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tauntombuzz

the newsletter of Taunton & District Beekeepers



What's in store?

March is the lull before the beekeeping storm and I along with all the many contributors hope you have time to enjoy this edition of your newsletter.

But before you get stuck into the news about changes at the top, start on some waxy artworks or make a note in your diary about various events coming up in the next few weeks, I'd like to pay tribute to my predecessor in this role – David Morris.

David is something of a beekeeping legend having been active at Divisional and County level for many years. But he has also been beekeeping for the past 60 years and at the recent SBKA lecture day he was presented with a certificate to mark this landmark by the Chair of the BBKA Margaret Murdin.

As we don't deal in fake news or alternative facts – to name a few of the phenomena dominating the current news agenda – I'm pleased to include a genuine photo of David and Margaret in celebration of this quite remarkable achievement.

Happy beekeeping!

Anne Pike, editor
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www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

Report from the Chair

Welcome to the first edition of Buzz for 2017.

Membership renewals appear strong this year so thank you for your continued support.

During the winter your committee have been working hard to finalise the 2017 programme and to prepare the grounds at Heatherton Park ready for the new season. We hope you will find both to your satisfaction!

The apiary team have been monitoring our colonies and feeding as necessary.

As well as a full programme for the more experienced, the new beginners programme started in late February with practical sessions commencing in April for the rest of the season. Volunteers are always needed at that time to give the newcomers a good grounding in hive inspection & manipulation so please contact Mike Dillon email: mikedillonbees@gmail.com if you are able to assist.

The work of the division also includes finalising the planning for our annual auction which is highlighted elsewhere in this publication.

Not long after it will be Bee Health Day which is being organised and hosted by our Division this year on behalf of the Animal & Plant Health Agency in June; this is an essential event if you want to ensure your bees remain healthy. Details will shortly be publicised across the county.

Peter Maben - Chair
mail@maben.plus.com



Keep up to date with what we're up to by following us on Facebook

Check out our Facebook page @TauntonDistrictBeekeepers for snippets of news from the apiary, events and beekeeping chat.



Taunton District Beekeepers

Published by Adam Robbins (9) · 14 hrs · 4

Hopefully a helpful reminder, if you are not doing it already.

From now until late March, when the nectar flow should hopefully be enough, it is worth visiting your hives and giving them a "helt" once every two to three weeks. If they are light then it will be worth giving them a feed.

A healthy colony of bees will consume about 24lb (11kg) of stores in February, so its worth checking them.

It's also worth beginning your plans for the next six months, especially feeding, swarm control and pest management and making sure your equipment is ready.



Taunton Buzz – editorial committee

Barbara Drakeford
Chris Harries
Simon Jones
Peter Maben
Dave Parry
Anne Pike

Appeal for SBKA year books from 1990 to 2016

Somerset Beekeeper's archivist, David Charles, recently went to the Somerset County Records office to ascertain what they have relating to SBKA.

There is an impressive run of year books from the founding of the association until 1987, with only one year missing (1929, if anyone has a spare!). However, after the yearbook was reintroduced, copies have not been deposited in the archives.

SBKA is therefore keen to know if anyone has any spare copies of the yearbooks from 1990 to 2016 that they are willing to donate to the county archives.

If you're able to help, please contact, Richard Bache, Secretary of SBKA
secretary@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

Share the buzz with our beginners in the apiary

Can you help our newbees when they start their apiary sessions in April?

Guided supervision is needed to help them to handle the bees and get familiar with hive management.

Meanwhile, the classroom sessions for the beginners' course are underway on Wednesday evenings in the teaching centre.

To volunteer or find out more please contact Mike Dillon on 01823 669619 or mikedillonbees@gmail.com

New Year Meal

There was a great turn-out for our annual meal held at the White Horse Inn, Bradford-on-Tone. The food was good, the buzz was loud and a good time was had by all!

Honey Show news!

The Taunton Honey Show incorporating the County Honey Show will take place on August 4 and 5 at Vivary Park, Taunton.

A working party will be getting together next month (April) to look at running our biggest shop window of the year.

