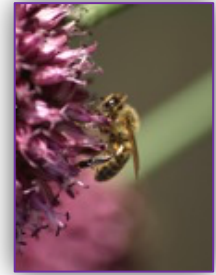


**SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS
BEEKEEPERS
BRANCH NEWSLETTER
APRIL 2024**

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Active Bees

With flying days in March being rather limited due to such cold wet weather, I have continued to feed throughout the month but, in those few hours of fine weather, the bees have been out foraging. Currently, at the end of March, every third bee seems to be bringing in a bright yellow pollen, most probably from the willow growing just across the road.

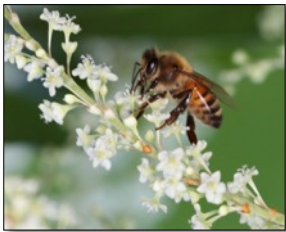


Photo by Paul F. Abbott

There are many plants now flowering: cherries, plums and nectrines will be followed by apples, and willow produces nectar as well as pollen. After leaving the bees alone so long, as it has been so cold, the season will suddenly get going very quickly and catch me unprepared. My inspections so far have been limited to a quick look into the centre of the brood nest to ensure the colonies are queenright. One colony in particular is well advanced and there will be a need for regular inspections from now on if I am to avoid losing swarms.

At Barrwood, one of the colonies seems to have a drone-laying queen. This is a common problem for beekeepers these days, as the queen lacks enough fertile sperm to last its lifetime. The plan will be to replace the queen with a new one raised from another hive. Simply expecting this colony to be able to raise a new queen is unrealistic as most of the bees will be ageing and their brood food glands too old to be able to feed a queen effectively.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman

Swarm List

If you have lost bees over the winter and would like to replace them with a swarm, please send your name, address, landline number and mobile number to John Farrow: stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk



Photo by Sarah Rapley

Due to Data Protection Regulations, we have removed the Swarm Request List from the website and 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. 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

Apiary Location on Offer

Guy Porritt is interested in having an apiary in a field at his home in Ivy Hatch. He is planning to plant more hedging and trees and has recently planted some wild flowers on site. He says it might be possible to have an entrance off the roadway for easy access. If you are interested please contact Guy directly: 07850 567133

April Evening Meeting

Cliff Hayward will be giving a talk on swarm management and queen rearing at our evening meeting on April 16th. The title - Will You Raise Good Bees? - comes from the mnemonic for remembering the order of queen marking colours (white, yellow, red, green, blue). The talk will be about making small adjustments to your normal swarm control procedure to help produce good, strong, highly productive queens that will not be superseded within a month.

Andrew Gibb, who was originally booked to talk about products of the hive, will now speak at our September meeting.

Climate Fair

Sevenoaks is hosting its second Climate Fair on the first Saturday in May and we are delighted we have once again been asked to represent the beekeeping community. There will be a wide range of local businesses and organisations represented, looking at many aspects of climate impact. This year we will be using this event as an opportunity to reinforce local knowledge about the Asian Hornet, as well as how to make gardens pollinator friendly. We will be talking about beekeeping in general and, hopefully, making some good contacts within the local community.

We will be selling honey and would like members with stock to supply honey for sale. The arrangements are: 16oz jars - sale price £7.50, supplier will get £6, branch retains £1.50; 12oz jars - sale price £6.50, supplier will get £5, branch retains £1.50; 8oz jars - sale price £5.50, supplier will get £4, branch retains £1.50. Contact me if you have honey available: noreply@membershipservices.org.uk

Sevenoaks Climate Fair will be held on Saturday 4th May from 10.30am at the Vine Gardens, Holly Bush Lane, TN13 3UH.

Liz Birchenough

Winning Ways at Honey Shows

John Chapman, a honey show judge and President of Medway Beekeepers, gave us a range of tips in his talk on entering honey shows. He said you should start by reading the schedule and rules carefully. For the honey classes, make sure your jars and lids are as described in the rules and come from the same batch. Handwash the jars and lids thoroughly as dishwashing can leave deposits on the glass. Filter the honey through a fine nylon mesh and pour into warm jars, like pouring a glass of beer, which prevents too many bubbles forming. Ensure you have slightly overfilled the jars. Allow the honey to settle then gently skim the surface with a piece of cling film if needed.

On the day, polish the jars with a clean glass cloth. If your honey is half set, give it a stir then leave in the fridge for a few days, repeat if necessary. To smooth the surface of set honey, use the bowl of a warm teaspoon. The judge is looking for perfectly clean honey, well presented, with a good flavour.

Wax can be tricky. Make sure your liquid wax has been filtered and the mould is spotless. You can use a smear of washing up liquid as a releasing agent. Put the mould in a hot water bath away from any draughts, such as in the oven. Allow to cool very slowly to prevent ripples on the surface.

If it sticks to the mould, pop it in the freezer for a day. Check the weight of your wax against the schedule and polish the surface with a piece of silk. Remember that every time you melt the wax, it can darken. Judges are looking for a nice buttercream colour.

If you are making moulded candles, your moulds should be spotlessly clean. Make sure you have the right wick and soak it in wax before introducing it to the mould. The wax must not be too hot or too cold, so it flows nicely but does not run out at the bottom. Make sure you have more than enough wax for the mould, if you stop halfway you will get a line and your candle may break.

For mead, the bottle and cork must be spotlessly clean and of the correct size and type. If there is any sediment you should filter your mead into a clean bottle, so you might need a spare for topping up.

Liz Birchenough



Photo by Simon Staffurth

Asian Hornet Trapping



So far we have issued 41 traps/bait stations to our members and most of those are now in place (*writes Martin Barrett, Branch Asian Hornet Coordinator*). We still have a lot of our area to cover so need more people to be involved. If you need a trap please contact me to organise collection/delivery or come along to an apiary meeting at Hilbert Road or Barrwood where we will have supplies.

We use What3Words to record the location of each station and this works well and enables us to see the gaps in our area.

We will be doing another presentation later in the season to talk about the next phase of dealing with this invader.

Protecting Your Apiary

Another member of the Branch Asian Hornet Team, Sue Knights, spoke at the Branch meeting at the beginning of March. She emphasised the importance of finding and trapping foundress queens between now and the end of May. From May to July the focus shifts to monitoring emerging workers. Then, apiary defences need to be in place between July and November. In your own apiaries you should do all you can to prevent Asian Hornets being attracted to your hives. Make sure that no honey or wax is left around in the apiary. Consider doing your inspections at the beginning or end of the day when Asian Hornets are less likely to be active.

Mary Staffurth

Identifying the Asian Hornet

The National Bee Unit has highlighted the lack of recognition of the yellow legged Asian hornet as a key issue. Of more than 20,000 reports in 2023 just 151 were confirmed. This video from the Government's Animal Plant and Health Agency might help: https://youtu.be/c4DRki97wzg?si=IVC_apThOoeuUsgD

Beekeeping Auction

The West Sussex Beekeepers' Association is holding its Bee Market and at Chichester College's Brinsbury Campus in Pulborough, West Sussex on Saturday 27 April. Auction details, Guidance Notes and Entry Form are available to download from the WSBKA website: www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/auction.html

Diary Dates

Saturday 6 April at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary, Shipbourne.

Sunday 14 April at 10am: Hilbert Road Apiary, Tunbridge Wells.

Tuesday 16 April at 7.30 pm at Weald Memorial Hall: Cliff Hayward - Will You Raise Good Bees?

Saturday 20 April at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary, Shipbourne.

Sunday 28 April at 10am: Hilbert Road Apiary, Tunbridge Wells.

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/>