The Newsletter

Somerton & District Beekeepers' Association

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SBKA website www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

Bumper Harvest?

Several of our members have mentioned bumper Spring harvests, even though the Oilseed rape was decimated by the heaviest rain for the month of February ever recorded.

In March and April, fruit blossom was allowed to do its thing, without being hit by strong winds or rain, and May, being the hottest on record provided an excellent nectar flow, without the mixed blessings of oilseed rape.

Thoughts from the Chair

Many of you came to the apiary to collect jars, which worked fairly well given the need for social distancing. Timed arrivals and spaced boxes for collection was the order of the day. There were a few problems with matching lids and jars and one member didn't get the jars expected. However by and large a success and most of the problems subsequently sorted. Thanks in particular to Stewart Gould who sourced the best financial deal for us.

Members should be pleased to know that work has started on the water supply at the apiary. The trench from the water trough in the next door field now stretches to the apiary boundary. Tim Brake hopes to complete the work shortly. It will be a joy to turn the tap on rather than carrying in water.

We owe a debt of thanks to Catherine Fraser who has been carrying out hive inspections at the apiary on a weekly basis since the start of the season. Clearly with the Covid crises we were unable to continue with the usual inspection teams. Catherine is standing down next month and a new inspection regime will start. It will not surprise some of the members to learn that it takes three men to carry out the work of one woman. Joe King, Nigel Gregory and I will attempt to muddle through. Many thanks Catherine!

I don't know if you have been affected by the "June gap" but I've had reports of low amounts of pollen being collected. Perhaps worth checking on your next inspection.

Over the last couple of years Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus seems to be the new kid on the block in the ongoing struggle against bee diseases. Several members have reported this problem and there appears to be no treatment. The good news is that some colonies survive. However some do not. We currently have an affected hive at the apiary.

July is upon us and the bees should be bringing in the summer harvest. You will need to keep ahead on the super front. A reminder to new beekeepers - bees are reluctant to fill the outside frames in the super , but you can move these frames to the centre - exchanging them with the capped frames from the centre. I hope you have a good harvest with many supers on your hives. I understand that one hive at the apiary already has four on top. If you carried out swarm prevention measures in the spring, the risk will have been reduced, however, the risk of swarming, although reducing, is still with us.

Good luck for the rest of the season. Best wishes to you and your family. Stay safe.

Eric McLaughlin

Can Vegans eat honey??

This is an article published online at www.veganonboard.com and is copied verbatim, complete with scientific inaccuracies, typos et al.

'With some vegans still choosing to eat local, raw honey and those following a plantbased diet consuming honey, we can understand why there's sometimes confusion whether honey is vegan. It's not, and here's why – plus a recipe for homemade vegan 'honey'!

Most people know that vegans choose to avoid meat, dairy and eggs in their diet and lifestyle. But honey is one of the lesser known products that isn't vegan.

"A philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals."

If you follow the definition of veganism by the Vegan Society, honey is clearly not vegan. When I first went vegan, I wasn't really sure why honey isn't vegan. I even knew vegans that still chose to eat honey. Like many others I thought that honey was bee friendly and a way of helping our little pollinating friends. This is a common misconception.

European Honeybees Apis mellifera are intensively bred, and transported across the world to pollinate and produce honey. Well we can all agree that pollination is a good thing – in fact we have a pollinator to thank for every one in three mouthfuls that we eat! But is honey a good thing?

Honeybees are just one of the many creatures that pollinate crops. The intensive breeding of honeybees can lead to increased susceptibility to disease. According to the Vegan Society, "these diseases are then spread to the thousands of other pollinators we and other animals rely on, disputing the common myth that honey production is good for our environment."

Cambridge University professor Dr Jonas Geldmann writes that Conserving honey bees does not help wildlife. He goes on to say that commercial honeybees compete with other wild pollinators and can have negative effects. “Levels of wild pollinators, such as species of solitary bumblebee, moth and hoverfly, continue to decline at an alarming rate. Currently, up to 50% of all European bee species are threatened with extinction,”

An common argument in favour of honey is often that they honeybees are necessary for crop pollination. However, honeybees are not nearly as efficient at pollinating as other wild bees. Wild bees simply don’t produce as much honey, or profits…

The honey industry also follows unethical practices, such as wing clipping of the queen bee, culling and burning hives in the winter. PETA says “Since “swarming” (the division of the hive upon the birth of a new queen) can cause a decline in honey production, beekeepers do what they can to prevent it, including clipping the wings of a new queen, killing and replacing an older queen after just one or two years, and confining a queen who is trying to begin a swarm.”

