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tauntonbuzz

the newsletter of Taunton & District Beekeepers



Cover photo:

A honeybee on sloes taken from Somerset Beekeepers' Association's photo gallery www.somersetbeekeepers.org



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.

What a year it's been!

What a year it's been! In beekeeping terms, that's probably a bit of an understatement – some of our members are saying it's been the worst for decades. Inside, see how the club apiary faired and read a review of the season by Taunton member Rosemary Burgess.

Also, don't miss member Lynne Ingram's feature about working with a beekeeping group in Morocco. She gives us a fascinating insight into some of the trials and tribulations of traditional beekeeping and how adopting more sustainable methods is paying dividends.

This is our final Buzz of the year! The editorial team and I hope you've found the newsletters useful and have enjoyed news about your Division. But, if you have any suggestions, would like to contribute an article or photos, we would be delighted to hear from you. This is your newsletter – please be a part of it!

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Report from the Chair

With the beekeeping year coming to an end, it's time to reflect on the season from Taunton Beekeepers' perspective.

Our New Year meal was a great success with good numbers and good food so that we will be returning to the same venue in 2018.

The beginners' programme kicked off in February with a healthy number of people and the programme was assisted by various expert "in-house" speakers throughout the season. I thank them all for their knowledge and enthusiasm in bringing a new generation of beekeepers to the Taunton Division. Some participants have already obtained colonies whilst others are waiting until the spring.

The main programme has had some fascinating external speakers and again "in-house" speakers to whom we are indebted. Attendance was mixed and it would be good to see a more consistent attendance next year. The 2018 programmes are almost finalised. We work hard to create an interesting series of educational talks and practical activities so I hope you can support all the effort which goes into your committee managing the process.

Auction day at Ruishton was a great success with many bargains to be had. This annual

event will be repeated as usual in late March next year with, I am sure, a great variety of equipment to be picked up for a great price.

In June we hosted "Disease and Husbandry Day" run by Simon Jones on behalf of the Animal & Plant Health Agency with over 60 people booking. Feedback was extremely positive as being informative and well organised and because some people were coming from outside our division, we received admiration of our facilities at Heatherton Park.

The Honey Show at Vivary Park in August was also successful after a great deal of hard work was put in by our volunteers on both the committee and by members setting up, manning over two days and taking down all the displays. I thank them all for without their help our major public face and source of income (from Heatherton Park Apiary honey sales) would disappear.

With our November AGM approaching, I hope we can encourage some of you to help in creating an equally successful 2018.

Peter Maben - Chair
mail@maben.plus.com



Taunton Buzz – editorial committee

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

Our part in the latest Asian hornet story...

Two of our members – Simon Jones, Regional Bee Inspector, and Eleanor Burgess, a Seasonal Bee Inspector – were involved in identifying, tracking down and removing the Asian hornet nest in Woolacombe, just over the county border in North Devon.

But the hornets didn't behave exactly as we might expect.

- They weren't seen hawking in front of the hive – instead they were trying to get into the back of hive, presumably because the guard bees were putting up a good defence.
- They attacked just one of four colonies in an apiary – possibly because it was weaker than the others.
- And when the hornets' flight path was traced back to the nest, it was easily accessible in a hedge, rather than high up in a tree as in Tetbury last year.

Asian hornets are most likely to start preying on honeybees in the autumn when others insects such as aphids are no longer available. Traps should be baited with protein – apparently cod smells less bad than prawns!

We should all remain vigilant and report any sightings using the Asian Hornet Watch app or email the Non-native Species Secretariat alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk and copy in the bee inspectors.



Exeter fact-finding visit

Seven members of the Exeter Beekeeping Association Committee visited our apiary at Heatherton Park on October 10 to view our facilities.

This had come about because some of them had attended the Bee Disease & Husbandry Day we hosted in the summer and they were very impressed with what we have.

They are intending to build their own premises in time and consider our layout an ideal starting point. A fact sheet was given to them outlining our build programme and costs to assist their future plans.

Peter Maben, Chairman



Membership subscriptions stay the same for 2018

As the end of the bee keeping year draws closer, here's a quick look at some of the membership statistics for 2017!

We end the year with 192 members - 143 full members and 49 associate members. We particularly welcome 7 new beekeepers from this year's beginner's course who have taken the plunge and upgraded to full membership!

About 42 per cent of you have up to three colonies; 24 per cent have up to five colonies; and 34 per cent have more than five colonies.

