

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

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**In the Apiary**

*By Peter Hutton*

March is a month when many colonies die out due to lack of sufficient young bees to feed an expanding brood nest, especially with inclement weather such as we have just experienced. You can help by feeding pollen substitutes and some syrup. You can unite small colonies although I tend not to in case one or the other is diseased. Nosema is often a cause of disease at this time of year; it is simple to diagnose and the Branch has several microscopes. The advertised methods of using a mortar and pestle are not helpful as you have to search the debris for the spores. I scrape up a sample of faeces, add a drop of water, stir well and make up a slide. You will then see lots of pollen grains and the Nosema spores. Alternatively, dissect the bee and remove the stomach which will contain spores without all the rubbish of the entire skeleton.



*Summer Days*

For those of you whose colonies have died out for whatever reason this winter, replace the worst combs with foundation. The best combs should be sterilised with acetic acid also known as ethanoic acid at 80%. There are some companies who sell this acid at 80% online. At 100% it is known as glacial acid since it has a high freezing temperature. As with all acids, you will need personal protective equipment, breathing mask for acids, eye protection, elbow length rubber gloves and a rubber apron, common sense and caution. Insert a saucer with cotton wool inside the top of supers and brood boxes, seal all the joints with tape as well as a solid floor, if you have only varroa floors then use a second roof upside down. Open after a week and ventilate. Now set up your hive and wait for a swarm to arrive.

For those of you who did not join the Ulster Beekeepers Webinars there is a chance to watch them this month as they have all been recorded and will be available from mid-March. I recommend the two by Professor Jamie Ellis and the one by Professor Robert Paxton.

*This photo, by Vanessa Jones, won second place in the Branch Honey Show*

**Exploring Pollen**

There is always something in flower no matter what time of year. If anyone is interested in pollen microscopy and/or creating their own pollen slides and would like to work alongside or share experience of creating pollen slides with another please contact Vanessa Jones on 07799 383996 or email:

[vanessajones@btinternet.com](mailto:vanessajones@btinternet.com)

## Musings from the Chair

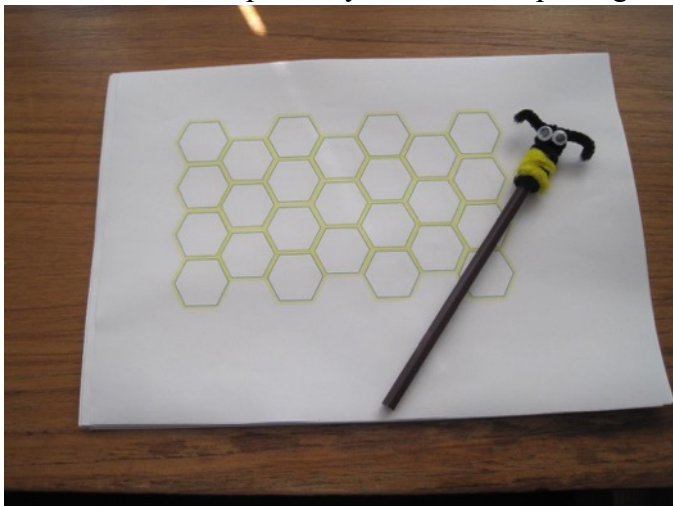
Much has been said recently of an insect apocalypse. Up until February 25 I was wondering where all the bumblebee queens were because I would normally expect to see the first few in January. Fortunately, I counted six the following day, feeding alongside the honeybees on my heathers; all were buff-tailed. The other plants that I introduced into my garden specifically for early season forage were crocus, mahonia and winter honeysuckle. All are beneficial to those queen bumblebees newly emerging from hibernation and desperately in need of food.

It is always nice to see activity from all the hives, although I have not yet witnessed bees returning with large pollen loads - the usual indicator that all is well inside, with a laying queen. However, don't be fooled into thinking you have successfully overwintered your bees. March can see the greatest losses of colonies as, with the queen's laying rate increasing, it becomes more difficult for the workers to keep an expanding brood nest warm. There is a corresponding greater consumption of stores and, if you are not prepared, colonies that seemed to have plenty of stores a week earlier can starve. The block of fondant you gave them for a Christmas present, that they have so far ignored, can be consumed within a very short time. So make sure you have some spare.

