



WARWICKSHIRE BEEKEEPER

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A MOST DESIRABLE RESIDENCE WITH ALL MOD CONS!

Is Tim Newcombe trying too hard to attract scout bees to his bait hive by installing TV or is it just 'future proofing'?



Tim's wife Berni, took this picture of a rainbow (unfortunately probably not visible in the black & white printed version of WB) against a blue sky and inadvertently included his roof top bait hive and TV aerials of the house next door

Newsletter of the Warwickshire Beekeepers' Association

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EDITORIAL

Spring is now well and truly under way and I suspect that most colonies are turning their collective minds to swarming. I know ours are tending that way and certainly the Coventry Branch bee colonies were making preparations in earnest last weekend resulting in an epic beekeeping session where Dave Bonner directed operations and the rest of us ran around doing his bidding, having lost track of what was going on after the first hour or so!! I think even Dave had to go away and lie down in a darkened room for a while to gather his thoughts!

This made me wonder if members have any interesting anecdotes or tales to tell of their beekeeping exploits, unusual places they have collected swarms from etc. I would like to try to do a regular slot of 'Swarm Stories' or 'Warwickshire Beekeeper Tales' but I need you all to chip in to supply the tall tales...

Are you a competent beekeeper?

Gill Grimshaw - Examinations Secretary

A common reaction after getting your first bees is to realise the difference between your taught course or reading, and what is in front of you when you open the hive. The first year of beekeeping is an exciting journey; a journey when you begin to understand the balance between theory, knowledge and practice that is the craft of beekeeping. You may wonder if you are doing okay, your fellow beekeepers may hope you are. This isn't just about newbees, though. Over the years practice and knowledge changes; more experienced beekeepers may have lost touch with the latest thinking and practice or wish to progress their qualifications.

Consider then, reassuring yourself (and your fellow beekeepers) that you *are* a competent beekeeper. As a member of BBKA, you can ask BBKA to assess your competence and (if you are successful) you will get a badge to prove it. Passing the "Basic" is also a gateway to much that BBKA has to offer in the way of learning and development. The BBKA *Basic Assessment* is a practical assessment of how you handle bees and your knowledge of the important facets of beekeeping such disease identification and swarm

management. A fellow beekeeper will observe as you open a hive and the gentle conversation while you are going through a routine inspection will probe your knowledge a little further. Many people had my experience of "doing the basic"; they enjoyed it, learnt much during the assessment and gained confidence as a result.

You may be lucky and belong to a branch of WBKA that runs training and examination sessions and have already done or been entered for the assessment. However, if you have had bees for a year or more and it hasn't been suggested to you, or you don't know how to go about "doing the basic" there are three things you can do;

- Ask your Branch Secretary for more information about what is available at branch level
- Look at http://www.bbka.org.uk/learn/examinations_assessments/basic_assessment for more information, and then
- Get in touch with me to discuss further

There is still plenty of time to register for an assessment if you have been keeping bees for a year or more, so go on, why not do it!

(Contact details on page 2)

SQUARE STEMS AND CUNNING FLOWERS

The Lamiaceae

Celia F Davis

In contrast to last month's family, the Lamiaceae, or Dead-nettle family, is not of great economic importance to agriculture and, at least in the UK, is not a family which gives us honey crops. It does though, contain many plants which are both attractive and provide nectar and pollen over a long season. This is important as we now recognise the importance of honey bees having a range of different pollens to give them a properly balanced diet and to help their immune systems.

The family can be confused with others, particularly the Verbenaceae, to which it is closely related, but the features are a (usually) square stem and flowers which are highly evolved with five sepals and five petals, much modified. The sepals often appear to be only two as three are fused to form an upper sepal and two are fused to form a lower one. They can be recognised as they are toothed according to the number of parts making them up. Similarly the petals are fused below into a tube with sometimes an upper 'hood' made from two petals and a lower, three-lobed structure, frequently incorporating two side 'wings' and a central lobe providing a good landing stage.



