

KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

April 2019

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Cliff Hayward's session on making hornet traps

Asian Hornet Threat

In March, Bob Hogge from the Jersey Beekeepers' Association gave a talk to Herne beekeepers about the Asian Hornet. He opened with some clear points:

- *We do not know a great deal about the behaviour of the Asian Hornet. It is essential that we try to catch live specimens so we can observe them carefully and try to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

- *Finding and destroying hornet nests is time-consuming and expensive. If the hornet takes hold in the UK as it has in western Europe it will not be possible to control this pest simply by destroying nests.

- *Jersey has seen a threefold increase in nests even with active intervention.

- *Asian Hornets can almost certainly fly across the Channel, so it is very likely they will be found in Kent this season. Asian Hornets on Jersey have been found in urban areas just as much as in the countryside, and have been seen to return to locations of nests that have been recently removed.

Bob reminded us about the lifecycle of the Asian Hornet. Primary nests are found in spring and early summer (typically April to June). These are small, roughly tennis ball sized and often found in sheds, outbuildings and roof spaces. These are superseded by secondary nests in mid-summer (typically July to October) which can contain hundreds of queens and thousands of workers. The nests are roughly beach ball sized, and commonly located in trees and hedges. They can be at any height above the ground.

The Jersey team has experimented with a range of bait traps. They have had particular success with Sutterra Liquid Wasp Bait, which apparently contains a bee repellent. This is also sold under the name Trappit, and is available online and in some hardware retail stores. The only down side is that it is not pleasant to handle, so the manufacturer's instructions must be followed thoroughly.

The Jersey team has also experimented with a variety of methods for destroying nests. There is always a concern when using pesticides because of the potential damage to other insects. There has been some success using carbon dioxide to freeze the nests. Don't try this at home! There is work ongoing with producers of professional pest control equipment to develop a CO₂ freezer gun using fire extinguisher technology.

Bob's message to Kent beekeepers is to get started now with monitoring traps, and spread the word amongst the general public at every opportunity – talks to gardening clubs, WI meetings, church groups and so on. Always carry your mobile phone with the contact details for alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk or the Asian Hornet Watch app because you need positive ID to get help. Please don't try to deal with a nest or sighting yourself.

Liz Birchenough

Learn More on the Asian Hornet threat

The Weald branch of Kent Beekeepers Association is holding a talk on the Asian Hornet entitled Practical Advice from France. It will be on Saturday 1 June 2019, 14:00 – 16:00 BST at Lenham Community Centre, 12 Groom Way, Lenham, Kent, ME172QT. See the Weald branch website for details: <http://www.wealdbeekeepers.com>

Sussex University Workshops

We have put the details of our forthcoming workshops online now, and perhaps some Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells members may be interested in attending one or more of these. We have two workshops on integrated varroa control, one on planting for bees and other flower-visiting insects, there is also one on how to decode the waggle dance and finally one exploring ivy, an amazing winter forage for many flower-visiting insects. The details are given on the link: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/lasi/newsandevents/events>

Dr Karin Alton, Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects, School of Life Sciences, University of Sussex

Advantages of Top Bar Hives

Peter Aldridge came to the very well attended March evening meeting to talk about “The Essex Top Bar Hive”.

He explored the different three hive options available:

*Fixed comb hives such as a skep or a vertical log hive

*Moveable frame hives such as the National or WBC

*Horizontal frame hives such as the Top Bar.

Already an experienced beekeeper, he wanted to expand his knowledge and find out more about the top bar hive. He had read about the benefits of keeping bees in this way and wanted to find out for himself whether the claims were true. He built his own hive using and adjusting the specifications found in the books to suit UK bees. The hive was made from reclaimed wood that had not been treated in any way. The bars were adapted with a V shape to encourage comb attachment. He then ordered a box of bees and tipped them into the body of the hive. The queen was kept in a cage for three days to acclimatise. The bees then behaved as expected, feeding and building comb.