The judges are: Margaret Davis with Gay Brown judging cookery and Jack Mummery.

We were sad to learn that Master Beekeeper Kay Thomas, who had been one of our judges for many years until her sight deteriorated, has died.

Working party cleans up!

Wondering why the apiary is looking so good? A working party spent a day ticking off a list of jobs that needed doing before the start of the season including hedge cutting, replacing fence posts, sawing wood for the wood burner in the meeting room, collecting leaves and general tidying.

Keeping ponies on their side of the fence!



Skep making

Devon beekeeper Mick Male is running a two-day skep making workshop at the apiary.

As a participant, I can report that Mick is hugely patient and helpful, which all goes a long way to make the whole business both achievable and hugely enjoyable.

For centuries beekeepers have used skeps to house their colonies. But, once the modern hives came into common use, they fell out of fashion.

These days they are mainly used to capture swarms – and look a lot more attractive than a cardboard box!

If you fancy having a go, there are videos on YouTube. But be warned, skep-making is a long and crafty process; Mick says it takes him about 20 hours.



Asian hornets

Everyone knows that the Asian hornet has landed – even The Sun carried a piece about the ‘Killer Hornet Invasion’!

But what can we do about it? The National Bee Unit has updated its instructions to make a monitoring trap. As Buzz went to press, Seasonal bee inspector and Taunton member Eleanor Burgess ran a trap-making session at the apiary. Traps need to be set about now with a sweet bait and monitored daily. <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>

Nigel Semmence from the Animal and Plant Health Agency addressing SBKA's Lecture Day with a model of an Asian hornet (not life size!)



continued overleaf >

Membership

Almost all of you have renewed your membership for 2017 by now; we currently have around 130 members including around 30 associate members! You will all have received your BDI certificate of insurance from me which includes a receipt for your payment; please remember to check your certificate to make sure that you have

been correctly insured and keep it in a safe place. If you do mislay it, I can send you a copy at any time during the year. There are still a few of you who have not yet renewed so your membership will lapse at the beginning of March!

Lyndsay Stone

lyndsayhurn@hotmail.com

Asian hornets (continued)

One of the key figures behind the UK's defence of honeybees, Nigel Semmence from the Animal and Plant Health Agency, gave an update on the Asian hornet situation at SBKA's lecture day last month.

Last autumn a single nest was discovered. It was found in Tetbury, was 36cm in diameter in a tree at a height of 16.7m and had five horizontal combs. Bee inspectors observed the behaviour of Asian hornets spotted foraging on foliage in the area (including aphids on willow) to trace the approximate location of the nest; they foraged within a radius of approximately 500m. The nest was subsequently destroyed.

Each colony produces around 100 queens but only five per cent are expected to survive over winter. The hornets have spread to the Channel Islands and 'terrorise' the south west of France and some other parts of Europe.

The hornets hawk honey bees – they face into the flight path of bees (with their rear ends facing the hive entrance) to pick them off. They are not aggressive unless their nest is disturbed.

He recommended making traps from the instructions as per the link above and ensuring the entrance is not less than 10mm. In the spring they should be baited with a sweet solution such as dark beer with sugar; in the autumn a 25 per cent solution of shrimp or fish in water.

Apparently the best bait is a wriggling Asian hornet – but he doesn't advise bringing one back from France!

Traps are also available from Thornes, the BBKA and Vita.

Meanwhile, SW Regional Bee Inspector (and Taunton member) Simon Jones, in his 2016 Annual Report, said: "With the amount of traffic, both commercial and private, entering the UK from Europe, further incursions are highly likely and as experience has shown, could occur anywhere in the UK, not just in the higher risk areas along the South and South East coasts."

Finally, make sure you're registered with BeeBase to keep informed! www.nationalbeeunit.com



An Asian hornet trap

Get ready for Spring at our annual equipment auction

If you're sorting out your beekeeping equipment and either have too much stuff or not enough, don't forget to come along to our Annual Spring Equipment Auction.

There will be hives and plenty of frames etc, if past years are anything to go by, along with extracting equipment, books and magazines and miscellaneous bric-a-brac. In fact something for all beekeepers!

