

# The Newsletter



Volume no 28 Issue 2 March 2021

SBKA website [www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk](http://www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk)



## Who wants bees?

With so many new beekeepers this year. We thought it would be prudent to give some advice, hints and tips on buying a nucleus colony.

There are a few people selling nucleus colonies, and there may be a few available to Somerton members from our apiary. Contact Joe King on 01749 890357, but be patient. Commercial prices vary from £100 - £300. Will paying more guarantee a highly productive colony, with mild manners?

**See page 4**

## Practical beekeeping sessions

Because of COVID restrictions, setting a date for these to start has been impossible. We will start as soon as we possibly can. They will be restricted to those from the Somerton Division area, and emails will be sent to those who are invited to come along.

Those who were on the online course and live outside the Somerton area will be contacted by their own divisions of Somerset Beekeepers Association. I know for sure that South East division are holding a practical course.

To quote good old Boris 'We will be driven by data, not dates'. We might be a little late getting off the ground, but some practical sessions will be possible.



**Mikes Bee Supplies**

**Click & Collect**  
[www.mikes-bee-supplies.com](http://www.mikes-bee-supplies.com)  
E: [mikes-bees@outlook.com](mailto:mikes-bees@outlook.com)  
T: 01278 445158

**Foundation**

**Jars**

**Hives**

**Suits**

**And more!**

**Bakers Fondant 12.5kg**

We take Cash or Card (no cheques)

PayPal VISA Mastercard American Express

Find us at  
72 Wembdon Hill  
Wembdon  
Bridgwater  
Somerset.  
TA6 7PZ

## **A REMINDER from your Divisional Library:**

We now have additional copies of the **HAYNES BEE MANUAL**. This is an excellent basic information and instruction book for beekeepers (it is used on the Divisional Beginners' Courses). There are plenty of photos, including including step-by-step demonstrations of beekeeping manipulations. All very clear – what you'd expect from a Haynes Manual!

To borrow a copy contact Sarah Kent (Librarian)

Email at [translation@lawsonkent.co.uk](mailto:translation@lawsonkent.co.uk) / text or ring on 07986965320

## **Bee suit order**

Because we had to hold up the order until all payments were received, we were a little behind the game, and hit BBwear at a particularly busy time. They have sent 9 of the suits which they had in stock, but the other 16 are being made to order and will be delivered as soon as they are able. Please bear in mind that they have orders for nearly 300 bee-suits on their books at present .



**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.

**13kg 1 - 4 boxes £24 each, 5 + boxes £23 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.

**1 x 2.5 Kg bag £5.00, 1 box 12.5 Kg £25, 2 + boxes £24 each**

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.

**Foundation.** National brood and super, 14 x 12 brood available

**Eddie Howe email:- [redrascal444@gmail.com](mailto:redrascal444@gmail.com) Mobile 07812 738793**

**Tel. 01458 272114**

## Buying bees

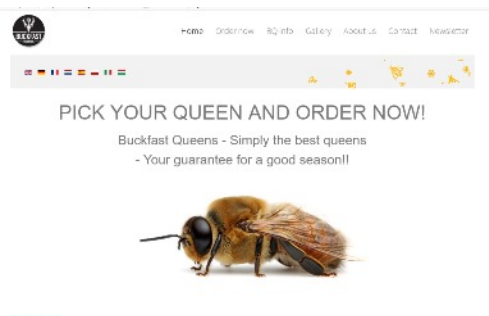
New beekeepers are always anxious to get hold of their first colony of bees. In this, and many instances, patience is a virtue. Rushing into buying a colony could cost you dearly as nucleus colonies are being sold this year for anything from £100 - £300. It is best to consider all the options before diving in.

