

# The Newsletter



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



## **Brockbuster**

This is what greeted Gene Carolan when he was called to investigate potential vandal damage of hives left unattended since the death of their owner, two years ago. One hive has been systematically spread around, and a nucleus (on the right) has been tipped, but fortunately fell into the stand, preventing further damage.

Even though these hives endured three nights of sub zero temperatures, they seem to have survived, and the general opinion is that there are no grey areas; this was the work of those black and white 'earth movers', badgers.

Don't be complacent, put great big weights on the top, or strap them down.

## Membership renewal

It happens every year: we send out reminders in the November and December newsletters, complete with a membership renewal form, and one or two members are absolutely positive that they have never received one. **There is another renewal form attached to the email containing this newsletter,** making three in total.

Membership runs from January 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31st each year. If you renew before the end of January, there is normally no problem, but after that time, it could cause you a headache. Full membership of Somerton BKA for 2019 is £32.50, which includes Bee Disease Insurance for a maximum of three hives. If you pay after the end of January, your Bee Disease insurance will have expired, and it takes 6 weeks for it to be re-instated.

If you were a new beekeeper in 2018, who attended our course, you will have had associate membership for the year. That has now expired, and should you wish to continue as an associate member, you will have to pay the membership fee. If you now have bees, and wish to continue as a member, you really should take out full membership, as described above. Attendees on the 2019 course (now running) have just become associate members by dint of paying the course fee.

In any case, where memberships have not been renewed by the end of February, names will be removed from the membership and email lists, and you will no longer receive newsletters, or have any membership benefits, which includes all insurances and bulk purchase discounts.

We really don't want to lose anybody, so please renew your membership.

## Land for bees

There is some land available for keeping bees on, in Glastonbury. The size and exact location aren't known at present, but if you contact Gene Carolan on 01458 223037, he will be able to put you in touch with the land owner.

## Programme of events - 2019

Joe King made two excellent bookings before handing over the programme to Stewart Gould. On Thursday February 14<sup>th</sup>, Bryony Huntley will visit at the Somerton Parish Rooms, to talk about her experiences with the Warré hive.



On March 14<sup>th</sup>, Clare Densley will be visiting again, but not to talk about Buckfast bees this time. Her subject will be a timely reminder of swarming problems and how to deal with them.

Meg's Bee Safari in May is another timely expedition, as this is the time of year when disease is easiest to spot, and deal with. Meg. Seymour, one of our Seasonal Bee Inspectors, will guide us around some interesting apiaries and point out potential problems.

In June we are returning to Buckfast Abbey for the fourth consecutive year. This is a perennial favourite. The only costs are getting there, and a £5.00 donation to this excellent educational facility.



Our very own skep making guru, Diana Robertson, had decided that it was time to hang up her turkey bone, and cow horn, but has been persuaded to act as a visiting expert for this skep making master class in July. She will provide the expertise, if we provide the materials, a constant flow of hot tea and a comfortable chair. All in the comfort of our apiary.

There will, most probably, be a queen rearing course during late spring, if Roy White can be persuaded to do it again. More information later.

To finish on a more studious note, there is a study group in the association, which has discussions around the BBKA modular exams, and is presently taking a correspondence course to enable them to sit module 3 in March.

Those who have been keeping bees for a year or more should also think about taking the BBKA Basic Assessment.

## Ground breaking research into Varroa



After Cornell University, Samuel Ramsey began research work for his PhD at the University of Maryland where he received his doctorate last year. His undergraduate studies fit perfectly with honey bees and Varroa. However, Sammy had noticed some problems with the Varroa and honey bee relationship, partially having to do with the white faeces Varroa left in honey bee larval cells. Many beekeepers have noticed this distinctive poop as a sign that Varroa had infested bee larvae in those cells.

Now to take a step backwards in time, to 1995. Varroa was in the U.S. and causing problems. Dr. Allen Cohen did identify the white material, Varroa poop, left on cell walls as a purine, a chemical compound called guanine. He even thought that substance was strange if Varroa was feeding on the bees' blood, or haemolymph. For some reason that initial discovery was never followed by more research.

Let's step forward quite a few years to an interesting but not pleasant situation. Unfortunately, Sammy's Dad acquired gout. Those people with gout have to avoid certain foods or they end up with a lot of joint pain. Fatty foods such as some meats, especially organ meats like liver, are on the list of foods to avoid. When digested, these foods will leave more purines circulating in the body which then build up in the joints. Sammy connected those fatty foods to avoid, with the excretion of guanine by Varroa. He hypothesized that since the mites were excreting the chemical components that make up fatty organ meats that they must be eating a lot of some sort of organ meat just like people who deal with gout.