Just under a quarter of our full membership is on the swarm collectors' list; this is a much needed service and it is good to see so many names on our list.

Only 22 per cent of people subscribe to BeeCraft, although I'm sure most manage to keep abreast of beekeeping news by reading the BBKA newsletters; however nearly everyone is on BeeBase which is good news!

Just over half of our membership has signed gift aid declarations and this provides the division with significant annual revenue of around £800. It means we can spend funds on improving and maintaining the apiary and clubhouse, for example, or look for interesting speakers from further afield for our programme of events.

So, looking forward to 2018, I am pleased to say that membership and BeeCraft subscriptions will remain unchanged. I will be emailing out reminders to renew membership at the beginning of December, and if anyone would like to consider gift aiding, I will also be sending gift aid forms out as well.

Thank you everyone for your support of Taunton Division this year, and we hope to welcome more new members next year!

Lyndsay Stone, Membership secretary



News In Brief

Would you like to get more involved?

The Division thrives because of the commitment of a small band of volunteer officers and the support of you, our members.

Shortly we will have a vacancy for the post of treasurer; our current post holder Julie Whitmarsh has decided to step down at the AGM in November.

If this is a role you would like to consider, please contact Chairman Peter Maben, or Secretary Barbara Drakeford to find out what's involved.

Peter: mail@maben.plus.com

Barbara: email@drakelilles.co.uk

Extracting the sweet stuff

A good number of people came to David Pearce's home to extract this season's honey from the hives at Heatherton Park.

David had already given a comprehensive description of all things extracting the previous Wednesday, so everyone soon got down to work.

Maggie North set up station identifying frames to be spun or cut out and it soon became obvious that the bees thought we should cut out far more than we could spin!

Two lines of 'cutters' took up position either side of the hot trays and were fully occupied for most of the session. It was a good humoured and productive day for us all, and we hope that the honey harvest will stand us in good stead for next year.

In numbers we have 16 colonies (and one nuc) in the club apiary and they produced 105 lb of extracted honey and 225 lb from cut out combs; this year we managed to get 13 pieces of cut comb.

Our thanks go to David and Joan for hosting another very popular and successful day and to our volunteers for their invaluable help.

Barbara Drakeford, Secretary





Have your say!

The AGM on Saturday, November 18 is an opportunity to find out more about how the Division is being run and to be a part of it. As well as the reports and elections, we are looking forward to the return of Ged Marshall whose talk is titled “The life of a bee farmer” along with tea and beekeeping chat.

AGM
18.11.17

Honey Harvest

What's your honey harvest been like this year? Some of our members describe it as the worst for more than half a century.



Our Chairman Peter said his three hives were in the same place as last year when they yielded approximately 180lb of honey - his best year ever – but this year there was 100lb “and as I always leave one super on for the winter there was only 15lb to extract!”

Lynne Ingram, a Master Beekeeper, says it was a generally poor year for her, too. “They did bring in some summer honey, but I didn’t get it off quickly enough so they ate pretty much all of it. Luckily I had some spring honey. Now they are very busy with ivy - the smell of it is hanging in the air.”

David Morris has been keeping bees for 61 years and describes this season as the worst-ever and averaged just five pounds of honey per hive.

“The cause is mainly weather-related,” he said. “We had a hot June followed by a wet July when what we want is the reverse to give us plenty of blackberry and clover nectar for a summer honey flow.”

According to the BBKA’s annual honey survey, beekeepers in the South West saw their honey crop drop to 18 lbs per hive.

There’s no doubt that local honey is in short supply and prices are expected to rise to reflect this season’s shortage.

Honey and other delights

Dave Parry, Honey Show Secretary



This year's County and Taunton honey shows attracted a good number of entries – one of the judges remarked on the high overall quality of the entries.

Entries from other divisions were again few and far between although we did have two entries in the county divisional class (this was a new class last year).

The show is an important part of Taunton Flower Show and once again proved a big hit with the public. Members of Taunton beekeepers were present on both days of the show to answer questions from the public who demonstrated an excellent depth of knowledge about all aspects of pollinators.

Beautiful displays of honeys, wax and other products and an observation hive attracted plenty of attention in the tent while an outdoor netted demonstration area let us show visitors how we open the hive and examine the fascinating action within.

In an earlier Buzz we asked for help with the show. I would like to thank everyone who responded and helped in any way towards making this a successful show. It was great to see some new muscle and brains joining the veterans!

