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tauntonbuzz

the newsletter of Taunton & District Beekeepers





Welcome to issue 5 of tauntonbuzz

I'd like to kick off this brief introduction to the edition's contents by sending my congratulations to our President Jenny Gammon. Her first book, Waxy Corner, is a compilation of her columns for this newsletter and has just been published. Jenny, who with her husband Sid has been beekeeping for 30 years, combines her expertise with straightforward step-by-step instructions. I've been inspired by her to make good use of the wax from my own colonies and enjoy all the stages of the process. Her next project looks at decorative rolled candles.

And, in addition to all the items you'd expect in your newsletter such as what the Division is up to and practical suggestions from Chris about how to make the best of the season, there is also an appeal for queens for research and an insight into the work of pollen detective Dr Michael Keith Lucas.

We all hope you enjoy the newsletter and welcome suggestions for topics you'd like us to include in future.

Anne Pike, editor

anne@ashford-media.co.uk



Word from the Chair

We have just enjoyed an inspirational talk from Clare Densley of Buckfast Abbey. The room was packed at the apiary to hear her treatise on beekeeping. This will be followed up by Clare's kind offer to welcome us to Buckfast Abbey on July 10 so please keep a look out for future information in this respect.

Occasions such as this always stimulate the mind and generally enthuse in the art of beekeeping and I hope you will continue to support such events.

We have just held our first working group to plan and manage the Honey show in August which this year will include the county honey show and we will shortly be planning next year's programme. I said it in my last report but I will repeat it again - please let me know if you have anything to suggest. It's your 'club' so tell me what you want to hear or learn! email: mail@maben.plus.com

Lin Uglow's widower Robert has kindly made a donation in her memory to help beginners plan and take the Basic Exam. To this effect we have purchased textbooks to help and these can be borrowed from the apiary.

Hungry bees - I hope your colonies have successfully come through the winter. If they are anything like mine they have needed a fair amount of fondant (despite leaving a full super on)!

Peter Maben - Chair



Cover pic: Busy bees! Photo: Luke Bailey

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Peter Maben
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Join the conversation with TBK on:



Beekeeping equipment

Our auction held in March was another great success!

Nearly 200 lots fetched a total of £3,000 and, with the raffle and refreshments, made us just over £500 to go towards the running of the Division.

Auctioneer, Chris Harries, in his 30th year on the podium, presided over bargain-seeking beekeepers who came from far and wide.

There was some ferocious bidding for complete hives and we sold scores of hive parts and useful equipment.

The lots were varied and included a swarm catcher, straw skeps, equipment to extract and bottle honey, decorative honey pots, text books and back copies of beekeeping magazines.

Afterwards our Chair, Peter Maben: "Once again our annual auction was extremely well supported by buyers, sellers and a great team of volunteers led by our auctioneer Chris."



Taunton MP Rebecca Pow's visit

Members and beginners met our local MP Rebecca Pow at the apiary last month and she left pledging to 'do anything I can to support beekeepers'.

During her visit we explained the role of the bee inspectorate and concerns about the impact of recent cuts.

Currently there is one regional and seven seasonal bee inspectors monitoring many thousands of colonies in the South West, which includes Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and Avon.

She said she would write to the Environment Secretary Liz Truss and call on her to protect the bee inspectorate.

Also, she joined our beginners in the apiary and was given a tour of the building where another group was making frames in the workshop.

"The centre of beekeeping excellence in Taunton Deane is really impressive," she said. "And I will take away members' concerns about neonicotinoids and the importance of maintaining the Regional Bee Inspectorate."

"We are delighted that our MP has come to talk to our members and discuss the issues that affect beekeeping in today's challenging conditions," said our Chair Peter.



Beginners Beekeeping Course 2016



This year's beginners' course started on the Wednesday, February 24.

The Venue was TDBKA Apiary at Heatherton Park.

The Course is run over six weekly sessions on a Wednesday evening and these are all theory covering all aspects of beekeeping for anatomy of the bee to pests and diseases.

The seventh lesson is a practical day which is when the beginners have their first contact with the bees out in the apiary and this covers lighting a smoker, opening a hive and inspecting the contents of a hive and having their first experience working with bees.

Following on from the theory there are monthly practical days in the apiary where the beginners will gain valuable

experience of working and handling bees throughout the summer.

There were 25 places available and the take up was very good as we had 23 beginners start on the evening.

All tutors have a wealth of experience which they willingly pass on to the beginners.

A very big thank you to all members of Taunton Beekeepers for giving their time and knowledge to make the beginners' courses an enjoyable experience.