Sammy first looked at the digestive systems and the excrement of haemolymph-feeding parasites and found that those parasites, when compared with Varroa, were definitely different. While beekeepers do see Varroa perched on the tops of thorax or abdomen of honey bees, Sammy found that Varroa feed on the underside, or the ventral part, of the bees. Furthermore the Varroa had wedged themselves under the segments that make up the body covering of the bee potentially giving them access to a specific fatty organ in that area called the fat body. He then marked this organ with a bio-stain that only glows when attached to fatty tissue and marked the haemolymph with a different glowing marker. After this he exposed the marked bees to the mites. Sammy's "eureka

moment” occurred – Varroa don’t feed on haemolymph—they feed on fat body. (Many books will now have to be rewritten to reflect his discovery.)

Beekeepers do know that the “fat body,” present in both the larva and adult bee, is essential to the bees’ lives, especially for winter bees. This fat body provides the nourishment for the Winter bees to live and is essential for enabling the Winter bees to feed the developing bee larvae when the queen begins egg laying during Winter months. Inside the adult bee the fat body is mostly found on the bottom (ventral) side of the abdomen.

To verify his initial thought, Sammy conducted several more tests. He froze bees with mites on them in place and cut straight through them both. Under a fancy electron microscope, he was able to show that the mites were destroying honey bee fat body tissue wherever they fed. Then he raised mites off of bees feeding them different diets of honey bee tissue, some with fat body, some with haemolymph and some with a combination of the two. Mites fed on haemolymph had the same results as those fed nothing – both died quickly. Those fed both fat body and haemolymph lived longer than those fed just haemolymph but the ones that lived the longest and laid the most eggs were the mites just given fat body.

After receiving his doctorate Sammy was employed at the USDA Bee Research Laboratory in Beltsville, Maryland. This lab, one of four Agricultural Research Service labs doing bee research, concentrates on bee health, such as diseases and parasites. His current project, based on his university research, is to figure out a practical way to kill the mites.

***From Bee Culture - The Magazine of American Beekeeping, December 2018***

## **Honey Sales**

We had quite a good honey crop at the apiary this year, and thanks to the extractor gifted us by Gerald Fisher, managed to get it all into jars. This left us with a conundrum - what do you do with that much honey? Our ever resourceful vice chairman, Eric McLasughlin, sorted that problem for us, and has just delivered the first batch to our new ‘outlet’, Cobbs Wholefoods, in Somerton. He has found other shops which will take it too.

## Asian Hornet Action Teams



Catherine Fraser

There have been 19 reported incidents of Asian hornets in the UK since 2016, with 4 nests having been found last year. Because of the near certainty of more incursions this coming season, Lynne Ingram, a member of Somerset Beekeepers Association is co-ordinating representatives from each of the Somerset divisions to form a Somerset Asian Hornet Action Team (AHAT). Catherine Fraser will be heading up the Somerton and District team. We all met up in November for a presentation from Lynne about the life history of *Vespa velutina* and the story of its European incursion and migration, as well as her experiences in Jersey of tracking hornets using bait stations.

The plan for the AHATs is that they will operate a bit like the swarm line. AHAT members will be alerted to possible sightings and will attend, and try to verify sightings with photos or trapping of individuals. Observations of flight lines and setting up of bait stations will enable information on nest sites to be relayed to the National Bee Unit, and our local bee inspectors, for location and nest destruction. The AHAT members will not be involved in nest destruction. Lynne has asked that each divisional representative gathers together a local team of people who would be willing to assist. If that includes YOU then please contact me at [helivet@msn.com](mailto:helivet@msn.com). Our next meeting is at Puriton Village Hall on March 3<sup>rd</sup> from 10.00 am – 1.00pm

Lynne Ingram is coming to give a talk to Somerton Division on the Asian Hornet on April 27<sup>th</sup>, at our apiary, from 2.30pm. I can thoroughly recommend her as a speaker.

**Catherine Fraser – Somerton AHAT co-ordinator**

## Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan

Somerset County Council have partnered up with Somerset Wildlife Trust & Friends of the Earth to initiate an action plan to help pollinating insects. However, they didn't think to involve Natural England, or the 850 members of Somerset Beekeepers' Association, and a similar number who don't belong to Somerset BKA. Mmmm! To my estimation they missed out on about 100 million pollinating insects.



