

KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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See our website: www.kentbee.com/stw/

Inside the Honeybee

Members of the Sevenoaks & Tunbridge Wells Beekeepers met at the Grosvenor and Hilbert Road Hub venue for the Bee Health Check. The morning session began with hot drinks and cake, then John Hendrie, Master Beekeeper and former BBKA president delivered an in-depth talk about the honey bee diseases acarine - a parasitic mite living in the breathing tubes of the bee - and nosema - single cell parasites that live in the gut of the honey bee.



words and pictures by Ellen Montelius

None of the beekeepers in the group had assessed their bees before using microscopes so everyone was quite keen to learn. John showed visual examples of how to make a nosema slide and how to stabilise a bee on a cork mount with an acarine needle. Ellen Montelius demonstrated how to set up a compound microscope and identified parts of the microscope. She then gave a practical demonstration on how to prepare the bee dissection for both the acarine and nosema assessment.

The acarine assessment required a dissection microscope. The beekeepers fixed a bee on a cork surface with a special two pronged acarine needle. Then using forceps they carefully removed the head and front legs. This exposed the 'collar' and this had to be removed first to actually see the tracheal tubes. Tiny acarine mites can live inside a bee's trachea and ultimately weaken and kill the bee. All the bees inspected on the day had a healthy trachea.

The beekeepers then assessed their bees for nosema, a spore that germinates and feeds in the gut of the honey bee. Nosema can weaken and destroy the colony. To assess the bees for nosema, the beekeepers extracted the gut of the bee from its abdomen, and placed it on a slide. Looking through a compound microscope at 400 times magnification, they looked for small rice-shaped nosema spores. Only one bee sample showed a small amount of nosema specimens. When they examined the gut, they also saw many pollen grains.

One of the beekeepers brought in varroa mites and hazel pollen. The varroa mites did look gruesome and menacing and the hazel pollen looked like little jewels.

During the afternoon session, a handful of curious visitors arrived and they had an opportunity to look through the microscopes and look at the nosema slide samples and the acarine dissection. It was a very good day and everyone is now keen to learn more about microscopy, assessing bee diseases and caring for bees.



Hilbert Road Prepares for the Season

The temperature was still quite cold for our March meeting but about six of our members arrived to inspect the bees. Two colonies have survived the winter and have been given a feed of fondant to keep them going. There were some flying bees but we didn't go into the hives for risk of chilling the brood. Helen's long hive, which is such a credit to her for constructing, is doing quite well. We had a check through the equipment in the store and there is sufficient equipment to operate the apiary except that there is a need for some new foundation brood and super for a national. Our next inspection is on April 14th and I would ask members to bring some tools for tidying up the area, for example loppers, shears or secateurs, and rakes to help clear the leaves.

Richard Rose

Solitary Bees



There are 250 species of bee in Britain and most of these are solitary. Ian Beavis, an entomologist who specialises in bees, wasps and ants, shared some of the fascinating facts about the lives of solitary bees at our final winter talk.

The High Weald of Kent has a good range of bees because of the wide range of habitats: there were traditionally lots of different types of farming; woodland including coppiced areas; flower-rich grasslands; commons; heathland, for example the Ashdown Forest. Parks, gardens, churchyards and cemeteries are also important today.

Mining bees are the most common solitary bees. They burrow in the ground but will also use vertical banks.

The Queens digs a shaft which branches out into chambers and lays about half a dozen larvae. The males emerge first and mate just once. They hover around the nest site waiting for the females to emerge or else they gather around a tree and perform a mating display. Males also use pheromones to attract females.

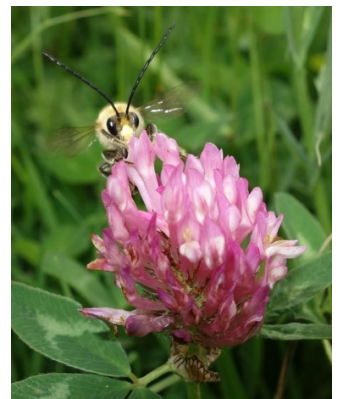
A lot of mining bees have their own species of cuckoo bee. These will go into the nests and lay their own eggs in place of the host bees egg.

The various solitary bees size from honeybee size to ant size. They are key pollinators of fruit trees and other commercial crops.

Many of the species have great common names, for example the Pantaloon Bee (*Dasypoda hirtipes*) pictured above, and the Long-horned Bee (*Eucera longicornis*) pictured right.

Mary Staffurth

Photos from Ian Beavis



Beekeeper Wanted

New Beacon School in Sevenoaks has plans to plant a mini orchard and install a small apiary, all that is needed is a beekeeper. Clare Sender explains:

We are a prep school for boys aged 4 -13 located on Brittain's Lane on a 22-acre site. We are going to plant a mini orchard of 5 fruit trees in a fenced off area and we are keen to add a beehive. We do not have any bee experts on our staff so we could offer to house one or possibly two hives on our land free of charge with the owner looking after the welfare of the bees. In return we would ask if the beekeeper could teach our boys about the importance of bees, the life cycle of the bee, maybe do honey tastings, perhaps sell the honey to our parents if there was enough and the beekeeper was interested in doing this.

We place great importance on protecting the environment, which features in our curriculum. We also have an Eco-committee which is pupil-led.

We hope to do this late Spring/early Summer and there will be a tree planting ceremony which would also be an opportunity to raise the profile of the Kent Bee Keepers Association as we would plan to gain press coverage.

I can be contacted on 01732 779024 or email: csr@newbeacon.org.uk

Equipment for Sale

3 Complete WBC Hives painted white - £250 for each hive.

2 Hives come with the following: 2 Brood Body / 3 Supers / 3 Lifts (one being the porch) +2 extra lifts / 1 Mesh and a solid floor / 1 Crown board and a glass quilt / 1 Wire queen excluder / 1 Eke + insulated foam quilt / 1 English feeder

1 Hive (nearly new): 1 Brood Body / 2 Supers + 2 new flat pack to be made up / 3 Lifts (one being the porch) + 2 extra lifts / 1 Mesh and solid floor / 1 Crown board and a glass quilt / 1 Wire queen excluder / 1 Dummy board / 2 Rapid feeders

Honey extractor - £70: Two framed stainless steel on legs (manual operation) excellent condition.

Contact: Sue Smith 01732 810138 sjssmith@btinternet.com

Diary Dates

Saturday April 7 at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary meeting.

Saturday April 14 at 2pm: Hilbert Road Apiary meeting with Richard Rose.

Saturday April 21 at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary meeting with Cliff Hayward.