

Buzz

The newsletter of Taunton & District Beekeepers March 2023

We are pleased to bring you the latest edition of Buzz timed to coincide with the start of the bee keeping season! We have a variety of interesting articles this month, including updates on the activities of Taunton Division, plenty of photos, and dates for your diary. Don't forget that our annual auction takes place on Sunday April 2nd – more details later in the newsletter.

Thank you to all our contributors for this month who have helped with the publication of this edition. If anyone would like to write an article, or even just a few lines on any aspect of beekeeping, we would be delighted to hear from you!

News Roundup

Firstly, congratulations to two of our long standing and well known members, Anne Pike and Lynne Ingram. Anne has been elected as the new President of SBKA, and with her vision, commitment and enthusiasm, there is no doubt that she will bring a great deal to her new role.

Lynne has been awarded the West Country Honey Farms Award. She was nominated by Anne Pike and in case you haven't yet read the draft minutes of the SBKA AGM, here is a precis of the citation:

"Lynne has made a substantial contribution to the work of Somerset Beekeepers' Association and beekeeping more widely. ...is a Master Beekeeper and was awarded the National Diploma in Beekeeping in 2021. She is a highly experienced beekeeper who generously shares her knowledge and passion with Somerset BKA's members and others.

She is the driving force behind Somerset BKA's excellent online lecture programme which brings members together virtually for practical advice, the latest scientific advances and friendship.

In her AHAT role she is a UK trail-blazer. This huge body of work enhances Somerset's reputation as a BKA committed to its founding principles, namely 'to advance the craft of apiculture and to promote general awareness and understanding of honeybees'."

Well done to both of you!

Lyndsay Stone Apiary

Report

The winter months are always a quiet time for the Apiary and its bees, as they hunker down trying to keep warm! Since the beginning of March, the Apiary hives have been going between busy, very active and inactive due to the variations in temperature we have been experiencing so far! We are hoping to come through the winter with 13 full hives and 3 nucs ready for the new season.

We've had a tidy up of the Apiary grounds and are looking forward to introducing this year's new beekeepers to our bees!

Andrew Perry, Apiary Manager

Apiary Spring Clean

Have you been to the Clubhouse recently? The car park gravel had over the winter period disappeared under a very thick blanket of soggy leaves and the surrounding trees had become alarmingly untamed. The apiary likewise was looking somewhat unloved and wild. With this in mind, and prompted by the glimpse of warmer weather a short time ago (not sustained as it happens), together with the forthcoming scheduled frequent use of the Clubhouse for this year's Beginners Course and Improvers sessions the Committee decided on a pre-season clean-up.



Suitably armed with an array of horticultural implements, members of the Committee spent one fine Saturday, slashing, cutting, blowing, digging, scraping and burning..... and what a transformation! The original tarmac surface of the tennis court on which part of the apiary sits once again saw the light of day and the entire area once more looks respectable. Whether the bees will appreciate the hard work that went into the day is another matter.



Robin Rees

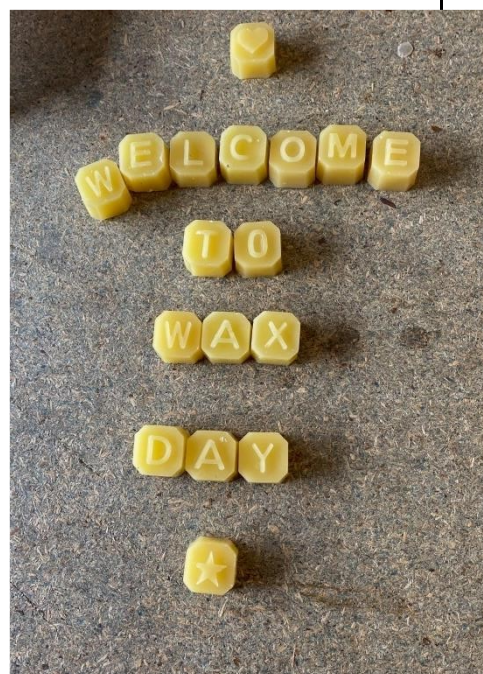
Wax Day at the Apiary

Maggie North ran a workshop on dealing with wax. We started out in the apiary car park looking at methods to retrieve the wax in old dirty brood comb using steam generated by wallpaper strippers. You do not get as much wax as you expect, and it all needs further processing. David Pearce was of the opinion that often it is more trouble than it is worth and one should just burn it.

