



Quantock Quest

The newsletter of the Quantock Bee Keepers Association (QBKA)

Issue 27

July 2021

An Inventors tale! - Bee Hoovers Part 1

Our intrepid Bob Muckett, who was featured in the “Meet The Committee” section last issue turned his attention to solving the perennial problem of “How to catch a Swarm”. As you know, some are easily caught by conventional means. Others, however, are slightly more difficult and demand a bit of lateral thinking. Bob set about a novel solution to this problem and the results were quickly put to the test. This is Bob’s tale:-

The Bee Hoover.

There was an article in one of the BBKA News magazine over winter describing a bee hoover where the vacuum unit was a modified two stroke petrol leaf blower/collector.

During lockdown it seemed like a project, but I wanted to be a bit “greener”. The choice of the Stihl leaf blower meant that it was compatible with other garden machinery I own. It was cordless so can be used anywhere, it has zero emissions. Two other things; I can use it as a super clearer (no more Porter bee escapes or fitting clearer board with Rhombus escapes. AND it can still be used as a leaf blower!

The main elements are:-

The business end.

This is from a Henry hoover with the flange bonded into the collector box. It can be fitted with various attachments depending on where the bees are and how difficult they are to access.

The Collector Box

Made from odds bits of ½” plywood. Measures 400 x 240 x 180. The lid is close fitting and the box is fitted with feet and battens just below the lid to act as handles. The rubber bungee ensures the lid stays put during transport. On the inside of the box at the vacuum end was fastened a piece of expanded metal mesh. In front of the was placed a close fitting piece of pond filter foam. This would cushion the bees as they were sucked into the box.

A soft foam bung ensures no escapes once the bees are safely in the box.

The Vacuum Hose.

Connects between the collector box and the leaf blower. Bought online from a company that supplies woodworking dust extraction equipment. The bigger the hose diameter the better but in this instance maximum diameter was 60mm. The two compatible flanges came from the same supplier.

The Leaf Blower and Adaptor

Chosen for the reasons stated above. I contacted Stihl technical to enquire if I could simply reverse the polarity on the motor which would have made things a whole lot easier, even though the fan is most efficient turning the way it was designed to. They advised against it so it was decided to take a mould from the air intake at the rear of the blower. Then take a mould from that and then use that as the mould to produce a glass fibre adaptor. Fine woven glass fibre cloth was used to make the adaptor and all moulds were constructed from reinforced papier mache. Great care was taken to ensure close fitting at each stage to minimise air leakage. A couple of hose clips to join it all together and the job was done.

The first swarm of the year that I was called to was in a water meter pit on the pavement, I couldn't believe my luck. Making sure the battery was fully charged the equipment was set up on the roadside. The manhole cover was lifted and the bees vacuumed out. It really was as simple as that. The soft bung fitted, the bees were transported to a site where a nuc was prepared. The bees were tipped in and it could be seen that there were NO fatalities.

Just waiting for the next job now.

An Inventors tale! - Bee Hoovers Part 2

Flushed with the success of the "Muckett Mk1 Bee Hoover" Bob settled down to bask in the glow of success. He didn't have long to wait for the "next job" but even he probably did not foresee the task that he was faced with! Would the invention work in difficult circumstances? What if it was a difficult swarm to catch? Ken Edwards fielded a call from a distressed young lady at Splatt Mill! There was a swarm of Bees under her roof tiles who had begun to make their new home between the tiles and the roof membrane! Ken thought that this would be a job for the Bee Hoover and asked Bob to attend. Fortunately, there was also a Scaffold Tower at the location, so access was not too much of a problem. The Bee Hoover was assembled and the removal began! Ken stood by with the Smoker, whilst the Intrepid Mr Muckett lifted the tiles and proceeded to Hoover up the bees. Once safely confined in the vacuum contraption all that remained to be done was to put the collected swarm into a Nuc box and place it back on the roof in order to catch any flying bees returning from forage. A complete success, and testimony to the Inventiveness of Bob. All that remained to be done was to sit on the grass whilst awaiting the stragglers return and take a well earned break!



