

Editorial: So far the spring is going well ...the top fruit had a good start so hopefully the bees gained and we might have some damsons and best of all greengages - although I don't want to tempt fate!

Did you manage a day or two at the BBKA Spring Convention at Harper Adams University? It was a great success with the lecture halls brimming over onto special out-feeds. Even if you are new to beekeeping, listening to the great research scientists from all over the world gives you an insight into the wonderful world of the bee. And the practical workshops (some were run by familiar people to our Branch -Tom Salter and Ivor Davis) were encouraging better husbandry.

We are taught how to read our bees—the old beekeepers used to rely on weather and the flowers that were blooming... one of our very own beekeepers (the late Dr Edward Jeffree) did research in Edinburgh many years ago and found that if *ribes* (flowering currant) is in bloom then it is probably a good time for the first inspection - in shirt sleeve weather.

My best wishes for a really good spring build-up.

See you soon




Honorary Associate Member
Prof. Keith Delaplane was awarded the MBE this year and has married recently. We send him our very best wishes and congratulations.



Branch Honey Show 2014.
Amanda Banks won the Jubilee Cup and Annabel Lewis and John Banks won the Novice Shield.



'Sedum. Grown by my Mum for my bees'.
This was the winning photo by Annabel Lewis in the Branch Honey show.

Education co-ordinator, Rob Francis,

writes:

The winter is now past and all that reading and studying about the life and times of the honey bee ends in the real thing – looking after your bees. It's been a busy winter. Members of the branch have studied for Modules 1 (Honey Bee Management) and 3 (Pest, diseases and Poisoning) and took their exam last month. We've had almost 30 prospective beekeepers on the Beginners Course and a further 12 who aim to take the basic assessment this summer.

A number of schools, youth groups and other organisations have approached us requesting talks about bees. To accommodate this increased interest we have added two more tabs under the EDUCATION section of the website. One tab gives information to children and young people who want to find out more about honey bees; the other tab gives information to teachers and group organisers and offers a beekeeper to talk to a class or group.

In the last year we have provided talks across the whole educational spectrum – from children aged 5 in reception classes to groups of students studying to become vets. We have a number of members in the branch who have given these talks but we are aiming to set up a small group of members who would be willing to give talks or demonstrations. If you would be interested in joining this group could you let me know.

We are also aiming to set up a digital library on the website. It's clear that many of our members now use the internet to gain information about the art and science of beekeeping and there are a number of excellent sites out there. One example is <http://www.dave-cushman.net>. There are also many good films on YouTube which provide information. If you've come across any site or a particularly good YouTube demonstration then could you let me know. We'll gather all these together in one place for your use. Also you shouldn't forget the branch library which over the years has had many excellent books donated. In the next couple of months I'll put a list of these books on the website; if there are any you would like to borrow then let me know.

Chair's Letter

I had a rare date with my wife to the cinema to see 'More Than Honey' -thought provoking, but I'm not sure it presented beekeepers in the best light! Some great shots of bees and well worth a viewing. The sunny end of March meant I could do my first inspection, key checks for me other than disease was can I find and mark my queen, how was brood building up and what frames need changing. Well I've only been bee-keeping 3 years and still have problems spotting the queen, I failed this time despite going through twice, she's there as I saw eggs and brood at all stages but could I spot her. The other hive, where she's marked, I spotted her on the first go through. Both hives have survived winter, which is better than last year, although my older queen has only produced about half the brood as the hive with last year's unmarked queen. Hopefully it will be nice next weekend and I can have another go at spotting her.

Next on my agenda is the Avon planning meeting for the Bath and West Show, I know Phil is looking for volunteers to help for a couple of hours, you get free entry and the rest of the day to explore the show, if you are free do volunteer, previous experience not needed just enthusiasm. Contact Phil Clemente nerja51@gmail.com

Happy bee-keeping!

Garry

Members' Corner

We welcome **Paul Hinchcliffe** to our Branch. We hope you will enjoy beekeeping with us.

Congratulations to **Peter Butcher** on passing BBKA Module 2 with credit.

