

North Somerset Beekeepers



Summer 2020

Welcome to the latest edition of our branch newsletter. We hope you are all coping with the COVID-19 lockdown and its lifting and have been keeping well and avoiding its devastating effects as much as possible.

As most summer fairs and events have been cancelled over recent months, we put the monthly newsletter on hold, and used our Facebook page and messages from David Capon to keep us all up to date.

So, this is a Summer edition and we will review the circumstances in August to decide whether to reinstate the monthly newsletter or continue with a seasonal version for the time being.

Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has made us all review how we do things and devise creative and remote ways of working and pursuing our hobbies and activities.

Although we have continued to provide a swarm collection service, unfortunately we have had to restrict access to our apiary to ensure social distancing; visits to the apiary are greatly missed during this time, however, we are now in a position to offer small group visits to the apiary. These will not include hive inspections and are being coordinated by David Capon (booking) and Eric Sortwell (hosting). We also had to cancel our grand opening, but hope to hold this when the restrictions allow.

Our introductory course was cancelled but those who enrolled have been offered places next year. We may need to reconsider how we deliver the course if, as we expect, social distances will still be needed at that time.

A small number of new beekeepers from this years introductory course, and brand new members to the club have got bees this year. In order to support these people, while we don't have the apiary available, we set up a small WhatsApp group with a handful of experienced members. This has enabled questions to be asked and answered nice and quickly. We have had discussions on disease, brood pattern and swarming (of course) amongst other things.

While it is not ideal, it has provided some support during these times.

We also had to cancel our programme for this year, but we hope to roll many of the meetings over to next year, possibly holding them via Zoom. The committee met by Zoom recently and it worked well. If you have any thoughts or ideas on this do get in touch.

The branch has offered to support anyone affected by COVID-19, e.g. sheltering, self-isolating or infected with the virus, to manage their hives. If you need help, please email David Capon, or put a message on Facebook.

Uncertainty around the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic into 2021 means that the committee is considering ways we can get back to business as usual.

Beekeeping training and development survey

Although we arrange a lively and diverse programme of talks, educational events and demonstrations every year, we are keen to find out if these meet your specific needs

To this end we have developed a questionnaire seeking your opinions and feedback. Responses are largely tick boxes, but there are text boxes for you to share thoughts and suggestions if you wish.

Results will be fed back to members in the next newsletter and will help to inform our future programme of events and development opportunities. To complete the questionnaire click the link in the email sent with this newsletter or click here:

<https://forms.gle/kTrFmCKbxpr8rkNA8>

Deadline 31st July.

BuzzZoom – 21st July – Rob Francis

Over the last two months we have been trialing the use of Zoom to bring together North Somerset members to discuss and consider their beekeeping problems. The sessions have been informal and designed for the easy

exchange of ideas about the variety of ways of dealing with the management of bees in the current situation. Starting at 7.30pm they usually last about an hour and a quarter. Members are invited to register interest in attending prior to the meeting. Once this interest has been declared they are put onto a list and invited to join each session and given the pass code that gives access to each session.

The next BuzzZoom takes place on Tuesday 21st July when we will be looking at winter preparations, together with an update on the Asian Hornet in the West of England.

If you would like to participate in one of these sessions and placed on the circulation list then just let Rob Francis know at robfrancishere@gmail.com. If you are already on the list, there's no need to contact Rob again.

These sessions have demonstrated the possibilities for using online technology to bring members together and Rob, as Avon's Education Officer, has ideas for beekeepers across Avon BKA getting together to study the BBKA Modules. He says, "Watch this space".

Zoom lecture – 30th July 7pm – Dr Jamie Ellis

Dr. Jamie Ellis, who spoke at the Spring Day School a few years ago kindly offered to do a Zoom talk for us on Thursday July 30th at 7pm.

A year in the life of a honey bee colony – Honey bees live in perennial colonies. One result of this is that they have to survive yearly fluctuations in temperature, rainfall, forage availability, stressors, etc. Survival and reproduction are the ultimate goals of any organism and honey bee colonies are no different. In this lecture, Dr. Ellis will discuss the yearly lifecycle of a honey bee colony and what it does to survive given the ever-changing conditions it faces.

To find out more about Jamie, visit his website at: <http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/people-directory/jamie-ellis/>

Update on Asian Hornet – Fran Frappell

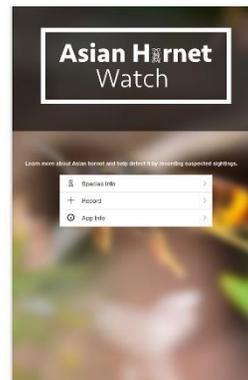
In the spring, a few members agreed to set up Asian hornet monitoring stations in their gardens. As temperatures start to pick up over wintered queens begin to emerge and feed

ready to start building their primary nest to produce their first workers. As soon as the nest is started there is less chance of coming across one, so monitoring was halted. It takes around 50 days for the first workers to emerge at this point unless it's easy to expand the primary nest they will begin building a larger secondary nest; these have the potential to become very large, 1 m tall and 80cm wide.