The Intrepid Duo take a well earned break after the Swarm Capture. The Nuc Box rests on the roof. Despite zooming in I still cannot see a flagon of Cider, but I think they deserved one!



Ken (with Smoker) and Bob contemplate the task in hand. The Bee Hoover rests on the Scaffold Tower

An Inventors tale! - Solar Wax Extractor

Continuing the theme of handy inventions, Mick Stenhouse writes:

Some years ago Phillip Jago one of the founding members of the Quantock Division died and his solar extractor was donated to us.

The only part that was usable was the stainless steel tray, so Ken and I took on the job of building a new box for the tray to sit in. We used offcuts of the insulated metal sheeting from the barn, then the project stalled for a couple of years.

Then along came Bob Muckett, a man of invention and it wasn't long before he had fixed wheels and handles on it and then went on to complete the project by making the lid.

As you can see from the photos it is now working and we have extracted our first wax. Please feel free to admire this work of art when you next visit the apiary.



Ken and Mick holding the original Stainless Steel Tray which formed the genesis of the Solar Extractor idea. From small acorns grow.....



Large Solar Wax Extractors! Mick Stenhouse hold open the lid on QBKA's very own scratch built extractor. Now, I wonder what else we can invent?

The Chairman's Musings

Chairman Barry Hulatt writes:

Dear friends,

This has been a very strange season so far, with atrocious weather early on and then scorching temperatures in July. We have also had an unusual number of swarms and casts reported, some even on the last week. Personally I have had four swarms turn up in stacks of supers and a couple in bait hives

This suggests to me there are beekeepers nearby who are not looking at their bees, or wild colonies in trees or roofs looking for new accommodation. I know of one wild (feral?) lot in the roots of an old alder tree which regularly sends out swarms. It is great to get 'bees for free', but remember our recent disease scare and be extra vigilant with regard to strange swarms. By the way, the Swarmcatchers WhatsApp group which we set up this year seems to have been very successful, as has our general WhatsApp group.

I recently visited a very posh garden called The Newt near Bruton which includes a hi-tech beekeeping display as well as very impressive plantings and a history of gardening. It seems a bit pricey but you get a year's membership and can take in guests. They employ a paid beekeeper on their staff. Nice work if you can get it!

Laying Workers?

Nic Wills has often supplied some very interesting tales and pictures to match so that there are always points of interest, especially for our newer members.

For this issue he has sent numerous examples of problems that may (or may not) happen to Beekeepers at some point. First up is his experience with a Nuc box in which the queen failed over winter. As you will know, if the Bees cannot raise a new queen the colony will become "Hopelessly Queenless". In many instances, because of the lack of Queen Pheromone, this will lead to some Workers to start laying. Tell-tale signs are irregular brood pattern, multiple eggs in one cell cup, and because the eggs are infertile and will be Drones, raised caps.



Nic's solution was to remove the frames and take them to a remote corner of the Apiary and shake the Bees out. He then removed the Nuc Box. The Bees will find their way to another Hive but the Laying Worker(s) will not make it.

Looking for an Out Apiary site?

Someone in Nether Stowey has made an inquiry as to whether anyone wants an apiary for one hive in a big garden. The site has not been checked out so would need looking at before bees could be placed.

First contact Mick Stenhouse on 01278 734633

Important Changes to BeeBase

[BeeBase](#) is an information resource for beekeepers, but perhaps its main function is as a register of beekeepers and their apiaries, which enables inspectors to target inspections to apiaries close to disease outbreaks. For this register to work, it must be up to date and accurate; NBU inspectors don't want to miss a beekeeper who has just moved into a disease risk area. Beekeepers move house, close apiaries, open new ones, increase and decrease their colony numbers. Our experience is that beekeepers often register and then forget to update their records when their circumstances change.

Over winter 2020/21, as a result of feedback, the Beekeeper Personal Records functions have been redesigned, made simpler and more interactive, making them easier to update. The new layout is much clearer: there are large buttons to 'Add New Apiaries', 'Edit Apiary' and 'View History'. There is now a **map with each apiary record**, showing the apiary location and you can drag a marker around to ensure the apiary is in the correct place.

