



Quantock Quest

The newsletter of the Quantock Bee Keepers Association (QBKA)

Issue 21

November 2019

ASIAN HORNET—The hunt is on

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On Friday 4th October an Asian Hornet nest was destroyed following the confirmed sighting of an Asian hornet near Christchurch, Dorset after it was reported by a member of the public. It is imperative that any Asian hornet colonies in the UK are detected and destroyed before queens are released. This is the time of year when colonies have been previously detected and we depend on alert beekeepers and members of the public to report sightings. As we have an abundant insect population, Asian hornets may not just be found in apiaries, they could also be at places where insects congregate – stands of ivy, for example, and on decaying fruit. At any sunny, warm period, take a little extra time – 20 minutes or more - to look around your apiary, any ivy and garden generally to help early detection of this alien insect.



Could you identify this menace?

Our Chairman, Barry Hulatt spent an enjoyable if exhausting couple of days at the Bath and West Show at the end of May. The QBKA stall in the Bees and Honey tent focused on enabling the public to identify the invasive Asian Hornet, and telling them what to do in the event of discovering one. He reports that “There was a remarkable lack of knowledge about these insects and the threat they will pose”. In particular people regularly misidentified our native hornet and other similar species, even though the Asian Hornet is conspicuously mostly black with yellow legs. This emphasises that we as beekeepers will continue to have a role in educating people on this invasive species.

Have you got yours?

- * QBKA have been fortunate enough to acquire some Asian Hornet traps and attractant. These traps are FREE, and there is one for every member!
- * Make sure that you collect yours from the Barn on your next visit, if you have not already done so.
- * Monitoring for this threat is vitally important. So make sure that you have your trap and that you know exactly what to do in the event of actually trapping one!



An Asian Hornet nest found near Fowey

The positive note, however, was that children even as young as five or six seemed much better at observation and identification than some of the adults that we met!

I should add a reminder that our aim should not be to destroy nests or individual hornets ourselves but to help in identifying and tracking them. To this end we have a lot of posters and leaflets available at the Apiary and there is an extremely useful and free Asian Hornet Watch app which can be downloaded onto your phone.

BeeBase—Annual Hive Count

It is again time to update your BeeBase records with the total number of overwintering hives as of 1st November 2019. To complete this year's hive count please use the link below which will take you to BeeBase. Once logged in, please answer the hive count questions displayed and then click the 'Submit response' button. It is as simple as that! Please update your records by 31st December 2019.

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/login.cfm?relocate=/secure/beekeeper/hiveCensus.cfm>

Bee Driving—A Lost Art?

One of the most interesting and best attended meetings of the summer was presented by David Charles at our Spaxton Apiary. David demonstrated the ancient art of driving bees, whereby the bees in a skep or hollow log were driven upwards into another container by rhythmic beating. In the early years of the 20th century this was a means of moving bees from an old fashioned skep system into modern moveable frame hives. It ensured that the bees would not be killed at the end of the season in order to remove their wax and honey. At one time demonstrations of driving the bees were given at agricultural shows, with the participants often wearing little or no protection.

After David had shown how it was done (initially wearing authentic Victorian beekeeping kit!) several members had a go at driving the bees into a clean skep. They were then transferred into a National hive, with their original combs tied into the frames. This hive is now very strong as it goes into the winter, with repairs made to these rescued combs and new comb drawn on foundation. Thank you, David, for a fascinating and informative day.



Rent-a-Hive review

As noted in a previous article the beginners course and the Rent-a-hive scheme have been thriving this year. Our thanks go to Sue for organising this and to the various experienced beekeepers who have been willing to share their expertise. We are also grateful to the several members who generously donated stock hives from which to make up the nucleus colonies in good time. In previous years it has sometimes been challenging to get the later nukes up to strength for the winter.



In addition to Rent-a-hive, the afternoon Practicals and the drop in evening sessions on Wednesdays have been well attended by both longstanding and newer members. It gives us a chance to do some much needed colony maintenance and to chat about shared interests and challenges. If you have not attended one of these sessions everyone is most welcome.

Crab Spiders

Sue Anderson writes: Readers may be interested to see this Crab Spider in my garden last summer. Crab Spiders are able to change colour and hide on flowers in order to pounce on unsuspecting prey. This one had managed to catch and kill one of my bees, even though it was bigger than the spider itself! It then dragged the bee underneath the flower and feasted for several days before returning to wait for more...



Annual General Meeting 2019

Please note in your diary the Annual General Meeting of our division which will take place at 7pm on Friday 22nd November in Spaxton Village Hall.

Our speaker will be the highly regarded Marin Anastasov NDB. Marin, as well as being at the forefront of beekeeper education, has an academic and practical background in sustainable food production. His talk will focus on Flowers and Bees, including the different stimuli emitted by flowers and how they affect the foraging behaviour of honey bees. He will examine the importance of colours, shapes, scent and taste in memorising locations, and how the environment (and we as beekeepers) can influence the ability of bees to be successful foragers.

