

Somerset Bee-keepers' Association NEWSLETTER



Getting ready for winter

Some beekeepers are claiming this to be one of the six worst years for honey, in the last fifty. As we head towards winter, the hedgehog will not make it through unless it weighs more than 450g and the bee should be conserving its energy for the long months ahead. If it's warm, the hedgehog can top up its energy banks, but not so for bees.

A short cold winter serves the bees much better.



Issue124
Winter 2015

www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

An Inspector Calls

It was a pleasant late morning in early October, and I was, in fact, re-felting my bee shed roof when two ladies walked up the garden path and said 'Mr Gould? Good morning, we are from Trading Standards'. I kept my calm and apologised before shaking their hands, for the bitumen which made me look like a member of the 'black hand' gang. I've had so many people tell me 'no-one will ever bother you' - WRONG! Trading Standards can, will and do visit people without prior notice.

Their only interest in my honey production and sales was with the accuracy and compliance of packaging, weighing and labelling. Most other areas of honey sales are covered by environmental health departments. What were they interested in then? They asked what kind of scales I use, and how I calibrate them. Taking them to the village shop and comparing weights against verified scales is sufficient, but having a lump of metal of a known weight, which has also been checked, is a good idea too.

They were pleased to see that my honey had a lot no. and also a 'best before' date: both positives. They also noted that my weight labelling was correct. That is, the weight in grams, and also, if you wish, an imperial weight afterwards, but in a smaller font size.

While I had their attention I thought I would plumb the depths of their knowledge and dispel some old wives' tales. So, old wives, look out. 'Is overfilling jars a hanging offence', I asked? They thought that it would be silly to penalise anybody for giving away a little extra. 'What about identification of the seller then?' They suggested addressing an envelope exactly as the details on your honey jar, and then posting it to yourself, from about ten miles away. If it comes home - that should be sufficient. Mono floral honeys came into the conversation too. You may claim a honey to be mono floral as long as it is mostly from that source, but beware, you may be required to prove it. That led on to the label not being misleading. Highlighting a flower species pictorially is inadvisable, unless the honey is mostly from that source.

Stewart Gould

DEFRA response to fraud allegations

The following is a letter from Richard Watson of DEFRA to Doug Brown, chairman of BBKA relating to allegations of fraud made by one BBKA trustee against another. Its delay in publication is entirely due to Doug Brown seeking permission to circulate it. This matter has rattled on for a very long time. Let's hope that this is an end to it.

7th August 2015

From Richard Watkins
Head of Bee Health Policy

Review of past BBKA contracts under the Healthy Bees Plan

Thank you for meeting with us to discuss the concerns regarding BBKA match-funded projects under the Healthy Bees Plan. I appreciate the time you have taken to update us on your internal review of the documentation on the projects.

We have read the BBKA's response to the Special Delegate Meeting note produced by Ken Basterfield (included in a BBKA email to Defra, 21st April 2015) and the trustee's subsequent reports refuting your findings, and conclude that on the basis of these documents we are unable to evaluate whether or not the alleged fraud has taken place. We have, however, reviewed our own documentation relating to the projects and their contracts and are satisfied that the BBKA delivered the outcomes required for each project and that the reviews and checkpoint meetings held during the lifetime of the contracts revealed no concerns. We do not therefore intend to take any further action to recover any monies on the basis of these allegations. We have asked the trustee to inform us if he has any plans to raise his concerns over the administration of BBKA's finances with the Charity Commission.

As you will know we had already made the decision to change the way we tender for projects under the Healthy Bees Plan. The changes will include moving away from a Single Tender process for projects and changing their on-going governance. We believe that this will provide more robust controls for everyone involved.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD WATKINS

Somerset BKA Lecture Day 2016

Kings of Wessex Academy, Cheddar - 20thth Feb

Your divisional secretaries now have the tickets for this annual event. They are priced as last year, with a full day including the lectures, refreshments and cooked lunch for a mere £12. This really is excellent value, given the class of speakers. Contact your secretary for more details.

