



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

ALL A-BUZZ AT INTRO WEEKEND



Burton Green Village Hall was alive with activity on Saturday 11th April and Sunday 12th April, welcoming 25 attendees to our popular Introduction to Beekeeping event.

Throughout the weekend, our attendees were gently introduced to the fascinating world of honey bees.

Sessions were filled with curiosity, thoughtful questions and plenty of 'light-bulb' moments as participants explored bee biology, colony life and what it really means to care for bees. Delivered with warmth, humour and a wealth of experience the sessions struck a fine balance between learning and enjoyment.

Practical skills also featured strongly with attendees turning their hand to making a super frame. For many this was their first taste of beekeeping craftsmanship, approached with concentration, careful measuring and the occasional friendly comparison of finished results. The sessions proved both satisfying and confidence building and a welcome distraction from keeping one eye on the ever unpredictable weather.

The weather in fact added a touch of suspense to the weekend, intermittent rainfall meant it was uncertain whether the hives could be opened at all and anticipation grew as the final afternoon approached. Fortunately luck was on our side, the rain eased allowing attendees

the much anticipated opportunity to look inside a live hive. After a weekend of learning and discussion, seeing the bees in all their glory brought everything together beautifully. The sense of excitement was unmistakable and the smiles said it all.

As always, the refreshment breaks were just as rewarding, they were filled with lively conversation and shared observations and by the end of the weekend new friendships were formed alongside a strong connection to the association and its members.

Participants left with more than goodie bags, various other freebies and a carefully made frame, they went home with enthusiasm, growing confidence and a real appreciation for bees and beekeeping. Many were talking about next steps, equipment and how to stay involved, which is very encouraging to hear and we shall look forward to seeing many familiar faces at meetings and training apiary sessions in the months ahead

Our thanks go to the presenters whose knowledge, patience and good humour made the weekend such a success and to the many helpers who supported throughout the weekend. Your time and enthusiasm are greatly appreciated. Finally, my thanks must go to the ever unpredictable weather gods for granting us the timely pause in the rain, making that all important hive visit possible at just the right moment.

Marie Day

WHO'S WHO ON THE BRANCH COMMITTEE



VAL DILLON – WLBK TREASURERAND MORE.

There can be few members who don't know of or who have never come across Val Dillon in their beekeeping journey. By virtue of her role as Treasurer, erstwhile membership secretary, Introductory Training Courses Co-ordinator, Meet and Greet guru, stewarding our public displays, and, together with husband Terry, being the first to put her hand up when there is any call for volunteers, she is by far the most membership-facing member on the committee.

A Coventry lass born and bred, she completed a catering technician's course at college and joined the Art and Design Department of John Cleveland College in Hinckley as a catering technician. She then returned to Coventry and took up a position as technician for Food Studies at City College Coventry. Whilst off work from a broken leg, the department closed and she returned to work in an administrative position for Creative Arts. Whilst at John Cleveland College she had worked in the same department as Terry, a lecturer in design and they met up after three years, marrying a year later. Together, they took on the renovation of a derelict barn just outside Kenilworth carrying out all the work themselves except for the plastering and roofing. Seven years later they had created the most beautiful of homes as anyone who has been there to collect /deliver stuff can testify. Val, clearly, is no stranger to hard work.

Val joined the branch in 2001 after she had attended the first Introduction to Beekeeping course run by Mike Townsend. At this stage, the membership stood at 32. Val played a supporting role in running these annual courses, deploying her not inconsiderable organisational, administrative and inter-personal skills. By 2010 numbers had increased to around 100 thanks to the surge in interest in keeping bees. These same skills were very much needed when she became treasurer in 2010 as the increase in member numbers meant that the existing paper-based system could not cope and she implemented the transition to a computer-based system. She was made an honorary member in 2016.

Bees, though, were not her sole preoccupation. She and Terry kept Koi carp for many years and, you've guessed it, – she played a leading role in the running of two koi carp clubs and still acts a secretary to one today despite giving up keeping koi themselves.

The sharing of her skills and energy so generously over the past 20 or so years, often in the background, has underpinned WLBK with its current 230 membership. She is a real treasure – not just a treasurer.

