



Quantock Quest

Business Name

December 2023

The Chairman's Musings

It has been an interesting season. For some of us there has been a bumper crop of honey, mostly produced in the gloriously hot and dry weather of early summer. For others it has been a struggle to contain swarming and to get the bees through the month or so of wet and miserable weather which followed the sunshine. There have been several reports of colony losses and, where possible, members have stepped in with nucleus hives or swarms to replace those lost. We are still not back to normality, however, and the impact of covid and EFB on members and on the divisional apiary have continued to be felt.

At the beginning of the year we held a small sale of surplus equipment limited to our own members. This proved an interesting social event which we would like to repeat next year. New members were able to buy enough basic equipment to set themselves up without spending a fortune. Older members, who perhaps wished to downsize, were able to dispose of items they no longer required, knowing that they were going to a good home. Look out for information on next year's event, and if you are stocktaking over the winter consider any items you may wish to move on.

No doubt you have been following the news on Asian Hornets. This is the year in which they really seem to be taking off on the mainland. (They already are rampant in the Channel Islands, of course). As I write there have been over fifty nests reported in various parts of the country, and DEFRA has been busy in tracking and destroying these. At present there have been no confirmed sightings in Somerset, but we must continue to be vigilant. As beekeepers we are the first line of defence, the first to notice predations on our hives, and those most likely to be immediately affected if they become established. We have a branch of the Asian Hornet Action Team in our Division, members of which have had training in what to do in the case of a local sighting. I and other members of our team have already been called out to identify suspicious insects, but fortunately these have so far proved to be our own native hornets, giant wood wasps, and 'hornet lookalike' hoverflies. The general public do not seem to be very skilled entomologists but we do have to take every report seriously and make ourselves experts in identification. I would encourage everyone in the division to download the Asian Hornet Watch App if you have a smartphone, and to take the BBKA exercise on the hornets (available on the BBKA website). Completing this exercise means that, if in future you can help with the team, you will be properly insured.

The AGM will be upon us in November, and I encourage as many members to attend as possible. The speaker will focus on honey contamination / fake honey, which is a current scourge in the supermarkets and which we all need to combat through education and example to the public. There will also be an update on the Asian hornet situation. Over the summer we have tended to see the same regular visitors to the apiary, and it would be good now if some new – or old - faces could come along. We need new ideas and input, and if you would like to put anything forward, please send it to the Secretary or consider joining the committee. Similarly, if anyone would like to help with the beginners course this will be running again, starting in November and then after Christmas.

I hope by the time you read this your bees have been prepared for winter, with ample stores and mouse guards in place. The only thing they may need over winter could be an oxalic acid treatment for varroa around Christmas and some candy if they seem to be running short of stores.

Best wishes to everyone. I hope to see you at the AGM on the 17th November.

WINTER WORKLIST

The Winter “Housekeeping” work period is nearly upon us, and as we look forward to sitting by the fire, sipping a glass of our own home made Mead, illuminated by our own homemade Candles, we need to remember that our Bees also need to be comfortable and safe. The Winter break is the ideal time to get on top of Hive maintenance.

If your equipment is old, or you have just bought it second hand at an auction you may notice damage cause by use over the years, Woodpeckers and even the Bees themselves! But with basic tools and a bit of time, the equipment can be made as good as new. Regular contributor Nic Wills shows us what to look for, and how to fix things.

Firstly, make sure that the Brood Box or Super is square and sturdy. If the box is not “firm” add some more Hive Nails as appropriate to make it so. Then inspect the box, top and bottom, for damage:-



Woodpecker Damage



Corner chunk missing



One of the most common problems is the gaps between joints, where the Bees themselves can make new escapes or entrances. These will need to be repaired and sealed:-



The best method of repairing damaged areas is with Wood Filler. And by far the best type of Wood Filler to use is the 2 pack variety, with separate paste and hardener. Follow the instructions and mix well together. Car body repair paste / filler can also be used instead of Wood filler.

Firstly, rough the area to be repaired with Sand paper or a wire brush, to ensure that the filler bonds well to the area to be repaired:-



Make sure that you fill all areas that need repair, and ensure that you apply more filler than is needed. Pay particular attention to the corners, where damage over the years by Hive Tools can cause wear and damage. Once the filler has dried you can use a sanding block, or even a Surform to remove the excess filler and level the surface.



Continually check the repair using a straight edge. Make sure that there is no daylight showing between the top or bottom edge of the box and the wood / repair. If there is, add more filler and sand down again. If there are any gaps the Bees / Wasps will surely find them. Finally, paint the box with a water based Hive paint to seal both the wood and the repair. Your box is now as good as new and will give many more years service. Now, time to enjoy that Mead!