Sage Flower
Photo: Celia Davis

The photograph of a common sage (*Salvia officinalis*) flower illustrates the point. The length of the petal tube determines which bees can utilise the flowers, dependant on the length of their tongues. There are usually four anthers and two stigmas. Mostly the flowers contain male and female parts (hermaphrodite) but sometimes male-sterile flowers are produced.

A bunch of herbs

I am not going to describe individual plants this time as in this family, there are no dominant honey species as there are in the Brassicaceae or Fabaceae. The family contains many herb plants, including sage, mint, thyme, rosemary, hyssop and marjoram. In addition there is lemon balm, which goes by the attractive scientific name *Melissa officinalis* (*Melissa* is Greek for honey bee). It is attractive to bumblebees but the flower tube is a little too long for honey bees. It is said that rubbing the highly scented leaves on a branch will encourage a swarm to settle there and that a skep, rubbed inside with the leaves, will be attractive to bees, but this may well be in the realm of beekeeping myths. The scent, rubbed on the hands is also said to deter stings. I have not tried it. Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) too, is an excellent bumblebee plant but the petal tube is too long for the comparatively short tongues of our bees. Thyme, on the other hand, gives a beautiful honey but it is doubtful whether it is ever sufficiently abundant to produce a crop in this country, although in some upland areas it grows wild in large quantities. It is the source of the famous Hymettus honey which comes from Mount Hymettus near Athens and incorporates

a lovely spicy flavour.

Lavender

Special mention must be made of lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*). It is very attractive to bees of various kinds and the nectar is accessible to our honey bees. The plant grows best on light alkaline soils with very good drainage and needs full sun. It flourishes in parts of southern Europe, where good honey crops can be obtained from it, but struggles in our garden, which consists of heavy, wet, slightly acidic soil. It does however, do well from cuttings, so all my lavenders tend to be small and young.

There are lavender farms in the UK, notably in Norfolk, but there are several in Shropshire, including one belonging to a lady who is a beekeeper. Details of them can be found on the web. Unfortunately, where lavender is grown as a crop, it is harvested when the flowers are in their prime.

Gardeners' friends

Many of the plants I've mentioned are well worth growing in the garden. We have a small herb garden which is always full of bees, and other insects, when any of the plants are in flower and

causes me to waste hours. So get your gardening and cooking friends involved with growing herbs and you will be doing bees a great service.

In addition there are ornamentals which are also good. These include *Nepeta spp.*, the catmints, *Phlomis*, a very handsome tallish plant usually with yellow flowers and downy foliage, although we have a pink-flowered one, *Prunella*, very low-growing plants which come in red/purple/white and are wonderful, trouble-free plants for the front of the border. Their wild representative is self-heal, which often grows as a weed in lawns, has pretty purple flowers and is very attractive to bees. There are also the various varieties of ornamental *Salvias*, which may be somewhat tender, but are very popular garden plants.

Remember that they are not all useable by honey bees but many solitary bees and bumblebees can still benefit.

Berkswell Gardens

11 gardens (including The Pines) in and around Berkswell will be open for the NGS on Sunday June 26th 11am to 6 pm. Cost £5. Teas available.

Choosing an Apiary Site

This advice on beekeeping was given by the Roman poet Virgil in his *Georgics* which he presented to Caesar Augustus in 29 BC:

First look for a site and position for your apiary, where no wind can enter (since the winds prevent them carrying home their food) and where no sheep or butting kids leap about among the flowers, or wandering cattle brush the dew from the field, and wear away the growing grass. But let there be clear springs nearby, and pools green with moss, and a little stream sliding through the grass. Whether the water flows or remains still, throw willows across the centre, and large stones, so that it's full of bridges where they can rest, and spread their wings to the summer sun if by chance a swift Easterly has wet the lingerers or dipped them in the stream. Let the hives themselves have narrow entrances, whether they're seamed from hollow bark, or woven from pliant osiers: since winter congeals the honey with cold, and heat loosens it with melting. Either problem is equally to be feared with bees: it's not for nothing that they emulate each other in lining the thin cells of their hives with wax, and filling the crevices with glue made from the flowers, and keep a store of it for this use, stickier than bird lime or pitch from Phrygian Ida.

