

SOMERSET BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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Please send any copy for the April 2023 edition to me by 15th March 2023.
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Photo by Sophie Prestige

Flowers are over, bees are quiet

FROM THE CHAIR – DECEMBER 2022



We finally reached the end of 2022 which gave us the easing of most COVID restrictions, three Prime Ministers and the hottest and driest summer on record, yet strangely, generally good honey yields.

The three-week cold snap in December afforded an ideal opportunity to treat the bees with proprietary oxalic acid treatments at a time when the colonies were as near to broodless as recent years have allowed, but the debate on treating against not treating seems to simmer away, with opposing views receiving support from different 'experts' at different times. I know of one member who has never treated for varroa but simply relies on a 'shook swarm' system at the start of each season. I remain unconvinced regarding not treating but am always open to a reasoned argument.

One of the extremely popular online talks produced, directed, and facilitated by Lynne Ingram and Anne Pike brought Randy Oliver (The Scientific Beekeeper) into our homes and on to our computer screens, from his home in California. His thoughts on treating, as opposed to not treating were extremely interesting. He uses only organic acids. Coincidentally, the President of Apimondia (Jeff Pettis – from Maryland in the USA) who was our next speaker, had a very similar opinion, with a particular down on amitraz (Apivar) which he concluded, affected drone fertility.

Winter feeding used to be a contentious issue, and the use of fondant was considered to be a sign of poor beekeeping when I started out fifteen years ago. There are those considerate beekeepers who leave a full super to tide their bees over, but most these days will provision their bees with sugar syrup after the honey is taken - and when the cooler weather sets in, place fondant over the feed hole of the crown-board. Not only will this give the bees a little boost should they need it, but in a transparent container, it acts as an indication of how much is left in the way of stores. Hefting with luggage scales is still my preferred route. Purchasing fondant is easier than making your own, but there is a significant difference in price. It's not difficult to make, and I have given the recipe to the editor so that she can publish it.

I would urge those who have now kept bees for a year to take the BBKA Basic Assessment. It really is an opportunity to assure yourself that you have appreciated the more important aspects of beekeeping. There is nothing that will surprise you. It was all in the course you took before starting your beekeeping trip. It's a practical assessment carried out while inspecting a colony, and is more of a conversation, with the assessor, who is willing you to get the answers right. The syllabus can be downloaded from the BBKA website, and all necessary details are available here [click here](#). To apply to take the assessment you should contact the examinations secretary Bridget Knutson at bridget_knutson@yahoo.co.uk. Pass, and you'll get a certificate and an impressive badge to sew on to your bee-suit.

Who knows what the coming season will bring? but we can be assured that it will bring us a crop of eager new beekeepers who want to take up the craft, new challenges, unexpected situations, perhaps a bumper honey crop – and maybe a few more Prime Ministers.

A happy and carefree beekeeping year to you all.

Stewart Gould

Fondant Recipe

Feeding bees during the cooler months used to be considered 'bad beekeeping', but as winters have got warmer, bees are expending energy when flying out to look for food on fine days. On their return to the hive, they replace that energy by devouring their stores. Fondant is the stuff to use in winter. Products like Candi-pollene (a pollen supplement) are intended for boosting egg laying in Spring, and not the ideal food for the cooler months, although they can be used in the late summer to help the bees make winter bees, which have to survive for 6 months.

Buying fondant is fine, provided you find a source of pure fondant, and beekeeping supply companies have it in abundance, but it's not cheap. Eddie Howe, one of our members, sells fondant and his advert can be found in this newsletter. Other sources of fondant are risky, as they nearly all contain chemicals dangerous to bees. Why not make your own? It's relatively simple and much, much cheaper.

You should have started hefting your hives, so that you can judge how much weight they are losing but remember that hives can also gain weight in wet weather, as the wood soaks up moisture.

Ingredients:

1kg granulated sugar

300ml water

Other materials:

Large plastic/wooden spoon to stir and ladle out. An electric mixer is really useful to stir as the mixture cools

Cooking thermometer

Large saucepan

Semi-transparent take away containers.

Method

Place the sugar in a saucepan and pour on 300ml of boiling water. While stirring, heat the mixture. There's no need to stir all the time, once the sugar is blended in, but an occasional stir will aid dissolving. Keep on heating until it boils, then keep on a rolling boil & monitor the temperature.

The temperature is critical, in order to set to the required consistency. Your mixture will only reach the required temperature when the correct amount of moisture has boiled off.

