

The Newsletter



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SBKA website www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk



Bees on a roundabout

A few years ago, somebody placed a beehive on a roundabout just outside Wincanton. Presumably it was in order to benefit from the swathe of dandelions. Well, they're back - dandelions and beehive. This photo was taken recently, on a cool day before the sun had a chance to persuade the flowers to open. I suppose that if it looks to be successful, whoever they belong to will put another box on, but that looks suspiciously like 2 supers to me.

It also looks a bit precarious balancing on a plastic tub. I hope it's got a solid

First reported swarm - Saturday 22nd April

Everything was a bit slow to get off the ground this season, but Eric McLaughlin can lay claim to the first reported swarm in this neck of the woods, as he picked up his first in Westonzoyland on April 22nd.

News from the apiary

At last we have a sense that spring is really with us and the new beekeeping season is underway. There is a lot of blossom already out and winter sown oil seed rape in flower is commonplace in some areas.

At the Apiary first inspections have been carried out, drones are appearing in the hives, and we have even seen an early queen cell. Before long the magic word swarm will be on our lips. It is still a little early for swarms and although there are drones about they are not sexually mature for the first couple of weeks after they appear as adults.

The first Beginners' class was a great success with a lot of participants really enjoying themselves and getting hands on for the first time.

The first cut of the grass and nettles has been carried out, and some wild flowers such as yellow rattle planted.

Those of you who are just starting, but seasoned beekeepers as well, might well consider putting out a bait hive. There is nothing quite so gratifying as a swarm of bees moving in without any major work on your part. An article on this tried and tested method is available in this newsletter.

The Apiary regulars will continue to meet at the apiary every Tuesday morning. We are usually there by 9.30 a.m and continue to 12.00 noon. Do feel you can come along for some good company, coffee, and kitkats and to carry out the tasks of the day. We look forward to seeing you.

Joe King

01749 890357

How's the bait hive coming on?

This is an article which Joe placed in the newsletter last year, and makes no apology for asking for it to be repeated. It is very timely and really sound advice.

Now is the time to set up a bait hive, so that you stand the best chance of tempting a passing swarm, or providing an easy move for one of your colonies which may have duped you into a false sense of security.

All you need is a spare floor, deep box, crown board, a roof and three frames. Two of these frames should contain old comb in which brood has been raised and the third is totally empty not even having any foundation. You place the three frames tight together in the middle of the empty deep box with the "empty" frame sandwiched between the two "old" flanking frames. Ideally you want to get it up off the ground, mine is on a corrugated iron flat roof approximately six foot above the ground.



I was delighted to hear just the other day from one of our members saying that, having lost their only colony of bees in the winter, they thought that they would give it a go, and sure enough in less than two weeks they had a handsome prime swarm settling in! Obviously once the bees have moved in, it is imperative to fill up the rest of the deep box with frames and foundation, or else you end up with a box of chaotic wild comb with three frames in the middle. To encourage rapid comb-building, I also then pop on a contact feeder with a gallon of thick sugar syrup.

As we move up to the potential "June gap" when forage may well be scarce, the feeder and syrup is even more important to get the bees off to a good start. There will now be fewer large prime swarms and a higher proportion of smaller casts headed by virgin queens. I tend to leave the bait hive in its original position until I am sure that the virgin queen is mated and laying successfully. I generally leave them in peace for two to three weeks and then make a brief inspection. If eggs and larvae are present, then I think that it is safe to think

about moving it. Obviously the more agile of you may just leave the hive in its original place, but I have a history of falling off ladders and have two fractured vertebrae to prove it, so I tend to avoid ladder-work and get it down to ground level.

What of my own bait hive? Mine is in my garden, and as my own bees are over three miles away I'm not expecting a swarm from them. There are a number of colonies about the village as well as a number of feral colonies. Scout bees start looking for a potential new home several days before the swarm occurs, and I was intrigued to see bees in increasing numbers showing great interest in the bait hive. Suddenly at mid-day on day three they abruptly stopped, and I couldn't help thinking "I bet that they have just swarmed"! Lo and behold, twenty minutes later I received a phone call from a fellow villager saying that a great cloud of bees were in his garden and what could he do? Needless to say I was round in five minutes with my swarm-collecting kit to find the bees were settled in a large leylandii hedge, a slightly disconcertingly twenty foot up. Needs must, so I was up the tree like a rat up a drain-pipe and the swarm was safely collected. That evening I ran it into one of the graduates of this January's Beginners' Course, who had their bait hive at the ready.