### Let's start by defining a nucleus colony.

1. Usually sold as 5 or six frame colonies in a nucleus box.
2. The box could be made of correx, cardboard, polystyrene, wood or plywood
3. The box may, or may not be part of the deal - check this!
4. The nucleus colony should contain a young proven queen
5. An over-wintered nucleus was made the previous year, with a young queen and should be an established and stronger colony which will cost more than a newly set up nucleus
6. A newly set up nucleus should contain a functioning colony created in the present year with a young queen.
7. **A swarm is not a nucleus colony** - it is a swarm. Normally they are of unknown provenance, temperament and health. Nobody should charge for a swarm. At worst you could be charged for expenses.

### The benefits of different strains of bees

Just to show you what you're up against, on the right is part of a genuine online advertisement for Buckfast queens. I could have sworn it is a drone. Many adverts claim that their queens are the result of work done by Brother Adam at Buckfast Abbey in Devon. He died in 1996.



The image is a screenshot of a website for Buckfast bees. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Home, Order now, Info, Gallery, About us, Contact, and Newsletter. Below the navigation bar is a row of flags representing various countries. The main heading reads "PICK YOUR QUEEN AND ORDER NOW!". Below this, it says "Buckfast Queens - Simply the best queens" and "Your guarantee for a good season!!". At the bottom of the advertisement is a close-up photograph of a Buckfast queen bee.

Buckfast bees are selected for traits which the breeder considers to be beneficial. There is no absolute definition, although many breeders claim there are.

**Buckfast Abbey Bees** - the originators of this kind of selective breeding stopped selling Buckfast queens many years ago.

Importing colonies of bees is now illegal, for fear of introducing unwanted pests, such as small hive beetle. There is one company taking deposits on Italian colonies - be very wary!

Importing queen bees from the EU is still permitted - mostly from Denmark and Italy, but a Danish or Italian Buckfast queen is still an unknown quantity. You could easily pay £40.00 for a single queen.

Buckfast bees are renowned for drastic changes in temperament in the second generation .

Other strains of bees are famed for different traits. Carniolan bees (*apis mellifera arnica*) have a quiet temperament and are quick to build up in the spring, but prone to swarming. Italian bees (*Apis mellifera Ligustica*) are known for their industry, gentleness, fertility, reluctance to swarm, zeal for building comb, white honey-cappings, a willingness to enter supers, cleanliness and resistance to disease. The native British black bee (*Apis mellifera mellifera*) which several breeders are trying to sustain and re-introduce are renowned as the most aggressive, and have high swarming tendency and low hygienic behaviour - a trait closely linked with Varroa sensitive hygiene.

Purchasing pure bred stock or queens means that, in order to maintain the strain, you have to ensure subsequent generations only mate with their own kind. Nearly impossible, unless you artificially inseminate new queens. Second generations of most strains which have interbred are famed for bad temper, and loss of most of the favourable qualities. Your best bet - locally acclimatised mongrels.

My advice would be to buy local where you can. More nuclei will become available in the next weeks, but the season has got off to a slow start because of the cool. Spring, and in beekeeping the weather rules everything. Be patient.

## White chocolate Honey

The cacao tree *theobroma cacao* is a native of Mexico, and was first domesticated in tropical South America some 5300 years ago, but is now grown in tropical climates around the World. The southern part of Mexico is largely tropical forest and wild cacao (cocoa) trees still grow here, although not harvested, in the normal way, by the indigenous people, the reason for which will become obvious.



The Mexican stingless bee *Meliponula ferruginea anahuaca* makes its home in hollows of the cacao tree and are famed for collecting particles from the ripened cocoa beans on the tree of their choice. Cocoa beans are made up of cocoa solids and cocoa butter and normal processing of the harvested beans is done by drying and fermenting. These dried beans which turn brown during the drying and fermenting stages, are exported for processing into chocolate, which is done by reintroducing the previously separated cocoa fats and sugars.