Via ebees

Drama Queen

As I was heading to Stoneleigh Park early on Saturday morning on 14th May for a two day queen rearing course I reflected on my knowledge of the topic. For me it's the queen and colony's job to do the queen rearing. As a beekeeper I just blag eggs and queen cells from fellow beekeepers and their nice docile colonies. But with an antisocial colony in the garden and my general husbandry exam looming it was about time to find out more;

The course was organized by the Three Musketeers of the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association; David Blower, Dave Bonner and Douglas Nethercleft, so it was entertaining, very informative and so practical.

With a mix of presentations, Q&A sessions and in the apiary work, we learnt all about the different stages of queen rearing, cell raising and then three different techniques: the Miller, Cupkit and Grafting methods.

By the end of Day One we put a Miller frame and two bars of grafted larvae into hives at the BBKA apiary and you can see their results in the photos.



Successful grafts

Day 2 covered queen cell distribution, queen introduction and mating.

Was I inspired? Well it wasn't as complicated as I thought and it doesn't need too much more new equipment! It really helped me to understand a lot about bee behavior.

The weekend was great and very sociable, hearing from other beekeepers about their experiences including trying to find drone congregation areas.

What was the first thing I did when I got home? Of course it was to put a Miller frame laid up with eggs from my favorite colony into my 'unloved' 'at point of swarm' colony. So I have now started taking a bit more control and am raising my own queens.

One place on the course was allocated to each of the eight branches and all the branches were represented. So I was very lucky to attend and now I want to cascade my knowledge to other local beekeepers and help to contribute to local bee improvement initiatives.

Jane Nimmo
Birmingham Branch



Successful Miller Frame



TOM'S COLUMN

Tim Newcombe

Queen rearing. This is my second year of queen rearing. Last year I tried using the Cupkit system where the queen is confined within a special unit on a frame. Within the unit are removable plastic cups for her to lay eggs in. Worker bees can come and go through the excluder sized holes. Here the queen is included rather than excluded. The queen is then released and the eggs are placed into receiving cups on a cellbar or special frame for the worker bees to develop into queen cells. In theory this is less intrusive than grafting because no eggs or larvae have to be removed from cells. In practice it is hit and miss whether the queen lays in the unit. I had about 20% success rate and good results with the transfer and raising of queens in Keiler mini-nucs. This year I tried the same again with less success so tried grafting larvae into the same cups which were then easily transferred to the cellbar. Much, much easier and a much simpler process.

The medium for the queen raising can be based on a queenless colony or a queenright colony. Without going into too much detail I have tried both, but favour the queenright way using the Ben Harden method where the queen cells are raised in a brood box above the brood box housing the queen and separated by two supers.

Tom was called out to a swarm this week. It was a very handsome prime swarm on a very accessible shoulder high bush. He assembled his kit, put on his suit and gloves and decided to record this one on camera for posterity. Seconds after the click the cluster unravelled before his eyes and rose several metres high. It paused for a moment before heading off with great purpose to an undisclosed destination.

Must have been camera shy he said. He followed for five minutes and then the swarm disappeared behind a row of houses. He was surprised just how fast they moved. He looked in hedges and gardens and in the process interrupted the slumber in the sunshine of several pensioners who soon became fascinated by his quest. Not one had seen anything. It was quite surreal how they had vanished into thin air. More searching in the nearby woods without success. Oh well... one that got away.

On the subject of swarm collection a word of warning from one who relishes the challenge and from Tom who has had a few disasters which could have ended with costly litigation. Swarm collection is indeed a buzz and a certain glory is available to the collector who appears to perform a miracle requiring great composure and bravery. There are drawbacks however. Sometimes the swarms are in inaccessible places and are very well established.

Chimney bees are impossible. (There was one exception when we were able to dismantle the chimney because it was being replaced). Others best left to the experts are lurking behind soffit boards or beneath floorboards. These are rarely removed successfully. Success only comes when the queen is found within the cluster. Without her there is no future for the colony. It is guaranteed that she will retreat into the deepest and darkest recess when disturbed or exposed to light. So she is rarely found when there are many escape routes.