We wish all the members who took BBKA modules in March every success.

ABKA is looking to fill the post of **Deputy Chair** to support succession planning. Any nominations or information contact **Neil Redman** email n.r.redman@btinternet.com

There is a possible apiary site going in the Yatton/Claverham area for someone with 1-3 hives. Further details from **Stephen Brain**.

Also **Stephen** is starting to put together a list of those who want Nat or 14x12 nucs and **Phil I Clemente** is doing likewise for Commercial. Price will be £160 per nuc, hoping for availability June on.

Stephen Brain stephen.brain@limesbb.co.uk

Phil Clemente nerja51@gmail.com

We had a great meeting on April 12. **Andy Wilson** a Trading Standards Officer and husband of our member **Alison**, gave a very thought provoking and interesting talk as it affects us as beekeepers. Proper labelling, jar size and selling real honey (!) are looked at and he advised us that if we sell honey we should register with the local authority that we sell foodstuff. Don't be frightened of these Officers; they would much prefer to help us comply with the regulations rather than prosecute us but they do have right of entry if they are concerned about an infringement of the regs. Keep on their good side!



A Cautionary Reminder!

Paddy Brading

Last Wednesday I went to look at three hives of mine up on the hillside above Cheddar. It was a beautiful afternoon and the first really full inspection. I thought they were an angry lot to be honest, making a lot of noise and rising above the frames in an angry mass, bumping into my hood visor. Two of the queens are red and are the daughters of the yellow queen which I bought with her entourage and hive last May or so.

I finished inspecting them and walked back across the field to my car taking what I thought was all of my equipment with me. At the car, I took off my hood and gloves because it was so hot and looking back at the hives I realised I had left two varroa boards and an eke on the grass.

This is the point where the best laid plans gang aft astry, as they say.....

I then proceeded to walk back to the hives. However, the ladies didn't think much of that manoeuvre and attacked. I began to get stung on my face and then my hands as I tried to swipe them off. Then they followed, would you believe.

Well, I managed to get into the car and drive the short distance home. Just!! I really thought I might not make it, feeling faint and a bit frightened to be honest. To cut a long story short, my son dialled 999 and the cavalry arrived. One first responder on a bike, an ambulance with two ambulance men and then two paramedics trotted up the garden path and into the living room. (Thank goodness for our NHS) No, I had not gone into an anaphylactic shock. Just shocked. My face rapidly looked like a balloon on one side and both hands were puffy and red. The paramedics left after half an hour or so and I'm obviously OK but some beekeepers maybe have not been.

But just how careless and complacent I was I can hardly dare say. I didn't have my mobile with me either and my antihistamine was in the bathroom cupboard.

What can I say?.....

David Welham, President, writes:

We completed another very successful Intro. to Beekeeping course with 30 attendees all enjoying the last session making up frames. The next phase is the visit to the branch apiary on the 6th April where we will meet the "girls". (see David Capon's apiary notes)

I would like to thank all the members of the branch who helped to make the course such a success.

and from Paul Fount - a member of the introductory course:

I think the course is going really well - I'm enjoying the classes and really learning what I signed up for. One outstanding aspect of the course is experiencing how friendly and helpful everyone is - there's a real culture of sharing and support among the tutors - sharing knowledge, ideas, experiences, tips and so on. I realise beekeeping is a serious endeavour and one that throws up constant challenges, but this course is giving me the confidence that I can be a beekeeper and that help is nearby if I need it. Keep up the good work!

Bring on the summer!"

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2014

Mon 5 May

North Somerset Show, Wraxall.

Sat 10 May 2.00pm *Stephen Brain talks about:*

What are the effects of swarm control?
at Tickenham Parish Hall

Wed 28 May - Sat 31 May

Bath & West Show at Shepton Mallet

Sat 7 June, 8 June 10 am

Skep Making with Paul Fitzsimons

Efi: please contact John Banks 01275 855685

Ja.banks1@btinternet.com

Avon Beekeepers' Association SPRING DAY SCHOOL 2014

Saturday 26 April 2014 10am—5.00pm

Old School Room, Chew Magna BS40 8SH

Celia Davis:

- ◇ **Nuc It!** A Talk In praise of the nucleus hive.
- ◇ **Mr Bee** All about the drone and how he affects the hive.