It is a well known fact that chocolate and cocoa powders are naturally bitter in flavour, but our friendly stingless bee has a trick up its sleeve. The dried cocoa powder is collected in exactly the same way as the better known European honeybees collect pollen, in the corbiculae or pollen baskets on the hind legs of the workers. Ingesting it would prove extremely unpalatable because of its bitterness. On reaching the nest, the worker bees pack the almost white (unfermented) particles in cells which already have some honey content.

The resultant deposits in the cells are a sweetened mixture of honey and cocoa and the native indigenous Mayo-Chinchipe people who have been cultivating these bees for centuries, harvest this sweetened cocoa delight, warm it to reduce the moisture content and use the resultant semi solid product as a primitive form of the chocolate that we know and consume by the ton at this time of year.



**Happy Easter!**



**Beekeeper, 89, blasts CPS after it drops charges against three teenagers who were accused of destroying 30 hives that he built over 20 years in quest to breed 'super-bee'**

- **The blaze toppled 30 hives owned by 89-year-old Ron Hoskins in March last year**
- **The expert apiarist lost decades of careful breeding and has to start from scratch**
- **It was confirmed at court last week that the CPS had discontinued proceedings**
- Beekeeper Ron Hoskins has blasted the Crown Prosecution Service after it dropped arson charges against Jay Lockyer, 18, and two youths who were accused of destroying 30 hives that he built over 20 years.
- The apiary in Stanton Country Park was burned down on March 16 last year and the blaze is estimated to have caused £21,000 worth of damage.



Lockyer was handed a six-month conditional discharge and ordered to pay a £21 victim surcharge after admitting possession of a head torch stolen from the site.

**One of the boys, who faced the arson charge and cannot be named because he is under 18, was given a two-year custodial sentence last December for torching a £1.3million cottage in Wroughton.**

Mr Hoskins, of the Swindon Honeybee Conservation Group, said it was 'most disappointing' that the CPS had abandoned the prosecution.

He had devoted more than two decades breeding a bee that was immune to the deadly Varroa mite, which has decimated honeybee populations.

The external parasites kill millions of the flying insects worldwide, with DEFRA urging beekeepers in the UK to monitor their hives for the pest.

Mr Hoskins said: 'That has caused a lot of damage to the future of beekeeping because I was breeding a bee that was immune to a virus that is a killer of bees nationwide. 'It does appear that I don't have any more bees to breed from. We couldn't breed any last year because we didn't have the facilities. It took me 25 years to breed this bee. I don't have another 25 years. left. The loss to beekeeping is ginormous.'



He has put up a notice by his Stanton apiary calling on anyone with information about the arson attack to contact Wiltshire Police. A CPS spokesperson said: 'The CPS has a duty to keep cases under continuing review and following a further review, we concluded there was no longer a realistic prospect of conviction.'

In the wake of last year's fire, more than £20,000 was raised online for the Swindon Honeybee Conservation Group.

Mr Hoskins added: 'I want to say thank you to everybody who donated, of course, because that was wonderful. That has more or less put us back on our feet.'

***From The Daily Mail***

***Ron Hoskins has been largely successful in breeding hygienic bees which are, to a large extent, able to ward off varroa mites***



## Neo-nicotinoid pesticides

In February I wrote to Somerton and Frome MP David Warburton and George Eustice, Minister of the Environment. I have had no reply from the Minister but

David Warburton sent this reply recently. Bear in mind that the need to spray sugar beet has been obviated this year by the cold spring.

Dear Stewart

It's certainly clear that some misunderstanding and controversy has followed the Government's recent decision to grant an application for emergency authorisation to allow neonicotinoids for the treatment of sugar beet seed in 2021. This was due to the potential danger posed to the 2021 crop from beet yellows virus. The ability to do so is maintained by the EU, which has allowed other member states to do the same and does not constitute a regression of standards due to our exit from the EU.

I've been in touch with Defra Ministers to seek reassurances and to highlight the strength of feeling in the constituency. I know wildlife trusts have voiced their concerns and I have been in touch with our local wildlife trust here in Somerset to hear their concerns.

