



Buzz

The Newsletter of Taunton & District Beekeepers

September 2023

Welcome to the latest edition of Buzz with news of what Taunton Beekeepers have been up to! Thank you once again to all those who have written articles and contributed to another informative and enjoyable read.

You may have read in the September issue of BBKA News that eR2, our membership renewal system, will allow members to share their details with the National Bee Unit's BeeBase if they wish. BeeBase maintains a voluntary register of beekeepers and the location of their apiaries in England, Wales and Scotland, as well as providing information about disease outbreaks, and all beekeepers are encouraged to join if they are not already members.

The option to share your details with BeeBase will be available to you at the time of renewal later this autumn; do read the article in BBKA news which answers a lot of potential questions that you may have.

You will all be aware of the worrying rise in Asian Hornet sightings; please read Vanessa's article later in the newsletter for all the latest information (correct at the time of going to press), and what you can do to help. Also included are details of upcoming events including our next social event – read on to find out more!

Lyndsay Stone Editor

Chairman's Report

We are now nearing the end of our year with the beginners having removed the honey supers from the apiary bees, and the extraction of the honey having been carried out at David Pearce's house. All who attended found this a very enjoyable day.

The honey show went well with TDBK having their own marquee housing excellent displays; this was down to the hard work of the Honey Show coordinator and his team of volunteers. Thank you for your help in making it a success.

Over the season new equipment has been purchased for use in the apiary.

My time as chairman of Taunton Beekeepers is coming to the end. I would like to thank all members of the Committee for their help and support over the past four years and I wish you well in the future.

Secretary's Report

Taunton Beekeepers AGM and after with speaker Jo Widdicombe

Our AGM will be held on 18 November at 2:30pm at the Clubhouse. We will start with the 'business' part of the meeting where we thank those who have given their time and are leaving the Committee and elect those who would like to support the running of the club. All AGM papers will be sent out before the meeting.

If anyone is interested in sitting on the Committee, please contact me or anyone else on the Committee for a chat. The Committee meets once a month, at the Clubhouse, but we can also use Zoom. There is a set agenda with a strong focus on actions, no waffling allowed.

Jo Widdicombe will then speak about improving the quality of our bees and the National Bee Improvement Programme. Jo has been a beekeeper for nearly 40 years and currently runs about 150 hives. Jo was Secretary of Cornwall BKA and Chairman of Southwest Group of Bee Farmers Association and has worked as a Seasonal Bee Inspector.

Jo has been a member of Bee Improvement & Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) for more than 30 years, and has served on the Committee including as the Group's Secretary and President. BIBBA's message of improving one's own bees rather than importing is as relevant today as when BIBBA was founded in the 1960s. With imports at an all-time high he sees the launch of the National Bee Improvement Programme (NatBIP) as hugely important for BIBBA and British and Irish beekeeping and hopes it will lead to a reduction in imports and an improvement in the quality of our bees.

Julie Husband Secretary

We need your help!

Robin, our Treasurer for the last few years, is stepping down at the AGM in November. We are very grateful for all the work he has done on the Committee in this role, and now we are looking for a volunteer to take on this role. It's an enjoyable role undertaking fairly regular

but undemanding financial transactions and general light financial engagement throughout the year interspersed with two or three short periods of more intense activity. Good organisational skills and numeracy are essential. Previous experience of preparing and managing budgets would be an advantage although formal book-keeping or accountancy qualifications are not required. You will play an important role advising the Committee on all financial matters and in return enjoy strong support from them.

If you are interested in finding out more about the role you can contact Robin on 07754907090 or email him at Robinrees1@hotmail.co.uk

Apiary Manager's Report

As we move into September and October, the hives are generally looking strong. The supers have been removed and any honey extracted. Most of the hives produced honey so hopefully there'll be a good harvest considering the variable spring and summer we've had.

The hives have all been given a first feed and the first varroa treatment has been administered, left for two weeks and the second added. After its removal more feed will be given, if needed. Hopefully this will ensure that all the hives will survive the winter months ready for the 2024 season.

Andrew Perry Apiary Manager



President's Day

We had an enjoyable afternoon in July listening to a talk by Richard Bache, Education Officer from SBKA, who is also a GP. He spoke about anaphylaxis and bee stings and offered excellent advice on what to do in the event of an anaphylactic reaction. The afternoon ended with a delicious tea and the chance to catch up with each other.



