



Quantock Quest

The newsletter of the Quantock Bee Keepers Association (QBKA)

Issue 29

March 2022

The Chairman's Musings!

My Aunt Eunice was a small and inoffensive person who never did anyone any particular harm and passed away leaving very little impression on the world apart from on her nearest and dearest. Not so the named stormy phenomenon, which has left its mark as I write, leaving a trail of destruction in her wake. You all probably received a foul weather warning from our county chairman advising us to batten down the hatches, tie down hives or put concrete blocks on them. I thought I had taken this advice and in the main things were ok with my bees, though there was a narrow escape from falling trees and a stack of supers managed to scatter itself around. I hope the storms, and covid, saw you emerging from the winter as unscathed as possible.

When it has been mild the bees have been flying and bringing in pollen from the snowdrops and hellebores. Perhaps the best winter shrub has been mahonia; though for beautiful scent there has been *sarcococca* (sweet box), *lonicera fragrantissima* (winter honeysuckle) and *daphne odora*. The bees, however, cannot rely on these winter treats, and their main flights have been for cleansing purposes. Now the light and temperature are improving we can expect the bees to consume increasing amounts of stores, and it would be a good idea to heft your hives to check on them. (Probably a good idea to remove the straps and concrete blocks etc first!). Remember that winter losses are, more often than not, early spring losses. While it is still cold, of course, it is advised to feed candy to save any vulnerable colonies. Soon, however, it will be possible to feed dilute syrup, especially if you wish to build up colonies for an early crop or to make an increase by making nukes.

The theory element of the beginners course at Brymore has again been a success with up to twenty new members attending. Thank you to all of you who have helped and participated in this course. We will begin the practical elements in March and would like to pair up new members with mentors or friends in their own neighbourhood, so volunteers will be welcome.

Best wishes to everyone for a healthy and successful season ahead.

Barry Hulatt (Chairman)

February: What a Month!

What a stormy month February has been! Fingers crossed we are over the worst of the bad weather now because those high winds were really quite disruptive. My hives were all heavily weighted to prevent them from blowing apart and luckily, I had no mishaps for which I am thankful for. Although we all follow the weather, the timely email circulated by our Chairman warning of the risks, and the actions to take was most welcome.

This month has also been a time of preparation. Frames are being made to replace old ones, plans are being drafted up on how to look after the bees this year, Regular heftings have taken place, Fondant fed and observations made. In my case I am pleased to say that I appear to have 2 very strong colonies coming into Spring and one which, although slightly weaker, still appears to be strong.

It will be interesting to see the results of the first inspections towards the end of the month. Here's to a good year ahead.

Diary Date: BBKA Convention

The Convention will be at Harper Adams University, TF10 8NB. Three days immersion in 'all things' honeybees, with the opportunity to meet old friends and make friends we don't yet know. All in a spacious campus in the Shropshire countryside and fuelled by their excellent, and reasonably priced, catering. A three-day or single-day Wristband Ticket (not Trade Show only) gets you admittance to all the day's lectures. These cannot be booked - just be at the lecture theatre in good time. Many workshops are now fully booked, so several extra have been opened to meet demand. Any places remaining after 29th March (when bookings close) can be reserved at the Convention from Friday 8th. The Key dates are:

10th March – last date for accommodation held at Telford's Southwater Hotels: Ramada & International.

29th March – last date for advance bookings of Wristband Tickets, Workshops, Dinners & Tent/Camper/Caravan pitches. Whilst Wristbands are available on-the-day, these are cheaper in advance.

Saturday 9th April 08.30 – 16.30: Convention Trade Show - One Day Only

THE major Trade Show of the year. Meet the traders; inspect the kit; handle the hive tools; try on that new bee-suit; trade-in beeswax; collect pre-orders; learn from Speakers Corner, and so much more. Tickets available only on-the-day, just £6. NB Card payments only at the Convention for Wristbands, Catering etc.

For full details and to book, see: www.bbka.org.uk/spring-convention-2022-updates

Diary Dates: BBKA Training

The following BBKA Training Courses are now available and still have spaces. You can book your place via the BBKA Web Shop by following this link

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/shop/departments/training-courses>

Advanced Husbandry Assessment Preparation Training 2022 - Stoneleigh, Warwickshire

A programme of three days will cover both theoretical and practical aspects of the Advanced Husbandry Assessment, aiming to give the participants an understanding of what the assessment entails and what they need to do to be successful. An intensive residential course, with high tutor to student ratio, providing time and space for both tutor to student, as well as student to student interactions. The participants are required to hold the BBKA General Husbandry Certificate and to be eligible to take the Advanced Husbandry assessment in the near future.