As soon as it reaches 232°F, remove it from the heat. Most recipes say 234°F, but I end up with a rock if I do that. Place on a tiled surface, or something cool and stir as it cools. Some recipes mention stirring once the mixture reaches 150°F, but I find that crystals are already forming by then. Stir thoroughly but not too vigorously, and the mixture will start to go cloudy, then milky and thicken. As soon as it starts to thicken, stop stirring and pour the mixture into the containers. **It is vital to fit lids, or you will lose more moisture than required.**

Notes:

- You can use multiples of these quantities.
- 1 kg sugar will fill 2 takeaway containers
- Semi-transparent take away containers mean that you don't have to lift them to see what has been eaten. Just raise the roof and look – less cold drafts.
- Fitting lids will prevent further evaporation of moisture while cooling and stop it attracting moisture when cool.
- If you can depress the surface of the cooled fondant with your thumb, you've got it right.
- The stirring helps to keep the crystals apart while setting, meaning a softer set.
- Overheat the mixture, and it will set like a rock. Break it up, add more water and try again.



Congratulations go to the following people for passing their Basic Beekeeping Assessment over the summer.

Andrew Alden (F), Credit, Tim Davies (F), Credit, Julian Martin (F), Credit, Pauline Truelove (F), Credit, Melanie Walcot (F), Credit, Patricia Needham (F) Distinction, Vanessa Barnes (F), Pass, David Truelove (F), Pass, Oskars Kuzmins (Q), Credit, Peter Masters (Q), Credit, Ian Pickering (Q), Credit, Ruth Walker (Q) Distinction, Stephanie Bryan (Q) Pass, Theresa Hallett, (SE), Pass, Jan Holley (SE) Pass.

Barry Hulatt passed the Bee Health Assessment.

Module exams next year are on 18th March 2023 and 18th November 2023. Closing dates are 10th February and 5th October respectively. Basic Assessments need to be applied for a month before you want to take it, with a cut off of July 31st, although I'd like your application in before then.

If you want to apply for anything, please email or phone me, and I will send you the link to the application form. Please read the note about modules exams above - written exams being held in three venues across the country next year. My email is bridget_knutson@yahoo.co.uk.

Some information about refunds, and written modules.

Refund Policy

The Examination Board has revised the refund policy for exams as publicised in BBKA news. Candidates email receipts, the application form and documents on the website have all been updated accordingly. The new policy is:

Refunds will only be considered in the event of illness, injury of the candidate or sudden death of an immediate family member occurring within two (2) weeks prior to the Examination or Assessment. The Examination Board Secretary must be informed before the commencement of the examination or assessment and full details will be submitted to the Board Secretary within two weeks of being requested. The Board will then decide whether the Examination or Assessment fee is forfeit. This paragraph will be applied sympathetically.

Module Syllabi

The module syllabi have also been updated in response to feedback. The revised syllabi will apply from March 2023. The 2022 syllabi and the 2023 syllabi are both available on the website. The changes are mostly fairly minor but please make sure that any study groups are aware and are using the correct syllabi.

There are some changes to how we run written module exams. Please see the following statement from the Chair of the Examinations Board.

MODULE UPDATES

BBKA Modules update

In April 2021, the BBKA Examinations Board ran the Module exams for first time on-line with remote invigilation, using a platform called Inspera. At the time, we had 386 candidates who took all together 500 Modules. While technology gave us an opportunity to conduct the exams in times when handwritten sessions would not have been possible, it was not without some challenges. There was a lot to learn for all of us, Inspera, the Examinations Board and of course the candidates. Since then, there have been several updates to the system, and we have also learned how best to support our candidates on-line and how to optimise our use of Inspera.

Over the last two Module sessions, most of the candidates chose the on-line option. This led to a reduction in venues for the handwritten modules across the country almost by half, with many of the venues having only one candidate. While taking the pressure from some associations in terms of costs and volunteers for invigilation, this also gave us the assurance that on-line Modules are well received by Module candidates.

Considering the diminishing demand for the handwritten Modules, in 2023, handwritten option will be available only in three venues across the country. One venue in south England, one in the Midlands and one in north England. We expect to have the exact locations agreed and published by the end of this year. Furthermore, in 2024 these three venues will be reduced to only one (Stoneleigh), and as of 2025, only on-line Modules will be available. The gradual transition is to give an opportunity to those candidates still wishing to take Modules as handwritten to do so by the end of 2024.

The Examination Board has met last week and have reassessed the continuation of written exams. Please read the statement form the Chair of the Examination Board below:

BBKA Modules update – November 2022

After the implementation of the on-line system for written exams in April 2021, the demand for the handwritten option has dramatically fallen. On 12th November 2022, there were all together 248 applications for the module exams, 40 of which were for modules as handwritten, representing 16% of all applications. In terms of spread, the applicants for handwritten modules came from 18 of the 75 Area Associations, with some associations such as Wales and Somerset having to provide more than one venue. The associations with the number of handwritten applicants are listed below.

