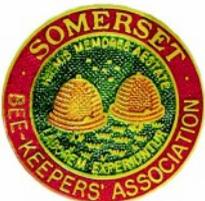


# Somerset Bee-keepers' Association NEWSLETTER



## 53 Shopping Days to Christmas

It seems impossible, but that is the case. Where did summer go? We all know to keep our bees well fed and safe during the winter months, from predators, mice, cold and water, but snow can easily pile up against the entrances and make it impossible for the occupants to get out for a 'comfort break', or to remove the dearly departed. As a consequence, entrances can be blocked by bodies. The simple solution shown above prevents snow blockage, but allows the bees free access. To prevent being blown away in winds, it could be secured at the top.



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[www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk](http://www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk)

## Somerset Beekeepers' Association September Council Meeting

The Vice-Chairman (Jonathan Friend – Wedmore & Cheddar), Chairing the Meeting, explained that in the absence of our Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer there was some uncertainty as to whether the Meeting was quorate. Rule 4 stated that we were inquorate but Rule 9 appeared to imply that we were in fact quorate. It was proposed by Bernard Newton (Mendip) and seconded by Joe King (Somerton) that we should continue with the meeting, but that there should be an urgent review of the rules to remove any ambiguity in the future. This was passed unanimously.

Because the meeting was to be considered inquorate, decisions made at the 14th September meeting will not become effective until the minutes of the meeting are passed at the next council meeting.

Ken Tredgett (Frome) said that our County organization worked well in some ways, but inevitably there were areas that we did less well. Members came and went often only being involved for short periods and not fully engaging with the Association. We needed to thoroughly review the way that we did things and were we really serving our membership in the best possible way? In a time of huge change it was essential that we constantly adapted to meet these challenges. David Charles (Somerton) broadly agreed with Ken that we need to review thoroughly the way that we go about our business. Stewart Gould (Somerton) said that at times our present management structure seems remote and even elitist to some sections of the membership. It was proposed that a Policy Review Group should be set up headed by Ken Tredgett (Frome) and with up to seven members to thoroughly review the way that we need to change in order to be able to confront the current and future challenges that we face.. The Group should report back to the AGM in spring 2014.

Proposed by Ken Tredgett (Frome) and seconded by Bernard Newton (Mendip). The motion was passed unanimously.

SBKA display at Royal Bath & West Display. Ken Tredgett (Frome) explained that a huge effort had been made by a small group of members to completely upgrade our County display at the Royal Bath & West Show.

They had created a colourful modern multi-media display, which was a huge advance. The next meeting will be held at Ash Village Hall, near Martock at 2.00 pm on Saturday November 9<sup>th</sup>.

on our previous format. Sadly, we had not received the award for the best County Display although widely tipped to do so. This had been something of a dampener on the team spirits and we will need additional volunteers next year.

David Morris (Taunton) asked the Council to join him in thanking Neil Trood for his years of service to the County Honey Show. Often, not only giving up eight days to the Show, but also entering a substantial number of high quality entries. A motion of our thanks was proposed by David Charles (Somerton) and seconded by Caroline Butter (President - Wedmore & Cheddar), and passed unanimously.

A full written Report of the BBKA Annual Delegate's Meeting had been provided. David Charles (Somerton) explained that it had been some years since the SBKA had proposed a motion at the BBKA ADM. He felt that it was very appropriate for the historical reasons explained in the written report that the name of BBKA News should be changed to the British Bee Journal. It was proposed that we back this proposal by Ken Tredgett (Frome) and seconded by Stewart Gould (Somerton). The motion was passed unanimously.

### **General Husbandry Exam**

Simon Jones (RBI for the South West) is intending to run a study group, starting in February of 2014, to look at the key elements of the General Husbandry Certificate. He is doing this on behalf of the BBKA. This certificate, which is outside the modular exam structure, and a separate qualification altogether, is the minimum requirement needed to oversee BBKA Basic Assessments. Simon tells me that the BBKA are seeking to have more members able to guide applicants through 'the Basic'.

If you are interested in taking the exam next year, please contact Simon on 01823 443737. The minimum requirements are that you have the BBKA

Basic exam under your belt and have been keeping bees for three years or more. It is possible to download explanatory notes and the syllabus from the BBKA web site. The General Husbandry exam is a practical one carried out at the



candidate's own apiary and covers general manipulation of colonies, queen rearing and honey extraction. There will inevitably be some travelling involved in the study sessions, as this is a course being run by one person, for the whole county, but don't be put off. Get another member from your division involved and share the transport.