We then moved indoors to look at various methods of rendering down wax cappings or reprocessing the wax retrieved from the brood frames. Maggie uses an old slow cooker lined with a J cloth. Once the wax has melted she carefully gathers the edge of the cloth and lifts it so the liquid wax strains through it. Do not squeeze as you force dirt through the cloth but let the wax drain naturally.



Vanessa uses a steam juicer to melt and strain the wax. It was rather too slow as she forgot to bring the coarse straining cloth for the steamer. After going through the steamer, any little bits of rubbish missed are removed using Janet Piper's method where the melted wax is poured through a paper nappy liner held over an old clean yoghurt pot with an elastic band. The wax produced is clean enough for the show bench, if not, repeat until it is.



We then moved on to using the wax. David Pearce brought the biggest pot of melted wax I have ever seen and demonstrated waxing the wick.

Maggie then explained how to use silicone wax moulds. She mentioned that they should not be stored with elastic bands around them as this eventually distorts the mould. When I got home, I removed all the elastic bands I had carefully stored around my moulds.

One of Maggie's innovations was how to pour melted wax into the top of a mould without spilling it. Having covered my kitchen worktops in wax during my efforts at making candles with moulds this struck me as brilliant – melt the wax in a clean, use a bake bean tin with the top bent to form a spout (just be careful of sharpe edges and use a cloth to hold when hot). Stand tin in pot boiling water to get to correct temperature. Maggie explained that if the wax is too hot then it shrinks in the mould and you get holes, if too cool it sets without filling in the fancy little nooks and crannies of the mould. One has to just experiment until one learns. Another idea is to stand the moulds in a roasting tin or on a plastic tray so spilled wax can be easily scraped off once set.



The day ended
having a go at
This looks easy
time it right –
wax and you
you’ve just
put on, too

you
lumpy candles.

but everyone
you Maggie



with everyone
dipping a candle.
but you have to
too long in the hot
remove the wax

short a time to cool
between dips and
get
Some results had
somewhat unusual
shapes
enjoyed it. Thank
and David.

Vanessa Woodford

Honey Ferments at the Somerset Lecture Day

The Somerset Lecture Day held last February at Bridgewater was very well attended and well worth going. This year workshops were included for the first time and I think were an excellent addition. I attended the 'Honey Ferments' by Angie Kirk thinking it would be about mead making, but not a bit of it, it was all about making condiments by slowly fermenting vegetables in honey. What an eye opener, we sampled different ones Angie has made such as:



Garlic – most unattractive to look at as bits of garlic floating in a clear brown liquid, but the flavour; the most incredible umami and smooth garlic. Everyone went ‘Oh wow.’ So I made some of that. In my very cold kitchen during this cold spring it has barely fermented at all producing only a few bubbles but I am hoping things improve with the warmer weather. I have used some in cooking and a little gives a surprisingly strong garlic flavor, but it is still missing the umami wow factor.

Fresh turmeric root – a ferment that produces a rich orangey yellow liquid. Turmeric is reputed to be good for arthritis and if you want yellow rice for any dish a teaspoon of this liquid will do the trick.

Ginger, cinnamon stick and a couple of cloves. The smell of this combination makes my mouth water. A ginger cake with that drizzled over the top!

Chilli – Angie used red chillies and they packed a punch. Besides making curries at home, this would be ideal to jazz up a rather bland chilli con carne or pre-made curry. I was given a packet of frozen, chopped green chillies and as an experiment I tried them. They have just started fermenting so it’s too soon to say if frozen veg. works.

Pomegranate – produces a bright red liquid with strong pomegranate flavour. I think you have to be quite careful not to add too much pomegranate as it contains rather a lot of water resulting in a ferment that tastes of mead rather than pomegranate, but you can always stop the ferment by placing the jar in the fridge.