A big thanks to the van drivers, flower and plant providers, volunteers etc; the show wouldn't happen without you.

The full list of results is published in the autumn edition of Somerset Beekeepers' newsletter and on the website, but the cups and trophies deserve an extra shout-out:

Taunton – trophies, cups & awards:

The Taunton Perpetual Challenge Trophy - Sid and Jenny Gammon
The Priscott Perpetual Skep Plate - Rosemary and Eleanor Burgess
The Stoker Perpetual Trophy - Sid and Jenny Gammon
The Pat Barter Trophy - David Pearce
The W. Elmsall Perpetual Observation Hive Trophy - Taunton Beekeepers
The Andy Coles Memorial Trophy for Mead - Graham Welfare

Somerset County Cups:

Jubilee Cup - David Pearce
Miss M.D Bindley Cup - Suzy Perkins
Terry Arnold Perpetual Challenge Trophy - Graham Welfare
The Tom Tucker Trophy for Cookery - Graham Welfare
The Downes Perpetual Cup - Rosemary & Eleanor Burgess
The Gammon Perpetual Trophy (novice) - Alan Miles
The Taunton Honey Show Plate - David Pearce
The Sally Bennet Trophy - Rosemary and Eleanor Burgess
The John Spiller Mascot - David Pearce
The Duffin Challenge Trophy - Rosemary and Eleanor Burgess
The Clifford Langford Award for Mead - Graham Welfare

The people's choice

Buzz is delighted to announce the winner of the honey voted most popular with the public. David Pearce is a clear winner polling 183 votes but our returning officer says some voters loved the honeys so much they voted for them all!

Jar E	D. Pearce Set Honey with	183
Jar B	Heatherton Park Set Honey with	117
Jar A	Heatherton Park Run Honey with	112
Jar C	Sid and Jenny Run Honey with	99
Jar D	D. Pearce Run Honey with	78

Could you be our next honey show secretary?

We are proud to run the Bees and Honey feature at Taunton Flower Show each year, including the Taunton Honey Show and, for the moment, the County Honey Show, too, writes Barbara Drakeford.

It takes a team of people to make it all happen – Jenny Gammon and Neil Trood have been assisted by Dave Parry for the last couple of years and we have a working party made up of active volunteers. But Dave has indicated that he is stepping down and we are really keen to find someone who will take on this interesting and rewarding role.

The Bees and Honey feature is immensely valuable – it gives us the opportunity to talk to and show the public about beekeeping, as well as an outlet to sell our honey which provides essential funds for the running of the Division.

It is a big undertaking but everyone involved agrees it can be a lot of fun! If you would like to know more, contact Dave Parry or speak to him at the Apiary – he'd love to hear from you!

01823 276655
DavidParry@btinternet.com



Beekeeping in Morocco

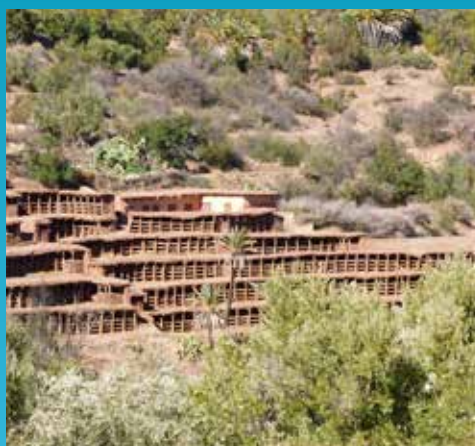
Lynne Ingram

For the last five years I have been going to Morocco – for holidays – but have also been working with the Atlas Cooperative of Beekeepers in Taroudant (between the Atlas and Anti Atlas Mountains); Morocco is a colourful and vibrant country with warm and friendly people.

In Morocco, bees are traditionally kept in 'Ssilt hives' – four feet long cylinders made of locally grown reeds, and covered in dung, which is dried in the sun. One end is sealed with a small entrance hole, the other end covered in a removable cloth. Dozens of these are laid next to each other on the ground and then more are stacked on top of each other with cardboard in between the layers. Wild comb is built inside each hive, and the beekeeper harvests honey by reaching in from the back and breaking off some comb. It is not possible to manage these colonies or inspect them in any way apart from peering into the back – which gives a limited view of the colony. As we might expect, colonies are small, and swarming is frequent – although it is also welcomed, as another Ssilt hive will simply be made to accommodate it. Ssilt hives provide a sustainable way of keeping bees for local people. Bees are still kept in this way, and even beekeepers that have moved onto moveable frame hives will also have some Ssilt hives.

