



Quantock Quest

The newsletter of the Quantock Bee Keepers Association (QBKA)

Issue 31

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The Chairman's Musings!

Let's hope you have all had a good season and have not been afflicted by any of the ills which have affected both beekeepers and bees in recent times. I hear mixed reports of honey yields in the area, but for me it has been one of the best seasons ever, and my bees seem to have thrived in the extraordinarily hot summer weather. Maybe that was because they are mostly on the Somerset Levels where the water table remained relatively high. It may have been different for those of you on the parched uplands?

You may have read in the newspapers, or in my report for our WhatsApp group, that the Queen's Beekeeper, John Chapple, performed the traditional role of telling the royal bees that their mistress had died. This ancient custom of telling the bees was probably more practised in cottages than in castles, and some of you may remember doing it yourselves? The hives were also draped in black or the entrances were turned sideways to face the house door. If these rituals were not observed, it was believed, the bees would abscond or would fail to thrive for their new owner. The custom occurs elsewhere in Europe and was also taken over to America by the early settlers. There is a moving Victorian poem about it by John Greenleaf Whittier, a song available online, and detail about it in a fascinating book 'Telling the Bees and other Customs' by Mark Norman. Of course, you should also tell your bees about happier times including births and marriages in the family.

I've just had to go out to my shed because my wife tells me there are bees getting into it. (I have been bottling honey and the smell seems to be wafting around). I seem to find it impossible to make the shed completely bee tight despite all my efforts. Then there will be the problem of getting the bees out. At times like this beekeepers might come to the conclusion that we don't really do it for the honey, that sticky stuff which gets everywhere and attracts every bee and wasp in the vicinity! So, why keep bees? I leave that to you.....

Last month I was asked by County to run an information stall at a Street party (in Street!). This went very well, with lots of interest and enthusiasm, especially from the children. In all, however, I think I only got one recruit as a potential beekeeper. Ruth tells me that our own beginners course for the coming year is very well subscribed. We will run this course in Spaxton Village Hall rather than at Brymore and would welcome any more experienced members to help out – please contact Ruth or Sue Anderson.

Several members took the Basic Exam this year, either at my home or the isolation apiary. I also took the Bee Health Certificate and Grahame Gould took another of the Modules. Results for the successful candidates will be announced at the AGM.

All best wishes for the quieter times to come over the winter. Have thoughts about your mouse guards (should already have been done) and whether you will be doing an oxalic acid treatment around Christmas time. I will be sending further information on this as it will be different from previous years and we will need advance notice of how many hives you will be treating. Remember the AGM on Friday 18th November.

Barry Hulatt (Chairman)

Examination Success!

Grahame Gould Writes:-

As you know we had a number of candidates taking exams this year, (pictured, Right), and at long last the results are back and they are as follows:

Barry Hullat passed the Honey Bee Health Certificate

Stephanie Bryan passed the Basic Certificate

Oskars Gould passed the Basic Certificate (with Credit)

Peter Masters passed the Basic Certificate (with Credit)

Ian Pickering passed the Basic Certificate (with Credit)

Ruth Walker passed the Basic Certificate (with Distinction)



Congratulations go to them all. Certificates and badges will be presented at the AGM or can be left for collection at the apiary if the candidates cannot make the AGM.

We encourage all new beekeepers (or experienced beekeepers who have not done it) to take the Basic Certificate to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and practical skills to be a good beekeeper.

Examinations and Modules!

Our Examinations Co-ordinator, Grahame Gould is keen to advance the skillsets of our members and especially those who are new to the craft. To that end he has asked to place this open letter to new (and old) members alike. Over to you Grahame:

Hello everyone,

I understand that some of you are interested in taking the BBKA Basic Certificate assessment. Passing this assessment is necessary if you wish to go on and take further modular exams. The syllabus can be downloaded or viewed on the BBKA website, and though it looks a bit daunting the assessment is really just a practical assessment of your beekeeping skills. Anyone who attended the beginner's course and has kept their own bees should have no difficulty passing.

You MUST have kept your own colony of bees for at least a year and be a member of the BBKA. There is a BBKA correspondence course (£75 fee) if anyone is interested, but we would suggest mentoring from some of the experienced beekeepers in QBKA as the best way to prepare. We can decide how to organise this when we know how many people wish to take the assessment.

Please email me and copy to Ruth if you would like to take the assessment and we can tell you how to apply. The exam fee will be refunded after you have passed.

Best wishes

Grahame Gould

gouldgrahame@gmail.com

And talking of Exam Success!

Apparently, Grahame is a modest person who shies away from publicising his own success when undertaking Beekeeping examinations. But a little Birdie has just whispered to the Editor that in amongst the successful candidates listed above should also be added his own name! So here it is. **Grahame Gould** passed the Bee Health (Module 3) examination. Congratulations Grahame. Well deserved.