During June and July, the hornets will feed on sugar-rich liquid to sustain themselves and they start to gather protein to feed the larvae. In August they are likely to target an apiary near their nest site. The nests can be in trees or on man-made structures, they even appear in hedges so keep your eyes peeled.¹

We are working alongside other associations in the South West to share knowledge and experience. Soon we will hopefully be able to roll out the next round of monitoring, but we are trying to work out the best way to go about this without using traps that kill our native insects by accident. If nests are found and destroyed before they begin to produce mature adults, in late September and early October, we can keep them from gaining a foothold. Together we can look after not only our honey bees but so many other native insects already struggling to survive.



Make sure you know how to recognise an Asian Hornet, download the Asian Hornet Watch app. You can visit www.ahat.org.uk for further information. Please report any potential sightings.

Gift Aid Declaration– Heather Pitch

Please notify me (heather@pitch.plus.com) if you:

- want to cancel this declaration
- change your name or home address
- no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

¹ Image copyright Jean Haxaire

If your tax status changes during the year and you are now able to help us with Gift Aid, please complete the Gift Aid Declaration form on our website: https://www.northsomerseetbeekkeepers.org/uploads/1/2/3/4/123455751/gift_aid_declaration_ns_-_2020.pdf and email it to the Membership Secretary at the above address.

Additional BDI

Bee Disease Insurance is a variable fee based on the number of hives you keep, including nucs. During the active beekeeping season, you may increase the number of colonies beyond your current cover. Insurance for up to 3 colonies is included in your annual subscription. The following table outlines the extra you may need to pay:

| No of Hives | Extra BDI |
|-------------|-----------|
| 0-3 | £0.00 |
| 4-5 | £2.00 |
| 6-10 | £5.25 |
| 11-15 | £7.75 |
| 16-20 | £9.50 |
| 21-25 | £11.10 |
| 26-30 | £13.60 |
| 31-35 | £16.10 |
| 36-39 | £18.10 |

Details of your current coverage are included on page 2 of your Membership Certificate. If you would like to pay for extra BDI, please email heather@pitch.plus.com and make the necessary online bank transfer.

Have we got your name correct?

Some members have said that the emails they receive via the eR2 system do not use their preferred forename. If you wish to change your name, e.g. use an abbreviated version, please contact Heather and she can change your details.

Apiary update – Eric Sortwell

This year so far at the apiary we have not been able to welcome our new beekeepers for the Sunday training sessions; which has been a real disappointment to both them and the apiary team, especially as we are now on our new apiary site at Langford. 🐝🐝



During this time we have been working hard to improve the club hives and the health and quality of our bees with shook swarms, Bailey Frame changes, combining weak

colonies, ensuring a good mix of hive types National, Deep National, Commercial, WBC, and we have even got our Bar Hive back in use. 🐝🐝🐝

All of this has been achieved with the hard work and dedication of a small team of club members: Eric, Annabel, Jodi, Fran and not forgetting the grass cutting and strimming team: John, Richard and Mike.



Looking forward to the time things return to normal and we can all meet up at the Apiary to enjoy our bees. There is nothing more enjoyable than a group of Beekeepers talking and enjoying the bees. 🐝🐝🐝🐝

All work carried out at the Apiary has been within government guidelines concerning social distancing and other current rules. Hope to see you soon but who knows?

Vacancy on committee – Education Coordinator

We are still looking for a member to act as Education Coordinator. If you would like further information, please contact Annabel Lewis at: busybee6@virginmedia.com

Experience with Demarees – Tony Slater

The following describes the results of a small experiment Sandra and I have conducted, which demonstrates the importance of genetics in the temperament and behaviour of our bees.

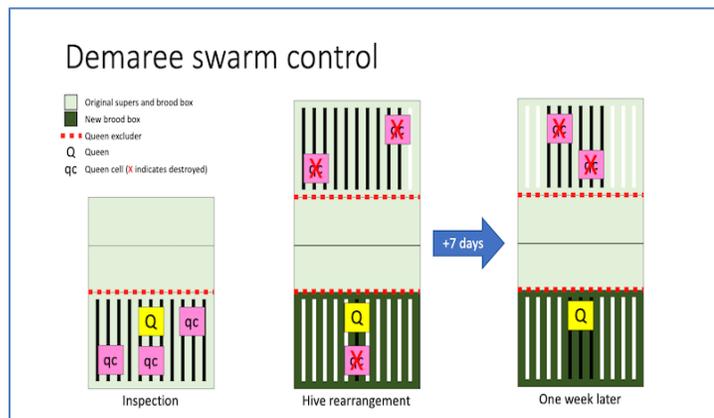
We had six colonies last year but did Demarees on two “rival” ones, which stand next to each other in our garden

apiary. One was the home-reared daughter colony of a black queen we bought in 2018; the other is a colony of a Buckfast queen we bought last year. Therefore, they were very different genetically. Both were strong colonies and healthy and produced a honey surplus last year, the Buckfast's being the larger. The black bees were, however, always noticeably, and ominously as things turned out, more defensive, and swarmy. We were never able to find the black queen and just put up with the bad temper.

