

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER JUNE 2021

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Welcome Back to our Apiaries



Barrwood: After the coldest, driest April and coldest, wettest May for decades, as well as the convoluted health guidance, Barrwood is back in action! Our first meeting was on the afternoon of Tuesday May 25th, and although there was still a cool wind and it was muddy underfoot we had a good turnout of members.

We have been making some improvements at Barrwood and have added a sturdy work bench and some folding chairs. The equipment in the shed has also been sorted, repaired and stacked. Huge thanks to the apiary team for ensuring everything was in order for the (delayed) start to the season.

Over the winter and early spring, the apiary team has also been monitoring the health of the colonies. Several had started to show signs of swarming, so we have already split these into nucs. One of the colonies has been earmarked for queen rearing, so members can see how this develops over the next few weeks.

It was really interesting to see how strong the colony in the WBC was compared with the others. Maybe the extra insulation really made a difference during the recent cold weather.

The bees are bringing in pollen and nectar, but there is very little in the way of honey production yet. The adjacent farmland is planted with cereal crops this year, so the bees will be foraging on the woodland plants. The woodland has not been heavily managed, so there are plenty of brambles, nettles and so on, which are starting to grow with the recent rain. The hawthorn has flowered very well this year.

Liz Birchenough, Membership Secretary and Treasurer

Hilbert Road: The first of the Hilbert Road Apiary meetings was also taking place. More details in next month's newsletter.

Three Swarms for the Price of One



If you look carefully at this picture you will see the main lozenge shaped swarm hanging on a bamboo branch just above the pond, with two casts vertically above, at the top of the picture.

Earlier I had provided Julian Brewer with a swarm I had caught from a Plaxtol garden that evening, which we housed in his new National Hive. Two days later he rang me to say he had three swarms in his bamboo, which he thought had come from a feral colony in a tree hollow, and sent me this picture.

As we were discussing the possibilities, his neighbour, Bob Blair, who also keeps bees, had the inspirational idea of using Julian's large fine mesh fishing nets to collect all three swarms while we were still on the phone.

Julian rang me later to say that they had housed the largest swarm in a nucleus and he was going to let them settle before they contemplated the next stage.

We know buses are renowned for three coming along at once, but three swarms of these sizes, must be some sort of record.

John Farrow, Swarm Co-ordinator

Honeybees in June

June is famous for the gap in nectar production although there is not always a gap. Field beans make a good, strong flavoured honey and this year I am surrounded by them, the only problem is they are barely 10cm high. There is oil seed rape north of Tonbridge and north west of Penshurst; all honey from brassica needs extracting as soon as it is sealed, if any combs are not sealed, hold them horizontally over the opened hive and give a sharp downward jerk, if the honey does not fall out, then extract forthwith.

A few colonies swarmed in early May against the odds. I had two prime swarms. As always, I split the remainder of the colonies into two or three nucs by way of using up the queen cells and preventing casts. Once queens start to lay and show good results consider removing the old queen from the swarm and unite with the nucleus. With many swarms, the bees will replace the old queen within a few weeks. Bait hives are a good way of collecting swarms, to date I have had five empty hives filled by incoming swarms.



(This photo was taken minutes after a swarm landed at a bait hive in Simon and Mary Staffurth's garden towards the end of May.)

There was a great deal of flower during May, yet the weather was so inclement and cold the bees made little headway and failed to spread brood sideways onto empty combs. Now, in June, the bees with congested brood nests will need a frame or two of foundation between the outer brood combs, this will occupy bees of wax building age and more importantly give the queen room to keep up her egg laying. You will now need to add supers for the expanding colony. Observation and interpretation of what you see in the colony is vital if you wish to prevent swarming, which is the natural development of colony expansion.

Winter losses and the survival of colonies have been varied due to the weather. It appears the jet stream is a main reason, viewed on the globe it has run lower down giving more, or less, rainfall with constant low temperatures at night and few really warm days.

Contrary to some theories of viruses causing this winter's losses, my theory from practical examinations of my own losses is: two colonies due to *Nosema apis*, the remainder of overwintering bees lives have expired before sufficient young bees have been bred, leading to a slower than normal build-up during February, March and April.

Conversely, the available spring flowers have been unusually prolific especially on trees. I planted four types of Acer 35 years ago as saplings, now 60 feet high, a Tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) several horse chestnuts (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) several sweet chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) different hollies, two types of elderberry various pears, cherries and other prunus as well as soft fruit. All these should supply copious amounts of nectar.

The hives that performed the best were Dadants, although this year I lost two colonies in Dadant polystyrene hives, three colonies in Langstroth polystyrene hives and a further four in six-frame nucleus polystyrene hives. All left plenty of stores. Losses occurred during March, a renowned month for colony losses. I have been sterilising all defunct hives with 80% acetic acid.

I hope to be producing my own foundation within the next fortnight.

Peter Hutton, Branch President

School for Bees

Swarm collecting can be easy or challenging. This group of pictures shows a large swarm that started high up in a tree on the edge of Russell House School tennis court and then dropped down adjacent to the tennis court fence. Obviously the bees looked at the sign, proving they can read!



Having stopped here at about 5 pm on a weekday the headmaster Craig McCarthy rang me asking if I could remove the swarm before school the next day. When I arrived half an hour later the bees had climbed up off the pavement and entangled themselves into the wire fencing.

So, what to do? I decided to leave my skep propped up against the fence trusting the bees to climb up with the queen into the darkness and comfort of my skep, hopefully overnight.

I arrived after 9am the next day when all the dropping off by parents had finished and found that the weight of bees in the skep had caused it to slide down the fencing, leaving about a quarter of the bees outside. So, I propped up the skep under my trusty small plastic flower pot and asked the school to ring me when they were all inside. I returned at 10.30 am and safely took all the bees away.

The headmaster was so enthralled with the whole event he sent me all these pictures which together with some movies was going to possible enthrall his pupils later in the day.

John Farrow, Swarm Co-ordinator

National Equipment for Sale

1 brood box, 7 supers, 2 roofs, 41 Freeman & Harding 8oz new jars with lids, queen excluders, floors etc.

Roofs - £30 each; supers/brood box - £20 each; box of Jars - £12; queen excluder - £5.

Contact: Katharine Coleman at kscoleman@hotmail.co.uk or 01732 838702.

Diary Dates

Barrwood Apiary:	Tuesday 8 June at 3pm
	Saturday 19 June at 2pm
Hilbert Road Apiary:	Monday 7 June at 11am
	Monday 21 June at 11am

Training Courses

The BBKA is offering training courses at Stoneleigh will this summer 2021. These include queen rearing and husbandry. For more details go to the BBKA webshop: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/shop/department/training-courses>

Go to our website for more on swarm collecting as well as all the latest beekeeping news: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>

Send pictures or items for the newsletter to marystaffurth@yahoo.com