The moral of this tale is give a bait hive a go, and have all the necessary equipment ready for when a swarm moves in!

Joe King

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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.

13kg 1 - 4 boxes £24 each, 5 + boxes £23 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.

1 x 2.5 Kg bag £5.00, 1 box 12.5 Kg £25, 2 + boxes £24 each

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.

Foundation. National brood and super, 14 x 12 brood available

Eddie Howe email:- redrascal444@gmail.com Mobile 07812 738793

Tel. 01458 272114

THE ROYAL BATH & WEST SHOW

Dear all

It's that time of year again! This is the link to the Bees & Honey Schedule at The Royal Bath & West Show. [URL: www.bathandwest.com/bees-honey-competition](http://www.bathandwest.com/bees-honey-competition) Don't forget if your entry fees amount to £12 including VAT, or more, you will receive one free admission ticket.

Also remember all exhibitors can sell their honey and hive related products on the Bees & Honey sales table in our 6500 sq ft Marquee - and with over 150 thousand visitors that's a lot of potential customers!

No Honey left? Have a look at the schedule as there are lots of other classes such as, cakes, photos, candles & wax etc.

I know what a high standard your exhibits are at the Somerton honey show, so hope you will support us at the Royal Bath & West. We really want to make sure that Somerset win the county shield from Wiltshire.

Thanks, in anticipation.

Bernie Perkins

Royal Bath & West Bees and Honey steward

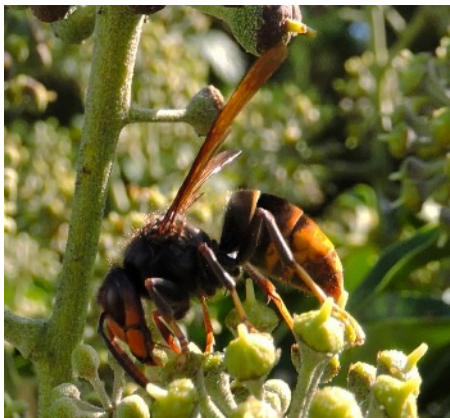
Any questions or problems, give me a shout.

berniep@bathandwest.com

07948 408770

ASIAN HORNETS SPOTTED IN DORSET AND KENT

I expect by now most of you will have heard the news of three confirmed Asian Hornet Queen sightings already this year. One on a Poole Cherbourg ferry, one in Folkstone Kent and one in Northumberland in a box of cauliflow-ers from France. At this time of year these will be mated queens. If we miss any AH queens, we will be at risk of nests being established in the UK.



For this reason, I would urge members to be vigilant. I fear we may really have a problem this year, hence as the Somerton Asian Hornet coordinator, I am looking for a number of willing volunteers to form Somerton's Asian Hornet action team.

The Asian Hornet season has got off to a frighteningly rapid start in Jersey this year, so we really need to be on the ball, and up our game in this department. Please contact me ASAP if you're willing to become part of the Somerton AHAT team for more information.

Suzy Perkins

apicrepe.tengore@gmail.com

This photograph doesn't relate to the above article. It's just a nice picture, which somebody posted on **facebook**, of a humming bird sharing a drink with some bees, somewhere in California.



From the Chair

Oil seed rape honey

As the blackthorn has now mostly gone over, the fields, meadows and verges are turning bright yellow with oil seed rape and dandelion coming into full flower. Both these plants provide our bees with large



quantities of nectar and pollen and encourage the colonies to expand at a rapid rate. However, this wondrous bounty has its downside.

Oil seed rape honey does granulate very quickly. So, you need to plan to remove the honey from the hive at the earliest opportunity and extract it from the comb as soon as possible. The accepted signal to do this is when the flowers start to lose their petals.