Demaree swarm control last year

Last year Sandra and I had good success in preventing swarming from either colony by carrying out Demaree manipulation on each of them. George Demaree published this method of swarm control in the American Bee Journal in 1892. It is supposed to prevent swarming without increasing the number of colonies and without seriously interrupting honey production. It also uses less kit, as all you need is another temporary brood box.

A recent BBKA News outlined how to do it in. But here are the basics:



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Three weeks later, the old brood in the top box has emerged and so it can be removed. The swarming urge is supposed to have gone. The frames in the new brood box can be drawn comb or new foundation. If the latter, this procedure is also in effect a Bailey comb change.

You can see with the above arrangement that as the most of the brood is placed in the top position, above a queen excluder, this traps the emerging drones which can kill

themselves trying to get through the QE. You can avoid this by inserting an eke, above the QE, with a simple swivel entrance which you can open from time to time to let the drones escape.

It is desirable to find the queen when doing swarm control manipulations but with a Demaree it is not essential. Last year we could never find the black queen. You can still do a Demaree, though. You remove the frames containing the brood that you want to separate from the queen and place it in the extra brood box. Shake and brush off all bees as you do this into the original box. Then assemble the Demaree with the new box containing the brood at the top. Because you have shaken and brushed off all the bees into the lower box, you know the queen is there, where you want her; she cannot be anywhere else. Once the structure is assembled the nurse bees make their way up to the top box to look after the brood.

We found one major disadvantage last year. Both colonies carried on producing a lot of honey, but a great deal of it was stored in brood comb in the top box rather than in the supers. This made the top boxes (12 x 14 nationals) very heavy and difficult to handle. We put one or two of the frames filled with honey back in the bottom brood boxes when the structures were dismantled and extracted honey from one of them manually and bottled it. (I seem to remember the brood frame honey doing quite well in one of the honey shows.) We stored the remainder after treating with them with Certan to deter wax moth and fed the honey back to the bees as and when needed.

This year

For those reasons, this year we decided to reverse the structure and put the queen at the top and the brood as the bottom. This would allow the drones to escape naturally and, we hoped might lessen the amount of honey in the top brood boxes. We thought it would be as effective and were gratified to see in the BBKA article that it is an accepted method, although one used less frequently.



This year, both colonies had produced swarm cells by the time we carried out the Demarees, and both colonies were again strong and storing honey already.

However, after we had carried out the Demaree procedures, and it came to dismantling them and removing the second box, we found that

both colonies were already producing a second wave of queen cells. Both queens had laid extremely prolifically in their new frames, particularly the Buckfasts. We therefore decided to do the Demarees again and did so by removing the queen and putting in her back in the original box which was now empty of brood.

By now we had three supers on the Buckfasts and one on the black bees; the honey stored in the brood frames was greatly reduced compared with last year and so we judged the amended method (with the queen on the top) to be more successful.

Tragic postscript

While we were carrying out the Demarees this year, we again noticed the difference in temperament between the Buckfast, which were relatively calm, and the black bees which were becoming increasingly aggressive. Defensive wasn't quite the word as they were now making unprovoked attacks and following us around the garden.

At that time, we fortunately found the black queen and marked her and decided to requeen the colony. After completing the second Demaree, therefore, we removed the black queen and put in a frame of eggs and young brood (cut in accordance with the Miller method) from the Buckfast colony to await development of emergency queen cells.

This turned out to be a serious mistake as the loss of the queen had a catastrophic effect on the black bees' temper. Their aggression level went from "pingy and stingy" to "killy". Single bees roamed the garden constantly trying

to sting us and the dog. If I approached the bees from behind very quietly and slowly, they swarmed out in strength and immediately began to bombard my veil. The colony became impossible to work with; I could not even take the partially filled super off. I became concerned about the neighbours. There was no question of transporting the hive to a "bolt hole".

We therefore decided to kill the entire colony, and sooner rather than later. Late in the evening, I blocked the entrance of the hive and poured a pint of petrol down the feed hole in the crown board (for the avoidance of doubt, this is to gas them, not to incinerate them. You should not have a lit smoker with you!) After the petrol was poured in, there was an unpleasant roaring but it only lasted 5 seconds or so. I left the hive in place until the next day, and then removed it to carry out the not inconsiderable clean-up operation.

Lessons learnt

- Good temperament is the most important quality for a colony
- Requeen defensive colonies and do it early.

Memories of holidays past



Honey bee in Prickly Pear flower Taormina, Sicily.