

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER MAY 2023

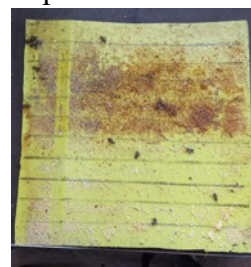
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Varroa Checks and Swarm Plans at Hilbert Road



Once again the weather has not been kind to us beekeepers. April has been cold and wet, which has delayed first inspections. We finally managed to do a proper inspection of our colonies on 16th April. We were able to mark all of our queens and the majority of our colonies are building up well, one of them rather too well! We performed the first artificial swarm of the year as there was clear evidence of swarm preparation. The queen was found and placed in a nuc box together with a frame of brood on the original site so that the flying bees would return. The brood was placed on a different hive stand to await the production of a new queen. A check seven days later revealed a number of capped queen cells in the brood box, reduced to one. The nuc, however, was full to overflowing with bees, so a hasty move to a full-sized hive was made. Now we wait and hope that the weather improves to allow the newly hatched queen to mate successfully.



Following the talk last month by Steve Riley of Westerham Beekeepers on how to find out if your bees are varroa resistant I have placed boards under each of our colonies and they are being monitored weekly for evidence of the behaviours which might indicate varroa resistance. Results so far are encouraging. The boards clearly show where there is brood which, given the inclement weather, is useful in assessing whether the colony is building up well without an inspection. There is very strong evidence that at least one of our colonies is uncapping the cells and removing varroa-infested larvae. The exoskeletons are easy to see. There is also a very high varroa count on the board which, as Steve explained, we should expect at this time of year if the bees are ejecting them.

Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager

On Show at Sevenoaks Climate Fair

Sevenoaks CAN (Climate Action Network) invited our branch, along with about 30 other local charities and businesses to participate in their first climate fair, held at the Vine Cricket Ground in Sevenoaks. Partly thanks to the best weather so far this year and some first class organising, it turned out to be a wonderful event. The charities included Kent Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Bore Place. Businesses covered everything from e-bikes to alternative babies nappies. There were also a number of talks, such as designs for passive housing, natural insulation for homes, green finance and flight-free travel.

On our stand, Cliff and Pauline Hayward were making bug hotels from recycled materials - including a free bee badge for the children. Sue Knights and Martin Barrett had brought an empty hive, typical beekeeping equipment and a range of pollinator-friendly plants for sale (supplied by Planet Plants), and packets of wildflower seeds for free. I was looking after the sales of honey and general enquiries, ably assisted by my husband. We had one new member sign up on the spot, plus several other expressions of interest. We also had enquiries about giving talks to local groups.

There was a wide range of people attending, from the Mayor and several members of the council, to a representative of Extinction Rebellion, who was one of the invited speakers. This was an exhausting but informative and successful event with much food for thought about what we can do to support our local environment.

Liz Birchenough, Membership Secretary and Treasurer



Varroa and the Asian Hornet



Most of my colonies succumbed to the long cold spring, and the few that have survived are only just beginning to expand beyond just a couple of frames. I know other beekeepers who are dividing their colonies as they are outgrowing their current space. In March, Steve Riley came to talk to us about how to recognise if your bees have the genetic traits for resistance to Varroa. All of this information with helpful photographs can now be accessed at <https://www.varroaresistant.uk>

It would be very interesting to know whether the strongest colonies coming out of winter are showing these traits for varroa resistance, compared with those colonies that have barely survived. If you can detect these varroa resistant traits in your colonies, please let me know. It would be interesting to discover its prevalence in our area. Maybe if we can be a little less concerned about Varroa in our colonies, knowing our bees have adapted to controlling it themselves, then we can turn our attention more fully to the very real threat from the Asian Hornet. It might still be very cold, but now is the time to put out monitoring traps near your apiary to detect the new queens that have emerged from hibernation.

“One swallow doesn’t make a summer”, so the saying goes. Well, today four house martins arrived. So at least spring is definitely here. If the beekeeping season has been slow to get started, I’m sure it will make up for lost time. Keep an eye on your colonies for signs of swarming, and change those old combs at the edge of the brood box that the bees are ignoring anyway.

Cliff Hayward, Chairman

How to Stop Colonies Absconding

In April many colonies of bees were busy with swarm preparations, as the Hilbert Road meeting discovered. Our swarm collectors, John Farrow and Sarah Rapley have also had a number of calls. In his talk our Chairman, Cliff Hayward said this proved we should already be on the alert with our own colonies.

Swarming is a natural reproduction method and is triggered by the colony becoming too crowded, the queen becoming old or weak, or an unbalanced colony. If you find eggs in queen cells and/or sealed queen cells then the colony is preparing to swarm. The impact of swarming is that you will get less or no honey

and will have a smaller number of bees going into the winter.

