

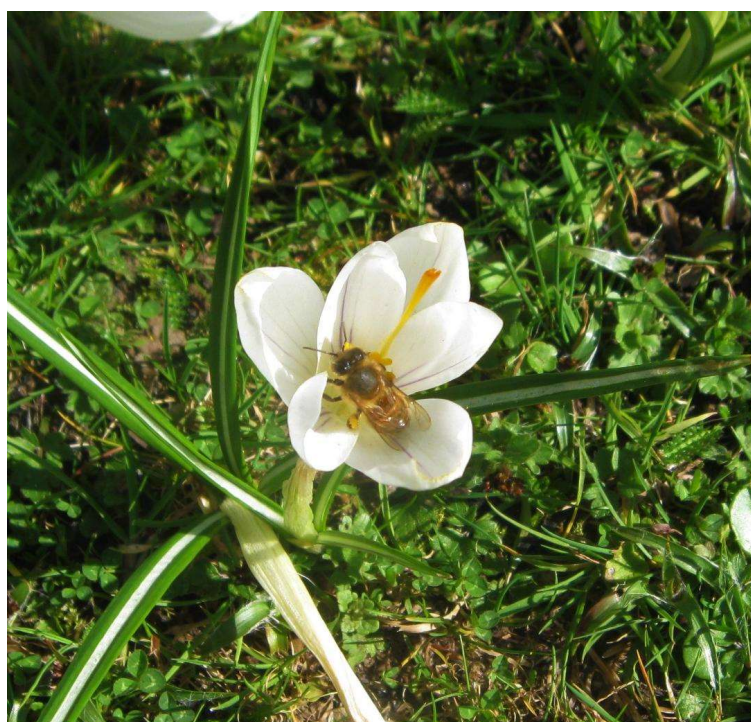
**SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS
BEEKEEPERS
BRANCH NEWSLETTER
FEBRUARY 2022**

Editor: Mary Staffurth
Tel: 01732 462931 / Email: marystaffurth@yahoo.com
Branch website: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>



Musings from the Chair

At our Zoom meeting this month Roger Patterson will give a talk entitled ‘The coming season; are you prepared?’ Of course, as we all are, we have no need to listen! If only that were true. Every year, I seem to get caught out when, after a seemingly endless wait for the long drawn-out winter to come to an end, the new season suddenly leaps into life and everything happens within a few short months. The next thing I know I’m trying to prepare the bees for winter again.



At last, Spring is here

Things may appear quiet in the apiary but deep inside there is much activity. Somehow the queen can detect the lengthening day, and her egg-laying rate will gradually increase. This requires the colony to keep the core temperature high, so the bees consume their stores far more rapidly. There is little the beekeeper can do but, if you keep a block of fondant on top of the crown board, you can replenish this if need be. Some beekeepers place the fondant directly on top of the frames, which makes it more accessible to the bees, but this cannot be replaced without causing disturbance and letting out a lot of heat: swings and roundabouts. Like so much in beekeeping, there is no definitive answer.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman

This is the winning picture from our branch honey show last September, entered by Cliff and Pauline Hayward.

The View from the Apiary

Colonies are now brood-rearing and looking for fresh pollen. They have been collecting pollen from the hazel catkins during the warmest part of the day, working those directly over my hives. Snowdrops and crocus were just beginning to flower towards the end of January. Along the farm tracks and under the hedge rows we have hundreds of snowdrops, crocus and daffodils. In our hedgerows we have hazel for the dormice, hawthorn, blackthorn and holly all providing nectar and producing berries for the wildlife. We cut the hedges back on a four year cycle, leaving a few overhanging the hives both for the catkins and for emerging swarms to hang on.

We planted trees suitable for nectar production more than forty years ago. There are four types of Acer, which yield copious amounts of nectar and flower in progression. The pussy willow grow like weeds and cherry, walnuts, plums apples and horse chestnuts also contribute to honey production. Later in summer our sweet chestnuts, along with the mass of brambles, provide the main honey flow. My out-apiaries are sited in view of lime trees (Tilia). These sources all give distinctive flavours to honey.

Between February and the end of March is the period when many colonies starve due to over-fast expansion of brood nests and bad weather preventing bees from flying. The breed of bee also has a bearing and those imported from hotter climes are most at risk.

I am researching the different types of hives in use by our newer beekeepers, particularly the flow hive, any type of horizontal long hive such as top bar hives: Beehaus, Warré hive, Sun hive etc. My advice to new beekeepers is to sign up for a beginners course and attend as many practical meetings as possible.

Peter Hutton

Preparing for the Spring

This is a good time to check you have frames and foundation ready for the spring. John Hendrie has some stock available, you can contact him on bibba26@talktalk.net to place an order.

The Bees Abroad Story

*At our first Zoom meeting of the year Richard and Jane Ridler spoke about Bees Abroad
Liz Birchenough reports*

Bees Abroad is a charity working with subsistence farmers in Africa, providing training and support to local communities to enable them to keep bees partly to support pollination of their crops but also to provide a much-needed additional income stream from the sale of honey and wax products. Richard and Jane have been actively involved with Bees Abroad for many years, as well as keeping their own bees at home in Essex. Jane is currently Chair of Essex BKA.

The case study presented was based in western Uganda, very close to the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, and only a few miles north of the equator. The area is quite mountainous and forms part of the Great Rift Valley. The climate is quite lush, with two wet and two dry seasons per year. Most of the crops are from insect-pollinated trees such as mango, guava, avocado and coffee, which provide continuous forage for the bees.

The overarching principle is that the projects must be sustainable and tailored to local conditions. This means that it is essential to work with local partners and community leaders. There are currently 35 live projects spread over eight countries. The hives, tools and bee suits are all made locally, and all the bees are sourced from local swarms. A household will usually start with three hives, with two more to follow. The time from initiation to full independent production is typically three to four years.