It takes place on Sunday, March 26 at Ruishton Village Hall near Taunton TA3 5JD.

Items received at the village hall from 10am – 1.30pm; auction starts at 2pm

Car parking is free and we'll be serving refreshments.



Chris Harries, our President and auctioneer, in action.

Wanted!

Auction raffle prizes!

We're after prizes for the raffle! If you can help, please contact Barbara Drakeford on 01823 490811 drakeford@lillesdon.fsnet.co.uk or bring your prize along on the day.

Volunteers to help on the day

Could you help us run the auction or help out on the door? Again, please contact Barbara as above.

Bee prepared!

Book your place now on our Somerset Bee Health Day – June 17

We're hosting a Bee Health Day with support from Simon Jones (Regional Bee Inspector on behalf of APHA) and his team of Seasonal Bee Inspectors on Saturday, June 17.

The day will cover presentations and workshops delivered by Simon and his team and will include:

- Apiary inspection at Heatherton Park
- Talk on general diseases
- Comb Workshop (inspection of diseased combs)
- Two further workshops to be confirmed

Venue: West Buckland Village Hall, Silver Street, West Buckland, TA21 9NA (adjacent to the playing field). Apiary inspection will be at Heatherton Park, TA4 1EU

Date: Saturday 17th June, 2017

Timings: 9.00am to 4.30pm

Refreshments: Tea, coffee and soft drinks will be available throughout the day. Please bring a packed lunch.

Parking: Free

Total numbers will be restricted to 60 members to maximise the benefits of the day and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to admit any members just turning up on the day. So, to avoid disappointment, reserve your place now!

Cost: £5.00 per person

Contact: Mike Dillon

Email: mikedillonbees@gmail.com

Telephone: 01823 669619

Mobile: 07585 537030

Cheques payable to 'Taunton Beekeepers' and sent to Mike Dillon at: 1 Walkers Gate, Wellington. TA21 8DJ



The crowning of a 'king bee'

At our AGM way back in November, Chris Harries became the President of our Division.

Chris, who has been a Taunton member for 40 years, was presented with the chain of office by retiring President, Jenny Gammon.

"It is a great honour to be made President of the club I have been a part of for so many years," said Chris, who runs Sedgemoor Honey Farm, is a former chairman of the Bee Farmers' Association and a regular Buzz columnist.

Chris was 'stung' by the honey bug at the tender age of 13 while a pupil at Priorswood Secondary Modern School in Taunton (now part of The Taunton Academy).

It was his woodwork teacher and our secretary at the time, Harry Harwin, who introduced the pupils to beekeeping.

"He took us out to Heatherton Park to get us to make up frames and clean up the equipment and he also had hives in the school grounds."

But his introduction to the craft didn't get off to the most auspicious start: "On the first afternoon, when we were taken to look at the schools' bees, my best friend was stung and suffered a severe anaphylactic shock."

Then it was the bees, themselves, that succumbed to Acarine [also known as Tracheal mites]: "We had a visit from the county bee inspector Arthur Rolt based at Cannington who treated them with a mixture that smelt of marzipan – within three weeks they were all dead."

In spite of the hard work, the vagaries of bee diseases and potentially fatal stings, Chris eventually became a fulltime bee

farmer and has 300 colonies divided between 20 apiaries.

"I have always had an interest in the natural world – wildlife and plants - and beekeeping combines so many of those interests. And I still enjoy beekeeping all these years on."

Beekeeping in this area is under threat from the honeybee-killing Asian hornet (discovered for the first time in the UK in the autumn in north Somerset and Wiltshire) and small hive beetle which has been spotted in Calabria, Italy.

But, pestilence and disease notwithstanding, what would Chris like to see happen during the three years of his Presidency?

"I'd like to see our new beekeepers become more proficient."



Chris Harries and Jenny Gammon

Our queen bee retires

After very many years at the centre of beekeeping in this Division, Jenny Gammon is taking a step back.

For the last three years Jenny has been President, but she's been championing beekeeping long before that.

She was our treasurer for 25 years, has visited local schools and organisations to promote the craft and assisted her husband Sid when he managed our apiary at Heatherton Park.

