

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER JUNE 2020

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Make Room for Your Bees

by Peter Hutton, Branch President

Following a wet and cold Winter and early Spring, many colonies have been strong with surplus honey and good health while many others have had minimal stores and elderly or poorly mated queens. Nevertheless, the best have advanced and prospered, storing in excess of 40lbs of honey while the poorer have dwindled to barely being alive despite having supplementary feed.

Those strong colonies have built up and thrown swarms which have filled many of the hives that died out because that is the nature of honeybees. Beekeepers who fail to observe the natural progression of flowering plants, especially trees, and who also fail to manage space in the brood nest precipitate the swarming instinct. I have removed brood combs absolutely full of granulated honey and replaced them with frames of foundation which the bees can readily draw out for the queen to lay up with eggs; the more eggs she lays, the more she inhibits swarming. You must also increase the supers ahead of being filled with honey, because nectar needs more space than honey so the bees can remove excess water.

This year we have seen a much greater need for water as bees need to both liquefy granulated Winter stores and regulate internal hive temperature and humidity. My wife has kindly been topping up one container with a daily gallon of water. Do ensure there is a clean water supply nearby.

Bear in mind if you keep three colonies you need at least one spare hive and a nucleus hive, spare frames made up and wax inserted as necessary. Bait hives are part of my apiary management and, so far this season, I have five occupied by incoming swarms.

The Lime trees (*Tilia x Europa*) are very close to flowering and the blackberry flowers are just opening, six weeks early.

Hilbert Apiary Still Flourishing in Lockdown

Words and Pictures by Tania Kennedy



Liz Birchenough delivered and refitted the recently PAT tested extractor motor to the branch extractor. She was also able to collect £105 in donations due to the sterling efforts of Vic Webb in swarm collection and colony preparation (with Robin Toop's guidance).

Robin worked hard rearranging all the kit that was unearthed or rediscovered during the pre-lockdown audit, as well as making up frames.



Tania Kennedy makes up frames at Hilbert Road

Vic got to work again clearing a lot of the vigorous growth towards the top left hand side of the apiary in order to make more space available for birds and encourage the growth of bee friendly plants. As a novice, I was delighted to receive expert tutelage in frame construction, both new and recycled.

What is clear - thanks to the efforts of members both past and present - is the sheer range of equipment and, more importantly, knowledge that is available on tap: a real credit and asset to the branch.

(left) Vic Webb with one of the new frames

Cancelled Events

Due to the restrictions on meeting together, the committee has decided to cancel the visits to members' apiaries in June and July (Liz Birchenough writes). This is a huge disappointment, as there is nothing we all enjoy more than having a good look round other members' apiaries, with a good natter and cup of tea! Many thanks to Vanessa and Victor for volunteering to host these events, and we do hope that we can re-arrange them as soon as circumstances permit.

Along the same lines, Penshurst Place is closed, so the Glorious Gardens event has been cancelled. This was the first time we had been invited to take part, the plan was to use this as a public engagement and information activity, and maybe recruit a few new members. The organisers had also asked if we could arrange an observation hive, which always engages the public. Maybe next year...

Congratulations to Vanessa Jones who has just passed the Asian Hornet Exercise. Vanessa is our branch lead in the efforts to deal with the Asian Hornet. If anyone would like to join her team and be on the front line for following up sightings in the area, please contact Vanessa directly: vanessajones@btinternet.com

Help Us Manage Swarms

John Farrow has been doing an excellent job managing swarm requests (Peter Hutton writes) but please let him know if you already have bees or are not ready to receive a swarm. This will make the system run much more efficiently when swarm collectors try to place swarms with intending beekeepers. Once we pick up a swarm we need to move it on right away, not in a week's time!

The Taming of the Bees at Barrwood

By Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman



Sue Knights uses her new queen marking cage



Wild comb built by the 'wild' colony

According to Howes, in his book *Plants for Bees*, bluebells can only be pollinated by long tongued species of bumblebee. However, honey bees can gain access to the nectaries of bluebells at the base of the petals. Unfortunately, the bees at Barrwood haven't learnt this trick. This is such a shame as, with very little rape being grown in the area now, there seems to have been a dearth in forage.