The local bee is *Apis Mellifera Scutella*, which is smaller than our bees, and forms smaller colonies. The preferred hive type is a top bar hive with the bee space adjusted to suit the bee body size. Since all the hive parts are produced locally, the design has to be simple and efficient with no imported parts. The hives need to be kept cool by locating under trees. The beekeeping techniques required are very different to the UK. The production of honey is continuous throughout the year. There is almost no use of agricultural pesticides, so the honey can be described as organic. The bees have a tendency to swarm and abscond, so it is common that not all the hives will be occupied continuously, but the bees come back at a later date and re-occupy the hives. In order not to trigger the bees to abscond, local beekeepers do not inspect in the same way as in the UK with framed hives. Also, the comb made is much more fragile than we are used to with framed hives, so inspections are often done by external observation.

The honey crop is about 10kg per hive per year, which is sold locally. It is normally liquid, due to the temperatures, and generally dark in colour with an intense flavour. It is sold as a health product, not a food product, so it commands a good price. The income can be sufficient to provide much-needed additional health care and education for families. For more information go to: <https://beesabroad.org.uk/>

Colonies and Hives For Sale

One of our members is retiring from beekeeping, so he is offering two live colonies, plus a long hive and three nationals for sale. If you are interested, please contact Grant on 07887 543179 or email grantscandling@hotmail.com

Beekeeping Course

A reminder that I am running a Zoom beekeeping course, starting at 7.30pm on Tuesday 15 February for seven weeks (*writes Branch Chairman Cliff Hayward*). It is aimed at novice beekeepers or those, as yet, without bees and is intended to try to give an understanding of bees and their needs. The aim is to help people make a more informed judgement about the various, sometimes conflicting, methods of keeping bees. This will be a small, informal series to give everyone a chance to raise their own questions. If you are interested or would like further details please e-mail me: pbhayward9@hotmail.com

There are a lot of Zoom meetings currently. Well worth a listen are Ulster Beekeepers winter webinar series each Wednesday. They seem to be getting about 500 people listening in from all over the world, such is the power of Zoom.

Why Varroa Control Matters

Peter Hutton is also a fan of the Ulster Beekeepers Association webinars and tuned in to one on viruses

The Zoom lecture by Professor Robert Paxton entitled: 'Viruses Past, Present and Future' was so very interesting and enlightening. It gave an insight into how the viruses particular to colony collapse have changed and which ones have become more dominant as time has passed. Robert referred to various work by other researchers as well as his students at the Martin Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg, Germany.

Deformed wing virus (DWF) and black queen cell virus were of particular interest as the main causes of winter colony losses. DWF is a major cause and there are currently two types: A and B. From the evidence shown, over a time period of several years DWF-B has ousted DWF-A and is the major killer of autumn-bred bees. If the colony lost the infected bees and bred sufficient workers late on, then both viruses were lost with the infected dead bees.

Transference of the virus between bees is, as with most viruses, caused by the Varroa mite so it is imperative to monitor and reduce the Varroa population. DWF-B is further propagated by contact during food transference between infected and non-infected bees since this was shown clearly in an experiment in caged bees. Honey bees were found to contaminate both bumble bees and some solitary bees when foraging the same flowers. This is described as spillover. In conclusion, Varroa control must be effective, otherwise colony losses will increase dramatically.

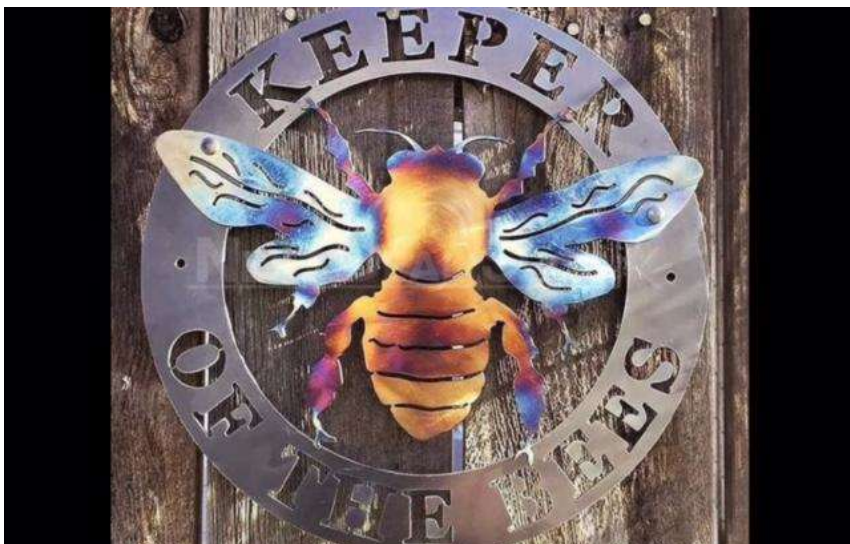
Dates for Your Diary

Wednesday 9 February at 7.30pm on Zoom - Roger Patterson: The coming season – Are you prepared?

Tuesday 15 February at 7.30pm on Zoom - Beekeeping course for beginners run by Cliff Hayward.

Sunday 20 February at 11am at Hilbert Road Apiary} Cleaning and preparation of equipment, clearing up
Saturday 26 February at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary} and general gardening.

Sunday 27 February 10am to 4pm at Weald Memorial Hall - Introduction to Beekeeping Day. Booking required. Contact Liz Birchenough: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk



Go to our website for all the latest
beekeeping news:

<http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>

Send pictures or items for the newsletter to

marystaffurth@yahoo.com

Photo by Vic Webb