Ivan A Perry

BEE BOOK SALE

Sale of the club library in April was rather a non event. There were 4 helpers (thanks to Chris Cox, Bernard, Jane and Bohdan) and as many book buyers. Yes, I know you are all busy beekeeping, with no time to read. However, there are some great bee books which heed to be re-hived. Arrangements have been made for them to migrate to the DHL Cabin for the summer. There will be opportunity to browse and buy in the autumn at our regular evening talks in September and October. An updated list of what is available will be posted on the website nearer the time.

DIARY DATES

Winter Talks - all at 7.30 pm at Kenilworth Senior Citizen Club, Abbey End, Kenilworth

17th September 2026 Margaret Murdin NDB: Honeybee nutrition - with a little on winter preparation

16th October 2026 Marin Anastasov NDB: Why bees don't follow the books

19th November 2026 Debbie Smith, Champion mead maker: Making and tasting mead

11th December 2026 The Best Christmas Party

Judith Masson
Meetings Secretary

TEA AT WREN HALL



Do come to Wren Hall, School lane, Wroxall, CV35 7NF for tea/ coffee/ squash and lovely cakes on **Sunday 31st May**, 2.30 – 5 pm. There is parking, seating inside and out and outside space for children to run and play. The organisation running that Sunday's event is 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.

YLH UPDATE

A Yellow Legged Hornet (YLH) has been confirmed, a mere

35 miles away in Castle Donnington, near Repton in South Derbyshire. Dale Smith, Nuneaton and Atherstone YLHAT co-ordinator, received the message direct from the NNSS (non-native species secretariat) of the sighting in a residential garden, recommending that his network of "Monitors" be mobilised to put out their monitoring stations. This is currently underway. Although not contacted directly, both Sutton Coldfield and Birmingham branches are on the alert. During the same week a sighting was confirmed at Rushcliffe, Nottinghamshire.



There have been 14 sightings so far this year, the first in Doncaster on the 26th February, and since then, two were spotted in Sawtry, just north of Huntingdon on the 13th March. Both these sightings, being outside the hotspot of the Southeast, are likely to be hitch hikers. Not to be outdone, on 8th April, 3 YLHs were spotted in the southeast just outside Dover and Folkestone respectively with another being spotted in Oxted (**NOT Oxford**) Surrey. A further three sightings were reported over 10th /11th April – all on the Kent coast, followed, by the time of penning this update, by 4 more. These have all been reported as single worker YLHs and, due to the time of year, are unlikely to be associated with nests, so no further action has been taken. These sightings are earlier than last year but the fact that all but one were reported by members of the public – the other was caught by a beekeeper in his trap – is, I think, testament to the public awareness campaign prompted by the BBKA and implemented by local beekeeping associations.

For us, the public shows season is about to take off and we have plans to make the most of our presence at these events to promote public awareness, using our banners, leaflets and other display materials, so please support the branch's shows. Just as effective is personal interaction with the public so do share your YLH knowledge with others in your social and business networks. Our YLH awareness promotion resources are also available on loan to members for deployment wherever they can spread the word. Remember also that we can give presentations to other organisations so please put this message across at every opportunity.

We fully expect the rate of sightings to increase over the next month or so as the overwintered Queens emerge and build their primary nests, but will increase even more steeply once the first batch of brood emerge and the YLHs embark on building their secondary nests to accommodate their peak of numbers in the early Autumn. So now is the time for heightened awareness and to be on the lookout.

These closer-to-home sightings reinforce the need to upgrade our readiness. We could still do with more "Verifiers" and "Monitors". For more information on these roles please click on this link: [YLH Monitor – Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers](#). You can register to participate in these roles by following this link: [YLH Monitor & Verifier Recruitment](#).

Please do give this serious consideration.

Bernard Brown
WLBK YLHAT Co-ordinator



SWARM SEASON

The swarm season has started, as we saw in the April BeeTalk that Bernard collected early on in the month and since then many collectors have been out responding to calls. With more sunny days to come we can almost guarantee that phone call around lunch time.

Our Swarm Collectors can now record swarms they are collecting by going to the Swarm Collectors page on our website: <https://warleambees.org.uk/swarm-collectors/>. We ask that you take a few minutes to do this as it helps us understand what is happening this season.

Go to the same link if you would like to join the Swarm Collectors to provide a service to the public and either replenish your stock or pass on to others. The BBKA May Talk (Zoom) might inspire you: 'Practical Swarm Collection' by Gerry Stuart on **Tuesday 19th May** at 7pm. Gerry is a retired police officer and member of Torbay Beekeepers.