I have seen the devastation caused by Tom in his enthusiasm to find the queen. Often encouraged by the house owner who is initially desperate to get rid of the bees ...he has ripped off and

broken soffit boards, slipped and put his foot through an upstairs window and then sprayed pink cavity foam (bright pink was the colour provided) into the space occupied by the nest after its removal so that it couldn't return. The problem was that the foam refused to stay put. It dribbled slowly down the wall and windows until it reached the ground, two floors below. At this point the owner's patience was seen to diminish. Tom sensed that escape was now the only option, and the cost of damages dominating his thoughts. He got away alright and sneaked back later in the dark for bees and equipment...but sadly had not found the queen. He was extremely fortunate.

My advice is to stand back and assess the situation before commitment and decide whether the swarm and queen can be retrieved without risk to life, limb or property. The bees should also be considered as we have a duty of care to them and should do our best for their survival.

COMB

Part 5 by John Chambers

How might I use the knowledge gained from researching the previous four articles in the apiary?

I confess that my favourite part of beekeeping is sifting through the best evidence I have found and working out my own way of applying it. I suspect that others are just the same and this is why there are as many ways of beekeeping as there are beekeepers! Of course, any of the following ideas might be flawed and I could have disastrous losses, but that is a risk I am prepared to take as I continue learning.

Drawing new comb.

I now have a better understanding of the circumstances required to draw new comb. It seems to me that there is no point giving colonies new frames to draw if they still have plenty of empty cells within the hive. In the absence of a nectar flow, it is unrealistic to expect comb to be drawn if the bees are not provided with a plentiful syrup supply. Alarmed at the potential for contaminants in foundation, I am tempted to experiment with home-made starter strips.

There is always merit in having a spare supply of drawn frames. Therefore, I wonder whether it might be possible to place a single colony into a near

perpetual comb-drawing state. A newly housed swarm will have a strong urge to build comb. I wonder whether, for the benefit of the apiary, this can be exploited by the strategic removal of drawn frames and the constant feeding of syrup.

Using comb congestion as an early warning swarm sign

There are many subtle clues that a colony might be preparing to swarm. The observant beekeeper should be aware of the growing possibility of such an event well before the first queen cell is charged with a larva. Progressive reduction in the amount of free comb might serve as one of several such soft indicators.

Using drawn comb as a swarm delaying tactic

I understand that, if done early enough, the addition of drawn comb to a colony in the early stages of swarm preparation might briefly delay proceedings, thereby allowing time for a more satisfactory, definitive and planned intervention by the beekeeper. However, it is now clear to me that the addition of foundation to such a colony will achieve nothing.

Colony dependent attitude towards drone comb

If a reasonably fixed percentage of a

colony's comb is drone comb then it seems churlish to tamper with this. Indeed, if one is happy with the behavioural characteristics of the colony in question then these are precisely the sort of drones that one would want in the area for mating purposes. However, for the avoidance of inbreeding, one would not necessarily want them mating with one's own virgin queens. The maintenance of a good and environmentally-suited drone population within one's apiary should perhaps be viewed as one of the most important community-spirited gestures that any beekeeper should make for the benefit of their local colleagues.

However, at the other end of the spectrum, drones from poorly performing or badly behaved colonies should perhaps be viewed as a community scourge. Of course, such colonies should ideally be re-queened. However, if this is not done or in those instances where a colony shows intermediate traits, I might be more inclined to use drone culling as part of my integrated pest management approach towards the control of the colony's varroa population.

Relaxed attitude to a little bit of brood in the supers.

I will continue to use queen excluders in my own idiosyncratic manner until such time as it goes disastrously wrong for me! By this I mean that I will use a queen excluder until I have a super full of capped honey. After that I will dispense with it in the belief that a queen will generally not cross a full frame of capped honey to lay more eggs. I will simply add further supers (when required) to the top of the super stack rather than directly on top of the brood box. My personal experience is that worker bees will move honey upwards from the lowest parts of the bottom super to expand the brood nest if necessary. All of this will cause me less concern now that I understand that

bees actually have a preference for honey deposition in cells that have formerly been used for brood. In fact, over the years, I might try to deliberately mix it up a bit so that a light smattering of old brood cells are introduced throughout my super frames.

