

Somerset Bee-keepers' Association NEWSLETTER



A Fresh Start

Let's hope so, because we don't want another like 2015, with honey yields way down on previous years and queens absconding left right and centre, even if they didn't take the family with them, or simply failing to get mated successfully.

2015 ended in confusion, with daffodils in full bloom as early as December 4th in Somerton, and blackthorn flowering at the same time. Aberrations these may be, but confusing for bees.



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www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk

West Country Honey Farms Award

Every year a Somerset beekeeper is awarded the West Country Honey Farms Award for contribution to beekeeping and the SBKA. Nominations of SBKA members are considered by a selection panel consisting of the last three winners. This year the panel is Gail Johnson, Milns Priscott and Ken Edwards (chair).

It is the highest acclamation that is available to a Somerset beekeeper. Any member can be nominated by any other member, except from a division that won it in the previous year, which, in this instance, is Taunton Division where Milns Priscott is a member.

Nominations should be sent directly to the chair (Ken Edwards). The nomination should explain how the proposed member has contributed to beekeeping within Somerset. The whole process will be conducted anonymously and the decision will be announced at the SBKA AGM, where the award takes place. Only the winner will be announced and there will not be any other discussion about candidates.

If you know somebody who merits consideration - nominate them.



Send written citations to:-
 Ken Edwards (chair of award)
 Bush Cottage
 Bush Road
 Spaxton
 Bridgwater
 Somerset
 TA5 1BX

If you need to know more, ring Ken on 01278 671544 or email him at :- ken@bush-cottage.freeserve.co.uk

Fondant Recipe

A mild winter, to date, has meant that your bees have been chomping into their winter stores. Placing fondant is a good insurance policy, but the real danger time is towards the beginning of spring, when stores will be at an all time low. Each year, at this time, I get asked how to make fondant. I do it automatically, but I want to be sure that I am not misleading anybody. If you have a lot of colonies, or don't trust yourself with a sugar thermometer, it might make sense to buy fondant, but if, like me, you are a skinflint, then here are the guidelines.



You will need a large saucepan, a long handled spoon for stirring, electric food mixer (optional, but labour saving), transparent takeaway tubs, weighing scales, sugar, water and a sugar thermometer.

A takeaway tub will house 1 lb (454g) fondant with ease, and when placed (inverted) over the feeding hole in the crown board, it is easy to see if the bees have devoured the fondant, with little or no disturbance.

For every 1 kg of sugar, you will need 300ml of water. That equates roughly to 2 lbs sugar and a half pint of water. Boil the water and pour it into the saucepan. Set the hob to 'high' and add the sugar. Stir gently while the sugar is melting. Once the mixture boils, turn down the heat so that it maintains a gentle rolling boil (as above).

Maintain the rolling boil, stirring occasionally, until the mixture reaches **234°F**. That magic temperature means that the moisture has been reduced sufficiently for the solution to form a soft set. Remove from the heat and let stand, undisturbed, until the temperature drops to **110°F**. **That could take an hour**. That temperature regulates the crystal size. Now stir the mixture vigorously until it starts to turn milky in colour, and thickens slightly. Then pour it into your take-away containers, seal and leave to cool.

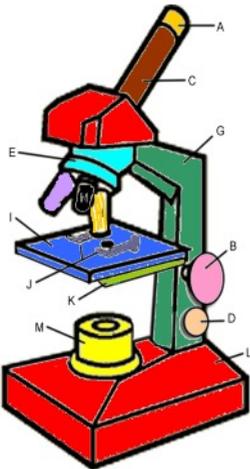
If it all goes wrong, it can be rescued. If it sets too hard simply boil a small amount of water, add the fondant and repeat the process. If it sets too soft, then repeat the process without adding water.

Microscopy for beekeepers

Quantock Beekeepers' Association hosted the Microscopy course in 2015 and a number of people from around Somerset entered for the BBKA Exam. There were 5 Sunday morning sessions throughout the year and from late July a session every two weeks, on a Thursday evening at the Quantock Beekeepers' Apiary near Bridgwater, on the Spaxton Road. Keeping in touch with each other on a regular basis has kept our budding microscopists motivated and a natural learning group emerged. The Apiary is very well equipped and a number of voluntary tutors were involved. The BBKA used the Apiary for the exams and there were 9 candidates from across the South West Region.

