 times daily. The results, even if negative, will need to be reported and, if positive, a photo and the

trajectory of its departure should be included in the report alongside the location and date.

The distinction between the two roles is that "Verifiers" volunteer to carry out this monitoring for suspected sightings on *other people's property* whereas a "Monitor" volunteers to perform this task only on *their own property*. The reason for this distinction is that to operate on other people's property, we require Public Liability Insurance to be in place. We do not require this where operating on one's own property. Consequently, a "Verifier" is usually a branch beekeeping member taking advantage of the public liability insurance provide through membership of the BBKA, whereas a "Monitor" can be any member of the public.

The "Verifier's" role on other people's property will involve additional tasks to that of a Monitor. These include contacting and arranging with the landowner for both the deployment of the monitoring station and access for observations and, also, to quiz the YLH sighting reporter to assess the credibility of his sighting. This role will, therefore, requires some flexibility of availability to fit in with that of reporter/landowner. "Monitors", on the other hand, have only themselves to consider.

"Verifiers" and "Monitors" will be supported by training sessions on YLH identification, types of monitoring stations/traps and their deployment.

We are, of course all volunteers and some, so they say, do have a life outside beekeeping so it is recognised that availability may well be compromised when the call comes. Consequently, by joining us in the fight against this insect, there is no firm commitment involved but will provide us with options.

You can become involved in this initiative by completing the form on our website accessible by clicking on this link [YLH Monitor & Verifier Recruitment](#), by visiting the Yellow-Legged Hornet section on the home page of our website, or by scanning the QR code on the right.

**Bernard Brown**  
YLHAT Co-ordinator Warwickshire BKA



## TEAS AT WREN HALL

If you haven't been to Wren Hall, Wroxall for Tea on a summer Sunday you have missed a treat! Every summer Sunday from 2-5 pm different charities raise funds by serving tea (coffee or squash) and **exceptional homemade cakes**. On **31<sup>st</sup> May**, it is the turn of the Women's Club. **Nikki Maritz**, a mainstay of WLBK, would like as many beekeepers as possible to support this event. Nikki has been a member of the Apiary Team, a speaker at ITB/ Taster Days and (with her sister) an entertainer at our summer BBQ/ Picnic.

Wren Hall, School lane, Wroxall, CV35 7NF is the old school off A4141 near Five Ways. There is parking, seating inside and out and outside space for children to run and play. Come if you can.

No more summer meetings but there will still be cake!

**Judith Masson, cake secretary**



# HINTS AND TIPS



The weather is gradually, although erratically, improving and the early blossom is appearing. Flowering currants are one of the first to yield nectar and the oil seed rape about the same time. Time to prepare for a first inspection of the year and here are a few hygiene hints and reminders.

Hive tools and gloves should be cleaned after inspecting each hive. A solution of 1kg of washing soda to 5 litres water will help to minimise the risk of transmission between hives.

Bee suits should be regularly cleaned and half a cup of washing soda added at the start of the wash will help to remove wax, propolis and honey stains.

Gloves should always be cleaned before an inspection as the odours from previous stings can result in further stinging action. Disposable gloves can be cleaned in the soda solution but when it is time to dispose of them do so in a container the bees cannot access.

Take a small sealable container to put any scraps of wax in. Old comb left in the apiary can lead to robbing and disease transmission.

Old brood comb should be replaced with new ideally every 3 years. So, take some new frames on that first inspection when the brood is small.

It will be worth it as finding eggs is so much easier in new comb!

When inspecting avoid crushing or squashing the bees. A dummy board can help to assist.

Inspection of cover cloths are a subject of controversy! I always have a couple with me if needed but rarely use them and wash them in soda after use to minimise the chance of them harbouring disease and reducing the possibility of transmission.

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**



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