As important as it is having Collectors we also need people who want Swarms. As a branch we prioritise those who have no bees but all are welcome to register on the Swarms Wanted list (<https://warleambees.org.uk/swarms-wanted/>).

Rich Pierce
(swarms@warleambees.org.uk)

WINTER LOSSES SURVEY

Our winter loss survey is complete and makes a dismal reading. 65 members responded. 18 suffered no losses but the remaining 47 members lost 90 colonies between them. This amounts to losses of 30% of the colonies which went into the winter. Nine members' apiaries were totally wiped out.

National and Regional Figures have yet to be published but, anecdotally, much the same trend is anticipated.

There is however some better news as swarm preparations are prompting splits and members are also collecting swarms reported by the public.

NEW LOOK TRAINING APIARY

The training apiary at Kings Hill Nurseries has had quite a make-over this year, thanks to our amazing team of dedicated beekeeping workmen.

The constant rain through January and February turned the whole place into a quagmire but we were able to have several working parties to clear the sheds, clean all the equipment and have a general tidy-up. As the rain stopped, the gardening began. On one Saturday morning, there were 14 of us beavering away!

It became obvious that a new surface was needed to keep the weeds under control. With many thanks to Neil Tabram, we acquired a large consignment of paving slabs which were going begging.

In mid-April, Steve Rushton got together a "Super Sub-Team" with Neil Tabram, Paul Hind and Chris Reynolds to complete the work. After many hours- and not to mention a few stings- they created a superb new look to the apiary. The hives are now on hard standing and the central area is covered with a thick layer of heavy bark.

On Tuesday 28th April, we were very happy to welcome ten new trainees who had attended the Introduction To Beekeeping course earlier in the month. Their journey begins...

A massive thank you from the training team for all the wonderful help and support we have received in the past year.

Maggie, Steve, Andy, Nicki, Richard, Hester, Becky, Neil and Paul



Before and after - what a difference!



SWARM CONTROL WITH THE SNELGROVE BOARD

Swarming is the honeybee's vital means of ensuring the survival of the species. However, for the beekeeper it can mean a significant loss of bees and the subsequent drop in honey production.

To prevent the loss and hassle associated with this natural phenomenon, various methods have been developed over the years to manage or reduced swarming. This article describes two that use a Snelgrove board to control the movement of bees and the suppression of swarming behaviour.

Snelgrove

Louis Edward Snelgrove, President of the British Beekeepers Association in 1956 and author of the book, *Swarm Prevention and Control* (1934 - still published today) was influential in educating the beekeeping world that there is a key factor that triggers swarming; namely, the presence of excess nurse bees. That is, when there is a surplus of nurse bees to the requirements of tending the brood, swarming, if other conditions are right, will be induced.

Snelgrove went on to reason that, if by some simple means, the nurse bees and field bees could be separated from each other, the swarming impulse would not develop. This proved to be the case.

There are now many methods of swarm control but all of them are based on the principle that if you separate either the queen, the brood or the field bees from the other two, the swarming instinct is suppressed.

Using the Snelgrove Board

Snelgrove developed methods of swarm control that use an ingeniously designed double entrance board (commonly known as a Snelgrove board). By opening and closing a series of paired doors the beekeeper separates the flying bees from either the queen or the brood whilst maintaining the bees in the same hive structure. This separation is the vital factor in suppressing the swarm behaviour.

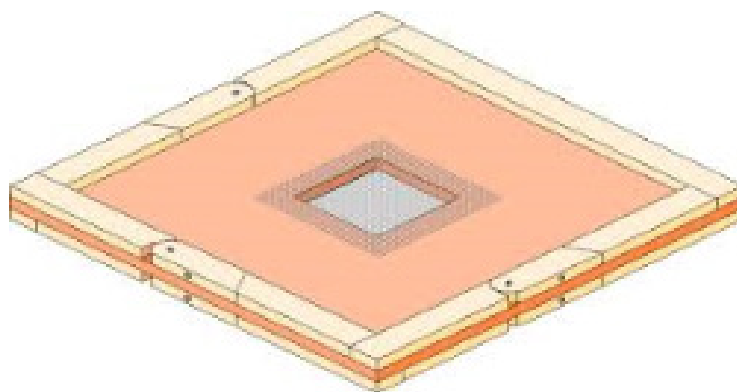
One of the big advantages of using the Snelgrove board is that it enables the beekeeper to do the operation under one roof. This economises on equipment – one stand, one floor, one queen excluder and one cover board.