Mike Dillon

Beginners Coordinator 2016

This stunning picture was taken by Luke Bailey, one of this year's beginners, at a practical session in the apiary. Each group opened up a hive to identify and cage the queen with a view to marking or clipping her, and to generally practise handling frames, using the smoker, and identifying different types of cell.





Varroa resistant bee warrior

When octogenarian beekeeper Ron Hoskins visited the club in March he talked about his mission to breed a strain of honey bee capable of protecting itself from varroa destructor.

Ron, who is a very active 85-year-old beekeeper, lost tens of thousands of bees after varroa arrived in Britain in 1992.

He has carried out research on his colonies for nearly 25 years, has isolated and is breeding a strain of bees which groom each other to remove the mites.

He is now taking sperm from these bees and artificially inseminating queens from other hives to allow the new breed to spread through Britain.

News from SBKA's AGM

Ken Tredgett was a double-winner at the SBKA AGM held in March.

He was elected President and was the recipient of the wonderful West Country Honey Farms Award for his distinguished service on behalf of county beekeepers.

President – Ken Tredgett

Chairman - Jonathan Friend

Vice chairman – Anne Pike

Secretary – Dr Richard Bache

Treasurer - Steve Horne (until 2017)

Posts to be filled – education officer and year book editor

New Groundsman

Welcome to Graham Welfare - our new apiary groundsman! He's taken over from the wonderful Malcolm Drakeford, who has kept everything in such good order for some years.



Newly elected President of Somerset Beekeepers, Ken Tredgett, receives the West Country Honey Farms Award trophy from retiring President Caroline Butter

Challenging times ahead in the apiary

As I write, Spring is still reluctant to make an appearance, but with a new, unexpected but keen helper, I've never been more ready for things to warm up.

Having checked some hives, they all have lots of brood and most have mature drones walking about - masses of pollen and fresh nectar too, mainly I suspect coming from dandelions.

Woodpecker and mouse protection has now been removed. While some colonies still need extra food, the first super is going on to make space and relieve congestion in the brood nest.

I am continuing to clean or replace floors and the odd dodgy crownboard. As, hopefully, the weather eventually starts to warm up, it will be possible to look in the brood nest to check for disease, find the queen, clip and mark her [white officially this year]. It will then also be possible to change all those old combs that you put on the outside edges of the brood nest back in September [didn't you?]. Always put new frames and foundation on the edges of the brood nest, never in the middle.

I suspect that as the apple blossom starts, colonies with lots of sealed brood and mature drones will begin swarming preparations. Be prepared! Look for eggs or larvae in queen cups. Decide what action you will take if you find some - maybe artificially swarm your hive, or alternatively remove the old queen, and leave just the best queen cell to develop.

During May, life in a beehive can move very fast, as honey flows start and stop. On a Sunday afternoon, when you look in your hives, workers may be cleaning up the empty super combs. By Friday, if the weather is good, the super could be filling fast. So when your bees are well into the middle of their first box, add the second.

Remember, as the month of May 'hots up', beekeepers need to keep their cool!

Chris Harries

Taunton Member & commercial honey farmer
(Sedgemoor Honey Farm)



EXTRA - visit to an out apiary!

Chris Harries (from Sedgemoor Honey) is hosting a visit to one of his out apiaries on Sunday, May 22 at Charlton Orchard, Creech Heathfield near Taunton.

The tour, which starts at 2.15 pm will be followed by light refreshments.

Please phone to book T 01823 442734.

This event is in addition to the programme published earlier this year.

Queens wanted by DARG



The Devon Apicultural Research Group (DARG) is extending its research into the root causes of drone laying queens. They have the support of a number of scientific establishments but also need the support of local beekeepers.

DARG is seeking live queens which beekeepers intend to discard. They might be drone layers, heading colonies with poor brood pattern, bad temper, tendency to swarm, failure to build up or even spare virgins or elderly, healthy queens being routinely replaced.

DARG have appointed a number of queen collectors in the South West and the Somerset list is shown below.

If you have a live queen which you can offer then please phone your nearest collector on the number shown. They will arrange with you to take the queen from your apiary and send it to the DARG coordinator who will arrange for killing, fixing and examination following strict protocols, which is why the bees need to be received alive.

DARG have a web site covering a number of topics which are of great interest to the amateur beekeeper and where further details of this study can be found.

www.dargbees.org.uk

Somerset Collectors for DARG:

Lynne Ingram 01278 786307

Alan & Tricia Nelson 01984 641388

Ken Edwards 01278 671544

Roy White 01935 823898



Honey Biscuits

Once again our thanks go to Rosemary Burgess for this delicious biscuit recipe using our favourite ingredient...