In 2012 she was awarded the West Country Honey Farms Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to beekeeping in the county.

The then judging panel chairman Tony Richards said her service to our members was 'unsurpassed as is the support she has given to shows and events across the county'.

Fortunately Jenny continues to be involved in the Division; she is the Entries' Secretary of the Honey Shows and is a regular contributor to *Buzz*.



Dining on dandelions – one of a honeybees' favourite foods

Forty years ago, on a February evening, I attended my first Taunton Beekeepers meeting, then held in an upstairs room at the King's Arms pub in Staplegrove Road. Upon arrival the first thing was to buy a pint, then upstairs to the meeting room.

The speaker that night was Harold Meade from Athelney; the subject – building up colonies ready for the dandelion flow. In those days the Levels were all grass, no cultivated crops. Come April those grass fields turned yellow. With all honey flows you need a large workforce to make the most of it. The problem was how to stimulate colonies at the end of February/early March to ensure lots of flying bees by early to mid-April.

Harold Meade kept his bees in WBCs with extra insulation [old coats, sacks, papers etc.] and not much ventilation. Winters were also [arguably] much colder forty years ago, and the bees were



not going to leave their cluster to take syrup from a feeder. So Harold had to somehow get the syrup from the feeder down to the cluster.

His ingenious method involved three pieces of knitting wool, each about six inches long with a knot in one end, and a one pound honey jar with three holes in the lid. After filling the jar with warm syrup, the wool wicks were threaded through the lid holes [knots inside] and the jars inverted over the hole in the crown board with the wool dangling down to the bees. The syrup simply trickled down into the cluster with no effort from the bees!

Now is the time to be watching the landing board to see what the bees are throwing out and what, if anything, is going in [pollen, water etc.].

Keep an eye on the weight of your hives, and have some fondant ready – just in case!

Chris Harries

Our President and bee farmer at Sedgemoor Honey Farm



Sixty years a beekeeper

David Morris is our longest serving member – he’s clocked up a record 49 years – and combined with his early days as a member of Somerton Division, has been a BBKA member for 60 years.

In the second of our extracts from his beekeeping reminiscences, David addresses a subject which is of great interest to us all – ‘the cost and presentation of honey’.

“I have yet to meet a beekeeper who has become a millionaire as a result of their craft. I’ve met plenty who have commented that, ‘Beekeeping is a rich man’s hobby!’

But things are easier today. In the 1950s and 60s ten sheets of foundation would cost for many almost a week’s wages. Today we can exchange our wax for foundation resulting in hives now receiving a regular insertion of new comb.

We are guilty of selling honey below its real value. When I started, a pound of honey sold for two shillings or 10 pence. The real ‘money spinner’ were sections, but they required a strong nectar flow and a number of techniques that were seldom

shared. Today the production of comb honey has been made much easier and the section classes have disappeared off many show schedules.

Today the labelling and premises regulations have proliferated. At no point however do they appear to examine the actual honey. Privet is an obnoxious honey and, until it has been stored for twelve months, taste and smells like ‘tom cats’. But as long as it is labelled properly and in an appropriate container it apparently is within the regulations.

Until the late 1970s, Somerset offered their members a grading system that had been started in 1929. To avail myself of the labels and the tamper seals I had to submit a half pound of honey in an appropriate jar every year to one of the graders who were well versed with quality. Their popularity waned and they were discontinued but we were allowed to continue to use the green label that I still use today. I still think that the County Label is more attractive to customers and of course Somerset Beekeepers is being brought to the consumer’s attention at every breakfast table!”





Margaret Murdin, BBKA Chair, presents David Morris with a certificate to mark his 60 years as a beekeeper

David finds beekeeping as compelling today as he did when he first started helping his father as a boy. “What I find fascinating is our ability to work with an insect that, for all intents and purposes, remains a wild creature. Whilst we try and exploit some of their natural instincts, hopefully at the same time, we make their lives easier with some of our interventions. Experience also reveals that no two colonies are the same. For example, some are placid and others are, to put it politely, very defensive.”

