

# The Newsletter



Vol no 30 Issue 10 November 2023

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



## In for a penny

Details of all the new King Charles III general circulation coins have been released, but it's not certain as yet when we'll see them in our loose change. Particular attention should be paid to the £1 coin which features a representation of buff tailed bumblebees (*bombus pascuorum*)



## You know it's been a strange year when.....

Somebody sends you a photograph of apple blossom taken on 1<sup>st</sup> October. Thanks to Howard Horsfall for this one.

## Notice of Somerton Beekeepers' AGM 2023

This year's AGM will be held on Thursday November 9<sup>th</sup> at 7.00pm in The Somerton Parish Rooms, TA11 7NB. There will be some changes to the structure of Somerton Beekeepers this year as our Chairman Jack Barr has stepped down for personal reasons. This leaves the post open, although Gillian Islip the current Vice Chair has been nominated for the position, and Michelle Wilson has been nominated as Vice Chair.

There is a need for a programme manager to organise talks and apiary visits among other things. This may be dealt with by co-option at a later date.

**Please note that the positions of all officers and committee members are renewable and voted for at each AGM, and the position of Chair has a term of three years.**

The Agenda for the AGM 2023 and minutes of the 2022 AGM are attachments to the email containing this newsletter.

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## **Fondant Recipe**

**I make no apology for repeating this article, as now is the time when your bees may need a little boost.**

Feeding bees during the cooler months used to be considered ‘bad beekeeping’, but as winters have got warmer, bees are expending energy when flying out to look for food on fine days. On their return to the hive they replace that energy by devouring their stores. Fondant is the stuff to use in winter. Products like Candipollene (a pollen supplement) are intended for boosting egg laying in Spring, and not the ideal food for the cooler months, although they can be used in the late summer to help the bees make winter bees, which have to survive for 6 months.

Buying fondant is fine, provided you find a source of pure fondant, and bee-keeping supply companies have it in abundance, but it’s not cheap. Other sources of fondant are risky, as they nearly all contain chemicals dangerous to bees. Why not make your own? It’s relatively simple and much, much cheaper. Start hefting your hives soon, so that you know how much weight they are losing, but remember that hives can gain weight in wet weather, as the wood soaks up moisture.

Ingredients:

1kg granulated sugar

300ml water

Other materials:

Large plastic/wooden spoon to stir and ladle out. An electric mixer is really useful to stir as the mixture cools, but ask for permission,

Cooking thermometer

Large saucepan

Semi-transparent take away containers.

## **Method**

Place the sugar in a saucepan and pour on 300ml of boiling water. While stirring, heat the mixture. There’s no need to stir all the time, once the sugar is blended in, but an occasional stir will aid dissolving. Keep on heating until it boils, then keep on a rolling boil & monitor the temperature.

The temperature is critical, in order to set to the required consistency. Your mixture will only reach the required temperature when the correct amount of moisture has boiled off.

As soon as it reaches 232°F, remove it from the heat. Most recipes say 234°F, but I end up with a rock if I do that. Place on a tiled surface, or something cool and stir as it cools. Some recipes mention stirring once the mixture reaches 150°F, but I find that crystals are already forming by then. Stir thoroughly but not too vigorously, and the mixture will start to go cloudy, then milky and thicken. As soon as it starts to thicken, stop stirring and pour the mixture into the containers. It is vital to fit lids, or you will lose more moisture than required.

#### Notes:

You can use multiples of these quantities.

1 kg sugar will fill 2 takeaway containers

Using semi-transparent take away containers means that you don't have to lift them to see what has been eaten. Just raise the roof and look – less cold drafts.

Re-using a single use plastic container means that it is no longer single use.

Fitting lids will prevent further evaporation of moisture while cooling and stop it attracting moisture when cool.

If you can depress the surface of the cooled fondant with your thumb, you've got it right.

The stirring helps to keep the crystals apart while setting, meaning a softer set.

## **Winter Oxalic acid varroa treatment**

For many years now we have ordered Winter Oxalic Varroa treatment in bulk, so that our members can enjoy the most favourable prices. We intend to do the same this year and are researching the best possible rates on either Api-bioxal or Oxuvar. As soon as we know where to go, we'll email you with a request for orders.

Oxalic acid trickle treatments are best administered on a cool sunny day when the bees are clustered. The treatment is used as a booster for bees which were treated after the main crop honey harvest.

## Supplies available from the apiary

There is a stock of frames, foundation and jars at the apiary which are available for purchase every Tuesday morning and on Saturdays when there is a New Beekeepers' practical session. The stock of jars is rapidly decreasing and won't be topped up until late July. Check with Eric McLaughlin if you wish to visit.