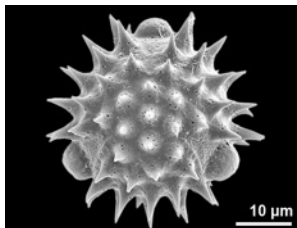
Now what to do with the Honey? If placed in jars it will granulate in the jar and be very hard, bending spoons trying to remove it. Alternatively, the following could be worth trying.

- 1) Take a bucket of solid honey and put it in a warming cabinet at 35°C for about a day until it is a thick consistency, and you can squeeze in the sides of the bucket.
- 2) Next, use a masher to break up the crystals by mashing it like you would mashed potato. Keep the masher below the surface and try to avoid introducing air into the honey.
- 3) When you have broken up the crystals, you should have a smooth pourable product.
- 4) Transfer this into a bottling tank and leave to settle for a few hours.
- 5) Then jar up.
- 6) Try to leave the jars in a cool place with a temperature of approx. 12-14°C,
This should allow the honey to set to a delicious soft smooth spreadable product.

Jack Barr
Chairman

Sunflower pollen and bee gut parasites

The spiny texture of sunflower pollen drastically reduces infections of a common gut pathogen in bees. Like humans, bees can tailor their diet to boost their gut and immune health. Earlier studies have established that pollen from certain species of plants - especially sunflowers – can help bees resist some infections. But no-one knew why sunflower pollen was so effective at suppressing the gut pathogen *crithidia bombi*, which can decrease the ability of queens of the Eastern Bumblebee (*Bombus impatiens*) to establish a colony successfully.



‘It could be because of the really spiny shape, it could be the unique chemistry, or it could be both’, says Laura Figueroa at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

To test what gave the pollen its anti-parasitic power, Figueroa and her colleagues first separated the pollen’s outer shell from the chemical metabolites in its core. They then fed the shell only pollen to one group of bees and gave the metabolite centres to the others. A third group received a whole pollen.

They found that bees munching on the spiny shells, or whole pollen, had between 81 per cent and 94 per cent less *chrithidia bombi* in their gut than those eating only the chemical packed pollen centres. Bees that ate pollen exteriors had the same reduction in the harmful gut pathogen as those eating whole pollen (Functional ecology, doi.org/gr3r37).

‘The chemistry isn’t the main driver – it’s the physical structure’, says Figueroa. ‘It was a really clear pattern’. Because previous work has focused on sunflower pollen’s chemistry, ‘the study adds a new brick to the pollen and bee relationship by pointing out the physical effects’, says Cedric Alaux at the French National Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, who wasn’t involved in the work.



Corryn Wetzel – New Scientist April 2023

Summer Apiary visits - Apiaries sought.

Each year we try to have a summer programme of visits to member's apiaries, which gives new and old, a chance to see how others have arranged their hives, and how they deal with certain aspects of beekeeping.

In order to do this, we need a few members to volunteer their bees for a demonstration. There is no judgement

involved - it's just a different scenario. You can either do this yourself, or ask another member to do it on their behalf. This photograph is actually of Clare Densley demonstrating at Buckfast Abbey Bees, but it's not dissimilar. A small group will descend on your apiary and go through the hives you pick. All sorts of topics tend to get discussed, and all sorts of suggestions are made.



Some members who offer their apiaries will also provide tea and cakes, but that's not mandatory, and other members can be persuaded to muck in with the cup cakes and scones.

Please give it a thought, and if you are up for the 'mild' challenge, please contact Joe King on 01749 890357 or at jk.pilton@btinternet.com.

Thank you

Stewart Gould

Dates for your diary

Kingsbury May Festival

Monday May 1st

A chance to represent Somerton Beekeepers and sell some honey

New Beekeepers 2nd practical session

Saturday May 13th

At the apiary - 10.00am

The Green Scythe Fair

Sunday June 11th

Thorney Lakes TA10 0DW

Another chance to represent Somerton Beekeepers and sell some honey.

Visit to Buckfast Abbey Bees

Saturday July 15th

10.00am at Buckfast Abbey

Baltonsborough Village Day

Village Hall and playing fields

Monday August 28th

12 noon - 5.00pm

Somerton Beekeepers Honey Show

Sat September 16th

Keinton Mandeville Village Hall
TA11 6ES

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