*editor*

### **County Secretary marries**



Richard Bache (Somerton division) and county secretary, has had a somewhat meteoric rise through the echelons of beekeeping and at a relatively young age (at least to me), he is a Master Beekeeper. He achieved that while qualifying as a GP. Now he has something else to celebrate. On September 14<sup>th</sup>, he and his fiancée Iris (Stacey) became Dr and Mrs Bache.

The ceremony was held at St. Catherine's church, Drayton (near Langport) and the reception was at Dillington House, near

Ilminster.. Iris and Richard honeymooned in California and briefly visited Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon.

We all wish Iris and Richard a long and happy future together.

## **Exam Successes**

Congratulations go to Lyn Uglow, Matthew Petley, Anne Pike, Therese Ellard, Maggie North, Sue Adams-Mcmillan, Paula Carnell, Bob Muckett, Francis Ronicle, Mark Gullick, and Christine Gullick, who have all passed their Basic Assessment this year.

Donald Mudie and David Eaton both gained their General Husbandry Certificates, congratulations to you both.

The following have all passed modular exams in March, congratulations to all of you.

Kevin Shillington, Module 2

Patricia Pegrum Module 8

Alan Nelson Module 2 with credit

Patricia Nelson Module 2 with distinction

Robert Fox, Module 2

Lynne Ingram Module 2 with distinction

Bridget Knutson, Module 8

Donald Mudie Module 2 with credit.

If you want to take your Basic, or the Modules, next year, get together with others in your division, and run your own study group. I know from experience it is a lot easier to work with others, and share the ideas.

All the modules are available in March and November next year. If you would like to see what the papers are like, I have back copies, and will email them to you.

See the separate article on the General Husbandry study sessions planned for the early part of next year.

***Bridget Knutson - Examinations Officer***

## The experience of using MAQS



After a torrid 18 months of beekeeping leading up to May 2013, this year my simple aim was to make up losses and have healthy colonies. I split most of my remaining colonies as they expanded, so many were still building up at the end of July when the honey came off and I considered varroa treatment. I have always used Apiguard, based on Thymol. I have found the 6 week treatment period compromised winter feeding if I got a bit sidetracked with life generally and the weather turned cooler early and the bees weren't great fans either. I decided to consider possible alternatives.

With a degree of indecision matched only by Santa considering shaving his beard off, I opted to try formic acid-based MAQs gel strips, mainly since it is a single week treatment. It was only licensed by the VMD (Veterinary medicines directorate) in the spring of 2103, so I thought I would recount my experience here for others consideration. It is neither to recommend it nor to condemn it.

I was a bit cautious in my approach, as it was a new product and my bees had suffered enough recently, without me getting all gung-ho with new treatments. MAQs uses two gel strips above the brood chamber, reportedly killing varroa in sealed brood cells as well as on the adults' bodies, so only needs a single week treatment period. I am not going to describe the product in detail or advise how to use it. The manufacturers' website and other Internet sources do so and you can then draw your own conclusions from them, as I did.

The manufacturers do stress an increased risk of adult and larval bee mortality or queen supersedure, if used in ambient temperatures above 29 degrees C and stress the need for good ventilation. I assumed at higher temperatures, the formic acid vapourises too quickly for the bees to tolerate easily. Having bought the product, I spoke to another of our members, who

reported very significant bee mortalities the day after application in August, which unnerved me somewhat. Treating varroa earlier, rather than later, is obviously desirable and the strips can apparently be applied with supers on, but this year's ambient summer temperature remained astonishingly high for weeks on end. With my hives situated in full sun, I opted to wait until the daytime temperature dropped a bit. After feeding a gallon (that's 4.54 litres for you, kids..) of syrup having removed the honey crop at the end of July, I reluctantly waited until it got a bit cooler to apply the strips, which wasn't until the first week in September.

Most of my floors have built in restricted entrances; all have open mesh ventilated floors with single national or commercial brood chambers above. MAQs strongly recommend full width entrances on application. There is no mention of mesh floors in the instructions, so I don't know if the makers comments around restricted entrances assume solid floors as standard (perhaps in the States and Canada they are the norm), but I did not wish to chance it. With fixed small entrances, MAQs instructions specifically recommend "setting back" a super, leaving a full width opening along the back of the hive to increase ventilation. With a wasp plague in my orchard this summer, this was simply not an option I could consider. It would have started a bigger immediate problem than varroa mites, as would having wide entrances. I decided to chance it that open mesh floors, a super of drawn but empty frames above the strips, an open crown board and applying in cooler weather would provide enough ventilation and mitigate effectively for reduced entrances.