*Cliff Hayward, Chairman*

## Inspiring Future Beekeepers

I was invited to visit the 3rd Broadwater Beavers in February to talk about the wonderful world of bees. Beavers are the youngest group in the Scouting family, aged six to eight, and predominantly boys. This was part of a series of topics they have been exploring associated with the natural world around them.



As the audience was so young, the time was divided up with activities. I started by describing my bees, and how they live. I took along some hive parts for the children to see, then we had a go at making pipe-cleaner bees on pencils. Not all the bees looked the same, but the children got the general idea. I then told them amazing facts about bees, such as how many eggs the queen can lay in one day and how much honey one bee can make in her lifetime. To end the event, all the children were given a pre-prepared sheet of paper with printed hexagons to look like large cells, and were encouraged to draw something they wanted to remember from the talk.

*Liz Birchenough*

## In Need of a Swarm?

If you have lost bees over the winter and would like to replace them with a swarm, send your **name, address, landline number and mobile number** by email to John Farrow at: [stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk](mailto:stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk)

- Due to Data Protection Regulations, we have removed the 'SWARM REQUEST LIST' from the website and will only circulate your details to our eight swarm collectors.
- Always bear in mind that we cannot guarantee the temperament or the health of a swarm. However, swarms rarely come with disease as it is generally only the fittest that take flight.
- We will try to fulfil requests in the order we receive them but as we need to move a swarm on quickly, we may have to work down the list until we find someone available to accept the swarm that day.

*John Farrow, Swarm Coordinator*

## Return to the Hall

This month we resume holding our indoor meetings in person rather than via Zoom. Andrew Gibb's talk: 'Drones, the Weaker Sex' will be on Tuesday March 15 at Weald Memorial Hall. Drones are often dismissed as having only a single function, to mate with the queen. Andrew Gibb will ask: is this fair? Or should we be giving closer consideration to our drones?

## **The Coming Season - Are you prepared?**

This was the title of the last of our winter Zoom talks, and it was great to see some new members joining us to hear Roger Patterson giving some sage advice about the forthcoming season. Firstly, Roger challenged us about the term 'season' because every year is different and every part of the county is different. The bees simply know when the queen starts laying and when the workers can get out and about. As beekeepers we just need to watch, wait and 'bee prepared' (pardon the pun!).

Good planning is top of Roger's hints and tips. Local knowledge is absolutely fundamental to good preparation. Books, websites and magazines can be really useful sources of information but these are very generalised, so don't overlook what other local beekeepers are doing.

Looking at the basics, especially for less experienced beekeepers, think through what you are trying to achieve. Roger recommends reading through the BBKA basic syllabus, just to make sure you are not missing any vital knowledge. Another excellent source of information is the NBU Beebase website. Roger is also an advocate of keeping proper records, which you can tailor to your own needs. These provide a good reminder as to what happened last year, what worked, and what did not.

This is the only time of year you have the opportunity to clear around your hives, repair stands and boxes and get foundation ready. Roger reminded us to keep foundation in sealed packets, and lying flat. He also suggested not skimping on spares, after all it is not going to deteriorate before next season if you don't use it. It is also important to remember that the natural world is changing around us. In particular there is anecdotal evidence that queens are not surviving as long as suggested in the text books. This means that you may get more frequent swarming behaviour. We will all need to be flexible in the future, which will almost certainly mean adapting management techniques learned in years gone by.

Roger described a system which has been used successfully in his association branch apiary. For a group of between four and six colonies, he has one additional support colony. The support colony is used as a source of drawn comb, new queens and so on with no expectation that it will produce honey at the end of the season.

Roger also gave a very helpful breakdown of what an inspection means. Look carefully at what is being brought in. If the workers are bringing in well-formed clumps of pollen, this is a good indication that all is well. If forage is available, but not much pollen is coming in on a nice day, that is a warning sign your queen may be failing. Do check for signs of AFB and EFB visually (Beebase has some good identification pictures) and, if you are in any doubt, get a second opinion quickly either from an experienced branch member, or the local bee inspector. Make sure, especially in early spring, that you get your supers on early. Roger gave a really helpful tip: you don't want to allow your bees to lose heat into an empty super, so lay a sheet of newspaper over the queen excluder with a few holes punched in. This will act as a bit of a draught excluder but allow the workers to get upstairs with stores, leaving the brood chamber for the queen to lay. Checking for queen cell development is also a very important part of inspections, so don't forget to have a nuc on standby, and be confident you have your swarm control method clear in your mind. Careful checking is particularly important if you are running double or one-and-a-half brood boxes, as you have twice as many nooks and crannies where you may find a queen cell. Roger's talk reminded us that, as beekeepers, we need to learn constantly. What was custom and practice ten years ago may no longer be relevant or useful.