Ingredients

- 9oz/ 250g self-raising flour
- 2 tsp bicarbonate of soda (baking soda)
- 2oz/50g castor sugar
- 4oz/115g unsalted butter
- Grated rind of an orange
- 4oz/115g honey
- 1oz/25g nuts chopped

Method

1. Preheat oven to 200 C/400F/gas mark 6. Lightly grease baking trays.
2. Sift flour, bicarbonate of soda into a bowl with the butter, rub the butter into the flour until it resembles breadcrumbs. Mix in the grated orange rind and the castor sugar.
3. Warm the honey, gently pour over the dry mix and work to a smooth dough.
4. Divide the dough into approximately 20 small balls and press one side of each lightly into the chopped nuts.
5. Place on the baking sheet with enough room to spread.
6. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes until lightly browned. Remove from oven and cool on a wire rack.



Stories from a pollen detective

On the face of it the appalling Soham murders, a Viking grave on Shetland and honey laundering do not have much in common.

But they are all cases involving the 'pollen detective' Dr Michael Keith Lucas, a retired plant sciences lecturer at Reading University, and unpacked at SBKA's AGM.

Known for his easy and informative style, Michael explained his involvement with police work came about after a chance meeting with detectives in a pub. Since then he has helped to shed light on many terrible events through pollen analysis.

Pollen's many unique qualities make it ideally suited for forensic scientists to trace evidence to specific vegetation (field, hedgerow, woodland, for example, and type of plant life within it), and hence particular locations and regions.

This means, for example, if pollen grains are collected from any objects linked with a crime, scientists will be able to use those pollen grains to help confirm details about that crime, such as the location.

And that was how Michael assisted the Cambridgeshire Constabulary to trace the movements of the then suspect, and subsequently convicted child-killer Ian Huntley.

On Shetland he worked with archaeologists in the excavation of a Viking grave. Pollen grains recovered from the nostrils of the undisturbed skull helped them to discover the types of vegetation in the area at that time and even the time of year that the seafarer was killed.

Honey fraud is a lot less grizzly than murder but equally widespread. He recounted how he was asked to analyze a pot of 'Devon honey', purchased in Glastonbury, which turned out to have come 'irrefutably' from Australia – the proof was in the pollen.

EU regulations set out how much pollen should come from a single flower honey eg a pot of sunflower honey has to contain at least 35 per cent of sunflower pollen, heather honey must have a minimum of 80 per cent while lime is just 15 per cent.

Pollen also helps to confirm, or otherwise, the country of origin stated on the pot; though some honey launderers in China, who make 'honey' with no actual honey, are adding pollen into their mix to make detection harder. Michael said he had come across a case when the fraudsters pressure-filtered the sticky stuff, which removes pollen, making the presence of pollen grains in the finished product a bit of a give-away.



Buckfast Abbey beekeeper Clare Densley is keeping up the tradition

“My aim is to get people to engage with their bees and see the work through the eyes of a superorganism” said Clare Densley from Buckfast Abbey’s specialist bee department during her recent talk at Heatherton Park.

And while walking in the gigantic footsteps of the legendary Brother Adam, Clare is very much treading her own path with a much more gentle style of beekeeping.

Firstly, for those who don’t know much about Buckfast Abbey, it has a long history of keeping bees. Brother Adam was a resident monk and head beekeeper from 1919 to 1991 and travelled the world to develop the Buckfast Bee.

During the early part of the twentieth century the so called ‘Isle of Wight disease’ wiped out thousands of colonies across the United Kingdom. It also killed 30 out of 46 of Buckfast Abbey’s colonies.

Brother Adam was convinced that Acarine was at the root of the problem and set about developing the Buckfast Bee, a cross breed which was designed to be more disease resistant, gentler than the indigenous British Black Bee, and a good commercial honey producer. Buckfast queens are now kept by beekeepers all over the world.

Clare said: “Although at the time Brother Adam’s hard work to produce a versatile hybrid bee was and still is widely applauded, Buckfast Abbey is now concerned with a gentler, more ‘bee friendly’ approach which respects the colony needs as well her ability to fulfil ours.

“We no longer think that controlled cross-breeding is the right way to create a bee that can survive all of the pressures we have inflicted upon them in our modern world.

“Instead, we closely monitor our colonies and work with them to make sure they have the best possible opportunity of not only surviving but thriving.”

In fact the bees at Buckfast Abbey are not ‘Buckfast Bees’ anymore but ‘Devon mongrels’ and they are no longer kept purely for honey production but more for educational purposes and the benefit of the environment.

