

Somerset Bee-keepers' Association NEWSLETTER



As far as the eye can see

This year's blossom has been sublime, hanging on for dear life for an exceptional length of time. It is apparently due to warm days and cold nights. The oil seed rape is now in full swing, but if you think the British countryside is all yellow at present, consider this area in Luoping, China, where with a couple of notable patches, the entire vista is indeed yellow.



Issue122
Summer 2015

www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

Special Lecture 2015

There were far fewer people than expected at this year's Special Lecture. Although there were two changes of venue, the evening was well publicised and the new venue was pretty much central on the county.



Professor Dr. Keith S. Delaplane took simple topics for his talk, and unlike some speakers, made the subject available to all levels of beekeeper. His explanation of why polyandry (multiple partners for females) was more beneficial to the bee than half hearted selective breeding, made perfect sense. The vast majority of those selecting queens, do so from stock considered to have the required traits, but they pay scant attention to the fact that they have absolutely no control of the queen's chosen partners. This self selection by the queen keeps the gene pool varied and allows for the inclusion of varying advantageous elements, but is in no way controlled by the queen rearer. True selective breeding by interfering, but thorough breeders, who inseminate their queens, reduces the gene pool, and unless carefully controlled, ultimately demeans the quality of the stocks.

Professor Delaplane went on to highlight some extremely interesting findings made at the University of Georgia. He maintains that a feral colony of bees has a one in four chance of surviving its first winter. In the second winter, a colony that survived its first winter will stand a 50/50 chance of survival. In other words, of every eight new feral colonies, only one will get through two winters. Furthermore, the average life span of a feral colony of honeybees (provided it survives everything else) is five years. So Einstein's supposed words are turned somewhat on their heads. Whether man would, or would not survive beyond four years without bees, seems less relevant than the fact that honeybees now seem almost incapable of surviving without us.

Retirement of John Kinross

Many regular attendees at the Annual Lecture Day will have missed the familiar figure of John Kinross behind his bookstall. Sadly John informed the organisers that he had sold 'Bee Books New and Old' and that after many years he would not be able to run his stall in 2015.

John, a vicar's son from Wiltshire, has had a life in which books have played an important part. He read History at Exeter University and then trained as a Chartered Accountant before going into publishing. He worked for some time in the book department of Country Life magazine. There is a long list of books to his name on such things as 'Discovering the Smallest Churches in Wales' and in England too. He has penned a number of books on battlefields, including 'The Boyne and Aughrim', others on Castles and one on Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the birth of Turkey. As well as writing he collected and sold a large range of beekeeping titles old and new – hence the name of his business. He edited the series of very useful leaflets 'Beekeeping in a Nutshell', persuading a range of informed beekeepers to contribute their experience and expertise.

His interest in beekeeping arose, I believe, while he lived in Somerset at Burrowbridge and he was the Careers Officer for Somerset for 13 years. His wife, Jacey, was a beekeeper and helped out on his book stall at the County Day School, starting in Neroche at least as early as 1994. When this event morphed into the Lecture Day they continued to attend and were always sure of a welcome. Even after moving to Herefordshire he and Jacey travelled down – sometimes in very inclement weather – to be with us.

We have been very lucky to have had such a close association with John over at least 20 years, and I am sure that I can speak for all SBKA members in extending our sincere thanks and best wishes to him and Jacey for a happy retirement.

John still has some beekeeping books for sale should anyone be interested.

Thank you John.

Caroline Butter - President of Somerset BKA

Le Frelon Viendra

In December we decided that we would take a trip over the channel just before Christmas and do some timely purchasing of wine, and seasonal comestibles. The French have a different slant on the festive season and do not involve themselves in the frenetic charge to the shops and the mad internet race to get 'stuff' delivered four weeks ahead of the one day that we call Christmas. On Saturday December 20th, the roads, shops and markets of Brittany were functioning like any other Saturday in the year. If anything the roads were quieter.



