

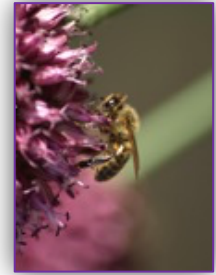
SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2024

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Asian Hornet Update

Tuesday 5th March, 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall

This meeting will set out how we can support the campaign to keep Asian Hornets under control. Until now, Dover Beekeepers have borne the brunt of invasion, but the Asian Hornet is spreading in our direction. Last year, there were a couple of confirmed sightings around the periphery of our branch area. The meeting will set out the KBKA plan for monitoring and observation for emerging foundress queens during the next 2-3 months, followed by monitoring for emerging workers in during the summer and early autumn. We will be issuing rations of Trappit bait and traps. We will also have information leaflets and AH identification cards.

Bring a clean plastic bottle with a screw top (about 200ml) for your Trappit ration. Please let me know if you are attending so that we can be sure we have sufficient supplies: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk
Liz Birchenough

Inside the Hive



At last, the long wait is over. March sees the beginning of resumption of hive inspections. That first inspection of the year is always full of anticipation. Will we find a viable colony? Will there be evidence of egg laying? Or will those few bees that you have been watching at the entrance on those fine days we have had this year prove to be all that is inhabiting the hive? Remember to wait for consistently warm and fine days and don't have the hive open for very long. It will rapidly lose the heat generated by the bees to keep the brood warm and, at this time of the year, there may be few bees to cover the brood. Glass coverboards are a real benefit this early in the season allowing you to see how many frames the bees are covering without having to let all the heat escape.

You are simply trying to establish that you have a queenright colony and that they have sufficient food and space. To establish whether the colony is queenright, simply pull up the frame from the centre of where the colony is and check for unsealed larvae. If there aren't any, it does not necessarily mean you have no queen. Give it a few more weeks and things may look more promising.

Check for stores at the edge of the cluster. They will be using stores rapidly at this time of the year, as there is increasing brood to feed and keep warm. A supplementary feed with syrup is recommended unless your hives are close to gardens with lots of early nectar sources.

Finally, towards the end of the month, it is a good opportunity to remove those old frames at the outer ends of the brood box and replace with new foundation. They may well be showing signs of mould and will be of no use to the bees.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman.

Preparing for the New Season

We will be back in the club apiaries this month with four meetings taking place to prepare for a new beekeeping season. The first session at Barrwood Apiary will be on Saturday March 2 at 2pm. This will be a gardening and general tidy up, so please bring gardening gloves and hand tools. Wear stout footwear as the ground is very wet at the moment. The Hilbert Road Apiary will hold its first session on Sunday March 10 at 10am.

Prize-winning Honey

Tuesday 19th March, 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall

John Chapman is an experienced judge who will explain the process of producing award-winning honey, wax and other items for the annual honey show. Many beekeepers do not know what is required to enter or are disappointed to find that their entries are unsuitable. This is the chance to pick up tips that will improve your prize-winning chances.



Bees in Trees

We were on holiday in Perth, Australia, in February when we noticed a sign on a tree warning of bee activity.

On closer inspection we saw the bees flying in and out of a hole in the tree just above head height.

Mary Staffurth

How to Trap Asian Hornets

At her Asian Hornet Trapping workshop at the beginning of February Vanessa Jones gave her views on the current options available (*writes Liz Birchenough*). She was at pains to emphasise that there is a lot of contrary information available, so it is important to consider the validity of the information before deciding what is best for you.

At this time of year the only Asian Hornets emerging will be over-wintered queens. They can only emerge from nests that were viable from September last year, and there were none in our area. However, it is possible that nests were missed, and it is possible that a queen could have hitch-hiked on a cross channel vehicle. The truth is we have no clues where it would be most effective to monitor at the moment.

Asian Hornets are attracted by smell. Trappit is generally considered the most effective bait, although this will also attract bees, wasps and other pollinators. There are various recipes for DIY cocktails which may not be reliable. It is also unclear how effective spring queen trapping would be, as there is a very small window of opportunity before the queens settle down to the serious business of producing workers.

There are three main classes of trap:

1. Open baited monitoring station. This is a shallow tray with some bait (e.g. Trappit) soaked into a paper towel. When left on the ground if there are insects around they should gather and start to feed within about 10 minutes. This allows any insects to escape unharmed and you simply observe which insects feed on the bait. Should you suspect an Asian Hornet, you can photograph it and submit the picture using the AH app. A wick type monitoring station is also effective. Similarly you can simply wait and watch around any early flowering plants you may have in your garden to see what arrives to feed. This type of trap can be used at most times of year and can be particularly helpful to identify the presence workers in midsummer and to confirm reports made by the general public.