Glyn Davis:

- ◇ **The essential mating process of the Honey bee.**
- ◇ **Devon's 2012 investigation into Drone laying Queens.**

All members welcome— no charge.

FFI: <http://www.abka.org.uk/>

In the Apiary.....

David Capon (Apiary Manager) djcapon@gmail.com 07551994848

I've said it before, but.....What a difference a year makes. This time last year we were just coming out of one of the coldest late springs I can remember; now here we are with fields of rape in full flower, brood boxes bursting with brood and even queen cells. It just goes to show you can never do beekeeping by the date on the calendar. I'm pleased to report that all the club hives in the apiary have come through the winter, especially pleasing as a couple of them were very small and I half expected to lose them.

We have invested in some rubber matting to make safe standing areas behind the hives. These were put to the test

last Sunday when we had our first beginner's session. Having enjoyed good weather for some time it was typical that on the day it was cloudy and overcast, and started raining just as we were assembling at Brockley. However the rain eased and we were able to give the beginners their first feel inside a hive. I think they all survived and hopefully will be back for more! The mats certainly saved the grass from getting chewed up in the very first session. These photos are of a week later when we had another session for the new members.

If the weather stays warm now is a good time to replace old comb, we are going to demonstrate both a shook swarm and a Bailey frame change at the apiary in the next few weeks. It is also a good idea to give your brood frames a thorough inspection to check for disease; you will need to shake all the bees off each frame to do this properly.

Oh, and be on the lookout for queen cells.

David



Occupational Hazard 28 March 2014

Along with others, I was asked to attend the last session of the 'Beginners Bee Keeping Course', I wasn't quite sure what the format would be but upon arriving I was surprised at the large number of people building souvenir frames. I wondered around, bemused by the range of skill. It took me back to my childhood and being instructed by my grandfather after extraction upon how to make up and repair mountains of frames; I was always keen to thread the wire and embed it into the wax with a tool that was kept hot in a pan of water. Frame making is one of those tasks that has to be done; I find it rather relaxing, quietly make up a batch but I digress. Whilst moving from bench to bench I chatted to a few people about frames and eventually someone asked questions about bee keeping; one of the questions was how often I got stung. "Twice in the last five or six years" was my reply. Thinking back, this was untrue. The answer should have been three times! I should have remembered, after all, the point (see what I did there) of a sting is to make us remember; associate pain with the evil that we have committed.

If there is one thing that we bee keepers know about bees it's that they have hot backsides! Some bee keepers seem to attract these rear ends like magnets while others take no precautions and never get stung. Maybe the one-piece bee suits are to blame? Do they promote a false sense of security that leads to poor technique? You will often hear me say to those unfamiliar with the apiary that your movements should be smooth and fluid, being suited-up makes gentleness less important, the odd knock or fumble something to be ignored.

So, let's examine those three stings:

I was minding my own business at the back of the apiary checking some roses when a returning bee, which was using the correct landing procedures, hit an unexpected object, my face! Bees return to the hive on autopilot until the last few moments, losing height rapidly and so flying quite fast, probably already thinking about unloading cargo and certainly not about moving scenery. She became trapped between me and my glasses. Before I could remove the glasses and rescue her, those hot engines had made contact with my face.

Yes, my fault entirely, I hadn't noticed the flight path.

Some say "lazy", I say "down with the kids" but unless running, I rarely do up my trainers. This occasion was a swarm collection; one of those itinerant bees had found its way between my loose shoe and thin sock. She wanted to be close, I squeezed, bang! Back off mister! My fault! The irony was that my bee box contains a pair of thick woolly socks.

While working "the defenders of the faith" with my son (more about him later). I had given him the good quality jacket, knowing that smoke and good technique alone would not protect us against their zeal. I wore the super-thin Chinese beauty that I keep in the car as a spare for observers. One of their lance carriers had landed in the crook of my arm, I didn't notice her and flexed those big guns. Bang! She drove the lance home! My fault again.

