

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER MAY 2021

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Our two training apiaries at Barrwood and Hilbert Road will open to members again this month, now that Covid restrictions are being eased. The final details are still being discussed. Look out for an email confirming the dates of meetings.

The Apiary in May

I have just heard of three swarms: two taken by their owners and one flown away. Well, May is the month for swarming. In March and April, though, the weather was terrible for so many colonies as night and daytime temperatures were adversely low. Sheltered colonies have expanded normally but so many have expired for various reasons. This year several losses of queens have occurred, many colonies which were flying well earlier and bringing in pollen, a sign of breeding, have dwindled and all of a sudden all the bees have gone or only a handful remain. I believe this is due to the life expectancy of the workers, six weeks, excepting those that develop in autumn and survive into January. As long as workers do not feed larvae using their hypopharyngeal glands, their six-week life does not start. This year in the smaller colonies, due to freezing nights and the odd warm days, new young bees have not developed in sufficient numbers to replace the older, dying bees. During cold days flying bees have not returned for loss of body heat.

If you have any hives now empty of bees but containing pollen and nectar, close the hive for a few days to sterilise the combs with an 80% solution of ethanoic acid (acetic acid). This is available online by the gallon, especially for beekeepers. Put a saucer or small bowl in the top of the hive with a lump of cotton wool to hold an egg-cupful of acid and allow to fumigate the combs for a few days, this will kill Nosema spores. If frames have too much defecation then replace. Remove the bowl after three or four days when the acid has evaporated and open the hive to await the arrival of a swarm.

If you lose a swarm, I suggest that you split the colony into two as you will have plenty of queen cells to divide and the remaining two lots will not have sufficient bees to caste.

Put supers on now with foundation in amongst drawn combs as there is a major nectar flow, ensure the queen has plenty of room to expand the brood nest, removing if necessary outer brood combs full of honey and old pollen to store for adding to nuclei you might make up. Replace with frames of foundation just outside the brood nest.

Best wishes for what might be a difficult season.

Peter Hutton, Branch President

The Branch Honey Show will take place on Saturday 18 September at St John's Church Hall,
20, Foxbush, Hildenborough TN11 9HT.

For Sale



National Hives and various other items are for sale. You can see more details on the website under 'NOTICE BOARD' or click on this link:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Sale-of-2-National-Hives-sds.pdf>

Beekeeper versus Bee

On April 13 the branch held the last planned Zoom meeting of the winter season. Celia Davis presented a very thought-provoking talk, which prompted us to question our actions as beekeepers.

Celia started from the position of how bees behave in the wild. How and why do they survive and thrive without us? She is convinced that strong healthy colonies arise from the right bee in the right place, living in a stable and relaxed environment. Like so many other speakers, Celia believes that importing bees is unwise and unhelpful. She is also sure that we can unintentionally stress our bees. Like most creatures, bees can tolerate a certain level of stress, but continuous and multiple stress factors are damaging. The stress factors she discussed were the kind of thing we all should (or rather should not!) be doing as beekeepers.

Firstly, inspections. Bees do not like being disturbed. Gentle handling is essential, and think carefully. We do need to inspect, but do we really need to take every frame out and give it a good shake every week? Maybe not.

Next, moving hives. This may be necessary, but should be done as little as possible.

Overcrowding and forage. How many hives do you have and how close together are they? We need to consider the amount of forage locally, what is the risk of the transmission of disease and drifting between hives? I had a quick look at Beebase, there are over 200 hives recorded in a 10km square around my apiary. Is there enough forage for them all? Some urban areas, especially London are very densely stocked to a point where there are too many bees in many areas.

Disease. Varroa has been the nemesis of beekeepers for years. It weakens the bees and is a vector for a range of infections. However, the medications themselves are not without side effects. Varroa must be controlled, but with care and discretion.

In summary, Celia was at pains to emphasise she does not consider herself a "natural" beekeeper. She is very aware that she has a responsibility to her neighbours not to allow her bees to swarm and relocate freely, and not to keep aggressive colonies. Her approach is that beekeeping should be undertaken with good stewardship in mind. Are we allowing ourselves to develop tunnel vision about our bees? Maybe we should take a step back and think about the bigger picture.

Liz Birchenough

Quiet Bees at Barrwood

Celia Davis, in her Zoom talk, stated that the beekeeping season had been slow to start this year. She was speaking from an overview across the country, so it is not just the South East.

