



# Quantock Quest

The newsletter of the Quantock Bee Keepers Association (QBKA)

Issue 32

December 2022

## Seasonal Greetings From The Chairman

I hope this finds you well and perhaps having a rest from beekeeping in what could be regarded as our quiet season. I always think it's good to have a time when we can forget about the weekly inspections and perhaps even go away for a while, knowing that all being well the bees will look after themselves in their cluster.

However, we can always find something to do, and maybe something to worry about. Are the mouseguards still in place (sometimes they inexplicably get detached)? Do we need to do that oxalic acid treatment for varroa that we missed? Are green woodpeckers going to attack our hives (although they haven't in recent years)? How often should we heft the hives and, if light, give them a block of candy? And what about repairs and replacements to equipment? Come to think of it, winter is not necessarily a very quiet time.

It is a good time though to read and research, using both books and some of the very useful online resources. In particular I would commend the recordings of some of the lectures on the Somerset Beekeepers website. A recent one by an American scientist/beekeeper, Randy Oliver, on the management of varroa by breeding resistant strains of bees and avoiding the use of 'hard' chemicals was particularly interesting. Look up [ScientificBeekeeping.com](http://ScientificBeekeeping.com) for more of his evidence based advice for both beginners and more advanced beekeepers.

There is, of course, time to look at catalogues and manufacturers' websites so that orders can be made in advance of the spring rush when everyone suddenly decides they need the same as we do. Some manufactures seem to be having sales for all sorts of reasons – black Fridays, winter, spring, conventions, honey shows, Aunty's birthday etc. I'm sure some bargains are to be had, but it's well to be wary and do not only a price comparison but also consider quality and delivery charges.



If you are considering planting for your bees you will notice that the hellebores are very attractive to them. The older varieties all droop down, hanging their heads, so that the pollen on the anthers is protected from rain and snow. Plant breeders have gone to a lot of effort to produce flowers which are more upright. I'm not sure these new varieties will be as useful to our bees if we have bad weather. (Remember also that 'double' as opposed to single varieties of flowers are also less accessible to pollinators). If you want to plant a tree the very early willow *Salix aegyptiaca* is a great attraction for bees, and the Mahonia shrubs should have a place in as many gardens as possible.

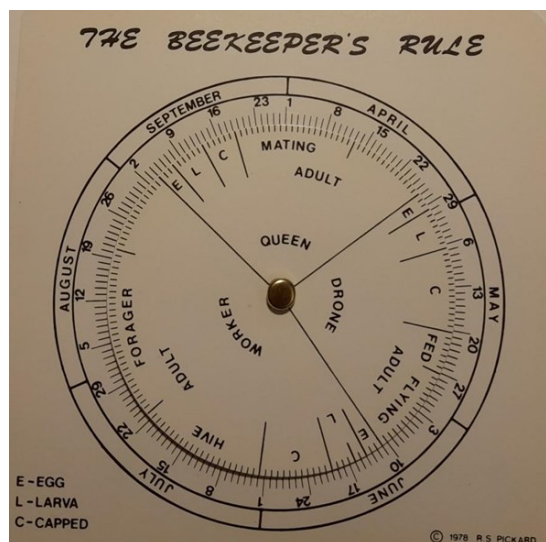
Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well in the new year and hope that we and our bees remain healthy and virus free.

Barry Hulatt (Chairman)

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# THE BEEKEEPER'S RULE

*I make absolutely no apology for including the full article below, submitted by Nick Wills. It shows one of the most fundamental tools available to Beekeepers, especially those who, like me, struggle these days with retaining information! It is both an aide memoire and a "Bee Bible" that is readily available and easy to use. And as Nick goes on to explain, it can be used to produce strong colonies when needed and as an aide to swarm prevention.*



So, what is the Beekeeper's Rule, and how do we use it to the maximum advantage?

A Beekeeper's Rule is readily available from National Bee Supplies, BBKA and other reputable sources. It is a series of Discs, arranged so that they can rotate against a background scale or chart.