If anyone wants a copy of the BBKA Basic syllabus or the link to NBU Beebase, please contact me.

*Liz Birchenough*

## **After the Storm at Barrwood**

I arrived for the first Barrwood meeting of the year rather concerned that the storm could have wreaked some damage. Fortunately all was well, although a fallen tree had come with a metre of one hive. We set to, clearing the path of fallen branches and cutting back the brambles. We also cleaned and sterilised queen excluders and crown boards and checked the fondant on the hives.

The next session will concentrate on making up frames with foundation in preparation for Bailey comb changes on those colonies that prove to be queenright. This assessment is unlikely to take place before the end of the month but, as Roger Patterson advised in his talk, we should be prepared early, before the season is suddenly upon us.

*Cliff Hayward*

## Looking for an Out Apiary?

*This month there are three offers of apiary sites*

- \* Semi-experienced beekeeper, surrounded by beautiful, bee friendly land (between Hildenborough and Leigh), with plenty to forage from early spring to late autumn. I am looking for an experienced keeper to share this space for their bees. It is particularly appropriate for those who want to keep bees considerately, but don't have the space. Contact Angus: [angymac12@gmail.com](mailto:angymac12@gmail.com)
- \* I work for Elysian the new owners of Wildernesse House. We have roughly 24 acres here and in the future will be planting wildflower meadows etc. and think it would be a fabulous place for bees to thrive. We would like someone to set up an apiary and look after the bees for us in the next year or so. We will have in the region of 120 homeowners who may also want to get involved although they would need to be shown the ropes. Contact Louise Simpson: 020 3143 0027 [L.Simpson@elysianresidences.com](mailto:L.Simpson@elysianresidences.com)
- \* We have previously had a beekeeper keep a few of their hives on our property. We live in Maplescombe Lane, Farningham and want to offer our site again for anyone interested. Contact Louise Grace-Timms: 07977 195512 [louise.grace@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:louise.grace@yahoo.co.uk)

## Bee Crowding

I read a newspaper article a while back saying too many bee hives were kept in London and they could be responsible for other species dying out from lack of forage. If you are interested you might like to follow the link to an article which supports that view and is the result of scientific study in several Swiss cities.

<https://lenews.ch/2022/02/19/city-beehives-destroying-wild-bee-populations-in-switzerland/>

*Tim Johnson*

## Diary Dates

Making frames, and putting together hive parts:

**Sunday March 6** at 11am at Hilbert Road Apiary

**Saturday March 12** at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary

Drones, the Weaker Sex – a talk by Andrew Gibb:

**Tuesday March 15** at 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall

Colony health check and introduction to integrated pest management:

**Sunday March 20** at 11am at Hilbert Road Apiary

**Saturday March 26** at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary

Beginners Course for those considering taking up beekeeping:

**Sunday March 27** 10am to 4pm at Weald Memorial Hall, booking required

Contact Liz: [membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk](mailto:membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk)

The West Sussex Beekeepers Association's Bee Market and Auction:

**Saturday April 23** at Chichester College's Brinsbury Campus, Pulborough, West Sussex

Auction details, Guidance Notes and the Entry Form are available to download from the

WSBKA website - [www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html](http://www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html)

An evening with Dave Goulson - Saving Our Insects, Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse

**Wednesday May 11** at 7pm at Bore Place, Edenbridge

Professor Goulson will explain why insects are declining, as well as looking at solutions for this crisis. This is a ticketed event organised by Bore Place:

[www.boreplace.org/whats-on/4376/an-evening-with-dave-goulson-saving-our-insects](http://www.boreplace.org/whats-on/4376/an-evening-with-dave-goulson-saving-our-insects)

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](mailto:marystaffurth@yahoo.com)