

The Newsletter



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SBKA website www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk



The first blackthorn

Snowdrops and hazel provide pollen very early in the season, but the first provider of both nectar and pollen is *prunus spinosa*, or blackthorn to you and me. Each year I try to spot the first bloomings of this harbinger of spring, and the dip on the A39 between the Pipers pub in Ashcott and the village itself, usually provides an early crop, but it is always pipped at the post by a hedge-row close to Hornblotton on the A37. Sometimes it is so early that it couldn't possibly bear any nectar at all, although it will provide pollen.

Still very early, it was seen on February 18th, in full bloom. As temperatures soared to the highest ever recorded in February (21.65°C), so blossom appeared everywhere, with other species of prunus, and magnolias as well.

Beginners' Theory & Practical sessions

The theory sessions finished on Wednesday February 20th, with only 3 people having dropped out along the way. We started with quite a high number of 42, which was 8 more than last year, but of last year's 34 starters, only about 25 made it to the end of the theory sessions. It is a long slog on cold winter's nights, and both Joe and I believe that quite a few participants start out believing that there isn't too much to learn. How soon they are disabused.

Because of the excellent numbers, the practical sessions will be divided into two groups, going to the apiary on consecutive days. With less people crowded around the hives, it will be much more interactive, and a better learning experience altogether. Because of the increased number of sessions, we will need more demonstrators. If you are prepared to give up a morning, once a month, then please let Joe or me know, as soon as you can. We are going to need around 8-10 in total. Two or three years' experience and a gentle touch are about all that is required, and the only two things we can promise you in return are eternal gratitude and chocolate biscuits.

If you can show how to open a hive, and observe the bees' activities, recognise signs of low level disease, queen cells, and signs of swarming, and other basic hive chores, you will be made very welcome indeed. If you're still not completely sure what is involved in demonstrating, or need some reassurance, then give either one of us a call. Our telephone numbers are on the back page.

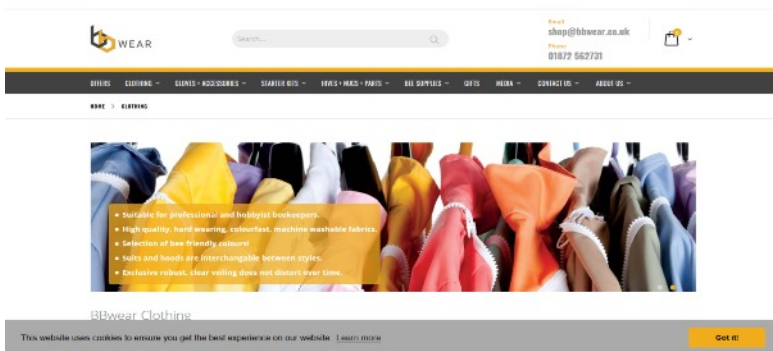
Stewart Gould

Bath & West Show volunteers

We are looking for volunteers to man the Somerset BKA stand in the Bees & Honey Tent, at the Bath & West Show. You can work a full day, or do half a day and then enjoy the rest of the day, taking in all the fun of the fair. Volunteers are needed for mornings and afternoons.

The normal ticket cost, at the gate is £25.00 . Volunteer and you get free entrance.

Contact Ken Tredgett at tredg@talktalk.net if you are interested.



BBWEAR suit offer

Every year we endeavour to get great deals for our members on jars, treatments, nucleus hives, Haynes Bee Manuals, bee-suits and anything else where there is a benefit from buying in bulk. We have taken a straw poll with the new beekeepers and it appears that around 20 would like to take advantage of our buying power. BBWear are definitely one of the top two suit manufacturers in the UK, but the other one, BJ Sherriff, is about £30 dearer for a basic suit.

BBwear have offered a discount of 15%, and provided we place an order of more than 5 suits, normally waive the postage and packing, which is £8.00 for a single suit. Their most popular line, the basic bee suit (BB501) is £103.95 plus p&p, but with the discount applied, will cost just £88.36, and no p&p.

There are less expensive suits available, but they tend to be heavy, and hot in the warmer months, and they are less durable. The 'cheapo' heavy duty cotton one I bought, lasted one season before the zip broke and the veil tore. I also had to stuff a kitchen tissue under the velcro chest strap, to keep the bees out.

Many people have had their BBwear suits for 15 years, or more. Whether you are a new beekeeper or just need a replacement suit, use this link to go to the website - <https://www.bbwear.co.uk>, choose a size, colour and style, with code no, then let Stewart Gould know all the details, at somertonbees@btinternet.com

The deadline date for orders is Saturday March 16th. We'll sort out the financial details after that date, but you can appreciate that we will want payment in advance. We have placed orders previously, and been left holding a bee suit, or two.