Making the condiments is simple. Take a small clean sterilized jam jar and fill 1/3 with the vegetables of your choice chopped to a uniform size. Spoon in honey until jar is 2/3 full. Screw on lid. Daily, for 3 weeks, shake/stir jar and loosen lid to allow gases to escape. The honey absorbs the water from the vegetables and the natural yeasts ferment slowly. Once fermented it can be kept in the cupboard and used as needed. If it begins to smell wrong, discard and start again. When you are getting low on your favourite condiment, just top the jar up with honey and the appropriate veg.

Angie also brought a gin and honey combination. OK but there are other flavours of gin I prefer. The dark rum and honey on the other hand was in a league of its own, nectar of the gods. Wish I had got the recipe from Angie but it is a good excuse to experiment and my first efforts should be ready to sample shortly.

Vanessa Woodford

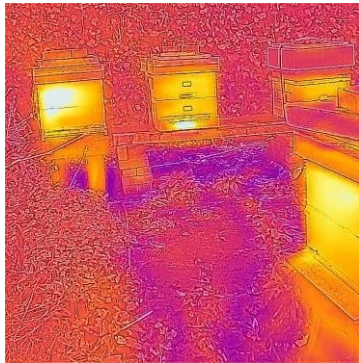
Thermal Imaging in the Apiary Camera - a beginning

As an interesting present the family decided that a thermal image camera would be a good addition to the monitoring aids for my bees (and their houses). I have had several sessions playing with it. The camera we have mounts to the mobile phone for ease of use, and photos can be taken for reference. The model that was chosen seems to give useful imaging of the bee cluster, especially useful if you have a hive you are concerned about. I have found that imaging is obviously best when sun is not on or been on the hive for a while.

Today being warm and sunny was a challenge but eventually I obtained an image that shows the route being used upwards in the hive body.



Comparison over the last few weeks show the growth of the nest and the increasing activity. The second photo of the same hive (taken at a slightly different angle) 20 days later shows the heat of the bees at the entrance and going up into the hive. The final picture is a wider view of the apiary; the leftmost hive is made of 12mm ply, the centre one is polystyrene. The one in the foreground is cedar, all clearly have different thermal properties. The catch with the poly hives is that the better insulation makes them a little harder to see 'into'. We will be curious to see how this can be used going forward.



Note: the Camera we have is a FLIR One Pro Camera for Android.

Janet Piper

Social events

Our New Year meal at the White Horse in Bradford on Tone was a great success with about 30 people gathering for a delicious meal and a catch up with friends.

We returned to the White Horse last weekend for a skittles match against Tiverton, accompanied by pie and chips. Unfortunately Tiverton were rather outnumbered, and Taunton won, but we look forward to a rematch in the not too distant future!

Upcoming Events

Annual Spring Equipment Auction – Sunday April 2nd at

Ruishton Village Hall TA3 5JD

Bring your items from 10am

Auction starts 2pm prompt

There will be a raffle and if anyone has a raffle prize they would like to bring along, we would be very grateful. As always we have a 'cafe' providing sandwiches, cake, tea and coffee. Just a mention about the parking; last year there were so many cars parked along the road that other cars were unable to get through as there were no passing places. Please do not park where you see traffic cones. There will be 2 passing places and this will hopefully ensure that cars can get through. The Parish Council has advised that there is plenty of parking throughout the village, so please consider parking there.

Tea and Chat – Saturday April 22nd, May 20th, June 10th, July 1st

After each Beginners Practical there will be a chance for ALL members to come along to the clubhouse at 4pm for a cup of tea and an opportunity to catch up with beekeepers. You may have a question or query and just simply want to have a Bee Chat. All welcome.

Basic Assessment

If any member would like to do the BBKA's Basic Assessment then Vanessa will go through the criteria with you during Bee Chat. This will be aimed at beekeepers who have had at least one colony of bees for a minimum of 12 months, and then there will be an assessment in the summer. All those who pass will get a free SBKA cloth badge to put on their suit. Contact Vanessa at vmwoodford@hotmail.co.uk to let her know if you are interested.

Swarm Control Afternoon – Saturday April 15th 2pm

Maggie North will lead this event and will talk about the basics of swarm control after which, weather permitting, all will go out into the apiary. This is open to all members but in particular those who have recently done a Beginners course and want to improve their knowledge and practice.