Speakers

Professor Jamie Ellis is the Gahan Endowed Associate Professor of Entomology in the Department of Entomology and Nematology at the University of Florida. He has a BS degree in Biology from the University of Georgia USA and a PhD in Entomology from Rhodes University in South Africa. At the University of Florida, Jamie has responsibilities



in extension, instruction and research. Jamie created the AFBEE program (African Bee Extension and Education Program), the UF, South Florida, and Caribbean Bee Colleges, and the UF Master Beekeeper Program. As an instructor Jamie supervises PhD and masters students in addition to offering an online beekeeping course. Currently, Jamie and his team have over 30 active research projects in the fields of honey bee husbandry, conservation & ecology, and integrated crop pollination.

John Whitaker was born and raised in the Isle of Man. His formative education took place working on his grandfather's farm during the school holidays where he learned to work long hours, get things done and love the country. His formal education was completed getting a degree in Mechanical Sciences at Cambridge. In the seventies he and his wife and packed our rucsacs and went travelling world



for almost three years, and having seen much, concluded that Yorkshire the was as good as anywhere to live. They bought a smallholding and a dilapidated house in the vale of York and there raised their two children, while John provided the financial wherewithal by developing computer systems in the construction industry. They are now proud and, given half the

chance, exceedingly boring grandparents.

John has kept bees for over twenty years. He has about twenty colonies in four apiaries. Hewas secretary of his local association for fourteen years, treasurer of Yorkshire BKA for eight years and is now on the BBKA examination board. The humbug and hubris of committees is all very well, but what he loves about beekeeping is donning his beesuit, lighting the smoker and quietly getting on with managing the bees - oh and a drink in the pub with his fellow beekeepers.

Professor Stephen Martin has spent 7 yrs in Japan studying hornets, followed by 7 yrs at the National Bee Unit researching the Varroa mite. This was followed by 7 yrs at Sheffield University studying the chemical ecology of social insects and pathogens of Honey bees. Since 2012, he has a permanent position at Salford University were he has returned to studying Deformed Wing Virus and Varroa. He has worked on honey bees and their pests right across the globe, including Japan, Pakistan, South Africa and more recently Hawaii and Brazil. Recently he has teamed up with Declan Schroeder in Plymouth to study the unique mechansism that has evolved which allows our honeybees to become tolerant towards the varroa mite.



“Bee Improvement for All”

Saturday 19 March 2016 9.00 for 9.30-4.30 approx.

at Donyatt Village Hall, Donyatt, Ilminster TA19 0RG

In conjunction with the Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) the **South West Division of Somerset BKA** will be holding a **“Bee Improvement for All”** day. This is one of a number that BIBBA will be staging throughout the U.K. on a regional basis. We have tried to select a date as far ahead as possible in the hope it doesn't clash with other events. These events are popular and it would be appreciated if you could avoid arranging an event on that day.

“Bee Improvement for All”.

An all day event aimed at encouraging all beekeepers to improve their bees. The purpose is to help all beekeepers to continuously assess their colonies, so they have a good idea of which queens to cull, and which colonies to take queen cells from when they need new queens.

There will be tuition on how to raise queens using queen cells that bees often present us with during the summer, as well as some simple “artificial” techniques that may be suitable for the more advanced beekeeper, or those working in groups.

Further details can be found on <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/beeimprovementforallday.html> and <http://bibba.com/bee-improvement-for-all-bifa-days/#more-243>

£10/head adult. £7/head for under 18, who must be accompanied by a fee paying adult. Refreshments included, but bring your own lunch.

Contact

Bridget Schneiders: Park Farm House, Donyatt, Ilminster TA19 0RN. email dominics@globalnet.co.uk

Telephone enquiries and requests for paper (rather than electronic) booking forms to: Jane Warde 01460 57673

Carols for bees



Please join us to help raise funds to buy Bee Keeping Suits for under 18s.