On the MAQs website it makes reference (somewhat tucked away) to single strip applications, but affording potentially lower efficacy. MAQs suggest you need a minimum of 6 frames of bees to use the product safely, so after checking colony strengths I left them undisturbed for four days and on a cooler evening applied two strips to two larger colonies and chose to use just single strips on two smaller colonies. I then put an excluder and a super with empty drawn frames (to aid ventilation and allow the bees to move about), then a crown board with open feedholes and roof. I placed spare crown boards in front of the entrance to catch any ejected dead bees or brood to allow me to quickly assess any adverse effects. The strips certainly whiffed strongly when the packet was opened and the bees drop back from



the top of the frames immediately on application and can then be heard to fan strongly when closed up.

A few dead bees were observed on the boards outside the double strip entrances the next day - probably no more than might be expected normally.

No dead brood / bees appeared on the boards in front of the single strip applications. Encouraged and somewhat relieved, I applied 2 strips to the other hives. Subsequent mite drops seemed neither noticeably higher nor lower than usual. I certainly can't report dodgy inferred statistics regarding percentage mite kills or make useful judgments whether having open mesh floors affected its efficacy or not. On removing the gel strips a week later, most had certainly sublimated their formic acid content, according to my cautious sniff test. On inspection of three colonies, the queens had gone off lay during the period of treatment and there was no open brood. One smaller colony had 4 QC's being built (which I left, trusting them at that time of year to be attempted supercedure cells). That might have been a seasonal bee choice or a response to treatment.

It is suggested on the Internet following treatment there may be a period of heavier egg laying than normal, making up for any losses. Treating as I did in September I didn't expect it and didn't look for it, but colonies do not seem to have "gone back" either. Would I use it again? Probably. I would only use single strip treatments on smaller colonies. I would also treat earlier in the year, by preference but only if the weather was cooler, like a normal British summer. You know the ones, sitting in the car on days out whilst the rain hammers down, listening to Test Match Special reruns of the 1981 Ashes at Edgbaston. Happy days!

***Pat Lehain***

## **More on MAQS**

Jochen Pfugfelder at the MSWCC this September (*page 3*) warned that although the formic acid treatment kills varroa mites by getting to the *juvenile stage on the bee larva (it can penetrate through the wax coating)* the dosage is critical. MAQS was developed in Canada, where the normal hive is a Langstroth or Dadant (1.3 or 1.5 time the brood space of our National brood box). Don't even think about the smaller WBC. Although that country experiences both higher and lower temperature than we do, they do not normally experience the rapid swings we get. As a result the current formulation is apt to dump more formic acid on hot days, coupled with our need to protect against wasps, which often means we reduce the front ventilation to allow our bees to guard their stores. Add these together and this seems to be where problems have occurred.

## **All Chinese honey is ordered off shelves**

Food watchdogs have ordered all Chinese-produced honey to be withdrawn from sale after trials found that much of it is contaminated by antibiotics. Forty per cent of the honey sold in the UK comes from China. The sudden withdrawal of all Chinese honey threatens to cause a UK shortage.

Tests of 16 pots found that ten contained the powerful antibiotic chloramphenicol. The chemical is a trigger for aplastic anaemia, a rare but serious blood disorder which affects up to 100 people in Britain each year. It has also been linked to leukaemia.

The news comes just two weeks after the Food Standards Agency told leading supermarkets to withdraw specific batches of own-brand honey produced in China which were found to be contaminated with another antibiotic, streptomycin.

Two Tesco Finest Acacia Honey jars tested positive for chloramphenicol. One also contained traces of streptomycin. A pot of Tesco Pure Set Honey also tested positive for both. Two jars of Sainsbury's own brand honey and a Gales product tested positive for both. Honey from Rowse, Bee's Queen and Asda also tested positive for at least one of the chemicals.

It is understood that the antibiotics are used in sprays by Chinese beekeepers to keep down bacterial infection of beehives. The country's shambolic food safeguards system means there is no proper testing to ensure illegal residues do not get into food. The FSA's original approach was to remove only batches of Chinese honey which tested positive for illegal contaminants. However, it adopted a blanket ban because the problem appears to be so widespread. Concern about potentially harmful residues in Chinese food imports led the EU and Britain to ban all new shipments. But at that stage they did not order recalls of products on shelves.

Apart from 11 tonnes of honey, China exports 17,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish and 48 tonnes of rabbit meat to Britain each year.

The FSA has convened a meeting of independent scientific experts to assess the risk. It said consumers could use Chinese honey already in their cupboards because the risk is considered 'extremely small'.