Chinese bees

An Asian honey bee (*apis cerana*) approaches a daffodil in Chengdu, capital of China's Sichuan Province. *Apis cerana* is smaller than our native honey bee, and was the original host for the varroa mite, and one strain of nosema, namely *nosema cerana*. The varroa mite and this bee have come to an 'agreement'. The bee tolerates the mite in small doses, and has built a resistance to some of the viruses that it gives, while the mite has adjusted to inflict minimal damage to the bee. Hardly symbiotic, but a working relationship, with damage limitation. Meanwhile, the Chinese government is working to reduce the incredible pesticide loads which are sprayed onto crops, especially in the Yunnan province in the south west of the country, where many species of pollinating insects have been wiped out by these toxins. This has made hand pollination of apple and pear crops a necessity.

It is widely known that the bulk of Chinese honeys are loaded with pesticides and antibiotics, which has caused many countries to ban their import.

Wallace's giant bee - megachile pluto

Alfred Russell Wallace was slightly ahead of the game, but Charles Darwin jumped in and published the 'Evolution of Species', before Wallace had a chance to expound his theories. They ended up collaborating on major discoveries. Forgive sort of bloke was Alfred Russell Wallace.



The giant bee, the World's largest, which is as long as an adult's thumb (40mm), and with a wingspan of 60mm - was recently re-discovered on a little-explored Indonesian island, where Wallace had reported it in 1858. Three more were found in 1981, but none had been since. After days of searching, wildlife experts found a single live female, which they photographed and filmed. The female makes her home in the arboreal mud nests of termites. She protects herself from them, by propolisising her 'nest within a nest'.

It was absolutely breathtaking to see this 'flying bulldog' of an insect that we weren't sure existed anymore, to have real proof right there in front of us in the wild," said natural history photographer Clay Bolt, who took the first photos and video of the species alive.

"To actually see how beautiful and big the species is in life, to hear the sound of its giant wings thrumming as it flew past my head, was just incredible. "

From the BBC News website - Feb 19th - thanks to Alan Brain

Enjoying the Warré Hive

It may have been St Valentine's Day, but we had a good turn out to hear Bryony Huntley of the Chew Valley Natural Beekeeping Group, with her opinions of the Warré hive. It seems that letting the bees do what they want is the answer to successful beekeeping. 'They know best'.



Bryony Huntley on left

European honey bees originally made their homes in hollow trees. It must then follow that a tall narrow home is what they require, and it should be well insulated, as the walls of a tree trunk are quite thick. Warré hives have an insulated quilt at the top, comprising wood shavings, with an under-blanket of hessian, or similar, which has been coated in flour and water to dissuade the bees from propolis-ing it. Extra boxes are added to the bottom (nadir-ing) rather than the top (super-ing), as in conventional beekeeping, and queen excluders are an absolute 'no no'.

The point that Bryony made, on a few occasions, is that stress should be avoided, at all costs, as it is stress which causes the bees problems. Varroa and diseases in general, don't seem to be a problem in natural beekeeping, as the bees appear to deal with it themselves, and swarming is positively encouraged, as this is how bees determine their future and reproduction. Bryony had lost one colony which simply abandoned a hive, but in her opinion, this is because they had decided that there was a better life somewhere else. Rather strangely, they all came back about a week later!!!!!!!

The audience was quiet, and they took it all in their stride, but when it came to question time, there were some hard, but well-mannered questions regarding diseases, and EFB in particular. Bryony thought that any disease problem could be spotted at the hive entrance, but was a little non-plussed when it was pointed out that EFB would not be visible at the entrance, as it is a disease of brood, not adult bees. Her retort was that there would be a significant reduc

tion in the number of bees using the entrance. She was also blissfully unaware that certain areas of Somerset are EFB hot-spots, and said that she hadn't seen EFB raised as a problem anywhere in the Natural Beekeeping world.

According to Natural Beekeeping sites on the internet, the common school of thought seems to be that EFB is stress induced, and Bryony made a strong point of keeping stress levels to a minimum. It was pointed out to her that whereas it may be exacerbated by stress, EFB is a bacterial disease caused by the feeding of contaminated brood food to the larvae. She did mention that EFB is 'certifiable', to use her word, but a few were left wondering how you could possibly notify the National Bee Unit of a disease, if you can't spot it at the entrance, and don't carry out disease inspections.