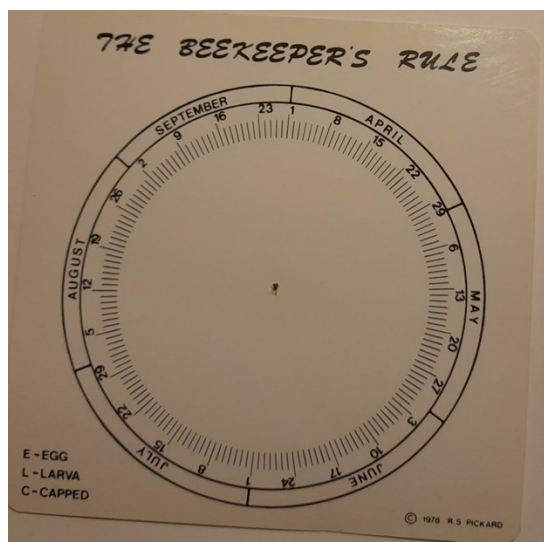
The centre disc has the three segments to show the stages, in days, of egg, larva and then capped brood. Therefore the full stage of a Bee's journey from laying to hatching!

So if we just study the centre disc we can see that it contains the following information:-

**Worker** – 3 days egg stage, 6 days larvae stage and 12 days capped. She will then spend 21 days on hive duties and later becoming a forager.

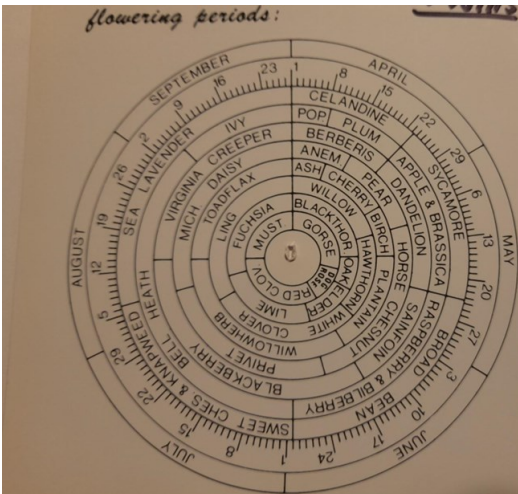
**Drone** – 3 days egg stage, 7 days larvae and 14 days capped. He will then spend 7 days feeding and maturing

**Queen** – 3 days egg stage, 6 days larvae and 6 days capped. She then has a window of 21 days in which to mate and then becomes an adult.



The outer ring (Shown Left, with the centre disc removed) covers the Beekeeping Year from April to September.

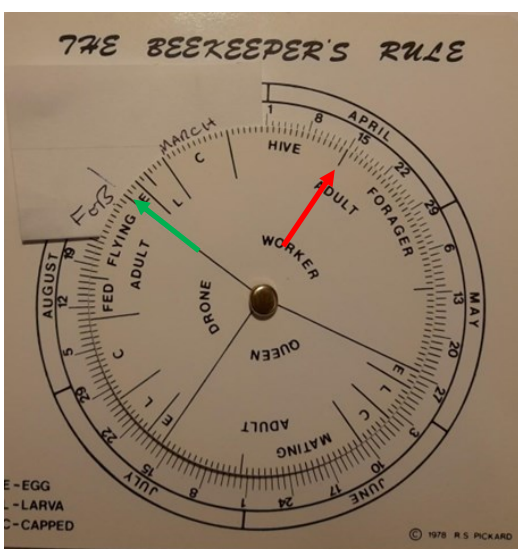
When the Centre Disc is in place it can be rotated to place any graduated stage of a Bee's development alongside a date. It then becomes clear, either working forwards or backwards, what stage of development will happen and when!



The rear of the Beekeeper's Rule contains information about the various Flowering periods for most common sources of forage. A very useful guide to what types of pollen our Bees are likely to be collecting.

So how do you put all this together and use it to your advantage? I will concentrate on what I consider to be a "Normal" Beekeeping year so I will show you how to have the maximum number of workers when needed. It will also show how to produce drones when needed, and the correct time for queen rearing. We can then put it all together to make splits/ nucs etc, so that it all comes together at the right time!

Although this article concentrates on a "Normal" Beekeeper and a "Standard" Beekeeping year I need to add a bit of a proviso! I am not a "normal" Beekeeper and this tool does not cover the flowering period of Oil Seed Rape which is around 2 week in April. This year it was earlier, but I tried to have full hives by the 14th April in order to maximise my foraging yield. Therefore, I have to fool the queen into thinking there is a full honey flow in progress in order to get the queen back into nearly full laying! How can we do this?