**Sean Poulter – Daily Mail (October 26<sup>th</sup>)**

*I'm a little concerned with the Daily Mail believing that 11 tonnes represents 48% of the total British usage of honey.*

**editor**

### Beekeeping for Beginners

The recent setback in the weather should make beekeepers especially careful of the food supply and syrup should be given regularly, as described last week. No attempt should be made to disturb the bees in any way for some weeks and Spring cleaning should be postponed until the end of April or the beginning of May.

For the benefit of readers who contemplate taking up beekeeping as a hobby, I intend in my next articles how to go about it. A hive should be bought at once. I recommend the double walled type known as the W.B.C. This has been found to be the most suitable for the climate, as it is cooler in summer and warmer in winter than the single walled type.

The hive should be assembled and dismantled until the way it fits together is thoroughly understood and the inner brood chamber, with its frames and wax comb foundation, placed in position. If the outside of the hive has not been painted, this should be done at once; two or three coats of good paint should be given.

There is no reason for painting hives white; in fact any light colour is as suitable, especially as white soon becomes dirty in town atmospheres. At the same time dark colours should be avoided as they draw the heat in summer and make the inside of the hive very hot, which increases the tendency of the bees to swarm.

A position free from long grass and other undergrowth should be chosen in the garden or orchard, and the hives should be set up so that the entrances face south east. In this position they get the advantage of the early sun and avoid the driving rain that often comes from the west. If possible, the hives should be sheltered from high winds by fences or hedges and in suburban gardens a high fence has the advantage of eliminating any annoyance to neighbours. A high hedge or fence compels the bees to fly high in their passage to and from the hive.

**Spotted by Fiona Whitcombe - 1936 press cutting**

## Quantock BKA Apiary - 6 months on

It is 6 months since the opening of the Spaxton road Apiary at Durleigh (near Bridgwater). A venture that has kept all of the Quantock Division beekeepers very active.



A BBC cameraman doing some slow motion filming of the wild colony



Roger Puddy demonstrates the 'All Weather' demonstration hive.

The Apiary Barn was finished on time (well we thought it was) and then (out of the blue ) a funding organisation offered us £9300 to install power and sanitation. An offer that we could not refuse! So we now have sanitation and mains electricity.

The BBKA have used it for Assessor training and a visit from the 'Past Presidents' of the BBKA. The BBC have used it for Springwatch, Somerset Sound, Points West, and a new programme about the Minds of Animals with Adam Hart and Chris Packham. Due to be screened soon.

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The filming (with Adam and Chris) in July was fascinating. Our 'All weather' indoor hive was blacked out and infra red cameras used to film the bees in the dark. The two broadcasters then discussed the bee behaviour. At one stage the screen appeared to be filled with bees doing a 'tremble dance'.

A local Media Community group (The Engine Room) have made two documentaries about the Apiary and can be seen on Youtube with the title 'Quantock Beekeepers New Apiary' parts 1 and 2. Part 1 has just been awarded a third prize in the National Honey Show.

The future is as exciting as the past. Our (free) Lantra beginners course is well subscribed and the rent-a-hive is flourishing.

Thanks to the combination of a large well equipped Apiary, a well appointed Apiary Barn and parking for up to 60 cars we are able to get adventurous and combine theory within practical activities. Often we have heard the comment of "What are we offering the more experienced beekeeper?" So, in the planning for next year we have : - Two joint visits with other SBKA Divisions, a monthly 'drop-in, 3 session practical on Queen rearing (to help our members get good replacement Queens), Nosema control (with practical use of the Bailey Comb change), Practical Varroa assessment and control, Swarm control , BBKA Basic exam prep, Honey extraction and Oxalic acid varroa treatment. Also being considered are – Taster days, Make your own foundation, BBKA Husbandry exam prep day, Skep Making and a Study Group. We are grateful to the SBKA for the £3000 contribution that they made to our venture, and (wherever possible) would like to invite members of other SBKA groups to come to our meetings. There may be a small charge for events that are expensive to run, and we would like you to contact the secretary on 01278 671544 in advance.

## **Dino impact also destroyed bees, says study**

Scientists say there was a widespread extinction of bees 66 million years ago, at the same time as the event that killed off the dinosaurs. The demise of the dinosaurs was almost certainly the result of an asteroid or comet hitting Earth, but the extinction event was selective, affecting some groups more than others. Writing in Plos One journal, the team used fossils and DNA analysis to show that one bee group suffered a serious decline at the time of this collision.