The 2023 Taunton Bee and Honey Show



This year saw the Bee and Honey Shows return to Taunton Flower Show but, with changes within TFS, it meant that we were in a tent on our own again! And, although the layout was changed slightly from previous years to accommodate some new educational exhibit areas, the feeling was that we'd never been away!

The Taunton and County Honey Shows were both well attended in terms of exhibits, but this year saw an increase in the number of SBKA County members entering. Across the two Shows, there were 210 exhibits from 26 entrants, which is perhaps a great sign that the Shows are still a valued part of our collective bee year?

A very noteworthy mention must go to Janet Piper who had clearly spent (too!) many hours perfecting her exhibits, as she went on to win eight cups and awards, including the TDBK's prestigious Stoker Cup.



The equivalent cup at County level, the Jubilee Cup, eluded Janet though as it was won by a very proud Malcolm Pearce. Malcolm also won the Show's 'Best in Show' Blue Ribbon award for his, by all accounts, delicious heather honey!

Photos show both being presented with their awards by TDBK's President, Michael Clark.



The Club's honey and candle rolling stalls did brisk trades across the two days, as was evidenced by the need of the volunteers to keep replenishing the tables!

Mentioning volunteers, the Shows simply could not happen without you/them and so, again, a big thank you to all who volunteered this year. Hopefully we'll see you again next year along with a few more of you? It really is good fun for a few hours or a whole day...and you get free entry to the Flower Show and lunch to boot!

The open honey tasting class competition is always a delight and well attended by both young and old in search of that perfect honey taste, as evidenced by smiles and sticky fingers everywhere! Congratulations to Malcolm Pearce for being this year's public's choice, in a class that is always very competitive amongst beekeepers.

The remainder of the Show was turned over to the wonderful bees, without them none of this would be possible either! With our ever-popular observation hive taking centre stage, we had created a great bee information area where willing volunteers provided details of bees and their lives; from egg to honey and all that's in between, using only their knowledge, photographs, information handouts, and various props in the form of hives and an extractor



There was also room for the very important subject, those pesky Asian hornets which really are now becoming a major concern across the South. So please do make yourself and others aware of 'How to identify them' and 'Who to notify in the event of a possible sighting'.

Although slightly smaller than our previous tent, having the Club's gazebo alongside meant we had a private area where people could relax and have a break in between stints of selling or talking!



Great to see Kate Solanki, one of last year's beginners, talking to the public!

Outside we had the popular Flying Bees with demonstrations planned for twice a day and inside, new to this year, we had a very relaxed Vanessa Woodford periodically demonstrating skep making.

So, now is the time to start thinking about what you could enter next year and honing those exhibits and also putting a day or so aside in your calendars to help and volunteer at the 2024 Shows. We are looking forward to welcoming you all back next year!

Andy Glendinning Honey Show Secretary

...and some thoughts on the experience of show stewarding

Having shown at the Honey Show for a couple of years and had some placings, I decided this was the year to learn what goes on in the judging. To that end I asked if I could help with the stewarding for the judges. I had entered a plethora of classes myself which I cleared with the Committee to ensure there was no conflict of interest. This was fine due to the new randomised competitor numbers that have been introduced in recent years.

Bright and early on show day I arrived at the tent. To begin with, all was quiet and the benches looked splendid with entries. Then the work commenced. David's van needed unloading of the apiary honey and then the judges and trainee judges started to arrive. The duties of the steward are "say nothing, make sure the judge has everything they need and run the results of the class to the Show Secretary for collation on the spreadsheet".

There were 2 judging teams, one on even classes the other on odd. I was on the odd team led by Suzi Perkins as Chief Judge. The honey is assessed for colour, using grading glasses, (lighter than the light glass for light, darker than the dark glass for dark, and the remainder are medium). They can be moved at the discretion of the Show Secretary into the correct class. Jars are checked for correct schedule description i.e. identical squat pound jars with lacquered lids. Jars must be filled so no light shows below the lid, clean, with labels in the correct position. Only then does tasting begin of those that have made the cut.

One jar of each is first checked for clarity, foreign bodies and signs of granulation with a torch, then opened and the aroma assessed, and then placed by the judge on the bench in the order they prefer so far. Then the tasting: small glass rods are used. The sample is placed on the back of the hand at the base of the thumb and tasted; rods are cleaned in hot water and dried, which was my job. The honey is then placed in prize order and the result written down, signed and taken to the Secretary. This is why judging takes so long!

