

March 2024 Monthly Meeting Report

NORTHWICH u3a – March 2024 meeting

The March meeting of Northwich u3a began with Anne Hales, Chairperson, providing up to date information about a concert, summer school and groups, which included news about Latin, Spanish, French and cricket.

Our visitor for the monthly meeting was Yvonne Matthews and her talk was entitled, 'Looking after Bees'. Yvonne had been a driving instructor before living in France for a while. On her return to the UK, due to several coincidences, Yvonne put herself on a bee keeping course and now has 13 hives at the bottom of her garden.

There are many products that come from a hive, including, honeycomb (which is nectar minus the water content), beeswax (which the bees create themselves), pollen (which is taken into the hive to feed the young and which some can be harvested in a few minutes without any harm to the bees or the larvae) and propolis (a resinous mixture that bees produce). There is also, Royal Jelly, but to extract this, the hive has to be fooled into thinking that the queen is dead, so Yvonne does not harvest this.

The extraction of honey sounds an interesting task. Yvonne told us a very amusing story about the first time that she extracted honey using a rather dilapidated electronic extractor which flung honey all over the walls, the floors and the people involved!

Yvonne then told us about the various jobs in the hive. The queen bee on a maiden flight will fly very high and all of the male bees in a three-mile radius follow and the bee that flies the highest is the one that mates with the queen. She then returns to the hive and lays eggs all day, every day for 3 –5 years until she dies. The male bees then return to their respective hives. Other jobs include pollen collection and the collectors are all female. The honey workers are all female. The propolis providers are all female. The temperature regulators are all female. The bees that look after the larvae are all female. The guards are all female. As Yvonne pointed out, after humans, bees are the most researched creature on the planet and there is no evidence about the role of the male bees apart from the flight to mate with the queen. However, if the hive becomes overcrowded or diseased, the females make the males leave. These males can often be found crawling around the grass and birds will eat them because they have no sting.

Honey comes out of the hive at 37.5 degrees and solidifies as it cools down over time. Yvonne advised us that some honey companies boiled the honey so that they could mix it and keep it fluid and that is why it is called 'blended'.

This was an extremely interesting and amusing talk given by someone with a great deal of first hand knowledge about bees and which the membership enjoyed tremendously. There were lots of facts that were new to many in the audience.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 17th April at Owley Wood Club, Weaverham at 2pm, when Paola Sylt will enlighten us about 'Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine'. Come and join us! Look on Northwich u3a website for a list of 2024 meetings.