A nominal £10 fee is charged to cover consumables for SBKA members. There may be an 'out of County fee' depending on demand. We are at the planning stage for 2016. So please get in touch if you are interested.

Please note that this course is pitched at a level to prepare microscopists for the BBKA Exam so candidates should already have the BBKA Basic Certificate, and intend to sit the BBKA Microscopy exam in 2016.



Email Ken Edwards at:-

ken@bush-cottage.freeserve.co.uk

or call 01278 671544

Somerset BKA Lecture Day

Although it has been mentioned in previous issues, this is the last chance to promote this annual milestone event. This really is a chance to hear acknowledged world experts in their subjects, at a ridiculously inexpensive price. The entire day costs Somerset BKA members (if you are receiving this newsletter first hand - that's you) £12.00 and that includes lunch and refreshments. Without lunch, the charge is just £4.00 for Somerset BKA members. Saturday February 20th is definitely a day for your diary.

This is a full day's programme with three key speakers:- **Professor Jamie Ellis** of the University of Florida who has over 30 active research projects in the fields of honey bee husbandry, conservation & ecology, and integrated crop pollination running at present. Where does he find the time to visit Cheddar?

Next on the list is **John Whitaker**, who has about twenty colonies in four apiaries. He was secretary of his local association in Yorkshire for fourteen years, treasurer of Yorkshire BKA for eight years and is now on the BBKA examination board.

Last, but not least is **Professor Stephen Martin** who 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 where he has returned to studying Deformed Wing Virus and Varroa.

It might all sound a bit high brow but this day is suitable for beekeepers at all levels of experience. Added to the above, you also get the chance to talk to Simon Jones, our Regional Bee Inspector, and his team of Seasonal Bee Inspectors, and you will realise just how approachable they are. At the end of the day, they are beekeepers too and simply have your best interests at heart.

Your divisional secretaries now have tickets for this event, so contact them for more information.

Bee Improvement for All

This is an all day event aimed at encouraging all beekeepers to improve their bees. The purpose is to help all beekeepers to assess their colonies continuously, 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 the Dave Cushman website at:-www.dave-cushman.net/bee/beeimprovementforallday.html and <http://bibba.com/bee-improvement-for-all-bifa-days/#more-243>

Saturday 19 March 2016

9.00 for 9.30-4.30 approx. at Donyatt Village Hall, Donyatt, Ilminster TA19 0RG

Cost:- £10/head adult. £7/head for under 18s, who must be accompanied by a fee paying adult. Refreshments included, but bring your own lunch. Contact Bridget Schneiders for further information, at: 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](#)

The Great British Bake Off



No! It's not April 1st. Richard Bache, secretary of Somerset Beekeepers' Association has received the following email .

BAKE OFF'S BACK!

BBC baking contest *The Great British Bake Off* is returning in 2016 and the production team are currently looking for the next batch of great home bakers to take part. So who's the best baker *you* know? If you, or someone you know, can turn out a terrific tart, produce a perfect pie or serve up a sublime sponge, then

please get in touch now.

For more information or an application form, go to:

www.thegreatbritishbakeoff.co.uk

Please also feel free to pop it on any social media accounts you might use or on your newsletter. I'd be more than happy to send flyers directly to you if you prefer.

If you or someone you know thinks they have what it takes to bake in the tent, then please do encourage them to visit our website where they can download the application form www.thegreatbritishbakeoff.co.uk or email baking@loveproductions.co.uk

Thanks very much for any help,

Jennifer



Doing the Basic

The Basic Assessment is the cycling proficiency test of the beekeeping world, but there are no hand signals. There were a lot of new beekeepers in 2014 & 2015, and after a full year you will qualify to apply to take the Basic Assessment. This is exactly what it says it is, an assessment of your knowledge of practical and theoretical beekeeping, but it is not an intellectual marathon. The Basic will give you reassurance that you have absorbed most of what you learned at the introductory sessions and honed during your first year. It is an informal experience and doesn't include anything that you have not already covered.