Venue Location: Stoneleigh, Warwickshire

Course Dates: Friday 15th July, Saturday 16th July and Sunday 17th July 2022

Course Fee: £350.00 per person - including accommodation and meals. Max 12 places

General Husbandry Assessment Preparation Training - Stoneleigh, Warwickshire

A programme of 20 hours over three days will cover both theoretical and practical aspects of the General Husbandry Assessment, aiming to give the participants an understanding of what the assessment entails and what they need to do to be successful. The participants are required to hold the BBKA Basic Certificate and to be eligible to take the General Husbandry Assessment in 2023.

Venue Location: Stoneleigh, Warwickshire

Course Dates: Saturday 30th April 2022 - Theory

Sunday 1st May 2022 - Theory

Sunday 22nd May 2022 - Apiary Practical

Course Fee: £150.00 per person. Participants must provide own lunch. Max 12

The Story of the Mary Celeste

We are all familiar with the story of the Mary Celeste. A ship that was found in the middle of the ocean, in what appeared to be a recently abandoned condition for no apparent and obvious reason. Even the kettle was still warm! But adrift, deserted and abandoned. Once again, here is our intrepid contributor Nic Wills to tell us the equivalent story relating to

In January I suffered from Mary Celeste bee hive syndrome! This is one of the big mysteries of bee-keeping and appears to be completely inexplicable. The Bees should be over-wintering and conserving stores / keeping warm and clustering. The last thing that they would want to do is to abandon their Hive and risk everything at this time of year!

The Colony went into the winter strong. They appeared equally as strong when they were varroa treated and again when oxalic acid treated was applied. They had plenty of stores when I checked them last. I went to carry out a check and a “heft” some three weeks later and to put more fondant on the hive to develop what I thought was a strong over-wintered colony, only to find it completely empty! No bees were to be found inside or outside! They had just gone without trace. There were no stores left, just the odd bee from other hives robbing the last remnants of the stores out.

If they had starved out and died I would have, naturally, been cross with myself for not monitoring and taking greater care, but this just leaves me mystified. I looked everywhere to see where they may have gone, but to no avail! They had simply vanished. There must be a reason why a Queen and her Cohort would abandon a perfectly good home with stores and take their chances outdoors, even in a mild winter such as this one, I find it inexplicable. And, as they were a strong colony for which I had high hopes, also a tad annoying!. Nature is wonderful, if often inexplicable.



No pile of dead Bees on the ground



*And no Bees in the Hive.
Or stores for that matter.
Gone. Lock, Stock and Barrel!*

The Nic Wills Advice Line Pt 2

Nic Wills writes:

This year was harder than usual to administer Oxalic acid. This winter has been so mild instead of being favourably cold. In more “Standard” winters the bees would be clustering between the frames, so making easier to dribble 5ml per frame. But this year was so mild that the bees were across nearly all frames in the hive and on the top bars, coming out to greet me as soon as I had pulled there roof off! Im therefore not sure how effective the treatment will be. It could be that it is better as the bees were more active, but I really don't know. I should have gone into the brood box despite the time of year in order to see if, because it has been so mild, there may have been a small amount of sealed brood. This would not be ideal because the Varroa mites would have somewhere to hide, and so Mite knock down may not be as high as would normally be the case.



They are so happy to come and see me!



Will it work as it should though?

The Nic Wills Advice Line Pt 3

Nic Wills writes:

Cleaning hive spacers? A top tip. Put them in a bucket containing a strong soda crystal and water solution. Leave them to soak for a couple of weeks and just give them a good stir now and again, making sure that they rub against each other. This helps the cleaning process. Hey Presto! Clean spacers.



To Mead, or not to Mead?

