

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER MAY 2022

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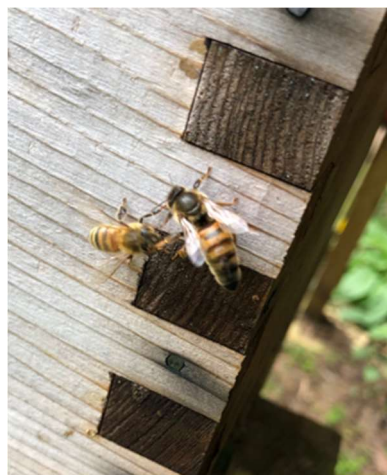
Strange Queen Behaviour

On April 14, with the air temperature around 17C to 18C, I decided to take a quick peek at my bees in the garden as there had been good activity with pollen being brought in for several weeks. Two hives that get the midday and afternoon sun had been very active and seemed to be building up numbers, judging from the quantity of bees congregating outside on the hive face, sunning themselves at every opportunity.

The other hive, positioned in a more shady spot, had been busy but for the previous week had seemed quieter than its neighbours and I wondered if the colony had suffered from the minus zero overnight temperatures of about two weeks earlier.

As I approached the hive, I saw about 10 bees on the front by the winter entrance with, it seemed, a larger bee, the queen! She was unmarked but I knew that from my records last year. The queen proceeded to walk around the entrance and went inside and then out again as I watched, before disappearing inside.

I took the lid off and did a quick check of stores - all seemed okay. Lid back on, I went to the other hives to do the same thing.



Ten minutes later I took another look at the 'queen outside' hive and saw she was out again! This time still on the hive front but further away from the entrance, accompanied (or being chased) by one or two worker bees.

I whipped my phone out to take a few photographs of the queen before she then decided to fly. I watched her do a few short circuits in front of the hive before she disappeared over the greenhouse and out of sight. Aarrggghhh! If she was a virgin there is little hope of her mating and anyway, where has she been all winter? And if mated, what was she doing in mid-April and will she return?

It wasn't really warm enough to do a full check of the brood box so I'm unsure if there are eggs/brood present or even queen cells indicating a very early swarm has occurred. Anyway, do I still have a laying queen or will the hive now die out as queenless? Or perhaps were there two queens all winter and one has now been thrown out. I've never seen this before or read about queens flying so early in the season and wonder what other, more experienced club members think may be going on.

Tim Johnston

The Changing of the Comb

Hilbert Road Apiary report



This month we have welcomed some new beekeepers to Hilbert Road; some are absolute beginners and others are second season old hands!

In line with our planned seasonal training programme, we have been changing the old comb on all our hives. We have employed three methods: the Bailey comb change, a shook swarm and a gradual comb replacement plan.



Two weeks on, having had some lovely warm weather, the bees are doing what they do best: bringing in forage and drawing out the wax foundation. The Bailey is a little behind the shook swarm, where several frames have been drawn. I think everyone who has attended the sessions has found them useful and will be able to apply the knowledge gained with their own bees.

With the nucleus colony (which we brought in last month) rapidly expanding the fill the brood box, we will be turning our attention to swarm control next month. My thanks to all who have attended for their support.

Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager

Barrwood Queens Tightly Marked in the Box

Barrwood is at its best in April, with the bluebells carpeting most of the wood. The bees, of course, don't hold this pastoral beauty in such high esteem and don't harvest its pollen or nectar.



With the strong wind lowering the temperature even further, we decided that inspection of the colonies on April 11 risked chilling the brood. Since the previous inspection, the weather had remained cold, so it was unlikely that there had been much development in the hives. So, after hefting the hives to ascertain that there were enough stores, the meeting was spent preparing equipment and having a 'dry run' of swarm control. It's always easier to appreciate the techniques, the extra equipment needed and the space required when you perform the procedures, rather than just following diagrams.

As is so often the case, the following day was glorious. The weather remained good until the next scheduled inspection on April 25, when a cool wind returned.

However, with a larger contingent than usual keen to join in the game of 'find and mark the queens', we pressed on with the planned programme.

Sue Knights led half the group to transfer the overwintered polynucleus to a WBC hive. The queen was spotted on the first frame. Scoreline: 1 to the beekeepers, 0 to the elusive queens.



With my group it took a little longer. The Double brood colony was first divided into two single boxes and then the top brood chamber divided into a further box. When dividing into two brood chambers so that the frames can be placed in pairs with space between them, the queen should hide in the dark space between adjacent frames, and so it proved with new beekeeper Rebecca demonstrating she has a good eye for queens. 2-0 to the beekeepers.

This colony had been earmarked as the best colony to produce queens, so in March had been given a frame of drone brood foundation. This was now full of drone pupae. We uncapped several to ascertain the level of Varroa infestation. With only one in 30 it was decided that we could afford to leave the drones to develop into adults. In other colonies, the drone pupae were simply cut out to keep the Varroa count low.

