

# The Newsletter



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



## Early Swarming

The second session of the Beginners' practicals is when we normally cover swarming, and that was due to be held on May 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>, but the bees beat us to it this year, with a swarm in Walton, near Street on May 7<sup>th</sup> and another one in Stawell, a bit further down the road towards Bridgwater, on the same day.

The bait hive above, attracts a new colony each year, and is on the flat roof of a woodshed. See Joe King's article on bait hives on page 2. You will have received an email from Somerset BKA inviting you to a **ZOOM** talk this Thursday evening, by Eleanor and Rosemary Burgess, on swarming.

## Creating a Bait Hive.

Each year I create a bait hive, and in the last two years, swarms have obligingly moved in. Getting your bait hive in place now, means that you might even get a handsome prime swarm move in. A big gain for little work!

Bait hives are counter-intuitive; one could easily imagine that a new hive set up in the garden with fresh foundation would be the ideal "des res" to entice the bees. The opposite is in fact the case. Professor Tom Seeley has shown that what scout bees are looking for is an empty space of 40 litres volume, a **small entrance**, with a little old comb in there. Ideally, he says that this should be 5 metres above the ground.

Personally, as someone who has fallen off the top of a tall ladder and fractured two vertebrae, I would hesitate to suggest that you go so high. I compromise, and mine goes on top of a flat roof about six foot off the ground.

The method which has worked well for me in the last two years, is that described by Jed Marshall. Jed will be familiar to many of you as a regular speaker at our evening meetings. He is a successful commercial beekeeper and a source of practical advice. He uses a solid national floor (**not open mesh**), deep box, crown board and roof. In the deep box he places three, but only three frames; two are old used deep frames with comb in them, which have had brood reared in them, the third is an empty deep frame with no foundation or comb of any type in it! He places the three frames in the centre of the brood box, with the old drawn frames on the outside edges and the empty frame sandwiched between them. They are tight up against each other. He finds that the bees draw out beautiful comb in the empty frame and this performs as well as any wired foundation. No other frames are placed in the deep box. Remember the scout bees are looking for a space to move into. They need the space. You can use a little lemon grass oil rubbed on the old frames as a swarm attractant if you fancy, or commercial chemical swarm attractant is available from the equipment suppliers. I have never used this.

Having set up the bait hive, I enjoy my daily watching to see if any scout bees are showing interest. When they do, then if you keep your eyes peeled, you may well see the swarm move in, something I personally enjoy. When the bees have moved in, they are going to build comb, and you will need to fill up the deep box with deep frames and wired foundation, so have eight frames ready,

although I prefer not to put the foundation in until just before they are going to be used. This keeps the foundation fresh and very attractive to the bees. You will need to do this quickly, otherwise you will have an exasperating box of wild comb with three drawn frames in the middle!

I like to encourage rapid comb-building by feeding; I place a gallon of thick syrup on the bees in a contact feeder. They draw out the foundation rapidly, the queen has room to lay, and they get off to a good start.

When I first set up the bait hive, I tend to use some little metal plates, that you can buy at a DIY store, to screw the floor to the deep box. This makes it much easier when the moment comes to move the bait hive off the flat roof, or wherever you have placed it, when the bees have settled down and have brood. You may then want to replace it with a second bait hive, if the first was successful. Jed, doing things on an industrial scale, has four hives lashed to a pallet, which he puts up on a flat roof with a fork- lift truck. He lowers them once all four are occupied!

When you move the bait hive off the flat roof, you either have to move it incrementally three feet a day until it is in the ideal final destination or you can move it three miles away in one go to an out apiary, and then move it back after a week or two to where you would really like it to be. You could of course just leave it on the flat roof, but in my case, I find it a bit of a fiddle and prefer to move it to ground level. Remember, I have a history of falling off ladders!

What if you really don't have a flat roof or raised area for your bait hive! Then by all means just put it in a quiet corner of the garden and with any luck you may still get a swarm move in.