Wax and candles are scrutinised for any debris, smelt for aroma and weighed to check that they meet the schedule requirements; yes, that means all 5 of the small wax blocks! Candles are lit and left alight for 30 minutes, then blown out and relit. This is why wick size is so important.

The polish was smelt, a small sample rubbed into a plain piece of pine, and the result was decided. Artistic items were judged together and mead also tasted by all, at the very end so as to not affect the palate.

I learned a massive amount of what goes into judging these events, thanks to the informative nature of the judging team. Some leave judging notes which for the competitor is brilliant for improving the standard of future show entries, and encouraging competitors to strive for a higher standard.

I would highly recommend the experience of stewarding to anyone who strives to improve their products, be it honey, wax or cut comb.

Janet Piper

Asian Hornet report

Yellow-Legged Asian Hornets

As some of you may be aware there has been a huge rise in the number of Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet sightings in the UK this year. The NBU report on 15th September was 48 nests in 40 locations. Kent has had more than its fair share of nest all over the county reaching up as far as Thamesmead in London. But it is not just Kent, hornet nests have been found in Plymouth, Portland, Southampton, Tunbridge Wells, Oxted and a possible sighting reported as far as Oxford. Maybe nests were missed last year and raised queens or the surge in hornet numbers on the continent last summer has resulted in more flying or hitching a ride across the channel.



If you want to see a map with all the nests found so far, please look at the BBKA website which has maps as well as lots of general information. On YouTube, type in 'Andrew Durham: Asian Hornet - A Special Briefing for Beekeepers' to see a recording of his two lectures which the BBKA have released. The first lecture is about how the hornet spread in France and what works and doesn't in controlling nest numbers. The second lecture is, I'm afraid, essential viewing for all beekeepers as it describes how to help protect one's hives.



It is vital that everyone puts up traps and monitors both them and their hives. The apiary has run out of traps and bait, but sugar water with fruit and beer or wine in it will attract both hornets and wasps but not bees. Andrew says the French find pressed apple juice (not concentrate which has added chemicals) works best. The apiary is currently sourcing more liquid bait and as soon as it arrives, we'll let you know and organise a time when you can collect some.

The BBKA is asking beekeepers to not only know what to look for and monitor but also to inform the public. If any of you are members of allotment, gardening, wildlife or other outdoor activity groups please make sure your fellow enthusiasts know how to identify and report any Asian Hornet sightings. I have leaflets and A4 information sheets if any of you need them. I also have samples of dead hornets and am happy to lend them to you for talks or give short talks myself.

Please put the Asian Hornet Watch app on your phones and if you find a hornet, photograph it and report it. If you need confirmation of what you have seen, put the photo on the TDBK advice/support WhatsApp group and we can check it for you.

Vanessa Woodford AHAT

Experiences of a 'Newbee'

Why does anyone take up beekeeping? I expect that there are more reasons than there are beekeepers, but for me it was the idea of helping one of the most important animals on the planet, combined with the concept of a stress-free hobby ... with the added perk of honey as a bit of a reward. I had no intention of growing this hobby into a small business, but being self-sufficient in honey was clearly attractive.

I did the first COVID beekeeping course run by TDBK, when we were all new to online learning. The course was fabulous, and the enthusiasm of all the instructors, mentors and other sages was palpable and infectious. Meeting other 'newbees' made me realise that I wasn't alone on this journey, but I was adamant that I wanted to do the full course before starting with my own colony.

I'd bought a second-hand WBC hive before I started the course but was such a novice that I didn't realise that all I'd got was the base and lifts, but I hadn't got a brood chamber, supers, frames, wax etc, let alone all the other paraphernalia that seems to be essential to keeping bees. Enthused by my course, I realised that I needed to do a bit more shopping so bought all the additional kit I would eventually need when I made up my mind to commit to getting some bees.

So, all good so far. I'm learning and buying and thinking about where to site my hive, preferably somewhere that was not only good for the bees, but also worked in our garden. But I didn't need to rush this as I wasn't getting a colony until after I'd finished my course. So, I just put the hive where it looked nice in the garden and never quite got around to assembling the brood box, supers, frames etc (all of which got stashed in the garage as I had plenty of time before I got my first colony).