Also new is a mandatory 'Varroa Present?' tick box – this is in response to the new Varroa recording requirement added to the **Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006**. This came into force on 21st April and requires beekeepers and/or officials to report the presence of Varroa in any of the hives that they manage. This amendment will allow us in England to comply with the Animal Health Law, which is necessary for future working relationships with the European Union. Similar arrangements have been made for Wales and Scotland. **No action is required from beekeepers** – the default setting has been set to 'Yes', given that Varroa is endemic in the UK (with a couple of very specific exceptions).

Disease Alert

QBKA members were advised by our Secretary that the following Disease Alert had been issued by the NBU.

*Please be advised that on 21/06/2021, the following disease has been confirmed within 3KM of one or more of your apiaries: Disease Diagnosed: **European Foulbrood (EFB)** Your Apiaries At Risk: **Quantock Beekeepers teaching apiary** . Please be vigilant and examine your colonies carefully, advising us if you have concerns. For help in recognizing disease, you can view our Foul Brood leaflet, or for more information please visit BeeBase online at*

<http://www.nationalbeeunit.com>

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Dealing with "Unusual" Swarms!

Whilst the Jury remains out on the issue of Queen Clipping there is one certainty. If the Colony decides to Swarm then a Clipped Queen will not be going very far! Nic Wills (for it is he!) sent some pictures of an incident in his Apiary where a Clipped Queen decided to leave. As stated, She didn't get far but the net result was that the issuing Swarm then clustered around her where she fell (crawled). That happened to be right underneath the Hive that she had just left!



The cluster of Bees surrounding the Clipped Queen, who couldn't fly off after Swarming.



The rather neat solution. Hive parts strapped together and tilted to reveal the cluster. Nuc Box in position to receive the Bees when they are brushed into the Nuc Box!

Nic decided to securely strap up the entire Hive to prevent the boxes / roof separating and tilted it backwards. He could then place a Nuc Box right under the cluster and then simply brushed the bees into their new home. A simple solution, It's nice when a plan comes together.

Forward Planning

Your Colony records will tell you the age of your queens and how their offspring developed over the season. You may have decided to replace an old queen that is unlikely to last the winter. Having checked for disease, you could replace her with a young queen from a mating nucleus or unite the colony with another healthy colony by the paper method. A younger queen and additional bees can help you benefit from a late crop, such as Himalayan balsam or heather, and a strong colony will better survive winter.

EFB and Bee Diseases Insurance

Many of you will have seen this article in the SBKA Newsletter, but I make no apologies for repeating it in ours! It is important, particularly in these straightened times, that we are aware of the schemes and courses open to us if we were, as we were last year, to suffer from EFB (or other notifiable Bee diseases).



EFB – replacement bees compensation fund

EFB has continued to affect our bees and although claims have been made to the BDI I am not aware that anyone has yet claimed anything from the compensation fund that was set up. Hopefully this means that people have been able to replace their bees from fellow members but just in case anyone has forgotten about the scheme, here is another reminder.

Aware of the possible problem when bees need to be replaced because of an outbreak of EFB, the Council decided in 2019 to set aside a £2,000 fund to support any member who loses all their colonies in all their apiaries to EFB.

Terms and conditions:

1. Must be a fully paid-up and registered member of SBKA, be registered on BeeBase, keep one or more colonies of bees in Somerset and to have lost all their colonies in all their apiaries to EFB in 2019.
 2. EFB must be confirmed by a NBU bee inspector and infected bees and equipment destroyed under his/her instruction.
 3. The NBU-issued Standstill Notice must be lifted by the bee inspector.
 4. Free replacement sources of local bees e.g. from the member's Division, fellow beekeepers etc, must be exhausted before a claim is made.
 5. One nuc/colony per member, irrespective of the number of colonies destroyed.
 6. Applications will be taken on a first come, first served basis and the decision to grant or decline an application will be made by the SBKA Executive, whose decision will be final.
 7. SBKA has set aside a maximum of £2,000 to support members with EFB in 2019; if claims are received after the fund has been exhausted, unfortunately they will be refused.
 8. Replacement bees are subject to availability.
 9. Applications to this fund should be made through the member's Divisional delegate.
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***** Equipment For Sale *****

This is a new feature for the Newsletter. A forum for QBKA Beekeepers to sell / exchange / seek equipment. If you have surplus equipment for sale or exchange then the best way for other Local Beekeepers to know is to offer it via this newsletter. Please send details of any items to the editor, using the email billmonteith@talktalk.net and it will appear in the next edition. Pictures are also useful. Include a general description and indication of condition and the price that you want.

