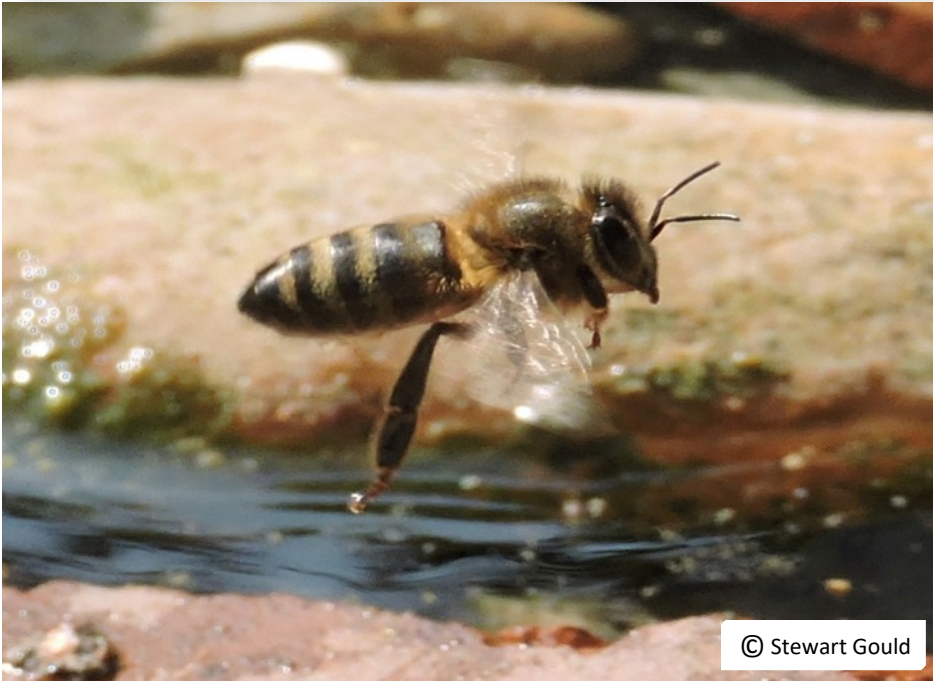


The Newsletter



Volume no 27 Issue 3 April 2020

SBKA website www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk



We live in strange times

With Coronavirus nipping at our heels, it is difficult to put a positive spin on the World at present, but there are plenty of things that we can still do. Unlike those living in inner city flats, and high rises, the vast majority of our members are lucky enough to live in small rural communities, which means that we can get out into the fresh air without leaving the confines of our own property. Mind you, the community hand clapping in support of the NHS falls a bit flat, when all you can hear is yourself.

Hopefully this newsletter will bring a little light relief.

News about our Apiary

For three years now we have had to cart water up to the apiary if we want to make tea and coffee, because the quotation from Wessex Water to lay a pipe in from the road was £6,500. Digging and back filling the trench was extra. We had the offer of using a bore hole adjacent to the



industrial units, but again, that would mean a 300 metre trench and the associated costs. The water would have had to be purified too.

Our chairman, Eric McLaughlin had the brainwave of asking Mike Brake, our farmer neighbour, if we could cross his land. 'Why would you want to do that when there is mains water within yards of your building? It appears that the cattle trough on the other side of our southern boundary, is supplied with good clean mains water. Eric has negotiated with the Farmer's son, to dig the trench, lay in the pipes, fit an external, and an internal tap, and all for around £500. The supply will be metered, but we don't use very much water at all. It will, however, be very convenient to have our own supply.

Can we carry on beekeeping during the Coronavirus lock down?

In a statement, BBKA Chair Anne Rowberry said: "Bees are livestock and should be tended. You may visit your bees for welfare purposes, such as checking feed or queen cell preparation. You must take into account social distancing and safe access. Also swarming, please do not go into houses, roofs etc, or go through houses to reach swarms. We are working with DEFRA (APHA). NBU inspectors will still inspect if you have disease concerns." **[Information current at 30.3.20]**

It might be worth carrying your BDI insurance docs or BBKA membership card when travelling by vehicle to visit out apiaries, in case you're stopped by the police.

Please bear in mind that this position could change at any time.

The bees at our apiary

The committee had been wondering how to manage the bees at the teaching apiary, given difficulties with social distancing, and Government guidelines on social gathering. There was also concern that a lot of those who involve themselves with apiary inspections, are in vulnerable groupings.

Step forward our super hero. Catherine Fraser has offered to look after all 9 hives at the apiary - **on her own. What a star!**

It won't be an easy task, as she also has around 12 hives of her own to look after in the Stoke sub Hamdon area.

We have a very large debt of gratitude to Catherine for this noble gesture.



