

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2022

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Have Your Say and Prize-giving

Once again our Annual General Meeting is upon us. Actually, the AGM will be a short part at the beginning of a gathering to celebrate the season with the awarding of the trophies and certificates from our honey show. The AGM gives me the opportunity to thank all the branch members who have helped to run our activities. It also gives the members the chance to put forward ideas that they would like to see the branch develop. Don't think that if you express ideas you will be expected to join the committee. We are fortunate that prospective committee members have already volunteered in advance of the AGM although if you would like to join us, you would be most welcome. Just speak to either me or Liz Birchenough in advance of the AGM. The meeting will be on **Tuesday November 15 at 7.30pm** at Weald Memorial Hall.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman

Talent and Quality on Display at Honey Show



The Honey Show this year was held at St John's Church Centre, Hildenborough on the first Saturday in October. This was an excellent venue with easy access and adjacent free parking. The judge was our president and long-standing member, Paul Abbott, with myself and Sue Knights as stewards. Sue is also entries secretary, so had the unenviable task of recording all the exhibits and allocating anonymised tags for each item. There were 24 different classes this year including, for the first time, wax wraps. Here, the judge was looking for overall even wax coatings but with flexibility and sticking quality around a sample mug.

There were a large number of entries in the honey classes, although very few examples of dark honey, which is not surprising because of the local flora. It was great to see so many newer members entering the novice class with some excellent quality exhibits. There was also a wide range of wax products, including sample blocks and candles. Probably the most difficult classes to judge were the cakes and cupcakes. There were so many entries it was really difficult to choose a winner and in the end it came down to tiny preferences regarding shade of browning on the surface. Even though everyone used the same recipes, no two examples were the same.



It was similar for the handcraft class - how to choose a winner? Eventually, Paul selected a beautifully handcrafted walking staff decorated with pyrography bees and comb (pictured left) entered by Martin Barrett.

There were a couple of entries in the mead class. Mead is notoriously unpredictable but worth a try: you never know how it is going to turn out!



Paul always enjoys judging the photography class. As many of you know he is a very keen and experienced photographer himself, so his comments are always worth considering. Finally we had the gadgets. Paul eventually settled for a simple device to reduce the risk of bees accidentally drowning in a frame feeder. Note for the future: it helps to write a short description of how your gadget works and how it solves your problem.

Once the judging was over, the event was opened to the public. We were really surprised by the number of visitors from the local community who dropped by. We had branch honey on sale and dealt with a number of

enquiries about training and membership, we even recruited a new member on the day. We also sold honey to someone who happened to be attending an activity in the church, and just dropped in to see what was going on.

All in all it was an exhausting and exhilarating day. I look forward to seeing you all next year!

Liz Birchenough, Honey Show Steward

The Honey Show Cup Winners

Captain Turner Cup: Bob Blair (For the best first-prize winner in the clear honey classes)

Inglis Mason Cup: Vanessa Jones (For the best first-prize winner in the set honey classes)

Wilbury Cup: Tim Johnston (For one cake of plain moulded wax)

Bradbury Cup: Vanessa Jones (For the best first-prize winner in the mead classes)

Jenner Rose Bowl: Zelda Williamson (For the honey cake)

Carter Cup: Sally Jones (For the novice clear honey)

Hart Cup: Sue Knights (For the novice set honey)

Crowther Shield: John Farrow (For a mounted colour photograph)

Sloane Challenge Cup: Cliff and Pauline Hayward (For the highest number of points)

Baking the Perfect Cake



When you look at the cakes in the picture, which ones catch your eye? To my mind the mushroom-shaped, overgenerous bunch, crammed onto their paper plate are head and shoulders above the others. Sadly, the judge did not agree. He disqualified them for being too big.

I say sadly because these are my cakes (*writes Mary Staffurth*). For the previous honey show I made my first attempt at cupcakes. Cupcakes, fairy cakes, I didn't really know the difference and when I put the mixture into my fairy cake cases it was too much and they oozed all over the tin in one gigantic mess. I didn't even bother to enter them for the show. This year it was going to be different: I bought cupcake cases, which are bigger than their fairy siblings and was a little surprised to find I still had to cram

in the mixture. In the oven the contents overflowed and the cakes stuck fast to each other but I decided to enter them for the show all the same. It turns out that if I had read the recipe and honey show rules properly I would have known that the cakes had to be a maximum of 70mm in diameter; mine were disqualified for being too big. The instructions didn't say that the amount of mixture given in the recipe makes many more than six cakes – a fact that all the other entrants had either worked out or understood.