The way to prevent swarming is by regular inspections, having a young queen, having room in the brood area for the queen to lay and having room in the super for nectar.

Cliff said it was important to have enough equipment available. He also advised marking your queens and considering clipping them.

Once you have established that you need to act you can split the colony with the intention either of expanding your number of hives or eventually reuniting the bees. There are a number of methods including the Pagden artificial swarm, the Demaree and the Snelgrove. Cliff demonstrated the methods with brood boxes and supers but you can find information online or borrow one of our library books from Sarah Rapley: stweditor2@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Mary Staffurth

Photos from Sarah Rapley



Poisoning from Spraying

A case of honey bee poisoning was reported in the Kent Messenger in April, involving a single colony in Hawkhurst. This reminded me of the 10 colonies I had poisoned at Pembury two years ago. Beekeepers selling their honey need to be aware of the symptoms of poisoning and understand that their crop of honey might be affected too.

If you suspect poisoning send a sample of 200-300 bees to the National Bee unit at York. Register your apiaries on BeeBase and join the list of anonymous apiary sites with the Spray Liaison Scheme for farmers and beekeepers.

Peter Hutton

A Lesson on Bees for St John's Women's Group

As you all know, we have used St John's Church Centre in Hildenborough for our honey show for several years, and we have participated in their Christmas Fair. At the last Christmas Fair, I was asked to address the women's group on the subject of my beekeeping experience, which I was more than willing to undertake. The meeting took place on Saturday 22nd April, with a group of interested and enthusiastic members of the congregation. I talked about how I got started in beekeeping, including some of the highlights, such as winning the novice class for my honey, to the depths of despair at losing my first colony. During the talk, I tried to be honest about the level of commitment needed to look after bees, and explained that it was far more complex than portrayed in the media.

Members of the audience were particularly interested in the effects of modern life on all pollinators, not just honey bees. The group was also interested in the many uses of honey and wax products, both historically and in the present day. At the end of the meeting we had the opportunity to discuss labelling of commercial honey as many people were concerned by recent findings of contamination with sugar syrup. Since our apiary at Barrwood is within walking distance of the church, many of the attendees took the opportunity of purchasing a jar of our local honey to try at home.

Liz Birchenough

May in the Apiary



Bait hives need to be set up now with two recently used brood combs and the balance of frames with foundation. Once a swarm arrives, allow the bees to settle in and draw comb for the honey they brought themselves. After the second day start to feed with syrup so they will draw as many combs as possible within ten days, by which time the bees of wax building age will be on to the next stage of their lives.

Old queens need re-queening by the end of July. Consider amalgamating any weak colonies, although both lots need to be healthy. If you have strong colonies add at least one super now, directly four combs are filled add another super as honey bees require plenty of space to ripen nectar into honey.

I over-wintered a five frame nucleus with a second five frame box of foundation above, the bees have drawn all the foundation in the past four weeks in the upper box so I have transferred them into a full size hive, keeping the frames in the same order and using another brood box with foundation. I will use this colony to ensure a good honey crop as well as use eggs to raise queens of this line.

Peter Hutton

Apiary Meetings

Club apiary meetings in May will concentrate on swarm control techniques and queen-raising.

Hilbert Road Apiary on Sunday 7 May at 11am with Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager.

Barrwood Apiary on Saturday 13 May at 2pm with Cliff Hayward, Barrwood Apiary Manager.

Hilbert Road Apiary on Sunday 21 May at 11am with Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager.

Barrwood Apiary on Saturday 27 May at 2pm with Cliff Hayward, Barrwood Apiary Manager.

Bee Friendly Schools

The BBKA is encouraging schools to become more honey bee friendly and to be aware of the importance of pollinators. It has set up a scheme called 'Friends of the Honey Bee' and has appointed Sarah Haynes as its School Liaison Officer. Sarah can be contacted at schools.officer@bbka.org.uk. Further details of how schools can become a 'Friend of the Honey Bee' can be found on the BBKA website: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/friends-of-the-honey-bee> Part of this initiative is to encourage schools to plant for pollinators. The BBKA is raising funds via the Aviva and Save our Wild Isles Community Funds so it can provide schools with seeds to help get them started. This is a matched funding scheme so for every £10 that is donated, Aviva gives another £20. The Aviva fundraiser only lasts for a few more weeks: <https://www.avivacommunityfund.co.uk/p/help-the-bbka-to-feed-the-bees> For further information contact Leigh Sidaway, gen.manager@bbka.org.uk

Send photos or articles for the newsletter to marystaffurth@yahoo.com

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