Bee Dating! – Sunday April 30th 3pm

Could you be a mentor for one of our beginner beekeepers? The benefits to the mentee of sharing your beekeeping experience are, perhaps, obvious.

"If you really want to learn something, then teach it for the preparation involved cements that knowledge and makes it stick. I've made many new friends and visited beautiful parts of Scotland and it's a privilege to be asked to mentor someone." Ann Chilcott - "The Bee Listener"

But have you considered the benefit of mentoring to you, an experienced beekeeper, and the possible benefits to your own beekeeping? Mentoring can be a very rewarding role and mentors comment that it has rejuvenated and consolidated their own beekeeping practice. And it can just be very rewarding to share your hard earned experience and knowledge with others and make some new beekeeping friends in the process.

Ann Chilcott's online blog The Bee Listener has some great articles on the benefits of mentoring to both mentee and mentor. Links to her excellent blog are here:

<https://www.beelistener.co.uk/beekeeping-in-scotland/who-needs-a-mentor/>

<https://www.beelistener.co.uk/beekeeping-education/more-on-mentoring-bee-buddying/>

Interested in finding out more? Come along to our bee dating event - we hope this will be a fun opportunity for experienced and "newbee" beekeepers to find a potential mentee or mentor over a cuppa. Or contact the Learning & Development Team at tauntonsecretary@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk for more information or to express interest.

Jenny Squire

Microscopy – Wednesday May 10th 7:30pm

A fantastic opportunity for Taunton members to find out more about Microscopy and get a sample of their bees tested for Nosema. This session will be led by Lynne Ingram (Master Beekeeper) and Eleanor Burgess (former Seasonal Bee Inspector) and will provide a basic introduction to Microscopy and Nosema screening.

Prior to the session participants will need to take a sample of 30 bees from one of their colonies, freeze overnight and bring along ready for testing, along with a pestle and mortar and/or zip lock plastic bag. Participants will be shown how to make up a test slide from their own sample of bees, which will then be screened for signs of Nosema.

All members welcome, however, numbers may need to be limited for this workshop if it proves very popular, so please contact the Learning & Development Team at tauntonsecretary@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk as soon as possible in order to express your interest.

To collect a sample of bees

You want old flying bees as they will have the largest nosema spore loads so block the entrance to the hive and wait until enough bees have collected around the entrance. Using a match box or a jam jar scoop up 30 bees, close the match box or put the lid on the jar and pop them in the freezer. Bring the sample with you to the Microscopy evening.

Bailey Comb Change - Saturday May 13th 2pm

Maggie North will lead on this event alongside other members, and all members are welcome to attend. The aim of the afternoon will be to learn how to put your bees onto new brood comb at the start of the season and why it can be part of your integrated pest management system.

Thanks to Janet Piper, Vanessa Woodford, Jenny Squire and Maggie North who have put together the Taunton Beekeepers Programme.

Julie Husband, Secretary tauntonsecretary@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

Adverts/Requests for help

Offer of land for out apiary

Helen Rook has offered some land (7 acres) near Wiveliscombe that she is planting for nature and biodiversity purposes. She has meadow areas, marsh, woodland and will soon be planting

a diverse forest garden. The key priority is to create more habitat for species, and bees are an important part of this. She is not a beekeeper herself and will have her hands full managing the land, but she'd welcome any bee keepers who would like to position some hives on her land. Helen can be contacted at helenrookhr@outlook.com

Help request from a Special Educational Needs Teacher

Would anyone like to help this school? If you are interested please could you contact me at tauntonsecretary@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk so that we can coordinate responses.

'I work in a Special Educational Needs School and teach Horticulture. We would love to keep some Beehives at our school. We do have big grounds but I don't know anything about beekeeping (yet).

We wondered if somebody would be kind enough to come out to meet me at my place of work and have a look to see if it is ok to keep them where we would like them, and also wondered if somebody would like to keep a hive or two at our school (when we are ready with Risk Assessments etc) and tend to them there.

I know it's a big ask but I thought I'd try. Our school is at West Hatch near Taunton. Thank you'

We hope you enjoyed reading our newsletter!

Deadline for June edition of Buzz: June 10th

Editor Lyndsay Stone