

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER MARCH 2023

Editor: Mary Staffurth
Tel: 01732 462931 / Email: marystaffurth@yahoo.com
Branch website: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>



Look Out for Asian Hornet Queens

The BBKA hosted the annual Asian Hornet Conference in early February and it was a good opportunity to hear from regulators, practitioners and researchers on the latest developments in the UK and Europe. There are some excellent materials on the BBKA website (Members and Associations resources section), in particular three presentations prepared by Andrew Durham, which are well worth reviewing if not essential reading for beekeepers in southern England. As beekeepers we need to be alert to any sightings of Asian Hornet queens coming out of hibernation and report any suspected sightings via the Asian Hornet Watch App or via an Asian Hornet Team Member.

Vanessa Jones, Asian Hornet team leader for the Branch

Pollen Frenzy



Vanessa Jones took this photo recently of a worker bee in action

Sell Your Bee Products at Our Show

I know that the Branch Honey Show seems like a long way off (*writes Liz Birchenough*) but the committee is planning to expand the event to make it more interesting for visitors. The idea is that in addition to the traditional honey show, we would like to offer members the opportunity to display and sell their bee-related items such as soaps, skincare products, decorative items, jewellery as well as honey, prepared comb, baked goods and sweets. The only thing we can't sell is mead, due to the licensing requirements.

We are hoping to use this as an opportunity to engage with our visitors about protecting the environment and pollinator-friendly gardening.

The idea is spearheaded by Sue Knights, so please contact her directly to tell her what you would be able to offer.

Email: soozbeez@gmail.com

The Honey Show will be on Saturday 7 October 2023 at St John's Church Hall, Hildenborough.

Why the Bees Need New Comb

Do you change your brood comb often enough? At our February talk, Bob Smith explained the importance of regularly giving the bees new comb. It helps to maintain a healthy colony, reduces the risk of swarming and improves colony handling by keeping everything moveable. Old comb can harbour pathogens such as Nosema and also reduce the number of cells available for egg-laying.

One method is to replace a few frames each year but the bees quite often ignore the new frames. In the Bailey Comb Change method a new box of foundation is put above the existing brood box and once the colony has moved in, the old frames can be removed. The Shook Swarm method can only be used on a strong colony. Under this system the existing brood box is moved forward, a new one is put in its place and, after removing the centre frames, you shake the bees in. Under the Double Brood system, which is Bob's preferred method, the queen is isolated in the bottom box towards the end of the season. Once the brood hatches the top brood box is filled with honey and can be extracted. Another new box of brood frames is added at the start of the next season.

Mary Staffurth

What is Happening in the Hive?



There seem to have been fewer flying days than usual this February. On those occasions when the bees have been able to forage I have not witnessed any pollen collection. I can only hope that all is well inside the hives. Bees returning to the hive with their pollen baskets full is a good indication that the queen is egg-laying and there are young being fed. With only nectar being collected, it could be that the queen has failed and the winter bees are just surviving into old age. Alternatively, the workers might be restricting the queen's egg-laying to ensure they do not need to keep the brood raising area at such a high temperature, resulting in better survival of the colony should the winter continue long into March. All of this can only be surmised.

With current temperatures only slightly above freezing, opening the hive will allow the warm air to escape and possibly tip the balance away from survival. A number of remote recording systems are being developed to measure the environment within the hive but I have not seen any articles, apart from those produced by the manufacturers themselves, that actually demonstrate the usefulness of this technology. It occurs to me that all that is needed is an endoscope fed in through the entrance: the type they use for inspecting drains or intestines. Has anyone else experimented with such an idea?

Maybe I just need to be patient, leave the bees alone until the warm weather that must be coming soon and remain optimistic that all is well inside the hive.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman

In Need of Bees?



If you have lost bees over this winter and would like a swarm as a replacement please contact stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk and send the following contact details: name, address and postcode, mobile/landline number and email address.

- We will only circulate your details to our 10 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, though they may come with the odd varroa mite!
- 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 move down the list until we find someone available to accept the swarm that day.

John Farrow, Swarm Coordinator

Preparations at the Club Apiaries

I would like to thank all those who came along to the apiaries to help prepare for the coming season (*writes Cliff Hayward*). Tidying vegetation, cleaning and sterilising equipment: it's surprising how much can be achieved with a small group working together. With the weather we are currently experiencing, it seems a long time before those queen excluders will be needed but once the season does start, one needs to be prepared. There is little time then for cleaning and sterilising equipment.

The conversation amongst the scraping was largely about beekeeping practices. I'm sure the new beekeepers gained additional insight. The treatment of comb with acetic acid led to some interesting conversation about the benefits of owning a freezer specifically for beekeeping. I am envious of those who have such freezer space because it's so much simpler than acetic acid. Applying the acid is not difficult, it's the ventilation of frames after treatment when it always seems either to rain, be so cold the acid doesn't evaporate, or so warm the bees are out flying and despite the smell take an interest in the stores.

Meetings

Hilbert Road Apiary - Sunday 5 March at 11am: First of the season's inspections. What to look for and introduction to IPM (integrated pest management) with Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager.

Barrwood Apiary - Saturday 11 at 2pm: First of the season's inspections. What to look for and introduction to IPM (integrated pest management) with Cliff Hayward, Barrwood Apiary Manager.

Hilbert Road Apiary - Sunday 19 March at 11am with Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager.

How to recognise varroa resistance in your own colonies – Tuesday 21 March at 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall. Steve Riley will explain how colonies that display hygienic behaviour against varroa are being managed without the use of chemicals.

Barrwood Apiary - Saturday 25 March at 2pm with Cliff Hayward, Barrwood Apiary Manager.

Electron Microscopy at the BBKA Spring Convention on 21st April 2023: Special workshops are available to book on the BBKA website <https://www.bbka.org.uk/planning-your-bbka-spring-convention>

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