Honey is not simply a by product of bees, it is what they make to sustain themselves through the winter. They take nectar from flowers, and combine it with an enzyme that they secrete, in order to make honey which they consume and store. When honey is harvested, beekeepers often replace their honey with a sugar substitute that is not nearly as nutritious for the bees as their carefully made honey. By taking honey away from bees we are exploiting them. Veganism seeks to avoid exploitation of animals, which is one of the reasons why vegans don’t eat honey’.

Terry Harris

Terry Harris was a gentleman in every sense of the word. In all the years that I knew him, I never once heard him raise his voice. He dealt with everything in a calm, dignified and efficient manner, and he got things done.

I remember once at a Somerset B.K.A. Council Meeting, when Terry raised the issue of our logo, which he thought was "dull as ditch water". He then went away, and re-designed the black and white icon into the colourful badge that we have today. No fuss! Just got things done.

He served as Treasurer to the Somerton Division for several years, and played a part in the substantial growth of the Division over this period, when it grew into the strongest Division in the county. He helped in setting up an apiary at the Somerset Rural Life Museum at Glastonbury. He constructed some very smart stands for the hives as I remember.

This was another area of Terry's expertise. As well as a superb beekeeper, he was extremely adept at woodwork. His lathe was his passion, and there are one or two beekeepers around, who will be in possession of one of Terry's turned bowls. He adapted the Divisional observation hive, so that it could be easier used at shows. When I needed some model hives, to help me at Introductory Courses, it was Terry, who produced perfectly scaled National hives, complete with self-spacing frames. I believe that these are still being used at Introductory Courses today.

Terry was a good beekeeper, a superb craftsman, and a loyal member of the Somerset Beekeepers' Association, but most of all, he was a good friend. I will miss him!

Gerald Fisher.

Association microscope

Want to look at some small details associated with your bees, flowers or pollen, then you can! Because of the generosity of Roy White, a long standing member of our association and a very experienced and respected beekeeper, we have a microscope that can be borrowed by our members.
The association would expect the microscope to be treated with care and the user would.of course,have to supply his/her own microscope slides. The instrument itself has a magnification up to x 1000 and is electrically illuminated.

To borrow it for a short period of time, I.e. 2 weeks, please contact **Fred Clarke on 01278 722830**, if you want to discuss its loan.

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

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Honey Jars

As was mentioned earlier in the newsletter, because of the large Spring honey crop this year,we have already made one order for honey jars.

Several members have made enquiries about a further order, and it is entirely possible that we will do this, but we need to know who wants what - and quickly. A few missed the boat the last time around. The more we buy, the less expensive they are.

Generally speaking, jars are available in the following shapes sand sizes.

8oz (272g) round - twist top
8oz (272g) hexagonal - twist top
12oz (340g)round - twist top
12oz (340g) hexagonal - twist top
1 lb (16oz or 454g) round - screw top

Unless otherwise stated, jars will come with gold coloured metal lids. Plastic screw lids are available for 1lb (454g) screw top jars, but please state if you require these. Lids can be ordered separately, but remember that with the possible exception of 1lb screw top jars, lids from one company may not fit jars from another.

Quantities per box/tray vary, dependant on which manufacturer comes up with the best prices. Please state how many jars of each variety you require and we will try to adjust your needs to a full box/tray. We aren't able to supply part boxes/trays, but you could split an order with a friend. Generally speaking, 1 lb jars come in boxes of 72. Smaller jars are in boxes of 72 or 84, but trays hold 33 or 41 jars.

We will aim for delivery towards the end of the month, provided sufficient interest is shown to make it worthwhile.

Problems with honey setting

We know that oilseed rape honey can cause all sorts of problems for the unwary, as it sets hard - very quickly, and has to be harvested before it sets in the combs.

Oilseed rape (OSR) has been the norm for April and May near my apiary, for the last few years and I expect others will have had the same experience. As usual I took off the oil seed rape honey at the end of May, after using a refractometer to make sure that it was ripe. (I had a problem with a batch from 2 years ago which I bottled this year and it started fermenting which is a first for me, hence using the refractometer). There wasn't as much oilseed rape close by this year but I managed to extract and filter and put into honey buckets around 110lb which is less than the last few years.

The weather has been good still, and the summer flowers (including Himalayan Balsam!) are well in bloom so I made sure that the bees had enough space. Then I started to anticipate a good summer crop of honey…. until that is I noticed some little yellow flowers in the next door field. My neighbour told me that he was going to sow mustard as a manure crop and what I was seeing was very much like oil seed rape. I looked it up on the internet and consulted Stewart and lo and behold it is a close relation of rape.