A visit from Ashcott Garden Club

An Ashcott Garden Club Reporter writes:- On July 11th, Ashcott Garden Club visited the QBKA Apiary at Spaxton for a very pleasant, warm evening exploring the wild flower meadow home to the bees of numerous new beekeepers. Here they have the opportunity to rent a hive while they attend classes to enable them to go it alone. The bees were very friendly, due to the warm weather and the group was able to get close to the hives. We had the chance to put on a bee suit, (Sue Wilton in the photo, right), listen to Ken Edwards explain some of the mysteries of the life of bees and Barry Hulatt did a demonstration, behind a screen, to show the group the inside of an active hive.



Our competition was to come up with a name for a new queen bee in this Platinum Jubilee year, and the winner was Sue Pinhay (Left) with **JULIBEE!** The evening ended with tea and honey cake and a chance to buy honey from the bees.

Editor's Note:- The Ashcott Garden Club made a generous donation of £40 towards the upkeep of the Apiary. We would like to thank them for their kindness, and hope that they enjoyed their visit and have taken away a better understanding of our craft.

Poetry Corner



Following on from the Poetic genius demonstrated by Shirley Stenhouse in the last edition, our Chairman Barry Hulatt has discovered this little Gem. Although he is not the author it is a wonderful offering, and one we would do well to heed! For the full story about **WHY** this is relevant see page 6!



Bees! Bees! Hark to your bees!

"Hide from your neighbours as much as you please,

But all that has happened, to us you must tell,

Or else we will give you no honey to sell!"

Rudyard Kipling

Do we have any other budding Poets out there?

Send your submissions to the editor: billmonteith309222@gmail.com



Rent—a—Hive. A Setback. Again!

Sue Anderson writes:

EFB in the Apiary.

Last Spring our apiary was found to be clear on EFB (European Foul Brood) disease by the seasonal bee inspector and our 2021 Rent a hive cohort were able to take their bees home. Unfortunately, this Autumn, the seasonal bee inspector again found EFB in the apiary as part of a larger local outbreak. This meant that all hives in the apiary were issued with a standstill order. As a result, no hives can be moved in or out of the apiary until the site is again clear of this disease, (which will now not be until a clear inspection next spring)



All hands on deck with the cleaning of the affected hives...



Burning the frames from the affected hives in a pit, after the bees have been killed. The remains are then buried when the pit is filled in again to ensure no further contamination.

In addition, the affected hives had to have the bees humanely killed and the bees and the frames had to be burnt, with the local inspector present. The affected hives were then scorched to ensure all traces of the disease were killed. Many thanks to Mick Stenhouse and Bob Muckett, who oversaw this process at the Apiary, and to everyone who helped on the day.

Accompanying the seasonal bee inspector as she went through the hives, was a great learning experience, to see how the disease presents.



Using strong washing soda and gloves to ensure hive parts are disease free, to maintain good apiary hygiene. We are now hoping that our Apiary will be free of disease in the Spring, so that this years rent a hive group can move their bees home....

Identifying EFB on the Comb.

European foulbrood (EFB) is caused by the bacterium *Melissococcus plutonius*, and is highly contagious. The bacterium is accidentally fed to a larva by nurse bees in the form of contaminated brood food. It multiplies in the mid-gut and causes the bee larva to starve to death by competing for its food. This normally occurs shortly before their cells are due to be sealed. The bacterium remains in the gut and does not invade the body tissues of the larva.

symptoms typically include:

- **erratic or uneven brood pattern**
- **twisted larvae lying unnaturally in the cell (not like the usual 'c' shape)**
- **discoloured larvae**
- **larvae which has a melted appearance (no segmentation)**



Needless to say, if you find any of your Brood Comb with any trace of the above you **MUST** contact the Seasonal Bee Inspector. EFB is a notifiable disease. It will mean that the colony, and its associated equipment will need to be treated in exactly the same way as it was in our Apiary.

You may be tempted to say nothing, and you may fear the destruction of your equipment. **PLEASE DON'T!** EFB will spread throughout your colonies and will ultimately infect other peoples Apiaries. Provided you hold Bee Insurance (one of the benefits of being a member of QBKA) then the cost of the equipment destroyed will be indemnified. Don't take the chance.

How do you "Humanely" Cull a Colony?

Mick Stenhouse Writes:

To kill bees infected by EFB in hives with mesh floors we put a couple of sheets of newspaper on the slide under the hive and block up the hive entrance in the evening when the bees have stopped flying. Then petrol is poured down through the holes in the crown board and the holes are blocked off. The newspaper on the slide is to prevent the petrol from going out through the bottom of the hive and help keep the fumes in. We use approximately three quarters of a pint per hive and this kills the bees in a few minutes.