Bees were also kept in cavities built into mud houses, as in Britain.

Many beekeepers have moved onto moveable frame hives. They were attracted by the possibility of moving bees to the nectar flows, and the possibilities of larger crops. Unfortunately traditional beekeeping did not provide the skills or knowledge to manage moveable frame hives. The encouragement of swarming that happens with the Ssilt

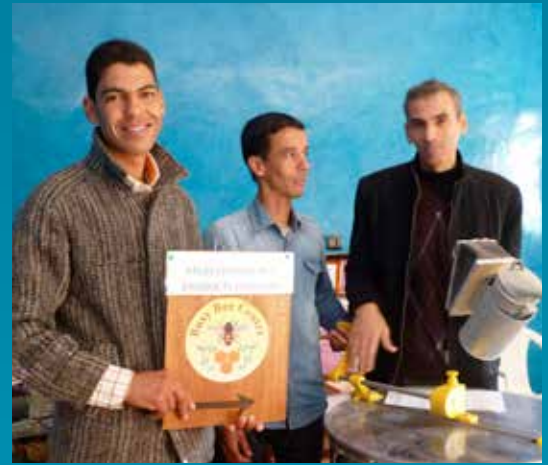


Lynne will be giving an illustrated talk about Beekeeping in Morocco on Thursday February 15, 2018.

hives, for example, means that colonies and crops are always very small. A lack of knowledge meant that some beekeepers were using paraffin wax foundation as it is cheaper than beeswax. Not only was this inappropriate in a food producing hive, but the lower melting temperature meant that for many years the beekeepers would lose 50 per cent of their colonies when they overheated and melted killing all the bees. Now that they are using pure beeswax, they have not lost any colonies.

Over the years I have worked with the Cooperative on helping them develop their skills so that they can get the best from their colonies. We have worked on many aspects of colony management, swarm management, queen rearing, and record keeping, and also marketing their honey. They now have proper extraction equipment, and a machine to make their own beeswax foundation. Varroa is a problem in Morocco and they are now using varroa treatment correctly. They are also working towards the reintroduction of the native Yellow Saharan Bee (*Apis Mellifera Sahariensis*) to the area. It is well adapted to life in the area – flying up to five miles to find forage, and well adapted to living in high temperatures and drought. But a combination of aerial pesticide spraying to control plagues of locusts, and migratory beekeeping means that the local bee is now a mongrel.

Honey is important to Moroccans. It is expensive and used as a sweetener and to preserve food. Honey is also traditionally used as a remedy - Euphorbia honey for sore throats, Lavender honey to reduce stress, Thyme to reduce blood pressure, Carob honey to aid digestion. Stings are also used to prevent arthritis. Other main honey crops come from Oranges and almonds.



Waxy Corner - Jenny Gammon

Have you seen some nice leaves that you want to preserve?

1. Melt some beeswax.
2. Do not get the wax too hot!
3. Dip the stems and leaves into the wax.
4. Hang upside down to dry.
5. Then display!

Jenny is a long standing Taunton member and author of Waxy Corner published by Northern Bee Books



Winter coats for our hives?

Elaine and Derek Mitchell visited our Apiary to talk about 'Thermal Hives'.

What an interesting topic! Elaine is a beekeeper and Derek a physicist and they talked about 'Mass Conductance Ratio'. In other words, how temperature can affect the bees inside their hive, and if they need to cluster or not.

Derek and Elaine talked us through what happens if bees don't cluster, even during the winter, and what effect the humidity inside the hive has on the colony. It was particularly interesting about the

effect humidity has on varroa. The information was backed up scientifically and, at the end of the day, even David Pearce was talking of how his hives could be insulated!

It was a measure of the interest from the audience that the questions just kept on coming and tea had to be an interruption with myself being asked if we would invite Derek and Elaine to come back again. All in all it was an excellent scientific and factual presentation.

Barbara Drakeford, Secretary

A Year in Retrospect by Rosemary Burgess

Another year passing at an amazing pace so what do I recollect?

Winter 2016 to 2017 was kind in respect of temperature with few cold snaps. Feeding with candy in the early spring helped ensure the bees were ready for the oil seed rape crops.