Peter Aldridge demonstrating his top bar hives

As a result of this experiment, Peter was able to confirm much of what he had read. He learnt to handle the bees and comb more gently (the comb not being supported as in a frame). The layout of the hive and the perspex window allowed close-up observation. With the bees not forced to comply with human plans they built their comb without foundation, the cells being different sizes to accommodate worker or drone brood; the drones were bigger and there were more of them. Queen cells were built on the edge of the comb. Inspections proved to be easy: there were few flying bees, finding the queen was not difficult, the warmth of the bars indicating where the brood was, there was no lifting of heavy supers. The varroa count was very low but wax moth is a problem and needs some work. The honey harvest cannot be extracted in a spinner but needs to be cut and squeezed, a fruit press does this very well. Without the foundation it makes beautiful cut comb.

Further reading: “The barefoot beekeeper” by Philip Chandler; “The Thinking Bee Keeper” by Christine Hemenway.

Sue Knights

Think Twice About a Top Bar Hive

I would like new beekeepers to know there are definite drawbacks to the manufactured top bar hives compared with the home-made model demonstrated by Peter Aldridge (*writes Peter Hutton*). In particular, the shape of the top bars. Those shown at the meeting were designed by the speaker from his experience, giving a greater surface for comb attachment than those of commercial availability.

We have had coffin hives at the Hilbert Road apiary in the past. We have had a top bar hive there now for the past four years, which I have found quite unsatisfactory and a good example of all the inherent problems.

The Warré hive is an absolute “No No” for beginners or any beekeeper as far as I am concerned. Supers are added at the bottom and it is a nightmare for health inspections which are time consuming and often require a stepladder.

Beginners should be encouraged to start with a movable frame hive. The speaker did show that he has Commercial hives for extractable honey. The top bar is good for cut comb honey only in my view.

Back in the Apiary at Barrwood

There was a good attendance for our first meeting of the season. Gardening being the main priority, cutting back the bramble and clearing a lot of the fallen wood. But with the meeting taking place amid high winds that had brought down a few trees on the way to the meeting, one can expect more clearing will need to be done.

For our second meeting, with the weather still too cool (11⁰C) for proper hive inspections, a group of eleven of us gathered to check for stores and clean, sterilise and replace the floors. With one hive still on a solid floor, we were able to see just how much debris had collected on this floor, compared with the open mesh floors, which were all quite clean. The other task for the day was to make room in the shed for the large amount of new equipment that we have acquired from a retiring beekeeper.

At the next meeting, we hope to have our first full inspection to assess the colonies. We will perhaps decide which colony will be used for queen rearing and which colonies will provide the donor bees for the anticipated nucs we will produce.

Following our evening talk about the use of top bar hives, I thought it may be an interesting experiment to bring our Dartington hive back into use. It is currently being used as a hive stand, so at our next meeting we will replace the stand and investigate the condition of the hive. If it is usable, then a Dartington has all the advantages of the top-bar hive - with all the frames in a single box so there is no heavy lifting - but without the disadvantages.

Cliff Hayward

Introduction Day for New Beekeepers

At our first training session at Weald Memorial Hall in March we had 16 delegates, with good feedback. We had some people who wanted to take the first step into beekeeping, a few who had acquired or been given some equipment, and a few beekeepers in their first season. I think we should seriously consider repeating the course, and maybe develop a proper training programme alongside hands-on apiary activities and encourage members to work towards their beekeeping qualifications.

We made a reasonable return on the event, although the prime motivation was benefit to members, rather than a profit-making enterprise. Four new members signed up on the back of the training.

Liz Birchenough

Beekeeper Wanted

I have a five-acre orchard in Brenchley with approx 700 half standard fruit trees, ranging from one year to five years old. I have got juicing apples, cooking apples and cider apples, plums, gages and pears. Last year we had a decent crop for the trees' ages but I was wondering if any local beekeepers hire or place hives to aid pollination. I have also planted approximately 3,000 native hedging plants. No spray has been used on the trees. Contact Jeremy Brown: pbrown0810@gmail.com

Diary Dates

Saturday 6 April at 2pm: Hilbert Road Apiary meeting

Saturday 13 April at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary meeting

Saturday 20 April at 2pm: Hilbert Road Apiary meeting

Saturday 27 April at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary meeting

Check the website for any late changes to meetings: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/meetings-and-events/>

Please send any articles or photos for the newsletter to Mary Staffurth: marystaffurth@yahoo.com