### All frames and foundation are for National hives

DN4 - Deep National Hoffman frames - £1.35 each

10 frames - £13.50

11 frames - £14.85

Standard brood foundation - £1.30 per sheet

SN1 Shallow National frames - £1.00 each

10 frames - £10.00

11 frames - £11.00

Super foundation - 80p per sheet

### SN1 frames are straight sided and will need plastic/metal spacers

**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

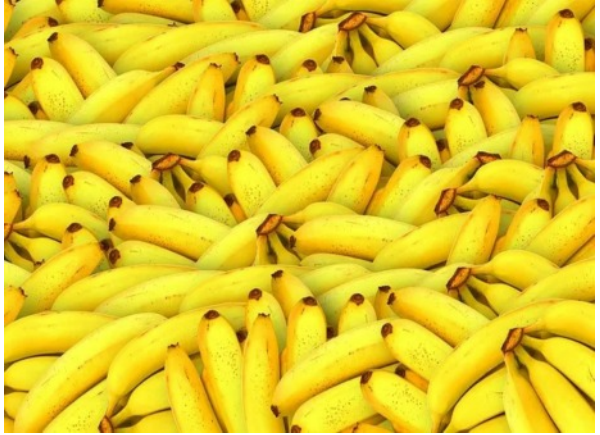
**Eddie Howe email:- redrascal444@gmail.com Mobile 07812 738793**

**Tel. 01458 272114**

## Have beekeepers gone bananas?

Bananas are not good for bees, especially in winter. Save them for your breakfast cereal.

Every few years we raise a new crop of beekeepers who want to feed bananas to their bees as a winter supplement. The forums are filled with anecdotal stories of bees thriving on



ripe bananas while overcoming every imaginable pathogen and parasite.

A recent Instagram posting explained that the potassium in bananas will help the bees flex their wings, and the gases released from ripe bananas will kill pathogenic spores. A similar posting on Facebook claims bananas will kill *Nosema*, varroa, and chalkbrood, and a link on Twitter claims your bees will live up to nine times longer on a winter diet of bananas. Of course, no studies are cited.

## Bananas and bees

In my wildest imagination, I cannot fathom why someone would toss a banana in a bee hive. First of all, if it were that easy to control all the pathogens and parasites, we wouldn't be having a problem. But putting bananas in a bee hive—especially a winter hive—is worse than doing nothing at all.

If you read beyond the wild claims, you will find other beekeepers who didn't have such good results. Some found rotten banana drippings raining down on their colonies. Others found that bananas attracted every opportunist you can imagine, including beetles, ants, armies of unidentified larvae, mice, and voles. Outside the hive, the scent of bananas attracted raccoons, opossums, and skunks. Can bears be far behind?

***Borrowed from Honey Bee Suite - Rusty Burlew***

## October News from the Apiary

Throughout September and early October we have been preparing the bees in the apiary for the winter. The suggestion is that with global warming and warmer winters colonies need more stores than in the past. 40 lb of stores is a figure often quoted. All the colonies are now up to that figure. Our next task is to remove the feeders, give them a thorough wash and pop them back in the clean shed ready for their next use.

Placing Mouse-guards is another job for us, one on each hive. I tend not to get them on too early as bees clambering through the holes knock off some of their pollen loads, a vital source of protein for the larvae. Whilst the bees are still flying freely and are not in a tight cluster they can see off an enquiring mouse, but once the bees are clustered a mouse can get in and cause absolute havoc, destroying comb and eating and fouling stores.

Green woodpeckers are another force to be reckoned with. Their preferred diet is ants in the grass. When the ground becomes frozen and the ants retreat further underground this is when woodpeckers will turn to our hives drilling holes all over the place. I find that for a national hive, an eight foot length of chicken wire works very well. Once this is wound around the hive then woodpeckers are kept safely at bay. I personally prefer to put the netting on in a way that the bees don't actually have to fly through the mesh itself when they go out on cleansing flights.

A further task is to make sure that each hive has a hefty stone on the roof to make sure that it can't be blown over by high winds, I used to be rather sceptical about this happening in a sheltered spot until it happened to me. I am now a convert to heavy stones!

Monitoring the weight of the hives during the winter and especially in early spring is important. The traditional method of hefting the hive i.e lifting the back to assess the weight is effective but for those not used to doing it an alternative is to insert a screw hook into each side of the brood box and then use a set of luggage scales to measure the weight on either side and add the weights together. This is not a precise measure of the weight but it does allow you to monitor the reduction in weight as winter and spring advance. Be careful though, as in wet weather, the hives can soak up moisture and increase

in weight. Soon it will be too late to feed syrup and the next best option is to feed fondant. This is something which you can buy or much more easily make yourself. Stew, our editor will be sharing the recipe with you (see pages 3 & 4). I like to make it and store it in those transparent plastic boxes they use in Chinese take-aways. This enables you to see what the bees are doing and also it's a good excuse to have a Chinese.