Woodpecker Damage. In this case the Woodpecker had not gone all of the way through the Hive wall. The damage was filled and sanded back as described.



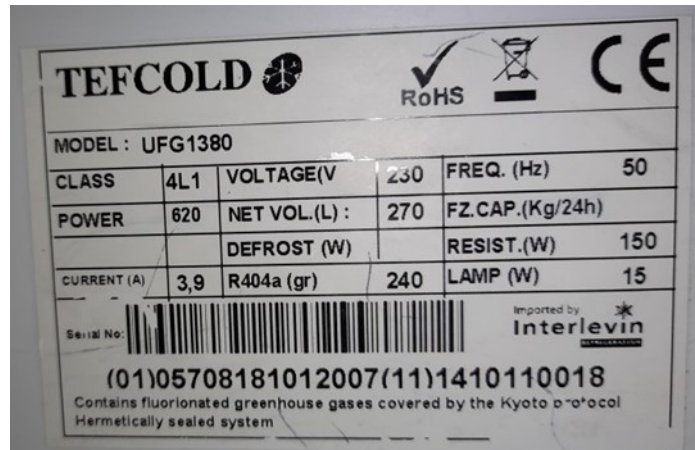
Selection of basic tools needed

Straight edge or spirit level
 Sand paper
 Soft wire brush
 Coarse file
 Set square – for making sure boxes are square
 Hammer
 Selection of hive nails
 Water based paint
 Surform (optional)

HONEY WARMING CABINET

Quantock Beekeepers are constantly looking at ways of making things easier, and some time ago , were offered a non working upright glass fronted Freezer cabinet. Because of the excellent thermal properties of these items we were minded to convert it into a Warming Cabinet to ensure that our Honey supplies remained “liquid”!

In what is increasingly becoming the “Nic Wills” newsletter, Nic describes how he converted the cabinet into a very useful addition to our portfolio!



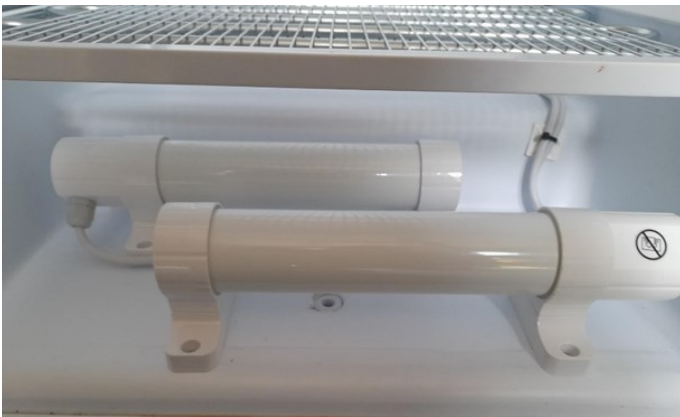
Firstly, we had to check what refrigerant this unit was using and a plate was found inside the freezer. The unit was found to have roughly 240 grams of Refrigerant R404a, which is a Greenhouse gas.

We recovered the refrigerant using the correct equipment and disposed of it correctly. Most of the freezer parts were removed, but the compressor was left in the bottom of unit to add weight, because, if removed the freezer could topple over with door open!





Looking at the shelf layout it was found the shelves were the evaporator coils, but we need to remove two of these so we could accommodate 30lbs honey buckets.



Due to the bottom floor shape it was decided to fit two 45watt foot long tube heaters. The wires from the tube heaters were run out through the back of the freezer to a connection box on the rear and a single earth run out to the freezer chassis for protection.

The old compressor can be seen in the bottom left and was retained as balance weight.





The lead from the connection box was then run to the 13amp socket on the heating side of the new Ink Bird temperature controller. The temperature probe was then run into the top of the former Freezer Compartment and was mounted on the back left hand side of the compartment, about a third way down. This gives a good temperature measurement point.



The Ink Bird Temperature controller is simple to use – the top temp shown is the current temperature inside the warming cabinet, and the second is the target temperature.

When correctly set, the Red heating LED comes on, meaning the tube heaters are on. It stays in heating mode until it reaches the “Set” temperature (In this case 400 deg C and then switches the tube heaters off. The temperature then has to drop a couple of degrees before it cuts back in.

Instructions will be fitted on the side of the Warming cabinet so members can safely operate it, and granulated honey can be warmed back to a liquid state in honey buckets or just in jars this cabinet will accommodate a mixture of both

As a new build, the temperature controller and the tube heater supply were all PAT tested. The cost of the equipment was around £70.00 to convert this old freezer into a warming cabinet. Money well spent!