But changing times haven't heralded in better times for beekeeping: “Yes, there have been some significant changes imposed by man whilst the bees themselves have remained the same. The big changes came with the arrival of varroa. Before then, and when I started, we were able to treat successfully most sickness in our bees, the exceptions being EFB and AFB.

Very few beekeepers wore gloves and the veils were very simple mesh covers that ‘fitted where they touched’ tucked inside a jacket. Farming practices have changed. The many hedgerows were thick with a variety of nectar bearing shrubs and trees. Silage was relatively unknown and most field were cut for hay. The clover that followed was short and yielded profusely if the weather was right. Many orchards have since been grubbed out. Today too many beekeepers have to rely solely upon oil seed rape for a decent crop.”

Despite the challenges, he still has early-season optimism: “We must always hope that the new season is better than the past. It may be a forlorn hope, but it would be great if the thousands of dollars, pounds and euros being spent world-wide on bee research finally came up with a simple and cheap solution to the varroa, EFB and AFB problems.”

David finds beekeeping as compelling today as he did when he first started helping his father as a boy.

Beekeeping in Slovenia

Simon Jones - a Taunton member and Regional Bee Inspector - gave us an informative and entertaining talk at the AGM about a professional visit to Slovenia.

The starting point was the course run by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) as part of the EU Better Training For Safer Foods (BTSF) initiative.

Skilled practitioners involved in beekeeping, including bee inspectors, researchers and academics from all over Europe attended the 'Health and Disease Prevention for Bees' course.

As you can see from this small selection of pictures, there was a mix of classroom sessions and apiary visits.

Things you may not know about beekeeping in Slovenian:

1. Slovenia's native bee is the Carniolan bee (*Apis mellifera carnica*) - famed for its docility, hard work, humility and excellent sense of orientation.
2. The Carniolan grey bee is an autochthonous species in Slovenia, which means that no other bee species are allowed to be kept.
3. According to the statistics, Slovenia is a beekeeping nation, as a relatively significant four out of every 1,000 of its residents are beekeepers.
4. The EU has granted Slovenian honey Protected Geographical Status.
5. A special feature of Slovenian beekeeping is folk art. Many beehives have pictures painted above the entrances in a tradition dating back to the middle of the 18th century.



Waxy Corner

You will need a mould, wax that is clean or needs to be cleaned, paint, two thicknesses of brushes, small glasses of water to clean the brushes and to mix your paint and a small flat bowl/bottle top to mix your paint. The paint, even though acrylic, can be mixed with a little water and then it goes a long way.

I got my paint, Decormatt Acryl, from Germany, but you can also get them on Amazon and eBay. Just go on the internet. You will need a few colours, but as long as you know what colours mixed together will give another colour – you do not have to get a lot.

It does not matter what mould you use. Clean your wax and pour into the mould. If you want to hang the painted wax at a later date make sure you put some hanging cord into the wax when it is still liquid. Make sure the thread does not go all the way to the face side. To make sure you can see what the pattern is as you paint it is sometimes better to make two moulds. The spare can always go back into the pot to be made into something else when you have finished.

Allow the wax to set well before starting to paint.

Do one colour at a time unless you wish the paint to merge into the one next to it. If you are painting the flowers, remember that flowers are not the same colour all over. It makes it look nice to have a lighter colour on the inner petals going out to darker on the outside. Leaves are usually a lighter colour than stems.

Jenny is one of our members and is an accomplished show exhibitor who has won many prizes and trophies

Painting on wax by Jenny Gammon



Your committee

President – Chris Harries

Chairman - Peter Maben

Vice Chairman – post vacant

Secretary - Barbara Drakeford

Treasurer - Julie Whitmarsh

Membership Secretary - Lyndsay Stone

Honey Show Secretaries - Neil Trood & Dave Parry

Apiary Team - Andrew Perry & Dave Parry

Equipment Manager - David Pearce

Training/Beginners' Co-ordinator - Mike Dillon

BUZZ Editor/Publicity - Anne Pike

Fire Officer/Health & Safety - post vacant

Delegate to SBKA Council - Lynne Ingram

Co-opted – Simon Jones (Regional Bee Inspector) & Diane Troake



Honey spice cookies

Rosemary Burgess is cooking up a sweet and moreish treat using that staple of any beekeeper's larder!