Good luck with the bees over the winter. If they starve to death in early spring it's not their fault it's yours!

**Joe King 01749 890357.**

## **Library Bulletin**

We have two new books in the divisional Library, kindly donated by Reg Pearce. These are ***“Keeping Bees”*** by Pam Gregory and Claire Waring, and ***“Keeping Bees and Making Honey”*** by Alison Benjamin and Brian McCullum. Both of these are ‘how-to-do-it’ books and likely to appeal to those getting started in beekeeping.

Gregory and Waring have published a number of books and scarcely need introduction. ***“Keeping Bees”*** is packed with information, very clearly and simply laid out on the page with lots of photos, information boxes and bullet points. Benjamin and McCullum’s book goes into less detail and is more basic in its approach, but is also very clearly presented and includes a handy table to help the reader identify honey from different seasonal floral sources by appearance and flavour, as well as covering candle-making, cosmetics and a selection of recipes using honey.

To borrow books from the Divisional Library, or receive the full booklist by email or post, text Librarian Sarah Kent on 07986 965320 or email at: [slawsonkent@gmail.com](mailto:slawsonkent@gmail.com). There is also a list on the Somerton & District section of the SBKA website.

**Sarah Kent - Librarian**



I would like to thank the Somerton Bee Association for letting me have a stall to raise money for Spiky Shires Hedgehog Rescue, at their Annual Show in Keinton Mandeville Village Hall, on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> of September.

Everything was so well organised, easy to set up, and despite the rain, well attended. There was a real Buzz (pun intended) everyone was so lovely and friendly; willing to stop and chat, buy something, have a go on our raffle or just make a donation. Thanks to my willing helpers Yvonne, Angie and Val, plus Andy and Dave who helped set up and pack away, we raised £230!

Many Thanks,  
**Sandie Jenkins**  
*On behalf of Spiky Shires Hedgehog Rescue*

## **From the Chair - October**

Sadly Jack Barr has decided to stand down from his position as chairman for personal reasons. It has been a pleasure to get to know Jack over the past year. He has been a helpful and knowledgeable leader of our committee and we are sorry to hear of his decision. We send our thanks and best wishes to him.

For two consecutive months, it has been a pleasure to be able to 'meet and mingle' with other beekeepers from our association. The Honey Show in September was a celebratory day for many despite the challenges of the beekeeping season. It was impressive to see the entries and standards on show. For those of us that were less successful, it was a welcome chance to commiserate with each other, share stories of the challenges we have faced and dream of greater success next year! In all it was a great day out. Thank you to all that helped to make it possible.

This month our winter talks resumed and we got off to a brilliant start. The evening was well supported and we were treated to a fascinating talk about Regenerative Farming. Sara and Simon Barrett are transforming their farm near Crewkerne, using innovative approaches to increase bio-diversity. Their story provided hope and optimism that soil health and bio diversity can be restored if approaches they are using are more widely adopted. At such a time when there is gloom about Climate Change and a feeling that politicians fall short of taking actions that are needed, it was so inspiring to hear how individuals are making a huge difference to the land they manage. Thank you to Sara and Simon for coming along and sharing your experiences with us.

A further opportunity to meet together will be at the AGM which takes place on 9<sup>th</sup> November at 7.00pm in the Somerton Parish Rooms. We do hope you will come along and participate. Refreshments will be available after the meeting and so there will be further opportunity to chat with fellow beekeepers.

Hope to see you there.

***Gillian Islip (Vice Chair, Somerton and District Beekeepers Association)***

**Dates for your diary**

**Somerton Beekeepers AGM**

Somerton Parish Rooms  
TA11 7NB

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> Nov.  
7.00pm**

**President**

Jackie Mosedale  
01458 241146

**Vice Chair**

Gillian Islip  
[gillianislip@gmail.com](mailto:gillianislip@gmail.com)  
01458 241562

**Secretary**

Alison Clewes  
[pansypots@icloud.com](mailto:pansypots@icloud.com)

**Treasurer**

Sarah Griffiths  
[s\\_e\\_lund@hotmail.com](mailto:s_e_lund@hotmail.com)

**Membership Secretary**

Alison Dykes

**Librarian**

Sarah Kent  
01749 670423

**Honey Show sub committee**

David Rose, Alison Dykes, Fred Clarke

**Newsletter Editor**

Stewart Gould  
01749 860755  
[somertonbees@btinternet.com](mailto:somertonbees@btinternet.com)

**Events Programme**

**Position vacant**

**County Delegate**

Keith Sturgess

**Deputy Delegates**

Suzy Perkins

**Apiary Manager**

Joe King  
01749 890357

**Extraction Equipment Loan**

John Speirs  
01458 241831

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