Clare runs Langstroth hives painted an attractive shade of blue with mesh floors and often doesn’t use queen excluders, “we don’t get swarming because of a lack of space and when the honey starts coming in the brood moves down”.

She also names the colonies rather than numbers them - Margaret, Mary Kate, Rosie, Eleanor, Chantal, Amy, Ruth, Sarah, Estelle, Juliette and Ellie-the-observation-hive.

Her passion for gentle beekeeping is infectious and has inspired me for the coming season.



Waxy Corner Having fun with rolled candles

by Jenny Gammon – Taunton Division President



Hat Candle

You will need:

- 2 beeswax foundation sheets – choose your colour
- Approx 3” of wick - I used a 2” wick
- 24” fused pearls
- 18” ribbon to match your foundation
- 3 wide peach silk roses or, if you have reached the stage of wanting to make your own wax flowers I suggest trying to get “An introduction to Beeswax Flower Making” by Elizabeth Duffin
- Some dried baby’s breath or plastic looking the same
- Some greenery

Making the candle:

1. Cut seven 2½” strips and make a basic rolled candle – butt-joining the edges
2. Cut ten ½” strips and wrap around the candle bottom forming the hat brim

I pinned the ribbon in place around the brim with a coloured-headed pin allowing the tails to cross and extending on the right hand side. Trim the tails at an angle just along the edge. Wrap the pearls around the hat as you want.

Tuck the flowers /baby’s breath and greenery into the ribbon or glue them in place.

Hot off the press!

Jenny’s how-to columns for Taunton Buzz have been compiled into a book. The content includes:

1. Salvaging wax
2. Making candles with silicone moulds
3. Making candles with rubber moulds
4. Care of rubber moulds
5. Making rolled candles
6. Having fun with rolled candles
7. Dipped candles

Waxy Corner is available from Northern Bee Books and costs £7.95.

www.northernbeebooks.co.uk





Suzy Perkins gave a tutorial session at the apiary to assist members who are going for their BBKA Basic and was ably assisted by David Pearce. Good luck to all candidates!



Dates for the diary

SATURDAY, MAY 7
2.30pm

Swarm control and splitting colonies

Tutor: Tony Richards
The Apiary

SUNDAY, MAY 22
2.15PM

Chris Harries invites you to visit an out apiary followed by light refreshments

Charlton Orchard, Creech Heathfield
Please phone to book T 01823 442734

WEDNESDAY – SATURDAY, JUNE 1-4 SBKA at the Royal Bath & West Show

To get involved contact: Ken Tredgett T
01373 464736
tredg@talktalk.net

The Royal Bath & West Showground near Shepton Mallet

SUNDAY, JUNE 12

Taunton Sustainability Show

Queens College, Taunton

SATURDAY, JULY 9
2.30pm

Exploring the role of the beekeeping inspector; Also, disease recognition and disease check

Tutor: The seasonal bee inspector
The Apiary

SUNDAY, JULY 10
2:30pm

Visit to Buckfast Abbey, Devon

Guide: Clare Densley
Pre-booking essential; await future email

SATURDAY, JULY 16
2.30pm

President's Day

This is a very special day in our annual calendar held in honour of our President Jenny Gammon. Enjoy a relaxed afternoon and a scrumptious tea!

Speaker: Megan Seymour
The Apiary

SATURDAY, JULY 30
1pm

Help us get ready for Taunton Flower Show
The Apiary





Beekeeping veil and suit repairs:
Ring Jenny on 07788407497
or 01823 270465

For sale
NATIONAL 5 FRAME NUCLEI
Queens marked and clipped
£170
Contact: Chris Harries
T 01823 442734 [evenings]

Need an out apiary?

Andrew Harvey and Felicity Shakespear are offering an out apiary comprising 11 acres of fruit trees and 18 acres of pasture, plus gardens at Burlescombe, just off the A38 south of Wellington.

Contact them at
Redhill Farm, Burlescombe EX16 7JT
on 01823 672244

Wanted for a WBC!

Floor, WBC 3 lifts and a roof.
Ring David Berkley of Brownings Farm, Hemyock
on 01823 680952

David wants to help a neighbour by setting up an attractive bait hive to lure swarms from a nearby wild/naturalised colony into a convenient location.

Classified adverts

If you want to buy or sell beekeeping equipment, you can do it here! We're offering free classified ads for Members and their families.

Email your advert to:
anne@ashford-media.co.uk

Remember caveat emptor – it's your responsibility to check out the goods/buyer! Plus, clean any beekeeping equipment thoroughly if you're selling or buying to prevent the spread of disease.