Ingredients

180g honey
120ml strong coffee
50ml vegetable oil
50g butter
140g dark brown sugar
Mixed spices – 1tsp ground
ginger, 2tsp cinnamon, 1/2tsp
nutmeg
Zest of 1 orange
420g self raising flour
1tsp baking powder
1 tsp vinegar

- 1 To make the dough place coffee, oil, butter, sugar and honey in a pan and melt and blend until just coming to boil.
- 2 Meanwhile mix all the dry ingredients together in a large bowl.
- 3 Add the vinegar to the melted ingredients then pour into the dry and mix well until smooth and thick.
- 4 Cover with cling film and put in the fridge for an hour.
- 5 Heat the oven to 180 C and line 2 large baking trays with baking paper.
- 6 Dampen hands before shaping each biscuit and allow a little space between each one as they spread when baked.
- 7 Cook for 15-16 mins until domed – they are still soft at this stage so leave to cool.
- 8 These look very pretty iced and keep well.

Dates for the diary

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

2pm

SBKA AGM

Hosts: Mendip Division
Cameley Lodge, BS39 5AH

The speaker will be Dr James Cresswell: 'Bees in farmland: value, threats and general ecology'

Directions: Heading north on the A37, just after entering Temple Cloud, turn left onto the Cameley Road and follow the road for one mile. Cameley Lodge is 100 yards past the church on the right hand side.

THURSDAY MARCH 16

7.30pm

PREPARING FOR SWARMING

Speaker: Adam Robbins
The Apiary

SUNDAY MARCH 26

OUR ANNUAL SPRING EQUIPMENT AUCTION

Items received from 10am; auction starts at 2pm
Refreshments, Raffle and Free car parking Ruishton Village Hall, near Taunton, TA3 5JD

APRIL 7-9

THE BBKA SPRING CONVENTION HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

THURSDAY, APRIL 20

7.30pm

MICROSCOPY NOSEMA CHECK

Tutor: Rosemary Burgess.
The Apiary

SATURDAY, APRIL 29

2.30pm

TUTORIAL ABOUT THE BBKA BASIC ASSESSMENT

Suitable for all applicants (must have managed at least one colony of bees for a minimum of 12 months)

Tutor: Suzy Perkins
The Apiary

SATURDAY, MAY 6

2.30 pm

SWARM CONTROL AND SPLITTING COLONIES

Tutor: Tony Richards
The Apiary

WEDNESDAY – SATURDAY, MAY 31-3 JUNE

SBKA AT THE ROYAL BATH & WEST SHOW

Volunteer stewards welcome

The Royal Bath & West Showground near Shepton Mallet
For more information contact Ken Tredgett
01373 464736 or tredg@talktalk.net

The Programme is subject to change.



A close-up photograph of two bees on a honeycomb. One bee is positioned above the other, both facing downwards. The honeycomb cells are a vibrant yellow, and the bees have their characteristic black and yellow stripes and translucent wings.

Beekeeping veil and suit repairs:

**Ring Jenny on 07788407497
or 01823 270465**

NUCs FOR SALE!

5 FRAME NATIONALS

£165

Further info from Chris

Tel: 01823 442734 [Evenings]

**Wanted! An apiary in
the Galmington area**

Derek Harrison has moved to Galmington and is looking for an out apiary site for his bees.

They are currently on the other side of the Quantocks and Derek would like to get them a bit closer to home.

If you know of anyone or anywhere that he could use – please contact him on
01823 326549.

Need an out apiary?

Pete Walker would love to see some hives in his orchard located in the Isle Brewers area. If you're interested, give him a call on
01460 281139.

Classified adverts

If you want to buy or sell beekeeping equipment, you can do it here! We're offering free classified ads for Members and their families.

Email your advert to:
anne@ashford-media.co.uk

Remember caveat emptor – it's your responsibility to check out the goods/buyer! Plus, clean any beekeeping equipment thoroughly if you're selling or buying to prevent the spread of disease.