The next two colonies proved to have elusive queens despite being smaller. (2-2 with time running out). We will try again next time. Sue's group had more success with its hives, making it 4-2. One colony proved to be aggressive and was left to be dealt with and re-queened at another time.

The queenless colony was united with colony 5 in order to boost its numbers, and the other overwintered nucleus was moved to a full sized National after Sue had marked the queen. Final score: 5 to the beekeepers, 2 to the elusive queens.

Cliff Hayward, Chairman & Barrwood Apiary Manager

Queen Rearing Programme

In order to accommodate the queen rearing programme, the meeting dates for Barrwood during May have been changed. Please note that these include several Mondays, starting at 3pm. This gives members an ideal opportunity to come along and raise their own queens from the larval stage.

Barrwood dates for May:

Monday May 9 at 3pm:	Comb placed in breeder colony
Saturday May 14 at 2pm:	Prepared comb placed in queenless cell raiser
Monday May 16 at 3pm:	Cell raiser returned to queenright status to become cell finisher
Monday May 23 at 3pm:	Sealed queen cells distributed to nuclei

May in the Apiary

I used to undertake pollination across Kent with 250 colonies. I well remember one year when a commercial beekeeper from outside brought in 20 colonies to Tonbridge; they all starved during May. I was lucky since I had realised that the bad weather was causing a shortfall of incoming nectar. This is a warning to us all to take notice of the natural environment and the effect on our colonies.

May is the opening month of the beekeeping calendar, swarming is often rife; it is the most difficult yet simplest behaviour to counter. The trick is observation and regular checks in the brood box. There must be sufficient space for the queen's egg laying capacity and that can be simply achieved by creating space either side of the brood nest, allowing the queen to keep up her egg-laying rate according to the stores being collected by the workers. Add a frame of foundation either side of the brood nest. If you piled on four brood boxes you would find the queen confining herself to the central five frames all the way up, with the surplus honey stored in the outer combs. In the autumn, the workers force the queen down the combs in order fill them with honey and pollen to survive the winter by eating the stores low down and rising, as does heat.

On 21 April I looked at two of my Dadant hives at Penshurst. They have over-wintered well with new queens from last year, they both had supers of foundation when I looked toward the end of March. On 24 April I had to add another super because the first was more the half full of spring honey. On my next visit I will be looking to possibly take a nucleus from both. I have moved ten more colonies into the orchard in Pembury to replace the ten that were poisoned and remove those contaminated hives back to my farm to have further analysis undertaken to establish the financial loss incurred.

Peter Hutton

For Sale



The following items of equipment which are between 4-9 years old:

- Brood boxes x 2
- Supers x 5
- Queen excluder
- Floors with mesh x 2
- Roof x 2
- Cover board x 2
- Plastic feeders x 2
- Brush
- Smoker
- Metal scraper
- Metal hook
- Lots of honey jars

£300 for the lot. I am also willing to separate the items into smaller groups.

Gail Leathers: rayandgailleathers@gmail.com

Bees wanted

I live in Tonbridge and, having lost my only colony over winter, I am looking for one or ideally two new colonies to get going again this year. I'd love to hear from anyone who has some bees to sell, or knows where I might find some, please. (I would also be interested in national hives and hive parts).

Richard Powell: richardpowell@gmail.com 07738 731 876.

The Pollen Collectors

Where do our bees go to collect pollen? A question that former Seasonal Bee Inspector, Bob Smith, did his best to answer at our April meeting. He told us that pollen was vital for honeybee nutrition, providing proteins and lipids that are not present in nectar. Although bees will collect nectar whenever it is available, they collect pollen only when they need it. The pollen is stored in the comb and moistened with nectar or honey to stop fermentation.

Bob carried out an experiment in his own apiary in Cliffe. He set pollen traps every hour for 15 minutes between 8am and 7pm on a day in July. The surrounding area was planted extensively with field beans, runner beans, potatoes and mallow, so those were among the plants he expected the bees to visit. In fact, they ignored them, instead opting for the weeds and wildflowers on the north Kent marshes. These included poppy, rosebay willowherb, bramble and clover. In another experiment he found that adjacent hives collected different pollen.

For each pollen load a bee must visit hundreds of flowers. Each bee needs 120mg of pollen, so a colony needs 30 to 50 kilos of pollen a year.

Mary Staffurth

Diary Dates

Sunday 8 May at 11am at Hilbert Road Apiary: Swarm control techniques

Monday May 9 at 3pm at Barrwood Apiary: Queen rearing programme

Saturday May 14 at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary: Queen rearing programme

Monday May 16 at 3pm at Barrwood Apiary: Queen rearing programme

Tuesday 17 May at 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall:

Vanessa Jones will talk about the control and treatment of Varroa and Nosema

Sunday 22 May at 11am at Hilbert Road Apiary: Queen raising

Monday May 23 at 3pm at Barrwood Apiary: Queen rearing programme

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