**Joe King**

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***Footnote:* I find that bait hives are more effective if placed in partial shade - ed.**

## Breaking News

It is with great pleasure I can announce that Stewart Gould, our former Chair and current newsletter editor is now the Chair of Somerset Beekeepers.



Members will be aware of the significant input Stewart has made into the functioning of this division over the years. Apart from his roles as our former Chair, committee member and Newsletter editor he has been heavily involved in setting up our apiary site and in training and mentoring new beekeepers, sourcing supplies of bee suits, jars and varroa treatments. We owe him a great deal for all his efforts and work on our behalf.

I wish him all the very best in his new role and hope he will be as effective and appreciated at County level as he is by us.

**Eric McLaughlin**

**Chair - Somerton Division**

An advertisement for Mike's Bee Supplies. The background is a honeycomb pattern. In the top left, a blue box contains the text "Mike's Bee Supplies" and a small image of a bee. To the right, contact information is listed: "Just phone before you call T: 01278 445158 E: mikes-bees@outlook.com www.mikes-beesupplies.co.uk". Below this, several hexagons contain the words "Foundation", "Jars", "Hives", "Suits", and "And more!". At the bottom left, it says "We take Cash or Card (no cheques)" and shows logos for PayPal, VISA, Mastercard, and American Express. At the bottom right, the address is given: "Find us at 72 Wembdon Hill Wembdon Bridgwater Somerset. TA6 7PZ". Small bee icons are scattered throughout the design.

## Winter Survival Surveys

There are two similar surveys doing the rounds at present, both with the same aim. COLOSS is a survey monitoring winter colony losses in Europe and the USA, and the BBKA Winter Survival Survey, monitors very much the same thing, but is UK centric, and a little more optimistic in title. Below are the links to both surveys.

Your help is requested in enabling both bodies to further research into what is causing the loss, or survival of colonies during the cooler months.

BBKA winter survival survey:

<https://wh1.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=158192743510>

COLOSS winter losses survey

<https://www.bee-survey.com/index.php/958611>

## The trials of an unlucky beekeeper

Some of you may remember that last year I lost my only colony to Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus. Following that loss in April and May, I went on to replace my hive with a nuc. in the July, which grew strong and looked like they were heading into autumn doing well. Unfortunately, early in the autumn they were raided by wasps and their survival through winter was concerning. As they were still taking down the syrup, I left a super on top of the brood to enable them to build up their stores. The intention was to invert this in early spring before the Queen went into lay. I fed them and fed them until they stopped taking down the syrup as we headed into the cold weather. Luckily the winter wasn't too harsh and come spring they started lapping up the fondant. All's good in the 'hood, or so I thought.

Come the warm weather and signs of activity suddenly started to burgeon forth. It seemed it was too late to invert them. Ok, I thought, looks like I'm running a brood and half this year. Then it was we humans that fell foul of a virus and managing my hive, with its brood and a half and no Queen excluder, with no on hand advice from my seasoned mentor, became somewhat challenging. I contacted young Eric who sent me written instructions and it seemed reasonably simple.

Having read the info. that stated we could manage hives with help as long as we maintained social distance, I called on help from my neighbour (also a Somerton bee keeper). Off we set down the field with two intentions 1. To check for brood and 2. To decide on whether to site a honey super. What could

possibly go wrong...

It seemed a relatively simple task. I took off the lid, removed the fondant and eke and took off the crown board. A happy tribe of busy little faces stared up at me. So far so good. I started to lift frames out of the super and found quite a healthy supply of stores. We decided they probably didn't need any more fondant. I then lifted a fourth frame and realised I'd just exposed a quantity of brood that had been laid in cells between the super and the brood box. We both stared into the abyss looking at the little white bodies of drone brood. We then looked at each other and back into darkness. I replaced the frame. Neighbour headed off to get a super frame and a dummy board while I went to get a honey super. The idea being to move a drawn but empty frame from the existing super into the honey super and place a dummy board in the brood super. After that put on the QE and close up the hive. Simples.