I slightly modify my Beekeeping Rule by simply adding paper overlays for the months required! I know that I need to have a full hive of workers by mid April (say the 15th). I then set the line between Hive / Forager (Red on Picture) for Worker Bees to the 15th April. I can then work backwards using the information on the dial and see that the Eggs need to be laid 41 days earlier. This date falls within the two months that I have overlaid in paper, and you can see that I need to start this process at the end of February / early March (Green line on picture). So I start to feed the colonies liquid feed sugar syrup at the end of February (still 2-1 as it can be cold and I do not want to give them dysentery), and keep feeding them so that by the 15th of April I have full hive of bees to work the rape.

Another thing that I ensure is that I only have young queens! I replace them every three years so they will start laying earlier and finish laying late in the season. Another good pointer to thriving colonies!

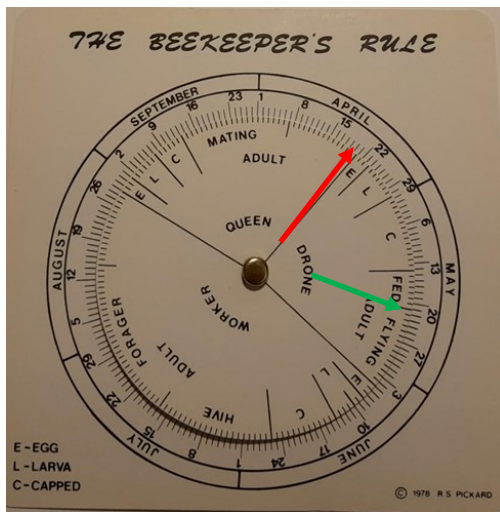
## At this point I need to add a word of caution!

If you do not move your bees around, like I do, you will be left with a full hive of bees with no forage around, and they will want to swarm! I have to be careful if the rape is early and my next crop that I will move them to (i.e. winter beans) are late. My Bees do not always follow my plan and very often (always) produce there own plan!

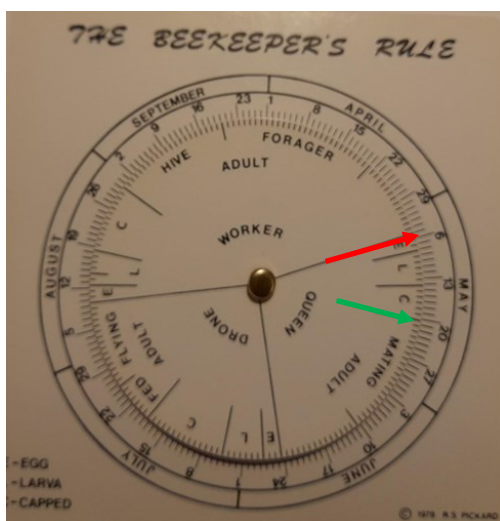
In my example, if all goes to plan, the bees will work the rape and continue, normally to the second week in May, when the Winter Field Beans start to flower. I know that I will have a full hive of bees, (50,000) plus so I can start to manipulate these hives. That way I still have a good honey harvest and can split my colonies without any great loss of honey production.

### Queen Rearing

Now I have the bees, I can start a queen rearing package, So, you have good bees, with desirable traits that you want to keep, you will need to enhance your chances of this by producing lots of your own drones to flood the area to try and stop other drones mating with your virgin queens! How do we do this?



I will remove one brood frame of worker brood and insert a frame of Drone foundation on the 19th April at the start of the second week on the Rape. I set my Beekeeping Rule so that the Drone laying line (Red in picture) is on 19th April. The bees will then start to draw out this comb, and the queen will hopefully start laying on the 21st April. As a result I should have mature drones by the 20th May (Green line in picture). This will be shown on the rule by the line between Fed and Flying, i.e. when they leave the hive to mate!