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Somerset BKA AGM 2020

The AGM of Somerset Beekeepers' Association was due to have been held on Saturday 28th March at Frogmary Green Farm, South Petherton, but because of the COVID 19 isolation policy, it was not possible to do so.

This leaves our parent association with a conundrum. The association rules dictate that there must be an AGM, and do not allow for quarantine situations. They were also written before the days of online conference meetings. The divisional delegates have agreed that as there is crucial business to be conducted, and new officers to be elected in place of those retiring or having served their term, an online vote for the election of officers will take place.

In the next couple of weeks, you will receive an email asking you to vote on pertinent issues and to elect those nominated for office. The process is quite easy but, for some reason, takes the form of an online quiz. I scored 75%, on the basis that I felt it unethical to vote for myself.

Those who do not have an internet connection will receive a voting form in the post. Please take the time to complete the online voting form (quiz).

Stewart Gould

Vice chair - Somerset BKA

Bee Suit order

The annual order of bee-suits has been placed, and delivery is expected in the very near future. In spite of the new beekeepers' practical sessions having been cancelled/postponed this year, a good number are committed enough to have ordered suits. I spoke to James Bright at BBwear and managed to get him to honour the excellent discount, regardless of the much reduced order size.

Orders will be a little slower arriving this year, as a few of their staff have gone into self isolation because of vulnerability.



Government ruling on keeping honey bees

The Government is presently considering the wisdom of keeping honey bees, because of the problems of social distancing while foraging, and being clustered in hives. Self isolation is totally impossible with a potential 50,000 souls packed into a box measuring 463mm x 463mm and 215mm high.

From April 1st swarming will be considered an illegal public gathering. At first, bees will be warned and advised to go home. If they persist in their actions, the authorities will have no option but to make arrests, and may also set swarm bait hives. Detractors have considered this to be a honey trap. Sting operations are not ruled out.

It is strongly advised that beekeepers divert their need, to keep insects in boxes, toward solitary bees, which cause none of the problems posed by social insects. Social isolation comes naturally to them, and they wouldn't be seen dead in a swarming situation.

Apiinvert. Syrup ready to feed bees. Unlike sugar solution it requires no mixing, more readily accepted and less work required for the bees to invert (not wasting energy), more close to a natural food.

1 - 4 boxes @ 16 Kg £23 each, 5 + boxes £22 each

Apifonda. If you are venturing on a Queen rearing project this fondant is what you need. Very similar to Apiinvert, it is a paste not a liquid. If a colony becomes light through the course of the winter a dollop of fondant could well be the difference between life and death of the bees.

The Apiinvert can be fed as a 'gee up' in the spring, emergency feeding during the 'June gap' and of course at the end of the season when preparing for winter. 1 x 2.5 Kg bag £4.75, 1 box 5 x 2.5 Kg £22, 2 + boxes £21 each

Foundation. National brood and super, 14 x 12 brood, 16 x 10 brood

Eddie Howe. email:- redrascal@tiscali.co.uk Mobile 07812 738793 Telephone 01458 2721144

Virtual practical sessions

We had a bumper turn out for the theory sessions at Tor Rugby Club, over the winter, and Joe and Stewart were looking forward to summer Saturday and Sunday mornings filled with inquisitive new beekeepers peering over their shoulders and testing their knowledge of the events laid out in front of them. Not so, unfortunately: COVID 19 stepped in and made this totally unrealistic.



One of the new beekeepers suggested taking video of the inspections of our own hives, and either 'live streaming' them or forwarding video using the internet. The first option seemed far too daunting, and getting everybody set up and online together might have proved a step too far. Recording inspections was a different kettle of fish, and indeed, earlier this week the weather was just about warm enough to conduct a swift 'in and out' inspection.

It meant some contrivance with showing the queen, as once found, moving the camera closer meant that she made a run for it, while I was distracted elsewhere. The joys of working in isolation eh? However, with several attempts and some amateur editing, those who have signed up to this exercise, were given a 15 minute run through what to see so early in the season, and on a genuine first inspection. As a pilot, it seemed to work, and valuable knowledge has been gained, especially by the entire 'crew' - me.

The next episode will be in a couple of weeks when the weather has warmed up enough to carry out operations like placing queen excluders and supers. If you would like the video of the first session, and/or to sign up for future videos, just email me at somertonbees@btinternet.com.

I'm not entirely sure if all those who requested the video, have received it, so please also let me know if you wanted it but it hasn't yet arrived.

Stewart Gould

Somerton BKA Honey Show

It might seem a long way away but given that government advice implies that the current coronavirus episode is likely to continue to September or beyond we need to make a decision about the Honey Show.

The show requires a good deal of preparation in advance which would be wasted if we had to cancel at the last moment.