What has all this to do with 'le frelon'? Well! We landed at St. Malo, one of the two French ports used by Brittany Ferries and we went to two street markets within 15 miles of St Malo, one in Paramé and the other in Dinan. At both markets I chatted to local beekeepers selling honey, pollen, royal jelly, various lozenges and beeswax products. I noticed that their prices were

higher than in previous years and were now very much closer to British prices, at €11.50 (£9.20) per. kg. for general floral honey. When we got onto the subject of how good a season the summer of 2014 had been, their faces dropped. It seems that they had the same good weather that we enjoyed here in the UK, but they had suffered terribly at the hands of '*le frelon*'. *Le frelon* is French for the hornet. We have been told, for two or three years now, that the Asian Hornet is just waiting to cross the channel, and although I heard it as well as anybody, it didn't really hit home until I got into conversation with these French beekeepers. Remember that it was just one shipment of garden pots from China to the Bordeaux region of France that brought the Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina nigrithorax*) to Europe. It is now present in the entirety of France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy. It really will not take much for it to make the short hop onto one of the twenty, or so, ferries that come over from France every single day of the year.

Beekeeping in France is different, in many ways, from British beekeeping. The most obvious difference is that the population of France is almost



identical to that of England, but France is much, much bigger. This means that the available forage for bees tends to be sparser and most beekeepers only have one harvest each year, unless they involve them-

selves in migratory beekeeping to areas like chestnut plantations, which they do, but the annual harvest per, hive is generally not as high as in the UK and chestnut honey commands a premium, selling for €14.50 (£11.60) per. kg. When I mentioned harvests of 36kg (80 lbs) per hive this year, these French beekeepers were 'gob claquer' (*gob smacked*). As mentioned earlier, they had the same weather as we did last season, but less available forage. This could mean that colonies were more susceptible to predation from hornets, but that is pure speculation. Regardless of the reasons and rationale, be prepared, because I, for one, am convinced that 'le frelon viendra' (*The hornet will come*). It's just a matter of when..

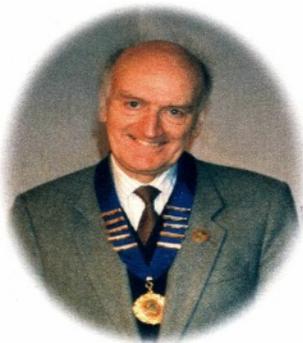
Since penning this article for the Somerton BKA newsletter, it has been used by several other associations. Interestingly, Ipswich & East Suffolk BKA added this very interesting link.

See the Asian Hornet's progress across Europe

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?msa=0&mid=zQZZvCfJcXQo.k0cLRXyow4C0>

John Charles Newcombe, 1931-2014

No beekeeper in Somerset can lay claim to such a long period of active membership or contribution to the craft as John Newcombe, who died after a long illness on 23rd December last. Members came from as far afield as Frome to pay their respects.



John's family moved to Minehead from Taunton when he was a boy of ten. He started keeping bees in 1948 and joined Exmoor BKA at the age of 17. His father tended the bees while he was away from home on National Service in the 1950s. Thereafter, John followed a career as a telecommunications engineer. In retirement he and his wife Sheila lived on the fringes of Minehead with an out-apiary a short distance away.

John served SBKA and the Exmoor Division as a delegate to council from 1960 onwards and was the Division's secretary from 1981 until 1993, becoming chairman until 1998. Over the years John rendered help and encouragement to scores of beekeepers. In the 1960s and 70s he was one of several Seasonal Bee Disease Officers appointed to inspect colonies under the Foul Brood Diseases of Bees Order. He also taught beekeeping classes run by the local evening institute. Between 1990 and 1993 John was Chair of SBKA, after which he was elected president in 1995. At this time he also received the West Country Honey Farms award, given annually to the member who is adjudged to have contributed most to beekeeping and the SBKA. In 1998, at the end of his term of office, John was elected a Vice-President. He was also awarded certificates by the British Beekeepers' Association in recognition of fifty years of membership and service to the craft, followed ten years later, in 2012, by a sixty year award, at the AGM in Cleeve organised by Exmoor division.