Both camps were very definitely left with food for thought. Bryony said that she would look into the relationship of EFB and Natural Beekeeping, and let us know the outcome.

Nothing so far.

Mike's Bee Supplies

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The Hives are stirring

Pollen is being brought in, and the season will start soon. That exciting moment has arrived when the bees are becoming active, and soon the beekeeping season will be underway.



For the last two years we have run a successful system by which we have several inspection teams, carrying out the weekly inspections of our Divisional hives at our teaching apiary at Upton.

These are led by an experienced beekeeper and the other members of the team are of varying experience. It is a great way to gain more experience in a supportive environment, seeing how others manage their bees, sharing ideas, and finding solutions to day to day challenges.

If you would like to be part of the teams then please ring me as soon as possible so that I can create the teams and work out the rota. We are looking for team leaders as well other participants. Probably it will mean giving up a couple of hours every four to six weeks depending on the number of teams. Mostly the inspections occur during the day, so it may be more difficult for those working full time, but if we had sufficient people who were working full time then we could have a team or teams that worked in the evenings during the summer. Our Beginners' classes occur on Saturdays and Sundays so some weekends will not be possible.

If you were in one of the teams last year and would like to join up again, or if this opportunity is new to you, then please contact me as soon as possible. I am poised at the end of the phone line!

Joe King
Apiary Manager.
Tel 01749 890357.

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 Mobile 07812 738793 Telephone 01458 2721144

At the apiary

Work goes on with the 'Fraser Wing' the euphemism for the large shed which Catherine Fraser has found for us, and it is slowly being renovated, with the possibility of it being erected very soon. Fred Clarke will be issuing a clarion call for help when we finally get to that stage, as it will take a few people to do the job.

We also have 420 more saplings arriving within the next few days, and with this very unusual late winter weather (yes, it is still winter), it is going to be very important to get them into the ground as quickly as possible. Again, there will be the need for a **serious work party** to get them planted within days of arriving. We will ask for help as soon as we have them. All we know at present is that they are arriving between the 1st and 15th March.

They will be used to thicken up the main perimeter hedge, which is rather sparse in places.



Free hornet traps

Somerset BKA have supplied us with enough hornet traps for each full member - totally free of charge, and they will also provide some very expensive bait to lure in any unsuspecting hornets.

It seems to have bypassed many of our members, just how serious a threat the Asian hornet will become. It's early detection and eradication are paramount to containing it.

Out of our 145 full members, just over 30 turned up to collect their traps. We really need to take this matter more seriously.

Anybody believing that a single trap is not going to stop the invasion is missing the point. They will only stop hornets if they are used. Sitting in a box at the apiary, they will accomplish nothing. The idea of these traps is not to stop the invasion anyway, but to monitor it. We need to be aware of hornets in the area in order to control them.

The French took little notice of their arrival in France, and now they are inundated. Beekeepers in the early 1990s also thought varroa to be of little consequence.

The only thing we ever learn from history, is that we learn nothing from history (Hegel).

Please collect your free hornet trap - and use it.

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 24th 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.

Next month's speaker

The ever popular Clare Densley (Buckfast Abbey bees) is coming to Somerton on Thursday March 14th. Clare is doing a world tour of Somerset at present, having spoken to Yeovil Beekeepers, and at Somerset BKA's Lecture Day.

Clare's vast experience of beekeeping allows her to choose a different topic each time, and she will be giving us a timely view of swarming. She has some slightly offbeat opinions regarding certain methods of beekeeping, but never ever talks down to her audience, and I am always amazed at how she can hold an audience of completely mixed experience. She speaks to everybody in the room.



Don't forget that we also have a visit to Buckfast Abbey lined up for Sunday June 23rd.

Dates for your diary

Swarming and the season ahead

Thursday March 14th - 7.30 pm
With Clare Densley
of Buckfast Abbey

Asian homet update

Saturday April 27th - 2.30 pm

At our apiary in Upton

With Lynne Ingram
Somerset AHAT co-ordinator

Meg's Bee Safari

Tuesday May 14th

With Megan Seymour SBI
Venues to be confirmed

Visit to Buckfast Abbey apiary

Sunday June 23rd - 10.00 am
Guided by Clare Densley

Skep making master class

Saturday July 20th - 10.00am

At our apiary

Overseen by Diana Robertson

Somerton BKA Honey Show

Saturday September 21st

Keinton Mandeville Village Hall

TA11 6EB
(New venue)

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