Are you seeing a pattern emerging?

I often keep bees in the garden, as did my father and grandfather with very little if any additional stings (it's my belief that most people stung by "bees" are actually stung by wasps). My wife and mother (these are not one and the same by the way, just the fault of the English language) would occasionally get stung, not from defensive bees, but when handling unseen bees that have been resting on the washing. They learn to become observant.

Until recently, when working at a school, I worked the bees with little protection; usually a very old veil made by my father that tucked into a jacket or secured with tapes around the chest, sometimes I would also wear gloves with home-made gauntlets. But sometimes, nothing at all. I now own an all-in-one suit that one needs to be naked in, or die of heat exhaustion! So it's me, running shorts and the suit. I now dare you not to think of that every time you see someone suited up. Mahahahaha!

My son, usually referred to as Boy or TYM by some (the young master), aka Robert doesn't have any bees of his own, but is always interested in mine, and it wouldn't be uncommon to come home to find Boy in the garden, in shorts and flip-flops going through a hive. That is until one fateful day last year, well, two days to be fair.

I'd gone through one hive and wanted to change the stand of another, so called Boy over, and explained the procedure. He was modelling the Chinese special, I wore the jacket – too hot for the all-in-one. All good! We both lifted, and a pool of water on the roof dribbled onto his hand, startled he dropped his side the two inches. This was the day that the 'defenders of the faith' [DotF] showed their hand, Bang! Boy was promptly stung on the head through the veil! and we were surrounded (quite rightly) by a cloud of angry bees for the rest of the session. A few days later and I'm going through the DotF hive when Boy emerges from texting in the car to tell me something. I am being subjected to what has now become the standard mode of operation for this hive, I'm being given the high frequency loudspeaker treatment with gunships circling and swooping into where my mouth should be! It's like 'nam! You don't know, you weren't there man! I see him approach from the corner of my eye "Put a veil on, they're not very happy". I rarely give the same advice twice in the same breath, and Boy is still approaching and trying to tell me something. "really, put a veil on or stay by the car!". I never did find out what he wanted. Bang, one of the gunships got a direct hit on the lip and he was chased off! Boy wears a veil now and I will be having very strong diplomatic talks with their queen shortly. I feel a black ops operation is in order, I shall be backing a dictator of my own choice.

As you see, most if not all bee stings are due to incompetence. So, what should we do to mitigate against stings to ourselves and bystanders?

Know your bees.

Bystanders should be either well protected or out of harms way. They should understand what you are doing and should know how to react when near bees.

If you need to smoke a colony, give time for the smoke to take effect (I try to use as little smoke as possible but usually have a smoker lit). DotF get smoke!

Bee respectful! Smooth and fluid. Be gentle in the apiary, imagine yourself a Shaolin master, every movement has purpose. The bees should not be flying at your hands and stinging your gloves at every move. Treat the colony as a single organism and every bee as an individual.

Be prepared! Understand why you are working the colony and what you expect to achieve. Have equipment to hand.

Work quickly, don't have the hive open for too long.

Be observant. Trapped bees sting! Back of knees and crooks of arms are potential hazard areas.

Clothing. Bees walk up hill! This is as certain as taxes and death. Tuck trousers into socks, Shirts into trousers! Don't wear skirts, that goes for the women too. It is rewarding to work the bees without gloves and veil, but get to know them first.

Obvious but, no arm waving or blowing. Why do bees home-in on your mouth and throat area? They don't swat up on human physiology, but they do follow carbon dioxide plumes. Standing still and holding your breath is very effective.

A bee in the hair is most effectively dealt with by swatting hard. Trying to untangle it will usually result in stung fingers or scalp,

Unsuit way from the bees. And check for bees on your clothing! When I work with children, before removing gloves and veils, we do the "dance of the veils" kids work in pairs, one, arms out, does a twirl while the other checks. Then a second twirl with the bottom of the netting lifted. When everyone is clear they can remove the kit. Simple, safe, fun.

Here's to a stingless season

Have fun
Adrian Wells