Acceptance of a bit more aggression when empty supers are first put on

Now I understand that empty drawn frames act as a positive stimulus for nectar foraging, I will ensure that I have at least one empty frame on the top of the super stack during the foraging season and will accept the two obvious theoretical drawbacks associated with this. The first of these is that my bees might behave a bit more defensively, again as a direct result of the empty comb. There is not much I can do about this, except try to improve the behaviour of my bees through selective breeding. The second obvious problem is that the bees will have more dead space within the hive that will negatively impact upon their thermoregulatory activities. I can mitigate against this to a certain extent by insulating the top and sides of the hive throughout the whole year.

Empty super in autumn

For the first time in 2015, I placed a near-empty empty super on top of each colony when I performed my final honey harvest in September and I only fed each colony strong syrup made from 8kg of sugar. Every colony continued to forage very strongly until early November and felt suitably heavy for successful overwintering when hefted in mid-November. Presumably, the empty comb encouraged this foraging activity. I assumed that, after millennia of coexistence, the honey bees would cope perfectly well with ivy honey despite its highly granulated nature. I also hoped, but did not check, that my colonies would not enter winter with their brood areas so congested with honey that it interfered with build-up in late winter and early spring.

Recipe of the month

Douglas Nethercleft

Honey Pudding 2

(For 4)

Ingredients

6 oz plain flour
2 oz margarine
2 tbsp honey
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
Pinch of salt
Milk as necessary

Method

Rub margarine and honey into flour. Add milk to make a stiff dough. Place into a bowl, cover with cling film or a tied cloth and steam for about 1¼ hours.

Serve with custard or cream and drizzle with extra honey.

Acknowledgement: Facts about Honey (4th Edition) – Beekeeping Annual Office, Harlow, Essex (Price 3d)

Note - The above publication makes much of honey as a medicine but, today, some of the 'recipes' may need a little further research!

Honey and Elderberry.

5 spoonful elderberry syrup, 1 spoonful honey, as much powdered sal prunella as will lie on a sixpence. A teaspoonful at intervals for sore throat.

Honey and Ipecacuanha.

Tablespoon of honey, juice of half a lemon and a teaspoon of ipecacuanha wine in half a pint of boiling water. Good for whooping cough.

HOW BEES LAND

Landing is tricky: hit the ground too fast and you will crash and burn; too slow and you may stall and fall. Bees manage their approach by monitoring the speed of images moving across their eyes. By slowing, so that the speed of the looming landing pad's image on the retina remains constant, bees manage to control their approach. But what happens in the final few moments before touch down? And how do bees adapt to landing on surfaces ranging from the horizontal to upside-down ceilings? Curious to know more about bee landing strategies Mandyam Srinivasan and others from the Queensland Brain Institute used a high-speed camera to film the instant of touch down on surfaces at various inclinations.

The scientists built a bee-landing platform that could be inclined at any angle from horizontal to inverted, then trained bees to land on it and began filming. Having collected film of the bees landing on surfaces ranging from 0-180° and every 10° inclination between, they analysed the bees landing strategies and saw that the bees' approach could be broken down into three phases:

Initially the bees approached from almost any direction and at any speed however, as they got closer to the platforms, they slowed dramatically, until they were 16mm away and then hovered for from between 50ms to over 140ms. When the surface was horizontal or inclined slightly, the bees' hind legs were almost within touching distance of the surface, so it was simply a matter of the bee gently lowering itself and grabbing hold with its rear feet before lowering the rest of the body. However, when landing on surfaces ranging from vertical to inverted, their antennae were closest to the surface

during the hover phase. The team saw that the antennae grazed the surface and this contact triggered the bees to reach up with the front legs, grasp hold of the surface and then slowly bring the middle and hind legs up too.

Finally the team concluded that bees land most easily on surfaces inclined at 60° to the horizontal. They found that when bees fly slowly or hover, their abdomen tilts down so that the tips of the legs and antennae lie in a plane at an angle of 60° allowing the legs and antennae to touch down simultaneously. "It seems like they are adapted to land on surfaces at this angle and we are keen to find out whether many flowers have this natural tilt" said Srinivasan.