## Introductory Course

Looking at the records, the highest turnout for this course was in 2015. We hadn't taken payment in advance, and had a trail of 76 people, out of the door and into the cold, wet streets of Somerton, all waiting to pay and sign in. That was, by a big margin, the largest number in living memory that have turned up for the Introductory Theory Course.

Since 2015 we have moved from the United Reformed Church venue in Somerton, mainly because it was sold, and we have collected the fee in advance, wherever possible, if for no other reason than to prevent the 'punters' from drowning, before they get in the door.

On Wednesday January 16<sup>th</sup>, we hosted 43 enthusiastic attendees for the first session of the 2019 introductory course. We sincerely hope that they will all go on to keep bees, but although that is the dream, some come along simply because they want to further an interest, and have no ultimate desire to keep bees, and that's fine.

## Somerset BKA Lecture Day

This really is an excellent chance to hear experts talking about the latest happenings in beekeeping. Don't be afraid though, it isn't all going to sail over the top of your head. These people are used to talking to all levels of beekeepers at the same time. There was, however, one speaker about 4 years ago who was very interesting on the topic of drones. He did go deeper and deeper into the subject (droned on a bit), and a few attendees glazed over completely, but that isn't the norm.

**Paolo Mielgo** is an Argentinian chemist who works for Vita Europe, the manufacturers of Apiguard, among other things. Guess what, he's going to be talking about - varroa. Bearing in mind Samuel Ramsey's thesis on varroa (page 4). It will be interesting to hear what Paolo has to say.

**Professor Stephen Martin** has been associated with entomology for 35 years and has his name linked with 137 publications, while also being an editorial Board Member of Plos One, the online scientific publication.

**Derek Mitchell** claims that his wife does the beekeeping and he tries to improve on the logistics side. He had an article in the BBKA News recently, on the subject of insulation in natural bee nests and the lack of it in modern beehives.

**Clare Densley** is well known to Somerton members, as we visit Buckfast each year, and intend to do so again this June 23<sup>rd</sup>. She will also be visiting Somerton BKA in March, to talk about swarming.

As mentioned in an email recently, tickets are £5.00, which includes refreshments, but not lunch. There aren't any discounts for not having the refreshments.

You can bring your own lunch, or visit a local hostelry, of which there are a good few. Williams' supermarket in the centre of Somerton also does sandwiches and salads.

Tickets are available from Jackie Mosedale on 01458 241146 or email: [jackiemosedale@gmail.com](mailto:jackiemosedale@gmail.com).

**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](mailto:redrascal@tiscali.co.uk) **Mobile 07812 738793 Telephone 01458 2721144**

## At the apiary

All is looking good at the apiary, even though there seems to be development, on an industrial level, going on at the top of Downslade quarry. We have 7 colonies going through the winter. Joe and Stewart treated them with apibioxal (oxalic acid) in early January, and although a little upset at being disturbed, they were in rude health.

The committee had settled on buying a shipping container for £2000 to keep clean hive parts and kit in. It was to be placed in the bee meadow, so that it wouldn't be necessary to go all the way back to the main building (The Bee Space) to collect kit. There could also be problems with bees following you back to the building, and putting people not wearing bee-suits in danger. However, Catherine Fraser managed to find a wooden shed, which was going to a skip unless a home could be found for it. Hence we have a shed measuring 4 metres x 2 metres, which may have been £2000 cheaper than a shipping container, but does need about £800 spending on materials to bring it up to scratch. That may seem like a lot, but will represent an £800 saving, thanks to the free labour of some of our members. We may also require some help when it comes to treating and sealing the new timbers, and finally erecting the 'Fraser Wing'.

The hedge between the car park and bee meadow is in the process of being laid, which should thicken up the base. This hedge was originally planted at the old apiary, and was removed when we vacated, as it didn't fit in with the landlords development plans. Although most of it survived the move, it was a bit sparse in places, and very thin at the base.

We have been successful in a renewed application to the Woodland Trust and are to be given a further 420 fruiting hedgerow saplings to thicken the rest of the perimeter hedging. It will require another work party to plant that lot, so keep your diaries free for the first part of March. We'll let you know when you're needed.

### **Death of a projector**

We purchased a second hand projector about 10 years ago, and it has soldiered on bravely. It is normally the bulbs which sound the death knell of projectors, as they have a limited life span, and new ones cost in the region of £120 - £150. In our case though, the bulb was fine, but the projected image was rather like a negative snow globe, with black snow. It was decided to bite the bullet, and we were looking at spending somewhere above £300 for a new one. An eagle eyed committee member spotted a £399.00 model being sold for £239.00, and advertised as nearly new. When it arrived, it was still in its original packaging, complete with adhesive plastic film. What's more, the electrical company that sold it also gave a 12 months guarantee.

