

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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Dripping Honey and Bees in the Bedroom

Peter Hutton first got hooked on beekeeping when, as a young man, he was asked to take a colony out of a cavity in a brick wall. His entertaining talk at our October meeting gave a glimpse into his decades of collecting feral bees from difficult locations. In February this year, when the weather was reasonable warm, Peter took a colony out of an Ash tree. He drilled holes to assess where the bees were and arranged for the tree to be cut down just above the comb. He took out five buckets of comb and honey. As well as building comb more than 2 feet high above ground level the bees had built to a similar depth below ground. They were very calm but unfortunately absconded from their new commercial hive in one of Peter's apiaries in May.

One of the most difficult removals was from the bedroom of an old house where the bees had made their home in the wall behind a thin plaster skin. There was a colony either side of the window. It took three-quarters of a day to remove the honey alone and Peter reckons he was stung hundreds of times. It was the wrong time of year to remove the colony but the home-owner had put his finger through the plaster so the bees were in the bedroom and he was desperate for them to be removed.

Peter has been called to houses where honey was dripping from the ceilings or walls. This can happen if a colony dies out, perhaps because it has been weakened by varroa.



Peter Hutton's top tips for dealing with feral colonies:

- It's best to take the honeycomb out first. If you brush or shake the bees into a brood box as you do this you will build up a reservoir of bees that can cover a frame as soon as you put it in.
- The best time to remove a feral colony is from the beginning of March to the middle of May. After that there tend to be too many bees and too much honey.
- If bees have just got into a chimney you can smoke them out in the first three days, after that they will have settled and it will be a much more difficult job to remove them.

This swarm of bees made its home at the base of a water butt. Sue Knights and John Farrow removed the colony. On their first visit, they found the bees were entering a damaged area at the base of the butt. They asked the owners to empty it of water and, on their return, they accessed the base and remove the colony. For more pictures and the full story visit the branch website:

<http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Swarm-of-Bees-in-a-Waterbutt-1.pdf>

Honey Tasting at the AGM

Cliff Hayward, our Chairman, has suggested bringing along some of your own honey to the AGM on Tuesday November 19 at 7.30 at Weald Memorial Hall. The idea is to see how the flavour of honey can be very different, depending on where your bees forage. The meeting also gives everyone a chance to hear from the Branch officers and to ask questions or make any points of their own. If you were successful at the honey show then please make sure you attend the meeting, where you will be presented with cups and certificates.

Subscriptions

Membership subscriptions are due, so if you have not yet paid you can return your form to Liz Birchenough by email, post or in person at the AGM. You can pay by cheque, cash or online transfer. Liz's contact details and the account details are on the form, which was emailed to you at the beginning of October.

Spreading the Word About Bees

Liz Birchenough has had a very busy October manning stands, selling honey and giving talks to promote beekeeping in general and our own branch in particular:

Promoting Bees in Tonbridge

Over the weekend of 5th-6th October, Tonbridge School hosted its "Festival of the Environment". This was a cornucopia of activities on an environmental theme, suitable for all family members, and supported by a number of local organisations such as the Woodland Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust and of course ourselves! Luckily the activities were indoors in the theatre and brand new science centre, so we were warm and dry, with copious supplies of tea and cake to keep us energised.

John Richards, who is a branch member and a member of staff at the school, ran a number of workshops introducing the audience to the joys and hazards of becoming a beekeeper. John also runs beekeeping sessions at the school for the students, so had access to their glass-sided hive and plenty of gadgets to interest the audience. I set up our stand in the foyer of the science centre, so John could direct membership and other general enquiries to me following his workshops. I also took along one of my spare hives so the visitors could handle the frames without bees. We had several enquiries from potential new members, and sold more than £160 worth of branch honey. The event seemed to be very well received in general, and was well worth attending.

Could You Help with a School Hive?

A few days later I spent two days delivering six classroom sessions to pupils in all age groups throughout Seal C of E Primary School. That's a lot of star badges! The school is a forest school, and has a large wooded area where specially trained staff take outdoor nature classes giving children who may not have outdoor spaces at home the chance to get hands on with plants and animals. The school is planning to open an apiary next year, and one teacher is currently undergoing beekeeping training. A space has been allocated, and the school handyman is getting started on levelling and fencing a suitable apiary space. The purpose of the classroom training for the pupils was to give them a chance to learn from a beekeeper how to manage a hive, and what the various hive parts look like close-up.

The teacher has been given the contact details of the schools liaison team at BBKA. However, the lead teacher is very aware that running an apiary can be tricky, and so is looking for a local beekeeper to support her at the school with some mentoring and guidance, plus hands-on help when required. Is there anyone in the Seal area who thinks they might be able to help? If so, please contact membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk to be put in touch with the teacher. Please note any volunteers will need to comply with the school safeguarding standards, and complete a DBS check.

Apple Day Lifts Honey Sales

On Sunday 13th October, I attended Apple Day at Bough Beech nature reserve. During the morning, I was concerned because the weather forecast was for heavy rain but, as luck would have it, apart from a light intermittent drizzle, we all stayed pretty dry. Apple Day is an annual celebration of the apple harvest at Bough Beech. The reserve has a small orchard with a wide range of heritage varieties that are no longer commercially available but have great flavour and texture. There was a wide range of activities and eating opportunities and, of course, I was there with the branch honey. I sold over £120 worth of honey.

This was also a great opportunity to talk to members of the public about beekeeping in general, and highlight awareness of the Asian Hornet. I was pleasantly surprised that many visitors were already aware of the hornet and were concerned that there had been confirmed sightings recently. Everyone I spoke to was happy to support our efforts to track down these hornets, and I do hope every extra pair of eyes on the problem will help identify nests before any queens get settled down for winter.

Make Your Own Cream Honey

Set honey is always more difficult to sell, so why not cream it to make it a much more acceptable product? You may find your customers will prefer its smooth creamy consistency. Here is an easy recipe:

- Heat a conventional oven to 50 C.
- Unscrew the lids of your set honey and place in the oven until it has liquefied.
- In a fan oven this takes 1 to 2 hours.
- Allow the honey to cool to 36 C, about body heat.
- Stir in about 10% of a seed honey. This creamy smooth honey is usually available from Waitrose.
- Mix thoroughly in a food mixer until the colour is completely uniform.
- Pour into final containers and store in a garage or outbuilding for 2 weeks.
- Keep one or two jars back as your seed honey for next year!

Another use for set honey is to add it to the sugar feed.

Again, heat to 50 C and mix the set honey with Tate & Lyle sugar, about 10%. You can simply achieve this by mixing 1/4 jar of honey to every 1 Kg of sugar. Bees love it!! Out of my 5 colonies, 4 felt anchored down so I only needed to feed one, so I placed 2 kg of this mixture on top of newspaper above the bees (see photo).

John Farrow



This recipe appears on our website, where you can find all the latest beekeeping information: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>