And I should say that the Government continues to support the restrictions on neonicotinoids to protect pollinators, and emergency authorisations for pesticides are only granted in exceptional circumstances where diseases or pests cannot be controlled by any other reasonable means. These emergency authorisations can provide short term availability of a product if the applicant can demonstrate that this addresses a danger which cannot be contained by any other reasonable means, that the use will be limited and controlled and that the necessary protection of people and of the environment can be achieved.

Emergency authorisations are also used by countries across Europe. I know that 10 EU countries including Belgium, Denmark and Spain have granted emergency authorisations for neonicotinoid seed treatments since 2018. Under EU legislation, member states may grant emergency authorisations in exceptional circumstances. I can assure you that the UK's approach to the use of emergency authorisations has not changed as a result of the UK's exit from the EU.

Emerging sugar beet seedlings are vulnerable to predation by aphids, which have the potential to spread Beet Yellows Virus. The 2020 sugar beet yields were severely affected and are forecast to be down by 20-25 per cent on previous years.

Due to this, the Government granted authorisation for the emergency use of Cruiser SB on the 2021 sugar beet crop in England. The authorisation was granted with strict conditions attached, including a reduced application rate as well as a prohibition on any flowering crop being planted in the same field where the product has been used within 22 months of sugar beet, and a prohibition on oilseed rape being planted within 32 months of sugar beet.

**Importantly, the authorisation only allowed the product to be used if a scientific forecast indicated that there was likely to be a significant problem with aphids. As the cold weather experienced in January and February meant that the forecast was for a lower level of pest pressures, the seed treatment will not be used this year.**

Protecting pollinators remains a priority for the Government. The National Pollinator Strategy, published in 2014, is a ten-year plan which sets out how the Government, conservation groups, farmers, beekeepers and researchers can work together to improve the status of the approximately 1,500 pollinating insect species in England.

I hope that helps and many thanks again for getting in touch.

Best wishes

Yours, David

**To précis: ‘We didn’t use it, but only because it wasn’t needed this year’**

## From the apiary

Despite Covid the apiary bees needed attention and the bees had weekly visits through the winter to ensure that they had enough stores and had not suffered at the hands of mice, woodpeckers, or wind (do they have hands? you ask ).

Two hives died out over winter but eight remain. Some had adequate stores but three required supplementary feeding with fondant. This can be a difficult time of the year for our bees as their winter stores decline and there is little forage available. Do check that your bees have enough food to get them through the next month.



We have cleared a patch of turf near the hives and sown a mix of wild flower seeds in an attempt to create a wild flower meadow. Yellow rattle has been sown elsewhere to weaken the grass and some seed has also been sown behind the Beespace.

Building maintenance has been taking place. The Gould Suite and the Dirty Shed have been repainted and are again a glossy blue. Thank you Caroline and Jim Dawson.

We have been donated some second hand equipment. It is currently at the apiary and available to members - particularly targeted at new members to reduce the cost of starting up. It is used but in fair condition.

1 National Brood box - £10

9 National floors -£5 each

5 English feeders - £5 each

3 Queen excluders - £3 each

3 Thirty lb honey buckets - £2 each

? Crown boards -£3 each

5 Ekes - £2 each

We usually have a presence at the apiary Wednesday mornings 9.30 am to around midday. If you are interested in any of the equipment please telephone

## **From the Chair of The British Beekeepers Association (BBKA)**

Dear Members

There have been a lot of questions about the importation of bees from Northern Ireland being proposed by Patrick Murfet of Beekeeping Equipment Ltd, and the detrimental comments he has made concerning the BBKA on the British and Irish group Facebook. I think it may be helpful to outline the main points of the actions I have taken on behalf of the BBKA:

Martin Smith (Director of BDI) and I composed a letter, concerning the circumvention of the law to import Italian bees into the UK. This was presented to the Bee Health Advisory Forum. Unfortunately, the Bee Farmers and National Farmers Union did not agree to the proposed action and Defra decided not to express an opinion, but everyone else supported the move. The letter objecting to the circumvention of the law on importing bees was sent to Government Ministers in Scotland, Ireland and Wales, outlining the potential danger of introducing the Small Hive beetle into the UK. The bees are being sourced from Southern Italy, an area where there is Small Hive beetle.