Please note that the items for sale are offered by members and **NOT** the QBKA, unless otherwise stated. The QBKA (or its management) cannot be held responsible for items that are not fit for purpose or are mis advertised. These are private deals between the individuals concerned, not the QBKA. Please deal direct with the member.

There are no items of equipment offered by members for sale in this issue.

August Apiary Tasks

We often talk about 'reading' brood frames and bees, but it helps to know what you are looking for. At this time of year, the number of bees will start to decline as the colony prepares for the end of the active season and overwintering. This may be seen as a gradual reduction in the queen's laying rate, hence less brood, and the empty brood cells being used for stores.

In order to ensure strong healthy colonies going forward, we need to undertake a full disease inspection this month. The same process should be followed as the one undertaken in April. Open the hive and remove some frames from the brood box. This gives you space to shake each frame to remove the bees and view the brood. Note anything unusual and seek advice if you suspect a foulbrood or an exotic pest.

If during the disease inspection, the Varroa mite count is seen to be high, treatment can be undertaken once the supers have been removed. Otherwise, infestation levels will increase throughout the winter and colonies will be very weak as they emerge in the spring. The next brood cycles will produce our winter bees which we need to last at least six months, as opposed to summer bees that only last six weeks.

The husbandry methods for Varroa control under the Integrated Pest Management System occur throughout the season, but at this time of year chemical treatment is more effective. Various chemicals can be used and you should reference the booklet Managing Varroa, available free to download from BeeBase. Remember, only use approved chemicals and please follow the manufacturers' instructions for use. All chemicals used should be recorded with batch number, date, volume applied and application method. If you sell honey, this information may be required by the Environmental Health Officer.

The next step in the beekeeping year is to prepare colonies for the winter. We need to ensure they have enough stores to last through the dark months; the amount will depend on the size of your brood box. For instance, a National hive will need around 20kg of stores, while a Commercial hive will require approximately 25kg. However, the amount of stores consumed also depends on the weather and whether it is mild or freezing during the winter, so supplementary feeding may be needed later on. A heavy syrup of 2kg white sugar to 1.25 litres of water is recommended. This is placed in a rapid feeder to give the bees maximum access to the syrup. Large feeders such as the Miller, Ashforth or their plastic equivalents are favoured. Smaller feeders can be used but you need to top up the syrup more frequently.

The newsletter of the
Quantock Bee Keepers

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President : Mr G Fraser
Chairman : Mr Barry Hulatt
Secretary : Mrs Ruth Walker
Treasurer / Membership: Mrs Alison Monteith



2021 Programme of Events

As Virus restrictions ease and we get more of a feel of “normality” returning we can begin to expand the Programme of Events. Those events remaining this year are as follows:

Saturday 7th August 1400 Assessing the crop
Wednesday 11th August 1900 Drop in for all
Saturday 21st August 1400 Removing honey + varroa treatment

Saturday 4th September 1400 Beginners' forum
Wednesday 8th September 1900 Drop in for all
Saturday 18th September 1400 Preparing for winter / uniting / feeding

Wednesday 13th October 1900 Drop in + mouse guards
Saturday 23rd October 1400 Maintenance + stocktaking

Mondays, November 1900 Beginners meetings begin
Friday 19th November AGM Spaxton Village Hall

Saturday 18th December 1400 Oxalic acid treatment

It is hoped that in addition to the above it will be possible to run sessions on skep making, wax preparation and visits to members' apiaries.



Caption Competition!

As a suitable endpiece to the Splatt Mill saga I have included this picture of the owner. The look on her face is a picture! But what do you expect when there are two strange men, armed with smoke and a Hoover invading your garden and climbing up on to your roof? Oh, and 25.000 angry Bees!

Suitable captions can be sent to the Editor for inclusion next issue!