Determined to remain as active as possible, and although very unwell, he was able to speak with me when I talked to the Exmoor beekeepers at Minehead, weeks before his death. This was 51 years after I first met him at the SBKA AGM held at King Arthur's School, Wincanton in March 1963, when, as a new member, I was pleased to be invited to join him for lunch. At the time of his death John was President of the Exmoor Division.

David Charles

Tom Tucker- 1924 – 2014

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of 'Tom' M Tucker on 27th August. Tom had been a member of Taunton BKA for many years. He had taken an active part in the running of the division, having held the office of Secretary, and was president from 2001 – 2004.

He used to enter the Honey Show each year, and won many cups and prizes, and in particular, his wax entries. His late wife Daphne and their son James had also been beekeepers, and over the years, Tom became very knowledgeable. He was always interested in the apiary building project, and donated a large amount towards the cost.

Tom helped me become a beekeeper in 2000, with a nucleus from his home apiary. He was my "buddy" for the first few years, teaching me much. I was allowed to use his extractor at his home until I acquired my own, and we spent many happy hours just chatting and putting the world to rights.

We had a friendship which spanned 14 years, and I, for one, will miss this quiet gentle man very much.

Mary Adams (Former Chairman of Taunton Beekeepers)

Ian Preece

Immediately before going to press, we have received the sad news of the death of Ian Preece. Ian was a member of Taunton Division of and also a member of Bath BKA. He lived in the Bath area before moving to Goosenford, near Taunton, keeping bees for over 35 years, but recently reduced numbers to about four hives.

Ian's interest in the world of beekeeping included the Bath & West Show honey tent, and he was a Master Beekeeper. He served on the South West Joint Consultative Council for many years and was also a past President of BBKA.

On Thursday April 29th Ian attended a lunch with his wife, for past presidents of BBKA and was holding forth about the upcoming Bath & West Show. Only 24 hours later, his wife phoned the two beekeeping related contacts in his personal phone book, to tell them the sad news of his sudden death.

Unsung hero honoured by Somerset Beekeepers

Somerset Beekeepers' most prestigious honour – the West Country Honey Farms Rose Bowl – has been awarded to Milns Priscott of Milverton. His outstanding contribution to the craft was recognised by fellow beekeepers at their annual meeting held at North Brewham, near Bruton, on Saturday March 14th. Milns, who has been a member of Taunton Division for 47 years, has taken senior positions within the Division and at county level.



Judging panel chairman and Taunton President Jenny Gammon said in her citation that Milns has been a committee member for 39 years, serving as Chairman and President during this time. He had Also been Vice Chairman of Somerset Beekeepers. “For many years his exhibits would be seen at the various honey shows in the county and his involvement with the County Honey Show is unsurpassed,” she said. Recently he provided the Division with a temporary home for its bees while new premises were built at the apiary at Bradford-on-Tone. She added that he was an unsung hero: “There is no doubt, that his modesty in not seeking the limelight, and his all-round involvement over so many years, across so many aspects of beekeeping in Somerset, may surprise many members.”

The guest lecturer was Dr William Kirk, from the University of Keele, who first developed a passion for beekeeping as a pupil at Parkfield Primary School in Taunton. With expert beekeeper David Morris as his teacher, he learnt how to handle bees in the school's apiary. He is now a Senior Lecturer in Ecology and Entomology and author of Plants for Bees. The top 10 plants that benefit honeybees are the herb borage at number one, closely followed by blackberry, cherry, dandelions, lime trees, Michaelmas daisies, orchards, rosebay willow herb, white clover and willow.

In terms of the election of Somerset Beekeeper officers, members once again returned Caroline Butter from Cheddar as President and Jonathan Friend from Axbridge as Chairman.