Buckinghamshire	1
Cheshire	1
Cornwall	1
Gloucestershire	1

Gwent	2
Lancashire & North West	6
Norfolk	1
Oxfordshire	3
Shropshire North	2
Somerset	2, candidates invigilated in 2 locations
Suffolk	1
Surrey	4
Warwickshire	1
Wiltshire	1
Worcestershire	1
Yorkshire	1
Wales	2 candidates invigilated in 2 locations
Sheffield	4

There is a significant level of attrition from applicants to candidates taking the exams, with an average across the country of 25%, and some areas with up to 50% attrition.

Half of the handwritten exams were one invigilator invigilating one candidate, often in the invigilator's home. These one-to-one invigilations present us with potential challenges on two counts. First, a safeguarding issue that does not exist in any other BBKA exam, and second, they provide an opportunity for invigilations with poor integrity, consequently challenging the integrity of the BBKA exam system.

To address these challenges, the Exam Board took the decision to discontinue all handwritten modules as of 2025. Having published the changes, the Exam Board received feedback from associations and individuals, stating that this disadvantages those members with inadequate IT skills, or access to internet. Interestingly, all feedback was received electronically on e-mail, with no feedback as handwritten letter.

At the last Exam Board meeting, the decision to discontinue the handwritten exams was therefore withdrawn. We will continue to offer handwritten modules, providing there are minimum of 4 applicants per venue, to ensure 2 applicants and one invigilator present, in the event of some applicants failing to turn up. This removes the issue of one-to-one invigilations, while providing an opportunity for handwritten exams to continue in local venues. Area Associations are to facilitate the process of consolidating candidates from several neighbouring associations into a venue convenient for all, in the event an association has less than 4 applicants. Further detail will be shared with all Examination secretaries and all future candidates.

All candidates and associations are reminded that from environmental impact, costs and drain on candidate's time, taking the modules on-line from home, remains the most sustainable, cost effective and time efficient option. We now have enough confidence in the system that can operate even in areas with poor internet quality.

Marin Anastasov, NDB
Chairman BBKA Examinations Board

FORTHCOMING EVENTS and LECTURES

ONLINE LECTURES:

7pm, Thursday, January 19, 2023



The role of colour patterns in the recognition of flowers by bees, a talk by Natalie de Hempel d'Ibarra from Exeter University's Bee Lab

Natalie Hempel de Ibarra will explain how honey bees rely heavily on flower patterns - not just colours - when searching for food. Natalie's research at the Exeter University Bee Lab focuses on studying the behaviour, senses and cognition of social insects, bees and ants, in order to understand how sensory information is processed, memorised and used in the context of

foraging activities, spatial orientation and navigation.

She says: "Our findings suggest that flowers don't need to evolve too many different petal colours, because they can use patterns to diversify their displays so bees can tell them apart from other flowers."

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-role-of-colour-patterns-in-the-recognition-of-flowers-by-bees-tickets-489609905407>

7pm on Thursday, February 2, 2023



Queenright Queen Rearing, a talk by David Evans

Somerset BKA is delighted to present this talk in partnership with East Devon & West Dorset Beekeepers.

Queen rearing gives both tremendous satisfaction and independence to beekeepers. Loss of a swarm or a

queen, or the need to make increase are easily solved if you rear your own queens. Beekeepers can easily rear queens of comparable quality to most commercially raised queens with a little effort. This talk is aimed at beekeepers with a year or two of experience who are interested in rearing a small number of queens each year. It is a gentle introduction to the subject and describes an effective and economical approach that employs methods that can be readily scaled as needs and experience increase.

The talk covers the importance of the quality of the starting material – the larvae and drones – and the necessity for good record keeping. It moves on to cover the practicalities of grafting larvae (much easier than most beekeepers realise), cell raising and getting queens mated from nucleus colonies. The talk does not try and cover the myriad of different queen rearing strategies, but instead focuses on methods achievable by beekeepers with as few as 1-3 colonies and limited additional specialist equipment. At the end of the talk there will be a brief overview of teaching practical queen rearing in a beekeeping association – using the same methods, but distributing grafted larvae for cell raising and queen mating. o make increase are easily solved if you rear your own queens.

David Evans (The Apiarist) is Emeritus Professor of Virology in the School of Biology, University of St. Andrews. His research interests included the replication and evolution of human and animal viruses, and the biology and control of both Deformed wing virus (DWV) and Chronic bee paralysis virus (CBPV) of honeybees. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/queenright-queen-rearing-with-professor-david-evans-tickets-503285369087>

Lecture Day: 11 February 2023



Our annual get together to talk all things bee and enjoy lectures and workshops takes place for the first time at modern conference facilities located just a few minutes from the M5 in Bridgwater.

The events team will email you direct with more details shortly.

The Canalside, Marsh Lane, Bridgwater TA6 6LQ.

