

Wincle & District WI Report

Our 1st Zoom meeting in 2021 took place on January 12th when our guest speaker was a local man, Taffy Davies who gave a fascinating talk about bees. Taffy is well known to many as a previous vicar at St James, Sutton and Rural Dean of the Macclesfield Deanery. Now retired and enjoying a lifelong love of bee-keeping, he keeps bees for a love of the creatures rather than a commercial undertaking, and at the moment he has six hives 'on the go'. One in his back-garden and five at 'Pyegreave Farm', just below Tegg's nose. For many years he has been a member of the 'Cheshire Beekeepers Association.'

Taffy's journey into beekeeping began at an early age when he was inspired by a Mr Rush tending his bees on a river bank. The fascination of the harmonious relationship between Mr Rush and his bees led to Taffy's lifelong love of them. On Mr Rush's death, Taffy was given his hives and all his beekeeping equipment.

Bees can number between 8-10000 in one hive, dramatically increasing to over 90000 in summertime. Their furry bodies are cleverly designed with an electrostatic facilitator for pollen attachment and their pointed tongues maximise nectar retrieval. It is the female bees that sting us and sadly that sting is fatal to them.

The majority of bees in the hive are worker bees and they carry that name for a reason; they turn nectar into honey, make wax, act as bee undertakers by removing any dead bees from the hive, guard the hive to prevent intrusion from wasps and signal with a pheromone gland to attract other bees into their colony-hence the term busy bees!

The purpose of the male bees (drones) is to mate with the queen bee, they then die after copulation. The remaining drones are pushed out of the hive at the end of the season so they don't enjoy the happiest of existences.

If the queen decides to leave the hives she takes half her fellow bees with her and that is known as a swarm. Amazingly the bees are very docile at this stage and the swarm can be collected by hand – not for the faint hearted!

It is tempting to think bees just provide us with lovely honey but, in fact, because of pollination, they are behind much of the food we eat. They also give us beeswax, pollen and propolis which is a very useful food supplement.

These industrious flying insects are crucial to our lives but worryingly are in decline; causes of this include aspects that affect us too, like pesticides, pollution, climate change and habitat loss, so it's vital for them and us that we look after our natural environment.

(J Marsh report)

Once Taffy left our meeting, we continued with our 'business' items. We have recently joined Swythamley WI in raising our serious concerns about the sustainability of small rural WI's as a result of the Covid Pandemic. We are very fortunate that the majority of our members have been able to embrace the technology of Zoom meetings, with good broadband speed, enabling us to offer our members 'virtual' events in return for their membership subscriptions, over the last few months. This has proved impossible for some rural WI's, with some of their older members at risk of resigning. Our regular income from suppers, and raffles has stopped, adding to the financial pressures to balance the books and it may be Autumn before we can resume normal meetings. We have therefore written to our Federation Chairman and intend to also raise it with the NFWI Chairman. Despite all these

concerns, we are very optimistic we can come up with ways to raise some funds to help get us through to the other side!!

The annual Resolution results have been sent off to the CFWI – our top 2 votes were 1) ‘a call to increase awareness of the subtle signs of ovarian cancer’ and 2) ‘stop women dying prematurely from coronary heart disease’ The Federation will collect all the votes and these will go forward to the NFWI, with the top one being discussed at the AGM in June.

Shirley Goodwin announced the date of this year's fete – June 12th, asking us all to keep it free. We will need to get baking in a few months' time and be ready for the tea tent rota! Everything is crossed it will go ahead at Burnt House Farm.

We have asked members to send in their photos of what they have been doing during lockdown, and we have a few examples! Training as a Covid vaccinator, baking from the Wincle Cookbook, knitting hearts for the local hospice and also showing some of the hyacinths bulbs, we gave to every member, as part of our 'goody bag' gift in 2020 to remind everyone we were thinking of them.