THIRD TIME LUCKY (With some Divine Intervention)

Guess what? Its another Nic Wills article! This time concerning Swarms. Nic writes:-

I knew a beginner, Albert, who had asked me if I had heard of any swarms, and if so, could I let him know.

Attempt 1

Not long afterwards I heard of a swarm in Wembdon. I contacted Albert with the news and we made arrangements to recover it. Before we left, however, I had to ring Albert back to say “hold fire, they have moved on”!

Attempt 2

Then came a message from a contact in the QBKA swarm watchers “Whatsapp” group. They had received a report of a swarm of Bees in Wyndham Road. Albert and I duly prepared ourselves and attended, only to find a small start of a wasp nest!



Attempt 3

So, after two false starts I received a call from the Vicar of Cannington church, about 7.00pm, letting me know there was a swarm in the Church yard, and they would like them removed! So the call went out to Albert and we turned up at the Church yard. It was a nice easy swarm to take, straight into the box and away! Third time lucky.

Albert has his first lot of bees.



A CAUTIONARY TALE

Its that man Wells again! (This is what happens when nobody else supplies articles for the Newsletter!) This time it is a tale of pain, and a salutary lesson about equipment. Nic writes:

Always dress well and bee proof, if not improvise and carry on! Its all you can do.

Recently, I helped to set up the stand at Brymore Open Day and had to bring in the prepared honey to sell. I could not stay, but would have liked to as it is always a great day. Had I stayed I may not have had the day that I had!

On my way back I had to look at my own bees and had many hives / Nuc's to go through. It was a very hot day. I got back from Brymore, got changed and thought, as it is so hot, I will not wear my full bee suit, just the jacket. That will be OK and I will stay a bit cooler.

All was going well until I thought I felt a bee crawling up my right leg! I looked down, just in time to catch another bee darting in through a hole in my trousers by the knee! Thinking to myself "I am not going to drop my trousers in the apiary" I decided to squash them through the clothing. This is when they started stinging! After feeling 3 or 4 stings and no more crawling bees I set about thinking about what I should do about the hole in my trousers. Looking in my beekeeping tray for any tape, the only thing I could find was an entrance block piece of foam that I use to block an entrance hole in a hive. Just the thing.



Yes I felt the stings, but had to carry on as I had many hives to go through, and sort out the Nuc's, as well as putting two Nuc's into one There were bees everywhere but the foam held up. So after all the excitement, the sweat and the pain of multiple stings, I got home and could finally drop my trousers, only to find 4 stings and with 3 of the stingers still left in. So I had the full dose of those stings. The ones above the knee were fine, it was the one on the shin that started to get painful. The moral of this tale if you do not want to get stung, check **ALL** of your clothing and your bee suits in case they have a hole or tear as the little devils **will** find it and get in.

The newsletter of the
Quantock Bee Keepers

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



REMAINING 2023 DIARY DATES

October

Wednesday 11th, Drop In – 7pm- Apiary

Saturday 21st, Maintenance and stock keeping- 2pm- Apiary, New beekeepers and all members

November

Tuesday 7.30 date TBC- Introduction to beekeeping course starts

Friday 17th 7.30pm QBKA AGM- Spaxton Village Hall

December

Saturday 9th- Oxalic Acid- 2pm- Apiary, New beekeepers and all members

NOTICE OF AGM

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held on Friday 17th November, at Spaxton Village Hall, commencing at 7.30pm. The Guest Speaker, SBKA's Lynne Ingram, will be giving a talk on Honey Adulteration and Contamination along with an Asian Hornet update, and this should not be missed.

There will also be the election of the Association's statutory Officers and membership of the general committee. We desperately need some new blood / ideas / faces on the committee and welcome any volunteers who believe that they can contribute to the continuing success of the Association. Please identify yourself at the AGM, or alternatively contact

AND FINALLY—THANK YOU

We are blessed in having the use of a wonderful Apiary facility. This has been built up over the years into the superb facility that it is today.

But this has only been achieved by the efforts of our members, and in particular the efforts of the Apiary Maintenance Team. This year we said goodbye to a stalwart of the team, **Bob Muckett**, who has moved on to pastures new (well, Axminster actually) and sadly, another stalwart, **Mick Stenhouse** has decided to step down for personal reasons.

We have what we have because of people like this, and I would like to thank them for their time, dedication and diligence that has helped the Association stay at the forefront of Somerset Beekeepers. Thank you, and best wishes for whatever the future holds.