### **The Honey Show 2019**

We have held the Honey Show at Long Sutton Village Hall for many years now, but were treated very shoddily this year, as the Parish Council tried to hike the rental price by a huge margin, and wanted to charge us for setting up on the evening prior to the show. A revised price was negotiated, but we were invoiced at the higher rate. We settled the invoice at the previously agreed rate.

That in it itself would have been bad enough, but we also had an agreement regarding leaving the hall by 6.00pm on the day of the show. We moved the prize giving from 5.00pm to 4.00 pm to accommodate this, but were jostled out by two committee members, insisting that we had to be out by 5.00pm, as another group had booked it.

Consequently, we have booked Keinton Mandeville Hall for this year's show. It's bigger, has a larger car park, and is definitely less expensive.

## Auction of secondhand Bee Equipment

Taunton Division's auction of secondhand equipment is being held at Ruishton Village Hall, (Cheats Road TA3 5JD) again this year. Put Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup> in your diaries. Items for sale are accepted from 10.00am onwards and you can view items as they arrive. The sale itself starts at 2.00pm.

As with all auctions, the quality of items for sale is entirely dependant on what is brought in. There are often used frames for sale, but these should be avoided at all costs. Some years there are absolute bargains, but sometimes there doesn't seem to be anything worth having at all. A 9 frame stainless steel extractor did sell for £40.00 last year, and there are normally some reasonably good bee-suits which go for a sensible price.

Any new beekeepers attending should be assured that advice can be sought from more experienced hands, who are only too pleased to help. If you aren't sure, seek advice. If you can't get advice, leave it alone.

On BBC1's Antiques Road Trip (Monday January 14<sup>th</sup>) an extremely shabby, and very old galvanized smoker sold for £30.00.

## Australian worries

Australian beekeepers are, understandably, extremely worried about several possible pests, but top of the pile are our own European wasps, which have already arrived there, and varroa mites, which as yet, haven't. They have some very interesting ideas about how to monitor varroa. They use a 'sugar roll' technique which involves placing about 200 bees in a mesh topped jar containing icing sugar. The bees are then rolled around, and according to the **Bee Aware** website, the icing sugar crystals get between the mites and the bees, resulting in the mites falling off. Then the jar is shaken over a bucket of water. The sugar will dissolve, leaving the mites floating on the surface of the water. The bees can then be returned to the hive - Mmmm?

The alcohol wash is the one I like best. Tip another 200 bees, or so, into a mesh topped jar containing ethyl alcohol, and swish them about for around a minute, which will detach the mites from the bees. Then invert the jar over a sheet of newspaper. The dead mites will fall through the mesh onto the newspaper. All the bees will be dead as well, but you will know if they had varroa mites - Mmmm?

### Dates for your diary

#### **Beginners' Beekeeping Course**

Wednesdays Jan 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup>, then Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>.

All sessions start at 7.30 pm

**Tor Rugby Club,  
Lowerside Lane, Glastonbury  
BA6 9BH**

#### **Somerset BKA Lecture Day**

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February

9.00am - 5.00pm

**Edgar Hall, Somerton TA11 6SB**

#### **Enjoying bees with the Warré hive**

Thursday February 14<sup>th</sup> - 7.30 pm

With Bryony Huntley  
Somerton Parish Rooms,  
TA11 7NB

#### **Swarming and the season ahead**

Thursday March 14<sup>th</sup> - 7.30 pm

With Clare Densley  
of Buckfast Abbey

#### **Asian hornet update**

Saturday April 27<sup>th</sup> - 2.30 pm

**At our apiary in Upton**  
With Lynne Ingram  
Somerset AHAT co-ordinator

#### **Meg's Bee Safari**

**Tuesday May 14<sup>th</sup>**

With Megan Seymour SBI  
Venues to be confirmed

#### **Visit to Buckfast Abbey apiary**

Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup> - 10.00 am

Guided by Clare Densley

#### **Skep making master class**

Saturday July 20<sup>th</sup> - 10.00am

**At our apiary**  
**Overseen by Diana Robertson**

#### **Somerton BKA Honey Show**

Saturday September 21<sup>st</sup>

**Keinton Mandeville Village Hall  
TA11 6EB  
(New venue)**

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