The farmer has now ploughed it in but there are still a few mustard flowers around the edge of the field. I have to make the decision whether to extract a second time now and then do a third extraction in a couple of months. The liquid summer honey sells much better for me than the rape. I have to say that my least favourite task as a beekeeper is extraction, so I might be lazy and hope that the summer crop isn't too contaminated and impossible to spin out at the end of the summer. If anyone else has the same experience then please give me a ring.

Steve Horne - 01278 662335

NB: oilseed rape and mustard are members of the brassica (cabbage) family, and have several close relations, including rocket, woad and wallflowers.

Carnivorous British plants???

Sally Lye, one of our members noticed that after recent heavy rain, she found lots of bees, which she presumed had drowned, in the cup-like junction between leaf and stalk on common teasels, in her allotment. The following is from an article in 'In Defense of Plants', an online magazine, which can bed read in full here.

As far as carnivorous plants are concerned, the common teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) seems like a strange fit. Observe this plant up close, however, and you might notice something interesting. Its leaves are perfoliate and form a cup-like depression where they attach to the main stem. Not only does this cup regularly fill with water, it also frequently traps small insects.

Many have speculated over the function of this anatomical trap. Much of this speculation has centered around the idea that it may serve as a form of protection for the flowers located above. Insect herbivores climbing up the stem in search of food instead find a moat of water. Some inevitably fall in and drown in the process. Other hypotheses have been put forward as well including the possibility of something approaching carnivory. The idea that common teasel could be, to some degree, carnivorous never really went away. For most of this time it has remained entirely theoretical. There simply was no empirical evidence available to say otherwise. All of that changed with a 2011 study published in PLOS. A research duo finally put this theory to the test in the first ever experiment to see if teasel gains any sort of nutrient benefit from its insect victims. By systematically supplying teasel plants with insect prey, the team was able to look at how plants responded to the addition of a potential meal. They added various levels of insect larvae to some plants and removed them from others. For their study, evidence would come in the form of some sort of physiological response to the feeding treatments. If teasel really is obtaining

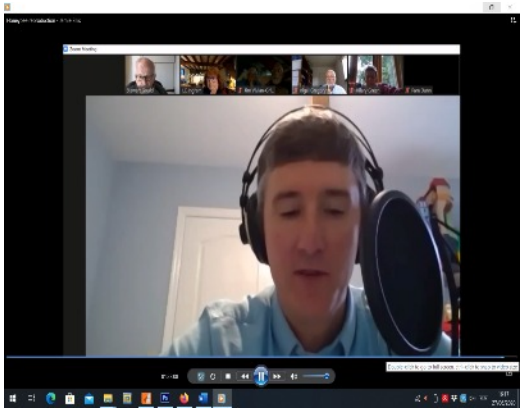
nutrients from its insect victims, it stands to reason that those nutrients would be allocated to either growth or reproduction.

The resulting data offers the first evidence that teasel may in fact be benefiting from the insect carcasses. Although the team found no evidence that plants supplemented with insects were increasing in overall biomass, they did see a positive effect on not only the number of seeds produced but also their size. In other words, when fed a diet of insects, the plants weren't growing any larger but they were producing larger amounts of heavier seeds. This is a real boon for a plant with a biennial life cycle like teasel. The more healthy seeds they can produce, the better.

As exciting as these finds are, one must temper their expectations. As the authors themselves state in their paper, these findings must be replicated in order to say for certain that the effects they measured were due to the addition of insect prey. Second, no chemical analyses were made to determine if the plants are actively digesting these insects or even how available nutrients may be absorbed. Simply put, more work is needed. Perhaps teasel is a species that, evolutionary speaking, is on its way to becoming a true carnivore. We still can't say for sure. Nonetheless, they have given us the first evidence in support of a theory that went more than a century without testing. It is interesting to think that there is a strong possibility that if someone wants to see a carnivorous plant, they need go no further than a

Zoom Meetings

Somerset BKA have arranged some excellent talks to date, and there are more to come - a programme will be published soon, but Stuart Anderson, co-inventor of the Flow hive is amongst them. My favourite to date, was definitely Professor Jamie Ellis of Florida University, talking from his home, while child-minding, about ‘ Reproduction of the honeybee’. He will be back with ‘Reproduction of the colony’ .



Dates for your diary

Online Zoom talks

Various upcoming online talks. Watch your emails.

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