Nottinghamshire BKA via ebees (adapted)

Branch News

Birmingham Branch

Train the Trainer

On the 3rd April, after surviving Rowse's April Fools' of limited edition Wasp honey, Noel very kindly offered a car share to Jane and myself. We flew down the M42 and M40, and arrived at Stoneleigh at 7:50am for a morning of Train the Trainer. This is an excellent way for members who have completed their 'Basic' to get more involved in their association apiaries.

There is a strong sense of community amongst our beekeepers, especially with our neighbouring districts. Everyone who attended helped set up and pack up, and even helped with the unfortunate surprise of the forgotten security details to enter the building. As they say, it's not necessarily what you know, but who you know.

Jane, Colin, and myself attended the Train the Trainer morning workshop, and gained a lot of insight in how to demonstrate and teach our knowledge of beekeeping in the apiary, with emphasis on good practice, safety, hygiene and working towards improving good bee husbandry. We were guided through risk assessment, teaching lighting and using the smoker, the use of the hive tool, how to open up a hive and close the hive, what to do after the hive is closed, how to conduct a disease inspection and then some general points to remember throughout the

inspection.

The morning was divided into two sessions. The infamous and very knowledgeable Celia Davis, also our County Chairman, provided a presentation on key points to remember when teaching and demonstrating to beginner beekeepers.

The second half was a practical session, where we practiced demonstrating lighting a smoker correctly and demonstrating opening a hive. Unfortunately, the weather was too cold to open and demonstrate on any live hives, so we practiced on 'dummy' hives.

So, you can expect us to be passing on what we learned at apiary meetings. Most importantly, with an attitude which strongly encourages members to participate in association activities and events and developing and sharing their knowledge. So what are you waiting for? Get stuck in!

Sarah Hopkins

Coventry & District Branch

www.covbeebbranch.co.uk

A small band of trusty committee members have had a big job on their hands trying to reduce the number of hives in use in the branch apiary at Ryton. With all the variations of hives in different states, trying to get them all in good order whilst also creating nucs

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that were available for members to purchase was extremely difficult work. However, they are getting there and a number of members have taken advantage of the good quality nucs on offer. Well done Dave and those that worked with you.

Saturday 14th May saw five candidates attend the first of our Beekeeping Taster Days at Ryton. A smaller number than we expect for these popular events, but at least they all had very personal attention! They seemed to enjoy and appreciate it and we had some very good feedback from them. They were well looked after by Julia, Mike, Peter, and Bill. Also big thanks to Graham and Jean who exercised control from a distance and ensured that all registrations were dealt with, that tea/coffee-making facilities were available, and that everyone went home with a goodie bag – which pleased them immensely. Thanks to both for their efforts!

Sunday 21st May will see the return of those students who took our Beginner's Beekeeping Course last February. They will be at Ryton to complete their apiary visit. As I write it looks like the weather should be reasonable. So we hope that handling a few bees for real will convince them that they really do want to become beekeepers and learn to do it properly – like what we do (Ahem!).

Looking ahead a little. On Saturday June 11th, Bill Crofts (i.e. me) will attend the Coventry Weaver's House Craft Day. I will take some beekeeping artefacts that should be of interest and in a further effort to support the 'craft' theme, I have told myself that I will revive my meagre skep-making skills and perhaps sit and do some of that while the public look on in admiration. At the moment I've got all the gear and no idea.

Our next branch get-together will be at Ryton on Sunday 19th June, however, someone will be there doing branch inspections every Sunday between about 3pm and 5pm, and would be more than pleased to see anyone who would like to assist and perhaps learn.

As always, please see our website via the url given above if you would like any other information about our branch and associated events.

Bill Crofts

Rugby Branch

Swarm time. Nature's way of reminding us of reproduction! Although to date we have not been inundated with swarm calls, the ones caught have provided perfect starter colonies for our new beekeepers, good luck to them all for their first season.

Last month David Bonner provided our branch meeting with a less delightful prospect! That of the potential high risk of the Asian Hornet and the Small Hive Beetle arriving in the UK. David described and clearly explained the life cycle of each, the damage that could occur and the best ways to identify the presence of these frighteningly destructive threats to our apiaries. Be alert was the message. David always promotes good husbandry and we are delighted to hear so many beekeepers have taken note and performed either shook swarms or Bailey comb changes a sure way to reduce risk of disease. Your words have not been in vain David!