Several ways of using his board are described by Snelgrove but they all involve splitting the colony and continually bleeding young bees from the top brood box through the opening and closing of a series of entrances.

Method I - Pre-emptive Split

Snelgrove's first method involves the following procedure for swarm control, and its success is dependent on there being no swarm cells in the brood chamber:

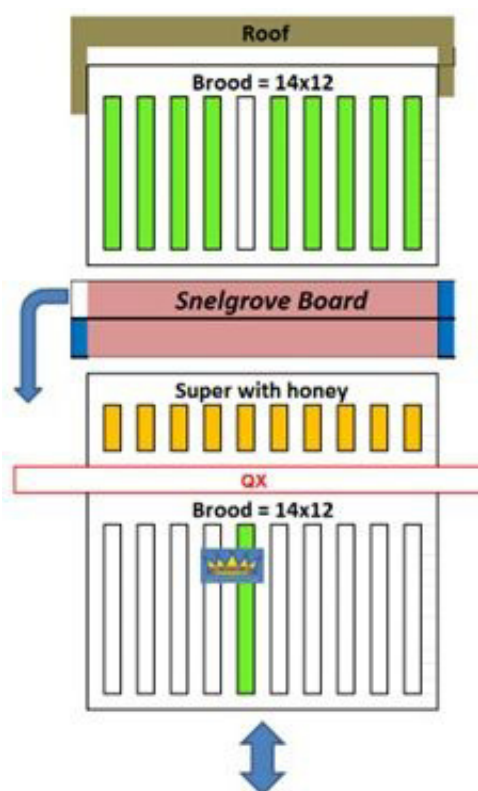
Day 1) Find the queen and place her in a brood body on a frame of brood. Add frames of drawn comb or foundation, which provides the queen plenty of egg laying space. This becomes the bottom box. Add a queen excluder, then supers and, on the top, another brood body



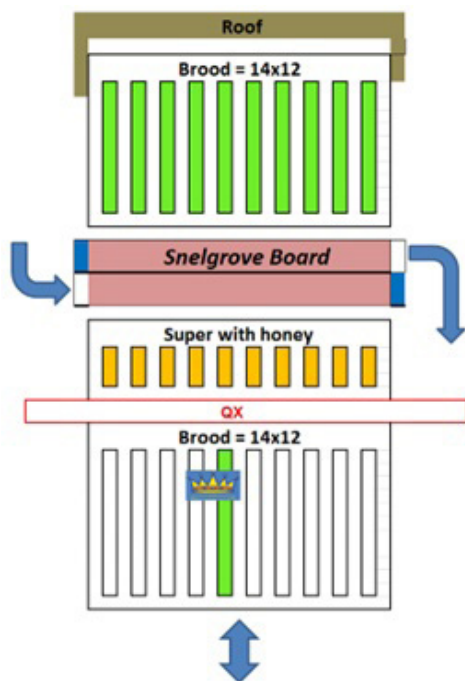
containing all the remaining brood from the original brood body.

Day 4) Place the Snelgrove board under the top box (the side with no entrances goes at the front of the hive). From the perspective of looking from behind the hive, open the top left entrance. Bees that have learnt to fly before will exit from this door but will return to the entrance at the front of the hive with which they are familiar.

In a matter of days, the flying bees will have left the top box and will have returned to the stock below through the main entrance. In the top box, the bees, although in contact with the stock below through a wire mesh in the board, will consider themselves queen-less and will start producing queen cells.



Day 7) By day seven, many nurse bees will have been 'promoted' to flying duties. These new flying bees will recognise the top left door as the entrance to their hive. To move them to the lower box, close the open entrance and then open the one underneath this (bottom left) which provides access to the stock of bees below. In addition, open the top right entrance. The flying bees leave by this latter opening and when they return to the entrance with which they are familiar they find it is blocked. Instead, they enter through the bottom one, which leads them away from their brood box to the stock below.



Day 14) By day fourteen more nurse bees will have assumed flying duties. These new flying bees will recognise the top right door as the entrance to their hive. To move them to the lower box, close the open

entrance and then open the one underneath this (bottom right) which provides access to the stock of bees below.