Little Brympton Micro-Farm, in collaboration with Yeovil Beekeepers' Association, will be starting children's Bee Keeping training from Spring 2016.

On Friday the 4th of December at 7.30 in Chilseborough Village Hall, Stanchester Choir will be giving a concert of traditional local Christmas Carols to help raise funds for this project. Children are particularly welcome.

Somerset Bee Keepers Association have already donated three hives, now you can do your bit! Tickets are £6 and include a glass of Organic Mulled Wine and Home-made mince pie. Artisan products will be on sale as well as extra glasses of mulled wine and mince pies. There will also be a raffle for some lovely home produced prizes, including jars of honey, beeswax soap and cream! All proceeds will go towards buying suits and equipment to start this training programme.

To book you can visit Little Brympton Farm Shop, TA14 6TW (continue up the road if using SAT NAV) Friday 2-6pm or Sat 9.30-12.30 am. Or call 07814 742653 to reserve.

BBKA Exam Results

13 people have taken, and passed, the basic exam in Somerset this year. Certificates for these should be available for AGMs.

6 people successfully passed module exams in March, and those certificates have been passed to the respective divisions.

Three people gained the advanced theory certificate, and two people the intermediate theory certificate.

I am waiting to hear officially about the advanced husbandry exam that took place in May and June, results and any certificates due will be available for AGMs.

A few people have applied to take the microscopy exam in November this year.

Bridget Knutson - Exams Secretary.



Oxalic acid treatment available

Oxalic acid, which has been much talked about and was declared unusable for the treatment of varroa, is suddenly alright to use again, but with one almighty proviso. As from September 16th 2015, one product has been licensed by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) for use in the treatment of varroa in beehives. Apibioxal, which is imported from Italy, was previously only available by prescription through a vet., via the

'cascade' system. The cascade system allowed for a veterinary medicine to be imported, provided there was no UK alternative. Now Apibioxal is available over the counter, so to speak. Oxalic acid is used as a winter treatment against varroa, and is trickled over the bees at a time when there is no brood in the hive, ideally after a cold snap in mid winter. Given that Apibioxal is simply a solution of oxalic acid in a sugar syrup, it is pretty certain that British products will become available, at a more reasonable price, as soon as they gain a licence.

Help needed for the 2016 Royal Bath & West Show

Help is required for both the setting up of the Bees & Honey marquee before the above dates and for stewarding during the week of the Show, says organiser Ken Tredgett. Setting up the marquee is done on Sunday, May 29th and the show runs from Wednesday 1st June to 4th June 2016.

The rota for stewards is as follows: either all day, 9 to 6 or a half-day, 9 to 1.30pm or from 1 to 6pm.

Contact Ken Tredgett at tredg@talktalk.net or call on **01373 464736**

Hedgehogs

This is absolutely nothing to do with bees, but indulge me for a moment. At this time of year, and given the warm weather, hedgehog charities around the country are inundated with orphaned, malnourished, injured and sick hedgehogs. Prickles hedgehog rescue centre, in Cheddar, currently has 146 foundlings which require care and attention. The charity needs money too, but is crying out for volunteers to help



look after these defenceless, but charming creatures. Although badgers have a lot to answer for, predation is not the main problem. All 146 hedgehogs presently cared for, have infestations of lung worm, acquired from their food source - slugs and snails. I can assure you that a morning spent weighing, cleaning and feeding, is very rewarding. **If you are able to help in any way, contact them on 07806 744 772** They will greet you with open arms. If you go to the website, you will be able to find out exactly what help is needed www.prickleshedgehogrescue.org.uk

Spray poisoning

This is not yet another rant against neo-nicotinoids, nor is it a call for a total ban of insecticides, but I am constantly amazed that there are not more incidents of spray poisoning reported each year, and this year there have allegedly only been 12 across England. That simply makes nonsense of the facts. There may only have been 12 incidents investigated, but that doesn't mean there weren't more. There are many people who are the victims of crime in this country, who do not report the incident, either because they consider it too trivial, that the authorities won't follow it up, because they just want to put it behind them, or because they don't know it has happened. That may sound strange, but when it comes to spray poisoning of bees, it is not always apparent that the poisoning has occurred.