Our focus at Barrwood this year has been to get the colonies onto new clean comb. We followed the Bailey method, as described by John Hendrie, back in the distant past when we could have indoor meetings (okay, January wasn't so distant, but it certainly seems that way). This method was particularly important with the swarm that arrived late last year and took up residence in an old hive, building wild comb. With the queen now laying on straight drawn foundation, the previously named wild colony, can be considered 'tamed'.

Hive Number 2 was always a strong colony and once moved onto new comb rapidly expanded, so another brood box was added to provide drawn comb for use around the apiary.

Queen raising was attempted again this year, using the Miller technique, to provide a small number of colonies to replace our Winter losses. The sealed queen cells were transferred to nucleus hives and, with the weather remaining warm and dry, I am optimistic that the hatched queens will successfully mate. I will be looking for pollen being regularly brought to the hive before opening up for inspection and it will be some time yet, before an assessment of the new queen can be made.

It's such a shame the Bluebell display is over.

Pictures by Pauline Hayward

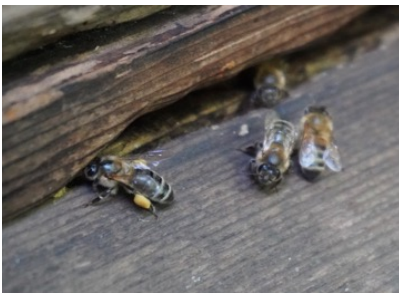


Bailey comb change in operation with the bottom entrance sealed

Diary of a Swarm

by Simon Staffurth

I was lucky enough to receive a swarm from Sarah Rapley early in May. Although it was large, Sarah thought it might be a caste. I had prepared my hive with five frames so I shook the bees in from the skep and immediately fed them with 2 kg of sugar made into a syrup.



Day 2: Bees are taking pollen into the hive; all seems to be looking good.

Day 3: Some syrup has been taken down but not much; there is nectar and pollen coming in.

Day 7: I carry out a brief inspection: all five frames are covered by bees so I add five more frames and a super just in case they need more space.

Day 9: The first full inspection. There are stores on five frames but no eggs, larvae or brood and I cannot see a queen. Oh dear! What is going on? If there is an old queen she should be laying by now and five frames of bees would seem to suggest a full swarm with an old queen. However, if this is a caste and there is a virgin queen then she quite possibly has not mated and therefore not started to lay. The positive signs are that pollen is coming in and the bees are quiet and not agitated. There seem to be polished cells in the centre of the frames.

(left) A bee returns to my hive with a pollen load

Day 12: The polished cells are now full of nectar/honey. The bees are happy but still no eggs and no sign of the queen. If I had a second hive I could put in a frame of eggs but, unfortunately, I only have this one colony. Should I ask a fellow member to lend me a frame with eggs? Should I try to obtain a sealed queen cell? Should I leave things and hope for the best? I am just hoping that, since pollen is still coming in and the bees remain quiet and happy, this means a queen is present.

Day 14: This time, with my glasses on, I see the queen on the second frame. Hurrah! So, it was a caste all along and she hadn't mated. Had she by now? Best to leave well alone for a week and then review.

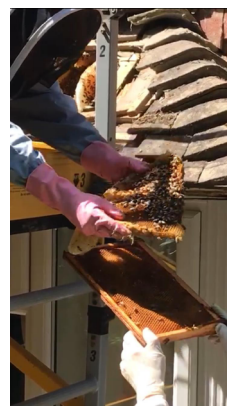
Day 21: Success! There are larvae and the colony is thriving.

A Buzz at the Window

In May, Sarah Rapley and John Farrow extracted a colony of bees from the roof space above the bay window of a house in Crowborough. Sarah started by removing the tiles (pictured left) then gradually removing the brood combs. These were then handed down (pictured right) to John to reshape and mould into a frame.

During a three-hour long operation, the bees and comb were transferred into a polynuc. A bee-vac was used to make sure that all the bees were removed from the window space.

For more pictures go to our website: <https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Bay-Window-Honeybees-Extraction->



Send pictures or stories about your bees to marystaffurth@yahoo.com for inclusion in the next Newsletter.

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

On the Home/Members Only page you can read the BBKA President Margaret Wilson's document on Positive Thinking.