The researchers chose to study bees within the subfamily known as Xylocopinae - which included the carpenter bees. This was because the evolutionary history of this group could be traced back to the Cretaceous Period, when the dinosaurs still walked the Earth. Previous studies had suggested a widespread extinction among flowering plants during the Cretaceous-Paleogene (K-Pg) extinction event 66 million years ago, and it had long been assumed that the bees that depended upon these plants would have met the same fate. Yet, unlike the dinosaurs, "there is a relatively poor fossil record of bees," said the paper's lead author Sandra Rehan, a biologist at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, US. This has made the confirmation of such an extinction difficult. The impact that wiped out the dinosaurs created opportunities for other animals. However, the researchers were able to use an extinct group of Xylocopinae as a calibration point for timing the dispersal of these bees.

They were also able to study flower fossils that had evolved traits that allowed them to be pollinated by bee relatives of the Xylocopinae. "The data told us something major was happening in four different groups of bees at the same time," said Dr Rehan. "And it happened to be the same time as the dinosaurs went extinct."

The findings of this study could have implications for today's concern about the loss in diversity of bees, a pivotal species for agriculture and biodiversity. "Understanding extinctions and the effects of declines in the past can help

## Winter Feed recipe

Liquid feed is not an option at this time of year, but if the bees' stores get low, they will need feeding with more solid food. It is possible to buy baker's fondant, but check the ingredients. You don't want any 'nasties' in there. Although seasoned beekeepers should be conversant with this recipe, for those of you who are going through their first winter, or have lost it, here it is again.

You will need 1 large saucepan 1 hand or electric mixer 1 cooking (sugar) thermometer & moulds (Flora tub, plastic takeaway containers, or the like). The translucent takeaway containers enable you to see if the bees are eating the feed, without disturbing them unduly.

Most beekeepers use fondant, rather than candy, as it requires less work by the bees, to make it edible. Some old hands think both are an admission that you have not fed your bees enough in the late summer. You can add supplements like vitafeed green or gold, but check the quantities.



### Ingredients

1 kg. granulated sugar  
300 ml water  
1 tsp. white vinegar (not vital)

Pour water and vinegar into saucepan and bring to the boil. Add sugar and stir constantly.

Check temperature with cooking thermometer, continue to heat until temperature reaches 234°F (112°C). Remove from heat and cool to 200°F (93°C) - about 20 minutes. Whip until mixture begins to turn white and creamy with air bubbles. Pour into moulds and allow to cool undisturbed.

**Note:** If you intend to store your candy, keep it in a waterproof container, in a suitably cool and dry place. Fondant, which is not quite so solid and therefore requires less dilution by the bees, can be made by the same process, but should only be heated to 221°F (105°C) and mixed constantly whilst cooling from 200°F (93°C) to the point that it begins to turn white & creamy.

*editor*

## Dates for your Diary



### November

Sat 2nd	South East	AGM & Honey Show
Tues. 5th	Quantock	Beginners 3
Sat 9th	Taunton	AGM - 2.30pm. Contact secretary for location
Tues. 12th	Quantock	Beginners 4
Thurs 14th	Somerton	Soap making - Somerton Parish Rooms - 7.30pm
Fri 5th	Quantock	AGM - contact secretary for details
Tues 19th	Yeovil	AGM & a show of honey - Abbey Manor
Tues 19th	Quantock	Beginners 5
Tues 26th	Quantock	Beginners 6
27th	Central	AGM - Earth Sciences Centre, Stoke St. Michael - 7.30pm
28th	Somerton	AGM - The Parish Rooms, Somerton - 7.00pm

### December

7 <sup>th</sup> /14th	Wed & Ched	Apiary meeting Oxalic Acid workshop
Sat. 14th	Quantock	Oxalic Acid workshop
Sat. 14th	Somerton	Oxalic acid workshop - N. Wootton Village Hall - 10.00am

Members are welcome to attend the meetings of any SBKA division, but I would suggest checking with the host or secretary when attending the meetings of another division as the time or venue may have changed. Further details are often available on the website or divisional newsletters. This list is taken from the Yearbook and may have changed or been added to since it was originally published.

## Have I got news for you

I've had some strange emails in my time, one asking if a van I had for sale would be suitable for use on BBC's 'Eastenders' programme. It was subsequently used and written off in a head on collision. It came as no surprise then, when today I received one email asking me for the history of Somerton Beekeepers' Association and another asking if the BBC could use



our newsletter for the 'Have I got news for you' programme. They want it as the guest publication for their missing word round. I knew my *typos* were infamous, but the missing word round?

After consultation, with another committee member, I agreed to the inevitable ridicule of us beekeepers and forwarded our last three newsletters, as requested. So, don't forget to watch on Friday evenings. You might even get a mention.

### **editor**

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