Unfortunately, the bees didn't get the memo about the hive having none of the innards necessary to serve as a proper hive, and so (much to my surprise) I came home one summer's day to find bees entering and leaving the hive in sufficient numbers for it to be apparent that we had some unexpected guests, which we weren't ready for. Having donned my suit and checked inside, I found a small swarm taking up residence in the shell that was my hive. I managed to get them transferred over into my nuc box (still with no frames) and what followed was a frantic evening of assembling the innards for the hive. I think I mentioned earlier that I was looking for a stress-free hobby; the bees didn't get that memo either and my introduction to beekeeping felt like that occasion when I was a kid and I'd climbed up to 10m diving platform at my local swimming pool to have a look, only to be pushed off by one of my friends!!!

The bees quickly settled down into their new des-res. I found the queen on the first full inspection and was able to mark and clip her successfully. My confidence and knowledge grew week-by-week, with a lot of support from the fantastic WhatsApp chat forum and my bee buddy. My biggest fear then and now was doing something that would harm the bees, but they seem to know what they are doing and put up with my lack of experience. Since the unexpected arrival of our guests, I cannot say that the experience has been wholly stress free, what with queens going missing in action, an unexpected swarming, the unexpected arrival of a second queen resulting in a rapid and unplanned splitting of the colony, varroa mites, wax moths etc, but we all seem to be surviving and muddling along.

So, doing something for these fantastic creatures – Yes!!! Stress-free??? As my school report often stated, “could do better”. But that first taste of honey from your own hive is like winning at life.

Richard Spencer

TDBK Advice/support WhatsApp Group: some changes this September...

TDBK advice/support WhatsApp group was set up in 2019 to offer Taunton members, a space to communicate on all things bees, with immediate access to chat with other Taunton members via the WhatsApp platform. The group has been a great success with 70 members and has become a place to find out about forthcoming events like The Honey Show, and a forum to share news and questions on beekeeping.

As a consequence one of the original purposes for the creation of the group, which was to offer immediate and swift support to Beginners who might have an urgent query, was getting lost in the hubbub of posts. So we’ve made the decision to create a separate *Beginners Questions* forum, which will be open to current beginners and their questions, which will now be answered by a core group of experienced beekeepers.

Meanwhile *TDBK advice/support* will get a name change to *TDBK Members Forum*, we’ll provide some guidance info to ensure the forum stays a safe and pleasant place for all Taunton members, but otherwise the forum will just carry on as it has.

So “Happy WhatsApp-ing!” and get posting.

Any questions about this change or if you would like to be added to the group, then please feel free to direct messages to any of the WhatsApp group administrators (Janet Piper, Jenny Squire and Vanessa Woodford)

Jenny Squire Training Coordinator

A review of TDBK Beginners course 2023

One wet Wednesday night in late February this year's Beginners' sessions began. There were 26 new, nervous strangers in the room, all keen to learn the beekeeping art. The theory sessions went well and people started to chat and get to know one another. Next the Practicals on Saturdays, where identification of your new students, becomes so much harder due to the suits! Unfortunately due to the cold Spring, the first practical had to be more of an indoor affair while the apiary team did the first inspection of the season. Practising lifting frames straight out of a box and holding hive tools, making frames and orientation of the apiary in daylight for the first time. The second session there was enthusiasm to actually get into a beehive, but the weather turned cold and windy again. Simon demonstrated the opening techniques and handed frames around, with eggs, workers, brood and drone for all to identify and familiarise their visual skills.



By the next session swarm season had well and truly hit and there were queen cells galore. Several hives were already re-queening, having swarmed and not a drone to be seen anywhere. That afternoon was beautiful and sunny. The drones were all out at the party.

During the course of the next few sessions the students increased in confidence, several got their own bees and mentoring began. Very few students dropped out this year during this time, feedback has been very positive with several lovely comments:

"My main reflection is how fantastic it's been to be supported by so many existing beekeepers/members, even more so given that the last few sessions have been at very busy times for you all! Really the time and support that we get. "

"I'm enjoying what I'm learning and the way it's being presented is great, thanks so much to everyone involved."

The Beginners' sessions finished with the honey extraction theory and David's kind hosting of the practical honey extraction day. We look forward to continuing the learning during the autumn series and subsequent practicals that are planned for the calendar.

Janet Piper

The next TDBK Beginners Theory Course will start in February 2024 followed by a practical course at the start of the beekeeping season in April. For more information about the Beginners Course contact Janet Piper TDBKA Beginners Course Coordinator.

Forthcoming events at TDBK.....