Poisoning manifests itself in many ways. It's not always a case of mass instant death, although that can and does happen. Different insecticides have different effects on different insects. The amount and frequency of exposure is another consideration, as is the potential build up of toxins in the comb and the bee. If you got your head around that lot, you still have to contend with

what chemists call 'half life' of insecticides, and sub lethal doses of toxins in insects. If it were that simple, it would be easier to regulate, and, or control, but individual decision making comes into it as well.

One of our members has suffered a severe poisoning episode this year, which culminated in the loss of 16 colonies. The hives involved were close to field beans, and the farmer warned that he was going to spray in the early evening of the following day. The beekeeper insisted that it would have to be after 9.00pm, when it could be assured that the bees would all be at home. Nothing to go wrong then? The spraying took place after 9.00pm, but the farmer sprayed the following day as well, with no further warning. Catastrophe! On inspection, piles of dead bees were seen outside the hives, and on further investigation, it became apparent that there was a major problem inside too.

Samples of bees were taken. Some were retained and others sent off to the National Bee Unit. There was much confusion as the bees were contaminated with a cocktail of chemicals, including pyrethroids and s-methoprene. Pyrethroids have been around for a long time now, and most people are aware that they are neuro-toxins which paralyse the subject insect, and in lower doses, suppress reproduction and generally deplete the bees' health.

S-methoprene is a different kettle of fish altogether, as it is not generally used as a crop pesticide and is, in fact, the main constituent chemical in the product known as **Frontline**, used on cats and dogs to regulate flea infestations. It doesn't kill insects as such, but restricts development, larvae cannot hatch into adults, and it prevents egg laying, among other things. The question is, how on earth could it be present in the bodies of bees belonging to a beekeeper who doesn't have a cat or a dog? Could the farmer be mixing chemicals to create his own unique formula? Record sheets are only as good as the person filling them in.

The upshot of this is that a member of Somerset BKA lost 16 colonies of bees in June, and a whole season's production of honey. To add to that body blow, the colonies were on double brood, and to get another 16 colonies to that stage is going to take time and cost a considerable amount of investment. To date, no compensation has been received. Tighter regulation of insecticide use might just help.

Dates for your Diary



Friday November 13 th - 7.00pm	Exmoor Division	AGM, Townsend House, Minehead
Saturday 14 th November	Taunton Division	AGM
Tuesday 17 th November	Yeovil Division	AGM and show of honey
Thursday 19 th November - 7.00pm	Somerton Division	AGM - Somerton Parish Rooms
Friday 20 th November - 7.30pm	Quantock Division	AGM
Tuesday November 25 th	Central Division	AGM - Earth Science Centre, Stoke St Michael
Saturday 12 th December - 2.00pm	Quantock Division	Winter varroa control - divisional apiary
Sat/Sunday 12 th /13 th December	Wedmore & Cheddar	Winter varroa control
Saturday 21 st February 2016 9.00am	Somerset BKA	Lecture Day - Kings of Wessex Academy, Cheddar

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 be reluctant to share our enthusiasm with the world.

editor

Editor: Stewart Gould
Email: newsletter@somersetbeekeepers.org.uk
Address: 1 The Folly
Ditcheat
Shepton Mallet
Somerset BA4 6QS
Mobile: 07739 345271
The newsletter is also available on the SBKA
web site www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

Copy deadline for next newsletter:
28th February 2016
©2015 Somerset Beekeepers' Association

Any views expressed within this newsletter are
not necessarily the views of Somerset
Beekeepers Association nor any area division