Open the top back entrance. The flying bees leave by this opening and when they return to the entrance with which they are familiar they find it is blocked. Instead, they enter the bottom one which leads them, (you've guessed it) away from their brood box to the stock below.

In this way, the field bees are continually diminished in the top box and increased in the bottom box.

Although in one hive structure, the bees in the upper box will attempt to raise a new queen. If the raising of a new queen is not the desired outcome, the beekeeper can knock down these cells.

Depending on their goal, a beekeeper can manage the colony to reunite it, replace queens or use the upper box as a nucleus colony.

Method II - When Queen Cells are Present

If, on inspecting the hive, queen cells have been discovered Snelgrove suggested an alternative method to control swarming using his board. This second method involves placing the queen in the top box together with most of the brood and placing a frame of capped brood in the bottom box together with frames of foundation or drawn comb. The Snelgrove board is placed under the top box. The sequence of opening and closing the entrances is different to the method described above but the principle of bleeding field bees into the lower box is the same. The separation of the flying bees from the queen tends to lead the bees to destroy the queen cells in the top box.

Conclusion

The Snelgrove board is an ingenious device that can be used in different ways to separate the flying bees from either the queen or the brood, which acts to suppress the instinct to swarm. However, a one-time manipulation using the board may not prevent the bees swarming later in the season. Regular inspections are required. It is also advised to have young queens that are strong layers in the colonies and to provide space for the building of new comb as these factors are also recognised to reduce the tendency to swarm.

Russell Connor

BBKA CONVENTION REPORT

As we wended our way to Harper Adams University near Newport, Shropshire for the 2026 BBKA Beekeeping Convention we were speculating about the quality of the lectures this year. Certainly the topics on the programme were topical and relevant and certainly the lecturers were leaders in their respective fields, but their success as in every talk is totally dependent on the presentational skills brought to bear. We were not disappointed. This year the lectures scored in all respects and our attention was held throughout the three days we attended. Lectures of particular interest were the one by Pieter Soece on the yellow legged hornet (YLH) experience in Belgium where the rate of spread and increase was shattering and bodes ill for things to come in this country. He, personally, had been stung once by a single YLH and suffered anaphylaxis. It was only the swift action of a friend in rushing him to hospital that saved his life. Ten minutes later and it could have been a very different story. It is even more amazing that he should continue his one-man quest to monitor, inform and lobby for the YLH.

Another lecture promised the end of scraping and scorching hive parts. Based on the observation that feral bees coat the walls of their chamber with propolis and never remove it and that yet they don't coat our hives to anything like the same extent, they speculated that the reason this behaviour was not repeated in our hives was due to the smooth finish of our walls, whereas the wild nest site walls were rough. So they set about trials and cut grooves in the walls of a standard brood box about 6mm wide and 6mm apart to a depth of about 3mm, and hey presto, the bees coated them with propolis. In a way, given the hygienic properties of propolis, its retention by the bees should not be surprising. Roughened walls do not seem to have been taken up by the hive manufacturers p.... yet.... but the next time a brood box comes my way, I may well give it a go.

Whilst the lectures exceeded expectation, the trade show didn't. There were few bargains and fewer stands than last time. One encouraging feature was the size of Simon the Beekeeper's stand and the range of products This company has come a long way since it's days in Nuneaton and is now based near Liverpool.

Ivan A Perry

HINTS AND TIPS

- Don't forget to take extra care when visiting a shared apiary. You may know your bees really well and consider them well behaved but other hives may contain more aggressive bees who may delight in reminding you of their species' potential!

- If you wear contact lenses it is a good idea to carry a pair of glasses with you. Should you get stung around the eye area swelling can occur pretty rapidly. This may result in the difficult decision to either take your lenses out promptly and not see so well if driving home or leave them in and perhaps struggle to remove them later at home when the swelling maybe even worse.



- **Honey for Hangovers**

Honey contains 40% of fructose, which is known to speed up oxidation of alcohol by the liver. Honey also contains the enzyme catalase which further aids the removal of alcohol. Some people recommend eating honey before drinking alcohol as a preventative measure against a hangover. Drinks that are high in congeners- substances that give the drink its distinctive aroma and flavour- cause worse hangovers. Fructose and vitamin C help eliminate congeners from the body.

Well, that's the theory, and the practical is.....to cure or prevent a hangover take 2 tablespoons of honey with as much lemon juice as you like. Let me know how you get on!



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.
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