The second half of the meeting will focus on the business of the division. This will include reports from the officers on our previous year's activities and proposals for next year's programme. Positions on the committee will be up for re-election, and I would encourage members to put themselves forward. Certificates will also be awarded for those who successfully completed their Basic Examinations. Congratulations to them.

In particular, I have to stress that we are in need of a new Secretary as Ken Edwards is stepping down after twelve years in the role. It would be quite impossible to replace Ken, who has been the driving force behind the division and its success, and we would not be seeking to do so. Ken will no doubt be happy to give help and advice, and his successor would not necessarily have his wide practical beekeeping experience. The committee will, however, need somebody to convene meetings, deal with correspondence and answer enquiries. Please consider whether you, or somebody you know, would be willing to fill this role. Without such a person the smooth running of the division as we have become used to will be problematic. As always our thanks go to Ken for so magnificently discharging his duties in this role. He will be a hard act to follow!

Light refreshments will be available at the meeting as usual.

Ask the Experts

How to store supers?

Hopefully you will have had many full supers this year and the Honey Harvest has been a successful one. But what now? Supers will need to be stored for the winter.

Supers can be stored wet or dry...A super is termed wet if it is stored straight away after extracting honey – so it is not put straight back on to the hive.

A super is termed dry if it is put back on to the hive to be 'cleaned up' by the bees. Supers fitted with plastic foundation are best stored wet, as this helps to bribe the bees back on to them in the spring; if stored dry the bees are very reluctant to re-use plastic foundation.

The best way to dry the extracted comb is by placing the super above a crown board without escapes. The bees "rob" the honey down into the nest. Without the crown board the bees tend to consolidate the honey in situ in the super, rather than taking it below. The dry boxes can be treated in several ways. You can freeze the frames in the supers; 24hrs in the deep freeze will kill off eggs of wax moth. The boxes can then be wrapped in plastic bin liner bags and stacked. Do ensure top and bottom of the stack is mouse proof.

Stacks of supers can be sulphured – two strips put into a burner and lit produces sulphur dioxide poisonous to most living things. Do this exercise in an open well ventilated area. This process needs to be repeated every few weeks.

Finally, if you have a dry dusty barn, with lots of spiders.... A broad mesh to keep out the mice, but allow the spiders in... this forms a good biological control!

Failing any of these you can always render down your wax and trade it for fresh foundation in the spring, giving the young wax workers plenty to do and helping to avoid swarming!

The newsletter of the Quantock Bee Keepers

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<https://www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk/quantock.html>

President : Mr G Fraser
Chairman : Mr Barry Hulatt
Secretary : Mr Ken Edwards
Treasurer : Mrs Alison Monteith



Proposed Programme of Events 2020

Beginners classes will begin in November 2019 and there will be further meetings in the New Year. There have been many enquiries about these classes which initially will take place at Brymore school, though later sessions may be held in Spaxton Village hall or at the Apiary. Please contact the secretary for an update.

We would like to hold a Social and/or Quiz on the 7th February, to which families and partners would be welcome. This will also enable members to compare notes on how their bees are wintering and discuss the build up to Spring.

There will be practical sessions at the Apiary on various Wednesday and Saturday afternoons for those who are available, and we will continue with our popular monthly Wednesday evening 'Drop-in' sessions from 8th April. Practical sessions will focus on seasonal manipulations and topics of interest such as preparing a nucleus, queen rearing, swarm control, managing varroa and producing honey and wax for sale. Hive building will take place in March, and beginners and established members will be able to order flat-pack equipment through the Association.

Some members of the beginners' group will wish to take advantage of the 'Rent-a-hive' scheme which will be run on Saturday afternoons from March onwards. Numbers for this scheme are strictly limited and details should be obtained from Sue Anderson who is our co-ordinator.

We would like to hold a summer picnic or barbecue at the apiary on a Saturday afternoon in June, and there may be also be an opportunity for an Apiary Open Day for the general public. For both of these events we will need to be very aware of the siting of activities to avoid the possibility of stings. On 27th June we will be running our usual information tent at Brymore School's own Open Day, and volunteers for this very enjoyable event are most welcome.

As and when the need arises we will update members on the threat of the Asian Hornet (*Vespa velutina*) and concerns about brood disease in the area. Some members have also expressed an interest in the use of microscopy for pollen identification and in 'reading the comb' for normal development and possible disease. We have a good observation hive and there will be a demonstration of this being stocked. Towards the end of the season we would like to run a session on mead making and organise a small, informal honey show for members only – not particularly as a competition but to demonstrate how it is done and to encourage entries to larger shows. Please let us know what you think of these ideas. Of course, some of our most enjoyable meetings have been at members' own apiaries, and if you feel you have the facilities (particularly parking) to invite members to your garden or out apiary, please let us know.

And Finally!

Thank you to all of those who have contributed copy for this newsletter. In order for it to be both informative and relevant I need regular member articles and information. Please send anything that you would like to see included, along with suggestions and feedback to the newsletter editor via e-mail to billmonteith@talktalk.net