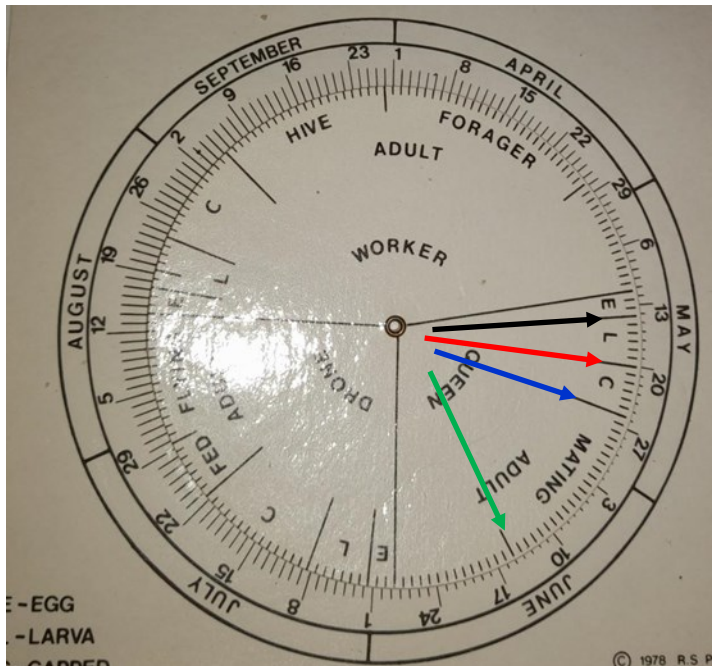


And now to produce my Queens! Queen rearing or grafting eggs to queen cells will start on the 5<sup>th</sup> May (Red line in picture) and I will then put these in a “queen right” hive with a lot of brood. Hopefully the workers will raise these queens, and once capped I will protect them with a cage and can then catch the queens when they hatch. If you then read the Rule you will see that the hatched queens should emerge around the 19<sup>th</sup> May (green line in picture) and these will be put in a queen cage with a fondant fuse opening and put in to either a prepared mating hive or a nuc. The queen will have 21 days to mate, hopefully with your own drones who carry the desirable traits that we are after!

## So what happens when your bees swarm

So you have missed a queen cell on your last inspections on, say, the 13th May. What will happen?

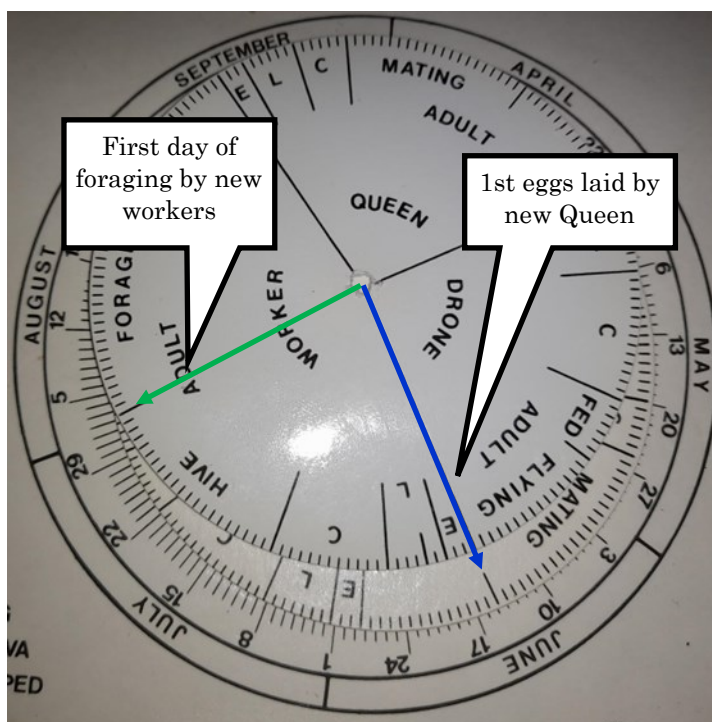
The old queen will leave the hive when the missed queen cell is capped on the 20th May. The old queen would have been slimmed down to fly, so egg production may have stopped around the 15th May! By the time the new queen hatches on the 26th May, and if she then mated by the 10th June she would be back in lay by 15th June.



How have we worked this out? Using the rule I know that I inspected the hive on the 13th May, and that a Queen Cup had an egg within it. If I assume that the egg was 2 days old I can put the middle line in the Egg section for the Queen on the 13th May. (Black Line).

Reading the Rule shows that the line between the Larvae phase and the Capping phase falls on the 20th May (red line).