One of the delightful by products of our hobby is Honey. Honey on toast, as a sweetener, as a medicine, the list is endless. But one of the earliest known uses of Honey, going back to the days of the pre-Romans was as an alcoholic beverage! A drink that we now know as Mead. Picture the scene. A long, cold and dark winters evening. The days exertions are over and we settle down in front of an open fire to relax. A good book on our lap, a pet at our feet and a glass of home made Mead by our side. What a glorious picture. So, in order to recreate that we head to our local Supermarket and ask for a bottle of Mead. "Bottle of what" comes the reply! And look to pay upwards of £10 for a small bottle of the stuff. Why suffer, when you can very easily make your own from leftover Honey? The question is, what dark arts do you need to master in order to do so?

The answer to that question, and many more, was revealed recently when a group of QBKA members attended a tasting and fact finding session recently and were treated to a nice, convivial afternoon's social gathering where lessons were learned and members offerings were sampled!



Let the Lesson commence!



The Dark Arts explained!

The session started off with our Chairman, Barry Hulatt, ably assisted by our newly installed President Ken Edwards, giving a highly informative lecture about the history, making and showing of this wonderful tippie. There were many questions from the floor and several members shared their own experiences of making Mead.

There was a good selection of member's Mead ready for sampling, although because most of us had driven, the samples were of necessity, very small! What was very noticeable was the extraordinary variation in the taste and "smoothness" of the samples. Sweet, floral, sharp, earthy. All were well represented and it just goes to show that our Bees make the most of their forage and the resultant

Honey is as different as it is possible to be, year on year. All in all, a splendid afternoon, in good company. I hope that this subject can be revisited again.



Many different Member's Meads for sampling.



Trying out the end product. Yummy!

The newsletter of the
Quantock Bee Keepers

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

President : Mr K Edwards
Chairman : Mr Barry Hulatt
Secretary : Mrs Ruth Walker
Treasurer / Membership: Mrs Alison Monteith



2022 Programme of Events

The provisional programme of events for next year are as follows:

January

Tuesdays 11th, 18th & 25th. 7.30pm– Beginners 6, 7 & 8 at Brymore School

February

Tuesdays 1st & 8th. 7.30pm- Beginners 9 & 10 at Brymore School

Saturday 12th Time TBC– SBKA Lecture Day, The Canalside Centre, Bridgwater

Saturday 26th 2pm– Mead making, judging and tasting- Apiary

March

Wednesday 9th 7pm- Drop In- Apiary

Saturday 19th 2pm- Hive building – Rent-A-Hive 1- Apiary

April

Saturday 2nd 2pm- Frames and preparing Nucs- Rent-A-Hive 2- Apiary

Saturday 9th 2pm- Swarm Prevention and Collection- Apiary

Wednesday 13th 7pm- Drop In- Apiary

Saturday 23rd 2pm- Queen rearing- Apiary

Saturday 30th 2pm – Comb Changing- Rent-A-Hive 3- Apiary

May

Saturday 7th 2pm- Queen rearing 2/Setting up the observation hive- Apiary

Wednesday 11th 7pm – Drop In- Apiary

Saturday 14th 2pm- Making Increase- Rent-A-Hive 4- Apiary

Saturday 28th 2pm- Rent-A-Hive 5

June

Wednesday 8th 7pm- Drop In- plan for Brymore Open day- Apiary

Saturday 11th 2pm- Using Apideas- Rent-A-Hive 6- Apiary

Saturday 18th 2pm- Feeding a Nucleus- Rent-A-Hive 7- Apiary

Saturday 25th – Brymore Open day (All help welcome please)

July

Saturday 2nd 2pm- Building Up- Rent-A-Hive 8- Apiary

Wednesday 13th 7pm- Drop In – Apiary

Saturday 16th 2pm- Reading the Comb- Rent-A-Hive 9- Apiary

August

Saturday 6th 2pm- Pests and Diseases/Moving Bees- Rent-A-Hive 10/11 Apiary

Wednesday 10th 7pm- Drop In – Apiary

Saturday 20th 2pm- Removing honey and varroa

September

Wednesday 14th 7pm- Drop In – Apiary

Saturday 17th 2pm- Preparing for winter/uniting/feeding- Apiary

October

Wednesday 12th 7pm- Drop In – Apiary

Saturday 22nd 2pm- Maintenance and Stocktaking- Apiary

November

Tuesday TBC 7.30pm- Beginner's course starts – Brymore School

Friday 18th 7.30pm- QBKA AGM- Spaxton Village Hall

December

Saturday 10th 2pm- Oxalic Acid Treatment- Apiary