Rugby fete was another very successful day for the branch (apart from the heavy April showers towards the end) and promoted beekeeping and awareness in the local area. Thank you to the supporters of the event.

The apiary is moving on well thanks again to key members.

Branch News



Gail Plester

Shipston Branch

Following our 'Introduction to Beekeeping' course it was great to welcome so many new beekeepers to our First Tuesday meeting at The Gate in Brailes. The meeting began at an earlier time to enable members to view the progress of the branch apiary. The hives are now in situ; Mike Clarke, Rod Oates and David Blower have erected a fence to separate the apiary from the pub's garden just in time for the spell of warm weather. They have been busy working on the pavilion as it needs a new floor and repairs to the roof (in time for the wet weather that will surely follow). There's still work to be done and others would be welcome if you have an hour or two to spare, just contact Mike to join the happy band of workers.

Back indoors James Robertson-Dunn guided us through swarm prevention, swarm control and swarm collection, something we're all thinking about as we begin to find queen cells in our

colonies. Swarm control can seem complex especially if the queen is elusive but James took us through a 'shook swarm' approach that does not require the queen to be found.

Weekly apiary sessions for new beekeepers have now begun with two groups meeting; one on Monday evenings, the other on Thursday evenings. They will work with a colony throughout the season alongside two tutors who will take them through basic manoeuvres enabling them to feel confident and competent enough to manage their own hives next year.

New beekeepers and several more experienced beekeepers enjoyed our first open apiary session at Chairman Chris Paxford's smallholding. He demonstrated the use of a Horsley board and we then examined a colony where it had been applied a week earlier. Drones were also marked and clipped as practice for marking and clipping queens in our own apiaries. It was fortunate that not only was the weather warm enough to open hives but also sit outside and enjoy tea or coffee and Caroline's (Chris's wife) delicious cakes over yet more chat about bees.

Margery Blower

Solihull Branch

To be honest, we were a bit disappointed with the turn out at the Nosema Clinic at the end of April. It was over the May Day Bank Holiday so we were obviously in competition with other events including the annual Solihull Go Green Fair in town, which was also valiantly supported by members.

Sample numbers were down on last year, being a total of 35. Of those, infestation levels were 8.5% heavy, 20% medium and 20% light. As Celia pointed out, that means there are an awful lot of undetected cases in the

Branch News

branch. I for one was very glad I had taken a sample along because although my bees were developing very well and seemed very healthy it turned out that they were amongst the lightly infected group. At least I know now and can act accordingly. As last year, Celia organised it so a big thank you to her from all of us.

Looking ahead we have our Chairman's Afternoon on Sunday 5th June. We will not be opening the bees or doing anything to mess up a good outfit so non-beekeeping family and friends are warmly invited to join us. Hopefully Chairman Mark Robinson has paid off the weather god and it should be a lovely social afternoon with tea and cake.

We also look forward to welcoming to the apiary Jo Schupp our new Regional Bee Inspector on 22nd June. She will be carrying out our annual bee disease inspection and it is an ideal opportunity to meet her and hear the latest on pests and diseases.

Finally, a word of warning from the Apiary Management Team; it seems that some of our colonies are keen to get swarming and aren't always waiting to cap a queen cell before taking off in search of pastures new! The advice is to take swarm control measures as soon as you see eggs/larva in queen cells.

Theresa Simkin

Sutton Coldfield & North Birmingham Branch

Our April talk was given by Julian Routh on varroa to prepare us for the summer ahead. Our oldest book on "varroasis" in the branch library goes back to 1976 and Julian did indeed go into the history of varroa in Europe and its spread into

the UK. However, he was also able to bring us right up to date with the relationships between varroa and the viruses which actually cause the symptoms we identify with excessive mites in a colony.