Again, reading the Rule shows that the line between the Capped phase (blue line) and the Mating Phase falls on the 26th May. She then has until the 10th June to mate (green line). 5 days later she would be ready to lay.



What this would mean to us, as Beekeepers, is that there would be no laying of eggs from the 19th May to the 15th June! Remember that a large number of flying Bees have already left the colony with the old Queen, and so the colony is already depleted. Couple this with the fact that as a result there will also be no laying from, potentially, the 15th May until the 15th of June! I have overlaid another disc to show when you would have workers that would be able to forage. This is not until the 3rd of August! As a result, this hive will not recover enough and will not be strong enough to go through the winter, and thus will become a winter loss! So you can see, a missed Queen Cup in May can be a disaster for the colony come winter. This is why its best **NOT** to let your bees swarm.

# 2023 BEE BASE HIVE COUNT

Please don't forget this year's Hive Count!

To update your BeeBase record, click on the link <https://nationalbeeunit.com/secure/beekeeper/hiveCensus.cfm> and submit your response by 31st December 2022. It is important that you update your record, even if this is to confirm that you currently have no colonies.

If you have any further questions, please visit the Hive Count page on BeeBase or contact the national Bee Unit at [Hive.count@apha.gov.uk](mailto:Hive.count@apha.gov.uk)

## Why Fondant and not Syrup?

Here are 5 reasons why you don't feed bees syrup during the winter

- The change in temperatures between night and day can cause syrup containers to drip cold syrup onto the bees.
- Syrup has more water in it than honey and bees will burn excess energy trying to remove the additional water.
- Sugar syrup will be very cold during the winter, and if the syrup is too cold, the bees will be unable to drink it.
- Syrup can mould easily if the bees do not consume it quickly, rendering the syrup undrinkable for the bees.
- Cold weather may keep the bees from getting to the syrup, leaving an open window for other insects to eat the syrup.

## 2023 Membership Renewal

Members are reminded that their Membership is now due. Your membership covers BBKA, SBKA and QBKA components and also includes your Beekeeping Insurance. Membership falls due in January of each month. If it is not renewed your Insurance will lapse and your colonies and equipment will be uncovered in the event of loss.

Existing members will have already received an e-mail from the Treasurer / Membership Secretary to remind them. If you have not renewed by Mid January you will be sent a final reminder e-mail, however it would be much appreciated if you could follow the link on the email and complete your renewal.

A hard copy membership renewal form has been uploaded to the QBKA website and can be downloaded from there if required.

A further reminder is necessary that if you do not renew your membership by 31st January your membership will Lapse. Your details will not be entered into the yearbook and you will not receive the Newsletter or any advance notification of events and training opportunities.

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



## 2023 Programme of Events

The Committee have not yet finalised the 2023 programme of events at the time of going to press. Details of upcoming events will be added to the next newsletter, but the following events are already scheduled:

The ever popular Beginners Course part 2 will continue. It will consist of 5 sessions beginning in early January. The date of the first session in the New Year will already have been given to the participants on Beginners Course Part 1. Sessions will again be held in Spaxton Village Hall at 7.30pm and will incur a nominal charge of £1 to cover the hire of the hall.

Following on from the Beginners Course there will be 7 practical sessions from Spring through the Summer as a follow on for the beginners.

We will once again be running the Rent—a—Hive scheme and associated programme. Due to the popularity of this scheme and the logistics of mentoring, this years RAH will be limited to 10 participants, so get in early!

The usual Wednesday Night “Drop Ins” at the Barn will continue and a programme of learning, covering most aspects of practical Beekeeping and knowledge advancement will be provided.

Check the Website [Quantock - SOMERSET BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION](https://www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk) for the latest information, or look out for the next newsletter which will drop in February.

## LOCAL BEEKEEPING HISTORY



Bridgwater takes its name from a chap called Walter de Douai and the first bridge (Brygd) that he built over the River Parrett around 1066. Hence BrygdWalter (Walters Bridge) became Bridgwater.

Prior to that the lands were a part of the Muchelney Hundred, and people paid dues, taxes and fines to the Monks who ran the Abbey.

Local Beekeepers in the area had to pay a “Honey Tax” (Hunig Gafol) of up to a Gallon of Honey per year in order to keep their “Herd” of Bees!

And we think that we have it tough!



**Have a great Xmas and a Happy New Year.**