Back home, as I savoured the honey flavour of my comfortingly large cake with a nice cup of tea, I thought 'I wonder what Paul Hollywood and Prue Leith would make of these?' Now, where did I put that Great British Bake Off entry form?

Lively Colonies at Barrwood

It's always nice to meet prospective beekeepers who want to learn about the hobby and ensure it is for them before obtaining their own bees. But coming to your first meetings late in the season can be a bit of a baptism of fire. With a large number of older bees but less foraging to do, more become aggressive guards to protect the stores from wasps - and beekeepers! So I hope that no-one was put off and will look forward, as I always do, to opening the hives in the spring to smaller docile colonies.

The usual end of season preparations were completed with mouse-guards put on, light colonies and nucs fed and chicken wire wrapped around the hives to prevent woodpecker damage. Normally, the supers would be placed under the brood box so that when the queen starts to increase her laying rate in the spring she will stay in the brood box and not go into the super because it will be cooler at the bottom of the hive. However, in the current mild weather the bees are flying most days, bringing in pollen and the queen seems not to have reduced her egg-laying capacity. So I have delayed moving the super and removing the queen excluder until the end of this month. With such late activity the bees are very likely to need supplementary stores earlier than usual. Normally, fondant is given as a Christmas present, but is largely ignored by the bees until the end of January. This year I am expecting the colonies to use up their stores within the month. So a regular check on the weight of the hives will take place from November onwards. It would be so much easier if they would simply hibernate.

Cliff Hayward, Chairman and Barrwood Apiary Manager

Apple Day at Bough Beech

When Bough Beech Reservoir was constructed, the remnants of the original farm were retained and have been used as a nature reserve for many years. The old oast house and barn are still standing and the old orchard, containing a number of heritage apple trees, which have not been chemically treated, still produces wonderful fruit. The nature reserve is managed by volunteers under the umbrella of Bore Place.

Every October, the volunteers run Apple Day, a celebration of local apples and related crafts with lots of activities for school-age children. This year, the event was held on Sunday 23rd October, designed to coincide with half term for local schools. What we had not bargained on was torrential rain during the morning while we were setting up, and there was a lot to do. Visitors could collect apples from the orchard, and have a go at willow weaving and broom making. In the barn, a local folk group played and sang, with refreshments in the oast house. SE Water attended with an information display about the reservoir and Kent Wildlife brought along an information stand. For the children, there was an opportunity to make bug hotels and bird feeders, and apple monsters - a mini version of Halloween pumpkin carving. Cliff and Pauline Hayward were there making the most wonderful fresh apple juice, and I shared their awning with the honey stand. I was ably assisted by David Rea, a member of Sidcup branch, who has worked with Bore Place in the past. David has some amazing bug goggles: glasses with lenses shaped to replicate the effect of the compound eye of an insect. The effect was extraordinary and kept the children amused for a considerable time.

Luckily, the rain held off for most of the afternoon so, apart from being a bit wet underfoot, we all had a good time, complete with sales of honey and general interest in beekeeping.

Liz Birchenough

Course for New Beekeepers

Our Introduction to Beekeeping course for people with minimal experience restarts this month. This is a one day classroom event covering the responsibilities of beekeeping, the basic lifecycle and behaviour of honeybees, and the logistics and commitment needed to keep honeybees in a domestic environment. There are two dates: Sunday 27th November 2022 or Sunday 22nd January 2023 at Weald Memorial Hall.

Contact Liz Birchenough for more details and a booking form: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Apiary on Offer

I have a small farm just outside Four Elms and would happily spare an area for an apiary in return for some of the honey the bees produce.

Contact Angela Dale: angela@angeladaleconsultancy.com

Providing for the Pollinators

At our October meeting, Master Beekeeper Pam Hunter gave a talk on pollinators. She said the role of pollen was often neglected although it is essential for feeding the brood. To maintain bee health, colonies need a variety of pollen. She suggested many plants for our gardens to help bees and other insects all year round. Here are just some of her recommendations.

In a winter garden: mahonia, Japanese honeysuckle, viburnum and daphne.

Late winter/early spring: snowdrop, crocus, blackthorn, cotoneaster.

Spring: fruit trees - especially apples, horse chestnut, hawthorn.

Summer: a huge range including ceanothus, hebes, salvia, roses (not hybrids) lavender, rosemary.

Later flowering: hydrangea, rosebay willowherb, heather, sedum.

To encourage insects: create an untidy corner/wild area, don't use insecticide.

If you have space for one small tree make it a crab apple.

Recommended book on pollen: *The Hidden Sexuality of Flowers* by Rob Kessler and Madeline Harley

Mary Staffurth

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