A sad, but necessary action if EFB (or any other serious Bee disease) is found in a colony!

So, Why tell the Bees?

The socially aware amongst you will recall a touching tale, following the sad passing of H.M. Queen Elizabeth the 2nd, concerning the Royal Beekeeper informing her Bees that she had passed away. This touching tradition goes back a long way and is not just confined to Royalty!

As our Chairman has already eloquently opined in his musings on page 1, there was a time when almost every rural British family who kept bees followed this strange tradition. Whenever there was a death in the family, someone had to go out to the hives and tell the bees of the terrible loss that had befallen the family. Failing to do so often resulted in further losses such as the bees leaving the hive, or not producing enough honey or even dying. Traditionally, the bees were kept abreast of not only deaths but all important family matters including births, marriages, and long absence due to journeys. If the bees were not told, all sorts of calamities were thought to happen. This peculiar custom is known as “telling the bees”.

Humans have always had a special connection with bees. In medieval Europe, bees were highly prized for their honey and wax. Honey was used as food, to make mead—possibly the world's oldest fermented beverage—and as medicine to treat burns, cough, indigestion and other ailments. Candles made from beeswax burned brighter, longer and cleaner than other wax candles. Bees were often kept at monasteries and manor houses, where they were tended with the greatest respect and considered part of the family or community. It was considered rude, for example, to quarrel in front of bees. The practice of *telling the bees* may have its origins in Celtic mythology that held that bees were the link between our world and the spirit world. So if you had any message that you wished to pass to someone who was dead, all you had to do was tell the bees and they would pass along the message. Telling the bees was widely reported from all around England, and also from many places across Europe. Eventually, the tradition made their way across the Atlantic and into North America.

The typical way to tell the bees was for the head of the household, or “goodwife of the house” to go out to the hives, knock gently to get the attention of the bees, and then softly murmur in a doleful tune the solemn news. Little rhymes developed over the centuries specific to a particular region. In Nottinghamshire, the wife of the dead was heard singing quietly in front of the hive - ***“The master's dead, but don't you go; Your mistress will be a good mistress to you.”*** In Germany, a similar couplet was heard - ***“Little bee, our lord is dead; Leave me not in my distress”***. So now, hopefully Rudyard Kipling's little Poem on page 3 makes more sense!



The bee friend telling the Bees, a painting by Hans Thoma

Keep Those Articles & Pictures Coming!

Please keep sending me any interesting articles, observations, pictures or items of equipment for sale adverts!. The Quest is only as good as YOUR input, and we would like to see more contributors. What about a regular article from a Rent-a-Hiver outlining their journey and experience. It would be wonderful to hear your side of things. I look forward to hearing from you.

Send any material or pictures to billmonteith309222@gmail.com



2022 Programme of Events

The remaining programme of events for this year are as follows:

November

Tuesday 8th 7.30pm- Beginner's course starts – Spaxton Village Hall

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

December

Saturday 10th 2pm- Oxalic Acid Treatment- Apiary

2022/3 Beginners Courses

The following dates have been set for the start of our ever popular Beginners Courses

- **Beginners Part 1** starting Tuesday 8th November 2022 at 7:30pm until 9pm and will run for 5 weeks. (8th, 15th, 22nd & 29th November and 6th December)
- Location: Spaxton Village Hall, High Street, Spaxton, Somerset, TA5 1BS
- Cost: There will be a small nominal charge of £1 per session to cover the cost of the hall.
- **Beginners Part 2** course - 5 sessions in early Jan 2023, dates to be advised during first part of the course, but will be held on Tuesday evenings at Spaxton, as before.
- If you wish to take notes during these sessions, you will need to bring a notebook and pens.

Practical course Spring / Summer 2023 - Seven (7) sessions in total throughout the season.

To join any of the courses, or if you would like further details, please email our secretary, ruth@penelope-pitstop.co.uk

Equipment for sale

There are no items of equipment offered for sale in this issue. However, if you have surplus kit and equipment that you no longer need then advertise it here.

Simply send details, and preferably a picture to billmonteith309222@gmail.com, along with a price and contact details and we will do our best to rehome it for you.

The Committee are also exploring the possibility of holding a QBKA "Members Sale" of surplus Apiary equipment at some point. Watch this space for further details.

Notice of AGM

Don't forget that the QBKA AGM will take place at Spaxton Village Hall on **Friday 18th November, 2022**. If you wish to be nominated for any Committee positions please contact the Secretary. Awards and certificates will be presented to those successful candidates who undertook exams recently. Do come along and be involved. It's YOUR Association.