There was a brief window at the beginning of the month that allowed a quick inspection of the colonies to determine their strength and the amount of stores. It was clear that the queen in colony number one had now developed into a drone layer. When it is warm enough for a full inspection, the queen will be found and (providing there is no sign of disease) the rest of the colony will be united with another.

Then April turned decidedly chilly. A critical time for the colonies, as with the queen now laying at a high rate, stores will be rapidly depleted. I cannot remember the last time I kept fondant on the hives in April.

Fortunately, on the warmer days, a few large cherry trees about 200m away provided both pollen and nectar.



A new arrival to the apiary this year is the Cuckoo flower, growing among the hives. It is the food plant of the Orange-tip butterfly, which, due to such a prolonged spell of cold weather, I have not seen this year. The bees have fared somewhat better, although brood is covering only a few more frames than at the beginning of the month. The colony in the WBC, with its double insulation is certainly the strongest, and a second super was added last week. Perhaps one should not read too much into this as a single colony hardly represents a good study, but there has been quite a bit of correspondence in Beecraft over the winter about hive insulation.

The relative quietness from the colonies has contrasted with the activity of the apiarists. Tim Johnston and I have had the opportunity to completely clear out the overcrowded shed, carry out a stocktake and clean and repair damaged equipment. Tim has replaced several broken panes on the glass quilts, and they now look new. Thanks to Tim's efforts we now have a small number of fully functioning Snelgrove boards instead of the large number of partially broken unusable boards that had been donated. The table top I acquired to replace the one damaged when a tree fell on it last year, has been cleaned and treated. The larger table will prove useful, although we have lost the 'picnic table' seating. So, if anyone has some old garden chairs, surplus to requirements, we could make good use of them at Barrwood.

It will certainly be pleasing to be able to welcome back members to the apiary from mid-May. We will be demonstrating queen rearing. We will also be able to demonstrate the use of the Snelgrove board as well as giving experience to those of you comparatively, or very new to beekeeping.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman

Swarm collection and re-homing

Although April has been unusually cold and dry, some of our bees will inevitably swarm sooner or later. Details and further information about swarm management is on our website, along with the contact details of members who can collect swarms if you cannot do this yourself. There is also a link to swarm collectors based in neighbouring branches. Please remember there may be a charge for collecting and managing swarms, so please check when you make contact.

Click here to visit the swarms page on the website: <https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/swarms/>

Hire of Branch Extractor

I know it is only May, but those of you who have oilseed rape nearby might be thinking about taking off some honey in a month or so. We have two extractors available for hire to branch members. They are both the nine-frame mechanical stainless steel type, and will take National, WBC, Langstroth, Commercial or 14x12 supers. The cost of hiring an extractor is £15 for three days. You will need to arrange collection and return, plus cleaning after use. You will be given instructions.

The extractors are fitted with detachable legs for ease of transport. The dimensions are approx. 55cm diameter, 60cm high (without legs) plus 15 cm for the handle and drive mechanism. They can be moved by one person, but it easier with two.

To reserve use of an extractor, please contact Sarah on stweditor2@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk or 07970 484232

Payments can be made online to the branch account using the same details as for your subs, or by cheque/cash.

Liz Birchenough

Studios Bees



Sarah Rapley was contacted some time ago about two colonies at the front and back of the old Schoolmaster's House in Chelsfield. They were entering under the external wood cladding and building their colonies between the 200mm joists. So, we waited for the warmer weather this April to begin their removal. Sarah started by removing the floorboards underneath the landing passageway carpet. Removing one of the boards revealed the honeycomb and although there appeared to be a good number of bees this turned out to be the smaller of the two colonies. We cut out the entire comb and transferred it to frames and secured it with rubber bands. Having filled 7 frames, we placed these in the bee-vac. Sealing the bee-vac with its roof, we used a Henry vacuum to suck up the remaining bees.

We placed the poly nuc. of the bee-vac outside on the porch roof to attract any returning foraging bees. The bees fanning at the entrance gave us confidence that the queen was inside.



Exposing the colony in the back bedroom was more challenging as we had to cut the floor boards along the first joist. As they were nailed down underneath the skirting board they could only be lifted up part way. So, it was difficult using the bee-vac and we were uncertain whether we had the queen.