Hive cleaning & sterilisation

Polystyrene hives may be sterilised with 'Virkon S' so don't have to be held under in a washing soda solution for 20 minutes! - see: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/downloadDocument.cfm?id=1069>.

Virkon S is a balanced, stabilized blend of peroxygen compounds, surfactant, organic acids, and inorganic buffer. Virkon S is recommended for use as a hard surface disinfectant in livestock production and transportation facilities. Virkon S delivers 99.9999% kill of numerous pathogens including 31 bacterial strains, 58 viruses, and 6 fungi with no evidence of resistance, eliminating the need to rotate disinfectants to avoid resistance buildup. Now you know.

It can be purchased online from www.bestpet.co.uk, www.viovet.co.uk and worryingly, www.ratbait.co.uk

General Husbandry Course.

The General husbandry course normally held as a part of a BBKA initiative and conducted by Simon Jones and Gail Johnson had to be cancelled this year because of a lack of interest from potential participants. The course has, in the past, been held at the Taunton BKA apiary.

Spring Auction

This year's auction of secondhand equipment at Ruishton, seemed to have a preponderance of WBC hives, although there was a good deal of National equipment too. There was a good turn out and Chris Harries did his normal excellent job as auctioneer.

Beekeeping

Taster Day

2015



Sunday 12th July 10.00 - 4.00
Avalon Marshes Centre BA6 9TU
Just 5 miles from Glastonbury

So! You want to know about beekeeping!

DEMONSTRATIONS, DISCUSSIONS, DISPLAYS

TALKS, TIPS, & TASTING (HONEY)

HANDS ON EXPERIENCE

Just bring Wellington Boots and a pair of gloves (Marigolds are excellent)

All of this for just £20.00, which includes use of protective clothing, lunch & refreshments. if you would like to take part, return this completed form to :-

Steve Horne, Willow Barton, Hedging Lane, North Newton, Bridgwater TA7 0DG

Please include a cheque for the appropriate amount, made payable to Somerton & District Beekeepers Association.



Beekeeping Taster Day

Name.....

Address.....

Post Code..... Tel. No..... Email.....

Menu options Non vegetarian

Vegetarian

Tick which applies and tell us how many of each

Number of adults	£20.00	
Number of children under 14	£10.00	
Total payable	Use right hand column	

Dates for your Diary



Saturday 5 th May - 2.00pm	Somerset BKA	Council meeting, Chilcompton Church Hall BA3 4HP
Wednesday 27 th - 30 th May	Somerset BKA	Royal Bath & West Show, Shepton Mallet Showground BA4 6QN
30 th , 31 st May & 13 th , 14 th June	BBKA	Advanced husbandry exams
Sat. February 21 st - 9.00 am	Somerset BKA	Lecture Day, Kings of Wessex Academy, Cheddar
Wednesday 15 th April - 7.30 pm	Somerset BKA	Special Lecture, Keith Delaplaine - Norton sub Hamdon Village Hall
Saturday June 13 th - 9.00 am	South East Division	Bee Disease & Husbandry - Ansford Academy, Castle Cary, BA7 7JJ.
7 th & 8 th August	Taunton BKA & Somerset BKA	Taunton & County Honey Show Vivary Park, Taunton, TA1 3JX
15 th & 16 th August	Central Division	Mid Somerset show, including Central division honey show, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5QZ

Members are welcome to attend the meetings of any SBKA division, but it is suggested that you check with the host or secretary 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.

Your news items

News items are occasionally sent for publication, but these come mainly from only one or two sources . If you would like the rest of the county to know what your division is up to, please let the editor know in plenty of time for publication. The sheer welter of apiary visits during the summer precludes including them. To include one, would mean including them all, but there are definitely other things going on.

Somerset is one of the most active beekeeping counties in the country, yet we seem to have little news to disseminate.

editor

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Copy deadline for next newsletter:
28th August 2015

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