Furthermore, it doesn't mean that you have to subject yourself to a lifetime of exams. Many people stop right there.

The syllabus is online at www.bbka.org.uk/learn. On this page click on the brown box marked examinations and assessments, and on the page that opens click on the brown box marked basic assessment. This page will tell you everything you need to know, and you can download the syllabus.

If you pass the Basic, and most people do, your fee will be returned to you and you will receive a certificate and a BBKA badge for your bee suit.

What have you got to lose.



House of Commons Neo-nicotinoid debate - December 6th

It seems that at least one of our MPs is taking the matter seriously. Mind you, there is no mention of the outcome of the debate, and I can find no trace anywhere. This is the reply to an online petition, from Lib. Dem. MP David Wharburton. **Other MPs are available and can be lobbied.**

Thank you very much for this – I absolutely share many of the concerns you’ve articulated around neonicotinoids and went to the debate on Monday. I intervened to draw the Minister’s attention to the enormous level of concern in our area and I can certainly assure you that I’ll be continuing to monitor this very closely – I’ve also just joined the All-Party Parliamentary group on bees too.

Many thanks again for your message and please don’t hesitate to drop me a line at any time in the future.

All good wishes,

David
(MP for Somerton & Frome)



Somerton Division land purchase

As the result of an extremely generous donation, Somerton Division are in the process of purchasing 0.7 acres of land in Long Sutton, so that they can create their own apiary, as opposed to renting a site, which they presently do. Their existing apiary has been highly successful, but security of tenure and health and safety issues have been of concern.

It is hoped that the new apiary will be up and running in the Spring of 2016.

60 years of beekeeping

David Morris of Taunton Division is celebrating 60 years of beekeeping and has written his memoirs in eleven sections. If anyone would like a copy, they will be published in the Somerton newsletter, but I am sure that David will let any interested parties have a copy. Contact David at d.g.morris@btinternet.com

Bath & West Show 2016

It may seem like ages away, but help is still needed to man the Somerset stand in the bees and honey tent. The show runs from 1st - 4th June inclusive. You could volunteer for half a day, or a full day. Come to that, you could be like the real hardened crew members and do all four days. Could divisional secretaries please ask all their members to volunteer, as it is usually left to one or two divisions. You do get free entry to the show (normally £21.00). Contact Ken Tredgett at :- tredg@talktalk.net. He would love to hear from you.

Somerset BKA AGM - Saturday 12th March 2016

It is possible to book lunch at Orchardleigh Golf Club, prior to the AGM, and there is usually a throng of members in deep conversation. So far there have been no requests for reservations. Please contact Ken Tredgett on 01373 464736 or by email at tredg@talktalk.net for further details.

Dates for your Diary



Wed 13 th January - 7.30 pm	Exmoor Division	Beginners' course - venue TBC
Wed 13 th January - 7.340 pm	Frome Division	Beginners' course, ASDA training room, Frome
Thursday 14 th January - 7.30 pm	Somerton Division	Soap making with Chris Rawlings of West Wilts BKA
Wed 27 th January - 7.30 pm	Somerton Division	Beginners' course. Tor Rugby club, Glastonbury
Wed 10 th February - 7.30 pm	Central Division	Beginners' course - Whitstone School, Shepton Mallet
Thurs 11 th February - 7.30 pm	Somerton Division	Kick start your season with Meg Seymour
Saturday 20 th February - 9.00	Somerset BKA	Lecture Day, Kings of Wessex Academy, Cheddar
Thurs 25 th Feb - 7.30 pm	Yeovil Division	Beginners' course - Thorne Coffin Hall, Yeovil
Saturday 12 th March - 2.00 pm	Somerset BKA	Somerset BKA AGM - Orchardleigh Golf Club, Frome
Saturday 19 th March - 9.00	South West Division	Bee Improvement for All, Donyatt Village Hall, Ilminster
See page 5 for details	Quantock Division	Microscopy for beekeepers

If you would like to see your division's activities here, just forward details to the editor. There is not room to include everything during the active season, but there seems to be a dearth of social gathering in the winter.

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.

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