2. The baited monitoring trap. This is a container baited with Trappit or similar, which has an entrance and exit system designed to allow smaller insects such as bees and wasps to escape, and exclude larger insects such as European hornets. There are many types available and it is inevitable that you will get some by-catch. Therefore it is essential that it is correctly placed downwind of your apiary and inspected preferably twice a day to remove any by-catch. Using this type of trap requires care and attention, since if by-catch insects are not released quickly they are not likely to survive. Remember that if you catch an Asian Hornet in this type of trap, you MUST NOT release it. This type of trap can only be used during the early spring, typically mid-February to the end of April.

3. The killing trap. This is an absolute last resort, and should only be considered if the apiary is under attack and there are no other viable defences. At this stage the situation is not serious enough to consider the use of this type of trap.

The overall message is to be methodical and responsible. You need to do as little harm as possible to other insects in the ecosystem. Consider what is going to be best for you and the environment.

Protecting Your Bees

In her final Asian Hornet workshop Vanessa concentrated on how best to manage our apiaries to protect our bees. She was at pains to point out that everyone has different circumstances, so there is no 'one size fits all' solution. Each beekeeper must make their own plan, which need to be an integrated pest management approach, because we cannot overlook the existing problems of varroa, nosema, wasps, wax moth, foul brood and so on.

Once Asian Hornets have identified a target colony they will attack continuously. The bees will attempt to stay inside the hive and, even if the hornets fly away, the bees will be so stressed they will not venture out to forage and will eventually starve. This is called foraging paralysis. Asian Hornets hunt primarily using their sense of smell, so our bees need to be as strong and healthy as possible to start with and we need to minimise anything that could attract the Asian hornets to our apiaries.

In terms of colony strength, make sure varroa and nosema are carefully managed and any weak colonies are united. Make sure they have plenty of stores of their own honey. There are also practical steps you can take. Beekeepers who have experienced Asian Hornet report that single isolated colonies can be particularly vulnerable, grouping colonies together does seem to help. However, there is a downside. Drifting can become a problem, so you may want to consider coloured symbols on the front of your hive to aid orientation. Beekeepers in France have experimented with a range of physical barriers. The electric harp seems quite popular, but it is very expensive, will catch honeybees, and you need to keep fallen insects cleared away regularly. There are also a range of wire guards to place over the entrance, and you can place baited traps in the vicinity of your apiary. One interesting option is to return to solid floors, which bring a number of issues of their own, but there is a suggestion that the open mesh floors disperse hive scents which attract Asian Hornets. Alternatively, you could keep the varroa board in place all year, although it will need careful cleaning. Asian Hornets are known to hide under stands to launch an ambush attack, so using a mesh screen or grass around the legs of your stand may help, or moving to a solid stand such as breeze blocks.

A possible alternative is to move your hives to a new location. This requires careful planning, as finding a suitable location may not be straightforward.

Beekeepers can do a lot to help themselves while working with their bees. Spending a warm summer afternoon pottering around the hives could be inviting trouble. One proposal is that we should undertake routine inspections either early morning or late evening and try minimise the amount of time the roof is off the hive. We also need to be absolutely scrupulous about hygiene, collecting any wax debris, and ensuring there are no spills of honey. Leaving wet supers in the apiary for the bees to clean is not a good idea. The other obvious attractant is sugar syrup so, if possible, we should avoid using it. If there is no option, we need to be scrupulous about avoiding spills.

Asian Hornet predation is at its peak from August to October. Vanessa suggests moving the beekeeping year forward, so taking off honey and varroa treatments are complete by the end of July, minimising the need to open the hive in late summer and autumn. We should also consider keeping the entrance as small as possible, without restricting access for drones or new queens on mating flights.

There is a lot to think about here, but we need to remember that the NBU have decided to keep to an eradication programme this season, which suggests they feel that Asian Hornet has not yet established. So although we all need to remain vigilant and prepare to work differently if things change over the next few years, for the time being there is hope we have a bit of time on our side.

Liz Birchenough

You can join Vanessa Jones on Zoom for her talk: A Closer Look at Asian Hornets on Wednesday 20th March at 7.30pm. The talk is hosted by the National Vegetable Society. To join you need to register at: https://www.nvsuk.org.uk/events/Vanessa_Jones_A_closer_look_at_Asian_Hornets

Apiary Meetings

Saturday 2nd March at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary, Shipbourne.

Sunday 10th March at 10am: Hilbert Road Apiary, Tunbridge Wells.

Saturday 16th March at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary, Shipbourne.

Sunday 24th March at 10am: Hilbert Road Apiary, Tunbridge Wells.

Send photos or articles for the newsletter to: marystaffurth@yahoo.com

Go to our website for all the latest beekeeping news: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>