But this later picture shows we did!!! *John Farrow*

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Chelsfield-House-Bee-Extraction-1.pdf>

Getting on with the Neighbours at Hilbert Road

My planned programme as apiary manager to improve, maintain and upgrade facilities at Hilbert Road, in parallel with my programme, for husbandry, queen rearing, and training is developing. I have had help firstly from Tania, and now from Huw a new member, with Peter Hutton our President in the background always ready to help with the knowledge of Hilbert Road history and with enormous practical experience.

Huw and I are at the apiary every Monday morning and I have been there many days a week over many months dealing with general maintenance and repairs and bringing old hives and supers back into available use.

I have sold over 40 jars of Hilbert Road honey and very often neighbours stop at the apiary gate and ask to buy our honey.

Vic Webb, Hilbert Road Apiary manager

Out on the Tiles



Huw and I successfully removed colonies of bees from a roof where builders were trying to work. We used a jemmy on the tiles and a hand saw to cut away cross timbers until we were supplied with an electric saw which sped things up.



It became apparent that there were two well established colonies under tiles at either side of the end of the building close to the gable. There was also comb in the roof space from earlier bee colonies. Huw and I successfully removed one colony, which we took to Hilbert Road in a hive. It took us all day until about 7pm. We worked well together, and Huw earned a crash course Masters in bee removal from buildings.

I returned the following day and removed the second colony, which I also took to Hilbert Road and hived although it was not strong and had no brood. The first colony is doing well but I think that the second will need to be married to another colony.

Vic Webb

Website Wonders

Our website has a wealth of material. The latest Kent Beekeepers' Association Newsletter for April 2021 is under NOTICE BOARD. This is the link:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/KBKA-Newsletter-2104.pdf>

There is a link, also under NOTICE BOARD, to join an AGM Zoom meeting for Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. (BDI), of which our branch is a member, on June 4. It will be followed by a talk from Kirsty Stainton on Bee Viruses - Why beekeepers need to know about them

The BBKA's Spring Convention 2021 is available to watch again at: springconvention.bbka.org.uk Catch-up until 31May is included for all who paid to attend. For those who couldn't make it to the live event, £12 secures access to it all until the end of May.

Varroa is now a Reportable Disease

Varroosis is the disease caused by the infestation of Varroa mites species, an ectoparasite of honey bees, it is now an endemic disease in the UK and present in most honey bee colonies. Until 21 April 2021, Varroosis was not a Reportable or Notifiable disease in the UK.

The European Parliament agreed to make Varroosis a Notifiable disease in the EU. Under the powers conferred by Section 1 of the Bees Act 1980 and subsequent orders, the latest being The Bees Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006, the UK government has decided it is in the best interests of the UK to align with EU regulations even though the parasite is endemic in most of the UK. They admit that no formal public consultation has taken place. The reason for this regulation is because there are small parts of the EU and UK that do not currently have Varroosis, such as the Azores, some islands in Denmark, the Isle of Man and possibly some isolated valleys and islands in Scotland.

We are told that making the presence of Varroa mites reportable by beekeepers will provide an opportunity to gather information to inform future policy, strategic decisions on controls of Varroa and reduce its incidence as well as its spread.

In Kent, all hives have Varroa so it is not realistic for beekeepers to report Varroa every time they do a hive inspection so the National Bee Unit have put a statement on BeeBase to enable beekeepers to comply with the law by ticking a box once, and not wasting too much time.

The message on BeeBase is: ***April 2021 - Reporting Varroa***

On 21st April, 2021 an amendment to the Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006 comes into force requiring beekeepers and or officials to report the presence of Varroa in any of the hives that they manage. This amendment will allow England to comply with the Animal Health Law which is necessary for future working relationships with the European Union. Similar arrangements are being made in Wales and Scotland. To make this simple, a tick box will be introduced to BeeBase, the voluntary register for beekeepers managed by the National Bee Unit. This will allow beekeepers and inspectors to report the presence or absence of Varroa. Although Varroa is known to be widespread, it continues to be one of the most serious pests faced by beekeepers. Reporting Varroa will contribute to the overall pest and disease surveillance work of the National Bee Unit and we are grateful for your assistance with this new simple measure.

The NBU have added a tick box to report Varroa for each of your apiaries. This box is already ticked which means you don't need to take any action unless you do not have Varroa in any apiary in which case you log on and untick the box. I don't think there are any published plans to include those beekeepers not using BeeBase.

John Hendrie

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