“Reading the Varroa Tray” with Janet Piper and “The Bees’ Needs” with Maggie North

Wednesday 11 October at 7.30pm

Heatherton Park Apiary

Free to Taunton Members

How do you know what is going on in your hive during those cold winter months when you don’t really want to be lifting the crownboard and chilling your bees? The winter secrets of the hive are often revealed on the varroa tray, so what is that “gunk” telling you? Janet will talk you through it!

Staying ahead of your bees’ requirements is essential throughout the season; however it’s particularly important in swarm season and during the preparation for winter. Discussing the basics of colony expansion and contraction throughout the season, Maggie will be discussing “space”: when there’s not enough, and when there’s too much and what this means for the colony.

“TDBKA annual clean and stow session”

Saturday 21 October 2.00pm

Heatherton Park Apiary

All Taunton Members welcome!

Many hands make light work so please join us for the annual cleaning of apiary equipment ready for storing for Winter. It’s a great opportunity for members to catch up with other members now the honey harvest is in and the beekeeping season is drawing to a close.

If you are a Beginner, or have just acquired your bees, then this is an invaluable practical lesson in what steps you should be taking to clean and sterilise your frames and boxes each year ready for the start of the next season.

Wear old clothes. Tea and cake will be provided!

“Practical methods for creating foundation-less frames”

with Baruch Livneh and James Fidell

Wednesday 25 October 7.30pm

Heatherton Park Apiary

Free to Taunton Members

A talk by Baruch Livneh, on how to wire a frame with no nails. A frame will be provided for those wishing to have a go. Please bring leather gardening gloves or similar, to stop the wire cutting your fingers when tensioning it.

James Fidell will be guiding us through how to make a wireless frame using wooden supports, if you'd like to try wireless free frames next season.

This is great opportunity to have a go, or maybe just come and watch and learn about the benefits of allowing the bees to draw their own wax comb on the frame.

“What to do with your Clean Wax”

with Maggie North

Wednesday 8 November 7.30pm

Heatherton Park Apiary Free to Taunton Members

If you attended the workshop earlier this year then you'll now quite possibly have an enormous mountain of clean wax sitting at home taking up valuable space. So let us give you some idea what to do with your clean wax, including some handy Christmas present ideas!

Taunton Beekeepers Pub Quiz and Curry Supper

with Quizmaster Simon Jones

Friday 24 November 7.30pm Allerford Inn, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton TA4 1AL

Fingers on the buzz-ers! Join us for an evening of food, tippie and jollity at the The Allerford Inn. Quizmaster Simon Jones will be asking the questions on all things Apicultural (that's bee stuff to you and me), some of us will be scratching our heads and all of us will be exclaiming “Ah! I knew that one!” at some point.

Bring your hive-mind and may the best team win!

Numbers will be limited, so book your place quickly! Come as a team of 4, (you'll need a name), or we can hook you up with some team-mates on the night. There will be prizes! Food wise, there will be a choice of Chicken Korma, Beef Madras and a Vegetable (vegan) Curry, all served with chutneys, poppadoms and naan bread, £15 per person. You will need to book and pay beforehand so please do this by 3 November.

Tickets: Contact Julie Husband at tauntonsecretary@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk with names and food order and you'll be told how to pay.

Adverts/Requests for help

Parking

Due to the popularity of our events, our carpark can get overcrowded. Please try to share transport if you can, and park tidily if there is no one there to 'park' you.

Offer of land for hives

Annabel and Chris who have recently moved to Churchstanton, have ten acres in the Blackdown Hills with a range of lovely forage and are offering up some land to a beekeeper for an out apiary. If anyone is interested then please contact them direct bellabouttle@gmail.com

NB this offer was in the last edition of Buzz and is still available

Extractor hire

If you need to hire the apiary's extractor then please contact either Mike Dillon 07585 537030 or Andrew Perry 07527 887620 to arrange.

For sale

Celia McConnell has recently given up beekeeping and has a range of equipment for sale at a reasonable price. If you are interested, please email Celia, (who lives in Hemyock) for a list of what is available at celia.mcconnell@gmail.com

Free to a good home

An electrically sound hostess trolley.



There is an article in BBKA News June 2022 explaining how to convert the hostess trolley to a warming cabinet. To find the article, click on the link below and login.

www.bbka.org.uk/bbka-news-information

Please contact Janet at janet.piper51@gmail.com for details.

Repairs to bee veils and suits.

Contact Jenny Gammon on 01823 270465 or 07788407497

We hope you enjoyed reading our newsletter!

Deadline for December edition of Buzz: December 9th