

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

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*HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR MEMBERS*

**Winter Meetings**

We are holding the January and February meetings on Zoom. The January meeting will be on Wednesday 19th January and the speaker will be Roger Paterson. The title of his talk is: "The coming season, are you prepared?"

Please note that under present circumstances it may be necessary to make a late change to arrangements. The link will be circulated just before the meeting.

From March onwards there will be a monthly meeting at Weald Memorial Hall which will cover a range of topics aimed specifically at developing skills amongst our members.

*Liz Birchenough, Membership Secretary*

**January in the Apiary**

2021 has been a terrible year in many respects. Many prospective or newish bee keepers never got started or for various reasons gave up. That is now behind us. We now have a new Hilbert Road Apiary Manager, Sue Knights, whom I hope you will support equally as well as our last, Vic Webb. Indeed I hope more of you will attend and participate in the meetings there.

I think education is important and, as far as I am concerned, the more courses for new beekeepers, the better. I stopped teaching at the Adult Education Centre in Tonbridge after ten years, when I was 70. Hadlow College dispensed with its courses as uneconomical, eight students being the minimum required. I kept two hives on the roof of the AXA Health Insurance Office in Crescent Rd, Tunbridge Wells, and ran two courses for both staff and outside students end to end in the lecture theatre until I was 73, when I properly retired.

Now is the critical stage for your bees. The queen will soon start egg-laying and the relatively mild winter means the bees have been consuming their food faster than is desirable. It is still too cold for the bees to take syrup so candy is the better option. You can make this by boiling up syrup to 110°C, using a jam thermometer to record the temperature. Turn the syrup out onto a cold surface (marble is ideal) and fold in from the outside continually with spatula to prevent the solution solidifying. In the first instance this is longwinded but subsequent boiling can produce candy speedily if you fold in some candy from the previous batch. As you finish the folding-in process add some honey from your own bees for speedy use. Do not use any honey from an unknown source in case it has foulbrood spores. The simpler way is to purchase fondant from a baker but the fondant goes hard as the bees remove the soluble content so must be dampened from time to time.

Again for newer beekeepers, if any of your colonies die out you should obtain advice as to why this has happened. Was it an overload of Varroa mites, paralysis viruses, starvation or even poisoning as happened last year in Pembury? Starvation is simple to see: the bees all have their heads and bodies facing into the empty cells. That may or may not be your fault, wasps may rob out a weaker hive prior to their own demise. I have seen worker wasps attempting to get into hives as late as mid-December. I noted a cluster of bees just inside the entrance waiting to pounce on them.

A failing, old or missing queen is also responsible for winter losses; darker queens are difficult to see. Where colonies have diminished too far to survive it is not advisable to unite them with good colonies for fear of introducing disease. Better to sterilise the combs with acetic acid at 80% and close up the hive until March. A stray swarm is very likely to take possession in late April or early May.

*Peter Hutton*

## Update on Hilbert Rd



The roof of the large shed at Hilbert Rd has now been renewed. The builder found that some of the roof timbers had rotted, so they were replaced at the same time. The shed should now be weather tight for a good long time. The material the builder used was very different to the felt you can get for DIY roof repairs. The adhesive and bonding material were prefixed to the roofing material, so the builders simply used a gas torch to warm the bonding layer to fix it in place. Much simpler than trying to spread mastic.

The red and white tape was there because the builder asked us to mark out a work area to minimise the risk of accidentally disturbing the hives during the work.

*Liz Birchenough*

## Beekeeping Courses

The Branch is planning one or two training events for new beekeepers in late February/early March. The dates have not been fixed yet as we are waiting to see how the Covid situation will affect meetings.

## BBKA Courses

### **BBKA Microscopy Intermediate Weekend – 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February – Cost £175**

The weekend comprises two streams, Beginners and Intermediates. The emphasis for both will be hands-on. For the Beginners, all the necessary microscopes and equipment will be provided by the BBKA. Intermediates will be expected to bring along their own equipment, although we have some available if they are requested.

### **Bee Handling and Management 25-29<sup>th</sup> April – Cost £695.00**

This course is suitable for those beekeepers who have three or more years of experience. It is designed to allow attendees to hone their basic skills and learn new ones, there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss techniques, practice manipulations and gain a fuller understanding of the principles involved in using them. Topics covered will include queen rearing, the uses of a nucleus, swarm control, disease and apiary hygiene, microscopy, handling skills, dealing with aggressive colonies, reading bees, and an opportunity to discuss bee related topics.

Follow the link for more details: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/shop/department/training-courses>

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

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