Our apiary season started at the end of April with our first meeting held in "continuous heavy rain" as the forecasters say. Unfortunately, our second meeting on 10th May went the same way, so it was only on Tuesday 17th that we were able to start our practical courses for beginners and open the hives. We can only hope that the weather improves so that a reasonable honey crop can be gathered in this year. In anticipation, our May talk was from Christine Clifton on "Honey".

Christine gave us a detailed talk on honey and how it gets from "flower to jar". She explained that bees travel near and far to collect nectar, targeting certain flowers because of their higher levels of sugar in the nectar secreted. This is then taken back to the hive, invertase is added and the water content is reduced. It is the flowers that provide the primary composition of the sugars found in honey as well as the different flavours and aromas that characterize the honey. Christine also talked about the laws around the sale of honey. It was an insightful talk that covered much of the basis of what our bees do to create honey.

Christine had also bought in a selection of honeys from around the world which the beekeepers sampled. These included supermarket honey, Manuka honey, Tupelo honey and Warwickshire prize winning granulated honey.

Richard Barron & Jitesh Patel.





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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

1 June	7.00pm	Branch Apiary Meeting And every following Wednesday Ravenshaw apiary	Solihull
2 June	5.30pm	Branch Apiary Meeting Dobbies Garden World (entrance via Plantasia) Nuneaton Road, Mancetter CV9 1RF	Nuneaton & Athersone
4 June	2.00pm	Apiary Meeting & every following Saturday in June Highbury Park, Kings Heath, Birmingham	Birmingham
5 June	2.30pm	Chairman's Afternoon Branch Apiary	Solihull
7 June	5.00pm	Branch Apiary Meeting & every following Tuesday in June Sutton Park Apiary	Sutton Coldfield
7 June	7.30pm	1st Tuesday Meeting The Gate Inn, Upper Brailes	Shipston
11 June		From Plots to Plenty The Black Country Living Museum (In association with Winterbourne H&G)	Birmingham
15 June	12 noon	Wednesday Lunch The Peacock Inn, Icknield Street, Kings Norton, B38 OEH. The Peacock Website Bdbka.socsec@aol.com / 0121 444 400	Birmingham
16 June	5.30pm	Branch Apiary Meeting Dobbies Garden World (entrance via Plantasia) Nuneaton Road, Mancetter CV9 1RF	Nuneaton & Athersone
16 June		Branch Meeting Pollination - Richard Barron Erdington Methodist Centre	Sutton Coldfield
18 June	11.00 to 5.00pm	Dunchurch Festival Village Hall, Dunchurch	Rugby
19 June	3.00pm	Apiary Meeting & Preparation for Godiva Festival Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, CV8 3LG	Coventry
24 June	7.30pm	Friday Social Loco Lounge, High Street, Kings Heath Loco Lounge Website Bdbka.socsec@aol.com / 0121 444 4005	Birmingham

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

25 June		Kings Norton Park Open Day	Birmingham
30 June	5.30pm	Branch Apiary Meeting Dobbies Garden World (entrance via Plantasia) Nuneaton Road, Mancetter CV9 1RF	Nuneaton & Athersone
2 July	2.00pm	Apiary Meeting & every following Saturday in July Highbury Park, Kings Heath, Birmingham	Birmingham
2 & 3 July		Godiva Festival War Memorial Park	Coventry
4 July	5.30pm	Apiary Meeting & every following Tuesday in June Sutton Park Apiary	Sutton Coldfield
5 July	7.30pm	1st Tuesday Meeting The Gate Inn, Upper Brailes	Shipston
9 & 10 July		Birdingbury Country Festival	Coventry
13 July	12 noon	Wednesday Lunch The Village, Alcester Road, Moseley, B13 8JR The Village Website Bdbka.socsec@aol.com / 0121 444 4005	Birmingham
17 July	3.00pm	Apiary Meeting Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, CV8 3LG	Coventry
21 July		Bar-Bee-Q Sutton Park Apiary	Sutton Coldfield
29 July	7.30pm	Friday Social: Skittles at Selly Park Tavern, 592 Persnore Road, B29 7HQ. TBC	Birmingham
30 July		Cherington Show	Shipston

www.warwickshirebeekeepers.org.uk

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**As members of the WBKA you are welcome to attend ANY of the
meetings listed on the Diary pages**