I returned to the hive and waited for the neighbour. As I stood there in the lovely sunshine, I looked around and came to the slow realisation that the bee I could see crawling around on the grass was actually my Queen. Well, to tell the truth I stared at her for quite some time before reality dawned. How Queenie came to be enjoying an adventure in the great outdoors remains a mystery as we'd meticulously searched the frames before moving them. But regardless, there she was. I scooped her up before she took off and placed through the hole of the crown board, hoping she'd scoot off to the dark interior. Now I was in a fix. I still needed to site the QE and the honey super and I had no idea if she was underneath the board or down inside. Trying to subdue the rising panic I got Eric the neighbour on the blower pdq. His sage advice was to sweep the bees off the underside of the crown board and then site the QE and honey super. Queenie was likely to have drifted down and if not, the bees have what they need to raise a new queen. Oh yeah, right, good! Sideways glance, these experienced beekeepers are so cavalier with their queens!

Now, all this may sound easy but whilst you're juggling boards, hive tools, a QE and a bee brush and trying to maintain social distancing and keep the smoker going, things can get fraught. But finally. we managed to get it all back together and site the honey super. Hopefully the queen did get back in the hive and is now going about her business and I'll actually get some honey this year. Who knew beekeeping could cause such an adrenaline rush?! Of course, there's always the possibility that it was a passing random queen that I inserted into the hive but that's a tale for another day... Ah yes, beekeeping at my place; helping wildlife in unusual ways.

## Very Sad News

Glyn Stenson was one of our very active members, but couldn't do quite as much while recovering from prostate cancer. He did, however, bounce back and when it came to dry stone walling around the apiary pond, or erecting the clean equipment shed, Glyn would be there, with his larger than life personality, Somerset humour, and usually, his wife June as well.



Their grandson Anthony came to our Taster Day in 2012, at the age of 10, and started keeping bees almost immediately. He and his grandfather shared 12 colonies in North Curry. Anthony, Glyn and June were inseparable, and you could be forgiven for thinking that Anthony was their son.

Glyn had, over the years, worked in many areas, but was a bricklayer, and stone mason by trade. He was also pretty handy at hedge laying.

Glyn had difficulty walking recently, which became worse, and worse. Finally, June persuaded him to seek medical help, and on being admitted to Musgrove Park Hospital on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April, he was diagnosed with Leukaemia, pneumonia, arterial blood clots in his legs, and his prostate cancer had also returned. Sadly, Glyn passed away at the age of 69, the following Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>.

He will be greatly missed by his family, and all who knew, and inevitably, liked him for the man he was.

## Apiary News

Here is an update to let you know what has been happening in the apiary so far this year. Inspections started 2 weeks ago. 10 colonies came through the winter ie all of them, which was a good start.

1 colony formed from a cast last year was very weak and has now succumbed. It had a queen but there were not enough bees to keep going. I was going to unite this week but when it came to the inspection, the queen had disappeared so I have removed the hive and left the very few remaining bees to find a new hive to enter.

I made the decision to abandon the flow hive and constructed a 'Heath Robinson' connecting board to transfer them to a National hive over 3 weeks, so retaining the brood, as the colony is very strong. (also quite cross so may well need re-queening once the transfer is completed.)

All queens except one have been marked and clipped, hopefully enabling control of swarming this spring. Hive 6 queen has eluded me so far. All hives apart from the flow hive are fairly small colonies at present but there is rape within flying distance which will hopefully enable them to build up well. All hives except the flow hive are good tempered. All hives have 1 super on and there is a flow of nectar coming in.

Thank you to everyone who spent time filling supers and brood boxes with frames of foundation, it has been a great help. We had very little drawn comb which accounts for the slightly slow build up as bees are always more reluctant to get going on foundation.