Attendance may well be down as members of the public may still be reluctant to gather in numbers. The judges (who are mostly in at risk categories) may also be reluctant to attend.

I have just spoken to Fred who has consulted with the other members of the Honey Show committee and they are minded to postpone this year.

It seems to me that public health concerns outweigh our desire to publish and promote our craft and I would support the view of the Honey Show committee.

As soon as a definite decision has been made, we will let you all know immediately.

Eric McLaughlin

Mildew (mold/mould) in hives

There is an article on page 138 of the latest BBKA News which mentions pollen succumbing to mildew. At this time of year, it is quite common to find that the pollen in outlying combs has gone mouldy, especially with a warm and damp winter like the one we have just gone through. One of the best ways to reduce this is improved ventilation. Bees will block the ventilation grid in hive roofs, and amp will then form on the inner side of hive walls and can collect on crown-boards too.

Talking to Eric McLaughlin earlier today, he mentioned this and said that on inspecting his hives in the warm sunshine earlier this week, he had mildew in only one colony, and that is the one with the solid floor.

Fungal spores are responsible for a couple of early season problems, so it looks like mesh floors and a Spring treatment with a blow torch are the answers.

March Evening Meeting

Our speaker on Thursday March 12th was Bridgit Strawbridge Howard. We didn't know what to expect as Social Isolation was just a couple of days away, but our members turned out in some numbers to listen to Brigit, who is, not only, an engaging speaker who certainly knows her subject, and also a very pleasant lady.



Before arriving, she had asked if it would be alright to a: talk for about an hour, and b: bring some copies of her book 'Dancing with Bees'. It's just as well she did, as there was a great demand for it, and she signed each copy she sold.

Just a day or two later, I emailed to thank her for one of the best talks this season, and she said that it would be the last for a while, as all her future engagements had now been cancelled.

Photographing bees

The shot on the front cover was taken using a Nikon P600, and the close focus setting. It was cropped using Photoshop, but you can get very good shots with most mobile phones these days.

In fact, the Nikon P600's resolution (amount of pixels in a given area) is exactly the same as my Samsung J6 phone. So the quality should be the same right?



Unfortunately not. There are a few differences between most mobile phones and reasonable quality cameras - lens quality is the first. The size of the lens on a phone is normally lower than

most cameras, which means it struggles to get the same clarity of image. Secondly, you will struggle to get a fast response from a mobile phone. So you have to pre-empt a possible shot. With moving bees, that's not always easy. Lastly, holding a mobile phone steady is not very simple. It tends to wander about a bit, and this will also blur the image.

If you can lean the camera, or phone against something when you are taking your photograph, chances are you'll get a better image. The differences become more apparent when the image is blown up. The photo on the previous page was taken with the mobile phone, and cropped using Windows 10's own system, while this one was taken with the Nikon P600. The flying bee on the left is really in focus and the resolution is good. The other bees are slightly out of focus, but that accentuates the flying one. The water looks better in this shot too.



Your best bet is a reasonable camera, but a phone will give you some good images. The real secret to it all is persistence. I didn't just take one photo with the phone and one with the camera. I took about 20 photos with the phone and almost the same number with the camera. Just choose the best ones, crop them to create the best picture and delete the others. No-one will ever know.

Another tip to remember is that bees are semi-translucent, that is, some light passes through them. This can be beneficial on occasions and can also work against you. Photographing a bee with the sun directly behind it will cause silhouetting, and the translucent parts will look strange, but if the light is slightly off to one side, you'll get a much more vibrant picture, as above. A little of the facial detail is lost, but not a lot.

If you have a garden, try photographing a few bees. There are some really interesting solitary and bumble bees around at this time of year, and most are easier to photograph than honey bees. Ashy mining and lawn mining bees are a good place to start.

Dates for your diary

Somerset BKA AGM

Frogmary Green Farm, Green Farm,
West St, South Petherton TA13 5DJ

Saturday 28th March
12.00pm - 4.00pm

Taunton Beekeepers Auction

Sunday 29th March
Ruishton Village Hall
Cheats Road, Ruishton TA3 5JD
2.00pm

BBKA Spring Convention

Harpers Adams University,
Newport, Glos
3rd - 5th April

Somerset BKA Special Lecture

Edgar Hall, Somerton, TA11 6SB
With Ken Besterfield
Wednesday 22nd April
7.00pm - 9.00pm

Somerset BKA AGM

Monday April 14th

ONLINE

Somerset BKA Queen rearing course

Sunday 26th April & Sunday 3rd May
Taunton Apiary, Heatherton Park, Taunton

Visit to Buckfast Abbey Bees

Poss Sunday 12th July
TBC

Beginners practical sessions

The Royal Bath & West Show

Was 28th - 30th May

NOW July 31st - August 2nd

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