I applied for a Parliamentary Petition which took several weeks to be processed, but It is now live and has already 7,070 signatures. The focus of the petition is to stop the circumvention of the Law to bring bees into the UK via Northern Ireland. I informed all Associations of our action and put a copy of the letter sent to Governments in the April Edition of the BBKA news.

Patrick Murfet has made numerous derogatory statements concerning the BBKA. His information is incorrect, his facts have no basis with the truth and it is upsetting to see someone who has a Bee Equipment business being willing to risk introducing disease and a potentially devastating pest into the UK in order to make profit.

I immediately spoke to the BBKA News Editor and asked for any adverts from Mr Murfet to be declined. It was unfortunate that the advert from Bee Equip had been accepted for the April Edition and the magazine was printed before it could be withdrawn. As you probably know there is a long lead time in the process of producing and printing magazines.

It is worth noting that Irish bee keepers are extremely concerned and upset about the potential effects on their native bee populations, in addition to the bio-security issues.

I have now written to Mr Murfet informing him that no advertising from him, his companies (Bee Equipment and Patrick's Bees) or the magazine BQ will be accepted for publication in BBKA News. I hope you will agree we are acting positively.

Finally, I want to thank you for all the messages of support I have received and for everyone who has signed the petition. Some Government departments are aware of the issues and questions are already being asked about the import situation.

**Anne Rowberry**  
BBKA Chair

***Note from editor: Patrick Murfet is the man behind the 'millions of threatened baby bees' news story, and also the Festival of Bees, which is a trade exhibition, formally known as Beetradox. Any promotion of beekeeping and the plight of pollinators would appear to be purely coincidental.***

## **Somerset BKA - AGM**

AGMs are by their very nature, mind numbingly boring, but Lynfa Davis gave an excellent reminder of the multiple uses of nucleus boxes.

The AGM itself threw up few surprises, but as the secretary and treasurer were being superseded, the committee now stands as below.

Chairman - Stewart Gould - Somerton Division

Secretary - Caran Keirl - Quantock Division

Treasurer - Peter Derbyshire - Somerton Division

Examinations Officer - Bridget Knutson - Wedmore & Cheddar Division

Publicity Officer - Anne Pike - Taunton Division

Executive members other than officers - Nic Bard - Yeovil Division

**Dates for your diary**

**Online Zoom talks**

Various upcoming online talks. Watch your emails.

**International Bee Day**

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May

**President**

Jackie Mosedale  
01458 241146

**Chairman**

Eric McLaughlin  
jandemclaughlin@gmail.com  
07910 764069

**Vice Chairman**

Jack Barr  
01458 252850  
jrbarrxv@btinternet.com

**Secretary**

**Alison Clewes**

[pansypots@icloud.com](mailto:pansypots@icloud.com)

**Treasurer**

Sarah Griffiths  
s\_e\_lund@hotmail.com

**Membership Secretary**

Alison Dykes

**Librarian**

Sarah Kent  
01749 670423

**Honey Show sub committee**

David Rose, Alison Dykes, Fred Clarke

**Newsletter Editor**

Stewart Gould  
01749 860755  
[somertonbees@btinternet.com](mailto:somertonbees@btinternet.com)

**Events Programme**

Stewart Gould  
01749 860755

**County Delegate**

Keith Sturgess

**Deputy Delegates**

Sally Lye  
Suzy Perkins

**Apiary Manager**

Joe King  
01749 890357

**Extraction Equipment Loan**

John Speirs  
01458 241831