I have done early season monitoring for Varroa and all hives have very low counts. I was going to do a Nosema check on the defunct hive but there was no evidence of diarrhoea and there weren't enough bees to sample. (The brood it did have looked normal.)

One of the other hives is showing some shiny black hairless bees which can be a sign of chronic paralysis virus but there have only been 1 or 2 each time I have looked so I am maintaining a watching brief. Thanks also to Jim and Caroline for cleaning some kit for me and to Richard for grass mowing with a 'high cut' on the mower as per Joe King's specific instructions!!

I am enjoying my outings so far but of course things may change once swarm season starts, so rest assured I will shout for assistance if it gets too much!

Stay safe everyone

**Catherine Fraser**



## Monitoring for Asian Hornets 2020

We are approaching the time when Asian Hornet queens will be emerging from hibernation – when the temperature is consistently reaching 13° C – and so we need to be monitoring for their presence. We don't know if there are any Asian Hornet queens over-wintering in the UK this year, or whether any mated queens will make their way into the UK post hibernation. But we need to be prepared. We strongly recommend the use of monitoring stations, rather than killing traps. This allows us to get the evidence of Asian Hornets that we need, without killing our native beneficial insects, in particular European Hornets. Asian Hornet queens will be searching for sugary foods to build up their energy, not preying on your bees. This means that all monitoring stations need to be positioned where you cannot help but see them and where you can easily check them daily - e.g. outside the kitchen window, or in a sunny spot in your garden. All beneficial insects must be released from monitoring stations **daily**. From mid May AH queens will be mainly in their nests and so monitoring stations can be removed. We are recommending the adaptation of Thornes traps to include the wick stations inside. This allows wasps and small flies to escape. (See Instructions below) Liquid bait Use Suterra (now sold as Trappit wasp attractant) Not available from the club this year due to Covid restrictions sadly. Possibly buy online (Pestfix.co.uk sells smaller bottles)

If you cannot get it due to current restrictions try one of these French recipes:

- Dark beer mixed with 25ml strawberry dessert sauce and 25ml orange liqueur
- 350ml sweet white wine (or white wine sweetened with sugar) + 20-30ml mint syrup

Please also observe any flowers where Asian Hornet queens may be feeding. Any trees that may be oozing sap are also very attractive to AH queens in Spring. Being confined to our homes at the moment gives us the ideal opportunity to spend time monitoring for Asian Hornets.

Please send grid reference of any traps you put up to Catherine Fraser at [helivet@msn.com](mailto:helivet@msn.com). This will allow entry on the Somerset map and let us see where the gaps in our defences are.

If you think you have seen an Asian Hornet • Get a photo (or sample) • If you are not sure or are struggling to get evidence contact your local Asian Hornet Action Team – [asianhornet@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk](mailto:asianhornet@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk) • If you are sure and you have evidence, then report on the Asian Hornet Watch App or on

alrtnonnative@ceh.ac.uk – and to your local AHAT. Due to current restrictions please make sure that you keep yourself safe and comply with government guidelines. Check BBKA website for updates on how this relates to beekeepers

**Monitoring stations instructions** This is the new design for monitoring stations that they are using in Jersey. They are designed to allow wasps and small flies to escape. The wick pot also prevents all but the smallest flies etc. from getting down the side. They still require daily monitoring. The traps have three 6mm holes drilled in them around the top in the flutings that act as reinforcements for the pot itself. The wick stations are cut down sample pots that when unmodified are 7cm high and just under 5cm diameter. (You may need to improvise with something of a similar size) The sample pot is cut at half its height i.e 3.5cm and the lower section is fitted through the top section base first. Place a small block of wood or similar over the top of the pot and tap the two parts together. That way you retain the screw top and the modified pot fits snugly into the trap. A 12mm hole is drilled in the lid to take the wick which is made from paper towelling. The wick pot prevents all but the smallest flies etc from getting down the side and the holes in the trap allow wasps and small flies to escape. Any questions contact Lynne Ingram, Somerset AHAT Coordinator. [asianhornet@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk](mailto:asianhornet@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk)

This is a reprint of the article sent out by Elizabeth Friend on 31st March. The original has photos which will make the above more understandable. If anyone didn't get it we can re-send - just let us know.