A couple of colonies came through the winter with drone laying queens - always a pity but this can happen when the queen is poorly mated the previous season or is just old or injured.

Spring appeared almost overnight with the blackthorn, cherry and hazel having a profusion of blossom and catkins followed by masses of chestnut, lime, dandelion, clover and hawthorn. The early honey this year was lovely with such a good mix of nectar. The temperature was warmer than usual and the bees were loving it. The colonies were building up well in the spring, ideal for taking nucs from the best colonies.

June came and the gap in nectar flow was very short as the blackberry was beginning to flower in the hedgerows, however the rainfall had been minimal and the flow was affected and the now thriving colonies needed a careful eye to ensure they had sufficient stores.

The nucs made up in the spring did well and raised lovely new queens and so we made up some more from the good strong colonies.

We were fortunate this year with little desire on the bees part to swarm and with two catch hives ready for action we had no takers, which is unusual.

Summer continued, but cooler than usual. The blackberry continued to flower and the bees continued working and bringing in stores but the flow slowed in August and the bees were dipping into their stores.

Those bees without stores or the small colonies were in need of food. Without stores the queen will stop laying, the bees will eat the eggs, cull the larvae and, in the worst cases, will die. This is easily remedied by feeding syrup in good time. As part of inspections, make sure the bees have sufficient stores including pollen. Our honey stayed on till September, later than usual, and the bees enjoyed a fair portion but I certainly don't begrudge them, I would rather they stay healthy and strong.

As winter 2017 approaches the bees have been fed and prepared for what the weather will throw at them. Those in out apiaries will be checked on especially if there is any possibility of stock causing mayhem; cows, sheep and deer find hives great scratching posts.

Disease this year in our hives was chalkbrood and sac brood but not significant. We had very little varroa and I only hope this has been common in the South West - long may it continue! The disease day at the association was excellent and well attended, I learnt a lot and also found talking to the other people there of value.

Highlights of the year were the Ruishton auction of beekeeping equipment, just who would want to miss it? A day of pure enjoyment, bee paraphernalia and bargains to boot!

The Taunton Honey Show, part of the Taunton Flower Show, where the general public get to see and share the delight and enthusiasm we have in our bees is not to be missed. Winter is always a good time to get started on the entries for next year!

Rosemary is a Taunton Division member who, with her daughter Eleanor, sells honey and hive products





Calendar dates

Saturday November 18

AGM

Time: 2.30pm
Speaker: Ged Marshall
'Life of a bee farmer'
Everyone welcome!
Location: The Apiary

Saturday January 13

NEW YEAR MEAL

Time: 7.00pm
Location:
The White Horse, Bradford-on-Tone
To book, please contact
Barbara Drakeford:
01823 490811
email@drakelilles.co.uk

Saturday, January *date to be confirmed*

LATE VARROA TREATMENT

Time: 2.30pm
Everyone welcome!
Location: The Apiary

The 2018 programme will be published shortly; it will be emailed to all members and will be available to view on the website www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

Honey Biscuits

If you have any honey you're happy to use in cooking, why not bake a batch of these delicious and crunchy honey biscuits?

Ingredients

4oz butter
4oz plain flour
2 tablespoons of honey
4oz granulated sugar
6oz rolled oats
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda

Method

In a large pan melt the butter and honey over a gentle heat.

Take off the heat and mix in bicarbonate of soda (it will froth).

Add remaining ingredients and mix well.

Put about one desert spoon of the mixture on a greased baked tray and flatten slightly. Roll these into balls and then flatten.

Leave plenty of space between biscuits.

Bake 160 C for 10 mins for a soft bake or 15 mins for a crunchy bake.

Allow to cool for about five mins on the tray and then remove to cooling rack.

Makes 20 - 24 biscuits.

A close-up photograph of two bees on a honeycomb. The honeycomb is a golden-yellow color with a hexagonal pattern. One bee is positioned above the other, both facing downwards. The bees have dark bodies with light-colored stripes and translucent wings.

Beekeeping veil and suit repairs:

Ring Jenny on 07788407497
or 01823 270465

OUT APIARY NEAR WELLINGTON

James Dexter has contacted us to offer an out apiary on his land near Wellington. He has a six acre small holding which is part of a total of 22 acres all farmed organically and sustainably.

The deal: the site for some honey!

He is part of the ecological land co-op.

<http://ecologicaland.coop>

Contact James by email:

jamesdexter45@gmail.com

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.