Stay safe.

**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

## 'Bear'-faced Intruder 'Sentenced' In Macedonia



Skopje \_ A bear has been 'found guilty' of stealing honey and destroying beehives after a Macedonian bee farmer filed a case before the courts, claiming damage to his property.

Since the bear could not be apprehended to repay its debt, the court decided that as the bear belonged to no one person, it was therefore the property of the state. The state should refund the damage of around €2400 done, by the **state owned** bear, to Zoran Kiseloski from the village of Krivogastani, near the town of Bitola.

The farmer decided to take legal action last year after exhausting all efforts to scare away the bear. Kiseloski had tried playing loud music in the form of Serbian folk tunes, by famous Serbian folk singer Ceca. These served to keep the bear at bay until the batteries on the CD player were exhausted, and the bear simply wandered back for more of its sweet treasure, according to Kiseloski.

"I will use the compensation money to buy additional bee hives because this business is profitable," Kiseloski told local Dnevnik daily after winning the one year long case against the animal, a protected species.

However, Kiseloski's lawyer, Vlado Gikovski announced he will appeal for greater compensation.

## **Notes from a Drayton Apiary.**

Well, we went into the winter with 4 full colonies and a nuc. Spring came and inspections started. Wet winter seemed to go and be replaced by dry and warmish weather. The Queen in our nuc declined to come into lay. No obvious problem so perhaps not mated properly last year. It happens.

All seemed to be progressing normally with the other hives. Brood in all stages ranging from 2 to 7 frames. Some old brood frames changed and replaced with new foundation. One hive on a solid floor had some mould problems so it required 5 frames to remove the mouldy ones. First time we encountered this problem, so perhaps a combination of a solid floor and a wet winter was the cause.

Bait hive set up last week.

20th April inspection. Scout bees interested in the bait hive as we walked down the field. An encouraging sight we thought. Then we opened first hive. Many Queen cells both open and sealed. Given the strength of the colony it did not seem Queen had swarmed although we could not find her. However eggs present on 8 frames. Hive had been inspected previous Saturday.

All sealed Q cells destroyed and all but one unsealed. This frame moved to nuc box with frame of stores and bees shaken in from supers. The entrance sealed with grass and moved to another part of apiary. Super added to the original hive to provide more space. Hopefully the destruction of the Queen cells, additional space and bleeding bees into the nuc will prevent swarming.

The second hive had 2 frames of brood last week and the same today. Queen not building up. However there was one unsealed Q cell with a fat larvae. It seemed the bees had decided the old Queen was no longer fit for purpose and supersedure was in process. Watch this space 3 weeks from now.

Hive 3 was less problematic. 3 frames had progressed to 4 so gradual building up. Basically leave alone to continue build up.

Hive 4 had been on brood and a half. We decided to put it on single brood. The super was mainly filled with stores, only 4 frames of brood - one of those mainly drone. The drone went to the chickens. All the bees were shaken from the super into the brood chamber and the super placed above the Q excluder. The hatching workers will be able to pass through the Q excluder into the brood the drones could not.

With all the ongoing excitement we forgot to check the brood box on hive 4. Given the rising pitch of tone from the hive we thought better leave them alone and should they swarm the bait hive is just up the field.

First hive on 3 supers and last hive on 4. They are clearly bringing in nectar. I suspect oil seed rape as there is a large field about half a mile away.

***Eric.***

**Dates for your diary**

**Somerset AKA Queen rearing course**

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April - Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May  
Taunton Apiary, Heatherton Park, Taunton

**Online Zoom talks**

Various upcoming online talks. Watch your emails.

**The Royal Bath & West Show**

Was 28<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> May

**NOW possibly July 31<sup>st</sup> - August 2nd**

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